

CRACKED FOUNDATION

Book One of the Eruption of Life Series

Based on Actual Events

TA'SHE'ANA BANKS



Columbus, Ohio

Cracked Foundation: Book One of the Eruption of Life Series

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DEDICATION

To my mom . . . with all my heart.

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To the family and friends who supported, encouraged, and strengthened me along this journey, I extend the upmost gratitude to you all. Be blessed.

PART I

No More Tea Parties

CHAPTER 1

THE MOANING ECHOED from wall to wall, floor to ceiling, and my teeth chattered a bit as the sound grew distressful. I stood alone at the top of the stairs and attempted to untangle the strap of my backpack. Although my curiosity increased with each passing second, my feet hesitated to move. I was too afraid to look, and even more fearful of the unknown. Slowly, I forced myself to walk down the stairs, and with each step, the low grumbling undertone became louder and louder. My breathing was shallow as panic lodged in my throat.

Finally, I stood at the bottom of the stairs, staring at my brother, Jordan as he sat on the couch watching *Bugs Bunny*. The TV blared throughout the living room; it was distracting, and I wondered if he'd turned up the TV to tune out the moaning. I couldn't blame him. I forced a slight smile at him, and he giggled. Then, a scream rang through my eardrums. The sound of a desperate cry made my bottom lip quiver.

"Help! God, help me!"

I looked slightly to the left. I was stuck in shock. My eyes flooded with tears.

Mama's feet shook rapidly; her legs twitched and her left hand rested on her chest, while the right covered her eyes. A box of Raisin Bran cereal was on the floor next to her, flakes scattered across the linoleum. Milk covered the countertop in a pool as the plastic gallon lay on its side, dripping into a puddle on the floor.

"Tori, come downstairs! Something's wrong with Mama!" I yelled for my sister as my heart beat faster and faster.

"Mama?"

I stooped down beside her. She lay flat on her back with a face full of tears, eyes struck with fear as she attempted to speak. Her lips tightened as if they were holding her tongue hostage. It seemed painful for her to move her mouth.

Her lips trembled. "Give me the phone." She extended her arm, and her hand shook like a tambourine.

I reached for the phone hung on the kitchen wall and stretched the cord as far as it would go. Jordan came running, standing in the doorway, gazing wordlessly with wide eyes.

I heard the operator on the phone as I held Mama's other hand.

"Nine-one-one. What's your emergency?"

"I need help. I'm lying on the kitchen floor. I can't move. My chest hurts. My head hurts. Everything hurts."

"What's your name, sweetheart?"

"Dina. Dina Brooks." Struggling to breathe and gasping for air, she coughed. Blood splattered all over my jacket

as it ran from her nose and down the side of her cheek to her ear.

I couldn't breathe. I grabbed the phone from her hand. "Please! Please help my Mama! She's bleeding."

"Who is this? What is your name, sweetheart? What's your address?"

"My name is Talisa. Please hurry. Something's wrong with my mama. Please, come quick. It's 1128 28th Street." I shook all over and the telephone bounced against my chin.

"Okay, honey, hold on. The ambulance should be there in just a few minutes. Stay on the phone with me. Are you able to unlock the door?"

"Yes, ma'am, I can." I set the phone down and ran to unlock the front door.

When I returned, Mama was still shaky and not speaking clearly. Her chest moved up and down, faster and faster, and I screamed into the phone, "Where are they? Where's the ambulance?"

"I promise you, sweetheart. They're coming in just a couple of minutes."

Jordan came running from the living room; his feet skidded around the corner. "I hear the sirens. I see the lights!"

"Talisa, I need you to go open the door for the paramedics, okay?" The voice on the other end of the phone was calm.

"Yes, ma'am."

I set the phone back on the floor and ran to open the front door. I couldn't feel my legs but I could feel a cool breeze against my sweat-beaded face as the door swung open. Two paramedics

came up the walkway to the front porch—one white man, one black man—moving fast, and carrying a large black bag with a yellow board. It looked like a surfboard. Jordan grabbed my hand as they ran past us.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Tyler from next door came over.

“Talisa, Jordan, are you guys okay?” Mrs. Tyler’s eyes were filled with worry as she kissed us on our foreheads.

“Yes, ma’am.”

As she slowly walked toward the kitchen, she placed her hand on her chest as if to still her heart. “Oh dear. Oh, my goodness. Talisa, what happened?”

“I don’t know, Mrs. Tyler. I just ran downstairs for school. She was just lying there on the floor.”

“Where’s your sister?” She raised both eyebrows and put her hands on her hips. “Where’s Tori?”

“She’s upstairs. I yelled for her to come downstairs, but she didn’t come.”

“I’ll go get her.” She stomped up the stairs, mumbling to herself. “This damn girl, I swear.”

We sat on the couch, waiting. The white paramedic walked into the living room and kneeled down in front of us.

“Hi, my name’s Thomas. What’s your name?”

“I’m Talisa, and this is my little brother, Jordan.”

“How old are you? What grade are you guys in?”

“I’m eleven. In fifth grade.” I was trying to look past him to see what the other paramedic was doing to Mama. All I could see was a flurry of movement, and I felt like he was blocking the view on purpose. I sat up taller but still couldn’t see.

"I'm six years old," Jordan smiled. "I'm in kindergarten. My teacher's name is Mrs. Kiplinger. Isn't that a funny name?" Jordan giggled as he wiped away his tears.

"Yeah, little guy," the paramedic agreed, "it *is* a funny name. So, listen, you guys. We're going to have to take your mom to the hospital. She isn't feeling very well and she needs further medical attention beyond what we can assist her with here. Do you understand?" He slightly smiled, but his eyes revealed serious concern.

"Yes, sir." My heart pounded. What did all this mean?

Mrs. Tyler and Tori came back downstairs. Tori walked sullenly over to sit next to me, shrugging away from Mrs. Tyler. Since Tori turned fifteen, it seemed that she constantly had an attitude about everything. She sat and pouted and didn't say a word, as though she was mad for some reason.

Mama had written all of the emergency phone numbers on the marker board on the refrigerator in case of emergencies, so Mrs. Tyler called Grandma. When she hung up, she turned to us.

"You guys aren't going to school today. Your grandmother said for you all to get in the ambulance with your mom, and she'll meet you at the hospital. After I lock the front door, Tori, take these keys. Give them to your grandmother when you get to the hospital. Got it?"

"Yes, I got it." Mrs. Tyler locked the door and handed the keys to Tori. She grabbed them and shoved them into her coat pocket.

The paramedics wheeled Mama down the walkway and

carried her over the four cement steps to the sidewalk. Her nearly lifeless body made my heart beat rapidly, her eyes closed, and once we sat in the ambulance it smelled like bleach. Everything was shiny and clean—too clean. Thomas put a plastic mask over Mama's mouth and nose. A needle in her arm was attached to a long plastic tube, which was connected to a bag of clear liquid that flowed into her arm. I didn't know what it was. What were they putting into her?

Her eyes suddenly opened, and she looked into mine. I took a deep breath and exhaled.

Her voice was gentle and raspy. "Don't cry. It'll be okay."

I tried not to, but I was so confused and lost. It was so hard. I tried to hold back my tears and blinked to stop them from falling. Jordan gripped my hand with his small, clammy fingers and I knew he was scared. Tori's slumped posture leaned against the back door staring out the window. Her headphones blasted music as she watched the traffic go by. She was speechless not acknowledging what was going on, as if she were scared to look at Mama.

While speeding through traffic rushing to get to the hospital, Mama's breathing became faint. Thomas yelled at the other paramedic driving, and he was alarmed, using medical words I didn't understand. The more the machine beeped, the tenser Thomas became as he moved hastily around her. He repeatedly checked her eyes, placed two fingers on her neck, pinched her wrist, and shook her each time she closed her eyes. As her arm hung loosely through the metal railings, her fingers swung back and forth as the ambulance

rolled over every bump on the street. The rapid motion of her chest slowly declined before it stopped. Her head limply fell to the side, her eyes rolled back, and she didn't respond.

"Come on, man, we need to get there. I'm starting compressions. Let's go!" Thomas started to sweat as he silently repeated, "Come on, stay with me. Come on, just breathe." He pressed continuously on her chest and with each compression, her body jerked.

The ambulance stopped, the back doors swung open, and four nurses and two other paramedics were waiting to pull her out. They pulled us out first to get us out of the way.

"Why are they here?" one nurse asked as she picked Jordan up and set him on the ground.

"Necessity," Thomas answered.

They pulled Mama out and rolled her through the big, red, swinging doors stamped EMERGENCY. Tori stood behind me with watery eyes and a blank face. Jordan sat on the ground with his backpack still on, knees to his chest, head tucked down and crying. One of the nurses kneeled down in front of me and grabbed my hand.

"Hi, I'm Laura. I'm going to take you guys to the waiting room."

"What's wrong with her?"

"I'm not sure, sweetheart, but we're going to figure it out."

We walked toward the red doors, and I looked up at the nurse. "Can I go with her? I want to see if she's okay."

She grabbed my arm. "No, you can't go back there."

"Please," I begged her, trying to pull away. I didn't want Mama to be alone. She was all by herself back there.

"I know you're scared, but you have to let the doctor figure out what's going on. Please, calm down."

Tori walked over to me, finally awakening to the tragic scene. She slid her arm around my shoulder. "Come on, we're just going to have to sit down and wait."

Jordan wrapped his arms around me and rested his head on my stomach. His hands shook. Grandma and Mama's boyfriend, Samuel—we called him Sam—came twenty minutes later. Sam stood by the nurse's desk, nearly stunned and stared blankly at us. He paced back and forth in the hallway and repeatedly rubbed his left hand over his beard. The longer we waited, the more worry mounted on his face.

"Are you guys hungry?" he asked. I thought of my breakfast covering the kitchen floor back home and nodded. He took us to the cafeteria to eat. He told us that we shouldn't have any fear or be sad.

"The doctors will figure out what's going on with your mom," he assured us as he bit into a piece of toast. His hands were bulky and his fingers were long with a couple strands of hair above each knuckle. He was highly educated, spoke eloquently, and his broad-shouldered demeanor was quite assertive. His typical scholarly approach to things often intrigued me, especially when he helped me study my spelling words or encouraged me to think out of the box. Sam loved to talk. People often said he was quite articulate, and many

sought his advice on various topics. So, I decided maybe I should believe him.

Grandma joined us in the cafeteria. She was tiny, but frank. She usually didn't have a lot to say, but her hand gestures and body language spoke loudly. She talked to Sam for a long time, and he listened and nodded his head as if he was agreeing with her.

Sam walked slowly back to the table and hovered over us in silence. He placed his hands in his pants pockets. "Okay, listen closely. Your mom has to stay here because the doctors need more time to examine her. They aren't quite sure yet what's wrong, but it's their job to figure it out. Do you understand?"

Jordan and I nodded while Tori stared without blinking.

"They're going to run some more medical tests and examine her more thoroughly," he continued. "In the meantime, I'm going to take you home, and I'm going to stay with you guys so you're not alone."

We left Mama there, alone. I couldn't comprehend it. I was so confused. Sam said we couldn't stay, so we had no choice but to leave. He firmly held my hand as we walked out the door, and Jordan followed.

"Come on, let's go." His voice was low; a near whisper. One by one, we did as he said because there wasn't anything else we *could* do. We followed him out, and as we drove away, I stared out the back window. Mama was all by herself—alone.