

THREE

MOON OVER MIAMI

You will show me the path of life.
Psalm 16:11

The water flowed up to my ankles and over my new sandals as I approached the phone booth. I didn't care. I didn't care that I was in the middle of a late afternoon downpour close to Miami. I didn't care, either, that I had just had an argument with George over a motel. There are some arguments in life that are simply worth having.

And this, without question, was one of them.

It had only been a few weeks since we had left Mayo Clinic. Doyle was just one month old, and we were reaching the end of our long, hot June journey to Florida. I felt like I had been holding my breath, riding an emotional roller-coaster of birth, death, hope, and despair, with three tired children in the backseat and an equally tired husband by my side.

And the motel that George pointed out from the

freeway was simply the last straw.

“It’s a good option, Betty,” he argued, wearily. “It will be fine until we get settled.”

“It’s probably the worst place for forty miles,” I muttered under my breath, increasingly irritated. I wasn’t going to spend the next few days staring at a concrete wall, being deafened by the noise of passing trucks.

“George!” I snapped. “I want a view of the beach and I want a pool.”

“Betty, we’re moving here for work,” he shot back. “We’re not on vacation!”

“George! I *need* a view of the beach.” There was a startling fury in my tone, shocking even to me. “Stop the car and give me a dime!”

I held out my hand as George pulled over. His lips tightened, as though he were biting his tongue, and I caught Allen’s eyes in the side mirror, glancing back and forth between the two of us. I knew what he was thinking and he was right: we were at it again. Florida was meant to give us a new start. No more veterinary school and no more conflict. Yet it seemed like we were picking up just where we had left off, before the nightmare in Missouri had begun.

Except this time, it was worse.

“May I *please* have a dime?” I said curtly, lowering my voice and slowing my words for dramatic effect. “I *would* like to choose the motel.”

The subject was not open for discussion.

George relinquished with a sigh, and to his credit, he did so this time more quickly than usual. He didn't have the patience to go from place to place. He knew me better than to dig in deep and battle this one out. We were both tired, but it was pretty clear that I had more stamina for a fight.

I opened the car door and was drenched in an instant, before I even had time to slam it shut behind me. The rainwater was fresh and warm. I could taste the drops rolling down my face. The sidewalk was flooded, the phone booth too. Tiny eddies swirled round my feet as I stood there, my finger running through a dampened copy of the yellow pages.

My eyes scanned the columns of tightly printed text.

"That's it!" I cried out triumphantly. FAMILY RESORT, FORT LAUDERDALE BEACH. OCEAN VIEW. TV. SWIMMING POOL.

The dime dropped into the cash box with a faint clink, barely audible above the noise of the pounding torrent. I let out a sigh and promptly reserved the room without any hesitation. The price didn't really matter to me. I needed this.

As I stepped back toward the car, the rainstorm subsided almost as quickly as it had begun. I could feel the anger begin to drain from my face. I felt vindicated but empty, washed out and somewhat ashamed.

for our nation. He said simply, “I never could forget that you told me as a family you were fasting and praying.” And with that he stood up, walked into the bedroom, and returned to the living room with a little notebook and pencil in hand. He opened it to the first clean page and wrote George’s name. Then he underlined it. I went about my work in the kitchen. George went to sit opposite him on the couch.

“Now. When did you first become interested in animals, George?”

“From the time I was young, growing up. I spent a lot of time with my mother’s parents. Even after my dad remarried, I would still go there—during the holidays and over the summer. My grandfather always had a pony for me to ride and one or two milk cows. They had a small farm at the edge of the community, and I guess I made friends with the animals as a young boy. I didn’t have siblings there, but many friends.”

“What was your childhood like, George?” Uncle Sid looked down on the page, ready to write. George hesitated. He barely talked about it with me, and I had never heard him discuss it with other people.

“My mother died when I was eight days old,” he started cautiously. “So I lived with her parents the first two years of my life.”

“What then?” Sid prompted.

“Well, my father married a college friend of my moth-

er's, and they wanted me to come live with them. So of course I did."

"Do you have any memory of that?"

George shook his head. "Except . . ." George wiped the back of his hand across his face, clearly uncomfortable with what he was sharing. "I spent summers and holidays with my grandparents. And each time I would leave, I would cry. When I got home I would go straight to my room and keep crying for several hours until I went to sleep."

"How old were you?"

"I don't know. I think that went on until I was perhaps fourteen."

George talked freely. Uncle Sid made notes. "I remember as a very small boy, Cleo, my new mother, holding my hand through the bars of the crib while I went to sleep at night. My mother's picture was never allowed on my dresser. When I would put it out, I would always find it back in the drawer. Dad was tense, and I always wondered if I was the cause; had I done something wrong?"

That was as far as they got that night. The phone rang: a brood mare was having difficulty with labor on a farm out in Eagleville. George apologized hurriedly and left. Uncle Sid closed his notebook and went to bed.

It was mid-morning Monday before he picked it up again. The boys were back at school, breakfast was cleaned away, and George was already back from his first two morning calls. Uncle Sid had been in his room, fasting

once again.

“Do you have a minute?” Uncle Sid inquired as George stepped into the kitchen. He had come out of the bedroom just a few minutes earlier and taken up residence in his favorite living room chair. “I want to talk to you about rejection,” he said.

“Sure,” said George, reluctantly. “But I don’t think that’s my issue. You see, I was never rejected. My dad went to every football and basketball game I played . . .”

“His dad has always been good to me,” I interjected, coming to George’s defense. “He’s always shown us a lot of love.”

“George, let me explain,” Uncle Sid replied. “When we’re born, we’re designed by God to be loved and accepted, to be held in our parents’ arms. Being held in the strong arms of your parents is very important. Every baby craves this kind of security. And if you don’t get it, you may grow up with an inability to be loved or to give love. Often it will affect every relationship in your life—*especially* your marriage.”

“Well, I have felt alone and isolated at times, I guess,” George conceded. “And I certainly felt *more* accepted by my grandparents. I was their only survivor. They were respected in the community and always seemed proud of me as their grandson.”

Uncle Sid was blunt in response. “It is possible that you felt rejection, George,” he said simply.

Suddenly, I saw a pained look dart across George's eyes. He sat down slowly on the couch.

"Jesus understands your pain," Sid continued. "He will help you forgive those who have rejected you."

"My parents?" George questioned.

"You know those who reject us rarely intend to," Uncle Sid said gently. "More often than not it comes down to circumstances that they have no other option; they suffer too. Rejection is painful and difficult to face. A need for forgiveness is not uppermost in one's mind, but it is the key to freedom. Freedom to love and to be loved by God, and by those close to you."

George didn't argue or protest. He simply knelt where he was by the side of the couch and prayed a simple prayer forgiving his father for going to Oregon when his mother died and leaving him with his grandparents. It was two years before he returned and decided to remarry.

"You also need to forgive your mother," Uncle Sid calmly suggested.

"My mother?" said George.

"She died and left you, too; it was not her choice," Sid explained.

"I feel like I have a basketball in my stomach," George said quietly. Uncle Sid just sat there, quiet, patiently sitting in his chair. A few moments later, George was quiet, kneeling with his head up and eyes closed. "God, you know I forgive my mother." Minutes passed without a sound in

the room.

“Now God can heal you, George. Your Heavenly Father offers you total acceptance through Jesus—*His* beloved Son, just as it says in the Scriptures:

having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

(Ephesians 1:5–6)

“Healing comes when we know we are a part of *God’s* family. When we accept *Him* as our father and when we understand that Jesus was willing to be rejected Himself, so we can share in His inheritance, His acceptance, and His adoption!”

Over the course of the following nights, Uncle Sid continued to spend time with the two of us, and we both in turn spent a lot of time by the couch on our knees! So we learned knowledge won’t bring healing. Telling our stories and retelling our past won’t bring healing. Rehashing all our family disappointments and our failures—it doesn’t bring healing to our hearts and minds.

There were areas of our past we had stuffed deep inside, and the emotional pain was stifling our present. In some areas of our relationship, we were failures. We needed restoration. We needed God’s forgiveness, and we needed