

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go."—Genesis 28:15

THE DOOR YAWNED OPENED, AND light from the hallway streamed in. A nurse, with a short boyish haircut, entered my room, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

"Have you seen Dr. Wheatherby, yet?"

Just then her shadow was joined with another and Dr. Wheatherby replied, "Did I hear my name? Is someone ready to go home?"

"When can I leave?" I felt like a kid on Christmas morning. Everyone at the hospital had been great, but I was beyond ready to leave.

"We've got some paperwork to do, but hopefully you'll be home by lunch time. How are you feeling?"

“Tired but good. I couldn’t sleep—too excited.”

“Hopefully, you’ll sleep better tonight. I’ve made you an appointment with Dr. Darzi, a urologist, for tomorrow. Make sure you keep it. Also, I’m giving you a prescription for antibiotics and pain medication. And Dr. Peterson will see you in two weeks for a follow-up. Any questions?”

“Nope. Chuck, do you have any?” I asked him.

“When will she get the catheter out?” Chuck asked.

“Dr. Darzi will determine it tomorrow. He’ll probably give it a few more days for the antibiotics to work.”

“Great! Thank you, for everything.” Chuck grabbed the doctor’s hand and pumped it. A pleasant aroma of bacon and eggs wafted in from the hallway.

“Looks like breakfast has arrived. I’ll leave you both to eat. Call me if you need anything; otherwise, I’ll see you in two weeks.”

Dr. Wheatherby left as a locomotive of a woman with a broad, pulpy face came in carrying a breakfast tray.

“Good morning, Miss Amy. How are ya’ doin’?” she asked depositing the tray on the table before me.

“Excellent! I’m going home today,” I replied, almost dizzy with excitement.

“Well, ‘um great. My name is Eleanor. Can I get you anything else?” Her aged-mottled hands lifted the covers from the plates.

I snatched a slice of bacon and broke it on my tongue—perfectly crisp and perfectly salty. The rich, bold scent of black coffee lingered in the air.

“Nope,” I mumbled. “This is good. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, ma’am. Good luck to ya’,” Eleanor replied, waddling from the room.

“I must be hungry because these eggs are delicious.” I dipped the buttered toast in the warm, gooey centers.

“I guess we should start packing. It looks like we’re leaving.”

“Yippee!” I shrieked. “I feel like I’ve been in here forever. Can we pick up Maggie after we leave? Have you called to see how she’s doing?” I missed my puppy.

“Yes, I called yesterday. Maggie’s fine. I’ll go get her tomorrow.”

“But why aren’t we getting her today?” I asked in an almost whiney voice. I terribly missed Maggie.

“I think we need one night at home to get you settled. She’ll want to jump on you and be on your lap.”

“She’ll be okay,” I protested.

“Let’s see what time it is when they spring you and then we’ll decide. Okay?”

“Sure. Whatever,” I mumbled. I knew Chuck was trying to help, but I missed my “Moo.” Just then, the nurse from earlier

walked in, and thoughts of Maggie moved to the back of my mind.

“I need to remove your IV, so you can get dressed.”

“Perfect, thank you,” I replied. We chatted back and forth as the nurse unplugged the lines attached to the IV. I found out her name was Joyce, and she had been a nurse for about ten years.

“I’ll be done in a minute. I’m just waiting on the discharge papers and then we can get you out of here.”

“How long does it usually take?” I asked.

“A couple of hours.”

I stared at the clock as if willing the hands to move. All my nervous glances and impatient shoveling of papers did nothing to make time move faster—it only succeeded in upsetting Chuck.

“Will you quit. The nurse will be in shortly. I promise.”

“You said it a half hour ago. They’re never going to let me go,” I replied, with a long, dramatic pause.

“You’re annoying. Why don’t you call someone...your mother perhaps?”

I shrugged my shoulders. Mom would commiserate with me—Chuck clearly wasn’t. I fished in my purse for my cell phone and glanced at the caller ID. There was a missed call from Mom earlier. Just as I began to punch her number on my phone, Joyce appeared in the doorway with paperwork in her hands. I snapped my phone down.

“Do you have the discharge papers?”

“Yes, Yes. Sit down so we can go over it.”

I positioned myself on the edge of the lounge chair like a lioness ready to pounce on her carefully stalked prey. Glancing at me cautiously, Joyce reviewed the highlights of the discharge instructions.

Rest for the next two weeks. No heavy lifting. No showering or sex for two weeks to allow the incisions to heal—Chuck glared with disapproval. I can resume a regular diet. No driving until my follow-up appointment with Dr. Wheatherby.

If there were any problems, I was to go to the CMC Main emergency room, if at all possible, since the transplant clinic was there. I signed and initialed where instructed, stating I understood all directions regarding my discharge.

“Can I go now?” I asked, hardly suppressing a smile.

“As soon as someone from transport gets here with a wheelchair.”

“I can walk,” I demanded.

“It’s hospital policy. They have to escort you to the lobby. Chuck, you can take her stuff to the car and pull it around, if you want. It shouldn’t be much longer.”

Within a few minutes, a tall man with black hair erupting in a curly, twisted tangle on the top of his head walked in with a wheelchair.

“Hallelujah! Let’s go!” I shouted.

Charlie grabbed my elbow, as I stood up, and guided me into the wheelchair. “Let’s go, Ma’am. Your chariot awaits.”

“Thank you. Can you make this thing fly?”

“What’s your hurry? Got someplace better to be?” He winked as he removed a Kleenex from his pocket to wipe off his glasses.

A girlish squeal escaped from my throat, “Yes, home.”

“Well, then let’s get going.”

As Charlie pressed the elevator down button, I remembered my escort to the pre-op lobby, who had pushed the up button on the same elevator only a few days before. Unsure what was about to happen, his comforting presence calmed me as I walked through the hospital halls. Like, Charlie, he was a gift from God—angels escorting me to and from His miracle.

Would I have gone through with the surgery if I would have known how difficult the recovery would be? Yes, resounded in my head because God had used me as a conduit of His love.

We were greeted by a warm morning sun as we exited the hospital. Charlie locked my wheelchair in place. Closing my eyes, I basked in the sun’s glow. Silently I prayed, “Thank You, Jesus, for touching my life in a way I never expected. You never leave me even when I leave You.”

The words caught in the back of my mind, as I remembered the day Jesus saved my life.

I was five years old, and my mother had taken my brother and me to visit a friend of hers. An unusually hot day had prompted Mom's friend to invite us to swim at her neighborhood pool. My eyes went wide staring at the pool. Jamie, my brother, ran off with his buddy, leaving me to play alone.

Not knowing how to swim, I stood on the first step leading into the water, white-knuckling the railing beside me. I bit my lower lip as my eyes darted toward my mother, making sure she was still nearby.

At the opposite end of the pool, the older kids played a game of keep-away. Oh, how I wished I was brave enough to join them, but I stayed on the stairs watching from a distance.

Brittany, the daughter of my mother's friend, must have suspected what I was thinking because she drifted towards me with her hands on the bottom of the pool and her face just barely above the water. She looked beautiful and confident.

"Want to go over there?" she asked, nodding in the direction of the deep end. "I can take you if you want."

I spun around and yelled, "Mom, can I go with Brittany into the deep end? She said she would take me. Please, Mom! Please, can I go?"

"I don't think it's a good idea, Amy. Just stay on the stairs."

"But Mom!" I pleaded again.

"It's okay, Mrs. Gray. I know how to swim, and I won't take her far—just to the rope and back," Brittany responded.

Mom said, "Well, I guess it's okay but just to the rope and back. And Brittany, Amy doesn't know how to swim. So, be careful, please?"

Electricity shot off in all directions like fireworks within my tiny body. Mom said yes!

"I understand. I got her," Brittany replied and then swooped me up in her arms. As we moved closer to the rope which separated the babies from the grown kids, my heart raced like a running away train.

"Do you want to go under the rope? I can show you how to hold your breath for a few seconds."

My mind froze as I stared straight at her. Go under? Hold my breath?

"Come on," she giggled. "It's easy. Pinch your nose like this and take in a deep breath at the same time. You can also keep your eyes closed if you like."

I did as she said and pinched my nose with my thumb and index finger and then together we took in a deep breath. I closed my eyes and fixed my legs tight around her small waist. Instantly, we were underwater.

A few seconds later we resurfaced, and Jennifer exclaimed. "Wasn't it fun?"

I nodded with a shaky smile, wiping the water from my eyes with the back of my hands.

"We did it!" I shouted, when suddenly water drenched my

face again. A big blue ball landed with a loud thud right in front of us.

“Hey, throw it back,” an older boy shouted. Brittany handed me the ball, and I chucked it in his direction. Excitement spilled out of me as if I’d gotten a large present on Christmas morning—I was part of the group.

We watched the older kids play awhile; then, Brittany’s mom called her name and she dropped me.

I sank like a missile, and water rushed into my lungs. I tried grasping for Brittany—for anything which could help me. But my struggling went unnoticed. She was gone.

Wild with fear, I flailed my arms and legs frantically. My screams vibrated in my ears as darkness overtook me. I couldn’t think of the word, but I knew I was drowning.

I stopped struggling. A golden white light resembling a giant hand—created a bubble around me. I could breathe. A voice whispered, “You’re okay, Amy. I’ve got you.”

As an adult looking back, I haven’t the words to describe the unconditional love I felt in the bubble. Even the most exquisite words fall short. I know I was in the presence of the Divine Source.

I wanted to stay in the moment forever. Jesus understood and responded, “No, Amy, it’s not your time. You have more to do but remember I AM always with you. I will never leave you. Now raise up your arm.”

I didn't want to, but I raised my arm, and within moments someone pulled me out of the water.

Years later, I asked my mother how she found me. "I saw your arm sticking out of the water."

I could not have stood there by myself in the water with my arm raised because I couldn't touch the bottom. And I didn't know how to swim, much less tread water. Jesus saved me!

Did this experience transform me into the perfect angel? No, that wasn't how life would play out. It took me years to remember my moment with Jesus and what He told me. But He never left me—no matter how hard I fought to forget Him or God.

Arousing me from my thoughts came Chuck's voice as if an echo, "Are you ready to go home?"

Spots formed in front of my eyes as I blinked to open them. Above me, hawks circled lazily in the sky, an affirmation from the spirit world. Feeling the satisfying gleam of joy, I replied, "Yes. I'm ready."