

# JOHN 3:16

---

**NANCY MOSER**



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com)

Check out the latest about Nancy Moser at [www.nancymoser.com](http://www.nancymoser.com)

*TYNDALE* and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*John 3:16*

Copyright © 2008 by Tekno Books. All rights reserved.

Cover photographs of women and man copyright © by Veer. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of football player copyright © by punchstock. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of crowd copyright © by Chabruken/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jessie McGrath

Published in association with the literary agency of Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc., 65 Bleecker Street, New York, NY 10012.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of either the author or the publisher.

---

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Moser, Nancy.

John 3:16 / Nancy Moser.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-2054-0 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-4143-2054-X (pbk.)

1. Bible. N.T. John—Influence—Fiction. I. Title. II. Title: John three sixteen.

PS3563.O88417J65 2008

813'.54—dc22

2008021735

---

Printed in the United States of America

14 13 12 11 10 09 08

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Katy McKenna Raymond.*

*I prayed for a friend like the Katie I'd left behind.*

*And then I met you. . . .*

*May you be all-the-way happy.*



# ONE

*We have had more than our fill  
of the scoffing of the proud  
and the contempt of the arrogant.*

PSALM 123:4

The elevator doors opened. Maya Morano stepped out, nearly overwhelmed by a single thought: *The world is mine.*

“Morning, Ms. Morano,” the receptionist said. “Congratulations on your award Friday night.”

Triumph sang an aria in her soul. She wanted to pump her arm and shout, “Yes!” like an NBA player after a perfect three-pointer, but she knew better than to let loose. Reining herself in to a proper corporate humility, she gave a slight nod and said, “Thanks.” There was a time and a place. . . .

She spotted her boss chatting with another employee outside an office nearby. She paused in the reception area, pretending to need something from her briefcase. But as she opened it, she mishandled the case.

It fell with a thud. Files scattered everywhere. Her ploy to get attention had succeeded—far beyond her wildest dreams.

“Why am I such a klutz?” she said, a little louder than necessary. She didn’t have to fake her reaction. The embarrassment that turned her cheeks pink was all too real.

“Let me help,” the receptionist said.

“Thanks,” she said out loud, but inside she was thinking, *No! Not you . . .*

2 Maya sensed her boss approaching. She looked up, offering him the smile that had been so instrumental in earning Friday’s award. “Good morning, sir. If you don’t mind, I thought I’d work from here this morning.” She waved her arms above the mess on the floor. “I do like to spread out.”

“I’ve heard of employees wanting a bigger office, but this—” he knelt beside her to help—“is taking that urge to new heights.” He winked. “I think we can do better than this.”

*Game. Set. Match.*

She gathered her things with the help of her boss and the receptionist, then saw they had an audience. Other workers had noticed. She could see what they were thinking by the looks in their eyes.

Being on the receiving end of envy was very satisfying.



Maya leaned the Top Seller award plaque against the wall of her cubicle. She hoped it was a temporary measure. An award like this should be hung on the wall of a proper office, not tucked away in an anonymous, gray-paneled cubicle, *leaning*.

*Soon. The boss indicated you deserved a real office. Be patient.*

She set her briefcase under the desk and shoved it out of the way with a kick of her foot, nearly toppling the trash can. She sighed. She really was a klutz. But she was working on it, getting better. Every day she got closer to being the person she wanted to be. With a quarter turn of her chair, she focused her attention on her computer screen. With a touch of her cursor, it came to life. Today’s schedule glowed multicolored: green tabs for inter-office meetings, orange tabs for prospective client meetings, blue

tabs for personal appointments, and red tabs for any HTDs—her personal shorthand for Hate To Dos.

She needed that code, her own warning system, stern orders to herself that on this day, at this particular time, she had to do something she disliked. The content of HTDs varied but usually involved babying some existing clients who needed reassurance that the office equipment they'd ordered from her was right for them and that Maya had given them *the* best price. She hated this part of her job. She was lousy at pasting on a smile, pretending to care. "Service after the sale" may have made a grand motto for the company, but in reality it was tedious work that Maya believed took time and energy away from getting that next big sale.

A coworker peered over the cubicle. "Hey, Maya. I would say congrats on the award, but both you and I know . . ."

"Leave me alone, Brian."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Another coworker approached. "Congratulations, Maya. Way to go on the award."

Brian shook his head and walked away.

"What's with him?" Susan asked.

Maya shrugged. "I don't know. Sour grapes, maybe?" Then she put a hand on the award, hoping Susan would bite.

She did. "Is that it? Let me see."

Maya held it close to her face like a game show cutie showing off a prize. She did *not* let Susan touch it. "Work hard, and you too can get one of these someday," she teased.

"Fat chance," Susan said. "I turned forty today. You youngsters have too much spring in your step for me to catch up."

*Young? Hardly.* At thirty-three, Maya felt the years rushing by.

A delivery person appeared, carrying a bunch of balloons. "I'm looking for Susan Bates?"

At the sound of her name, Susan looked up. "Hey, that's me." She took the balloons. "Thanks."

Maya examined the silvery globes bobbing above Susan's head. They were kind of hokey, but nice, in a weird sort of way. "Who're they from? Look at the card," Maya said.

"Doesn't seem to be one," Susan replied.

4 "Well, enjoy the gift from your secret admirer. Meanwhile, we'd better get back to work."

"Work. On my birthday." Susan looked at the balloons wistfully, then sighed. "I don't know where you come up with your clients, Maya, but if you have any extra, send a few my way, all right?"

*Not in this lifetime.*

Susan headed back to her work space. A few seconds later Maya overheard their boss say, "Happy birthday, Susan."

"Thank you, sir. People are being so nice. Joyce brought a cake. It's in the break room. Make sure you get a piece."

"I'll do that."

During the exchange, Maya set the award aside, flipped open a file, fanned a few papers out on the work surface, and picked up a pen. She leaned forward over the work, jotted some random numbers on the margins of a page, then moved her calculator close, adding something to anything as she waited.

"Busy at work, I see," her boss said, on cue.

She pushed her chair back and tossed the pen on the desk. "Always." She pointed at her daily schedule glowing on the monitor. "I'm clearing up the backlog so that I can visit a client who has some issues about some damage on his last order. I know he should just call claims to handle it, but—"

"But you want to give him personal service."

*Not really. If he hadn't insisted on the meeting I wouldn't be going. But since I'm going, he's going to be eating out of my hand before I'm through with him.*

"That's commendable, Maya. That's the way we do things here at Efficient."

"I aim to please." *You. I aim to please you.*



“It’s not just about sales. I wish more salespeople realized that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Carry on.” He walked away.

Maya looked at her award. Her boss was wrong. It was all about sales.

Her future depended on sales.



*If I never have to hire another teenager . . .*

Velvet Cotton leaned back in her chair, rubbed her eyes, then stretched until her spine popped. She’d already interviewed five students, and none of them were qualified. Considering the positions she was trying to fill were concessions workers, it was a pitiful situation. Although she hadn’t given the five contenders math tests, she doubted any of them could count out change without having an idiot machine tell them how much to give back. And even then she wouldn’t bet on them managing it well.

No. That was mean. There were plenty of good kids out there. Maybe if she was a better boss, a more patient person, she might be able to get more out of them. After all, any college kid who could program a computer, work a cell phone, or record a TV show had more talent than she did. Teaching them how to say, “May I help you?” with a smile and inspiring them to show up for work in the first place were doable goals—if she kept her attitude in check.

Velvet needed three more workers for Saturday’s football game. But so far . . .

The task threatened to overwhelm her. She barely had the energy to get up to fetch the next applicant, so she broke her own internal code for professional courtesy and yelled, “Next!”

An employer’s worst nightmare appeared in the opened door,

a twentysomething with a hoop piercing in her nose, a tattoo of a rose on her forearm, and a swath of gray hair sweeping around her face.

“Hey,” the applicant said from the doorway.

6

*Brilliant.* “Have a seat.”

To her credit the girl was dressed in something besides jeans. She wore a long gathered skirt with contrasting bands of patterned fabric, Birkenstocks, and a voile peasant blouse. Not that far from Velvet’s style of choice: anything vintage, anything that screamed “bohemian.”

The girl handed over her application, and Velvet took a quick look to see if there were any obvious red flags beyond the body piercing with—she glanced at the first name—Lianne. Before she could examine the résumé in detail, the girl spoke up.

“I don’t know why I’m applying for this job. I hate football. In fact, I hate all sports. Why waste all that energy chasing a ball around a field when you could be doing something productive?”

It was an odd way to start an interview, and a bizarre way to get a job—although Velvet shared the girl’s views, to a degree. But it certainly got her attention. “If that’s your attitude, then why are you here?”

Lianne crossed her legs. “Karma, I guess. I was looking through the *Daily Nebraskan* and saw an ad for the job.”

That didn’t explain—

“At first I read it wrong. It said ‘concessions worker’ and I thought it had something to do with the law—you know, maybe arbitration or mediation. Something interesting.”

Velvet laughed. “Trust me, this job can be interesting. Dealing with hungry customers often utilizes mediation of the most serious sort. But I’m still not sure why you’re here.”

“I didn’t realize I’d read it wrong until I saw that this office was attached to the stadium. And then I figured a job’s a job, and I need the money, so . . .” She shrugged. “Here I am.”

Teaching this one to smile while helping a customer might stretch even Velvet's capabilities, but she was desperate. She looked again at the girl's application. Lianne . . . Lianne Skala.

"Skala?"

"It's Czech. Means 'strong as a rock.'" She shrugged again. "Whatever."

7

It may have been Czech, but Velvet was more interested in the fact that it was unusual. A rare name. One Velvet hadn't heard in over twenty years.

She checked Lianne's address. It was an apartment a few miles south of campus. But where was she *from*? In a college town most of the kids were from somewhere else. "Are you a student?"

"Sociology. Sophomore, though I'm old enough to be graduated."

"You're from . . . ?"

"Here. Born here. Live here. Hopefully won't die here."

Velvet's heart skipped as an assortment of details converged. *No, it couldn't be.*

The girl spoke. "You're shaking your head. So does that mean I crashed and burned? Or do I get the job? Whatever."

The job was the furthest thing from Velvet's mind.

Lianne leaned forward, resting her hands on the edge of Velvet's desk. "I know I've probably blown it, saying all the wrong things. I always do. But you need to know I am a hard worker. I show up and I do what needs to be done, which is more than most morons I've worked with can say." She pushed away from the desk. "No offense, but selling junk food is a no-brainer. I can handle the job. I promise."

Velvet's mind swam. She had one more fact to check. She needed to find out Lianne's birthday, yet age was not something she could ask about; that whole antidiscrimination thing regarding race, age, creed, etc.

She had an idea. "May I have your driver's license, please?"

“For . . . ?”

“It’s procedure. We make a copy when people apply.”

Lianne looked skeptical but dug a license from her floppy crocheted bag.

8 Velvet restrained herself from looking at it. She would wait until the girl was gone. She made a copy and returned it. “Well, then, I’ll get back to you about the position.”

Lianne rose. “But you need someone for Saturday, right? That’s what your ad said. Saturday is just five days away.”

Velvet got her point. “I’ll call by tomorrow.”

“Cool.”

*Maybe.*

*Maybe not.*

As soon as Lianne left, Velvet drew the copy of the license front and center. She braced herself, not sure whether she wanted the date to match or not. Her uncertainty was surprising. It had been twenty-three years.

She looked down. Twenty-three years, two months, and twelve days.

Her hands covered her mouth. “No.”

*Yes.*



Lianne had been the last applicant. Objectively, the girl had as little or as much going for her as the other applicants. As the girl had said, selling junk food wasn’t brain surgery. It wasn’t a question of capability. Velvet could choose the three she needed from the applicants and get by.

The question was, should she choose this particular girl?

Lianne.

Lianne Skala.

A hometown girl.

A girl with a unique streak of gray hair framing her face.

Not so unique.

Velvet crossed her office to a grouping of photos on the wall. Faces looked back at her: football players from her past, coaches, administrators. There, in a photo on the right-hand edge, was the one she was looking for. She removed it from its nail and stared.

At herself. Twenty years younger, smiling at the camera, a sweep of gray hair framing her face.

She pulled the photo to her chest and endured a wave of panic rushing up her spine. To have seen that same streak of hair in this girl—proof that, in spite of decisions made back then and the circumstances created since, they were cut from the same cloth.

Lianne had mentioned karma had brought her here. Today. To apply for the job. Velvet didn't believe in karma any more than she believed in divine intervention, or signs, or predestination, or fate, or . . . or much of anything. Life just *was*. Things just happened.

Yet the fact remained: Lianne had walked into Velvet's office. No one else's office. Velvet's office.

It hardly seemed a coincidence.

Lianne, born on the same day as the child Velvet had given up for adoption, as the daughter she'd not seen since the day they'd both left the hospital. Lianne, looking enough like her younger self to be her double. No, that wasn't coincidence.

Punishment. That's what it was. Further punishment for her own ignorant, rash stupidity.

More than twenty years ago, Velvet had messed up her life. And because of that, she knew she deserved every trial, every slice of suffering, every price—no matter how steep and unpayable—that she'd endured ever since.

Including this.

Yet rather than run from it, Velvet did what she always did. She embraced it.

She returned to her desk, found Lianne's application, and dialed the phone.

10

"You got the job," she told the girl and ended the call with the details of where and when to show up for the first day of work.

Now she just had to figure out what came next in this dance of . . . what had Lianne called it? . . . karma.

She put her head in her hands and cried.



Peter McLean sat on the plaid couch in his apartment, his feet on the coffee table, a copy of *Cross-cultural Sociology in Today's World* open on his lap. Chapters one and two were assigned for Wednesday's class. He just couldn't wrap his head around them. Turning on the TV sounded much more appealing. Maybe changing his major wasn't such a good idea. Not that the textbooks for his old agribusiness major would have been any more riveting.

He felt stupid for not being able to get into any textbook that came his way. Peter wasn't a kid anymore—and this wasn't his freshman year. Shouldn't he be able to grasp big ideas, big concepts, and even big words by now? Shouldn't he find his classes interesting and inspiring? This was real life he was working toward. Shouldn't he feel more grown-up about it?

Peter looked up when he heard whistling in the exterior hall. His roommate, William, never whistled. It had to be Lianne.

Lianne never bored him like his textbooks did. Excited him, challenged him, and even scared him more than he would ever admit. But bored him? Never.

Making her usual grand entrance, she burst through the front door without knocking.

She didn't say anything, just plopped onto the couch beside him, slammed his book shut, swung her legs over his, and lay down, taking possession of the couch. And him.

"So?" Peter asked. "Did you get the negotiations job?"

She wiggled her feet, a sign she wanted him to remove her sandals. Which he did. "Actually, it wasn't that kind of concessions work. It's food concessions. For football games."

Peter tried unsuccessfully not to laugh. Only Lianne could have made such an assumption. Lianne saw everything a half step off square from the rest of humankind. Whether that made her less or more than anyone else, he hadn't fully discovered yet. But it sure made her intriguing. Unlike him, she was wild and wonderful, always doing the unexpected.

She swatted at him but missed. "Stop laughing. It was an honest mistake. And I applied anyway. I might even get the job. So there."

"You? Selling pop and hot dogs? At a football game? Have you ever even seen a football game?"

"I don't need to know football to hand someone a burger and change." She snuggled lower, adjusting a couch pillow under her head. "I didn't know about the negotiating kind of concessions either, but that didn't stop me from wanting to apply for that job. I can learn anything. Do anything. I am *woman*."

"Yes, you are." He began to massage her feet. He admired her zest for life as well as her confidence. Nothing fazed her.

Most everything fazed him. He felt so stupid sometimes. In fact, half the time he opened his mouth, he heard stuff his father used to say pop out. Which freaked him out every bit as much as it freaked Lianne. Better to keep quiet and soothe his lady's feet.

She closed her eyes. "Mmm. Never stop that."

He could handle that. His constant goal was to make her happy, to have her smile at him and kiss him and . . . Peter hadn't had much experience with women. Living on a farm and going

to a small-town high school hadn't offered him many opportunities. It felt like people were watching him back home, no matter where he went. But now, here at college, it was like he was free for the very first time. And with Lianne . . . he was free to be hers—body, mind, and soul.

But was she his?

He wasn't sure.

They'd met last semester in an art history course—an elective for both of them. At the time he'd still been going after his agribusiness degree, learning how to run the family farm. Lianne was studying to become a world-class social worker—preferably in some far-off land that had poor plumbing, tropical diseases, and big societal needs. Making money wasn't as high on Lianne's priority list as it was for most people. Peter wished he could feel that way about life. Sometimes he wanted to break free. To experiment. But the expectations of his parents held rein over him, possessed him, propelled him, pursued—

A blast of some punk rock ballad shrieked its way through Lianne's handbag.

"Your purse is ringing," Peter said.

"Tell it to call back. I'm comfortable."

He reached over her legs and retrieved the bag. "Take it. It might be destiny calling."

She rolled her eyes but dug the phone out and answered. "You got me."

Lianne gave few clues as to who was calling. Her one-word answers of "Okay," "Sure," "Cool," and "Bye" were too generic to be informative.

Once finished, she flipped her phone shut and dumped her purse back on the table. "Where were we? Oh. Yes. Feet. Never stopping."

Peter resumed his foot massage. "Who was that?"

"My new boss."



“You got the job?”

“Looks like.”

He shoved her legs away and sat upright. “Awesome. Congratulations.”

Though she was sprawled across the couch, totally relaxed as usual, she still smiled.

And crooked a finger at him.

“Let’s celebrate.”

He could handle that. . . .



Lianne brought him a glass of water. “Guilt is for idiots, McLean,” she said.

He patted the space beside him on the couch. “A lifetime of being told not to have sex before marriage hangs over me. Hovering. Threatening to crash down on me.”

“It’s wrong for your parents to hold you to that. You’re an adult now. A baby adult, maybe. But an adult just the same.”

She loved holding her older-woman status against him. But three years wasn’t that big a deal.

“I don’t feel like an adult. I feel clueless.”

“Yeah. I know that feeling.” She nodded. “Sounds like an adult to me.”

He pushed her silver streak behind her ear. “You always make me feel better.”

She smiled. “I know.”

“Not like that!” He grinned at her. “That’s not what I meant—or not just like that. You always make me feel better about life. You make me believe there’s stuff out there waiting for me. Stuff I’d miss without you.”

She pulled back in order to see him fully. “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me, McLean.”

“I mean it.” He took her under his arm, and she settled in as if she belonged there. He couldn’t believe how amazing it felt to hold someone he loved and have that person hold him. “I’ve led a boring life. I had it good as a kid. Good parents on a good farm. Got through school okay, too.”

“I know—big man on campus and all that. But?”

“But . . . I’m expected to go to college, get a degree, and go back to the farm like I never left. To carry it on, just like my dad and his dad before him.”

“And you’re supposed to marry a nice local girl, go to church on Sunday, and have 2.5 children.”

“Yeah. Like that. Like some Gomer out of a sixties sitcom. Though my mom would probably prefer even more grandkids. She keeps telling me we’ve got that big ol’ farmhouse to fill.”

She pulled out of his embrace a second time. “You know I’m not what your parents want for you, McLean.”

“No. But you’re what I want for me,” he said.

“Awww.” She gave him a big, smacking kiss. “Style points for that one. Still, your parents aren’t going to like me tomorrow. And I’m pretty sure I won’t like them.”

“They’re good people. Give them a chance.”

“I will. But I can’t be who I’m not. Before we got serious, I told you I’m no churchgoing Lutheran farm girl. I warned you.”

He traced the edge of her knee. “You did. You warned me. It was one of the things that made you irresistible.”

She narrowed her eyes and stared at him in a way that always made him feel warm inside, like he was melting. There was something about Lianne that drew him in like a moth to a flame. He let himself fall further into the fire now.

Lianne groaned. “You are so . . . so . . .”

He couldn’t let that one go by without a challenge. “Perfect for you?”

She answered with a kiss.



Roman Paulson sat in the bleachers and closed his eyes, imagining a sea of red all around him.

On Saturday this stadium would be just that: a sea of red. Eighty thousand people dressed in the color of the Nebraska football team. Wearing red was not a requirement for entry, but the local culture meant it was near enough to being a law. Anyone coming in sporting another color was given a second look, their loyalty to team and state in question.

Being in the stadium was electric—even today during a simple practice. His dream was finally within his grasp. He'd left work early to be here. The advantage of being the sales manager at Efficient Office Machines was that he could do such things. Yet with his son's first starting game coming up Saturday—being high in the corporate ladder or not—he couldn't concentrate on work any better than a clerk in the mail room.

Roman's best friend, AJ, bumped against him, shoulder to shoulder. "Hey, proud papa. Keep your head in the game."

Roman opened his eyes and let the dreams of a glorious victory transform into the reality of a daily practice. No crowd, no cheers, no marching band. Just the sound of pads hitting pads and the shouts of coaches drilling the plays.

"I've waited a lifetime for this," Roman whispered.

"Five more days and our Billy will have his day on the turf—his first start."

Five more days. What was that compared to a lifetime of preparation?

AJ pulled his XXL T-shirt away from his chest a few times to get some air moving. It might have been September, but summer held on fast. "I remember you and me teaching Billy how to hold a football. The thing was as big as he was. And now . . . the way he runs with that ball . . . I'm so proud you'd think he was

my son.” He slapped Roman on the upper arm. “Should have been my son if only you hadn’t wooed Trudy away from me.”

“It didn’t take much,” Roman said.

“So you’d like to believe.”

16

“So I know. The better man won. Me.” It was their usual banter. Roman knew AJ didn’t take offense.

And it was the truth. Roman had indeed won AJ’s college sweetheart away. He’d been glad about it—because he’d loved Trudy madly—but a part of him always felt guilty too, because after losing out on their love triangle, AJ had settled for someone far lower on the great-woman pole than Trudy. She’d been a woman who had no tolerance for AJ’s humor or the fact the two couples lived next to each other. Roman hadn’t been too keen on that last detail either—at first. But as the years passed, and the love he and Trudy shared deepened, he quit worrying about having an ex-boyfriend next door. All he remembered was that AJ was his best friend. *Until death do us part.*

AJ’s wife never got used to it. After eight years of marriage, she’d moved on.

Soon after, Trudy had also moved on. But not because she’d felt the need to find herself. A heart defect that had silently been a part of her since birth made itself known, invaded their lives, and all too soon, took Trudy away from him.

He’d never felt whole since. But he’d had a son to raise, so he’d gotten on with the business of living. He’d made a good job of it, he thought, even though he still missed Trudy with every breath, every heartbeat. And AJ was a part of his parenting success.

The friendship between the two men had intensified due to their common grief and anger at the world. Without children of his own, AJ had become a second father to Roman’s seven-year-old son, Billy. AJ was the unassuming good old boy to Roman’s driven stage-father routine. Two fathers. No mothers.

No women to speak of.

Roman had dated a few times since his wife's death, but no one could match the spirit and inner loveliness of Trudy. She had been the spark to his fire, the wind to his sails, the . . .

The love of his life.

Surprisingly, AJ had dated a lot. Hardly the handsome lothario type, more down-home than uptown, AJ always had a bevy of women who wanted to date him. He'd succumbed to many, but none for long, until a couple of years ago when he'd suddenly left the dating scene behind. He never would talk about it much, but Roman guessed some date had accidentally (or not so accidentally) made a bad comment about AJ's growing paunch and receding hairline. AJ's offhand remarks about women these days made Roman think something along those lines had given AJ second thoughts about the entire process. In Roman's experience, men could be every bit as vain as women—and their egos even more delicate.

"Hut!"

The ball was hiked and the quarterback executed a smooth handoff to Billy, who sped around the right side, sloughing off defenders, juking left, then right, gaining nine yards.

"Good one, Billy!" Roman yelled as AJ let out a holler.

Billy looked up at them, and even with the helmet, Roman could see the smile that continued to melt his papa-heart.

Roman had often wondered what he, as a father, would have done if this plan to bring up a football star hadn't worked out as planned.

Thankfully, that wasn't an issue. Billy had been a fine running back in high school, fine enough for Nebraska to come calling, offering him a scholarship. Roman often wished Lincoln were a smaller town so everywhere he went people would know him and ask about his son, a star football player for the Huskers. Lacking that, Roman managed to bring up the subject

in most venues. He knew it was bragging, but he couldn't help himself. His son was an amazing kid.

If people didn't like it? They could move to another state.

18

This coming Saturday, after two years in the program, after working himself up from third string, Billy was going to start the game. Roman had aspirations he would be another Heisman trophy winner like Mike Rozier or Johnny Rodgers. The tradition and legacy were firmly established. His son was ready to slip into those same running shoes. If his buttons were threatened by bursting now . . .

Roman let his gaze rise from the green of the field to the sky. It was a brilliant blue with white clouds offering the occasional blessed shade. Once again his thoughts turned to Saturday, when thousands of red and white balloons would be released upon the first Nebraska score—the first Paulson score. He always found the balloons mesmerizing. The majority rose quickly above the stadium, yet there were always a few that offered an interesting side step as a current of wind took hold. Roman would follow the stragglers until they found a point of release and sped skyward as though the heavens had drawn in a breath.

Heavens. Trudy. He and his wife had never had a chance to discuss plans for their grown-up son. Yet Roman was certain she would approve of the path he'd set for Billy. Trudy loved college football. They'd met as students at a Nebraska game. If only she could see him now. See Billy. Sit in the bleachers next to Roman. Hold his hand, lean her cheek against his shoulder . . . He could easily remember the feel of her hair against his lips.

Billy broke through his tackles and sped toward the end zone. Roman and AJ stood and cheered—even though Billy didn't run full-out the entire way. After all, this was only practice.

Saturday was the real thing. Saturday was *everything*.



Roman and AJ walked past a concessions stand, empty except for a lone woman with a clipboard. A special woman. Roman took a step toward her. “Make sure you have plenty of Runzas for the game Saturday, Velvet.”

19

She took up her pen as though she would take notes at his command. “How many shall I put you down for? Ten? Twelve?”

“Three each should do it.”

“Unless we’re losing,” AJ added. “We eat more under stress.”

“Then let’s hope for a loss.”

“Watch it, lady.” Roman walked to the counter and gave her a smile. He enjoyed teasing Velvet. They’d met two years previous during Billy’s freshman year. Billy didn’t play that first year—being redshirted so he could play when his body was more mature and finely tuned—but Roman had still come to every home game. He’d met Velvet Cotton at the first one, her unlikely name as eccentric as her massive mane of gray hair and her no-nonsense talk. They’d been friends ever since, though they had little in common other than she was the concessions manager and he was a concessions eater. Not even Nebraska football was common ground, because despite her position, Velvet disliked football and all things Husker. Roman had asked her about it—why she would want to spend time with him when he lived football and worshiped all things Husker—and she’d responded, “Sue me. I’m a masochist.”

He’d tried to prod more out of her but had gotten nowhere. But he liked her style. And so they’d continued their strange relationship, as it was, illogical or no.

Responding to her hope for a loss, Roman crooked a finger toward her. She dutifully leaned forward. “Don’t ever talk about losses, Velvet,” he said. “You know Billy’s starting for the first time Saturday. They can’t lose.”

She laughed and stood upright. “They can’t lose because Billy’s the greatest player who’s ever lived, or they can’t lose because you’d die on the spot if they dared?”

“Both,” Roman and AJ said at the same time.

She pulled a box of cups from under the counter and checked its contents. “Then I retract my statement. I will sacrifice a few Runza sales for the sake of your pride.”

“I appreciate it.”

“I appreciate it, too,” AJ said. “He’s too heavy to haul back to the car.”

She made a notation on the clipboard, then pointed at a stack of boxes on a shelf. “Get me that top one, will you, Roman?”

He went behind the counter and pulled down a box of paper napkins, placing it on the counter.

“So,” Velvet said, “aren’t we due for another outing?”

Roman noticed her choice of words. They never called their time together *dates*. It wasn’t that kind of a relationship. But when *had* they last seen each other? Two weeks? “I’m game if you are,” he said. “Wednesday? Dinner?”

“You’re on.”

The two men walked away. “I still don’t understand why you two see each other—or what you see in each other,” AJ said. “From what you tell me you never really get beyond small talk.”

Roman tried to put it into words. “We’re more than friends, but less than . . . I let her be in whatever iffy mood she’s in, and she does the same for me. We don’t have to pretend or be *on*. We understand each other.”

“A feat, I’m sure.”

“Hey, it works, so back off, bucko.”

“Fine,” AJ said. “For the moment. But I reserve the right to razz you and harass you at a later date. If warranted.”

As if Roman could stop him.





Roman and AJ stood outside the door to the team locker room waiting for Billy to exit. Others waited for their players, an impromptu society of well-wishers.

21

The door opened and the boys streamed out. They were far less formidable without their shoulder pads, but many still outweighed Roman by a hundred pounds—of muscle. Billy was third out. His face lit up when he saw Roman and AJ. They took turns pulling him into a manly hug with the requisite pat on the back. Roman snuck a peck to his son's ear. Then he slid his arm around Billy's shoulders and they headed for the parking lot. "So? How does it feel to be a football star?"

"The game's Saturday, Dad."

"You got two touchdowns today."

"Against our own players. Saturday . . . it'll be different."

"It'll be awesome," Roman said.

"I hope so."

Roman couldn't tolerate any doubts. "None of that. You've worked hard for this. You've earned your starting position. It will be great."

"I know. You're right. I admit that when I'm on the field—" he looked at his father, his eyes serious—"it feels amazing. Like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. What I've been building toward, my entire life."

Roman drew his son's head toward his until they touched.



The restaurant near campus was nearly full, but nothing like Saturday, when it would be swarming with fans. The decor was pure Husker-mania with banners and pennants and signed posters of past football heroes on the wall. Roman edged his

way through the crowd to the hostess desk and said, “Three, please.”

“Name?”

“Paulson.”

22

A man with a protruding gut that revealed he liked to watch football, not play it, stepped toward Billy. “Hey, I recognize you. You’re William Paulson, right?”

“Billy,” Roman said.

“Uh, yeah. That’s me,” Billy said.

The man shook Billy’s hand, then shouted out to those present, “We have William Paulson here! Number sixteen! Our best hope for a national championship.”

The people at the tables applauded. A few stood to get a better look. The good preseason press Billy had received paid off. Someone started chanting, “Go Big Red! Go Big Red!” until the entire place rocked.

A grandmother type who was waiting for a table kissed Billy’s cheeks as if he were her own boy child. A couple of men slapped him on the back and wanted to shake his hand.

“This is my dad and our best friend,” Billy said.

The greetings were expanded to Roman and AJ. Roman filed the moment away for later reliving. It was everything he’d ever hoped for.

Big Belly told the hostess, “We’re up next on your list, but give these three our table. We can’t have our best hope waiting like a nobody.”

The hostess made a notation, winked at Billy, then said, “If you’ll follow me, your table’s ready.”

Once they were seated, and the newest onslaught of well-wishers left the table, Billy leaned toward the two men in his life and said, “Send me to heaven now. It doesn’t get any better than this.”

Roman agreed completely.



They were just finishing their steaks when Roman asked his son, “When are you coming to dinner this week?”

“I can’t,” Billy said, sitting back in his chair with a satisfied grunt. “Not this week.”

23

Roman couldn’t help but voice his disappointment. “You couldn’t last week or the week before. I bet you’ve only been over two or three times all summer.”

“Sorry. I had that lawn job and then practice started, and . . . and this week I have something every night.” He looked at AJ, and some kind of acknowledgment passed between them.

What was going on?

“What kind of something?” Roman asked.

“Just stuff I committed to. I’ll come next week.”

Roman was saddened to see how their once-a-week visits had diminished the past year or so. When he’d first started college, Billy had often brought his friends over to hang out. Recently, more often than not, he had something going that kept him away.

Roman’s disappointment overflowed. “It’s always something.”

“I can’t help it, Dad. I’ve made promises. Commitments.”

“You’ve made a promise to me.” He felt bad for being so harsh and straightened his unused spoon so it was perpendicular to the edge of the table. “Come on, Billy. How about Thursday?”

“I . . .” Another look to AJ. “I can’t.”

“Lay off, Roman,” AJ said. “The boy has a busy life, you know.”

*I don’t know, but apparently you do.*

Roman pushed his plate toward the center of the table. “I don’t mean to complain, but it feels like I’m in the middle of a conspiracy against me; like you two have something planned, and I’m not invited, and . . . and I don’t like the feeling.”

“It’s not a conspiracy, Dad.” He looked down at the table. “On Thursday I have this picnic thing I have to go to. For charity.

Some kids I'm mentoring with a few friends. We're taking them for a picnic and swimming, and in a few weeks they're even going to get to go to a Nebraska football game."

"Who's *we*? Who's taking them to this picnic?" *And why am I not invited?*

Billy hesitated and once again glanced at AJ. "Church. I'm doing it through church."

Roman fell back against his chair. "Since when are you still involved in church? I thought we discussed that ages ago."

"We did. And I know the whole church thing made you nervous back then—"

"Still makes me nervous. I thought you stopped going to church."

Billy sighed. He looked like he wanted to be anywhere else. "I stopped telling you about me going to church. But I still go."

AJ defended him. "Back off, Rome. Since when is church a bad thing?"

"Since my son became obsessed with it." His insides churned in a way he hated. His relationship with Billy had always been good. They were best buds, chums, friends. But lately . . . it killed him to see Billy pull away. Especially because he suspected the culprit was an interfering coach who was butting in where he wasn't wanted.

"I'm not obsessed. I just got involved. Coach Rollins said that—"

Roman felt vindicated. "Your coach is making you go?"

"Not at all. But some of my teammates—"

"The coach should keep his faith to himself."

"He does. He doesn't preach at us. Nothing like that. But his faith is a part of him. We all see it. You can't talk to the man without seeing it. Feeling it."

"I know what you mean," AJ said. "Even when he gives an interview to the press, you can tell he's an honorable man, a good man. A godly man."

Roman objected. “A man can be good and honorable without being a Holy Roller.” *Look at me, Billy. Look at me.*

“He’s not like that,” Billy said. “He just makes a guy want to be a better person, you know? Off the field as well as on.”

“Sounds good,” AJ said.

All Roman’s frustration came tumbling out. “It sounds intrusive. Like I told you when you first started talking about this God stuff, I don’t want you involved with people like that. People who offer false promises, who get you involved with a bunch of meaningless ceremony, with a God who doesn’t . . .” He couldn’t finish the sentence as intended. “I said it then, and I’ll say it now: You have a father who loves you. You don’t need another one in your coach, or God.”

AJ laughed nervously. “That’s pretty egotistical of you, Rome.”

Probably. But Roman didn’t take it back. He couldn’t. “I told you I don’t want church stuff to interfere with your life. With sports. Your future is football.”

Billy rearranged his steak knife on his plate, setting it just so. “That’s my present. My focus right now. But it’s not my future—at least not forever. Not completely. John 3:16, Dad. That’s my future. Our future.”

*John what?* Roman had no idea what he was talking about.

The waitress came to the table and reached for their dirty plates. “Can I tempt you with some Death by Chocolate or Crazy Carrot Cake this evening?”

“No,” Roman said, staring across the table at his son, pleading with him with his eyes. “Unfortunately, we’re done here.”



The ride back to Billy’s apartment was made in silence. As was the trip to Roman’s and AJ’s homes—until Roman pulled into the driveway and turned off the car.

AJ put his hand on the door handle. “You really shouldn’t be so hard—”

Roman pointed a finger at him. “Don’t.” He took a calming breath. “Please.”

26

AJ kept his eyes locked on Roman, took in a breath, let it out, and took another one.

Roman mentally coaxed him. *Don’t say anything. Not a thing, AJ. I don’t want to discuss—*

AJ got out of the car, shoved his hands in his pockets, and started to walk away. Halfway across the lawn he turned. “Barring the gates of heaven is a hefty job, Roman. I hope your muscles are as strong as your ego.”

Low blow.



Roman tossed his keys on the table in the foyer and stormed to the kitchen. The door of the refrigerator was the next victim, as was the can of Coke, which dared to foam upon opening. He tossed it in the sink, where it gurgled and fizzed down the drain.

AJ’s parting words returned to him, fresh and biting: *“Barring the gates of heaven is a hefty job, Roman. I hope your muscles are as strong as your ego.”*

The kitchen table, which had the audacity to exist, seemed to mock him. Anger washed through him until he could hardly stand it. He swiped his hand across the surface, sweeping it clean of the morning newspaper, salt and pepper shakers, napkins, a coffee mug, and a plate and fork dirtied with egg yolk.

They fell to the ground with a satisfying crash.

“He’s not yours; he’s mine!”

Roman’s words echoed in the sudden silence. He felt a shiver course up his spine.

*I shouldn’t have said that.*

Yet how could he not say it? Billy was everything to him. Billy was the only thing that gave his life meaning and purpose. Sure, he had his work, but it was just work. And, yes, he had friends, but they had their own lives.

Billy was *his*. And the thought of his son being lured into a world of church and charity without Roman's knowledge and against his will—it was like getting slugged in the stomach.

The house was quiet. And empty. Too empty.

He never should have let Billy move out of the house. Yet everyone had said it was a good idea. They told him letting kids live in a dorm, and then an apartment, gave them the full college experience, helped them make friends, forced them to be tolerant and deal with problems and people issues. It helped them become independent.

Which is exactly what had happened.

And it had Roman's temper steaming at full boil.

Billy's newfound independence had made him defy his father's wishes. Over the last thirteen years Roman had carefully honed a plan for Billy's life, a plan which Billy was now ignoring.

Roman looked upon the litter of debris on the kitchen floor. It sickened him. The whole situation sickened him. The broken shards were like the debris of his shattered dreams, evidence of Billy's betrayal. And of God's greedy nature.

God—if he existed—had stolen Roman's wife from him.

No way was Roman letting God take his only son.

He left the mess where it had landed.

Turning his back on everything, he turned out the light and stomped off to bed.



After work, Maya pulled into the driveway and was surprised to see her husband's white pickup. It was still daylight. As a landscaper,

Sal used the daylight like a fisherman used the sea. Too soon the days would be short and the work would dry up for the winter.

She sneaked her compact car beside his and entered the house via the kitchen door. Sal was at the kitchen table arranging purple asters in a vase.

“For me?”

He reddened. “For Mama. She wants to see us as soon as we can get over there.”

Agata Morano. The quintessential Italian mother-in-law: full of pasta and pester. And Salvatore was the quintessential Italian son: full of pamper and provision.

Maya set her briefcase on the floor by the coat tree. “Oh, Sal. Can’t it wait? Or . . . or maybe you could go alone? I’m just not up to it.” It’s not that she didn’t love her mother-in-law, but polite chitchat after a hard day at the office was not what she had in mind.

He cut off the end of an aster before slipping it into the vase. “I saw her alone last time. Tonight she specifically asked for both of us to come.” He glanced up. “I’ve been thinking about asking *her* for the money.”

*Really?* Maya perked up. “Your mother doesn’t have that kind of money. Does she?”

“She might. Dad left her some.”

She knew the concession Sal was making in offering to do this. And yet she wasn’t sure it would be worth it. Not when the chance of success was so small. “Your mother barely gets by as it is. Besides, as her only son and daughter-in-law, we should probably be the ones giving her money, making *her* life easier.”

A flower stopped in midair. “But I know she wants us to have a child as much as we do. Unless we keep trying the infertility treatments . . . We don’t have the money for another one, Maya. You know that.”

All too well.

He snipped another stem. “I’m sure she’d like to be a part of



it, contribute something to the cause.” He placed the last flower in the vase. “I just want a child. I want one now.”

Maya’s stomach clenched in a far-too-familiar degree of tension. This need they shared, this desire to conceive, consumed nearly every thought she had and far too many of their actions. They’d been disappointed twice already. To try again was her greatest desire—and also her greatest fear.

Practicality claimed its moment. “There’s no guarantee more treatments will work, Sal. We’ve already spent twenty thousand with nothing to show for it, not to mention the mental and emotional cost of getting our hopes up each time only to fail. It’s enough to break my heart.”

“It’ll happen. I know it.” He pointed the clippers at her. “Don’t get pessimistic on me, Maya Morano. God wants us to have a child. Period. Because of that, nothing will stop it from happening.”

She was far less certain. If the past six years of trying was any indication, Maya was pretty sure Sal was reading God’s intentions wrong. Way wrong.

He was waiting for her to say something, to yield to his pep talk. But she couldn’t egg him on. It didn’t do either of them any good. There wasn’t much that did either of them any good anymore. Which was another problem.

He took her silence as dissension. “Super,” he said. “With your kind of attitude nothing’s going to happen.”

She’d hurt him. Again. “Sal, I’m just trying to be realistic.”

He picked up another flower. “Let me finish this. Mama is waiting.”

As was *this* mama.



Agata met them at the door, catching them before they knocked. “Come; come in,” she said.

Maya's defenses rose immediately. Not that Agata wasn't always welcoming, but her eagerness, and the fact Maya spotted the requisite cherry biscotti and coffeepot and cups already set on a tray in the tiny living room—there was a hint of desperation in the air.

They offered their hugs and received Agata's dual kiss to their cheeks. Sal received an additional cupped hand to his face. "I am so glad you have come."

It was too formal. Too arranged.

Instead of heading back to the kitchen to sit around the table while Agata pattered at the stove or sink, they were led to the gold couch. The piping along the cushion's edges was worn where the bend of the knee met fabric.

Agata sat in her usual place, the olive Queen Anne chair across from them, the table of coffee between. She made no move to serve, but sat with her feet on the floor, her hands playing with the edge of a flowered apron.

Sal adjusted a needlepoint pillow at his ribs. "Well then."

The easy conversation—as much a feature of this house as the bevy of throw rugs leading from here to there and the porcelain knickknacks holding court on every doiled surface—was absent. The gallery of family pictures looked down on them, their smiling faces covering their certain confusion.

Something was up. Something big.

Maya was about to take a napkin and place a biscotto on it—for she knew nothing pleased Agata more than an eating guest—when her mother-in-law lifted her hands from her apron for the briefest of moments, then let them fall as words spilled out. "I have lung cancer."

The room became a snapshot, a slice of time caught forever in Maya's mind. *Oh yes, this is what my mother-in-law's living room looked like the day she told us she had cancer.*

Sal was out of his seat, kneeling at his mother's side. He put

his arms around her and hugged her like he thought his strength could hold the cancer at bay. “I’m so sorry. So, so sorry.” Tears rolled down his cheeks, mirroring his mother’s.

Maya tried breathing and was surprised when a breath allowed itself to be taken in and released. She felt frozen, like Lot’s wife. A pillar of salt trapped in a living world. But even when freed from that paralysis, she didn’t know what to say. She knew her first thoughts were probably not the best to put into words just yet: *What’s the prognosis? How long do you have?*

Agata took Sal’s hand in both of hers and looked into the eyes of her son. “I’ve already had tests. It’s rather extensive. All those years living with your father’s smoking, I guess.”

That Eduardo Morano had died in a car accident even though he should have been the one to suffer lung cancer was an irony that didn’t change a thing. His beloved wife had been left behind to pay the price for her husband’s vice. Life was so unfair. Maya thought of her own childless state and immediately felt a twinge of guilt. Her troubles were dwarfed by what Agata was facing.

She searched for the right words. What came out of her mouth finally was, “What can we do to help?”

“I go in for my first round of treatment tomorrow.”

“So soon?” Maya asked. Yet time . . . time was always of the essence in these things. All things, really. . . .

“The doctor thinks it’s best.”

Maya’s eyes met her husband’s, saw what was implied, then looked back to Agata.

“I’ll take you,” Sal said.

“I’ll go too,” Maya said.

“No, Maya. I appreciate the offer more than I can say, but I don’t want to make a big production of it. But, Sal, I *was* hoping you would come with me.” She reached for the coffee and began to pour. “Maya, take a biscotto, dear.”

Maya took a napkin and placed a biscotto on it. As she waited

for her coffee, her mind ticked along its ingrained track. An ungracious thought intruded.

*So much for asking her for money.*

*Stop it!* she told herself firmly.

32

And yet the need to have a grandchild *now*, to give this woman some bit of happiness, just in case . . .

Maya had to get pregnant. Had to.



Sal drove a fist into his pillow before placing his head in the indentation. Although he had done so every night of the seven years they'd been married, tonight's punch seemed to possess an extra dose of force.

Maya lay on her side facing him and waited. Once under the covers he turned his head in her direction and held out a hand, palm up. "We need to pray. About Mama."

They didn't pray every night—at least not together—but Maya *did* pray. Quite often. *Make me a mother, make me a mother* was a prayer she said so often she wondered if God was getting tired of hearing her.

A lot of good it had done. She kept thinking there was some magic word, some stance or way of praying that would assure her God would hear and give her the answer she wanted. She'd tried most of them: sitting, standing, shouting, whispering, begging . . .

In her deepest, most secret core, she sometimes wondered if there was a God out there to listen at all.

But her questions about prayer could not be answered tonight. Tonight, to please her husband, she took his hand and let him reach out to the Almighty for them both.

## **SCRIPTURE VERSES IN JOHN 3:16**

- CHAPTER 1:** Pride/Psalm 123:4
- CHAPTER 2:** Wicked/Psalm 10:11  
Temptation/Matthew 26:41  
Temptation/1 Corinthians 10:13 (paraphrased)
- CHAPTER 3:** Approval/Galatians 1:10  
God's provision/Psalm 121:3
- CHAPTER 4:** Plans/Proverbs 19:21  
Purpose/Jeremiah 1:5
- CHAPTER 5:** Pain/Psalm 69:29  
Unity/Matthew 18:20
- CHAPTER 6:** Hope/Psalm 130:5-6
- CHAPTER 7:** Wisdom/James 1:5-6
- CHAPTER 8:** Sacrifice/Matthew 20:28  
Prayers/James 5:16  
Sacrifice/John 15:13  
Lord's Prayer/Matthew 6:9  
Strength/Philippians 4:13
- CHAPTER 9:** God's ways/Isaiah 55:8-9  
Love/1 John 4:19  
God's ways: Isaiah 45:15 (paraphrased)  
Prayer/Matthew 7:8

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever seen someone hold up a John 3:16 sign at a sporting event? What did you think about it at the time? Did you know what the verse said/meant? Why is the message of this verse important?
2. In Chapter 1, Maya says she is striving to be the person she wants to be. Is this goal common to all people or are some people content with who they are? Which is better: to strive for change or to be okay with who you are?
3. Maya followed her boss's instructions toward success but went too far. Do you think she should have been held more or less responsible than she was? Have you ever experienced a situation at work where a coworker cut ethical corners? What were the results?
4. What do you think of William and Carrie's vow to stay pure until marriage? Is this feasible in today's world?
5. At Billy's funeral, Agata says William was praying for her and cites a verse: "The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." What constitutes being a "righteous" person? Who, in your life, would you deem righteous?
6. Peter gets seduced away from the foundation of his life. When have you or those you loved been lured away from your foundation? What came of the experience? Are you better now for having gone through it?

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Nancy Moser is the best-selling author of seventeen novels including *Solemnly Swear*, *The Good Nearby*, *Mozart's Sister*, and the Christy Award–winning *Time Lottery*. She also coauthored the Sister Circle series with Campus Crusade cofounder Vonette Bright. Nancy is a motivational speaker, and information about her Said So Sister Seminar can be found at [www.nancymoser.com](http://www.nancymoser.com) and [www.sistercircles.com](http://www.sistercircles.com). Nancy and her husband, Mark, have three grown children and live in the Midwest.

## **A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

*Dear Reader,*

If someone held up a John 3:16 sign right now, how would you react?

I have to admit that years ago, when I first saw such a sign at a game, my first reaction was, “Huh?” My second reaction was to figure the verse had something to do with victory. Only years later did I actually read the verse and remember the sign and go, “Oh . . . that kind of victory.” Better late than never.

In this book I wanted to showcase characters who were given multiple chances to say yes to God but for a variety of reasons told him “No” or “Not now.” We all have a tendency to believe there’s always another day to dig deeper into our souls and commit. We can pray a little harder later, when we have more time. Like Scarlett O’Hara always said, “I’ll think about that tomorrow . . . after all, tomorrow is another day.”

Sometimes. But not always. Because time does run out.

I am guilty of all the excuses listed above—and more. I’d like to rationalize that it’s normal and human nature, but so is eating too much at Christmas and vegging out in front of TV, neither of which is good for us. Making our relationship with God number one on our daily to-do list is a goal we need to strive for—over and over and over again. He appreciates the effort and blessedly understands and forgives the failures.

This book is also about lives that intersect. Some call it coincidence. I call it destiny. Some may say, “But to have so many lives intersect is implausible.”

Is it?

There’s a game about Kevin Bacon that points out how most Hollywood stars can be traced back to some connection with



Kevin Bacon. Is that because Bacon is that important or special? No. The same exercise could be executed with other actors who have been around awhile.

410

Why can't the same exercise occur between unfamous people? We all know dozens, if not hundreds of people and come in contact with hundreds more. Is there a thread connecting us, pulling us together? I believe that's how God works, binding us, weaving our lives into a fabric of being. Why has God created us to live at this particular time, together? Why do we live where we do? Why do we have the jobs, the families, the organizations, the hobbies we do? To bring us into contact with others. Sometimes that contact is trivial, but sometimes . . . if we look closely, we can see the warp and weft, we can see the stitches, the knots, the mistakes of the weaving. Perhaps from far away, we can see only a block of color. Unimpressive. Ordinary. Yet, when we get close and really look . . . we just might see a purpose in it. A plan.

On a less lofty train of thought, the other reason this book combines these people in amazing ways is that I want it that way. I'm certainly not interested in writing about people's lives that have nothing to do with each other, and I bet you aren't interested in reading such a bit of prose, either. And so . . . I had great fun in discovering the connections, the possibilities, the *aha!* moments of the plot, where A could add to B and get C. And I want to thank my editor, Denise Little, for helping me dig deeper into their heads and hearts in the process.

So forgive me if I've annoyed you by my weaving. My intent was to inspire and to open your eyes to the weavings going on around each one of us. Take up a thread and dive in. Become part of this amazing fabric of life God has created for us. John 3:16, people; John 3:16.

*Blessings,*  
*Nancy Moser*