

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

BRIDGE TO HAVEN

a novel



FRANCINE
RIVERS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

PRAISE FOR *BRIDGE TO HAVEN*

“This is another compelling and moving story by one of the genre’s most honored and talented writers.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL, STARRED REVIEW

“Rivers returns with a page-turning recasting of the story of the prodigal son, here a prodigal daughter. . . . This story arc will be particularly resonant for Christian readers, but Rivers has the writing ability to reel in others who enjoy a well-told tale of redemption.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“In Rivers’s exquisite style, she takes the biblical story of Ezekiel 16 and translates it into a character-driven tale. . . . Richly detailed, at times disturbing, but completely real and dynamic, this is a book to savor.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“Longtime fans of Francine Rivers will not be disappointed in this painful, moving, and triumphant tale of redemption. For those who have not yet given this bestselling legend-of-an-author a try, I highly recommend *Bridge to Haven*.”

SERENA CHASE, *USA TODAY*

“*Bridge to Haven* is a wonderful and real coming-of-age story from the 1950s, when Hollywood was the dream and life could be a harsh reality.”

CBA RETAILERS+RESOURCES

“It is obvious why [Rivers] is a bestselling author, as she knows her craft so well. . . . Even though the book was set in 1950s America, the themes are universal and timeless.”

CHRISTIAN TODAY

“*Bridge to Haven* is a beautifully breathtaking and instantly captivating journey filled with heartbreak, despair, hope, and love. . . . What an amazing story!”

RADIANT LIT

“Rivers’s work is always dramatic and holds an underlying thread of redemption throughout. *Bridge to Haven* is replete with this theme of unconditional love meets temptation, trial, and failure. The story speaks volumes about the difficulties of life and how faith, hope, and love can indeed win out.”

BOOKREPORTER.COM

“Francine Rivers is perhaps the best novelist of our time. In *Bridge to Haven*, she quickly captured me with her characters and pulled me into the story of this prodigal daughter. It’s a story you can’t forget.”

NOVEL ROCKET

“Francine Rivers shows once again why she is a must-read author in Christian fiction.”

FRESH FICTION

“With exceptional characters and fantastic storytelling, *Bridge to Haven* is a gorgeous story of unfailing love and redemption.”

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

BRIDGE TO HAVEN



FRANCINE
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Bridge to Haven

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Bridge to Haven is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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CHAPTER I



*Yes, you have been with me from birth;
from my mother's womb you have cared for me.*

PSALM 71:6

1936

Filling his lungs with cool October air, Pastor Ezekiel Freeman started his morning vigil. He had laid out the route on a map when he first came to town. Each building brought people to mind, and he upheld them before the Lord, giving thanks for trials they had come through, praying over trials they now faced, and asking God what part he might play in helping them.

He headed for Thomas Jefferson High School. He passed by Eddie's Diner, the students' favorite hangout place. The lights were on inside. Eddie came to the front door. "Mornin', Zeke. How about a cup of coffee?"

Zeke sat at the counter while Eddie made stacks of hamburger patties. They talked high school football, and who might win a scholarship. Zeke thanked Eddie for the coffee and conversation and headed out into the dark again.

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He crossed Main Street and walked down to the railroad tracks toward Hobo Junction. He could see a campfire and approached the men sitting around it, asking if they minded if he joined them. Several had been around town long enough to have met Zeke before. Others were strangers, men who looked tired and worn from crisscrossing the country, picking up odd jobs along the way, living hand to mouth. One young man said he liked the feel of the town and hoped to stay. Zeke told him the lumberyard north of town was looking for a loader. He gave the young man a card with his name and the church's address and phone number. "Stop by anytime. I'd like to hear how you're doing."



The crickets in the tall grass and the hoot owl in a towering pine fell silent as a car pulled into Riverfront Park, stopping near the restrooms. A young woman got out of the driver's seat. The full moon gave her enough light to see where she was going.

Groaning in pain, she bent and put her hand over her swollen belly. The contractions were coming swiftly now, not even a minute between. She needed shelter, some hidden place to give birth. She stumbled through the darkness to the ladies' room, but the door wouldn't budge. Uttering a strangled sob, she turned away, searching.

Why had she driven so far? Why hadn't she checked into a motel? Now it was too late.



The town square was next on Zeke's route. He prayed for each of the shopkeepers, the council members who had a meeting in the afternoon at the town hall, and the travelers staying at the Haven Hotel. It was still dark when he walked along Second Street and spotted Leland Dutcher's produce truck turning at the mouth of the alley alongside Gruening's Market. Everyone called him Dutch, including

his wife, who was in the hospital, suffering through the last stages of cancer. Zeke had sat with her several times and knew she grieved more about her husband's lack of faith than her approaching death. "I know where I'm going. I'm more worried about where Dutch will end up." The man worked six days a week and saw no need to spend the seventh in church. In truth, he was mad at God and didn't want to give Him the time of day.

The truck's brakes squealed briefly as it stopped. Dutch rolled down his window. "Cold morning to be gadding about the streets, Pastor. Have a girlfriend tucked away somewhere?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, Zeke pushed his cold hands into his pockets. "This is the best time to pray."

"Well, hellfire and hallelujah, don't let me stop you from doing your business." He barked a hard laugh.

Zeke came closer. "I saw Sharon yesterday."

Dutch let out his breath. "Then you know she's not doing too well."

"No. She's not." Unless there was a miracle, she didn't have much time left. She would rest easier if she weren't so worried about her husband, but saying so right now would only make Dutch more belligerent.

"Go ahead, Pastor. Invite me to church."

"You already know the invitation is always open."

Dutch wilted slightly. "She's been after me for years. Right now, all I feel like doing is spitting in God's face. She's a good woman, the best I've ever known. If anyone deserves a miracle, Sharon does. Tell me what help God is giving her?"

"Her body will die, Dutch, but Sharon won't." He saw the flicker of pain and knew the man wasn't ready to listen to more. "Want help unloading the truck?"

"Thanks, but I think I can manage on my own." Dutch ground the gears, uttered a vile word, and drove down the alley.

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The child came in a rush of slick warmth, spilling from her body, and the young woman gasped in relief. The iron, clawing embrace was gone, leaving her time to catch her breath. Panting in the shadows beneath the bridge, she looked up between the steel supports to the star-studded sky.

The baby lay pale and perfect in the moonlight, on a dark blanket of earth. It was too dark to see whether it was a boy or girl, but then, what did that matter?

Body feverish, the young woman struggled out of her thin sweater and laid it over the infant.

A cold breeze was blowing in. Zeke pulled up the collar of his jacket. He walked along Mason, across First and down McMurray, back up Second, toward Good Samaritan Hospital. The bridge came to mind, but it was in the other direction. During summer months, he often crossed over to Riverfront Park, especially when the camp was full of visitors living in pitched tents at the small adjacent campground.

No one would be in the campground this time of year, with temperatures dropping and leaves falling.

The darkness was loosening, though it would still be a while before the sun rose. He should be turning for home, but the bridge loomed in his mind. Zeke changed direction and headed for the bridge and Riverfront Park.

He blew into his hands. He should have worn gloves this morning. He stopped at the corner, debating whether to go to the bridge or make his way home. He always showered and shaved before sitting down to breakfast with Marianne and Joshua. Going to the bridge now would mean he'd get home late.

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He felt a sense of urgency. Someone needed help. It would only take ten minutes to walk to the bridge, less if he quickened his pace. He wouldn't have any peace unless he did.

Shivering violently, the young woman rolled up her car window, knowing she would never be free of guilt and regret. Her hand shook as she turned the key she had left in the ignition. She just wanted to get away from this place. She wanted to cover her head and forget everything that had happened, everything she had done wrong.

Turning the steering wheel, she pressed down too hard on the gas. The car skidded to one side, sending a rush of adrenaline through her. She corrected quickly, as the wheels shot pebbles like bullets into the park. Slowing, she turned right, toward the main road, staring ahead through tear-blurred eyes. She'd go north and find a cheap motel. Then she'd decide how to kill herself.

The breeze moved down over the sandy beach and beneath the bridge. No longer in the protected warmth of a mother's womb, the abandoned baby felt the stinging cold of the world. A soft cry came, then a plaintive wail. The sound carried across the water, but no lights went on in the houses above the river.

The steel Pratt trusses rose above the trees. Zeke crossed the old river road and took the walkway over the bridge. He stopped halfway across and leaned on the railing. The river rippled beneath him. It had rained a few days ago, leaving the beach smooth and packed. The place was deserted.

Why am I here, Lord?

Zeke straightened, still troubled. He waited another moment and then turned away. Time to head home.

A soft mewling mingled with the sounds of the river. What was

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it? Holding the rail, he leaned over, peering into the shadows of the abutment. The sound came again. He walked quickly across the bridge and cut across the grassy knoll to the parking lot. Was it a kitten? People often dumped unwanted litters along the road.

He heard the sound again, and this time he recognized it. Joshua had sounded like that when he was an infant. *A baby, here?* He searched the shadows, heart pounding. He spotted footprints. He went down to the riverbank and followed them across the sand to the gravel beneath the bridge. Pebbles crunched under his feet.

He heard it again, weaker this time, but so close he looked carefully before he stepped. Frowning, he hunkered down and picked up what looked like a discarded sweater. “Oh, Lord . . .” A baby lay so still, so small, so white, he wondered if he was too late. A girl. He slipped his hands beneath her. She weighed next to nothing. As he lifted her into the curve of his arm, her arms spread like a tiny bird attempting flight, and she let out a tremulous cry.

Surging to his feet, Zeke yanked open his jacket, popping shirt buttons so he could tuck the baby against his skin. He breathed on her face to warm her up. “Scream, sweetheart; scream as loud as you can. You hold on to life, now. You hear?”

Zeke knew every shortcut and was at Good Samaritan Hospital before the sun came up.

Zeke came back to the hospital in the middle of the day to see Sharon. Dutch was with her, looking grim and worn. He held his wife’s frail hand between his and didn’t speak. Zeke spoke to both of them. When Sharon held out her hand, he took it and prayed for her and for Dutch.

He couldn’t leave without going back to the nursery. He shouldn’t have been surprised to see Marianne standing outside the window, her arm around five-year-old Joshua. He felt tenderness and pride

well up inside him. Their son was all gangly arms, long skinny legs with knobby knees and big feet.

Joshua put his hands on the glass. "She's so little, Daddy. Was I that little?" The tiny baby girl slept soundly in a small hospital bassinet.

"No, Son. You were a whopping nine pounds." The look on Marianne's face concerned him. He took her hand. "We should head home, honey."

"Thank God you found her, Zeke. What would have happened to her if you hadn't?" Marianne looked at him. "We should adopt her."

"You know we can't. They'll find someone to take her." He tried to lead her away.

Marianne wouldn't budge. "Who better than us?"

Joshua joined in. "You found her, Daddy. Finders, keepers."

"She's not a penny I found on a sidewalk, Son. She needs a family."

"We're a family."

"You know what I mean." He cupped Marianne's cheek. "You've forgotten what it was like to take care of a new baby."

"I'm up to it, Zeke. I know I am. Why shouldn't she be ours?" She drew back. "Please don't look at me like that. I'm stronger than you think." Her eyes filled before she turned. "Just look at her. Doesn't she break your heart?"

He did look, and his heart softened. But he had to be practical. "We should go."

Marianne squeezed his hand. "Pure, genuine religion in the sight of God is shown by caring for widows *and orphans*."

"Don't use Scripture against me when it's you I'm trying to protect."

Joshua looked up. "Protect from what, Daddy?"

"Nothing." Marianne gave Zeke a quelling glance. "It's just an idea your daddy got into his head a long time ago. He'll get over it. God put her in your arms, Zeke. Don't tell me He didn't." Marianne looked at him with doe eyes. "We have our boy. A little girl would make everything perfect. Haven't I said so?"

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She had. Marianne had always yearned for more children, but the doctor had warned them that her heart, damaged by childhood rheumatic fever, wasn't strong enough to survive another pregnancy.

Zeke felt his resolve dissolving. "Marianne. Please. Stop." It had taken months for her to recover after Joshua's birth. Caring for another newborn would be far too taxing for her.

"We can be foster parents. Let's bring her home as soon as we can. If it's too much, then . . ." Her eyes grew moist. "Please, Zeke."

Ten days later, Dr. Rubenstein signed the release forms for little Jane Doe and placed her in Marianne's arms. "You'll make fine foster parents."

After the first three nights, Zeke started to worry. Marianne was up every two hours, feeding the baby. How long before her health suffered? Though she looked exhausted, she couldn't have been happier. Sitting in a rocking chair, Marianne cradled the baby in her arms and fed her a bottle of warm milk. "She needs a real name, Zeke. A name full of promise and hope."

"Abra means 'mother of nations.'" He said it before he could stop himself.

Marianne laughed. "You wanted her all along, didn't you? Don't pretend you didn't."

How could he not? Still, he felt a jab of fear. "We're foster parents, Marianne. Don't forget that. If things become too much for you, we'll call the caseworker. We'll have to give Abra back."

"Give her back to whom? The caseworker wants this to work. And I don't think there's anyone in town who'd take Abra away from us now. Do you?" Peter Matthews, a teacher at the local elementary school, and his wife, Priscilla, had expressed interest early on, but with an infant of their own, they had agreed Abra should stay with the Freemans if they were able to handle it.

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Marianne set the empty bottle aside and raised the baby to her shoulder. “We’ll need to save money so we can add another bedroom. Abra won’t be a baby for long. She’ll be in a crib, then a regular bed. She’ll need a room of her own.”

There was no reasoning with her. All of Marianne’s motherly instincts had kicked in, but each day wore her down a little more. Catnapping throughout the day helped, but catching a few minutes of sleep here and there wouldn’t be enough to keep her healthy. She was already tousle-haired and ashen, with dark circles under her eyes. “You sleep in tomorrow morning. I’ll take her with me.”

“In the dark?”

“Plenty of streetlights, and I know the town like the back of my hand.”

“She’ll be cold.”

“I’ll bundle her up.” He folded a blanket into a triangle, plucked Abra from Marianne’s arms, tied it around his waist and neck, and straightened. “See? She’s snug as a bug in a rug.” And right next to his heart, where she’d been from the first moment he laid eyes on her.

Sometimes Abra fussed when he took her out for his early morning walks, and he would sing hymns to her. “I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses . . .” She’d sleep for a while, and stir when Zeke stopped in at Eddie’s Diner or paused to talk with Dutch.

“Good of you to take on that little one. Isn’t she a cutie, with all that red hair.” Eddie ran a fingertip over Abra’s cheek.

Even hard-hearted Dutch smiled as he leaned out the window of his truck to peer at her. “Looks like a little angel.” He drew back. “Sharon and I always wanted kids.” He said it like it was another black mark against God. Sharon had passed away, and Zeke knew the man was grieving. When Abra’s tiny fingers grasped Dutch’s pinkie, he looked ready to cry. “Who’d leave a baby under a bridge, for heaven’s sake? Good thing you happened by.”

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“It was no accident, me going there that morning.”

“How so?” Dutch’s engine rumbled in neutral.

“I felt impelled to go. God does that sometimes.”

Dutch looked pained. “Well, I won’t speculate. No question that little girl needed someone that morning or she’d be dead and buried by now.” Like Sharon, his eyes said.

“If you ever want to talk, Dutch, just call.”

“Better just give up on me.”

“Sharon didn’t. Why should I?”

As Abra grew, she slept longer between feedings, and Marianne got more sleep. Even so, Zeke didn’t give up carrying Abra on his walks. “I’ll keep at it until she sleeps through the night.” Getting up every morning before the alarm, he’d dress and peek into the children’s bedroom and find Abra wide-awake, waiting for him.

1941

Even the demands of an easy child could wear on someone, and Zeke saw the toll on Marianne.

When he came home one afternoon in June and found Marianne asleep on the couch while Abra, now four years old, dunked her doll up and down in the toilet bowl, he knew things were going to have to change. “You’re exhausted.”

“Abra can get into something faster than I can say, ‘Jack Sprat could eat no fat.’”

“You can’t go on like this, Marianne.”

Others in the congregation noticed how tired Marianne looked and voiced concern. Priscilla Matthews spoke to them one Sunday after services. Her husband had put up gates so their four-year-old, Penny, couldn’t escape the living room. “The whole room is one big playpen right now, Marianne. I gave up and packed away everything breakable. Why don’t you have Zeke bring Abra over a couple

afternoons a week? You can rest without worry or interruptions for a few hours.”

Marianne resisted, but Zeke insisted it was a perfect solution.

Zeke bought lumber, nails, tar paper, and shingles and started work on a bedroom off the back of the house. Nine-year-old Joshua sat on the boards, holding them steady while Zeke sawed. One of the parishioners added wiring for electricity. Another built a platform bed with pullout drawers and helped Zeke put in windows overlooking the backyard.

Though Zeke was less than enthusiastic about his son moving into a narrow, converted-back-porch bedroom, Joshua loved his “fort.” His best buddy, Davy Upton, came over to spend the night, but the quarters were so tight, Zeke ended up pitching a tent for them on the back lawn. When he came back inside, he slumped into his easy chair. “The fort is too small.”

Marianne smiled, Abra tucked close beside her in the easy chair, a book of Bible stories open. “I don’t hear Joshua complaining. Those boys sound happy as crows in a cornfield, Zeke.”

“For now.” If Joshua took after his father, and his uncles back in Iowa, he would outgrow the space before he reached high school.

Zeke turned on the radio and went through the mail. The radio had nothing but bad news. Hitler grew ever more ambitious. The insatiable führer continued sending planes west across the English Channel to bomb England while his troops stormed Russia’s borders to the east. Charles Lydickson, the town banker, said it was only a matter of time before America got involved. The Atlantic Ocean wasn’t any protection with all those roaming German U-boats eager to sink ships.

Zeke thanked God Joshua was only nine years old, and then felt guilty, knowing how many other fathers had sons who might soon be going off to war.

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When Marianne finished reading the story of David and Goliath, she pressed Abra closer. The child was half-asleep, and Marianne looked too weary to rise. When she tried, Zeke came out of his seat. "Let me tuck her in tonight." He lifted Abra away from Marianne's side. The child melted against him, her head on his shoulder, her thumb in her mouth.

Pulling the covers up and snuggling them around her, he bowed his head. She made prayer hands, and he put his around hers. "Our Father, who art in heaven . . ." When they finished, he leaned down and kissed her. "Sleep tight."

Before he could raise his head, she wrapped her arms around his neck. "I love you, Daddy." He said he loved her, too. He kissed each cheek and her forehead before he left the room.

Marianne looked wilted. He frowned. She shook her head, smiling faintly. "I'm fine, Zeke. Just tired. There's nothing wrong with me that a good night's sleep won't cure."

Zeke knew that wasn't true when she started to rise and swayed slightly. He caught her up in his arms and carried her into their bedroom, then sat on the bed with her in his lap. "I'm calling the doctor."

"You know what he'll say." She started to cry.

"We need to start making other plans." He didn't have the heart to say it any other way, but she knew what he meant.

"I'm not giving up Abra."

"Marianne . . ."

"She needs me."

"I need you."

"You love her as much as I do, Zeke. How can you even think about giving her away?"

"We should never have brought her home."

Zeke rocked his wife for a moment, then helped her remove her chenille robe and settled her in bed. He kissed her and turned out the light before closing the door.

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He almost tripped over Abra, sitting cross-legged in the hallway, her teddy bear clutched against her chest, thumb in her mouth. He felt a jolt of misgiving. How much had she overheard?

He lifted her into his arms. "You're supposed to be in bed, little one." Tucking her in again, Zeke tapped her on the nose. "Stay under the covers this time." He kissed her. "Go to sleep."

Sinking into his chair in the living room, he put his head in his hands. *Did I misunderstand, Lord? Did I allow Marianne to sway me when You had another plan for Abra? You know how much I love them both. What do I do now, Lord? God, what do I do now?*

Abra sat shivering in the front pew while Mommy practiced hymns at the piano, even though Daddy had turned on the furnace so the sanctuary would be warm for tomorrow's service. Miss Mitzi said without the heater up and running properly, "the church smelled damp and moldy as a graveyard." Abra told her she didn't know what a graveyard smelled like, and Miss Mitzi said, "Well, don't look at me like that, missy. Only way I'll go is if I'm carried there in a pine box."

Rain pelted the roof and windows. Daddy was going over sermon notes in the small office off the narthex. Joshua had gone off in his Boy Scouts uniform to sell Christmas trees on the town square. Christmas was less than three weeks away. Mommy had let Abra help make gingerbread cookies for shut-ins and set up the crèche on the mantel. Daddy and Joshua put up lights around the outside of the house. Abra liked going out the front gate after dinner and looking at the house all lit up.

Mommy closed the hymnal, set it aside, and stood. "All right, honey. Your turn to practice." Abra hopped off the pew and flew up the steps to the piano bench. Mommy half lifted her and then let go, stepping aside to rest her hand heavily on the piano, the other hand against her chest. She panted a moment, then smiled encouragement

and set a beginners book on the stand. "Play your scales first and then 'Silent Night.' Can you do that?"

Usually Mommy stood right next to her. Except when she didn't feel good.

Abra loved to play the piano. It was her favorite thing to do. She played scales and chords, though it was hard to reach all the notes at once. She practiced "Silent Night," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and "Away in a Manger." Every time she finished one, Mommy said she was doing so well and Abra felt warm inside.

Daddy came into the sanctuary. "I think it's time to go home." He put an arm around Mommy and drew her to her feet. Disappointed, Abra closed the lid on the piano and followed them out to the car. Mommy apologized for being so tired, and Daddy said she'd be fine, just fine, with a few hours' rest.

Mommy protested when Daddy carried her into the house. He sat with her in their bedroom for a few minutes. Then he came out to the living room. "Play quietly, Abra, and let Marianne sleep awhile." As soon as Daddy went back out to the car, Abra went into Mommy and Daddy's bedroom and climbed up on the bed.

"That's my girl," Mommy said and snuggled her close.

"Are you sick again?"

"Shhh. I'm not sick. Just tired is all." She fell asleep, and Abra stayed with her until she heard the car out front. She slipped off the bed and ran into the living room to peer out the front window. Daddy was untying a Christmas tree from the top of the old gray Plymouth.

Squealing with excitement, Abra threw open the front door and ran down the steps. Hopping up and down, she clapped her hands. "It's so big."

Joshua came in the back door, his cheeks flushed from the cold, but eyes bright. Christmas tree sales had gone well. If the troop raised enough money this year, everyone could go to Camp Dimond-O

near Yosemite. If not, Joshua had already talked to the Weirs and McKennas, neighbors down the street, about hiring him to mow their lawns. "They agreed to pay me fifty cents a week. Times two, that's four dollars a month!" It sounded like a lot of money. "I'll have enough saved to pay for camp myself."

After dinner, Mommy insisted on doing the dishes and told Daddy to go ahead and open the box of ornaments and get started on the tree. Daddy untangled and strung the lights on the tree. He turned them on before he started unwrapping ornaments and handing them over one by one for Joshua and Abra to hang. "You take care of the top branches, Son, and leave the bottom half to Abra."

Something crashed in the kitchen. Startled, Abra dropped a glass ornament as Daddy surged to his feet and bolted for the kitchen. "Marianne? Are you all right?"

Shaking, Abra stooped to pick up the pieces of the ornament she'd broken, but Joshua moved her aside. "Careful. Let me do it. You might cut yourself." When she burst into tears, he pulled her close. "It's okay. Don't cry."

Abra clung to him, her heart thumping fast and hard as she listened to Mommy and Daddy arguing. They were trying to talk quietly, but Abra could still hear them. She heard sweeping and something being dumped in the trash under the sink. The door swung open and Mommy appeared, her smile dying. "What's the matter?"

"She broke an ornament."

Daddy picked Abra up. "Did you cut yourself?" She shook her head. Daddy patted her bottom. "Then there's no reason to be upset." He gave her a quick hug and set her on her feet again. "You two finish decorating the tree while I get a fire going."

Mommy turned on the radio and found a music program. Settling into her easy chair, she pulled some knitting from her basket. Abra climbed into the chair with her. Mommy kissed the top of her head. "Don't you want to put some more ornaments on the tree?"

“I want to sit with you.”

Daddy glanced over his shoulder as he arranged kindling. His expression was grim.

Sunday was cold, but the rains had stopped. Couples gathered inside the fellowship hall with their children, herding them off to Sunday school classes before going over to the sanctuary for “big church.” Abra spotted Penny Matthews and ran ahead of Mommy. When Abra reached her, they held hands and went off to their class.

After Sunday school, Mrs. Matthews came and got Penny. Mommy helped Miss Mitzi wash and dry cookie plates. Daddy talked with the last stragglers. After everyone left, the family went into the sanctuary. Mommy straightened up the hymnals, gathered discarded bulletins. Daddy put away the shiny brass candlesticks and offering plates. Abra sat on the piano bench, swinging her legs and playing chords.

The church door banged open, and a man ran in. Mommy straightened, a hand pressed against her chest. “Clyde Eisenhower, what on earth? You scared me half to death.”

The man looked flushed and upset. “The Japanese bombed one of our Naval bases in Hawaii!”

As soon as they got home, Daddy turned on the radio. He took off his suit jacket and hung it on the back of a kitchen chair rather than put it away in the bedroom closet the way he usually did. “. . . *the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by air, President Roosevelt has just announced. The attack also was made on all Naval and military activities on the principal island of Oahu. . . .*” The voice on the radio sounded upset.

Mommy sank onto a kitchen chair. Daddy closed his eyes and bowed his head. “I knew it was coming.”

Mommy helped Abra onto her lap and sat silent, listening to the

voice that just kept talking and talking about bombings and sinking ships and men burning to death. Mommy started to cry, and that made Abra cry. Mommy held her closer and rocked her in her arms. “It’s all right, honey. It’s all right.”

But Abra knew it wasn’t.

Miss Mitzi opened the door with a flourish. “Well, if it isn’t my favorite little girl!” She whipped her shawl over her shoulder and held her arms wide. Giggling, Abra hugged her. “How long do I get to keep you this time?”

“As long as you like,” Mommy said, following them into the living room.

Abra liked spending time with Miss Mitzi. She had knickknacks all over the living room and didn’t mind if Abra picked them up and looked at them. Sometimes, she made coffee and even filled a teacup for Abra, letting her pour in cream and as much sugar as she wanted.

Mitzi looked concerned. “You look awfully tired, Marianne.”

“I’m going to go home and take a nice long nap.”

“You do that, dear.” Mitzi kissed her cheek. “Don’t push yourself so hard.”

Mommy leaned down and gave Abra a hug. She kissed her on each cheek and ran her hand over her head as she straightened. “Be good for Mitzi, honey.”

Mitzi lifted her chin. “Go hunting,” she told Abra. Mitzi escorted Mommy to the front door, where they talked for a few minutes while Abra wandered the living room, searching for her favorite figurine—a shiny porcelain swan with an ugly duckling by its side. She found it on a corner table under a feather boa.

Mitzi came back into the living room. “Found it so soon.” She set it on the mantel. “I’ll have to find a better place to hide it next time.” Rubbing her hands together, she wove her fingers and cracked her

knuckles. “How about a little honky-tonk?” She plunked down at the old upright piano and banged out a happy tune. “After you learn how to play Bach and Beethoven and Chopin and Mozart, I’ll teach you how to play the fun stuff.” Her hands flashed up and down. She stood, nudging the stool aside, and kept playing, putting one foot out and then the other, in a clumsy hop-kick, hop-kick. Abra laughed and imitated her.

Mitzi straightened. “That was just a little teaser.” She swung the end of the shawl around her neck again and lifted her chin, her face grim. “Now, we must be serious.” She stepped aside and waved her hand airily for Abra to sit on the stool. Giggling, Abra took her position as Mitzi put some sheet music on the stand. “A little simplified Beethoven is the order of the day.”

Abra played until the mantel clock struck four. Mitzi glanced at her watch. “Why don’t you play dress up for a while? I’m going to make a call.”

Abra slid from the stool. “Can I look at your jewelry?”

“Sure you can, honey.” Mitzi waved toward the bedroom. “Look in the closet; check through the drawers, too. Try on whatever you like.”

Abra found a treasure trove of sparkly baubles and beads. She put on a pair of rhinestone earrings, and a looped necklace of red glass beads. She added one of pearls and another necklace with jet-black beads. She liked the weight of flash and glory around her neck. Spying Mitzi’s rouge pot, she rubbed a bit on each cheek, then used Mitzi’s eyebrow pencil. She chose the darkest red lipstick from Mitzi’s horde of small tubes. Opening her mouth wide, she imitated one of the women she’d seen in the church ladies’ room and smeared on the lipstick. She dug through more makeup and powdered her cheeks, coughing as a sweet-scented cloud engulfed her.

“Are you all right in there?” Mitzi called from the other room.

Waving her hands around her face, Abra said she was fine and

dandy, and headed for Mitzi's closet. She put on a wide-brimmed hat with a big red bow and found a black shawl with embroidered flowers and a long fringe. Mitzi sure had a lot of shoes. Abra sat and untied her oxfords, then slipped her feet into a pair of red high heels.

"Oh, my!" Mitzi hurried over and grabbed her hand. "Pastor Zeke is coming to pick you up. I've got to get you cleaned up before he gets here." She laughed as she whipped off the big hat and sent it sailing into the closet. She unwound the shawl. "An admirer gave me this when I was singing in a cabaret in Paris a hundred and fifty years ago."

"What's a cabaret?"

"Oh, forget I mentioned it." Mitzi flung the shawl on the pink chenille bedspread. "And these old necklaces! Good grief. How many do you have on? I'm surprised you're still standing under all this weight. Come on, now. Into the bathroom." Mitzi smeared on cold cream and wiped it away again. She giggled. "Don't you look like a little clown with those black brows and red lips." She giggled again, scrubbing Abra's cheeks until they tingled.

The doorbell rang.

"Well, that's the best we can do." She tossed the washcloth aside, straightened Abra's dress, fingered her hair here and there, and patted her cheek. "You look just dandy, sweetie pie." She took her hand and went back into the living room. "Wait right here." She went to the door and opened it quietly. "Come on in, Pastor Zeke."

Daddy took one look at Abra and his brows shot up. His mouth twitched as he gave a sideways look at Mitzi. "Hmmm."

Mitzi put her hands behind her back and smiled, all innocence. "Put the blame on my account, Zeke." She grinned. "I told her to have at anything she wanted in my room while I called Marianne. I forgot all the temptations. Marianne sounded so tired, I said I'd call you. I didn't think you'd be here until after five."

Daddy held out his hand. "Time to go, Abra."

Mommy was asleep on the couch. She roused, but Daddy told her

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to rest; he'd fix dinner. He told Abra to play quietly. Joshua came in the back door and talked with Daddy. The telephone rang. For the first time Abra could remember, Daddy ignored it.

Mommy seemed better when they all sat down to dinner. Daddy prayed the blessing. They all talked about their day. Joshua cleared and washed the dishes. Abra tried to help, but he shoed her away. "It'll be faster if I do it myself."

Mommy went to bed early. As soon as Daddy tucked Abra in, he followed. Abra lay awake, listening to the low sound of their voices. It was a long time before she went to sleep.

Abra awakened in the dark and heard the front door close. Daddy had gone out for his early morning prayer time. She could remember him carrying her on those walks and wished he still did.

The house felt cold and dark when he was gone, even with Mommy in the next room and Joshua out in his fort. She pushed the covers off and tiptoed into Mommy and Daddy's bedroom. Mommy shifted and raised her head. "What is it, honey?"

"I'm scared."

Mommy lifted the covers. Abra climbed up and shimmied under. Mommy put an arm around her, covered them both, and held her close. Abra soaked in the warmth and felt drowsy. She awakened when Mommy made an odd sound, a low groan, and muttered, "Not now, Lord. Please. Not now." She moaned again, her body stiffening. She rolled onto her back.

Abra turned over. "Mommy?"

"Go to sleep, baby. Just go back to sleep." She spoke in a strained voice, as though talking through her teeth. She made a sobbing sound, and then she let out a long breath and relaxed.

"Mommy?" When she didn't answer, Abra snuggled close, curling up beside her.

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Awakening abruptly, Abra felt cold, strong hands lift her out of bed. “Back to your own bed, Abra,” Daddy whispered. The cold air made her shiver. Wrapping her arms around herself, she looked back over her shoulder as she headed for the door.

Daddy went around the bed. “Sleeping in this morning?” He spoke in a soft, loving voice as he leaned down and kissed Mommy. “Marianne?” Straightening, he turned on the light. Her name came out then in a hoarse cry as he flipped away the covers and lifted her.

Mommy hung in Daddy’s arms like a limp rag doll, her mouth and eyes open.

Daddy sat on the bed, rocking her back and forth as he sobbed. “Oh, God, no . . . no . . . *no.*”

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

DEAR READERS,

The inspiration for *Bridge to Haven* came from Ezekiel 16, where God speaks of His chosen people as an unwanted newborn whom He cared for, watched over, and eventually chose as His bride, despite their rejection of Him. The story spoke profoundly to me, one who grew up in a Christian home and then abandoned what I had been taught. I set off on my own way, squandering the gifts God had given me. That quest brought its own consequences of pain and regret, but the repercussions eventually brought me to my knees, where I surrendered to the Lord who loved me through it all.

I have struggled in writing this book. I wanted Pastor Zeke to reflect the character of God, but I came to realize no man, not even a fictional one, can do that. Only Jesus, God incarnate, is a true representation. Zeke needed to be a loving father, fully human with strengths and weaknesses, faults and failures. The same was true of Joshua, the son, who strives to be like Jesus. Abra is like so many of us: wounded, confused, pursuing happiness by chasing after things that never truly satisfy. Few of my friends came to faith easily. I myself struggled and fought against the Lord, believing that to surrender would be to admit defeat. It took a long time for me to open

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my fist. But when I finally did, He was waiting for me, and He took my hand. He has never let go, and I've been in love with Him ever since.

My prayer is that the story of Zeke, Joshua, and Abra will draw you into a closer relationship with the God who sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for you so that you might live forever in Him. Our dreams of happiness are fulfilled only in Him.

May you step out in faith and cross the bridge to the haven of rest God provides.

Francine Rivers