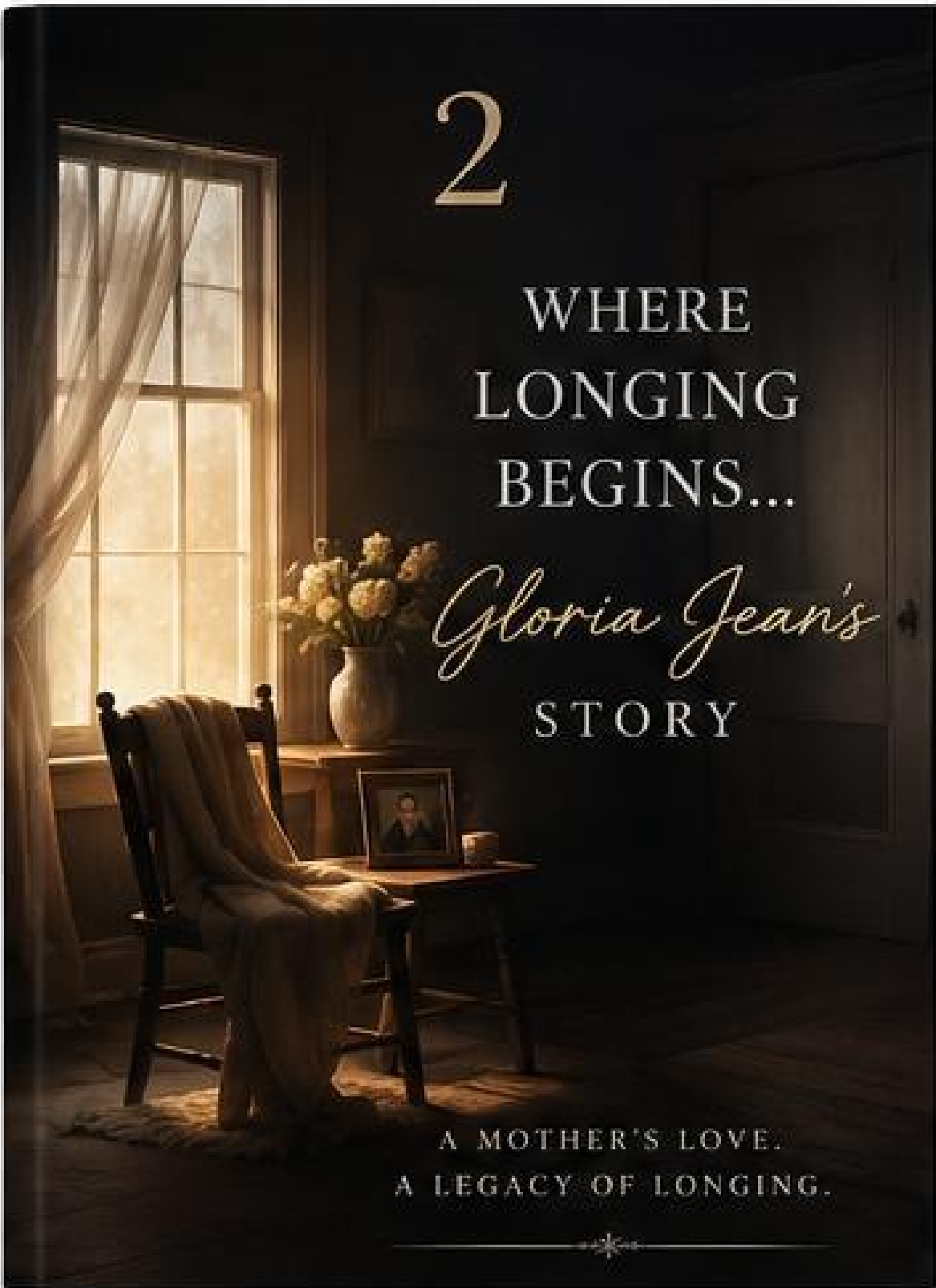




Part 2: Where Longing Begins

Gloria Jean's Story

We inherit more than eye color and the shape of our smile from those who came before us. We inherit stories, both the ones told around the table and the ones never spoken aloud. We inherit unspoken vows. We inherit patterns of love, patterns of hurt, examples of rejections and sometimes, we adopt the ache of longing that shaped them.

Gloria Jean was born in Kentucky, the daughter of a tall, slender man named Virgil, whose absence would mark her early years. Gloria would later learn that her father's absence was a direct result of his early years of abandonment and rejection experienced as a child. Virgil's parents died while he was very young, his father was "a drinker," his mother died from illness at a very young age. Virgil was placed in an orphanage, familiar with the longing for more. Virgil's brokenness rendered him unable to maintain a healthy relationship, consequently, my mother's mom, Ann, a single mother now, gathered her few belongings and her daughter Gloria and moved elsewhere, seeking to establish a home together. Anna was a gentle, steady presence, a sweet soul who carried her daughter through those years.

At seventeen, Gloria worked in a dress shop in the city. One afternoon, a young Italian immigrant came in with his stepmother, Mae. His accent thick, his English limited, but his eyes were clear in their purpose. Looking at her across the counter, he introduced himself as "Vito" and asked, "What is your phone number?" That night became the beginning of a love story, one that was both beautiful and complicated.

Gloria was a "more" person from the start. Losing her father created a silent vow within her: her children would never be without a father. This resolve would be one of the threads that kept her marriage intact, even when the fabric frayed.

My father was also a "more" man, carrying his own wounds from a fractured family history in Italy. His father, my grandfather (Nonno) would leave his wife, my grandmother (Nonna) in Italy, and though being married

in Italy, would marry another woman in America. My father was the firstborn boy, magnetic, bright, and gifted, with an ability to love people deeply, but that charisma sometimes contributed to his wanderings in other directions that would eventually emerge as an unsuitable characteristic for developing a stable marriage and family. My mother's world revolved around my father. Even through betrayals, she forgave, always returning to the hope that their love could be restored. She wanted to learn how to love him in a way that would reach him fully, but never quite knew if what he longed for was truly love or something else. Were my father's misguided pursuits a trauma echo of his past? Time would soon reveal.

And yet, my mother remained steady. She was consistent. She was a lover of God. She mothered with devotion and faith. She stayed because she believed her children's lives would be stronger with both parents under one roof. She stayed because she carried a vision of more, of family, of faithfulness, of love that endured.

When I think of my mother, I think of a woman who never stopped wanting more for her family, even when her own heart went without. A mother, whose kindness to others was characterized by giving "more" yet receiving less in return. As a child, I inherited "more" through a genetic transference of love, sorrow, connection, betrayal and compromise.

Reader Reflection:

Think about someone in your life whose love has been marked by steadfastness, even in seasons of difficulty. What did their "holding on" teach you about love?

Consider the unspoken vows you've made in your own heart. Where did those vows come from—loss, hope, faith, or something else?

When you picture "more" in the context of family and relationships, does it look like staying, like leaving, like forgiving, or like learning new ways to love? Why?

Pause in the quiet and let the faces and moments rise in your mind. What you remember may reveal the shape of your own "more."

