

In her 86 years Miriam had never suffered a night like this. And she was no stranger to pain. Her father abused her when she was young. Her husband slept with other women. She watched her only child fall into the sea and drown. She lived her entire life as a slave. Leprosy ate at her feet. But she had never suffered a night like this.

"Follow Moses," her mother used to tell her. "Moses will free you." Tonight she followed Moses, she and all her people. Tonight they walked away from Pharoah. Tonight they walked away toward freedom.

They used to dream about this day. They dreamed of the day they could entomb their daily cares and walk away from them as one leaves the cemetery at the death of an enemy. "On that day the sun will sparkle," they said. "On that day the road will be a meadow. On that day our feet will fly like wings."

Now that day had come, but the dream was gone. They left at night. Pharoah's army hunted them. The road was rocky and damp, and their feet ached with every step. Her pack weighed heavily on Miriam's back. The dew soaked her boots and pebbles cut her leprous feet.

She turned her head. The camp had disappeared from sight. In front, no sign of settlement.

She became aware of the wailing now. A child crying for its mother. Miriam's burdens were enough already, but she could not leave an abandoned child. She found her, sitting on a stone near a pool, sticky from the journey. "Where is my mother?" the child whimpered. Miriam removed the child's shoes and bathed its feet in the quiet waters.

In 86 years she had never suffered a night like this. She stooped down, took the child's hand, and followed Moses once again. The weight of her pack seemed light.