For Linda
May the legacy of your unwavering faith, selfless love, and priceless prayers live on through these pages.
My husband, Shane, is to thank for this book. Sometimes I was so afraid of what might come out should I put pen to paper that I tried to stall the fulfillment of my own dream. Yet Shane relentlessly pointed to the goal as the sunrise on the horizon, not letting me run away for fear I would fail, and believing if I sprinted toward that horizon, my dream would come true. Surely our Father worked through Shane in this; as I hand this book over to you, the sun is dawning a new day in my heart.

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Contents

Introduction .................................................. 11
1: The First Lie: You Are What Man Thinks of You. ...... 15
2: The First Truth: You Are a Beloved Daughter .......... 39
3: The Second Lie: You Are What You See in the Mirror .. 61
4: The Second Truth: You Are a Precious Creation. ..... 79
5: The Third Lie: You Are What Magazines Tell You ...... 93
6: The Third Truth: You Are a Beautiful Temple ....... 109
7: The Fourth Lie: You Are the Mask You Wear ........ 123
8: The Fourth Truth: You Are a Shining Light .......... 137
9: The Fifth Lie: You Are Mastered by the Media. ...... 153
10: The Fifth Truth: You Are a Chosen Ambassador ... 167
   Afterword: P.S. Pass It On ............................. 181
1 The First Lie:

You Are What Man Thinks of You

I used to think man could measure my value, but now I see no man is a reflection of me.

In Search of a King

Gazing into the hazel wells of his eyes, I dive into the spark of light embedded there. The light funnels me into another world, basked in beauty. The warm wind rushes through my hair; I swim and fly at the same time.

Here on earth, my husband kisses me, but in my mind, we are on the edge of the thicket, where the meadow meets the woods. The whole world around us is alive with wonder. The floor of the thicket bends beneath our footsteps; perfect peace is ours. Union is our Master.

He is man; I am woman; stitched together by God.

Someday, there will be no pain, no division, no heartbreak, and no tears.

Someday, there will only be the fullness of joy.

What is it about the fairy tales that make them such a beautiful lie?
Before the Disney princess meets the prince, she is just a common girl. Desperate, lonely, lost, and poor, she has little chance to escape the ruthless world. But once the prince on the white horse gallops into the scene, the view shifts.

In the prince, there is safety from the sorrow of her upbringing. Somehow all the broken places are healed—the mother who didn’t love her, the father who wasn’t there, the siblings who envied and scorned her, the poverty that humbled her. In the prince, she is healed and set free. He is a new day, the dawn of her dark night.

The prince does what no one before him can do: he slays the enemy who so hungered to devour her and rob her of her rightful place in the kingdom. Willing even to die for her, the prince becomes her salvation. He descends on bended knee to ask her hand, rescuing her from a life of lonely torment. The moment she agrees to marriage, she transforms from a lowly girl dressed in rags to a beloved princess, gowned and crowned.

The future is now bright for her. She’s beautiful, she’s precious, she’s chosen, she’s redeemed. Never again will she worry about her former sorrow or question her value or destiny. All of that is settled in the prince.

As a young woman, I believed the redemption of the fairy tales. I wanted the prince and the castle and the crown. So in high school and college, I put my hope in the future. If the future appeared clothed as a boy and promised me love, I handed him my heart, and with that went my identity and value.

But the boy kept taking my heart and crushing it. One after another blundered down the slippery slope of drugs and alcohol, falling cracked and bleeding at the bottom of his own well. From that place of darkness, again and again, I could not raise him. When you are young, you do not realize what the world can do to a boy, or what a boy can do to himself. I could not fix the problems they had with substance abuse, depression, school, money, and more. Although I tried to throw a rope, they had neither the hope nor the faith to grab it, and I certainly had no muscle to raise them.
Watching their souls wither, my heart withered too. They were supposed to save me! They were supposed to throw the rope! They couldn't promise me anything, and if they did make a promise, they didn't keep it. I wanted love to prevail, but I couldn't make it.

My heart torn, my soul bore the mark of loss. I became disenchanted and lost, wishing to wander the world in hopes of finding something else to fill me. My soul craved unfailing love, but I decided that if boys would fail me, I would conquer the world on my own. I would slay my own dragons. I would find my own castle, and I would build my own dreams.

For me, these wishes were potential realities. I often had a plane ticket to take me away, an escape route the average princess might appreciate.

My journey as a fashion model began when I was eight. My mother enrolled me in a Cinderella class at a local charm school, hoping to help me with my coordination and give me some grace. I was quite tall and inept at sports, but modeling was not hard for me. Time and again, I won “Miss Photogenic” in pageants, and when I graduated from the charm school, my tall, sleek, elegant teacher named me “Most Potential Model.”

Throughout high school, my mother and I heard that if we really wanted to know if I could make it in the business, I needed to meet Nina Blanchard, the legendary empress of the West Coast modeling world.

So, at six feet tall and seventeen years old, with blonde locks falling to the middle of my back, I strutted into her Hollywood office wearing high heels and a little black dress, my mother fading into the background.

I’ll never forget the way Nina looked up from her spectacles, her judicious eyes scanning me from top to bottom.

“Let me see her pictures,” she whispered out of half of her mouth,
her deep, scratchy voice commanding the man to her right. Her gaze stayed fixed on me.

I leaned on one heel, then the other.

The man’s name was Mack. He had a pocked face and a joker’s grin. Polite and professional, he handed Nina my photos and asked us to wait while she examined them with a loupe on a light box.

Windows lined the expansive floor of their offices; the colorful lights of Hollywood Boulevard gleamed behind them. Nina and Mack whispered about me.

Finally he ushered us into her private lair. Mom and I sat down opposite her, a grand mahogany desk between us. Throughout the entire interview she left her thin smoldering cigarette propped in a tray piled with ashes. I tried not to be distracted by the stinging sensation in my nose, the glamorous view of Hollywood’s jeweled lights, and the knowledge that this fiery red-haired woman possessed the power to either catapult my dreams to the moon or dash them against the rocks.

Leaning forward, cinching her wrinkled brow, and peering with emerald eyes, Nina spoke to my mother: “She has potential. We want to sign her.”

With her veined hands and red porcelain nails, she slid a contract across the desk.

This was the continuation of my first beautiful lie: if a man—or woman—thinks I’m pretty, I am. If he or she thinks I have potential, I do. If they want me, I’m worth wanting.

Nina named me the “Face of the Nineties.” She sent me to the offices of L’Oréal, Oil of Olay, Eddie Bauer, and Jordache. She got me in *Glamour, Seventeen, Cosmopolitan,* and *Vogue.* She introduced me to Steven Spielberg, Eileen Ford, Giorgio Armani, and Patrick Demarchelier, the favored photographer of Princess Diana.

Nina was my fairy godmother, and by my first year in college, I could perform a disappearing act at will, a convenient setup for a
brokenhearted girl. I could run away on a plane or a train, I could hide behind a mask, I could take a picture and smile.

Upon graduating high school, I moved to Europe on Nina’s direction. The money and travel were great, but when the summer ended I returned to LA. While other models forsook school to pursue the fleeting fame of modeling, I didn’t. Nina even turned down a potential stint for *Sports Illustrated* for me, insisting I stay in college. For the next four years, I maintained a scholarship and majored in broadcast journalism; deep down, I wanted to speak and write.

But I was also one of those girls in the pictures—the ones you see in shop windows, magazines, and on TV. As soon as classes ended in the summer I flew to Europe. There, the local agency would direct me to buy street and metro maps, hand me an address to my new apartment, and have me write down a list of interviews.

Although I lived with other models, I spent most days alone. I’d go from streets to subway stations to buses to trams to hotels to office buildings to sets, touching up makeup in between interviews, touching base at the agency, allowing makeup artists and hair styliststo make me look like a different person every day.

Because I was so young the lifestyle appeared harmless. My parents, who knew very little about the sordid side of the business, were in great support of my modeling career. Everyone from home cheered me on. They all saw modeling as an opportunity to see the world and make money doing it.

So plane tickets arrived on my doorstep like gifts from my fairy godmother, and off I went.


At 21, I sat in a corner of my Hollywood agency as an Italian man sat across from me. He had curly blond hair, and with his
curious accent he dangled before me the allure of travel, fame, and the promise of a beautiful life in Italy.

My mouth watered; it sounded too sweet. I bit into that gloriously shiny red apple with everything I had. I wanted all our world had to offer.

During my plane ride to Milan, I studied Italian and jotted down translations in my diary, repeating Italian sayings like mantras. *Chi cerca trova*—“He who searches, finds.”

“*Chi cerca trova…Chi cerca trova…*” I would repeat, looking out the plane window at the limitless horizon.

With college behind me and my little Italian phrasebook in hand, I thought myself well-armed. Without school as an anchor grounding me in the States, I didn’t have to return home. I held in my hand a passport which could take me from place to place for as long as I wanted.

The agent who had summoned me to Italy convinced me the runway would open the door to success. So prior to arriving I did everything I could to measure up to the standards of the European market: I tanned, fasted, sweat, dieted, ran, did yoga, ran some more, fasted some more, took vitamins and fat burners galore, ran, straightened my hair, ran, bought new clothes, worked out some more, ran some more, fasted some more, took some more fat burners, packed my bags, and practiced my Italian.

But no matter how much you make over your outside, the heart is still marred beneath the surface.

It was on this trip to Italy that I met Damien, a magazine owner and fashion mogul who went on to manage my career. He became a sort of protective father figure to me, or so I thought.

During my first season in Milan I often dined with the agents, clients, and photographers, which was customary for models. These
men were typically twice my age or older. Instinctually I knew not to let relations go further than dinner or dancing, but a shadowy line blurs the distinction between obliging the clients as they offer to entertain the models and keeping things on a professional level. I centered these encounters on the hopes that these men were going to advance my career, and I simply desired to experience the “beautiful life” promised me in Italy. What a fool I was to believe that these older men would expect nothing in return. I often found myself in awkward situations where I had to politely or sometimes forcefully let them know I was not interested in them romantically.

But of all of the men I met, Damien was the most interested in me. During my first interview with him, he didn’t just look at my pictures. He looked into my eyes. He was in his fifties; I had just turned 22. In an industry where very few recognized the soul of a girl, it seemed like he could see straight into mine.

In the world of fashion, he possessed influence, knowledge, and experience. He knew the photographers, magazine owners, and designers. He could catapult my career with the wave of his hand, which also meant he could bury me with the flick of his thumb.

From the moment I met him, he said that I had a pace dei sensi, something difficult to translate, but it is a kind of “sense of peace” or “peace of mind.” By this time I was an expert at appearing pulled-together and centered, and he took on my career as his little experiment. He put me on the cover of his magazine. He exposed me to fine dining, “important people,” and the haute couture. He treated me like I was his prize.

When I was in a new city where I knew no one and nothing about the way the business worked there, Damien made me feel like he knew everything. With his deceitful accent, he promised he would protect, direct, and promote me—just what a young model wants.

But then the night arrived when he revealed that he really wasn’t interested in being a father to me. He wanted more.
Shattered

The water for my tea is boiling so I get up and walk to the kitchen. I fix my tea, and as I return the empty pot to the glass top stove, I linger there for a moment to see the reflection of my face. My friend had warned me before I came to Milan not to enter a man’s apartment by myself, but I have ignored his warning.

I sit down close to the fire.

“I have never seen a woman who can come so close to the fire,” he says, approaching me from behind.

I have never been this skinny before. I lost all my body fat before coming to Milan, in hopes of getting the runway. I’m cold.

Damien sets down his espresso and wraps his body around my back like a heavy cloak.

Every muscle in my body stiffens in fear and I try to pull away. Forcefully, he pushes my shoulder down to keep me there.

“Damien! No!” I protest, yanking myself away and whisking to the window. “What are you thinking?” I demand. This man is well over twice my age, older than my father.

Without sound, he moves across the room.

“You are afraid to be held,” he hisses.

“Leave me alone!” I insist. I whirl around, turning my back to him.

“It really is a pity,” he whispers, “Because I just wanted to do you a favor. From the moment I met you I thought to myself, what can I do to get this girl to relax? I wanted to do for you something I have not done for a woman in a very long time. A favor, for you, not for me.” His words are venom in my ear.

I am frozen in rage, stuck between him and the window of his high rise apartment. I see a few distant streetlights. They remind me of the lights at Nina’s, worlds away. The very first thing she did as my agent was to send me to a photographer’s apartment, alone. I was seventeen.

“Why are you so afraid to be held?” he pries.

I turn to face him, seething my disgust through clenched teeth, “I am
only afraid to be held by the wrong person!” The truth is, I am terrified to be in this man’s presence.

Why have I sunk my teeth into the apple of another man’s promises? I want to run. I want to hide. I want to wave a magic wand and disappear. But this is not a fairy tale; this is my life, and I can’t get away from it.

Damien is an adept predator. At first he earned my trust. He befriended me. He fed me fine Italian food and wine. He showed me the kingdoms of the world and offered me the runways of Paris. All the while, he must have planned to go in for the kill when I was conveniently right before him, unaware as Snow White who was hunting me. What I should have done—and what I tell other women and girls—is to never allow myself to be alone with a man, and to run far and fast should one attempt to compromise me.

How is it that a girl in her early twenties can honestly believe a man in his late fifties simply enjoys her company? How is it that a college-educated woman can be under this kind of spell?

I begin to tell him I don’t want what he wants; I want love. I believe in the prince. I just haven’t met him yet, but I know he exists.

“You should give up on love,” he says, exhausted. “I don’t believe in it anymore.”

But I do, and I’m not going to give up believing.

“I am destined for misery,” he drones. Why is it that I haven’t let this man touch me but I feel soiled in his presence? I fear his misery will be transferred to me.

Suddenly we are cut off by the most wicked explosion I’ve ever heard. Fire combusts from the kitchen and bursts into the living room where we stand. Flames and shards of glass explode from the kitchen.

He runs screaming, blaming me. You left the gas on!” In a blur he rushes into the fire, cursing and filling buckets of water, frantically pouring them over the flames that are leaping like happy demons.

I am crying and screaming and crawling on the floor trying to sweep up the hot glass. “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, but I didn’t…”
“Watch out! You are going to get cut!” He is throwing water on the fire and lashing me with hot curses: “Stupid girl! How are you so stupid?”

I say, “My God, my God…”

“No!” he screams. “You’d better thank God that he spared your precious face because it was nearly destroyed! I cannot imagine how deformed you would be!”

When I finally get out of there, fear is running through me like an electric current but I don’t know how long it will be until it stops. Shamed and confused, I walk back to my apartment in the dark, shadowed, Milanese streets.

“I never die,” Damien had moaned when I was at the door, saying he regretted he had not been standing in the kitchen when it blew. “I have brushed death a thousand times but I never die.”

A few weeks later, the agency has scheduled a photo shoot for me at Damien’s studio, and they say I have to be there.

When I show up, my skin is broken out. I have been living in Milan for about six months now and my career is moving at the pace of a speeding train. I have been doing the runway, sliding down the steep slope of anorexia. I have no other option of entry for that stage—I have to starve myself.

Now, the anxiety, the fear, the loneliness, and the drugs have all shown up on my skin.

I’m feeling more and more like I want to leave the modeling industry. I can’t measure up. I am exhausted from men telling me I should get some sun or get lip injections or take better care of my skin or straighten my hair or wear different shoes or walk this way or that way or gain some weight or lose some. I feel like no matter how hard I try, I always fall short.

The makeup artist is working on my face when Damien comes up
and stands behind me. When I see his reflection in the mirror, my stomach turns. Once, he was like a wing of protection. Now he’s a predator.

He analyzes my acne in the mirror. “What is wrong with you?” he demands, pointing out the imperfections on my face.

Inside, I shrink. I feel like I have a deformity and someone’s shed a spotlight on it, and everyone is pointing at me and laughing.

His son is the photographer, a strange troll-like person in his early twenties. I do the best I can on the shoot, but inside I’m screaming to be let loose, to be free of their analysis.

At one time the camera was my friend; now it is a foe. My soul is literally becoming ill from being painted up, judged, praised, scolded, examined, and pursued by men. I need a break. I need to breathe…. somewhere without makeup and cameras.

That weekend I choose to get away from it all by staying in a hostel out of town. Under the guise of protection, Damien sends his son “to make sure nothing happens to me.” But that evil troll creeps into my room in the night and takes what is mine to give.

I was so dead inside. I believed the lie that I was as disposable as the way they treated me. I believed the lie that I was as worthless as the way they made me feel. I believed the lie that I was what man said I was. If I had life to do over again, they would have been the ones shattered and not me. But I carried the broken pieces inside my heart for years to come.

The fairy tales were a lie. Boys fall, men steal from you, fathers fail, and kings betray. I was soon to find out, however, that God protects, God saves, God redeems, and God heals.

When I returned to Milan, Damien discovered what happened with his son and discarded me. His “love” turned to hatred. He let me know my *pace dei sensi* had left me. I was just a stupid American girl with a pretty face, and that was all.
At first I was his prized possession; his little discovery, his corsage, his peach. Now, I was breaking out and anorexic and foolish and broken, and he wanted nothing to do with me.

“I don’t need you in my life,” he growled at me the last time I saw him. Reaching out to touch me, he pressed his thumb hard into the cystic pimple that flared on the side of my mouth and laughed wickedly at me.

I hurried away from him, running through the rain, my head down so he couldn’t see my tears.

Soon afterward, I began to have wicked headaches and blurred eyesight. The acne began to take over my face—a death sentence for a model’s career. In search of pleasing my other king, Giorgio Armani, my body became dangerously skeletal. My eyes became sunken and hollow; I no longer looked like the young girl who started out full of life. Darkness clouded my heart and soul.

The word for model in French is *le mannequin*, and that’s what we were to most of the men—mannequins upon which they could hang the clothes; mannequins they could position however they wanted; mannequins they could take apart and discard when a new model came to town. Plastic, things to be bought, sold, traded, trashed, and dumped when they were done with us.

Since everyone was telling me I was too thin, I tried to eat heartily for a week or two, even stuffing my face to gain weight. But when I showed up for the spring shows, Armani could feel the extra half inch around my waist. He sent me off the stage. The stylist removed my clothes and left me wondering what just happened, standing alone in the massive dressing room, until someone finally came over and told me they were “finished” with me.

I went back to the agency, and the men there were clearly upset with me. I had been cancelled for the Armani shows, and the rest of my jobs that month were cancelled too.

“You look sick!” my booker said to me across the room in front of everyone. “You are as pale as mozzarella!” Then he turned to another
girl, some new, fresh-faced girl who had just come to town, and started lavishing her with praise and attention.

I had allowed man to be my mirror, and in the reflection of that mirror all I saw was a twisted vision of my value: I was only as good as I looked that day. I was only as good as they said I was. One day beautiful, the next not. One day wanted, the next no more.

When I first started modeling, Nina was my mirror. For years and years, the praise of the photographers was my stamp of approval. But now, because of Damien and Armani, because of all the photographers and agents who held their magnifying glass up to me to analyze my appearance, I no longer saw anything good in myself. I only saw what was wrong, what was not right about me. The way they saw me became the way I saw myself. These men—the ones who held the measuring tape around my waist, the makeup brush to my eyes, the light meter against my cheek, the ticket to my career—became my source of validation. It was they who measured my beauty, who asked, Is she a high-priced commodity or is she just average? What do you think she is worth?

One day you’re worth a lot; the next you’re worth nothing. Humans can become poisonous prisms, distorting lenses that misshape our value. When we give them the power, they can completely change the way we see ourselves and the way we see the world.

But humans can also act as crystallizing lenses for us, realigning our gaze to the one mirror that never lies.

Chi Cerca Trova

It seemed like there were churches around every bend in Italy. On my way to castings, I would stop on the sidewalks and crane my head up to admire the gargantuan structures. Sometimes as I would look up I would whisper my mantra: Chi cerca trova.

He who searches will find.

When I first arrived in Milan, I went into one of the more
intimate churches around the corner from my apartment. Out of curiosity, I copied the aged Italian women: they would drop a coin in the offering box, light a tea candle, bend to one knee, pray, and rise, signing the image of the cross. I did the same thing one morning, and said a prayer for my success there.

Not long afterward, I did have success...as the world defines it. I began working nearly every day, while many of the models were struggling to find work. Lots of precious girls from all corners of the world sought affirmation from men in the business, and rarely received it. I watched their roller coaster rides firsthand, not even realizing I was on the same ride.

Ultimately I wanted love—what we all want—so when the roller coaster of approval and rejection bottomed me out, I began to pray for love instead.

Eager to leave the darkness I found in Milan, I planned to move to Munich, where I could make a lot of money doing catalogue work. But I still had a wandering spirit and the desire to see “the beauty of Italy.” So before I left the country, I told my booker to find me a job in Rome. They found me a runway job for one of the gaudiest designers I had ever seen.

For the show, the stylist literally dressed me up like I was a candy cane in stilettos. I struggled not to laugh at how ridiculous the red-and white-striped outfit was, and even on stage, I realized the idiocy of this particular parade. For the grand finale, they sent me down the runway dressed like the bride of Dracula with a ten-foot-long satin and lace train. The extravagant wedding gown arched up in the front to reveal black satin shorts, fishnet stockings, and high heels. The runway was an I-ramp instead of a T, so there was no place for me to turn around at the end. Having not practiced turning in this train that took up half the runway behind me, I stopped for a moment, not knowing how on earth I was going to pivot without tripping over the fabric.

Then an image flashed in my mind: these fancy people, in their
tuxedos, diamond tiaras, and fur coats, had beating hearts beneath all those layers. All these people were was only “men.” What did I have to fear from them? That I would fall? That they would laugh? Reject me? For one moment, I didn’t care.

I grabbed the train in my right hand and whipped it out so that it sailed, all ten feet of it, over their heads. On a coin, I turned and tramped down that runway as everyone gasped and then erupted in applause. I walked off the stage, barely turning my head. I didn’t care about the applause anymore; it just didn’t satisfy. I couldn’t get that crazy outfit off fast enough. I had come to see what was truly beautiful. I had come to see Rome.

I left the hotel before dawn the next morning, clasping my ticket to the Vatican. Standing in St. Peter’s Square at the break of daylight was more fulfilling for me than interviewing with Gucci or Versace. I passed by the Swiss guards with their tin-soldier outfits and went into the church. There, to the right of the entrance, was Michaelangelo’s *Pieta*, his only signed work: a sculpture of Mary, the mother of Christ, the fallen body of her son collapsed in the massive folds of her robe. In her face I saw the real *pace dei sensi*, the kind of peace which great suffering cannot steal. In her face, I saw beauty—not beauty that is found in magazines. Real beauty, which comes from a life of faith.

As I walked through the seemingly endless hallways of the Vatican museum, I felt like I was on a timeless journey, like the marble floor was moving my feet ahead while a movie played on fast-forward in my mind: image after image, painting after painting, sculpture after sculpture, mile after mile, on all sides I saw *God. Man. Angels. Demons. Sinners. Beggars. Prostitutes. Prophets*. And most of all, *Jesus*.

When I got to the Sistine Chapel, I couldn’t imagine there could be more. But there was so much more: cherubim, angels draped in ribbons of purple and gold. Creation, God reaching out and touching the hand of man. Eve, the serpent. The Fall in all its great pain.
I poked my head in other churches in Rome, touching the pews, noticing the people who went through those open doors to pray at all hours of the day and night.

En route back to Milan, I stopped in Siena, a little Tuscan hill town outside of Rome. There, on a bus, I met a girl who saw the city with me the next day. We sat in the square and with simple clarity, she told me I needed Christ in my life. This girl looked me square in the eye, and with her calm, serene voice, told me about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

“I pray,” I said.

“To whom?” she asked, a question I could not answer. In kind, compassionate words, she suggested I pray in the name of Jesus and read the Bible. I just took her advice and tucked it in my back pocket, still believing I could forge my own path and fashion my own dreams.

I went on to Munich, where the days and nights were long. In the dead of winter, I trudged on icy sidewalks from appointment to appointment, shivering to the bone, leaning into the wind. On interviews I faked a smile as yet another man and another woman evaluated my face and body in terms of translated profit. Sometimes the makeup artists and photographers would even command me to “look happier” on the set.

My spirit began clanking its empty cup on the prison cell of my body and I began to turn against my own self. Smoking too much, drinking too much, binging one day and starving the next, I would stay in my bed for long hours while voices ripped at my self-worth, blasting messages through my brain. I wasn’t good enough, beautiful enough, perfect enough. No one loved me, no one saw me, no one knew me, there was no way out. The voices circled through my head like a merry-go-round on high.

One night it got to be too much for me. In a moment of quiet, calculated desperation, I attempted to drown myself in the bathtub. The voices were cheering me on.
My head was underwater. The air was running out and I was starting to panic. Then, through my mind’s eye, flashed visions of myself as a child. I was pure, I was beautiful, I was free. I was filled with joy. There was no striving and no pain. I thought of my family and remembered that I was loved.

Sobbing and gasping at the same time, I sucked in water, began to cough, and shot up like a geyser from fertile soil.

“Jennifer, get up.” The voice beckons. It comes from the window and I sit straight up. I’ve been lying under layers of blankets for so many hours. My head is throbbing. What time is it? What day is it?

Light streams through the snow-laden glass of the window, casting rainbows on the floor.

Who was that? I could have sworn I heard my name.

I lie back down to keep warm but I’m shivering, freezing. I squeeze my eyes shut and try to go back to sleep. I just want to stay here under the covers.

“Jennifer, get up.”

I sit straight up this time; I stand up.

I go into the bathroom and wash my face, trying to not look at the tub. I get dressed. I ignore the flashing light on the answering machine. I know it’s my agency telling me about some stupid appointment. I don’t want to go. I have been to hundreds of stupid appointments, and I’m not answering that light today.

I take the metro to a park and stay there all day. The Danube rushes through it like an ice blue ribbon weaving through an emerald landscape. There is a giant stone gazebo perched on a hilltop where people gather in the evenings to watch the sunset, play music, have a picnic, hold hands and talk. I envy the lovers, but more so the friends. I envy the food they eat. I envy their companionship. I envy their smiles, especially their laughter.
I choose a seat at the base of one of the pillars in the gazebo so I can hear some music. This man behind me is singing and strumming his guitar, his voice high and sweet. I turn to look at him and he reaches down into an old cardboard box of books and hands me a German New Testament.

The cover of it is sapphire, and the words are engraved in gold. I take it in my hands.

He and his friends hardly speak any English. They are so kind that when they realize I am alone in the park, they offer to walk me out.

Right when we are nearing the edge of the darkened wood, these strangers stop and pray for me. It is the oddest thing to hear them saying my name in German.

They ask me if I would like to go to church with them that Friday night. I don’t feel that anyone else on the continent cares about my well-being, so I go.

Friday comes and the falling snow speckles the night with wonder. They pick me up and drive me to a small brick church on the outskirts of town. When I see it from the car, the windows are all lit up. It’s like a glowing topaz stone embedded in the cotton snowdrifts.

When they open the door for me warm air surges out, climbs inside of my coat, and cuddles me like a heated blanket.

I take it like a hug.

If someone could taste joy, I taste it in that place. It whets my palette and my mouth waters at the sweetness. Children run this way and that; adults are laughing. There are big coats and big hugs and big handshakes that rock my bony frame. Smiles and songs fill the room. And although I recognize not a single word of the sermon, my spirit begins to peek its head up from its watery grave.

I go back to the church the next Friday night. The people there are worlds away from what I see in the world of fashion. They speak to me,
not at me, and try their best to help me understand. They get me a translator this time who sits next to me and whispers the sermon in my ear. Afterward they invite me to eat with them, and when we do, no one eyes the way I eat or excludes me from a story. They don’t seem to notice my imperfections or the fact that my pace dei sensi is gone. They don’t look at my body or measurements, but at my heart. I don’t feel like I have to wear any kind of mask when I am with them.

When I have questions about this Jesus they talk about, they just answer them clean and clear. They explain the gospel to me—that faith in the blood of Christ gives us forgiveness of sin, heaven, and everything we need for life—and the third time I go to the church, a girl named Naomi comes bounding out from the back pews with a book in her hands, barely able to contain her excitement.

“Jenny-fair! Jenny-fair! I have found you an English Bible!” she exclaims, her face radiant.

The worn, thin pages feel good in my hands. I shove it in my pocket and take it home.

Back in my apartment at night, I grow curious about that little book. Somehow it woos me to itself. I begin to thirst only for it, its fragile pages tender and delicate.

The most striking thing about Jesus to me is that he loves those our world doesn’t. He touches those no one wants to touch and befriends those the prideful people refuse. The people who are full of sin and pain, the weak, the broken, the confounded—he loves them all. I feel like I have been waiting my whole life to meet him, and now that I have, I want to follow him wherever I go. I keep that little book in my back pocket and read it on trains, waiting for interviews, and at home at night.

By candlelight I eat up most of the book of Matthew, then pack my backpack for a weekend away. I take a train to the base of Mount Zugspitze, the highest mountain in Germany, and stay at a little bed and breakfast to finish reading the last few chapters. In my rented room, I sit at a tiny desk and look out a window at the descending snow. Snuggled
in a blanket wrapped from my shoulders to my toes, I read the story of the end of Jesus’s life.

In the pages of that Word, I discover a man who loves me despite the ways I fall short of man’s expectations. I discover a man who accepts me just as I am. A man who offers me freedom from the slavery of my life. A king who will never leave me or forsake me.

I fall so in love with him.

On a white blanket of snow on Mount Zugspitze, I lie down on the ground and open up my heart to Jesus. I know nothing about Scripture or theology or denominations or church. I just know I have found the one my soul loves, and that he is my only hope. There in the snow, I die to the lies of my old life, and when I get up, before me there is a new beginning. I am resuscitated and new.

After fifteen years in the modeling industry, I pack my bags and leave. I don’t need to explain to anyone why I am leaving. The people from the church translate to my German agency that I am no longer modeling and ask them to tell the rest of the agencies for me. I am finished.

I leave an entire world behind that says, You are what I say you are. You do what I say you do. And I am done with you when I’m done with you.

This time it is my turn to speak. I say, This is not beautiful to me, and I am leaving in search of what is.

He Who Searches, Finds

In the coming years I fell deeper and deeper in love with my King. When man lied, God told me the truth. When man tried to lure me back to my old ways, God told me to walk away. When man tried to bind me with his rules, God set me free to take his path. When man turned his back on me, God opened his arms.

The things that I couldn’t explain I poured out in hungry prayers. Page after page of my diaries, book after book, became filled with prayers, yearnings, questions…and in return came answers through
his Word and Spirit. My diaries became a chronicle of our conversations. I asked, hungry to know, and he answered with sips of wisdom, morsels of truth, a feast of faith.

But as is natural, I longed for a man.

Shane came at just the right time, about four years after I left modeling. He was strapping, handsome, strong, funny, faithful, ambitious, and had seen far greater depths than I. In his late teens, he had wandered away from his family and faith, traveling for years in search of what would satisfy. Once he landed at the bottom of his mud-lined and slippery pit, he decided that God and family were the answer to his questions. He too walked away from a life of lies and was doing his best to start over—God’s way. Shane was as big a messy miracle as I was.

His hand feels so good in mine, like a hot mitten just warmed. His eyes dance when he laughs. He’s silly, so much fun, and makes me giggle. When he talks about the ranch he grew up on in Texas, his eyes glimmer and his whole face lights up.

His southern charm is enticing me. He serenades me in the car, plays DJ, picks me up every Sunday morning and takes me to church. He sits in his pickup with me for hours listening to me talk, like I’m the only one in the world who matters. He’s got a big, generous heart and big, beautiful dreams. He’s not the least bit overwhelmed by my pain; he’s much stronger than I am. He’s falling in love with me, and it feels like healing oil dripping down into the crevices of my heart.

I know early on, one day on the sandy beach in Mexico, who I’m dealing with. In a flash I see the golden hue of sun on the side of his face, and I know.

We have spent the better part of the day waiting our turn in the hot summer sand, watching two horses trudge up and down the beach carrying unsatisfied tourists on their backs. The horses’ spirits are tired, and
their speckled and spotted coats are heaving and sweating. As Shane and I sit on the beach watching this pathetic display, we lean in and whisper to each other, “I wonder if we could get those horses to run again.”

When it is our turn we mount and kick them into action. And like lightning they bolt.

When the crowd on the beach sees those mangy horses coming at them in full gallop, they run for cover. With a smile and a nod, Shane points to the islands and we take off for the horizon. The insides of our thighs grip the horses’ sides. Water sprays from descending hooves in crystallized beads and the wind lifts us under its wings. Riding on a speckled white stallion, Shane’s thinking, I’m a cowboy—I know how to ride a horse, and there is no way this California girl is going to keep up with me. But when he turns his head to see how far he’s left me in the dust, I am right there beside him, riding high and free.

The sun flashes its golden light on his cheek. I see the reflection on his face and my heart skips a beat, and I know I’ve found my prince.

I email my best girlfriend when I get back. “I met a guy named Shane. We rode horses on the beach, and I’m going to marry him!”

“Simmer down, upstart,” she writes back, “We’re not living on The Young and the Restless.”

“Oh, yes we are!” I respond. I have no intention of simmering down. The feeling gets stronger and stronger. Our souls’ connection is undeniable, and finally the day comes for us—the day every girl dreams about.

Standing at the end of the aisle, I am dressed in white. The delicate, sheer fabric of my veil softly blurs my vision, but I can see all the way down the sunlit runway to my groom. Discovering just weeks before the wedding that my gown hung far too short, seamstresses added inches to the satin hem, extending the train with vines of hand-stitched embroidery, sequins, and pearls. My father carefully lifts back the veil, kisses my cheek, and I see in Shane’s eyes the glisten of true love.

We carefully recite our vows, and then it’s time to take the Body and the Blood. I fight back a flood of tears, trying not to smear all my wedding makeup. When I taste the cracker in my mouth, I remember how
God reached into the darkest place of my soul and offered me a whole new life. He performed an even greater work redeeming Shane. We tip the cups back and wine coats our throats. I am so grateful to be saved and loved and cherished like this, to be wearing white, and to have my groom wait for me and treat me like I was worth waiting for. This day is a miracle.

A Man or a Mirror?

It had been a long, broken road that led us both to that altar. Shane certainly did see a potential bride in me, and he definitely wanted to scoop me up in his arms and sweep me away to the castle. In fact, he redesigned our entire backyard of our new home before that wedding day so it would be a lush garden when I walked into it for the first time as his bride. He prepared that place for me.

And even though I came cleansed by faith into the marriage, there were still a lot of broken pieces buried at the floor of my heart. I still had the habit of making man my mirror, and as happens with many brides, I turned Shane into the prince who was supposed to be my perfect king for everything.

If he was having a great day and came home praising me—complimenting me on dinner, noticing how nice the house looked or I looked—I felt great. But if he didn’t, I felt terrible—I thought he didn’t see me or love me or something was wrong. Poor guy! If he was happy, I was happy. If he was grumpy, I was grumpy. If he was angry, I was angry. If he was playful, so was I. What a rollercoaster.

What I didn’t realize was that even though Shane was my husband now, that didn’t mean he was responsible for my happiness. Sometimes his mind just wasn’t on me. He was thinking about other things. We had two babies in the first three years, so I was dealing with diapers and tantrums and he was dealing with work. We loved
each other, but there were lots of days when we didn’t exactly lavish each other with love the way we did when we were dating.

It is so easy to get confused with the prince thing. Like the princesses in the fairy tales, we think our husbands are the ones who are always going to tell us we are loved and valued and deserving of a hope and a future. We expect them to be responsible for our peace and joy, but we end up like a ship with no anchor, blown and tossed about.

When a woman makes a man her mirror, we do both him and ourselves an injustice. No man was ever designed to be the exact reflection of our value, beauty, worth, and purpose. Man and woman were never designed to define one another. So when we look to our husband to be the perfect reflection of our value, we are trying to get something from him he was never designed to give.

But when we both look to the Father for our reflection, we have more love to give. When we turn away from the mirror of what we can see to the mirror of what we can’t see, our vision becomes 20/20. Everything crystallizes and through the glasses of the Word, we see exactly who man is, who God is, who we are, and what we need to know.

We must remember: God came as a man, and only his love can raise a dead girl to life.