

A man and a woman are dancing on a dark blue, rippling surface that reflects the light. The woman, on the left, is wearing a long, white, sleeveless gown and is looking up at the man. The man, on the right, is wearing a dark suit with a red boutonniere and is looking down at the woman. They are holding hands, with the man's right arm raised. In the background, a large, full moon is visible in the upper right corner, and the sky is a deep blue with many small, bright stars. The overall scene is romantic and ethereal.

Cynthia's DANCE

THE JOURNEY FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH
OF AN UNBORN CHILD

TERRY HARRIS

CYNTHIA'S DANCE



A Christian fantasy novel by

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DEDICATION



This story is dedicated first and foremost to the glorious King who planted the idea in the soil of my heart some thirty-five years ago and nurtured it until the time came for it to be written.

To my sweet Laura Marie, who gracefully endured the pain of losing our three babies. Thank you for listening to the Holy Spirit and holding on to the hope of a “third child.”

And to our dear children:

Nathan – Our incredible firstborn whom
I wish to be like everyday

Gracie – Our most precious and beloved
daughter who inspires me daily

Jordan- Our third child – a true gift from God

Baby Harris – Our first baby in Heaven

Joseph – Our second baby in Heaven

Angela – Our third baby in Heaven

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ON A SUMMER NIGHT OF LOUD ROLLER COASTERS AND sticky, pink cotton candy, Madeline Brewer Richards stood on a grassy green hill in the center of a popular theme park called Ziggy's Island.

She was waiting for Danny Richards, the love of her life and the owner-operator of Ziggy's. They had met just twelve months earlier when Madeline began working there. He had told her she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen and he couldn't live without her. She found that her God-given looks had opened many a door in her young life but seeing one of the most distinguished men in all of the county propose to her on one knee confirmed the fact she was a "catch."

They quickly fell in love and married. But Danny made it clear that between his lousy childhood and living on his own since he was a teenager, he had no interest in having kids. He was convinced he would be the world's worst dad, and he wasn't about to spend the rest of his life swimming in guilt and regret.

A week before their wedding, his rude behavior at dinner caught her off guard. "Let me put it this way," he said while chewing his asparagus, "you let yourself get pregnant and you'll be raising that kid on your own."

With a hard gulp of her wine, she responded the only way she knew to keep them on the same page. “Don’t worry, I’ll never let myself get pregnant.”

Despite taking precautions, four months and two days into their marriage, Madeline discovered that she was carrying their child.

She was scared to death.

They had just launched enormous plans to expand Ziggy’s Island and make it the largest theme park in North America. With its time-travel experience, it was already different from its competitors (Ziggy would take you back to the 1950s and let you indulge in all things from the decade). Madeline intended to grow the park to include the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and even the 90s. For the price of one ticket, you could travel back in time, as it were, and relive the memories of your youth.

But now she was pregnant, about eight weeks along, and the zest for building an empire with Danny was secretly replaced by dreams and desires to raise a child.

She had created an excuse to meet privately with a doctor earlier that week. What took place was unforgettable: hearing the heartbeat of the child inside her. The repetitive, fast swishing sound was not what she expected. The noise was odd at first, but the sonographer assured her that the baby’s heartbeat was strong and healthy. It was the most glorious thing she had ever heard. That extraordinary day changed her feelings about life and the future.

Though the ultrasound could not yet confirm the baby’s sex, Madeline strongly suspected the child inside her was a girl. In their home perched atop a cliff, overlooking the blue ocean, she secretly began planning a girl’s nursery. Theirs was no ordinary home; it was more of a castle, with eleven bedrooms, two kitchens, and its own personal, private stretch of beach. Madeline smiled at the thought of a mermaid-themed room for her daughter.

Her joy turned to anxiety, however, when she thought about how Danny would take the news. She had been smart and careful. *How in the world could this have happened?* she asked herself over and over. The whole situation had come as a complete shock, but she couldn't shake the feeling of absolute joy of carrying Danny's child.

Perhaps Danny wouldn't be so offended after all. Perhaps he would forget about their discussion some months earlier and, hearing the news of being a father, have a change of heart.

Or perhaps he would leave her to raise the child on her own, just as he had said he would. She had already decided that if he did, she would choose the life of her baby over his fantasy of a marriage without children.

Or would she?

She had chosen their favorite rendezvous spot, a grassy area overlooking the lights at Ziggy's, to break the news, hoping it would play in her favor. But now she wondered. The more she wondered, the more anxious and nervous she became.

This night, the park was filled with distinguished and influential visitors for Ziggy's black-tie inaugural summer ball, which was Madeline's brainchild. CEOs, politicians, and even celebrities were dancing, mingling, and probably making deals. These were the people who could help Ziggy's grow through investments and influence. In the distance, she heard laughter and music, and she knew the event was a huge success. But the evening's victory took a back seat to her feelings about having a baby girl.

Madeline reflected on the doctor's visit and her daughter's heartbeat. It was all so real to her now. With her hand on her belly, Madeline spoke her first words to the child. "Hey, Baby. I'm your mommy, and this is Ziggy's Island. I want you to know that I love you so much and ..."

"There you are!"

Madeline jumped, wondering if she'd been overheard. It wasn't Danny, it was Ziggy's newly appointed chief financial officer, Radcliffe Finklemeier. A short and stubby man who dressed to impress others, tonight he wore a fine custom-made Italian tuxedo that assisted in covering his bulging belly. Madeline didn't like Radcliffe. Ever since she challenged him at a board meeting on a financial decision months earlier, she always felt a strange awkwardness between them. There was a coldness about him. He never seemed happy. But, overall, he was very good at numbers and keeping Danny in check with financial matters, so Madeline tolerated him.

"Oh, hello, Radcliffe. Why aren't you enjoying the party and schmoozing the bankers?"

"I could ask you the same question. I was told Danny was coming up here. I need to talk to him about some financial issues I discovered today. Were you aware of the amount of money that this event is..."

Madeline cut him off. "Yes, Radcliffe, I'm aware of how much we spent on this ball, but tonight is not the night for this. We will be in the office on Monday morning, and we can address your concerns first thing."

"Concerns? What concerns? Tonight is a party!" Danny bounded up the slope, sporting a smile. "Hello, sweetheart." He kissed Madeline and gave Radcliffe a dismissing grin, which prompted a small sneer on his CFO's plump face which reinforced Radcliffe's look of disdain towards Madeline.

"Walter," rebuked Radcliffe.

"Radcliffe, I prefer to be called Danny."

"I was just reviewing our expenditures for this extravagant debacle and I crunched some numbers. Are you aware that the dance floor alone cost us-"

"Radcliffe, I do appreciate your due diligence, but let's talk about this some other time. There are a lot of important people

down there that I need to entertain, and I just can't handle any more tonight, all right?"

"Of course ... Danny." Radcliffe smirked as he walked away, but only Madeline noticed.

Danny finally turned his attention to Madeline. "So, I got your page. What's up?" He looked down at the pager strapped to his belt as it lit up with another green message.

She avoided eye contact, which was unusual for her. "Just thought it would be nice to be alone for a little bit tonight."

"Alone? We have over six hundred VIPs and their dates dancing under the stars at our park, which means more open doors for me to get on the boards of a few more Fortune 500 companies."

Madeline paused. She knew Danny loved having his name splashed on whatever plaque, marquee, advisory board, or building front would let him. If his name could be in lights, he was there, regardless of the inconvenience or cost. Typically, she would encourage him in his quest to be among the elite. Tonight, she wanted him focusing on her.

"Did you see the governor was here?" he flirted.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I accepted his RSVP last night."

"So why are we standing here and not over there hanging with the most important people in our time zone?"

She took a deep breath. "I got some news the other day and I wanted to share it with you."

A strange ring sounded, breaking the awkwardness. Danny reached down and, like a revolver, drew his pet toy—his cellular phone. It was almost the size of a blow dryer and came with a carrying holster. It rang again, the sound chirp-like, and Danny answered it.

"Hello. Oh hi, Susan. Yes, yes, I understand. Please tell the governor I had some business to take care of and I'll be there in ten minutes to give him a personal tour. Thank you, Susan."

Madeline's eyes were filled with tears. She snapped her hand up to wipe them away.

"Are you crying?" he asked as he replaced the oversized phone in its waist holder.

"No. I think I got some mascara in my eye," she lied.

Danny heard a new song kick in. He started to dance in place. "I really gotta get back down there, hon. Is this something that can wait till later?"

Madeline hesitated, her mind racing. How should she break the news to him? A thought struck her that she believed would get his attention. "Danny, have you given much thought to retirement?"

"Retirement?"

"Yeah, you know. You. Me. Sailing off into the sunset on our hundred-foot yacht?"

"Sounds good to me, in about thirty years."

Madeline smiled. She had him hooked. "So, who's going to inherit Ziggy's when we're ready to do that?"

"I don't know. I guess we'll sell it to the highest bidder."

"We could do that." She took a step away from him and leaned close to a small willow tree. "I was thinking it would be a lot better for us and everyone else to, you know... keep it in the family."

"Well, since I don't have family, that would mean your mom, and I don't see her outliving either one of us."

She sighed to herself. *Why does he have to make this so hard on me?* She took a deep breath and nervously turned and looked him in the eye. "I was thinking more of our family. You, me, and our..."

"Look, Madeline, I told you before we got married that I'm not interested in having kids, and that means adopting, foster kids, none of it. Just the idea of..." His pager chimed, interrupting him. He snatched it up and stared at the green light.

“Okay. The governor just paged me. Now we really have to get down there. We can’t keep this guy waiting. He means too much to our future.”

Madeline was discouraged and wondered for a moment about *their* future, regardless of who was governor.

“Come on,” Danny flirted. “Let’s adjourn this meeting for now and reschedule for some other time years down the road, when my hair starts to fall out. Okay? We’ve got a whole lot of stuffy shirt VIPs I want to show my wife off to.” Danny held out his arm and waited for her to join him.

Madeline was stuck. She forced a smile, placed her arm in his, and strolled down the grassy green hill toward a long red carpet, the pathway to the grand ball.

Since Madeline was a young girl, she had dreamed of a starry night like this where she and her true love would spend the night dancing and romancing like a prince and princess. She had pulled it off. The place. The night. The man. Even the stars were cooperating.

But the only thing she could think of now was how to break the news that she was pregnant.

Life didn’t seem fair. She was filled with mixed feelings of regret, anger, hurt, and confusion. After all the hard work she had put into a night she had dreamed of for years, now she only wished she could go home, lock the bedroom door, and curl up with no one to interrupt her crying. *What is wrong with me?* Not wanting to appear weak, Madeline took a deep breath. *Must be hormones.*

The two walked arm-in-arm across the red carpet that guided them to the top of a sunken amphitheater, where they could see all the guests dancing and partying below. Ziggy’s normally used this space for dances and high school reunions associated with the 50s, but tonight’s occasion was their biggest and most expensive event yet. With all eyes on them, the striking couple descended the steps and stopped at the edge of the dance floor.

The evening was so beautiful. The small lights hanging over their heads, beautiful white and red flower arrangements, and hundreds of votive candles strategically placed throughout. The expensive Italian hardwood dance floor provided the perfect setting for couples to fall in love, whether for the first time or the hundredth time. Couples swayed and twirled as they danced to the romantic ballad the ten-piece orchestra played.

By appearances, everything was perfect, including Madeline. So why didn't she feel like dancing?

"Care to dance, my lady?" Danny waited and then, not getting an immediate response, pulled her close. They foxtrotted their way across the dance floor toward the governor. Danny was handsome in his tuxedo. His hair was combed back, not one out of place.

Nearby women looked on her with envy. He was the obvious catch of the crowd. She stared at him, torn. Her love for the man she had admired since the moment she met him had been arrested and was held in contempt of his behavior just moments ago. She wanted him to want their child.

She awkwardly and abruptly stopped the dance. "I'm sorry, honey. I'm just not feeling well. My head's pounding. You go ahead and chat with the governor, and I'll just sit here and rest."

Danny snapped, "What is with you tonight?" He spun on his heels and left her standing alone on the dance floor.

Madeline stared at his back as he walked away. She was ticked and squelched a desire to throw something at him. She groused to herself and looked her husband up and down, noticing a spot where his hair had begun to thin. Suddenly, he didn't look so hot. She stepped off the dance floor and stood uncomfortably near the edge.

Danny joined the governor and his guests. To Madeline's dismay, they laughed and patted each other on the shoulder. True to form, Danny was the life of the party. Madeline pouted;

it didn't seem as though he missed having her by his side. She even suspected she was on the brunt end of their crude jokes.

Angry, and now paranoid, Madeline sat back in her chair and crossed her legs. The mother-to-be was in for a long, miserable night, though she acted like she didn't care. Her heart sank, as she truly did care—a lot.



During the ride home that night, Danny was like a little kid on Christmas morning. It was obvious that, in his mind, everything had gone off without a hitch, and he couldn't contain his excitement. The night's success was a turning point for Ziggy's Island and the company's growth. He complimented Madeline up and down for her phenomenal work and attention to detail, but his words meant nothing to her. He didn't even seem to notice that she hardly spoke a word the whole ride home.

After arriving home, Madeline immediately went to bed, with no further explanation of her behavior other than saying she didn't feel well. She laid there consumed with how she was going to tell Danny that she was pregnant. The more she obsessed about it, the more restless she became. Finally, frustrated and wide awake, she turned over to see if she could talk with him, but of course, he was sound asleep and in fact, slept like a log that whole night.



Over the next several days, Madeline struggled with how to find a way to tell Danny about the baby. She would sometimes distract herself by thinking about names. She celebrated the moment she decided to name the baby Cynthia. She would not

allow the name to be reduced to Cindy; Cynthia was a name of distinction and class. It boasted in part of some mythological Greek goddess, and that was inspiring to Madeline. Her daughter—*their* daughter—would be groomed into the finest young lady she had ever known; a young lady Danny would be proud to call his own.

But even those thoughts were often short-circuited by a bolt of fear that Danny would never stomach the interruption to their busy lives. He had already stated that he was not interested in a discussion about having children, and she was scared to death he would continue resisting it. Even worse, what if when she finally did tell him, he gave her an ultimatum—him or the baby? Her skin grew cold. Fear and terror invaded her fantasies of being a mom and robbed her of the joy she deserved.

In the depths of her soul, losing Danny was not an option she entertained. But neither was giving up the baby. Somehow, she would have to convince him that nothing would change. She would be there for him in building Ziggy's and everything would be better.

As the war inside her soul raged, Madeline continued working long, hard hours. She devoted herself to making sure Danny saw a stronger work ethic than ever before. Once he learned of the pregnancy, she imagined, he would see no threat to building Ziggy's Island into the largest park of its kind. She often rehearsed that thought when she felt powerless; it was her defense in the courtroom of her mind, providing a sense of control that she needed desperately.

As a reward to herself, she spent her brief lunch breaks window shopping for baby outfits and little dresses. The small children's clothing store in the center of 1955 Boulevard proved a fun place to peruse. It also happened to be one of Danny's favorite streets in the park.

On one such day, she ran into Cecilia, an old friend from her college days, and they had lunch at a local malt shop. Cecilia surprised Madeline with her response to the baby dilemma.

"You cannot afford to lose that man of yours, Mattie." She panned the park with her left hand, showing off her perfectly polished nails.

"Of course I'm not going to lose him." Fear stormed Madeline's brain, causing her spine to stiffen. "Danny will completely understand and support me in this." She looked down at her salad and took a bite, feeling Cecilia's stare.

"Hey. I'm not here to scare you or anything. I'm just telling you as your friend who has a quasi-functioning husband that you have got yourself a million-dollar man there, and *nothing* is worth losing him over. Nothing! But you gotta figure it out quick. He's gonna notice sooner or later." She smacked her lips and sucked the last few drops of her malt from the bottom of her glass. Madeline cringed at the annoying sound.

"Let's talk about something else. I'm not worried about losing my Danny. We're deeply in love." She threw a hinting wink at her friend, hoping to steer the conversation another direction. Cecilia shook her head as she stabbed her salad with her fork.

The lunch meeting with Cecilia heightened Madeline's fear. Feelings of anger and distance took root in her heart along with bitterness and resentment. But was her resentment toward Danny or baby Cynthia?

None of these feelings had been a part of Madeline's thought life before because nothing ever meant so much to her. If something became too contentious, she would either win the battle through her smile or let the matter go, indifferent to the possible consequences. Feeling happy and getting what she wanted was always the priority for her. But now there was something—someone—to fight for. She knew that a smile and a wink would not win this battle, and it scared her to death.

Days passed and she was still unable to sit down and talk with Danny. Her conversation with Cecilia played over and over in her mind, creating waves of anxiety, tons of questions, and truckloads of anger – anger at herself for not telling him, anger at Danny for not knowing what she was going through, and even anger that she had to deal with this immense struggle.

On a couple of occasions, she and Danny clashed over their vision for Ziggy's future, which caused fierce arguments. He often inflamed the situation by saying under his breath, "I can't believe I married my chief communications officer." His plans for the expansion were on the line, and he showed no patience or flexibility.

On the heels of one such tumultuous day, Madeline woke up in the middle of the night, sensing that something was wrong. She quietly went to the bathroom and closed the door. Anxiety and deep fear filled her as she stared at red liquid in the toilet. She had no idea what the blood meant, but her instincts told her it was not good. She put on a feminine pad and went back to bed. Not being able to go back to sleep, she tossed and turned and dreaded the worst. Time dragged like a two-ton anchor being pulled through the mud.

The clock seemed to stand still. When the sun finally started to come up, she rose from the bed and made her way to the kitchen, fumbled through her address book, and called her doctor's office. The message on the other end asked her to call another number in case of an emergency. She hesitated. *Was this an emergency, or was it just her wild imagination? After all, she felt fine.*

She scribbled the number down and called it. It was a voice-mail message center that routed emergency messages to the doctor's beeper. She dialed the digits and cleared her throat. "Uh, hi. This is Madeline Richards. I saw you a couple of weeks ago and, um..." She started to cry. "Um, I saw blood in the toilet tonight after I went to the bathroom, and I'm not sure what

it means. Can I get in tomorrow, I mean, this morning?" Not knowing what else to say, she left her home number and hung up the phone.

A few hours later, she received a call back while Danny was in the shower. She was told to go for another ultrasound. She was thankful for the chance to find out what was going on, but at the same time, scared out of her wits at what the news would be. She felt so out of control.

She dressed and drove to the medical building, anxiety rushing through every cell in her body. Her first visit here had been a great day. Deep inside she prayed today would be the same. She slipped her sunglasses up on top of her head and stepped up to the window, softly announcing her name. The front desk attendant, who was on the computer, smiled at Madeline and directed her to sign in.

Her hand trembling, Madeline scribbled her name onto the appointment sheet. She was the fourth person that morning. She briefly looked at the clock to indicate the time of her arrival. It was nine minutes before nine a.m. Though it was early in the day, she wondered, was it too late to help her baby?

She glanced at the names on the list again and wondered if the other women were also there because they were afraid for the life of their baby. She couldn't help but turn and scan the room. Two young moms, both very pregnant, sat in the front lobby. Sitting opposite each other, they were each engrossed in a gossip magazine. It was apparent neither one of them was too concerned about any immediate danger. Feelings of envy and jealousy, uncommon to her personality, sprung up inside her heart. She felt so desperately alone and scared.

She bit her nails as she waited for the nurse to call her name. She had not done that since she was in college. Those days of exams and crazy long hours with no sleep reminded her of recent nights. Her mind wandered back to the days when she was single and carefree. She had the world by the horns, and

she was going to steer it in the direction she wanted it to go. Oh, how she longed to be that girl again.

Minutes dragged by as she did her best to keep distracted by thinking about Ziggy's Island expansion plans. Work made her feel good about herself. She knew she was, in many ways, irreplaceable, and it provided her much-needed feelings of power and control. She looked up to realize she was the only one left in the room. Just then the nurse called, "Cynthia Richards."

Madeline jerked with a shock. "Excuse me? Don't you mean Madeline Richards!?"

The round, short woman of Philippine descent glanced down at her chart. "That's what I said, Madeline Richards." She smiled, opened the door, and gestured for Madeline to enter.

Madeline was unnerved and unsettled by hearing her daughter's name called instead of her own. She clung tightly to her purse and walked down a narrow hall that led to the same tiny, dark ultrasound room. It seemed different than the last time she visited—smaller, claustrophobic, and lifeless. Madeline outwardly remained calm, but her mind raced uncontrollably as she contemplated various possible outcomes of this visit. None of them felt safe.

"Please undress and put this on. The sonographer will be in shortly." The nurse handed Madeline a baby-blue gown with Velcro adhesive on the back and left the room.

Madeline undressed and cautiously laid down on the cold leather exam table. Her eyes stared at the white-tiled ceiling. Again she waited, trying to reason why she was going through this alone and why her husband wasn't with her. Anger rose up in her soul. *Why didn't he see me? Couldn't he tell that something was going on inside me? Why didn't he pay as much attention to me as he does his precious amusement park?*

She eyed a plain white calendar hanging on the wall that displayed the date in big black letters: September 1. She stared at it and pondered if it would be a day of celebration or grief.

A young Persian woman entered the room and introduced herself as Sonia. She rolled a table alongside Madeline and asked her to lie still.

Sonia took the handle off the equipment and apologized for the cold goo she had to squirt on Madeline's belly. As Sonia stroked the device around Madeline's stomach, she boasted about the new 3-D Volusion ultrasound equipment they were using. Madeline didn't hear a word, fixated on hearing the swishing heartbeat. Each second of silence confirmed Madeline's deepest fears.

"Is it on?" Madeline desperately asked.

"Yes," Sonia replied. Then she said words Madeline dreaded to hear: "I can't seem to find the heartbeat."

Adrenaline surged through Madeline's body. She held her breath and anxiously asked, "What does that mean, you can't hear a heartbeat? Is my baby okay?"

"Let me get the doctor," Sonia calmly stated as she removed her gloves and left the room.

Madeline asked her again if everything was okay.

The sonographer smiled with compassion and said, "The doctor will be in shortly."

The moment Sonia stepped out of the room Madeline sat up. She couldn't stand the vulnerability of lying down any longer. She longed for some sense of control. She gazed at her belly, tears welling up in her eyes. "Baby? Are you okay?"

Just then, the doctor appeared in light-blue medical attire. Madeline looked for signs of hope in her facial expressions.

The doctor grabbed the ultrasound wand and went over Madeline's belly once more. "Madeline, was there any sign of spotting before last night?"

"None that I know of," Madeline stated insecurely. The quiet in the room was deafening as she waited to hear any sound of life from the machine.

With a slight smile of sympathy, the doctor put down the wand and delivered the news Madeline did not want to hear. "I'm sorry but there is no heartbeat."

Anxiety gushed through Madeline's body. She went numb. "No. No. We just heard the heartbeat nine days ago, and you said it was strong. Check again!"

"It's fetal demise," the doctor said with compassion. "There is no heartbeat."

"You mean, my baby is..." Madeline dropped the last word, unable to say it audibly.

"I'm so sorry." The doctor touched Madeline on her right shoulder. "I would like you to stop by my office and schedule a D&C so we can get you cleaned up inside. Okay? Is there anyone we can call for you?"

Madeline shook her head and mustered the strength to squeak out, "I'll be fine."

The doctor left the room. Never before had Madeline's life so completely fallen down around her. She felt devastation and loss to her bones. Her hopes, dreams, and future died in her womb along with her child. She wanted to burst out in hysterics and scream and cry.

Instead, she got up and dressed. She was a shell of a woman walking down the hall, using all her strength to suppress her emotions. Very calmly, she made her D&C appointment and slowly walked to the parking lot.

Finally, she made it to her car and the solace of her driver's seat. Once she closed the door, she couldn't restrain herself any longer. She had never cried so hard in her life. So much of the emotion she had buried for weeks flooded her body in uncontrollable convulsions. Her baby was gone. *She failed. She failed her baby. What did she do to cause this? What didn't she do to cause this? This was her child she was supposed to protect.*

I'm so sorry, Cynthia. I'm so sorry! I didn't protect you! The last thought played over and over in Madeline's head until she couldn't take it anymore. She cried and cried. *Why, God? Why?*

After an exhausting hour of sitting in her car, questioning and pleading for answers from God, Madeline got angry at God, at Danny, even angry at the doctor. "Fetal demise, are you kidding me? This was my *baby!*"

With each tear she cried, Madeline subconsciously placed another brick in the wall she was building around her heart. When she wiped away her last tear, she decided that no one would ever hurt her like this again. Internally, she posted a "No Trespassing" sign over the door to her heart, and instead of going home, she drove straight to the office.

On her drive to the park, Madeline traced her thoughts of the night before, to when she sensed with all her being that *something* happened with baby Cynthia.

Questions flooded her mind, driving splinters of pain into her soul. *What happened to my baby? Where did she go? Is she ok? Will I ever see her?* Madeline knew she didn't have the answers to these questions, nor did she know of anyone who did, so she turned up the volume on her radio, hoping to tune out the voices that blamed her for the loss of her baby.



The years slowly passed. Madeline never told Danny about baby Cynthia. Madeline's secret festered inside of her, and she carried a deep hurt and anger toward Danny that he couldn't understand. Danny's heart eventually softened to the idea of parenthood, but when they finally did attempt to have children, they were unable to get pregnant. Danny shrugged parenthood off as it "wasn't meant to be." It was obvious that he had no idea of the hole his attitude left in Madeline's heart.

She never released the guilt of Cynthia's loss years before and was certain that God was punishing her. Her secret battle ate her up inside. She had to endure alone the pain of being unable to conceive. Their multiple attempts to get pregnant failed again and again.

Every month for years, Madeline would see her doctor, use her ovulation kits, be with Danny, take a pregnancy test ten days later, and be disappointed. Every negative test made her more jaded, and Danny began to feel more like a sperm donor than a husband. Their intimacy was now restricted to dates on a calendar. Spontaneity or true affection were gone. They both agreed that they wouldn't try IVE, and as the years went on, they eventually stopped trying.

The agony of infertility added to the distance between them, especially as Madeline's friends, including her friend Cecilia, had no problem having children. Madeline would put on a happy mask at baby showers and hospital visits. Every time she would see a pregnant woman or a mom with a baby, she physically felt a jab in her gut. Danny was completely disconnected from her during this time and focused his energy on Ziggy's. Madeline suffered alone.

Eventually, the pain grew too great, and Madeline and Danny ended their marriage in divorce court.

The day Madeline signed the divorce papers, Danny proposed a strictly business relationship and named her chief operating officer and marketing manager of Ziggy's Island. He had learned in those years just how important Madeline was to the park's future and, more poignantly, his success. Ziggy's catapult into a new level of success was his estranged wife's brainchild. And perhaps, if she worked for him, he might win her back.

Madeline, on the other hand, went back to her maiden name, Brewer, and convinced herself her new position at Ziggy's was exactly what she needed to move beyond her pain and make a life for herself. She liked seeing Danny squirm in his admission

of needing her help to expand Ziggy's the way they had envisioned. Madeline was keenly aware that Ziggy's Island was Danny's baby, as it were, and it would require her vision and marketing savvy to make it everything he wanted: one of the greatest amusement park experiences in North America.

She buried the deep ache in her soul for a child. But no matter how hard she tried, her thoughts often returned to the haunting question of what life would be like if Cynthia were alive.

She made up a myriad of rules to protect herself from emptiness. One of the first rules was that no one would be allowed close enough to crush her like the miscarriage and her infertility had. A second rule: there would never be another ball at Ziggy's Island.

It was in these pain filled years that Madeline and Danny's business relationship grew as Ziggy's expanded. Madeline stayed true to her promise, keeping walls around her heart and focusing on work, on the other hand, Danny was twice divorced and on occasion had some young, attractive gold digger after him.

2

DURING THIS TIME, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF HEAVEN, Cynthia matured from the baby Madeline lost into a young woman and a beautiful daughter of the King.

A unique part of that growth was a deep yearning and desire to meet her mother and father; this became part of her conversations with her heavenly family. Her childlike desire to leave Heaven and go see them on Earth seemed reasonable to Cynthia, even though, to this moment, that type of journey had never been allowed by the King.

But neither Cynthia, nor anyone else, for that matter, knew that her unusual desire was actually initiated and nurtured by the King Himself. For His own reasons and glorious purposes, He had ordained in the secret places of His throne a plan that could never be conceived by the human mind: to change the world through the life of a young woman who had never been born.

As with each of His children who arrived as an unborn child, Cynthia was cared for and loved by the citizens of Heaven, for everyone was like family. As Cynthia grew, she had a deep love for children and took it upon herself to care for a newly arrived orphan girl named Angela. Angela matured under Cynthia's care and the two became like sisters, doing everything together.

Cynthia and Angela served together in the King's court, teaching and leading small children in dance and worship. They demonstrated an extraordinary passion for their service and taught each of the children how to express their own voice and skills in the act of worship.

"Angela, I am so excited about the festival! The children have been working so diligently on their routines," Cynthia bubbled as the two of them walked along a bright, golden street. The road was transparent and brilliant in its colors. The surface was soft to the touch and always warm. It led to anyplace you might want to go in the Celestial City.

Both were dressed in dazzling white, pure-silk gowns that were far brighter than any mortal eyes have seen. They danced, as it were, along the road in their crystal shoes. The shoes were flat-soled with a soft-colored tint to them. Each daughter of the King wore her own pair of crystal shoes as unique to that soul as their fingerprint. Each son of the King owned a pair of soft leather sandals customized according to his particular identity.

The two of them suddenly darted off the main road and rushed down onto a pure, silver-white sandy seashore. The shore surrounded a magnificent body of water; its end had yet to be seen. Cynthia removed her smooth crystal shoes, dropped them, and then ran across the silky soft sand and onto the glassy sea. She did not sink but stood atop the water just as firm and sure-footed as the golden road on which she had just walked. Angela, just a step behind, slipped out of her glass footwear and joined Cynthia in a splashing contest.

After a bit of splashing and laughing, Angela removed a beautiful white-stone necklace engraved with her name, Angela Marie, and tossed it high into the air. She and Cynthia watched it sink into the depth. The water was as clear as day, all the way down to a level that could not be measured but could be seen by their perfect vision. As the necklace freely dropped, Angela

waited, as though testing it. Finally, she bent over and without so much as a strain, snatched it up.

“Ha-ha!” she exclaimed. “That’s the farthest I’ve seen it sink.”

This was a game that the “sisters” loved to play. Cynthia removed her own necklace, which bore the name Cynthia Hope, from around her slender neck and tossed it up in the air. Again, the girls watched it plunge into the deep. Cynthia watched and waited.

Angela seemed confident that her friend would not be breaking her new achievement. Cynthia felt differently and waited some more.

Angela peered down at the necklace dropping further than she had ever seen. She glanced at Cynthia, who knew Angela thought she was done, but did not move to stop the necklace from its seemingly never-ending descent. Angela was being tested. This had never happened before.

The necklace continued to drop farther and farther. Cynthia watched her friend’s expressions and could tell she was thrilled at the anticipation of what would happen next.

Finally, Cynthia reached down and yanked up her priceless treasure by its chain. The depth was unimaginable but certainly not unattainable. She revealed the pure solid-gold chain in her hand and then dangled it playfully in her friend’s face.

Angela let out a gasp and a loud, “Ahhhh!”

“Nothing is beyond your grasp when you know to Whom you belong,” Cynthia informed her friend.

They shared a hug and a laugh. Angela loved learning from Cynthia. This girl knew how to live out every moment as though it was an original moment, never to be duplicated again.

Just beyond them, great blue-and-white-colored whales glided through the waters and engaged playfully with schools of dolphins. The stunning lights of the city glistened off the water and created rainbows around the girls. In the distance, beautiful snowcapped mountains gave a feeling of majestic provision.

Water flowed into enormous waterfalls and eventually made its way into the sea of Heaven.

From the heart of the city's center, a loud trumpet blast was followed by a roar of excitement from the citizens. It was time to eat.

Cynthia and Angela waltzed across the glassy sea and onto the silky soft sand, where they replaced their shoes and made their way to the Great Hall, the gathering place for meals and festivities.

The King's Throne Room, situated behind the Great Hall, was the focal point of the entire kingdom. It overlooked the city, which held at its heart the King's chamber. Placed all around the city were the dwelling places of the citizens, which rested on the hillsides in a step-like fashion. Each dwelling place had doorways but no doors and open windows but no glass or locks of any kind. The dwelling places were the private settings in which saints old and new could gather and enjoy fellowship.

The golden streets that led to the Great Hall were lined with breathtaking gardens. Profound mixtures of blues and yellows, greens and purples, pearl whites and sharp pinks tantalized the eyes, evoking a deep gush of praise and worship. The King's children encountered nature's magnificent beauty and a plethora of colors as common to them as black and white are to the souls of those on Earth. Paradise cannot be imagined—only experienced.

On their way to the Great Hall, a small boy with curly brown hair and big blue eyes asked Cynthia about her now-famous request to meet her parents. Josh had arrived in glory as a nine-month-old and found a special place in Cynthia's heart as he developed into the young boy he was now.

"I'm waiting to hear," she said. "Hopefully, I will know soon. Real soon ...". She hugged him and then watched him skip ahead, singing as he went.

She turned her attention back to Angela. “It seems that nearly all the city is aware of my request to visit my parents on the other side.”

“There is a ton of excitement about your request,” Angela reassured her.

“But how do you enter time if you have only known timelessness?”

“Yours is not the first wish for such a miracle, only the first to voice it.” Angela wrapped her arm around Cynthia.

In Cynthia’s development and growth, the desire to meet her father and mother in person grew perpetually. This desire is common among babies who never had the opportunity to be born. There is an unspoken but known longing to meet and love the biological parents who have been part of their soul since arriving in Paradise.

Sadly, some children wait patiently to meet their parents but will never have the chance because their parents ignored the King’s calling to trust Him as Savior. They choose to reject His love; therefore, they will never be united with their child in Heaven.

But, one day, in grace and compassion, the King will put each child’s disappointment to rest. Memories, desires, and tears of separation will be wiped away forever.

Others meet their parents and are allowed to be the first ones at the portals of glory to greet them on their arrival. As one can imagine, those moments of joy and completion are fulfilling for both the child and the parent.

Cynthia’s desire was unique; she wanted to go to them on Earth. The King had never permitted this before. Over time, she had also developed a deep desire to dance with her father, perhaps learned from her duties as a worship leader, or perhaps just the innocent desire of a young lady.

The sisters entered the city’s courtyard, joining thousands of others who were gathering for the great feast. The sounds of

talking and laughter were considerably loud and celebratory, but Cynthia clearly heard a soft, deep voice call her name.

Her perfectly shaped legs came to a peaceful halt. She turned to see Sebastian standing in the distance among some prominent men of the city. Sebastian was a dominion commissioned to care for the girls as they matured. He was in the second sphere of angelic beings and served the King as a governor of heavenly matters.

Around Sebastian were beasts of every kind: lions, lambs, dogs, rabbits, bears, squirrels, cheetahs, and so many more perfectly formed animals who all lived in unity with no fear of demise.

“Sebastian!” Cynthia ran to him and graced him with a hug, with Angela following close behind.

Cynthia was as close to being a daughter to Sebastian as a human can be to an angel. He admired so much about her—her beauty, character, and exuberant smile that conveyed much love. He often teased her that the crown of her head had been rounded as though made to wear a diadem.

“I have something to discuss with you,” Sebastian informed her as they walked in step. “I believe you will find it exhilarating.”

“I’m all ears,” she said as a gesture of interest and respect. Indeed, she had slightly oversized ears, like her mother, but on Cynthia, they were charming.

“You have been granted the privilege of sitting with the King at this festival.”

Her face beamed with light and her heart was raptured. She began to thank Sebastian incessantly.

“My child, please. I am only the messenger of this good news, not its initiator. The King gave the order, and I am simply here to announce it to you.”

“I’m so glad it was you who told me. Thank you. I cannot wait to sit with Him!” She turned to Angela, who was beaming with joy for her friend.

The two friends locked arms and sang songs of rejoicing as they drew closer to the palace. With no pole or wire for support, exquisite banners that proclaimed the many names of the King hung above them on either side of the golden street. Their gentle wave served as reminders of His many victories.

The fine silk flags represented every language and tongue. *Jesucristo* (Spanish for Jesus Christ), *Yeshua* (Hebrew name for Jesus), *Princeps Pacis* (Latin for Prince of Peace), *Re Dei Re* (Italian for King of Kings), and *De Zielzorger* (Dutch for the Shepherd) were just a few of the titles that flapped in the windless air. The King's favorite of them all, Son of Man, was proclaimed prominently in various languages such as Swahili (*Mwana wa mtu*). The declaration of His mighty name provided an ambience of majestic splendor and royalty.

The stairs to the Great Hall were a flawless blend of pearl and sapphire. The crowd of every tribe, tongue, and nationality moved harmoniously into the banquet room. Their entrance into the massive gathering place left them in awe, regardless of how many times they had entered it.

Its walls were covered with untarnished gold. Pillars of translucent marble adorned the corners and were used to hold red silk curtains draped across the top of the room from corner to corner. Laid within the gold walls were thin strips of purified silver that accentuated the streams of silver light that shone around the room.

The hall was massive but intimate in its settings. Its length appeared to be greater than one hundred football fields, and its width broader than fifty, yet it was immeasurable. Innumerable tables filled the vast space, positioned around the main walkway, which led to the platform that hosted the King's table. Three translucent golden steps encircled the King's dining table, providing full access to Him at any time.

The people celebrated being in His and each other's presence. Each person knew his or her place and took it at one of

the many large, three-sided tables, which resembled the ancient triclinium. These allowed a reclining posture for dining instead of sitting upright in a chair. The three sides also promoted an intimate setting and a space where the servants could serve the guests.

Cynthia took her place at a table and reclined next to a gentleman of stature. He had large hands that bore the scars of a great fisherman who had spent the better part of his life toiling with fishing nets. But the hands were also gentle, as was his Galilean face. Peter had a strong jaw, a bright smile, and a large nose. His hair was dark and curly.

Cynthia smiled. "Hello, Peter."

"Cynthia, my child," he responded. "I heard a wonderful story about your father today from Sebastian."

"Oh, please tell me," she pleaded. "I want to hear everything you can tell me." Oftentimes, a person in Paradise will be told stories, as it were, about the life of a loved one on the other side. The stories are told as though they have already happened, even though in many cases, such as with Cynthia's father, they have yet to take place. This is because the person's life is not viewed from what he or she is at the moment, but what that person will become and accomplish once their heart is united with the plans and desires of the King. All lives are seen from the perspective of eternity, whether for good or for evil. In Cynthia's case, she had heard story after story of a brave father and a loving mother who together lived in a mansion that served the needs of many children who otherwise would have no home, no life to celebrate, and no one to love them.

As Peter was about to share his story, Naomi, a young girl with a very big grin that accentuated her tiny nose and long, flowing blonde hair, nearly tackled Cynthia with an oversized hug.

"Ahhhh!" Cynthia cried out.

Naomi stepped back, soaking wet, and laughed with Cynthia. “You should have seen the dolphins. They were so hilariously fun. We traveled across the sea at outrageous speeds.”

Cynthia understood every word perfectly, even though Naomi spoke her native Russian.

Peter bellowed. “Naomi, you are such a girl of the water,” he said in Aramaic.

“Says he who swims with the whales,” Naomi jabbed back.

“But I am a fisherman.” They roared with laughter.

Applause suddenly filled the vast room. Conversations ceased and songs of celebratory expressions rang out. As an outsider, you would hear thousands of native languages. But as a citizen of Paradise, they sounded like one perfect language.

Shouts of the King’s name resounded. “Melchizedek, Melchizedek. The one great King.”

The King appeared. Everyone rose to their feet, then bowed in complete humility and honor to the One they adored and loved. They shouted out His name in every dialect ever created: “Jesus!” It was a sound beyond description. The heavens shook to their core, yet not one soul trembled in fear.

Bright light emanated from His being. Angels and cherubim circled high above and honored Him with a chorus of thundering shouts. “The Highest! Glory to the Highest, who reigns now and forevermore.”

All citizens bowed low, filled to the brim and overflowing with joy and celebration that erupted in shouts of personal gratitude and thanksgiving. Smiles of jubilation covered the faces of all citizens. Creatures of every kind—lions, lambs, cattle, and others—took their rightful place as invited beasts of the King’s court and paid homage to their maker.

The King was elegant and strong. His eyes were clearer than transparent gold but looked as soft as a baby’s brown tone. He stood a tall six feet, and His posture was that of a general who had seen battle and walked away victorious.

As He drew near, they lifted their heads to receive His smile. No one could take their eyes away from His deeply compassionate face. Beams of joy exuded from His glance. Love was not an emotion that came from Him; it was His very essence. His royal garments were a brilliant white with gold trim accentuated by a golden belt. The sash held small stones of amber and amethyst that hung with just the right tension.

His feet were housed comfortably in soft sandals that exposed marks of victory. His hands were partially hidden by His low-hanging gown, but as He gestured toward those He called His own, you could see perfectly healed scars on his wrists just above his palms.

The sight of the scars brought tears of incredible joy and gratefulness to the eyes of many—but not all. There is a sweet, intimate understanding about the meaning of those scars between the King and those who once lived life on Earth. It was similar to the look of understanding that two people share when they have been through a battle together and come out victorious. The battle's price was known only by those intimately familiar with it.

There were also many in the crowd who had never seen the light of day outside the womb. They were not fully aware of life's battles or the price that the marks in His hands and feet represented.

Cynthia was one of those. Oftentimes, she found herself staring at those who shed tears at the sight of the King's scars. It always made her curious. Sebastian, her dear angelic friend, had tried to explain it to her, but he too was limited in his understanding of the deep intimacy between the Eternal Prince of Peace and His children who wore His forgiveness like a crown.

Angels do not have a savior. Those that chose rebellion would forever remain banished from glory. Forgiveness of any sort had not been provided to them by the King. Human beings were the only creatures to be offered such a remarkable gift and only those

who had lived on Earth and received His forgiveness understood the depth of the meaning of the scarred hands and feet.

The King made his way down the middle of the aisle and touched those around Him with a hand of blessing. He approached Cynthia and stopped. Cynthia bowed her head in reverence, her insides vibrating with life and energy. He lifted her chin and gazed into her eyes. She had no reason to look away. There was not even a partial hint of shame or embarrassment that intruded the moment. He paused.

“Will you dine with Me?” His eyes sparkled.

Thrilled and humbled, Cynthia nodded with a beaming smile. She rose to her feet and followed the King to His rightful seat of authority atop the platform. Together they ascended the wide steps of pearl and sapphire. The incline was steep, yet it seemed short in its distance.

The King’s table looked much like the others, but it had a designated place for authority. He motioned for her to recline at His right hand.

She had not noticed that the music and celebration had paused. The city was enjoying a slice of perfect life, and no one dared to interrupt.

A great bright smile crossed His lips. “Let the celebration begin!” He announced.

Instantly, the music resumed to a perfect level and joy-filled laughter filled the hall once again. Trumpets, harps, violins, horns, and even percussion instruments played beautifully in the background.

Magnificently prepared food was placed before the King and Cynthia. Fruit, luscious and large, dripped with beads of clear water and was laid open on a pure-gold serving plate. Figs, berries, nuts of every kind, and other delicious delicacies were spread on the table within arm’s reach.

All eyes were on the King as He rose from His seat and served Cynthia. She had seen this holy moment many times before, but

she had never personally experienced the magnitude of what was taking place. She was like a newborn baby who lacks the capacity to fully understand the great depths of love bestowed on her by her loving parents.

Dancers and singers began to offer their gifts of celebration in front of the King's table. Men and women ascended and descended the stairs as they honored their beloved King.

"May I join them?" Cynthia asked the King.

"By all means, My child."

Cynthia launched out of her seat and joined the dance. Her feet and legs moved gracefully amid the other dancers. A choir of children rushed to the front and joined in a choral. Cynthia moved toward them and choreographed their moves to the rhythm of the music and the other dancers. Angela joined Cynthia in the jubilation. A lovely maiden named Jeannette, who was of Lithuanian descent, ignited a great round of clapping in time with the music from the vast crowd of worshippers. Wakeyia, a shorter African woman, joined Jeannette and they both beamed while shouting out words of adoration.

The music rose to a new level. The clapping morphed into applause and filled the city. Not even the walls of the Great Hall could contain the praise. The rejoicing and celebration swept over the Celestial City like a tsunami, bringing all living things to once again fall down on their face in gratitude and humble devotion.

Magnificent brilliant streams of translucent and multicolored light radiated from the King's face. Its weight penetrated the skin of each person and creature present. Unbridled ecstasy flowed from His presence into His creation, leaving them speechless.

After this culminated and the applause settled down, Cynthia took her place next to the King.

He sang a soft and personal melody of love over her. Words of blessing clothed her and without her knowing it, draped providential protection and provision over her. When He had

finished, He smiled and then playfully ruffled her dark hair. They shared a laugh.

“What is it you wish, Cynthia?”

“Only to be here, with you, my King. I need nothing more.”

“Hold out your hand, my child.”

She lifted her right hand and mysteriously the necklace she had been wearing now laid flat across her palm. She touched her neck where the precious stone once hung.

“What name does it bear?”

“Cynthia Hope,” she answered.

“And such a beautiful name, at that. But there is more to it, and the time has come for you to discover it.”

“My Lord?”

“Tell me the yearning of your heart.”

She pondered the request. Not because she had forgotten that yearning, but because she searched her mind for any desire outside of this very moment. “That I might meet my mother and father. If only but for a moment, that I might tell them how much I love them and how grateful I am to them for all they have done to help so many.”

She paused. There was more. The King waited for her to finish.

“And if I may, Your Majesty, I pray that I might dance with my father, if but just one time.”

He touched her cheek and replaced the necklace around her neck. “Your petition has been granted.” His words roared through her soul and lifted it to a new height. Her King, the Creator of all, had just granted her permission to do something no other person had ever done.

As the words of the King moved throughout the city, a sudden loud applause erupted from the citizens and a new celebration rang out. Cynthia blushed with warmth and awe as those around her congratulated her.

The King turned and drew Cynthia into an embrace. "Daughter, remember who you are." As He let her go, He made His way through the hall, touching His people.

Angela ran to her friend and held her tightly. "This will be a moment to be celebrated by all who have ever longed to meet their family."

Cynthia scanned the throng of well-wishers surrounding her as she pondered what Angela had just said. Then it occurred to her that Angela too would love the opportunity to meet her own mother or father.

With compassion, Cynthia turned to her friend. "I wish it was you taking the journey to meet your parents."

"This is the perfect will of Him who made us both," Angela said. "It is right. I celebrate this incredible moment with you and will intercede as you do what you have been called to do. My joy is complete. I am content with the King's plan."

"I must go at once and thank Sebastian. Surely he had a hand in seeing this come true," Cynthia declared.

Sebastian chimed in with a chuckle, "We have a long journey ahead. You will have plenty of opportunity to thank me then."

Cynthia spun on her heels and saw her guardian standing behind her with open arms. She gave Sebastian a strong hug of gratefulness. Tears of joy rolled down her lovely face.

As the enormous crowd made its way out of the room, taking their laughter and conversations with them, a holy silence filled the space, which allowed Cynthia a moment alone to ponder all that had just happened.

She scanned the Great Hall. "What did the King mean... 'Daughter, remember who you are'?"

"It will make perfect sense when the time comes," Sebastian answered.

She considered the thought more deeply. "Yes, I suppose there will be many surprises in my time there. What's it like down there, Sebastian? Surely you've been there many times."

“Not as many as some of my fellow angels. Let me just tell you this—expect the unexpected and remain true to who you are. Never forget that. Never deny it.”

“Why would I ever do such a thing?”

“You will be on the other side of the veil. What often seems to be true is not, even though it feels true. Your feelings will deceive you. Remember who you belong to, and let faith take the place of feeling.”

“Faith? What is that?”

“It is how you will live your life while absent from our city. Are you ready to begin your journey?”

“Now, Sebastian?”

“It is the appointed time.”

Cynthia unconsciously rubbed her necklace between her fingers. She took a long pause to process it all. She looked up and locked eyes with Angela. Angela reached for her hands and held them tight.

“The silence of this Great Hall pays homage to the remarkable event that is about to take place. Now we, as citizens of the kingdom, will watch in awe as you begin your new journey to a world you have never known.”

Cynthia’s eyes sparkled with excitement. She squeezed Angela’s hands in anticipation and turned to Sebastian. “Let’s go!”

Together, they disappeared.