

Chapter 1

My Story

What happened to me?

I lost my husband.

I lost two promising careers.

I lost my sense of dignity.

Most painfully of all, the children I never had.

None of these losses occurred all at once; they unfolded gradually over many years.

Shortly after finishing high school, I stepped into the world believing I was strong. I assumed that if a person worked hard, made wise choices, and treated others well, life would eventually reward that effort with stability and meaning.

What I did not yet understand was how easily a person's thinking can be shaped by ideas that appear harmless at first. One of those ideas would quietly influence many of the decisions that followed in my life — the belief that a woman's value depends largely on how she is seen

and admired by others. At the time, I did not recognize that belief for what it was. I simply accepted it.

The story that follows explains how that belief gradually shaped my life, often in ways I did not fully understand until many years later.

Early Influences

Looking back now, I can see that some of the foundations of my thinking were formed long before my marriage began.

I grew up with a father who could not be present for me in the way I needed. Throughout my childhood I hoped for his affirmation. It rarely came. Even on my wedding day, I remember waiting for him to tell me that I looked beautiful in my dress. He never did.

Years later we were able to make peace before he passed away, and I remain grateful for that. But as a young girl and later as a young woman, I did not yet understand how deeply the absence of a loving and engaged father had shaped my sense of worth.

These early experiences often remain hidden for many years. Only later do we begin to see how strongly they influence the way we understand love, acceptance, and belonging.

Marriage and Insecurity

When I was young, I did not spend much time thinking about beauty. I did not obsess over my appearance. I believed I was reasonably comfortable with how I looked.

That changed when I met the man who would become my husband.

I loved him almost immediately. To me he seemed larger than life — handsome in a rugged way, intelligent, confident, and well educated. He came from a strong military family and carried himself with natural authority.

In my eyes he was extraordinary.

Without realizing it, I began comparing myself to him. He seemed accomplished and impressive. I felt ordinary.

For months I wondered whether I would ever truly be enough for him. He did not say that he loved me right away, and during those early months I often worried that my love might never be returned.

Then one day he told me that during a business trip early in our relationship he had been involved with another woman..

The news affected me deeply. My imagination immediately created an image of another woman — someone glamorous and striking, someone who appeared far more beautiful than I believed myself to be.

Even so, when he later asked me to marry him, I accepted without hesitation.

Our wedding was small. The reception was even smaller. I believed I had married my prince.

There was no honeymoon. Instead, we spent the first days of our marriage in his mother's small bedroom. I remember sitting alone on our first marital bed and weeping.

For many years I could not fully explain why that memory stayed with me.

Only much later did I begin to understand that beneath the happiness of being married there was also a deep desire in me to feel cherished and admired — a desire that had never been fully satisfied in my earlier life.

From the outside our life appeared successful. We had careers, friends, and eventually a beautiful home. Financially we were secure.

Yet beneath the surface I longed for something that was difficult to name.

I wanted to feel beautiful in my husband's eyes. I wanted to feel chosen, valued, and deeply cherished.

I rarely sensed that kind of affirmation, and those feelings echoed the emotional patterns of my childhood.

The Decision That Changed Everything

During those years a young man at work began paying attention to me.

I told him clearly that I was happily married. Looking back now, I see that he interpreted that statement as a challenge rather than a boundary.

He asked me to lunch. He made certain he sat near me at business gatherings. From time to time he would joke about when I might leave my husband. At first I dismissed these remarks. Over time his persistence slowly wore down my resistance.

At the same time, my husband and I were beginning to talk about starting a family.

Then one day I received devastating news from a doctor. I was told that I might never be able to conceive, and even if I did, I might not be able to carry a child to term.

I was overwhelmed.

Instead of calling my husband immediately, I returned to work and sat at my desk in tears. The man from work saw me crying and asked what had happened. In my distress I told him everything — the doctor's report, the fear, the possibility that I might never have children.

He apologized and offered to take me to lunch.

That decision changed the course of my life.

Instead of going home to my husband, I walked out of the office with another man.

Lunch led to dinners. Dinners led to secrecy. Secrecy eventually led to the end of my seven-year marriage.

The truth is that I never loved the man I left my husband for. Even during that time I still loved my husband. Much of what happened during those months felt strangely unreal, as though I were moving forward without clearly seeing the consequences that were unfolding.

Only weeks earlier I had been secure, married, and hopeful about the future.

Suddenly I was alone.

Consequences

The consequences of that decision were severe.

I lost my marriage.

I lost my home.
I lost my security.

And eventually I lost the possibility of children.

Without the financial stability I once had, I could no longer pursue medical treatments that might have helped me conceive. My health deteriorated and I eventually required a total hysterectomy.

The grief and regret were overwhelming.

Later I learned that the man I had left my husband for had not been faithful during the time we were together. I ended the relationship immediately.

I was still a young woman.

The years that followed were difficult. I worked during the day and often cried myself to sleep at night. I missed my husband deeply, but he had warned me that if I left the marriage he would never take me back, and he kept that word.

Repentance and Renewal

A few years later someone invited me to church.

There I heard a message that forced me to confront the truth about my life. I began to understand that my actions had not only wounded my husband and myself — they had also been sins against God.

I knew I needed to repent.

I asked God for forgiveness and slowly began rebuilding my life through faith, Bible study, and the support of a church community.

Years later I contacted my former husband to ask if we could meet. I wanted to ask for his forgiveness and to be certain that there was no possibility of reconciliation.

He agreed to see me.

When I told him how deeply sorry I was and asked for his forgiveness, he listened without interruption.

Then he said something I will never forget.

“God might forgive you,” he said, “but I never will.”

Those words were devastating.

For a long time, I believed they confirmed the worst conclusions I had drawn about myself. Only later did I begin to understand something important.

I was not a bad woman.

I was a broken woman.

There is a difference.

A Different Life

Years passed. My faith grew stronger and my life gradually stabilized.

When I was thirty-seven, I sensed a call to full-time mission work and began making plans to attend Bible school. Around that same time I met a man during a weekend retreat who would eventually become my husband.

We shared the same faith and many of the same convictions about life. We married only a few months after that first meeting.

Marriage, like life itself, has not always been easy. But it has been good. As I write these words we have now been married for more than three decades.

Christ has been at the center of that marriage.

The Beginning of Understanding

Several years later another chapter of life unfolded.

A chronic medical condition left me in severe pain for many years. Medication caused my hair to fall out in patches, and I began researching wigs in order to manage the changes in my appearance.

During that difficult season I started a small YouTube channel to help other women facing similar challenges. To my surprise the channel grew, and women from many places began writing to me.

Through the letters, messages, and comments I received, I began to notice something troubling.

Again, and again women expressed the same fear — that they no longer measured up. That aging, changing appearance, or life circumstances somehow diminished their value.

The same lie that had shaped my own life appeared again and again in the lives of other women.

Gradually I began to understand that what had happened to me was not unusual.

It was a pattern.