

Seeing Beyond Darkness (Chapter 1)

Late one March I traveled with my fiancé to a doctor's appointment that would be pivotal to us for the rest of our lives together. For years, due to a childhood disease, I had been placed in an intensive eye research program. Each year I was monitored to determine if the juvenile diabetes had affected my sight in any way. The exams were very thorough causing the days of testing to be grueling and extremely long. I hated them! There was always a fear that if they looked too hard they would actually find something wrong. My companion for this visit, however, had helped me focus on the brightness of my future, and I didn't dread the exam quite so much since I was with the man I loved. This was the first time I had been accompanied by my future husband. Neither one of us were ready for the changing variables this disease could bring.

We had spent the two-hour drive to the Midwest hospital making lists of last minute details that needed our attention before the day of our wedding. We were excited and very much in love. Our courtship had been nine months of letter writing and phone calls. For the past three years we had both traveled throughout the United States in our own individual ministries. Tony's focus was to college campuses with an evangelistic thrust. Mine was to churches where I sang and spoke. How appropriate it seemed to be planning our wedding while we drove down the highway. Our lives were going to merge two road ministries into one, and we could not wait!

The entire day was consumed with hours of pupil dilation, investigative pictures of the eyes by the hundreds, various visual tests, and lengthy monitoring. The process was long and exhausting. We sat among other research patients and our care seemed impersonal as they called each of our numbers.

Our daylight hours had slipped far from us as we had been taken prisoner in a windowless clinic in the center of the hospital complex. At last, my name was called. Cheerfully, I quickly informed the nurse that she would have to change my last name on her records by the time I saw her next! I was about to be a bride!!

Within minutes, my happy countenance would be challenged. For the first time, the boring waiting and marathon of tests took a sharp turn onto a bumpy road. The presiding doctor gravely warned that a slight change in my eyes had been detected. He explained some of what he saw in the fragile, compromised blood vessels behind my eyes. He resolutely stated, "You will inevitably see blindness in your lifetime." No one knew exactly when. There would be no warning. The storm in my eyes was pending until some future time which no one could predict.

Together, as we heard the news, we anchored ourselves to a faithful God who could do the impossible. Our faith would overcome. Both of us were naive and focused only on our new love for one another.

The next hour became a blur as the dark cloud hanging over us began to settle. I felt anxious as I tried to find a place to file away the doctor's report. If only I could shred the

memory of his prognosis. We drove into the dark night with our hearts too numb to form words. Just hours previously we had heard the warnings from the skilled medical staff that told us of a threatening, coming storm. I painfully reflected on their observations as I wondered if the very man now driving me home would still want to marry me in three short weeks. The sun had set without warning on the horizon of my bright future. I finally found the courage to softly say, “Tony, you don’t have to marry me.”

We sat in silence as we drove down the highway, held captive by our own thoughts. The day had been long, however the grace, which had absorbed our shock, still lingered over us. Our trip was half over when we began our exit onto a two-lane road one hour from home. Something very eerie finally broke our silence. “All of the lights are out and the power lines are snapped in two!” Everyone appeared to be missing. The darkness was blinding!

The scene had the appearance of a ghost town nestled in a twilight zone, a stark contrast to the noisy, bustling city we had left earlier. There wasn’t a trace of life anywhere as our tires suddenly skated onto a thick, unexpected ice covering. Clueless as to any impending danger, we inched our way down the faintly traced path. Since our day had been spent in the corridors of a major hospital in the Midwest, we were oblivious to any weather warnings or threatening storms. After all, it was spring and winter’s grip had been loosened, marked by the changing pages of the calendar. Mother Nature, however, had surprised her residents with a wintry blast that would be unforgettable in the halls of weather history. Before encountering this winter storm, Tony and I, without any warning, had already walked into our own catastrophic life-storm.

Creeping along our ice rink, we marveled at the deep hole of darkness that was coupled with deafening silence. We saw firsthand the devastating damage to our state. The Illinois fields were trapped in thick ice and the power lines lay frayed and lifeless with the tall power poles now snapped like tooth picks. How had we missed the warning signs?

The journey that should have taken only two hours had become a five-hour, tension-filled trip. There were no cell phones at the time so no one could be reached nor did anyone know if we were safe. My heart’s quest has always been to make a memory, but this was a bit off the charts! The ice continued to increase in the passing hours, and I wondered at what point we would find relief from the storm’s rage. Ironically, we were only a few weeks from our spring wedding. Now, I watched my fiancé fight to hold the wheel as He steered his future bride to safety.

My tense body gave way to prayers along the way. This had been a day of constant heaviness and potential sadness. Now this! “Oh God, we are in desperate need of Your help!” The scenes were identical as we passed through one small town after another. No one was moving and the plague of darkness seemed to blanket the world---like it had ours.

Finally, we were close to home, anticipating the greetings of my anxious parents. I underestimated their own trials during the storm, however. Due to the extensive power outage, the septic pump in the basement wasn't working and water had mercilessly flooded our finished basement. They had been bailing water all night.

My wedding dress had been hanging in the basement with the hem carefully spread out on a white sheet. It was pressed and awaiting the celebration of marriage to the man I loved. Now, the bottom of my dress was stained with dirty water bubbling up from the ground. This was more than I could bear when we finally arrived home. My nerves were shot!

With diligence and a team effort, the basement was saved. My soiled dress was taken to higher ground as my mother assured me we would find the perfect cleaners to make it like new once again. In my exhaustion, I tried to disengage from the last twenty-four hours that seemed like a nightmare!

The wedding that I had looked forward to all of my life now seemed threatened. It was not merely because of a stain on the bottom edges of my beautiful wedding dress, but the threatening, permanent medical stain that could make my fiancé change his mind about marrying me. I kept thinking that this was a terrible way to start our marriage. The man I loved had not yet committed to any vow of “for better or for worse, in sickness or in health”! I knew that he must be given the chance to be released from his commitment to marry me.

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