

Surrendering Love



“I don’t love you. I’ll never love you. I don’t want to marry you. I’ll never want to marry you. You’ll make someone a good wife...just not mine.”

This was no way to treat a girl on her birthday! Especially when the girl was me and Richard already accomplished everything to make the day a complete disaster. The fervor of his words spread an icing of disappointment on my birthday cake.

My expectations were that he’d have a special celebration organized. Conversely, he anticipated utilizing my planning skills this day. The bar was set way too high and our differences converged on my birthday.

Before we got into an ugly argument bent on assigning blame, I suggested we walk around the block. Somewhere in the middle of our stroll, I turned to him and rather flippantly said, “It’s okay. I forgive you for ruining my birthday. I still love you. And I’m still going to marry you.” Meant to be an olive branch effort to absolve him and ease the tensions of the situation, instead I received his irate “I don’t love you” speech.

My heart was pierced, but Richard reeled from an even bigger shock.

You see, we weren’t dating at the time.

My birthday was a few short months into a self-imposed year-long sabbatical from dating - a year of self discovery, so to speak - after a man I had grown fond of said good-bye before I was ready. For me, self-improvement meant temporarily stepping

back from men. This desire to awaken to the blessings cluttering my life produced a negative consequence. I became less and less me.

Ironically, my heart was impetuous; impatient to carve out the history of a uniquely personal romance. Yet, I was never one of *those* women...ones so desperate to be married, they would happily marry any bum on the street. The matrimonial yearning didn't possess me like it held captive most of my girlfriends. I never even cried before the wedding of a girlfriend wishing it were me instead.

Profoundly understanding the heartbreak of being single after thirty, being past that barometer myself, my mind sketched shadowy images of married life; mostly I'd skip over them since they lacked form and substance. I wanted to be married - eventually. Like most women, I dreamt longingly about my wedding day.

Truth be told, though, I loved my life and didn't want to complicate it with a man. It had abundance: I traveled, enjoyed a wide circle of friends, found work that fed my passions, loved my service at church. But in quiet, tranquil moments I confessed to myself and my bedroom walls that while my life wasn't lonely, it was bone-dry. These mental gymnastics grew mind-numbing.

Believing life was a shiny apple waiting to be devoured, I simply added more. More people, more service, more travel, more study, until I'd fall into bed each night utterly exhausted without having the space to think about what happened during the day. It was a life, all right, but it lacked soul and purpose.

Hence the self-banishment to the realms of the dateless; spending the effort and emotions of dating on repairing my broken parts, sheepishly attempting to live the life I

thought I was meant to live. Yet only rarely did I revel in the palpable presence of a Holy God.

Proverbs says man makes plans and God laughs. Well, God must have enjoyed true hysterics at my expense. Two months into my self-imposed sanction, Richard crossed my path. I volunteered in children's ministry and he helped with cleanup. Somewhere over the ground-into-the-kindergarten-room-carpet Cheerios, we noticed each other.

Don't cue the violins yet! It was not love at first sight.

I was still compromising my best life, overlooking life-affirming and sacred moments.

And Richard...well, that was an entirely different situation.

He was, quite simply, interested in another girl. Not just any other girl, but another kind of woman altogether – one who was stylish and vogue, skinny and dainty, stunning and ravishing. One I couldn't imitate for an evening, much less be.

Over straightening up crayons and coloring books, Richard and I became friends. Good friends. We prayed together, read the Bible together, served together, attended church together. So inseparable, we kept reminding those close to us, "No, we're just friends."

After the first year of our uncomplicated friendship, the price for playing it safe finally went 'tilt.' That realization started a process so gradual, it was imperceptible. Between the need for romance, the void from not having it and healing from love's faintest hint, I wanted a future with this man...maybe not a marriage, but a future.

I wandered around this feeling, closer and closer to the option until it became, well, real. Much in the same way you break in shoes; uncomfortable, painful at first until little by little they become your favorite pair. I preferred an epiphany or the skies opening with a booming voice announcing, "This is the man I created for you and you alone." Instead, my emotions developed like a photograph, vague and mysterious at first until at last God displayed their exquisiteness.

Richard's friendship was a place I grew to love, the good parts of it and the hard parts of it. Leaving its familiarity was fraught with anxiety, the stark defeat that overwhelms when releasing your dreams.

And so I did the only thing I don't feel ashamed to tell you. I prayed. God's laughing spell at introducing Richard when I didn't want to date, forced me to my knees. Out of control, scared of missing out, I carried my panic to God. And in the midst of my vulnerable moments, the Lord whispered to me Richard would walk alongside me for the rest of my life. Even after that assurance, I still prayed continuously because my anxiety was strong and the Bible says we should pray until the peace that passes all understanding fills us.

That was what I hungered for - deep, delicious, sweet peace. Yet, I also prayed to be one-half of a truly great partnership; for my love story to be worth the telling. Those thoughts flew up to God to the point He must have wanted to shout down, "Okay already, I understand. Ease up, down there!"

While God got the message, Richard moved in reverse. Dismay over my inelegant way of informing him of God's decision almost certainly drove him.

Especially since this was the first time something as significant and beautiful as marriage was verbalized between us.

For a while the relationship wobbled on. I told people he would marry me. He told them with equal passion he wouldn't. Knowing God is consistent in His whisperings, well-meaning friends took me aside for "the talk" - the "he's just not that into you" kind of talk.

Despite praying constantly, life was not going my way. So, I switched tactics, seeking solitude instead. Wrestling with God isn't like turning on a light switch; it couldn't happen given the sheer velocity of my life. So I stopped, brought to a standstill the desperate fight for control and spent a day worshipping God. Long after the shadows on the wall told me the day was ending, I plaintively cried out to God, "Did I misunderstand You?"

Even in moments of scorching pain, there is always a next step. I invited God, practically demanded Him to show me where I went wrong. I questioned if my pain would ever end, howling through the night like a wounded animal. In that broken, shattered place, something beautiful blossomed. After crying my throat raw and my body limp, I finally relinquished the outcome to God.

God's response was clear. "Get up, my child. You are so precious to me. Now we can work together. You will have the desires hidden in the secret places of your heart. Trust me. Honor My role and I will prepare you for a new, sweet future."

Wafting in with dawn's light was a luscious mixture of transformation and peace. The most succulent, beautiful, mysterious feeling in the world, it forced me to

say out loud to the empty room, "This is what it is like to experience manna." By letting go of *my* way, God created a space in me for new things, good things, new patterns to be built, new moments of warmth and connectedness.

Later that month, I sat Richard down. It was a short talk but wrapped in serenity, expectation and confidence. This was an opportunity to grow - to relieve the pressure on the relationship so new life would spring from this experience.

I explained this was the end of a challenging season, filled with uncertainty and questions. He was an oasis, a port in the storm, a connection in the midst of a season that started with incredible loneliness. No matter the future, I'd remember his flame shining brightly in the darkness of my life.

But...I wanted more; he didn't. And unlike my birthday, a walk around the block wasn't going to solve this impasse. Continuing wasn't healthy for either of us, so I would be his friend...until I couldn't. There would be no more talk of marriage - at least not from my side. He'd have time to reflect, but one day I'd be gone. I still loved him, but God promised me something Richard said he couldn't give me. My faith in God, to remain true to Him, was paramount. He'd let me know when to move on.

The moment was kinetic, rich; my words didn't bring fear, but a soft place to land. God can make something beautiful out of anything. He can shine a light into the darkest night and He did as I became freer, lighter, more flexible and more comfortable with who I was.

Being transparent with God forced me to realize community with Richard had to be marked by a totally risky, terrifying, but ultimately redemptive honesty. Even before

the sound waves settled, I learned the benefits of a better life cannot be reaped without the pain of making wiser decisions. God didn't want just a marriage for me, but a union filled with love, tenderness and laughter. A bond He would develop into a picture of how good life can be.

Surrendering love isn't for the faint of heart. Despite being bone-dry, it means waiting for God, in His timing, to turn on the faucet and transform desert into garden. Surrender is difficult, holy work - requiring an unconditional release. Yet in this beautiful labor, the Creator softly sighed, "Myra, I love you just as you are. Stay devoted to Me and together we'll hew a magnificent adventure out of your life."

Forfeiting my dreams dramatically altered this story's ending. My dreary heart embraced God's sacred, transforming work. In surrender, God illustrated His love never loses its ability to redeem. The person who changed most was me.

My year of self-discovery had the perfect God-sized, not Myra-created, ending. God kept His promise on a brilliant August afternoon. I wore a cream-colored dress that wasn't stylish and vogue, but absolutely, perfectly me. The man of my dreams met stunning and ravishing me at the altar where we spoke the vows that made us husband and wife. After placing the outcome in God's hands, love bloomed between my future husband and me.

During the months of our friendship, God revealed the same thing to Richard, the information he so passionately rejected - the wildly determined, untamed, loud woman who was his friend would be his wife. Surrender changed my countenance so drastically Richard stopped telling God, "You've got to be kidding," and took a second

look. He acknowledged our passionate connection; that he wanted to be a husband to me for the rest of our lives; that ours was a love story worth living.

And since my very next birthday was celebrated as man and wife, in the end, God in His graciousness permitted me the last laugh.