

IT'S NOT A GAME



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INTRODUCTION



This novel is based on my life from August 5, 1988-1999 when I went for a completely routine eye exam to renew my vision prescription for corrective lenses. What you about to read is not an autobiography. Although each individual situation took place it may or may not have occurred in the order presented or with the same people because several individuals either have been omitted or combined due to privacy or stylistic restrictions. Likewise, the names have been changed.



"Do not worry about your life--what you will eat or what you will drink. Nor, about your body--what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these.

Now, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' for after all these things the Gentiles seek for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But, seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:25-33)



CHAPTER 1



When I became conscious, I was floating suspended in a dark and silent, yet extremely peaceful void. I never wanted to wake up, but remain there forever. However, someone was tickling my toes and the sensation was really annoying. So, very reluctantly I decided to wake up for a second, just long enough to tell whoever it was to stop bothering me and immediately return to wherever I was.

Oddly, I had to struggle to open my eyes. When I finally managed, the first thing I saw of was not my tormentor, rather my fiancé standing to the left of my pillow, with my father and several strangers dressed completely in white just staring at me. Adding to this bizarre scene, my mother and another white intruder stood opposite Brian. Everyone was so close that I was unable to see anything else in my entire bedroom. They all appeared to be sad, yet relieved at the same time.

The male intruder in front of my fiancé broke the silence when he said, "Good afternoon, Kara. Can you see me?"

I thought, "What? Of course I can see you. The question is, who are you and what are you doing in my bedroom?"

Stupefied, I nodded.

"Good. Do you know who you are?"

I weakly nodded affirmatively again, but speculated why he had said afternoon instead of morning. I also wondered why he would ask the owner of a home where he obviously was trespassing if she knew who she was. Of course I knew the answer; his identity was the one in debate not mine. I tried to talk, but something was blocking my throat. Puzzled and annoyed, I tried to lift my right hand to feel the impediment.

"Do you know where you are?"

I nodded almost imperceptibly a third time. This was too weird. Not only were both my fiancé and parents in my bedroom this morning, they evidently

had let in a bunch of strangers and even were permitting this one interrogate me. I attempted to reach towards my neck once more to touch my lips, but sensed that my right hand did not respond, at all. I looked up at Brian for help. He gently took my hand without touching what appeared to be an IV and smiled lovingly.

The same man asked another question. "Do you recognize these people?"

I looked at my parents standing next to him and nodded as much as possible a fourth time. He then signaled one of the women at the foot of my bed and she moved from there to stand next to Brian.

"Kara, I'm going to touch your body lightly with this pin. Nod every time you feel it, okay?"

I indicated agreement once more. Wait a minute, how did both she and the guy asking me stupid questions know my name? I knew I had not said it because I had not spoken. Therefore, either Brian or my parents had told them, but why? What else had they revealed to these strangers about me? None of what was happening made sense.

She moved to begin at my left shoulder and walked around the bed tapping me in various spots. I watched everyone shuffle to allow her clear access to the rest of my body then resume their former positions. I nodded whenever I felt contact. I sighed and considered getting up and taking a shower, refusing to participate any longer in their bizarre game.

However, before I could jump out of bed a second strange man asked, "Can you move your left arm?"

I stared at him, gently eased my hand free of Brian's, and complied by waving at him as if I were a beauty pageant contestant.

He grinned. "Very good. How about that leg?"

I willed it to move but could sense that it did not budge. I attempted to shake my neck to show negativity. Curiously, it would not stir either. I was able to move my chin up and down, yet not side to side. I glanced up at Brian in bewilderment. He only squeezed my fingers and smiled softly again. I watched his jaws tighten and eyes begin to glisten. He gulped and tried to peek unobtrusively at my mother. What was going on? Why wasn't my body responding to my thoughts? I was completely clueless and no one seemed inclined to reveal the mystery.

The first male intruder grabbed my attention a second time. "How about your right leg, Kara, can you move it?"

I tried. Nothing.

A third man asked, "But you have feeling in both of them, correct?"

I slowly nodded at him, at the same realizing that since I was lying completely flat I could not see them. Everyone looked at each other worriedly,

clearly sharing a horrible secret. I knew that I had been normal when I went to sleep; whatever could have happened to my body overnight that I was not aware of?

Stranger number two gave me another request. "Try moving your right arm."

Again, nothing. I scrunched my chin and noticed it lying on my chest curled in a tight fist with the thumb inside. I wanted to cry.

"Can you wiggle your trunk?"

The same. No reaction there either.

The first man resumed, "What about your neck? Can you turn and face me?"

Apparently he had not recognized that I had attempted that movement only seconds ago. By this time I desperately wanted to discover what was wrong. I was able to shift my eyes, so they furiously darted back and forth to reveal any clues to explain my dilemma. I was unable to spot anything but my crippled right hand on my chest and the group of people surrounding my bed.

He cautioned, "Kara, I realize you're very confused, but don't try to lift your head off the pillow. You had surgery several days ago to remove a brain tumor and have been in a coma. You gave us a big scare, young lady."

WHAT! I felt my eyes bulge and my heart begin pounding. I tried to remember, but I had no memory at all of the recent past. However, his statement solved the mystery of who the strangers in white were and why they had been asking me so many peculiar questions. I had to be in a hospital.

"Listen to me very carefully. You can't talk because there is a respirator down your throat. The tumor was benign, but it was immense and we had to perform a very radical procedure in order to save your life."

Only then did I perceive the steady whooshing noise beside my head. I wished fervently that what I was experiencing was just a bad dream. My eyes began to water and I stared at Brian for confirmation but he did not say a thing. He merely squeezed my hand with both of his. His grip became so tight that I was not sure what was more painful, that stranger's words or my fiancé's grip. I noticed that his eyes were tearing up the same as mine. So were my mom and dad's.

"Due to its size, the tumor had to have been growing in your head for years, maybe even up to fifteen. Seemingly it developed so slowly that your body adapted to the disease instead of rejecting it so you never recognized any symptoms until it was almost too late to operate. Frankly, all of us were astonished that you were alive when you came here. You're very lucky to be alive."

I glanced at the rest of the strangers and they grimly nodded in agreement. Lucky? I wondered if this guy would say the same thing if he were lying in my place.

My mom gasped and stared directly at him. "How long will my daughter be like this?"

He took her hand. "Best case scenario? Her loss of motion is due to the trauma of the surgery and will last only several days."

Brian swallowed. "What's the worst?"

The stranger pivoted his head. "Let's not go there, Brian."

My fiancé dropped my left hand, and rounded the bed, clearly aiming for him. Everyone else sheepishly backed away and not a single person even attempted to stop Brian.

He grabbed the man's lapels in his fists and demanded, "Tell me what is the worst thing that can happen to Kara?"

The stranger calmly disengaged his coat from Brian's grip and stated, "She could be paralyzed forever."

Brian's face turned completely white and I thought he was going to faint. I wanted to myself. The stranger took my fiancé's elbows to steady him.

"Brian, she just woke up from an extremely invasive operation and it will take some time for her body to adjust. There are several reasons that could explain why Kara can't move. At this stage of her recovery anything could happen."

Brian wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and straightened the stranger's lapels. "Please forgive my outburst. It's just that...."

He patted Brian's shoulder and said, "I understand completely what you're going through."

My fiancé scoffed, "Completely, Doctor? I don't think so."

Lying helpless beside their conversation I silently shouted at them both, "I could be paralyzed permanently? No! Take me back to the operating room and just kill me." I struggled to sit up using my left arm as leverage, but my fiancé placed his hand on my right shoulder and held me down. I looked up at him weeping and felt the tears sliding down my own cheeks. My mother looked aghast.

She asked, "Don't you have any idea?"

"I'm sorry. We can't forecast precisely how the brain will react to any trauma, let alone one as severe as Kara has experienced. Furthermore, we had to perform a brand new procedure in order to save her life which makes her prognosis even more difficult to ascertain."

I stared at just him and yelled inwardly, "You experimented on me? How dare you! You didn't save my life; you destroyed it! I'd rather be dead than

left like this!" I furiously kept willing my head to shake from side to side. The liquid filling my eyes was blinding me now. Since the respirator gagged me, my mouth only emitted shrill noises and I felt as if my brain would explode due to the intensity of frustration. I felt like someone buried alive struggling to get out of a tomb.

Brian held my shoulders even tighter against the mattress and asked the strangers to leave. They all filed out of the room like shadows, with the majority never having spoken a single word. He walked around to my left side once more to take my hand and kiss that temple. Only able to feel the intensity behind the caress instead of his actual lips I assumed that he had to kiss a bandage.

He whispered, "I love you, Kara, unconditionally. Remember that."

I nodded still weeping silently.

My mom made an effort to grin. "Don't worry about anything, Honey. Go back to sleep. We'll be back tomorrow."

Rounding the foot of the bed once more, Brian blew me another kiss as he put his arm around her shoulders and turned her towards the door. She collapsed into him and I'm sure would have fallen to the floor if not for his support. My dad likewise kissed my forehead and left the room behind them with his shoulders sagging.

Finally wide-awake and able to observe that I really was not lying in my own bedroom as I had supposed when I initially opened my eyes, I took stock of my present surroundings. Yep, I most definitely was lying in a hospital room, complete with all kinds of gadgets. I became acutely aware that they possibly were sustaining a life that I was not sure was worth living any more. I tried to consider my present physical condition and attempted to think of something that could be good about the situation. I wracked my brain, but it wanted to stay fixated on what I evidently had lost. Crying silently next to the whir of the respirator pump, I slipped once more into a deep-drugged sleep passionately wishing that I had died.

Very early the following morning, the loud swish of drapes being opened woke me up. I peered through half closed eyes and spied a blurry figure leaving the room as I groggily wondered why someone had broken into my home seemingly just to uncover the windows when it was still dark outside. I determined to get up to shut them in order to go back to sleep. When my body did not respond to that thought I shut my eyes hoping that I merely had a nightmare about being paralyzed. Unfortunately, the instant I tried to sit up I knew that my memory of the day before was of a real event.

The nurse who pricked me yesterday entered, greeted me, took my vital signs, and checked the IV inserted into the back of my left hand. All the while I simply watched in silence as she performed her duties, hoping that if I did not react to anything she did that she would vanish and my world would return to normal. She pressed a button somewhere on the side of my bed until I was in a reclining position. I then noticed a TV on the wall caddie-corner to the foot of the bed situated between the door and above a counter with supplies arranged in very neat piles. She placed a remote that controlled both it as well as the call button into my still functional left hand, smiled, and departed leaving the door ajar. I turned on the set and watched the only thing on at that hour--farm reports. Apparently, being paralyzed and mute was not only going to be extremely traumatic, but boring as well.

Additionally, during the night my hospital gown got twisted under my butt in a most uncomfortable and unladylike manner. I thought about calling her back to rearrange it but I did not know how to mime having a 'wedgie'. After learning from the TV that this year's orange crops in Florida were predicted to be normal after a freeze, I decided that I had had enough excitement for awhile, turned off the TV, and instantly fell back asleep.

While unconscious, I slid sideways onto my left shoulder and awoke lying on my good arm with my face smashed into the side rail. Due to the respirator I only made grunting noises which evidently were not audible outside my room even though the door was partially open. I finally managed to wiggle that hand free, but not enough to be able to reach the remote control, which had slid onto the floor. Unable to summon help any other way, I banged a repeated SOS in Morse code on the metal railing with my engagement ring. It seemed like eternity before anyone heard it, found me and sat me back up. I had never felt so helpless or wretched in my entire life.

Sometime later that morning, Brian and my parents arrived with the two people I had termed "First-Male-Stranger" and "Woman-Who-Pricked-Me." My mom and dad each kissed my right cheek and stood quietly holding hands. They both looked completely exhausted and drained. Brian kissed me on the bandage covering my left temple again and carefully squeezed that hand without dislodging the IV. He looked as if he had not rested whatsoever; nor had he shaved. It occurred to me that my loved ones were suffering as much as I was, just differently.

The man I had termed 'First-Male-Stranger' said, "Good morning, Kara. How do you feel today? In case you don't recall who I am, my name is Dr. Wells."

I nodded slightly that I did remember. Wanting to communicate even more than breathe, I shook my hand free of Brian's and aimed my forefinger directly to the chest pocket of the doctor's white coat. He flinched.

"Kara, what is it you want? I don't understand."

I thought, "I want your pen, Idiot. Take this blasted thing out of my mouth I'll be able to tell you." I was not in a forgiving mood for a predicament I imagined to be mainly his fault.

My dad offered tentatively, "I think she's pointing to your pen."

Brian exclaimed, "Yeah, that's exactly what she wants!"

I nodded and touched my nose like in Charades. The doctor handed it to me and I pretended to write something in the air.

My mom added, "She needs paper, too."

I thought, "Yes! Thank you, Mom!"

The doctor left the room cried, "Nurse, quick! Give me that pad on the desk over there."

He returned with a writing tablet, followed by more strangers dressed in white. My room began to fill up rapidly and I wondered if there was a capacity limit, like an elevator. Brian sat down and leaned forward so I could use his back as a writing surface. I set the pad on his back with my left hand and got ready to marvel the crowd with my intelligence and writing expertise. However, communicating this way turned out to be much more of a challenge than I had imagined.

I positioned the pen and clumsily wrote "WANT GO". My hand cramped and the pen fell on the sheets and promptly rolled onto the floor. Brian jumped up and retrieved it. After a long pause to rest then shake out the tightness in my fingers I added "HOME" and showed my audience the message. I wrote in big block letters that were almost indecipherable and was stunned at my lack of dexterity. The doctor might as well have given me a crayon.

He responded, "I'm sorry but you can't go home. You just had an operation and need time to recover."

I grimaced as much as possible to show my disgust at him. He continued to address me as if he did not discern my loathing.

"Once again, how do you feel this morning?"

I felt like a quarterback who just won national sports championship being interviewed in the locker room by a tedious reporter. I always wanted one of them to respond, "How do you think I feel? We just won the Superbowl, Jackass!" Nevertheless, since it was far easier and my mother was present I simply printed, "OK."

Another nurse rushed in elbowing her way through the crowd carrying something I could not see. She shouted, "I heard the good news. I found an

alphabet board. Here!"

She hurried around the circle of bystanders and handed me a piece of stiff white plastic with black capital letters on it. I immediately perceived its advantage over trying to write left-handed. I dropped the pen and paper in my lap and reached for it eagerly over Brian's slumped shoulder. He stood again.

My mom asked, "You never answered the doctor, Kara. How are you really feeling this morning?"

I glared at her and rapidly tapped out, "T-H-I-S-S-U-C-K-S"

She stifled a laugh. "Dr. Wells, Kara may be paralyzed, but trust me, there's nothing wrong with her mind. She always was a smart aleck."

Then she leaned over and kissed my cheek. Everyone began to chuckle openly, including Dr. Wells. Brian grabbed my hand, drew it to his lips, and kissed each finger separately.

I thought, "This does suck, but at least Brian's here."

The following evening, as soon as Brian appeared after work he entered my room softly closing the door. His demeanor was so somber and resolute that I knew I was not going to like whatever it was he was about to say. He put his hands in his trouser pockets and started to pace back and forth at the foot of my bed.

He never glanced at me until he declared, "Kara, I don't want to wait until you get out of here to get married. I want to do it as soon as possible. Tomorrow, if possible."

I stared at him and tears began to streak my face. I recognized that my fiancé loved me enough to consider losing his independence in order to take care of a woman who, although she was lucid, might be paralyzed and dumb for the rest of her life. I looked around for the alphabet board and saw it on the counter under the television set. Brian noticed what I was looking for and brought it to me.

As he held it out I grabbed one forearm with my still functional left hand and pulled him onto the bed. He struggled to get up but I held on firmly. He started to speak again but I gently placed my fingers over his mouth to indicate that I wanted him to keep silent. I removed them to spell out, "N-O," on the board. His eyes bulged in shock and he jumped up, almost knocking the water pitcher on the tray table next to the bed to the floor.

He shouted, "NO? What do you mean no? I love you, Kara." He sat back down and asked, "Don't you want to marry me anymore?"

The pain in his voice and the confusion on his features were almost unbearable and I winced knowing how much my answer must have wounded

him. We had known each other for several years and been planning a future together for almost that entire length of time. I could not recall a single second after the day I met Brian that I had not adored being with him.

Our first encounter had taken place on a Saturday on a deserted beach. I had decided to get up early and drive over to the seashore to watch the sunrise. As I strolled enjoying the soft breeze on my face and the sand on my bare feet, I spotted a man in the distance throwing a Frisbee into the surf for a golden retriever. After countless recoveries, instead of carrying the toy back to her master, the dog gingerly trotted over to me as I passed by them and pushed it into my hand.

As I was taking it from her mouth, the man approached and said, "I think she wants you to join us. Do you mind?" He bowed at the waist and added, "This is Sara Lee and I'm Brian. We are very pleased to meet you."

Sara Lee wagged her tail and barked once in agreement. Then she sat and offered me her paw to shake hands. I smiled and shook it.

"Pleased to meet you likewise, Sara." Addressing Brian I asked, "Do you normally use your dog to pick up girls?"

He blushed. "No actually, this is a first. How's it working?"

I chuckled, "Not bad so far. As the commercial says, 'Nobody doesn't like Sara Lee', so I accept her invitation. Does Brian come with a similar character reference?"

"Better," he responded flirtatiously as he took my hand and shook it, too. "Nobody doesn't like Brian either, and Brian comes with a money back guarantee."

He stared into my eyes challenging me to deny his claim. My heart began to race, although I tried desperately to appear unruffled. Not only was he the most attractive man I'd ever seen I sensed a good possibility that he would turn out to be one of, if not the most charming. Brian seemed to be the epitome of the guy that parents warn their daughters to avoid and want their sons to become--tall, athletic, broad shouldered, with luminous brown eyes and lashes that usually only came store bought. Mesmerized by his closeness and touch, I even forgot completely where I was or why I had come there in the first place. Most of all though, he had such an engaging smile that it invited a girl to want more, of anything. I was not about to let the opportunity to get to know him pass. No way.

Still feeling as if I had been struck by lightning, I shrugged my shoulders and replied casually, "Why not? I have nothing better to do. My name's Kara and I'm pleased to meet you both,"

Throwing a Frisbee at sunrise turned into breakfast at a seaside café further down the beach, which turned into lunch in town, which turned into dinner at

his apartment. From that day forward Brian, Sara Lee, and I had become virtually inseparable. I motioned for him to sit next to me again, but he backed away from the bed and spread his arms to indicate my condition.

"Have you stopped wanting to marry me just because of this?"

I deliberately lied and spelled, "N-O," again.

Brian slid off the bed, combed his hands through his hair, and began to pace agitatedly once more.

He turned and groaned, "I don't get it, Kara. If I'd asked you to elope with me last week you'd have said yes in a second. What's different?"

I was stunned at his denial of my new reality and waited several seconds before responding, "E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G."

He stopped abruptly and faced me squarely. He put his hands on his hips and sneered sarcastically, "What's that supposed to mean?"

I looked at him in astonishment and pressed, "D-U-H." Brian sat down on the bed and grabbed my good hand once more, almost crushing my fingers.

"Everything hasn't changed, just your body."

I shut my eyes to block him out. Instead of acquiescing to my resistance, he cupped my chin with both hands.

"Look at me, Kara! Do you still love me?"

I nodded slightly and opened them. He hugged me as tightly as possible.

"Then what's the problem, Sweetheart? Please tell me."

I reached for the board that had slid off my lap onto the sheets.

"I-L-O-V-E-Y-O-U-B-U-T..."

"But? What do you mean, but?" he shouted. "Either you do love me or you don't. Which is it?"

He jumped up and began to pace a third time while he continued to rant. I hit the board with my fist to reclaim Brian's attention. I quickly jabbed, "L-I-S-T-E-N," so hard that I chipped a fingernail. However, he kept moving around the room. I poked the letters, "L-I-S-T-E-N," again even faster and struck the board three times with my fist for emphasis.

He stopped walking, faced me, and shouted, "Listen to what? You can't talk!" As soon as he uttered that condemning sentence, his face paled.

"I'm so sorry, Kara. You know I didn't mean to say that."

I widened my eyes. "Y-E-S-Y-O-U-D-I-D."

I swear I didn't!" he protested.

I calmly spelled out again, "Y-O-U-D-I-D."

Brian grabbed the board out of my hands and flung it on the floor.

"I did not!" he exclaimed once more.

I pretended to write in the air and he sheepishly retrieved the board. I sighed slowly and deeply. "G-O-O-D-N-I-G-H-T-B-R-I-A-N," cautiously placed

the board on my lap, and closed my eyes again to ignore him recognizing that it was futile even to try to explain what living with me might be like once I left the hospital. It was clear that Brian and I were not going to do anything that night but create further havoc and tension in our lives than the brain tumor and operation had already instigated.

I heard the door open and slam shut. As I expected, when I opened my eyes I was alone. I did not know where he was going or just how badly our relationship had been shaken. However, even if he wanted to pretend that the problems could be resolved by a single ceremony I knew that they could not. Although I did appreciate his gesture to what amounted to a sacrifice of his old life for my new one, I also recognized that accepting Brian's offer would be extremely selfish. For the third night in a row, I fell asleep sobbing quietly to the steady rhythm of the respirator pumping



CHAPTER 2



On the fourth day, Dr. Wells pronounced my breathing stable enough to remove the respirator and be transferred out of the ICU. Settled in my new room, Brian and I were savoring my newly regained speech by making up after last night's disagreement. At one point in our discussion, I noticed a cluster of small iridescent needles dangling in the air next to his head that looked like a school of fish treading water all parallel to each other and perpendicular to the floor. I asked him if he knew what they were.

"Kara, what are you talking about? There's nothing there."

"Bri, how can you miss them, Bri? They're bright pink!"

"I promise you, Sweetheart, there's nothing there."

I was stunned. "You don't see them?"

"I tell you, there's only space, nothing more. Are you okay? I'm getting the nurse."

As Brian exited to summon help I sat fascinated by the fact that he denied seeing what I was certain was floating in my room. However, when I blinked repeatedly in confusion the needles vanished. I shifted my eyes left to the window because I noticed movement there as well. Horrified, I watched the semi-closed paisley hospital curtains turning into beetles about 6" in length, which started to crawl down the drapes and spread out over the entire floor.

I cried out as loudly as I could muster in fear, "Brian, don't come back in here! There are giant bugs everywhere!"

In another second I was totally delusional, with no grasp whatsoever of reality or my true surroundings. All I saw were giant bugs encircling me and I started screaming in agony as I imagined them start to climb up onto my body. I made feeble attempts to drive them away with my left arm, attributing the paralysis everywhere else in my body to stem from panic. Since I only saw the images being provoked by the medication I did not detect Brian return

accompanied by a nurse. Although I did not see him or her I was able to decipher his voice through my confusion. However, it was very faint, as if it were coming through a long tunnel.

"Kara, can you hear me?"

I nodded dumbly and glared in terror at the monster insects now covering my legs. I swung my good arm vigorously to try to swat them away but Brian held onto it firmly. The human contact did not comfort me at all; rather, the confinement induced me to try and fight to free myself even more.

"Kara, calm down. There's nothing touching you but my hands," he soothed.

He turned to the nurse and appealed for help. She touched his arm.

"She's hallucinating. Keep talking to her while I call Dr. Wells. Don't try to argue or reason, just speak calmly and assure her that you're there."

He nodded in stupefied horror.

After a while, the bugs in my mind gradually vanished and I eased struggling, so Brian relaxed his hold on my left arm. Then I noticed that the wall directly in front of the foot of my bed was not a wall at all, but a deep canyon and I was suspended on a very small platform above it. Instead of being frantically agitated as I had been to get away from the insects, I suddenly stiffened entirely.

"Kara," Brian whispered. "What are the bugs doing?"

I whispered back, "Nothing, they're gone."

He gripped my arm even tighter.

"Do you see something else instead?"

"Shh, don't bother me. Be quiet because I have to pay very close attention to what I'm doing."

"What's that?"

"Balancing. If you're too loud I'll lose my concentration and fall into a deep pit."

When I screamed again Brian asked anxiously, "What happened? Did you fall?"

"No, all of a sudden it's gone and I'm somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I think it's hell."

He grimaced and said, "Why?"

"I'm surrounded by creatures that are trying to scare me and everything I see is on fire, including my gown."

"But you don't believe in hell, or God, or anything like that, so what you're seeing can't be real."

"Sure seems real."

Just then, Brian heard the voices of my parents coming down the hall. They had been notified about my move out of the ICU and were eager to see my face without tape criss-crossing it from every angle. As soon as Brian heard them speaking, he pressed my call button tell whoever answered to warn them about what was transpiring. As soon as they set foot inside the door, he pivoted his head and put his right forefinger to his lips to direct them to be silent.

He addressed me. "Kara, describe what you're seeing now."

"There's fire all around me and shadows dancing everywhere. Please get me out of here," I whimpered. "Please save me, Bri."

My dad immediately turned around and went back into the waiting area in the hall. My mom remained in the room, but the happiness that had been so evident before faded and she became pale with fright. Realizing that she needed to be comforted as much as I did at that moment, since he could not help me Brian crossed the room to embrace her. She started to weep.

"What's happening to my daughter?" she moaned through her tears. "They told us over the phone that she was doing very well."

Brian answered, "Kara's been hallucinating since soon after she was transferred to this room. Fortunately though, since Dr. Wells also gave orders to take out the respirator she's been able to tell me what she's seeing. He's been notified but he's in surgery. However, he sent a message that he will be here as soon as possible and that this isn't permanent. The images most likely are caused by the strong quantity of drugs she's on."

My mother separated her head from Brian's ear to look at his face, cupped his chin, and stared into his eyes. With tears streaming down her face, she squeezed his arm and left the room to attend to my father. Brian returned to my side and sat on the bed. He gently took my left hand in his and stroked it with both thumbs.

He leaned over very close to my ear and murmured softly, "Kara, you're not in hell. You are safe here in the hospital. What you're seeing isn't real. Resist those images."

"I'm trying, Bri, but I'm so tired."

"Then lean on me and feel me holding you." He cradled my limp body in his arms and whispered, "I need you; come back to me. I promise I won't pressure you about the future anymore. Please recognize me again and how much I love you."

He kissed me on my lips for the second time in days and somehow I felt his touch through the fog enveloping my mind. I still saw only mirages, but Brian's voice was not just impersonal narration to the nightmares any more. That was the turning point when my sanity started its voyage to regain its grip on reality and each image scared me less and less. After eighteen hours they vanished

completely and I was so worn out fighting them that I fell soundly asleep. Brian never left my side.

I came to in the middle of the next night and saw him sitting watching me from the visitor's chair.

"Bri, what are you doing here?" I whispered. "Visiting hours must have been over long ago."

He got up and sat by my side. "Dr. Wells gave orders that I could stay."

"Why? That's odd, I don't recall him being here today."

"Do you remember anything at all about it?"

"I remember the respirator being removed and talking to you."

"Anything else?" he prodded softly.

I put my hand on his cheek and stroked it. I blinked and furrowed my forehead. "

"Yes, strange pictures that frightened me."

Brian leaned over and gently kissed me. "Kara, they were hallucinations. You had them all day yesterday. Do you see any now?"

I shivered. "Really? No, I can't see anything but you and this room."

"Thank God," he said and embraced me carefully.

"Were you here the whole time?"

He nodded affirmatively. I squeezed his arm and felt his body shaking.

"Bri, I'm fine now; they're not going to happen again. I can't explain why, but I just know it. Go home, Sweetheart. I'll be fine. Really."

Brian carefully cupped my face with both hands and stated into my eyes as if he were trying to engrave my image into his mind.

"Kara, I'm afraid to let you out of my sight. It seems that every single time I leave you for even a second something bad has happened and I haven't prevented any of it. I feel as if I've let you down."

"I should be apologizing to you, Bri. I'm the one who has upset our plans."

"I'm supposed to take care of you and I failed, miserably I might add. I'm so sorry. Can you forgive me?"

He kissed me so intensely that I could sense his love, his longing, as well as his absolute frustration at feeling so powerless. He enfolded me completely in his arms and whispered in my ear, "I don't know how much longer I can stand this, but I promise you, Kara that I will hold on to you and fight whatever attacks you ever again with my last breath."

He carefully slid my body just enough so that he could lie down and cradle me in his arms. For the first time since I woke up after brain surgery, I fell

asleep feeling safe.

Dr. Wells informed us the following day that since I was no longer hooked up to a respirator I was allowed to eat. To me, this signified regular food, but unfortunately it meant something entirely different to him--only liquids. Two afternoons later I implored him to let me have something to chew but he told me to be patient. As soon as he left, I dialed information, got the number to a local pizza place, and had it delivered to my room. I timed its arrival with Brian's in order to have someone there who had money to actually pay for it. My strategy would have succeeded perfectly, if only Dr. Wells had not forgotten the pen his wife had given him for his last birthday and returned to retrieve it just as we were finishing eating.

I was gnawing on the last piece when he walked in saying, "Kara, I hate to bother you but...."

He stopped short when he spotted the empty box and napkins strewn everywhere.

"What, pray tell, is going on here?"

Brian had the good sense to look apologetic and start gathering up the remains of our feast. I, on the other hand, just kept devouring the slice of pizza hanging from my mouth.

I mumbled, "I told you I was hungry."

Dr. Wells never told us whether he was more upset at me for the pizza itself, or the fact that there wasn't anything but crust left to share when he caught us. Nevertheless, after that incident he lifted all constraints on my diet

The sixth morning, while 'Nurse-Who-Pricked-Me', a.k.a. Jan, was cleaning me up from learning to eat cereal left-handed, I informed her that Brian was coming to see me earlier than usual. Since I was not allowed to see myself in a mirror yet she helped me put lipstick, as well as a clean gown. After I complained about hating to have to wait for him completely immobile, Jan opened the drawer to a small night table to my right and handed me a book to keep me occupied before he arrived.

"Have a nice morning. Don't do anything I wouldn't do," she called out cheerily over her shoulder as she withdrew.

I put the book in my lap however and ignored it. Instead, I surveyed my room and drummed the fingers of my good hand on the loose sheet covering my body. I grabbed the remote from the bed table and switched on the TV but

there were only game shows, repeats of old TV dramas, or talk shows whose guests didn't interest me on at that hour. I obviously couldn't take a stroll or write a letter yet. I could always go back to sleep, but was not even drowsy and Brian would show up momentarily. Decisions, decisions. I remembered the book and picked it up.

"The Bible?" I scoffed. "She gave me a Bible to read?" Since I had nothing else I wanted to do I started to leaf through it.

Just then Brian poked his head in the door and inquired, "May I come in?"

I instantly dropped the thing back on my lap.

"Please, you're just in time to save me from sheer boredom." He sat down on my bed.

"I can wait until you finish what you were reading."

I laughed, "Don't be silly. I'd rather be with the love of my life than some old book any day."

Brian kissed me. "Do you have on lipstick? Your lips are greasy."

"Yes and thank you very much for the compliment. I'll be sure and tell Jan how you appreciated her effort to beautify me."

He reached and pulled a tissue out of a box to wipe it off my lips. He kissed me again and said, "That's much better."

I punched him in the ribs. He ignored both the sarcasm as well as the poke and picked up what he saw me scanning. "What's it about? Would I like it?"

I scoffed, "I doubt it. It's a Bible."

He looked bewildered. "A what? Where'd you get it?"

I snatched it from his hand.

"Jan gave it too me. She got it from that drawer. They're probably in all of the rooms, like in a hotel. Forget about it and kiss me again."

He grinned and arched his eyebrows quickly several times. "With pleasure. Just let me close the door first."

I giggled.

"Too bad you can't lock it, although I can't move enough to even consider needing to."

"That will come, my Sweet," he said lasciviously, rubbing his hands together and cackling as he shut it and turned towards me.

Although I had managed to piece together my memories of the events that led me to where I was lying, I still had huge gaps and knew that only Brian could fill them. Although I sensed that he wanted to avoid that particular discussion, I decided to ask him to recount everything that same evening. He

entered my room as if all of the world's problems were upon his shoulders.

I said, "You seem especially tired tonight. Come here and I'll rub your back."

He approached the left side of my bed as usual, buckled his knees and faked a mock stagger in anticipation of being caressed. He kissed me, spun around, and sat by my side. He started to purr like a kitten as I began to massage his neck.

"That feels absolutely wonderful," he groaned.

"At your service, Milord. How was your day? Anything special happen?"

"Just the usual stuff, but worrying about you has been taking a bigger toll on me than I ever imagined. No matter what I'm doing, or who I'm talking to, everything else seems so trivial compared to what you're going through."

I stopped moving my hand but left it on the nape of his neck.

He turned to face me and quickly declared, "Kara, I want you to agree to marry me even if you're paralyzed forever."

I held my breath.

He continued, "Before you tell me that I haven't considered all the ramifications, know that I've done little else since two days ago when I spent the night holding you after you hallucinated."

Brian then took my face in both hands and silently stared into my eyes. He carefully embraced me and put his head on my chest. He whispered, "Please marry me. I want and need you whether you can move or not. You mean much more to me than just an active body."

I stroked his hair and thought how much I was torn between my need to have this wonderful man in my life versus giving him the freedom that he insisted he did not want. Nevertheless, whether he believed it or not, I was confident that if I remained as an invalid someday he would become restless and eventually leave altogether.

"I do think that you still love me, Bri," I murmured in his ear. "I'm just not sure that marriage will be the best thing for either of us anymore. Before we decide something definitive, let's wait until we learn how this is going to turn out, okay?"

He raised his head to face me again and his eyes began to water.

"So you don't necessarily want to break off our engagement?"

"No, Sweetheart, I don't, but I don't want to do anything rash like elope either."

"You have to promise me one thing though. Promise me that you won't ever withdraw and shut me out any more, no matter what happens. I have enough to contend with without you purposely making my life harder."

I started to answer, but Brian cut me off by placing his fingers over my

mouth.

"I mean it, Kara. Never again."

With his hand still on my lips I nodded and my own eyes began to tear. We embraced and held onto each other silently for a very long time. When Brian finally released me, he sat up straight and stared intently into my eyes for several seconds.

He cocked his head and said, "You've started to remember, haven't you."

I nodded. "How can you tell?"

"You look different from this morning. I don't know how or why, but you just do."

"I haven't remembered much though. I recall that you were the one who brought me to the hospital and that Dr. Wells was there. Just bits and pieces about the rest. Will you tell me what happened?"

"Of course. When? You mean right now?" Brian drew back and held himself rigid. "Why now and not before?"

"Because we couldn't seem to have a discussion without one of us crying."

He groaned, "Okay, but first of all I have to tell you something. I forced you to have this surgery. You were adamant that you didn't want it."

I gasped in surprise. "What? Then why did you make me?"

"Why do you think? To save your life!" he shouted and jumped off the bed. "Two weeks ago I found out that the person I loved most in the world slowly was dying and I never even recognized that there was a problem, let alone did anything about it."

He began to pace around the room.

"You know what's ironic? When I finally did something, my so-called solution made her life worse than dying."

"Bri, it wasn't your fault that there was a tumor in my brain, and as far as I can tell from what Dr. Wells told us, not even I realized it. How could you have been expected to discern that something that awful was growing in my body when I didn't sense it myself?"

Brian stopped in his tracks at the end of the bed and faced me.

"Logically, Kara, I know you're right. Nevertheless, I still feel as if I'm the person responsible for your condition no matter where I am or what I'm doing I can't stop feeling guilty about it."

"Is that why you wanted to marry me so fast before and still want to now? Just to relieve your conscience?"

"No!" he bellowed. "Sorry, I'll try not to raise my voice again. All right, yes," he admitted, "that could be the reason I insisted on marrying you so the day after we found out that you couldn't move, but not now. I still love you, Kara, as much as ever before. It's just that I've never been in this situation

before and have no idea how to handle it gracefully."

I shouted, "How exactly do you think I feel, Brian? This isn't exactly familiar territory to me either. I'm the one confined to this hospital bed, not you. I've been in this place for six days and never even seen the nurse's station in the ICU or on this floor. How many times have you seen either one and you're not even a patient here?"

I moaned, placed my left hand on my forehead and felt the bandage underneath my fingers. I paused and swallowed.

"Okay, what's done is done. I'm asking you again, please tell me what happened that led us here."

"Are you sure you want to do it right this minute?"

"Yes."

"Are you positive?"

"Brian, quit stalling and tell me."

He walked to the window and stared at the sunset outside. "Three weeks ago, you asked me to drive you to your yearly eye exam because your pupils would be dilated. I was sitting in the waiting room reading when I saw the doctor exit and go into his office to make a phone call. This struck me as odd because you'd only been with him a few minutes. When he returned he asked me to accompany him to where he'd left you. He told us both that he couldn't finish your exam so he'd made an appointment for you to see another doctor the following day."

"Did he explain why?" I inquired softly.

"Yes, apparently you needed some tests that he didn't have the equipment to run. Sweetheart, it's getting late and I'm really beat. Besides, you need to rest. How about if I continue tomorrow? I'll be here after eleven thirty."

"Promise me that you'll tell me the rest of the story then?"

Brian grinned and formed the Boy Scout honor sign with his right hand up.

"I swear."

"Okay, I'm going to hold you to that. Plan to eat lunch with me because I intend to keep you here until you finish telling me everything. The food here is great and I'm sure they'll let me order something for two. Really, don't make that face at me, Bri. Believe it or not, ordering meals has become one of the few highlights of my day."

For the first time in just under a week, he actually smiled so much that his teeth showed. He kissed me thoroughly and departed. That night I fell asleep for the first time in six days thinking about what I still had in my life, instead of what I had just lost.

Brian was late, but still appeared in my hospital room by noon. He arrived at the same time our food did so we ate prior to his continuing his tale. Soon afterward, an orderly came and took away the empty trays but left our coffee. Before Brian even began any intense conversation, he picked up his mug and got up from the visitor's chair. He rolled the table that swung over my bed to the side in order to sit on the bed beside me and put his coffee on it.

He gently stroked my cheek and asked, "Are you ready?"

I held his hand to my face and expelled a sigh. "Whenever you are."

"I had a light schedule the morning after you saw the eye doctor and was done by eleven o'clock. So, we decided to go see him together, as we did the previous guy. We were expecting an ophthalmologist to finish your eye exam, but this man turned out to be a neurologist. Excuse me, Kara, but I have to move around as I do this. You may not have these next memories at the moment, but to me reliving them is like pouring salt on an open wound."

"I'm so sorry, Bri. If I didn't feel so empty I'd never ask you to do this."

He grasped my good hand. "I know, Sweetheart. I agree that you have to remember what happened."

He released my wrist and resumed pacing.

"Where was I? Oh, yeah. During his examination it became apparent that your whole right side was weaker, as well as less coordinated, than your left. This fascinated you, but it was very disconcerting for both the doctor and me."

"I don't recall any of it."

He stopped walking and looked concerned. "Do you want me to stop?"

I shook my head. "No. It's just strange, not unbearable, just strange."

Brian forcefully expelled a breath and started to wander once more. "The neurologist said that he'd like to run a CT Scan on you and that he'd rush their development so we wouldn't have to return to see him."

"That was nice of him," I said sarcastically. "Sorry, go on."

At that point, Brian came over to where he had left his coffee and took a big swig. I did the same with mine and noticed that I had left it untouched long enough to become cold.

When he set his mug down, I asked, "Since you're over here will you sit here for a minute and hold me?"

"Will you hold me back?" he teased lovingly and tweaked my nose. He perched on my bed with one foot on the floor and the other dangling. I felt the vibrations as it swung back and forth and also sensed his heart beating wildly. He buried my head in his shoulder and absently stroked my right cheek.

"Are you okay?"

"Um-hum. I just wanted to feel your arms around me." I pulled away and looked at him intently. "Don't I feel okay?"

"No, you're very tense."

"You are, too."

"I already told you that."

I bit my bottom lip, sighed heavily, and directed him to finish even though my eyes had begun to tear. Brian got up and walked over to the window to stare outside the same way he had the previous evening.

"The CT scans looked normal until we saw a whitish mass in one frame, which appeared to expand in the following pictures. You turned to the doctor and asked why there was a small brain inside your big brain. He answered that you had the largest brain tumor he'd ever seen in over twenty five years."

I covered my mouth and gasped.

Brian continued, "Not only that, but it even had broken through your skull completely. He said that to be blunt, in his opinion you'd be fortunate to live another two more weeks. He added that it was nothing short of a miracle that you were still alive."

This time I was too stunned to respond. None of what Brian shared seemed even remotely plausible. Rather, it sounded more like something from a science fiction movie than a real event. Nevertheless, what he just said gelled with what Dr. Wells had told us when I awoke a week before. My eyes began to water even more. I gulped.

"How did I react?"

"You remained calm, so much so that it was chilling. It almost was if you died at that precise moment. The doctor asked what you were feeling and you said very slowly, 'Nothing. Absolutely nothing at all.'"

Brian paused and pivoted his head to stare at me.

"Sweetheart, I have to tell you I was more anxious about you then than ever since, including a possible coma and the hallucinations."

I motioned for him to join me on the bed and peered into his eyes intently as I stroked his cheek. We embraced and Brian moaned into my ear, "Why is this happening to us?"

I hugged him as hard as I could with only one arm. Speaking softly I answered, "I don't know, Bri. I really don't. I wish I did."

After several minutes, he composed himself, sat up straight, and wiped his eyes with his fingers. He took a deep breath and expelled it even louder than before.

"Let's get this over with. You still have to hear about the second diagnosis."

"The second? That doctor seemed pretty positive about his diagnosis."

"He was, but he thought that you didn't understand the seriousness of your predicament because you never broke down. When you remained so calm, he shoved the scans into a big envelope and told us to get a second opinion. That's

why we did."

"Oh."

Brian cleared his throat several times and pivoted his neck to look at the shelf under the TV.

"Is there any water in that pitcher? I don't have any coffee left and I really need something to drink. I don't suppose you have any chocolate hidden anywhere."

I chuckled and motioned to it. "Sorry, no. As to the other, go ahead and help yourself."

He crossed the room, poured himself a full glass, and swallowed it with one gulp. He sighed deeply and made a big production out of yawning, stretching, and bending his back far enough to see the ceiling.

He peeked at me to make sure I was watching his performance and I said, "Bri--an! Quit stalling again! We have to get this over with."

He sighed profoundly and moved to stare out the window a third time. He took another deep breath and proceeded. "Dr. Wells, you still remember him, right?"

Brian glanced at me arching his eyebrows and I nodded smiling. He resumed staring out the glass.

"Just checking. He agreed to see us during his lunch hour the following day. He perused the CT scans and tested your coordination and reflexes just like the neurologist. He said that in his opinion you did not have another possible two weeks to live; you'd be lucky to last half that long. When I reached over to grip your hand and it was absolutely glacial. I might as well have been touching a corpse. You seemed even more distant than with the previous doctor. I've never seen you act so blank or remote, Kara."

I didn't respond to that news whatsoever when Brian pivoted his head to check for one so he continued.

"Anyway, Dr. Wells told us that he recommended that we leave immediately for the hospital and he would operate on you the following morning. You thanked him for his time and told him you'd have to get back to him. I wanted to kidnap you and force you to comply, but I knew that only would make you more determined to make your own decision. You stood up shook his hand, and we left. Neither of us spoke the entire ride home until you asked me to drop you off at your place. You made me pledge to guard your secret and went inside without looking back. I had no idea what would happen next."

I swallowed. "What did?"

He turned to face me again. "Sweetheart, I think that's really enough for now. You have to rest and assimilate what I've just told you and I need to take

a walk and get some fresh air."

"I'm fine, Bri."

"You might be, Kara, but I'm not. I have to regain my composure. Reliving these episodes is even harder on me than I thought. I need to be alone."

I pushed the button to raise the head of the bed as upright as far as possible and exclaimed, "Brian, you can't stop now and leave me wondering!"

He stroked my face and whispered, "Shhh, Sweetheart. I can hear the nurse coming to give you more medication and you always have to take a nap after that anyway. I'll be back soon, I promise. I do intend to tell you everything, but not at the expense of your recovery or my sanity."

He kissed me and left quietly. Nurse Jan entered before the door had time to shut. She got my afternoon blood samples, changed my IVs, made me swallow some pills, checked the catheter tube, straightened my covers, made sure I could reach the call button, and departed. I did not even have enough time to meditate on anything before I fell soundly asleep.



CHAPTER 3



When I awoke, I heard Brian and Dr. Well's voices coming from the hall outside my door. I eavesdropped intently on their conversation, but all I could make out was my name. When I felt alert enough I called out and they both entered my room, taking their normal positions--my fiancé on my left and the surgeon opposite him. I briefly wondered if Brian would have to be content only being next to side of my body in the future.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Wells," I said. "Do you have any good news to tell us today?"

"Except for being paralyzed, Kara, you're as healthy as the proverbial horse. Have you noticed any more tingling or movement than just your left arm and hand?"

I shook my head and frowned. "No, nothing. By the way, why did you give orders not to let me use a mirror?"

He answered as he jotted some notes on a clipboard, "I don't want you to be alarmed by your appearance."

"I wasn't until you said that. How bad do I look?" I asked in shock.

Dr. Wells chuckled.

"Not bad at all. Only your right arm and hand look unnatural. Other than that you appear to be a very pretty young woman in a bed with a big white turban on her head."

Brian complained, "See what I have to put up with? She's just as cranky and vain as she ever was."

I elbowed him. Dr. Wells grinned.

"I can tell you're in good hands, Kara. I'm going to visit some of my sick patients."

"Catch you later, Doc. Wanna go surfing when you finish your shift?" I called out as he exited the room.

After Dr. Wells' departure Brian remarked, "It appears as if you've forgiven

him. It isn't his fault you're paralyzed, you know. It isn't anybody's."

"Not even yours, Bri?"

He blushed.

I continued, "You're right. I'm not mad at him anymore, although truthfully when I'm alone I still wish that I'd died. Whether you want to admit that yet or not, it would have been much easier for all of us."

He sat on the bed and cupped my chin with both hands. "Not again! Whatever were you just dreaming about? I assumed that we ended that particular discussion last night, Kara, and you vowed never to even try to push me away any more. Have you ever once considered the fact that when I asked you to commit you life to mine, I also committed mine to yours? This predicament is what we, not just you, have to overcome."

I gulped and said, "Bri, I never said that I didn't want you in my life. However, I've decided that I don't want to marry you any longer."

Brian looked as if someone had hit him in the face with a brick.

"How many times do I have to repeat myself before you believe me?" He made a fist and began to count with his fingers. "One, you've just insulted my intelligence. Two, I have just as many conflicting emotions as you do. Don't ever even think about playing with them again."

He paused breathlessly and I asked sarcastically, "Is there a three?"

He stood up, turned to face me, and put his hands firmly on his hips.

"Yes, there is. Three, I'm so mad at you at this moment that if you weren't paralyzed already, I'd probably make you so myself!"

I nodded sheepishly. "Bri I wasn't merely dreaming. Someday you will leave." He started to speak but I cut in. "Please don't interrupt. It might not happen for years, but someday it will become too hard to have to shrink your dreams to include me in them and you'll simply vanish."

He leaned over to put his face right in front of mine and growled, "Kara, I cannot believe you think I'm that shallow. I will never, I repeat, never abandon what we have just because of a little setback, so get used to it!"

I continued to press my case, "You call this a little setback? My God, Brian, what would you call a big one? Can you tell me truthfully that you'll be content to sit day in and day out only talking, eating, reading, or watching TV together, because so far that's the extent of what I'm able to do."

He sat by my side and said gently, "Yes."

I shook my head and said, "Then you're denying reality."

He jumped off the bed and sobbed, "Kara, stop it! Why do you keep doing this?"

I waved his words away with my hand. "Brian, be reasonable. I'm not trying to ruin our future; I'm trying to save it. You have to let me go. No, that's

not enough, we have to let each other go."

At that point I started crying, too. I remembered how when I first was able to communicate my feelings and point out letters on the alphabet board after the operation I had written and thought; "This sucks!" It sure did.

Suddenly he declared, "You're driving me crazy, Kara and I need to be alone again. Will you be all right and not waver any more about us at least until this evening?"

"Sure," I responded sarcastically, "just peachy."

Brian opened and slammed the door shut as he left without even glancing in my direction. I picked up the TV remote control from my lap and turned on a soap opera.

I must have fallen asleep because I was disoriented when I became aware of Brian sitting under a soft light in the visitor's chair watching me. I also noticed that it was dark outside and my dinner tray was on the tray table. Brian did not say a single word for several minutes but remained mute and immobile. I kept quiet and stared back. He broke our silence and spoke without moving.

"I spent all afternoon with Sara Lee on the beach where you and I met and finally had to admit that you were right, Kara. I couldn't come up with even a single argument to debate your logic and ironically that's what I do for a living, argue a case in a trial. Therefore, you won our dispute because I decided not to press the issue of marrying the active woman I fell in love with there again. Apparently, she doesn't exist anymore."

I gulped. He got up and stood by my side.

"However, during this past week I have fallen passionately in love with someone who could be her twin--the courageous woman who's confined to the bed in this room. And, even though she's trying to drive me away I have something to ask her and want an answer right now."

He paused and swallowed visibly. He knelt by my side and took my left hand in both of his. "Will you marry me, Kara Ewing?"

I jerked my hand away.

"Brian, don't do this to me! I'm begging you, don't. I explained to you why it won't work!"

I began to sob and wondered if we ever would be able to have a normal conversation again without one or both of us breaking into tears.

He remained motionless and said coldly and evenly, "There is a question on the floor. Do me the courtesy of answering it please."

"I can't," I blubbered. "You know that. Bri, I love you too much to accept your offer."

"Just answer yes or no." He retorted without emotion.

I pleaded with my eyes, "No. I mean, yes. I mean no. Don't do this!"

Brian slowly stood up without taking his attention away from mine for even a second and repeated deliberately, "Answer my question, Kara."

I reached out to take his hand but he swung it just out of my reach,

"You don't really comprehend what you're asking. Let's discuss it another time."

He crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Yes, or no, Kara. They're very simple words. Say one of them and I'll either stay in your life or leave it forever. Either you can choose to allow me to remain in your life as your future husband or I can say good-bye and walk out that door. Before you answer though, you should know that Jan has agreed to send a cot in here so I can spend the entire night if it takes you that long to make up your mind. I've made my decision, but you have to make yours. You have only until tomorrow morning to make it."

"What happens if I can't decide by then?"

Brian shrugged, "I'll assume your answer is no."

I tried once more to grab his hand, but he backed away from the bed even further so I couldn't even reach his legs.

"How about if you just help me get through this as a friend?"

"It would be ludicrous for me to deny that I won't miss certain things if you're still paralyzed when we get married, but I'll willingly learn to adapt to a life without them. I won't without you, and as my wife, Kara, not just a friend. Therefore, I repeat, is your answer yes or no."

I gave in. "If you're positive that this truly is what you want then yes, Bri. You win; I'm tired of fighting both you and this body. Yes, I'll marry you."

He said smugly, "Good. Consider that particular subject settled once and for all. So, what do you want to do for the rest of the evening?"

He approached the bed and sat down. I sagged against him and muttered, "Will you choose please? I'm done for tonight."

He embraced and kissed me as tenderly as a newborn and whispered, "You sure took your time, Kara, but you made the right choice when you finally did. By the way, I'm still spending the night with you. Get used to it."

Several evenings later while Brian and I were watching TV we both became thirsty. Not wanting to disturb Jan for juices that he was permitted to get by himself by that time, he left during a commercial. In the meantime, my parents stopped by to find out the latest news on my medical condition. Brian lit up when he saw them and put our drinks on the counter under the TV so he could

hug my mom.

She said, "Brian, we just ate at Kara's favorite restaurant and brought back two eclairs. Would you like one?"

"I'd love it, thank you."

In order to prepare the snack they walked to the counter where Brian had left the plastic cups. My dad kissed me and sat down in the visitor's chair.

"So what's the latest, Kara? Have you seen Dr. Wells today?" I nodded affirmatively and he added, "What did he say?"

"I still can't move anything but my left arm, although I can turn my head side to side a little. Watch."

As I spoke I started to notice an odd sensation throughout my midriff under the untucked sheet which felt like a belly dancer undulating her trunk.

I exclaimed, "Bri, Mom, Dad, I think my waist is twisting a little from side to side! I'm not I'm not doing it on purpose; it's just happening."

As my mother was bringing me my dessert and beverage she replied, "Kara, it's wonderful about your neck, but don't get too agitated and jerk your left arm too much. You don't want to disturb the IV."

I insisted, "I'm moving! I can feel it!"

Brian turned around from the counter where he was fixing his food and cautioned, "Kara, I agree with your mother. I'm looking directly at the sheet covering you and it's not even shifting."

I persisted, "I swear to you all, I am MOVING!"

All of a sudden, my left leg shot up from under the sheet and remained suspended in mid-air. My mom gasped and the cup she was carrying fell to the floor where it landed with a big splash. My dad jumped up as if he had heard a gunshot. When Brian twisted his head to see what was happening, he dropped everything he was holding. Juice splattered all over the front of his shirt and jeans as the eclair likewise fell out of his left hand. It spun around on the counter and fell over and landed with a dull thud in the wastebasket.

"Oh my God!" he blurted as he walked almost in a trance to my side without once taking his eyes off the spectacle.

My father whispered, "It's like a miracle."

The four of us started to laugh hysterically. I kept raising and lowering that leg in awe of that simple movement. Instead of merely trying to cope as we had for the past nine days, we celebrated and even had chocolate to do so. Well, I did anyway. My parents didn't have any to begin with and Brian had ruined his. Too bad.

Brian spent that night remaining beside me in the bed the entire time instead

of transferring to the cot once I fell asleep. He lay next to my right instead of left side, alternately clutching me or reaching over my body to run his hand down my left leg in wonderment. Although I still was on massive dosages of medicines that knocked me out for hours at a time, I woke up often and shared in his delight. Thus, on the tenth day after the operation, I awoke not to the swishing of heavy drapes being opened, but by the gentle kiss of my fiancé who had gotten up much earlier and persuaded Jan into letting him do the honor. He told them about my restored mobility and as usual he charmed his admirers into granting him just about any request.

"Ummm," I breathed without opening my eyes. "Whoever you are, that was very nice. May I have another?"

He consented.

When my mouth was unoccupied once more I continued, "You'd better leave before Brian arrives."

"Oh really? Who's Brian?" he whispered nibbling my left ear where apparently it was not covered by the bandage. "I'm not worried."

"Just some guy, but he'll show up eventually. He always does. And, he may look tiny and weak, but he's very strong."

I opened my eyes turned my head as far as I could and gasped in mock surprise. "Brian! What are you doing here? I didn't realize that was you. How embarrassing!"

"Tiny and weak, huh?" He sat up and tickled me all over my right side. Fortunately for him it was still completely paralyzed so I couldn't retaliate. Unfortunately for me I could feel all of it.

Laughing at the sweet torture of not being able to fend off his attack I gasped, "Brian stop it! Paybacks are hell and I'll remember this. I don't know how or when, but I'll get you someday."

"Sweetheart," he said murmured without stopping his assault, "that's another promise I intend to hold you to."

He gazed lovingly into my eyes but did not stop pestering me. Just then Dr. Wells opened the door and walked in. He cleared his throat to announce his presence.

"Good morning Kara, Brian. I heard that something occurred in this room last night that I had to see for myself. I assume this wasn't it."

Brian jumped off the bed looking sheepishly. "Sorry, Doc. I thought Kara was hallucinating again and I was trying to hold her down so she wouldn't hurt herself."

I pursed my lips and tried not to laugh.

Dr. Wells raised his eyebrows and said dubiously, "That was quite noble of you, Brian. However, why aren't you standing by the arm she can move?"

"Ummm. Well, she.... You explain what happened, Sweetheart."

"Dr. Wells," I began.

"For the record, I think it's wonderful that you can be playful. It will help Kara's recovery immeasurably if you can find things to laugh about."

Brian took and squeezed my gnarled right hand. He looked directly at the surgeon, saluted him, and exclaimed like a soldier, "Be assured that we will do everything in our power to do so, Sir."

"Good. Now, Kara, let's see this new trick of yours."

I swallowed and Brian gave my hand another squeeze. I took a deep breath, expelled the air noisily, looked directly at the doctor's eyes and deliberately elevated my leg exactly as I had done unintentionally the evening before.

"Well? What do you think?" I asked holding my breath in suspense.

"Very nice. I'm very hopeful that more movement will return, Kara."

Brian interjected, "How much? Can she be like before?"

Dr. Wells sadly shook his head. "I wish I could promise you that, Brian, but that might not be the case. This is extraordinary, however we still can't predict which of her previous functions will or will not be restored, or when. Since most healing takes place within the first twelve to eighteen months, it's vital that we do whatever we can to assist her right away."

I nodded at him. "Thank you for being honest with us, Dr. Wells. However, I'll that time frame won't apply to me."

He arched his brows and asked why.

"It's not because I'm special or anything, but because it seems as if I have a future husband who never will allow me to give up the likelihood that it will happen someday. I have found out in this past week that he's even more hardheaded than I am, excuse the pun."

Brian grinned at my words and gave my hand yet another squeeze. I turned back to look once more at the surgeon and he smiled.

"I'd love for you to prove me wrong, Kara. I would love that more than you can even imagine."

"Not anymore than we would, Doc, I'm certain of that," Brian declared.

Dr. Wells bowed with a flourish. "Then I'll bid you farewell until tomorrow. You have my permission to resume your former positions," he replied and departed chuckling.

Left by ourselves, Brian glanced at me lasciviously, raised his eyebrows and said, "I just decided to take the day off. Now, where were we?"

At that precise moment there was a knock on the door and someone called out from the other side, "Breakfast!"

Brian instantly stopped what he had been doing again and muttered, "I can

learn to deal with you being paralyzed, but not these constant interruptions."

I laughed and yelled, "Come in!" as he slid his feet back onto the floor for the second time and backed away from the bed.

A female orderly brought in a tray entirely covered with dishes, smiled and said, "Good morning" in a high cheery voice. She set it on the table that swung over my bed and gave Brian a shy grin, too. I considered that there probably were not any people left in that entire hospital whom he had not yet charmed. As far as I knew, they even might have been letting him perform minor surgeries just for kicks.

Brian then informed me that he had to go out for awhile, but he refused to say where or why, just that he would be back. As usual, Jan soon entered and followed her normal routine.

Before she departed she asked, "Kara, do you need anything else?"

Munching on a piece of toast, I said, "Yeah, I do. Do you know where that Bible is you gave me the other day?"

She opened the top drawer in the same small table and handed me a book. "Is this what you mean?"

"Yeah, that's it. Would you mind closing the door to give me some privacy?"

She smiled. "Sure, just press your call button if need anything. Happy reading."

Jan exited and I finished eating with the Bible on the bed tucked under my left hip. After the dishes were taken away, I swung the tray table to my left, pulled out the book, and gently placed it on my lap. I sat looking at the cover for a long time pondering what to do next.

After about a half hour, I raised my head and said timidly to the empty room, "God, if You really exist and are listening to me will You give me a sign?"

I waited breathlessly in anticipation, but absolutely nothing happened. The phone did not ring nor was there a knock at the door. Even the bustling noises in the hall oddly vanished. I felt more isolated from the world than I had before and felt foolish to have expected an answer. I wanted to cry over the fact that apparently I was desperate enough to grasp at any straw, so to speak, for relief. Inexplicably, instead of discarding the Bible on my tray table and reaching for something else to occupy myself, I picked it up and opened it at random.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." (James 4:8)

I dropped the book in my lap and it slammed shut. Chills ran up and down my spine even though reading this particular passage had to be a fluke. Nevertheless, I picked up the Bible again and opened it again whereupon I my eyes immediately noticed another verse.

"I am the Lord and there is no Other." (Isaiah 45:18c)

I stammered, "How can I know that God is showing me this?"

"I am God; there is no other. I am God and there is none like Me." (Isaiah 46:9)

I wondered what were the odds of getting a direct answer from a book a third time. I was engaged to an attorney and he had taught me the importance of words, so I countered boldly, "If you're not lying, prove it."

"It is impossible for God to lie." (Hebrews 6:18)

My left hand went limp and the book slid onto the sheet and slammed shut once more. My heart started thumping so hard that I looked at my chest supposing that the movement would be visible, like something in a cartoon. I cleared my throat, composed myself, and pushed the button on a side rail of the bed to sit up straighter.

This time I ventured more respectfully, just in case, "Why are you answering me through this book?"

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." (II Timothy 3:16a)

"If you won't say anything out loud, will you at least show yourself?"

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29b)

As I was considering this information, my fingers began to flip pages once more without my willing them to do so. I fleetingly sensed that I was not sure if I was more fascinated or annoyed for someone other than myself apparently guiding them.

"Give attention to my words. Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart, for they are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh." (Proverbs 4:20-22)

Health to all my flesh? I decided that I was more fascinated. "In that case will you help me find more of what you said? After all, God, you must admit that the Bible is huge. Other than what you've just shown me, I don't have even the slightest idea where to continue from this point."

"Ask and it will be given unto you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

"Where can I find this door to knock and ask for stuff?"

"Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I am the door.'" (John 17:7a)

"Jesus. Isn't he supposed to be your child or something?"

"This is My beloved Son." (Matthew 3:17b)

"Am I correct in assuming that you want me to learn as much as possible about him in this Bible?"

"The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." (Ephesians 1:17)

I automatically tried to shift in my seat to get more comfortable then remembered that I could not. My mouth was dry so I reached over to get some water from the tray table. I was transfixed by what was taking place and wanted to keep God's attention as long as I could.

"Will you give me a clue what especially to look for?"

"The gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes--for the Jew first and also for the Gentile--for, in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." (Romans 1:16-17a)

"What exactly is faith?"

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

I asked hopefully, "How can I get it?"

"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17)

"What will happen if I choose not to do any of this?"

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He IS (Exodus 3:14) and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

"If I do it will you keep helping me?"

"The Holy Spirit--Whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:9)

I whispered in awe, "Thank You again, very, very much. I'm sorry I rejected believing in you. Please forgive me. Oh, and another thing, I still don't understand. Why did you reveal yourself to someone who didn't believe you existed?"

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

I didn't fully understand what had just happened, but I took a nap with the Bible clutched tightly to my chest.

I awoke to feel Brian sitting on the bed stroking my cheek. He obviously had been studying my face for awhile.

"Do you have any idea how beautiful you are, Kara, even with your head totally bandaged?"

I stretched my good arm. "Why thank you, kind sir. You'd better say that for it seems as if you're stuck with me. By the way, what time is it?"

He looked at his wristwatch. "Nearly 11:00. Are you hungry for lunch already?"

I blinked my eyes several times and yawned. "No, I was just wondering.

It's really easy to lose track of the time in here. Sometimes I only can tell by what the food is. Don't laugh, I'm serious."

"I know you are. That's precisely why I thought it was funny."

"Where did you go?"

"I told you, it's a secret."

"I thought we agreed never to have secrets from each other anymore."

Brian kissed me on the nose. "That's not quite true. I made you promise to tell me everything, but I never agreed to do the same. You should listen better, Kara."

I feigned distress. "So that's how it's going to be, is it. I'll file that away with having to avenge myself for being tickled. Now that's two I owe you."

He snickered and kissed me again,

"Did you ask the doctor when he's going to take this IV out? It's really cramping my style when I lie down and hold you."

I punched his gut playfully. He grabbed the remote and swiveled so his back was facing me.

"What's on TV at this hour?"

"I haven't a clue but I'll bet it's boring. Bri?"

"Hmmm?" he said without turning his head.

"Do you believe in God?"

"What brought that on?" he asked still surfing the channels. "Oh, I know, that Bible. Are you turning religious?"

"No, it's just that...."

"Just that what? Did something I should know about take place after I left?" He turned the set off and pivoted his trunk to face me once more.

"I prayed, or at least I think I did. Anyway, something happened."

"What?" Brian's attention was fully aroused and he scrutinized my face. "Please tell me you didn't have another hallucination, Kara." He looked very worried and grabbed both of my upper arms.

"No, nothing even remotely like that, I swear."

Brian relaxed his grip.

"Tell me what did occur then!" he demanded.

"Do you believe in God?" I repeated.

He cocked his head. "I'm not sure. Why?"

"Do you believe that He communicates with people?"

Brian groaned "Don't tell me you think you heard His voice."

I chuckled and kissed him. "No, but I believe he personally replied to some questions I posed by showing me in the Bible where the answers were."

Brian frowned. "I have no idea what you're talking about, Kara. What kind of questions?"

"Well, I asked the nurse to close my door completely even though they don't like to do that when I'm alone, especially after I slid over in my sleep and couldn't reach the call button."

"What does that have to do with this morning?"

"After you left I knew I didn't want to watch TV and I certainly didn't want to be alone and get depressed. So, I decided to talk to God about what has happened."

"I thought you didn't believe in God."

"I didn't really, but I challenged him to prove himself to me if he existed."

Brian sighed, "I'm assuming you think he did."

"Uh-huh."

"And?"

"It was amazing! He kept answering my questions by having me turn right to an applicable answer in the Bible. It was creepy at first, but then thrilling."

Brian's eyes suddenly widened. "You're kidding, right?"

"Not a bit," I replied. "It was wonderful."

He pulled me to himself. "It affected you that much?"

I nodded into his chest. I was trembling and could feel that Brian was also. I sensed that my life had been transformed inalterably by what I'd done, and way more than undergoing brain surgery.



CHAPTER 4



When Dr. Wells came in to check on me that afternoon, Brian had left again but my parents were visiting.

The surgeon entered, greeted my folks and announced, "Good news. I'm going to remove Kara's bandage."

The three of us nodded our heads vigorously in agreement.

The doctor went over to the door and called for a nurse to assist him. She came in and the two of them proceeded to cut the masking tape and unwrap my head. I was so excited that I did not discern anyone's reactions as the dressing slowly was unfurled.

When my head was completely unwrapped my mother gasped, "Is her head supposed to be that big?"

My father exclaimed, "What have you done to our daughter?"

I turned my head to look at Dr. Wells.

He said, "With the amount of trauma Kara has had there was bound to be some inflammation."

"You call this some?" my mother blurted out. "She looks like ET!"

I demanded to see a mirror and when the nurse handed it to me I almost fainted. My head was completely bald except for some fuzz. In addition, a huge wide scab that looked like a zipper started from my left temple, crossed to the right and turned to where I could not see it. I gently pressed the wound with my good hand and felt the swelling wind almost completely around my skull. I thought I would throw up.

I whispered, "Thank God Brian isn't here to see this. I don't know what it's going to do to him." I turned to my mother and said, "Will you warn him for me? I think I'd scare even Sara Lee right now. Either that, or she's try to lick the wound."

The doctor said, "Kara, I expected to see something like this. I'll take care of you, don't worry."

"Worry! You'd better take care of her," my dad shouted, "Kara's head looked like a water bed when she pressed on it. I can see bubbles underneath her skull."

I started to panic but remembered the Bible and the little I'd read only hours before and that memory relaxed me. I said, "May I be alone please? I'd like some time to myself."

My parents started to protest but I added, "Please. It's my head, not yours. I'm asking all of you again, please leave me alone."

They departed under strong protest and declared that they would give me five minutes, no more.

As soon as the door closed I prayed, "God? You still listening? If so, please help me get through this, too. Will You speak to me again through the Bible and tell me what to do."

I picked up the book and indeed found encouragement.

"Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Cease from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret--it only causes harm." (Psalm 37:4-8)

I looked to my right and noticed another vision floating in the air, not one that frightened me like the hallucinations but one that comforted me instead. I saw a single word in iridescent violet block letters--JESUS. A warmth started in my middle that expanded throughout my entire body and became confident that I was not alone.

I whispered, "Thank you," to the air.

Brian was with the doctor and my parents when they returned. He approached and spoke to me right away.

"Kara, don't worry or be sad. We'll get through this just as we have everything else."

I gazed lovingly into his eyes and he appeared puzzled by my demeanor. Evidently he had been told to expect a much different reaction. I did not explain my behavior because I could not account for it myself, other than the fact that I was positive that no matter how bad my head appeared to be I would be all right.

Dr. Wells said, "Kara, I have to aspirate your brain to drain some of the fluid. It will hurt, but it is crucial." I saw Brian and my parents wince.

"Do I have to be operated on again?"

"No, I can do it here, as soon as I have your permission to proceed."

"You have it. Go ahead."

Everyone looked at each other in shock.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

I smiled peacefully and said, "Positive."

Dr. Wells told us step by step what he was about to do and called a nurse whom I did not know to bring him the necessary implements for the procedure. Next, he asked my family if they wanted to remain, but only my mother chose to stay. Brian and my father stated that seeing a giant needle being stuck in my head would be too hard for them to watch. When the nurse entered with a tray I vaguely glanced to see what was on it. Only when Dr. Wells explained that he had to shave a small square behind my left ear did I protest.

"Hold it right there, Doc. You can forget about doing that again right this second."

"Kara, it's necessary."

My mom said, "Please let him Kara, for me."

I looked up at her and thought, "So this is why she stayed."

I resigned myself and grumbled, "All right, but don't shave much. I may not remember the operation, but I do remember you telling me you'd only shave off part of my hair and just saw that I'm completely bald."

Dr. Wells prepared my head and said, "Brace yourself, Kara, this is what will hurt."

I felt a sharp jab like gigantic hornet stingers enter my scalp behind my left ear and heard the loud pop as the needle penetrated my skull.

I heard him say to the nurse, "Where are the vacuum tubes? They're supposed to be on this tray."

"I guess I forgot to bring them," she said stiffly.

He tensed up and muttered through clenched teeth, "Don't you think you ought to get them?"

We waited until she did so; meanwhile I had a huge needle stuck in my head, hoping that the doctor did not have to sneeze. It took several minutes to drain my head until Dr. Wells was satisfied with its shape. He told my mom and me that it was very fortunate that he had ordered the bandage to be removed when he had, as there had been absolutely no indication in any of my daily updates even to suggest that there had been anything even slightly amiss.

All in all, I needed four spinal taps and three more brain aspirations. Dr. Wells wanted to perform another, but I persuaded him to give me time to pray to see if the swelling would reduce on its own. I did so because during my new regular prayer and study sessions I recognized that one-day I would have to put my new beliefs into practice without expecting God to do everything for me. To my surprise and delight, two days later my head returned to its normal shape.

I secretly began reading the Bible regularly. Brian caught me several times and although he was skeptical, he did not persuade me to stop because my perspective concerning our situation started to improve. He even brought me leather rose colored one with what would be my new name embossed on the cover. Unlike the hospital copy, this edition included notes in the margins with comparable segments and a concordance at the back so that I would be able to cross-reference. Sometimes he even listened while I read to him out of it.

Although God rarely guided my fingers automatically, as He had the first two times I prayed, I learned how to locate the information I wanted by using the citations to each verse in the margins. By using those as springboards, when I was patient and diligent I always found at least one answer to the questions I posed and possibly several. It might take from several minutes to a few days, but God never failed to guide me to a revelation of His will concerning a particular concern. One special day I spent the entire afternoon with Him without falling asleep.

"God, is there a best way to approach You?"

I opened the Bible to a passage He had shown me previously, surveyed the references in the margin, and looked them all up. Those did not lead me to a definitive answer, so I scrutinized the next batch, as well as the ones they listed until I located what I had been seeking.

"Let us therefore come boldly to the Throne of Grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

"I'm really tired of being confined to this bed. Are you planning to perform a miracle to restore me or should I just get used it?"

"Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones." (Proverbs 3:7b-8)

I pushed the button to sit up even straighter. "Great! How do I do this?"

"Be doers of the Word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves." (James 1:22)

"How can I? That's precisely my problem; I can't do anything, or at least not very much."

I felt a slight breeze brush lightly over my body and grinned. "Oh, I get it, do what I can, even if it's not much. By the way, out of curiosity what will happen if I don't?"

"For indeed the Gospel was preached to us as to them, but the Word which they heard did not profit them not mixed with faith in those who heard it." (Hebrews 4:2)

"Is that like the old saying, 'God helps those who help themselves'?"

"Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap whatever

we have sown if we do not lose heart."

"I guess it is."

I paused to look out the window. It was very sunny with a warm breeze from the ocean ruffling the tree leaves, most especially the palm fronds. It also fluttered people's hair and clothing while they strolled through the hospital parking lot and beyond. Many looked up at the sky enjoying the beautiful weather as they greeted each other smiling and waving. Suddenly it hit me that every verse I had just read in the Bible combined with all of the others in perfect compatibility, just as nature and people should. Individually, each revealed only a glimpse of God and might be overlooked. However, when blended everything became like a great symphony instead of merely being separate instruments.

I closed my new Bible gently to consider these ramifications and realized that it was just a crumb of what He had to offer. I further recognized that His words could not apply to me alone, but were designed and intended to help every single person not merely in this hospital, but those I saw through the glass as well as the rest of the entire world. The realization of how powerful the God I had denied just a few days previously was boggled my mind.

After praising Him for awhile, I whispered, "God, I'd like to find out more about Jesus. Will You show Him to me as You see Him?"

First I unearthed, *"He is the image of the invisible God."* (Colossians 1:15a)

"So what? I read yesterday in *Genesis 1:26* that you made the first man in Your image, too."

"If you had known Me you would have known My Father also." (John 14:7)

"I repeat, God, so what?"

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power--Who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38)

"But You were with Adam and breathed Your Spirit into him, too. I still don't see any difference between them."

"And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Man Adam became a Life giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not the first, but the physical and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust. The Second Man is the Lord from Heaven, and as was the man of dust so also are those who are made of dust (Psalm 103:14). And, as is the Heavenly Man so also are those who are Heavenly. And, as we have borne the image of the man of dust we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly Man." (I Corinthians 15:45-49)

"I think I understand this, God. When I was reading the beginning of *Genesis*, wait, I'll show You where, in verses 2:17 and 3:4 Adam defied You by

doing something that You expressly commanded him not to. So, the difference between him and Jesus must be that although Adam was indeed perfect when he was created he severed his link to You, whereas Jesus never did. Am I right?"

"The Father has not left Me alone for I always do those things that please Him."
(John 8:29)

I made a fist and said, "Yes!" in triumph.

"Is it even remotely possible for us to enjoy the relationship You had with each Other, or are we limited because of what Adam did?"

Automatically, my eyes moved to that margin and noticed another verse, which I looked up as quickly as possible one-handed. It did not satisfy my needs at that moment, so I searched for the citations it listed but they weren't relevant either. I had to keep doing the same thing until locating a passage that was pertinent to my objective at that moment.

"Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also. And, even greater works because I go to my Father and whatever you ask in My name I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name I will do it. If you love Me keep My commands and I will ask the Father and He will another Helper that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth--whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But, you will know Him for He dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:12-17)

Wow. This was better than I had expected, let alone even hoped for. Once more, I was astounded at what I had tapped into and wondered why more people did not take advantage of it. I had yet to discover anything even slightly disconcerting, let alone outright alarming, about what I was finding in the Bible. I gently closed it again, set it on my lap, and looked out the window a second time, with the realization that if I had not been paralyzed, I never might have slowed down my hectic life to appreciate God, let alone Jesus. I drifted off to sleep feeling very blessed, instead of sorry for myself.

Brian broke this second remarkable interlude with God at dinnertime several hours later by banging into my room abruptly and noisily. He was carrying a large tray with a huge white napkin that concealed whatever was on it completely. He set the thing on my tray table, which was swung to one side, and went to close the door. As he did, I let the Bible slide to the floor under the bed and amazingly, he did not hear it hit the floor.

He came back, kissed me, and said in a very bad English accent, "I trust that milady slept well?"

I slowly replied, "Yes," eyeing him suspiciously and wondering what he up to now.

He continued unfazed, "I thought milady might be tired of hospital food, so I brought her a treat," and whisked away the napkin with a flourish. "Ta-da!"

I stifled a giggle with the back of my left hand. The tray was entirely covered with chocolate eclairs, each with a tiny toothpick protruding out of the top of it.

"This is what you call dinner?"

"Yes and no. To be precise, it's a food bribe."

"What's a food bribe?"

"I was thinking today, Kara. When did you move your left leg?"

"Last week, why?"

"What were you doing?"

"What? I was watching TV with you."

"What else?"

"My parents stopped in."

"And?"

"They brought us dessert. What are you getting at, Bri?"

"Bear with me, Sweetheart. What was the dessert?"

"Eclairs. Why?"

"Don't you see? If your leg moved for just one, just think how the rest of your body might respond for twenty!"

I grinned from ear to ear. "I love your logic, Bri. Let's find out. Give me that big one in the middle, will you?"

"Sure, but I'd rather feed you."

"Do you feel it's necessary?"

"Most definitely."

Dr. Wells caught us doing that, too, and I wondered if he ever left the hospital. At least that time we heard him coming and there was enough food to share. Having to stop our private interlude anyway, Brian invited not only him, but everyone else on staff that evening to partake of our feast. Unfortunately, however, we also discovered that Brian's theory about chocolate instigating healing did not work. Darn.

The following morning, after Brian spent another night holding me and we had breakfast together, I asked him to pick up my new Bible and hand it to me before he left for work.

Although he pursed his lips in disapproval, he complied, saying, "Kara,

don't go overboard on this God stuff. I realize I'm the person who gave this to you, but I'm still skeptical about religion being an answer to our predicament."

I grabbed his hand and squeezed it.

"I'm being careful, Bri. I was skeptical too at first, but God's been able to answer every single one of my questions so far."

He grimaced so I took hold of his elbow as well.

"I feel the need to finish what I've started. Trust me about this, okay?"

He leaned over to kiss me and replied, "Sure, Sweetheart. It's organized religion I don't trust, not you. I think it's all a scam."

I made a mental note to ask him later why he was so against it. I knew my previous reasoning, but not Brian's because we never had even discussed the subject. I also recognized that it soon would become imperative for us to do so.

"What I'm learning has nothing to do with that, Bri. It's just been God, the Bible, and me. No one and nothing else. The first time I feel even slightly uneasy, I'll stop immediately. I promise."

"I just don't want you to get your hopes up and then get hurt when what you're doing doesn't work out," he said.

I nodded my head in understanding. "I know that and I appreciate it more than you know, Bri, but I'm so convinced that it will that I'm willing to put my life on the line."

As soon as he closed the door behind himself I prayed, "Good morning, God, Jesus. I have another favor to ask. Will You please help Brian and me come to some sort of agreement about all of this? I believe You will, so in advance thanks. Okay then, what do You want to show me today?"

I opened my Bible at random and started reading. Although the content was valuable, once again it did not pertain to our particular situation so I believed that I had not located what They wanted me to see yet. I persevered though and within a half-hour felt led to cross-reference a certain verse. I discovered this passage which comforted me, not just about my body this time, but my relationship with my fiancé as well.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men, the Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if anything is praiseworthy, meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do and the God of peace

will be with you. I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to live humbly and I know how to live in prosperity. Everywhere, and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:4-9, 12-13)

I prayed aloud once more and said, "Thank You for showing me this, Guys. I will rejoice in Your presence and not be worried about my, I mean my and Brian's lives any more."

I also spent the remainder of that morning, as well as afternoon, intermittently rereading or marveling at the richness and wisdom in this single passage.

During my third week of incarceration, Brian quietly poked his head through the door one afternoon when Ramona, the physical therapists in the hospital assigned to my case, was passively working on each of my legs separately. She had instructed me to keep my eyes closed that particular session and as Brian entered the room he put his finger to his lips to silence her before she could greet him. Then he silently motioned for them to switch places and waved her away. She exited closing the door very gently behind herself. I heard the click but ignored it, supposing it to be Jan out for more blood.

I asked, "Will you lift my right leg again? I'm sensing a change there but I can't quite make out what it is."

Brian grinned and answered, "Um-hum," in a high falsetto voice.

"Will you let go please? I want to try to do that by myself."

I placed my left hand over my eyes so I would not be able to peek if tempted to do so and focused all of my energy on elevating that leg. I thought I felt it lift, mainly because I did not feel the sheets on my calf anymore. I uncovered my eyes and saw two things: that heel was several inches off the bed and Brian was standing where I expected the therapist to be, with tears streaming down his cheeks and a huge toothy smile from ear to ear. He grabbed foot and held it.

"See? I told you we should stay together, Kara. We're a great team. Was I right or what?"

I giggled so hard that I also began to weep with the sheer joy of the moment. After that morning my physical progress increased steadily and instead of only doing therapy on my bed twice a day I was taken to a different floor where the actual hospital therapy room was located. Gradually, my body began to recover although it was infinitely weaker, as well as less flexible and coordinated than before the surgery. Nevertheless, day after day all of us involved became more confident that I would regain full mobility one day in my

legs at least. The doctors and nurses soon began to refer to me the miracle baby of the hospital.

Brian insisted on skipping work to take me to my first day of "real" physical therapy--sitting also for the first time in a wheelchair. He was so excited that after he picked me up from the bed, he almost tripped and dropped me on the tile floor of my room. He wheeled me past the nurses' station on our way to the elevator so that I got to see it and greet Jan out of bed. It wasn't nearly as exciting as I'd imagined, but I finally had to shut up complaining to him about him having done something there that I had not.

When we arrived at our destination, I saw a huge room with all kinds of contraptions, including a large vivid blue mat on a stand about two feet off the floor. Ramona directed Brian to lock the chair perpendicular to it on my left side. Then she removed the side arm and shoved a wooden board under my hip and over the mat like a bridge.

"Kara," she directed, "this is your first test. Can you slide over this board using your good hand and sit on the mat?"

I looked at Brian for support. "You can do it, Sweetheart. I know you can."

I gulped and grabbed the end of the board and yanked it all the strength I had in my left arm, but the rest of my body did not budge. I looked at him and the therapist blankly. Ramona encouraged me not to give up.

"Try to push with your left leg as you pull."

I looked at her, then at Brian again.

I whispered under my breath, "God, please help me do this," and attempted to transfer once more.

I pressed down as hard as I could with my stronger leg and slowly but surely pushed as well as pulled my body over the wood to sit entirely on the mat. It took so much effort that I was sweating when I finally got there, but I did it. Brian became so ecstatic that he picked me up by the shoulders high enough so that my feet did not even reach the floor. He began to kiss me so long and hard that we both finally fell backwards on the mat laughing. Evidently embarrassed by what should have been a private moment, Ramona cleared her throat and excused herself to make a phone call as he continued to nuzzle my body. Fortunately for once, Dr. Wells was not around to witness our show. I'll bet he heard about it though.

After four weeks of being in the hospital, he did come by on his normal rounds and said, "Kara, you are doing so well that I'm going to discharge you."

"What? Really? Don't kid me about this." I wanted to shout with unadulterated joy, but he held up his hand.

"I'm not, but before you get too excited and start planning, I want to run a CT Scan of your entire body this afternoon, not just your head. I want to be certain that you're as healthy as you appear to be before you leave."

I grinned at him. "You mean it, Dr. Wells? This is finally over? Thank you. Thank you so very, very much! You can do whatever tests you like."

He chuckled and left shaking his head.

I sat alone in my bed beaming with delight. I thought, "Freedom. Finally Brian and I can get on with our lives."

I reached for my new Bible, which by that time was my constant companion, and reviewed the Scriptures that had begun my walk with God. I said, "Thank You, Lord. I sense Your hand in getting me discharged tomorrow and I want You to know that I appreciate everything You've done for me and Brian so far, as well as what You will do from this moment on. Amen."

I closed the book and hugged it tightly to my chest with my good arm. Brian arrived on that floor of the hospital and had caught the surgeon as he was about to descend on the elevator so he already knew the exciting news when he entered my room. He rushed over to kiss me, almost tripping over the wastebasket in the process.

"Kara, Dr. Wells just informed me that I can take you home. Isn't it wonderful? I have some good news of my own for you, too. Wanna see it?"

"See it? Don't you mean hear it?"

He grinned with satisfaction. "Judge for yourself."

Two of our closest and dearest friends, Pam and Scot Taylor cautiously entered and approached my bed.

She exclaimed, "We're so happy that you finally wanted visitors, Kara! When Brian called and told us that it was okay to come, we rushed to get here as soon as we could get a flight. You look wonderful!" She hugged me and sat on the bed.

"So, what's new?"

Scot stared at her in shock. "Pam! How insensitive! Maybe she doesn't want to talk about it! Kara, I'm so sorry. Please forgive my nosey wife."

I reached for his hand and pulled him towards us. "Scot, think about it. I'm bald with a huge scab on my head and my right hand's curled in a fist on my chest. I think it's too late for me not to realize that other people might not notice those things. I'd rather we discuss what's happened than skirt the issue. I'm not the elephant in the living room that everybody's afraid to talk about, you know. Feel free to ask me anything."

He gave a sigh of relief. "Okay, sure. So, why aren't you wearing a wig or a scarf or something?"

Brian, Pam and I just howled.

"Scot, you went from not wanting to talk about my condition at all to that? Nevertheless, I'll tell you why. Because they're itchier than I am vain. However, if someone who shall remain nameless had informed me that I was going to have visitors, I would have put something on my head to cover it."

"I'm glad you didn't," Pam said. "You have such a nice one, even with that huge scab. How long is it? Has anyone measured it?"

I chuckled, "If you like that, it's too bad you weren't here to see my brain. I've been told that it was even nicer. And, yes, Brian did. It's 15 inches. Enough about me, what's going on with you two?"

"Scot was offered a job in the district attorney's office here with Brian. We're seriously thinking about moving to this area. His final interview is today, right after we leave you."

I was delighted to hear this news. "Really? Please tell me you're not joking."

Pam and Scot's presence at this time would be such a boost to both Brian and me. They could share in my recovery and I knew that he would love their emotional as well as mental and physical support as much as I would.

"No, it's true. In fact, while we're here this weekend we're looking for a place to live. Kara, there's one more thing I have to tell you." She paused for effect.

"What?"

"I passed my doctoral exams! I'll be writing my thesis."

"Oh my God, you did? Congratulations!"

She cocked her head. "Having been through it yourself, I expect you to help me you know."

"Of course. Count on it."

The four of us talked and laughed together until it was time for me to eat lunch. Before they left, Pam vacated her space on the bed and Brian filled the void.

He kissed me and murmured softly so that only I could hear his voice, "I'm glad you like your surprise. I'll see you later. Wear something sexy."

I whispered back, "I'll wear my birthday suit under my gown. Be sure and come alone."

"You're on. It's a date."

As I watched them leave the hospital through my window, I marveled at how much life could change radically in under a month. That afternoon I had the complete body scan for Dr. Wells and when I was wheeled back to my room I saw that my things had been packed, ready to leave the hospital the next morning. I took my usual afternoon nap eagerly anticipating the future. I had Brian, my parents, God, as well as our best friends with me now, so no matter what happened I would be able to endure it.

When Brian returned he was still excited. He came to his usual perch and said, "Sweetheart, Scot loves his new office and he and Pam just went house hunting. Things are looking better and better for us everyday. I guess there just might be something to this God stuff."

"Looks that way, doesn't it, Bri. I never would have imagined in a million years that we'd find ourselves in these circumstances, but I have to admit that it hasn't been boring. By the way, I know why I didn't believe, but not why you didn't. Will you tell me?"

"You know that my parents are dead, but I've never told you the details. They both died the same day in a massive car wreck when I was eighteen. They were strong Christians who went to church all the time and even dragged me until I was old enough to rebel and stop attending two years beforehand. They believed that God would take care of us, but He couldn't have because He wasn't there to save them and they died. I lost my faith in Him that day and never looked back."

I stroked his hand on my lap and soothed, "I'm so sorry, Bri. You never told me this before. I have no idea what happened in their cases, but He has been helping as well as healing me. It's very slow, but I literally can feel it sometimes. Will you let me share more about what I've found in the Bible with you?"

Brian stroked my cheek with the back of his hand and said, "You know, Kara, I'd like that. I really would. I'd like to try again to believe."

"I'm going to pray first. Close your eyes and just listen."

"Is this necessary?"

"No, but it helps me set the mood, like stretching before exercising."

He hugged me and shut his eyes. I did the same.

"God, I truly believe that You exist now and that You want to be a part of our lives. Thank You for showing me what You have in the Bible, what You've already done to help us, as well as how You will help us in the future. I ask You to show us how to proceed as we leave here in a way that will please You. Amen."

Brian opened his eyes and asked, "That's praying? It wasn't that hard."

"Yup, that's how I've been doing it anyway. I just talk to God as if He were in this room."

He kissed me tenderly. "I can learn to live with that."

I stroked his cheek and replied, "Good, 'cause you're gonna hear it a lot."



CHAPTER 5



While Brian and I sat savoring the moment, Dr. Wells knocked and entered the room. His face looked more desolate than I had ever seen.

I asked, "Is something wrong?"

"I'm glad you're both here because, Kara, you can't leave here tomorrow or anytime soon."

"Why not?" I asked stupefied.

"The CT scans I just had run show that there are two tumors growing in your right lung. They must have broken off from the main one some time ago, traveled through your bloodstream, and settled there. They're life threatening as well so you have to have another operation, as soon as possible."

Brian's grip on me tightened and his face went as white as a sheet. "NO!" he shouted and his fingernails started to cut into my arm.

I started to sob, looked up at the ceiling and cried out, "God, why?"

Dr. Wells placed his fist over his mouth and cleared his throat.

"I'm going to leave you two alone for awhile to digest this news. I'll come back and we can discuss our next move in an hour or so."

I nodded mutely and buried my face in Brian's shoulder. By that time all of my memories of the weeks prior to the operation had returned, so I knew that this information was worse than hearing about the original growth.

I whispered, "God, I can't. I simply cannot take any more. I just can't!"

Brian and I sat together crying until I pulled away from him.

I moaned, "God, how could You let this happen? You knew about them, didn't You! Yet, You concealed them from me just as You did the other. You lied to me and Your book is a sham. I hate You! I never want anything to do with You or it ever again!"

I picked up the Bible and flung it as hard as I could where it smashed against the far wall and fell open and crumpled. Brian grabbed my shoulders.

"Kara, stop it!"

I sobbed, "Don't you ever tell me what to do again, Brian! I don't need you either one of you! God let me down just as you will too some day." I moaned in tears, "Just leave me alone and go away." I began to cry uncontrollably.

Brian went to the door and locked it. He turned around and sighed profoundly.

"Let's have this out once and for all, Kara. You want me to get out of your life? Then make me!" He moved to stand just out of my reach and added, "Until you do I'm staying right here. I warned you not to even try to push me away anymore."

I tried to grab his arm, but my hand only made useless circles in the air between us.

I screamed, "I hate you, too!" at the top of my lungs.

Someone on the other side of the door tried to open it. When it would not they started pounding.

"What's happening in there? Are you okay, Kara?"

I started to speak, but Brian rushed over and quickly put his arm around my neck, efficiently placing his hand over my mouth and answering in my place.

"She's okay. We're just having a difference of opinion." Then he snatched the nurses' call button out of my hand and whispered sharply, "Oh no you don't."

The voice on the other side responded, "It sounds like much more than that. Open this door right now or I'll have it opened!"

As I struggled to free myself, Brian called out again. "Don't worry, she's fine. We'll try to be quiet, but if you hear any more sounds just ignore them. I'll call you if I can't handle the situation. Also," he added, "will you please call Dr. Wells and inform him that Kara will be indisposed for awhile? He'll understand. Thank you."

I was stunned. I could not think of a way to get out of this predicament that Brian could not anticipate or counter, so when he let me go free and backed away again from the bed I glared at him with as much hatred as I could muster. He calmly sat down in the visitor's chair, crossed his arms and stared back at me.

"You don't want to talk to me? Then neither one of us will talk. I can hold out just as long as you can, Sweetheart."

"Don't call me that anymore."

I continued to sob, but Brian didn't even flinch. He simply stayed where he was and waited for me to make the next move.

I finally mumbled through my tears, "If you still care, I just remembered something."

"And...."

I swallowed timidly. "I know why I didn't want to have brain surgery."

"I'm listening."

"After I talked to Dr. Wells again...."

Brian looked incredulous and interrupted, "Wait just a minute. You went back to see him and didn't feel the need to tell me?"

"I didn't see him. I merely called him in order to review some of the details of what he'd diagnosed and the possible outcomes."

Brian's face became a mask again. "Go on."

"I wanted to discuss the possible consequences if I did survive an operation and they were bad. Very, very bad. He said that judging from my scans it would be almost impossible for me to live through surgery, even though it was my only chance. Also, if I did pull through it was quite possible that I would be blind or not be able to think or speak any longer--in other words be a total vegetable. However, never once did he mention being paralyzed. Ironic, isn't it, considering the way things did turn out."

Brian looked at me in agony. He got up and slowly crossed the room. However, instead of sitting next to me as usual, he remained standing and merely kept staring without speaking.

I gulped and continued with a sigh, "I decided right then that even though my life evidently was screwed I refused to pay someone a ton of money just to screw it up even more. Yours didn't have to be, however, so I chose not to have an operation, especially one that in all likelihood would fail. I also considered the fact that someday you'd be able to get over my death and move on, which you wouldn't do watching me slowly decline. I know you, Bri, and you'd feel much too guilty to abandon a sick fiancé, especially if there was even the slightest chance that she'd ever get better. So, I thought that given the circumstances, my dying quickly was doing the best thing for everyone, not just me. For what it's worth, that's what I just remembered."

Brian perched himself on the edge of the bed, carefully pulled me to his chest where I could feel his heart beating, and asked softly, "Kara, do you hate me for what I made you do?"

I struggled to look at him, but he held me still. I sighed in resignation, "No, I don't really. In fact, not at all. I understand why you did what you did because I would have acted the same way if our roles had been reversed. However, I truly don't think I can endure another operation, Bri, so this time please don't make me have it."

I pulled away and looked into his eyes. "Logically I realize that I shouldn't be because it has to be a much easier procedure, but in all honesty I'm more scared this time than ever before."

He moaned and embraced me tighter.

"There's a way to fix this, Kara, and from what I've seen so far, your recovery does seem to be tied somehow to your faith in God and what you've been studying the Bible. As I see the situation, the solution for this, too, must lie in it and Him," he whispered softly. "Even though I still want to deny it, I've started to believe in everything you've shared with me."

"Really?" I whispered. "Why haven't you told me?"

"Because I didn't want to admit that I might be wrong about something. Believe it or not, I can be as stubborn as you can."

I smiled and tweaked his nose. "I'm glad to finally hear you admit it."

"So, shall we give Him another try, or not? If I can do it, you should be able to."

I swallowed, put my left hand over my eyes and said, "Brian, I'm not sure that's wise. What if the Bible's what I thought it was when I came in here, nothing but a fraud used to deceive people and get their money. Do you know the saying, 'Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me'?"

He nodded.

"Well, that's exactly how I feel at this moment. How can I be sure that if I return to accepting it as the word of God I wouldn't be like letting a slick con artist control me a second time? I would be very stupid to begin even a deeper search for someone I believe betrayed my trust."

Brian got up and retrieved the Bible from where I'd hurled it.

"Do you remember how you first spoke to Him?"

"Yes, but...."

"Didn't He show you that whatever He does for one person He's obliged to do for everyone else who asks?"

I chewed my bottom lip. "Yeah, sort of, it's in *Galatians 3:28*, if you want to look it up. But, what if what kept happening to me was nothing more than a string of coincidences that I inferred a message from because I wanted it to be true?"

Brian said into the air as I had several days previously, "God, if You really exist please demonstrate it to me from the Bible the exact way You did for Kara."

"Brian," I cautioned, "If He was lying before He'll just do it again."

He nodded in agreement. "I realize that, but do you have a better suggestion to help us now?"

I shook my head no, so we waited for fifteen minutes, but as I feared nothing happened. Finally, I got fed up waiting. "Are you satisfied? Can we get back to our real concern?"

"Let's be patient and wait a little longer just to be sure." I shrugged my left

shoulder in resignation.

Another fifteen minutes went by.

Brian said, "I'm going to see what happens when I just open the Bible at random they way you did."

"Go ahead, it's your dime."

He did so and drew in a breath in surprise. He handed the book to me and pointed to what he had noticed first on the page.

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord." (Psalm 27:14)

He looked at me and asked, "Is this what happened to you?"

I nodded mutely, absolutely astounded. Brian pursed his lips, thought a moment and asked another question.

"Why did You answer Kara when she prayed two weeks ago?"

"God shows personal favoritism to no one." (Galatians 2:6)

Brian whispered to me, "That seems to be further proof of what God showed you, doesn't it." He directed his voice to the air a third time. "Why didn't You or Jesus simply appear to her?"

"Because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen Me and believed." (John 20:29)

"Is that why You prefer to communicate through the Bible?"

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do all that is written in it for then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid nor be dismayed for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:8-9)

Brian spoke as if he were thinking aloud, "My parents evidently believed that and weren't afraid of death, even a violent one. You know, mom died at the scene, but dad remained alive long enough for me to see him at the emergency room. He was so peaceful; he even told me that he was going to be with God and not to worry. I was so overcome with grief that I refused to hear what he was trying to tell me."

He shook his head as if he were trying to clear it and added under his breath, "I can't believe that I grew up in their house and was so deaf, not to mention blind."

This particular verse also jarred my memory again. I tugged at Brian's arm and offered, "When God did this to me He showed me verses that declared that He engineered all of the content in the Bible and was responsible that nothing in it was a lie."

Brian stopped reminiscing and stared at me intently. "Kara, do you realize

that you never doubted in either God or the Bible until something bad arose? Before that, for two whole weeks you've been trying to persuade me to believe how wonderful they were."

I hung my head and said sheepishly, "Yes, I do. I can even show you a verse I found several days ago which talks about it. I never imagined that it ever could be describing me. Listen."

"These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground, who when they hear the Word immediately receive it with gladness, but they have no root in themselves and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation, or persecution, or temptation arises for the Word's sake immediately they stumble." (Mark 4:16-17)

Brian embraced me tightly and I uttered, "God, please forgive me." I expelled a breath and sat up straight. "I'm ready now, Bri. Please continue what you were doing."

He repositioned himself to sit cross-legged on the bed to get more comfortable. By this time he was as completely engrossed as I was at what was taking place. "Okay, God. Will You now show me something in the Bible that will help us with this new predicament?"

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man. But God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it." (I Corinthians 10:13)

I shuddered and pled, "God, I really don't want to have to suffer through another surgery. However, if You tell me that I can endure it along with everything else that's happened to me recently I'll agree to have it."

"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

"How will He do it?"

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 6:10)

Brian turned to face me. "Well, Sweetheart, what do you think, Kara? Whichever way you choose to go, this time I'll abide by your feelings no matter what you decide."

I bent over and kissed him. "Suddenly I'm not scared anymore. After all, what better place to hear this news, right? I mean, I'm already in a hospital."

There was a knock at the door and Brian went to open it.

Dr. Wells entered cautiously and ventured, "May I come in yet?"

"Please do," I answered.

"What have you decided to do, Kara?" he asked as he walked in.

"Have the operation." I replied.

Brian winked and gave me a thumbs up behind the surgeon's back.

I underwent surgery to remove part of my right lung two days later. It was just as awful as the first, but for different reasons. I was almost completely paralyzed by the former, yet I experienced very little physical discomfort. The latter was the most painful thing I ever had to go through, yet this time I had stronger comfort to be able to endure it.

The second time I awoke in the ICU I saw a whole new set of doctors and nurses, including Brian, my parents, and Dr. Wells. I felt as if my insides were about to explode and every breath brought excruciating agony. I could talk though because there only was an oxygen mask covering my mouth, not a respirator completely blocking my throat like before. I began to speak, but my voice was so soft and raspy that it was a wonder that anyone understood it.

"Why do I hurt so much?"

The new surgeon, Dr. Tyssoy, addressed me directly. "Kara, the operation went very well; we got both tumors and as we had hoped they were benign like the first one. You're in such pain because we went through your back to get to your lung with a rib-spreader. You're feeling that effect, as well as your lung. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"I need for you to do something for me now. I want you to cough."

Cough? Was she nuts? I could hardly draw a single breath without wincing. When I tried to obey all I managed was a slight hacking noise, which sounded like a gerbil sneezing.

"That was good," Dr. Tyssoy responded. "Look at the black watch on your right wrist. You're going to require a more intensive painkiller than before, so we've hooked you up to a morphine drip. You may press it every six minutes to get some relief. If you do so earlier, its timer will start all over and you'll have to wait another six minutes. Do you understand this, too?"

"Yes," I groaned again feebly. "I need more pain killers than this, a lot more."

"Sorry, Kara, we don't want you to become addicted."

"I don't care."

"You will later. The pain only should be this bad for several days."

He patted my left hand to comfort me.

"Several days?" I gasped. "I can't make it."

"Sweetheart," Brian chimed in, "This may make you feel better. I'm taking a leave of absence so that I can be here with you around the clock." He glanced at both surgeons and added resolutely, "It's all been settled."

I smiled feebly and nodded my head. "May I go back to sleep now?"

My mother approached the bed. "You've done so well this far, Kara, please don't give up now."

My father came over, kissed my cheek, and repeated her message of encouragement. I glanced at Dr. Wells and he nodded in agreement.

"I'll try," I groaned. "Can I press this watch yet?"

Dr. Tyssoy glanced at the clock on the wall. "Sure. Go back to sleep. I'll see you later."

Everyone said good-bye and filed out of the room except Brian. He put both hands on the bed rail and leaned over it.

"I told you, Kara, I'm not leaving you, ever. I'll be in the visitor's chair reading while you sleep." He pulled down the oxygen mask far enough to kiss me and then repositioned it. I nodded, closed my eyes, and thankfully became unconscious once more.

When I awoke, the first thing I did was to push the button on the so-called wristwatch with my left index finger. Then I turned my head to the left and saw my fiancé.

"What time is it?" I croaked.

He carefully sat by my side.

"It's almost two o'clock. You slept through lunch so I ate it for you."

I grinned feebly. "I trust you enjoyed it for me, too."

He chuckled, "Yup, especially the éclair."

"They brought...?"

"I'm just teasing, Kara." Brian looked very concerned and stroked my face.

"Are you still in as much pain as this morning?"

"Yes, even being paralyzed was better than this, " I rasped.

"Really? The pain is that bad?"

I nodded in agreement.

"Look on the bright side. At least they didn't shave your head again."

I chuckled feebly again, "Don't make me laugh; it hurts."

"Then you're really going to hate what I have to say next. I have instructions to make you cough at least once every half hour."

"No way," I moaned.

"Sweetheart, Dr. Tyssoy made it very clear that it was vital to determine how successful the operation was. If you can't cough you may have to go back to surgery."

I widened my eyes in shock. Brian appeared so miserable and tired that although it was pure agony I did as he asked.

"I'm so sorry about this," he whispered as he stroked my cheek. "I wish I could trade places with you."

"I wish you could, too."

Brian and I spent several more days like this, only interrupted whenever necessary. I even begged him not to allow anyone else, including my parents,

visit again until I was out of such intense pain. I learned several more things during that period: Brian's exceptional patience, as well as how much I liked the morphine because it never failed to knock me out.



CHAPTER 6



One morning after I was transferred out of the ICU for the second time, I was sitting alone in bed in my new room feeling sorry for myself again and considering how much better it would have been for everyone, most especially me, if I were dead. I did not want anyone, even God, to try to cheer me up although I now conceded that that notion was completely pointless.

"Can anyone hide himself in secret places so I shall not see him?" says the Lord. "Do I not fill Heaven and earth?" (Jeremiah 23:24)

Additionally, by that time I also had located in the Bible that Jesus expressed the same idea about Himself, which made trying to ignore the two of Them simultaneously more foolish and useless.

"I am with you always." (Matthew 28:20)

I also had discovered that although Jesus always had wanted to help everyone in trouble or need, He never did anything to even His closest friends unless they expressly petitioned Him to do it. A classic example occurred when He walked on water to be close enough to save his disciples from a great storm when their boat was sinking; He did not react until they called to him. In fact, He *"would have passed them by"* (Mark 6:48) had they not done so, and they very well might have drowned with Him nearby watching.

Nevertheless, I simply did not want His help at that moment. For some reason that I could not explain I preferred to wallow in self-pity instead, knowing full well how stupid my feelings and lack of action to rectify them were. Brian stopped by to visit unexpectedly and noticed the bitter expression on my face although I attempted to disguise it.

The first thing he said was, "What's wrong, Sweetheart?"

"Nothing. Why do you ask?"

I tried to appear calm even though my thoughts were churning with bitterness. He sat next to me and stared into my eyes.

"You're lying, Kara. Something's bothering you."

I shoved him off the bed and retorted coldly, "Oh, really? So you can read my mind, can you?"

"Uh-huh. You were sitting here feeling sorry for yourself."

"No I wasn't," I lied again.

"Yes," he said gently, "you were."

"Maybe."

He arched his eyebrows. "Maybe?"

"Oh, all right I was, but just a little."

"No, you were fixating on being dead again."

"Brian, how dare you say that! I thought we'd ended that discussion."

He shook his head sadly and said, "I thought so, too, but evidently I was wrong."

"Let's talk about something else," I offered and patted the bed next to me.

"Come and sit down here again and I'll rub your back." Brian remained standing and looked around the room. "Where's your new Bible? I don't see it anywhere." He began to walk around searching.

I shrugged my shoulders casually and said, "I don't know. It's around here somewhere."

"You don't know where it is? Why not?" he asked as he opened a drawer.

"If you must know, I took a break from reading it, all right? Don't make a big deal out of nothing, Brian. It's just a book."

He responded calmly to my outburst. "No, Kara, it's not all right. Answer me this, have the things afflicting your body and emotions been taking any time off?"

I shut my eyes and sighed in disgust, "Not that I'm aware of."

"Then how do you plan ever to overcome them without God's power backing and supporting you?"

He lifted up the corner of a folded sheet on the counter under the TV.

"Ah-ha! There it is. How did it get way across the room?"

"Jan must have moved it when she changed the bed."

"Why didn't you ask her to put it back where you could reach it?" he asked, arching his eyebrows skeptical of my response again.

I shrugged my left shoulder. "Brian, did you come here just to pester me?"

"No, I came because I sensed that you needed help."

"Well, I don't and if you're just going to be a bother you can leave."

He sat on the bed once more. "Kara, what's going on? You're very jittery today and I'm not going until you explain why."

"I suppose you're going to lock the door and steal the call button, too." I handed it to him. "Here, I'll save you the trouble."

Brian slid off the bed and started to pace. He refused even to glance at me,

although I repeatedly tried to get his attention.

He started, "God, please...."

"Don't you dare pray in here right now. It's my room and I don't feel like hearing it."

"Kara, be quiet."

"Don't tell me to be quiet. This is my room, not yours, and I'll do whatever I like in it."

He whirled around to face me and said icily, "Shut up then! Is that better? I'm warning you, Sweetheart. Don't say another word."

He glared at me and I kept silent. He said, "God, I am confident that You know what's wrong with Kara today. Please give me the wisdom to know how to help her. I remind You of the fact that You can never lie or change."

"He must hate it when a lawyer prays," I interjected rudely.

Brian looked at me sternly and continued, "God, please forgive Kara for being impolite to You. Help her to trust in You, as well as confide in me. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen."

"Why did you say that?" I asked.

"What, the thing about Jesus? You're not the only one who's been reading the Bible, you know. I found it in *John 14:13*. See for yourself."

"Whatever you ask in My Name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

Brian tweaked my nose and showed me another page. "I also discovered an additional statement that I'm counting on to be true as well."

"For all the promises of God in Him are 'Yes' and in Him 'Amen', to the glory of God through us." (II Corinthians 1:20)

"I may not be able to understand the majority of this book, Kara, but I can spot a binding contract when I see it. If God claims to have full control over everything written in the Bible, He is obligated to keep every promise in it. The only variables never mentioned specifically are when, where, and how."

I felt ashamed and said timidly, "You were right, Bri, I was thinking about how much better it would have been, not to mention less expensive, if I had died. I hate being this way. I hardly recognize myself anymore. We both need a vacation, but apparently we can't have a break from this, can we." I sighed deeply and added, "Thank you for not giving up on me even though I wanted to. Will you show me more of what you've learned without me?"

"Gladly," he offered and sat next to me on the bed. "Just close your eyes, relax, and listen. You'll love this one."

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort--Who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to

comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (II Corinthians 1:3-4)

"That was nice."

"You have to keep allowing God to help you through this book, Kara, not only when you feel like it but especially when you don't."

"Have you found anything else that applies to us?"

"Plenty, and I've highlighted them all, so I can find them easily again."

"You wrote in your Bible?"

"Yes, I did," he chuckled. "I figured it was just like my textbooks in law school and I took notes all through those. How do you think I passed the bar exam?"

I smiled and replied, "With your looks?"

"I needed to memorize at least a few things."

"Bri, I'm sorry about...."

He put his index finger on my lips. "Didn't you see the movie, 'Love Story'? Love means never having to say you're sorry." He cocked his head and asked, "By the way, has that ever made any sense to you?"

I laughed. "None whatsoever. Share more of what you've found, will you?"

"Let me think." He leafed through the pages.

"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance to the end that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherited the promises. For, when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.' And so, after he had patiently endured he obtained the promise." (Hebrews 6:11-12)

"That's nice. You may kiss me now if you like."

He did, thoroughly.

My sojourn in the hospital lasted over two months. When I finally was discharged, both Dr. Wells and Dr. Tyssoy discussed my going to a rehabilitation clinic to undergo intense therapy, but I pleaded to go home. So, they agreed that the best thing was for me to live with my mother and father until I Brian and I were married.

My life at their house remained pretty much the same as it had been in the hospital, although I gradually began to accept visitors other than just them Pam, and Scot. Additionally, Brian came for dinner every evening and lifted me into my new wheelchair so I could eat with everyone else at the table, instead of from a tray in bed. Once more I felt guilty about the extra bother that my loved

ones were going through, yet they maintained sunny demeanors constantly, at least in front of me.

One of the first things I asked Brian to help me with was to take me into the swimming pool. I had not told anyone, but in the hospital I repeatedly had fantasized about being there. I believed that just like a dolphin released from a carrier, I would be able to swim freely and feel as I had before the traumas.

He carefully scooped me up in his arms from the bed in their guestroom and carried me to the patio where my parents were waiting. He gently set me on the highest step in the shallow end and stepped out of the pool. Instead of scooting myself off it and swimming as I had anticipated, my feet instantly rose to float absolutely on top of the water. I immediately fell sideways on my good arm and absolutely could not move. If Brian had not reacted fast enough and grabbed my shoulders to lift my head up, I would have drowned there, in only several inches of liquid. I was thoroughly baffled as that dream shattered.

As soon as he positioned me upright and sat the same step and held me so I would not fall over again, my mom asked worriedly, "Kara, are you all right?"

"Yes, just a little shaken and very surprised."

Brian added, "You don't have to do this you know. We'll all understand if you want to go back to bed."

"I learned how to swim when I was two. I'm determined to do it again."

My dad cautioned, "Kara, you don't have to prove yourself to us."

"This isn't for any of you. It's for me. I need to discover the extent of my handicaps." I put my left hand on his knee and asked, "Bri, will you help me?"

He replied solemnly, "You know I will. I just don't want you to get hurt."

I whispered in his ear, "Then have faith that God is watching over us."

He grinned and answered softly, "You've got me there, Sweetheart. So, what do you want to do first?"

Gritting my teeth, I asked, "Will you take my hand and pull me completely off this step? I want to see how well the rest of my body floats."

Holding my left hand, Brian eased himself off of the step and started to walk backward. The water felt so soothing and natural that I instantly forgot about what had happened only minutes before and let go. Due to the natural buoyancy of the water, I slipped away from his reach, my trunk twisted, and I landed face down. Brian quickly grabbed me again and lifted my mouth up so I did not suffocate. I came up gasping for air and he pulled me to his chest.

"Kara, this wasn't such a good idea. I'm taking you back to bed."

"No!" I shouted. "Please don't. I have to overcome this." I stared into his eyes and pleaded, "Brian, please!"

My father yelled, "Kara, get out of there this minute!"

My mother began spreading out towels on the wheelchair. I began to sob in

desperation.

I faced them and yelled, "Don't you get it? This is exactly why I didn't want to have brain surgery. I wanted to spare us from all of this!"

I buried my face in Brian's wet shoulder and wept. He patted me on the back while he motioned to my parents to go inside and leave us alone. He lifted my head from his body and kissed me gently on the forehead.

I moaned, "This is what I was concerned about before I agreed to go in the hospital in the first place. I envisioned that something like this was going to happen and now we're all stuck with it."

"Sweetheart," he murmured. "It's only the first day."

"You think things are going to get much better immediately?" I wailed. "Wake up and smell the coffee, Brian. Of course, everyone wants me whole again, but watching what I apparently am going to have to do to get there is going to be a whole different ball game. You've just witnessed the beginning; even my parents had trouble. Why didn't You just let me die when I wanted to?"

He held on to me and I struggled in vain to get away from his embrace even though I realized that I would get myself into trouble and need to be rescued once more. He sighed in resignation and shut his eyes.

"Bri, you know your life could be so much easier if only...."

He put his fingers on my mouth and admitted, "Kara, I really don't want to argue about this all over again, but yes it would."

I looked at him in shock. Those words sounded far differently whenever I thought or said them. Coming from my fiancé, they sliced my heart in two.

He added, "Does my admitting that finally make you happy, Sweetheart?"

Ashamed, I weakly shook my head no.

"Then will you please stop saying that? Before you try to drown yourself again let me finish. You know that I love challenge, right?"

Biting my bottom lip, I nodded sheepishly.

"Have you ever seen me even once take the easy road over the more difficult one if the potential for reward was greater?"

I shook my head.

"Then we have no other choice but to keep trying to conquer this, do we. Look at the bright side, the water might make the scabs fall off faster. Since we're being so honest, I think you're still beautiful Kara, but they are so ugly that I want to tear them off your head as well as back."

I laughed. "Please resist the urge. They might be what's holding my head and back together."

Brian hugged me and said, "Only if you let me help you learn to swim again. Otherwise, I won't promise anything. Deal?"

I smiled and he hugged me even tighter. I whispered in his ear, "Deal. You, me, and God, Bri. You, me, and God."

After that afternoon, my improvement in the pool advanced, although very, very slowly. My dad had a truck lift installed by the stairs at the shallow end so I could do therapy without Brian always needing to be present. We began every session the same way: Mom dressed me and dad lifted me into a sling positioned on the wheelchair seat. She wheeled me out to the pool and hooked the sling to a heavy hanger. Then, he pumped me up out of the chair, swung me out over the water, and lowered me onto the second stair. By the way, I do not recommend this approach unless absolutely necessary because no matter what the true temperature of the water is, it feels 60° on you butt.

To resume, mom held me upright in the pool while dad fastened weights to both ankles so that my legs would remain under the water and not float to the surface and tip me over like the first day in the pool. (I already would be wearing socks and shoes too keep my toes from curling.) Then, he dragged me to the opposite side of the shallow end and they both helped me take shuffling steps holding onto the side for dear life, with my weight balanced firmly on my left forearm.

As soon as I reached the stairs again dad had to drag me backward because the muscle in back of my right thigh was still paralyzed completely, in order to repeat the slow and very deliberate process. We began with two widths the first weeks, gradually working up to fifteen by the end of the summer. I never fully had appreciated the depth of the love of a parent to a child until those unbelievably tedious sessions, nor will I ever underestimate it again.

One of the best things I did enjoy about this exercise was the freedom I felt being out of bed or a wheelchair. Plus, it was a great place to wash my hair, so to speak--or at least the fuzz that was growing like rabbit's fur on the right and new grass on the left side of my scalp. Once I was pumped back into the chair (onto several towels instead of the sling), mom took that opportunity to scrub my head with a fingernail brush.

Although we had strict orders not to touch the huge scab, the water softened it enough so almost every day that tiny pieces flaked off of their own accord. The yellow cradlecap secreting from all of the chemicals inside my head though returned almost immediately after she washed it off. Now, that was gross.

In the meantime, Brian and I located more and more passages in the Bible that not only was God watching over us, but also that He was deeply interested

in and encouraging my recovery. We had not shared our discoveries with anyone yet became increasingly apparent from comments we overheard daily that few people appreciated this aspect of Him. Rather, they considered Him to be the source of their problems as well as the solution—something Brian and I did not agree with any more.

Day by day we learned not only about God's constant role in both of our lives, but about our own responsibilities, too. Maybe neither of us had initiated or done anything to deserve having to go through this tragedy, but according to the Bible we definitely were accountable for how we dealt with it.

"Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus--the originator and finisher of our faith. Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For, consider Him Who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary in your souls." (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Simultaneous to pool therapy, I underwent intense physical and occupational rehabilitation with two private local therapists--one physical and the other occupational--to build up the lost strength, coordination, and flexibility in my trunk, legs, and right arm. These sessions were as arduous as they had been in the hospital, yet they too yielded pleasing results whenever I persevered. If I got depressed and felt sorry for myself, or simply too tired to press on were the only occasions when my body digressed or ever got hurt.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials and tribulations knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But, let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-4)

Unfortunately, however, during the same time that my body was progressing, I discovered even more unseen manifestations of the damage the brain tumor and/or surgery had caused. Just as I had heard that I needed a lung operation soon after I seeming had cheated death, these revelations cropped up to try to undermine both my spiritual, as well as physical progress. For example, during the second month after I was discharged from the hospital, I screamed in absolute terror when I thought that Brian deliberately ran a red light. He immediately pulled off the road and grabbed my left arm in horror.

"Kara, what's wrong? You're shaking. Do you need to see Dr. Wells?"

I looked at him aghast and cried, "Brian, you just ran a red light! You could have killed us!"

He sat back stunned. "No, I didn't."

"You most certainly did! I was looking straight at it. It was bright red!"

"Kara, the light was green."

"The heck it was. It was red!"

He was totally perplexed. "Is that the color saw?"

"Brian, I know my own eyes. It was red."

Several days later, my mom was wheeling me through the neighborhood to get some fresh air. She pointed to a long hedge beside us and said, "Aren't those flowers beautiful?"

I looked at a solid green and very lush shrub. I replied, suspicious of her eyesight, "Mom, there are no flowers on that entire bush."

"You can't see them?"

I wondered about her sanity after the trauma she'd had to deal with as much as I had recently. "Mom, listen to me, there are no flowers on it. It's entirely green."

She seemed absolutely mystified.

"You truly can't see them, Kara? They're almost covering the entire hedge."

"Mom...."

She put her index finger on a petal and I saw a dash of red at the end of her fingernail. "Wait a minute, do that again, will you?" She did and I perceived another flash of red.

"Kara, why are you frowning? Do you need to go home?"

"No, but when you touched the hedge I did catch a glimpse of red. However, without your finger as contrast, I can't any longer."

"Let's try again." She held a blossom cupping it completely with her palm. "What do you see now?"

"I can see an entire flower. Oh God, Brian didn't run that stop light. Could I be red-green color blind?"

Once we became aware of this problem, I had my eyes examined--a procedure I had been extremely reluctant to have ever since my bad memory of another supposedly routine eye exam returned in the hospital. I never had felt a pressing need to do so beforehand because I used the same prescription after brain surgery; even though being one-handed it clearly was not safe to wear contact lenses any longer.

It turned out that I had additional vision problems, which I had never noticed because I had been confined to bed or a wheelchair for so long. The tests also revealed imperfect spacial and depth perception, as well as impaired peripheral vision. I took the news in stride and added these obstacles to my list of things to overcome. On the bright side, the scab on my head finally fell off after 5 months and my new hair covered the scar completely, so no one nagged

me about wearing a scratchy wig in public anymore.

Life was not all melancholy with intermittent intervals of pleasure after I became handicapped. On the contrary, given the circumstances we laughed much more than we cried. The most classic examples involved my mother. From the time I first learned that I was paralyzed, I imagined that if I ever heard something bad happening to her, adrenaline would build up in my body enough to make me jump out of bed and run to her rescue. One evening after being at my parents' house for several days, I was lying sideways on the bed facing her with my legs dangling over the side.

She was changing the white stockings that I had to wear constantly for circulation. She struggled to remove one of them and yanked hard enough to fling herself backwards through the open closet doors, flying completely through the clothing and loudly crashing into the back wall. She finally landed in a heap on the floor still clutching the stocking. Instead of moving a single muscle to help, I merely raised my head off the mattress and just roared with laughter.

Also, my hair, or lack of it became a major source of amusement and jokes between us. It had been very long, as well as blonde, before my head was shaved and I had asked Dr. Wells numerous times not to remove anything that wasn't necessary for brain surgery. Due to my insistence, he had left me a tail about 10" long, which I promptly asked him to get rid of once I could talk.

I never complained about my physical condition to her, however I might have casually mentioned not even looking like myself once or twice. Okay, every single day, for not only was I almost bald, the color had changed and darkened noticeably. When she finally let me accompany her to the grocery store, I pretended that I wanted to look for something and asked her to go on and leave me in a certain isle.

I then asked a clerk to wheel me so that I would be where I knew she was headed and got there first, but at the opposite end. When she rounded the corner and saw me just sitting there about 15' in front of her, I whipped off my wig and pretended that I had very long tresses blowing in an imaginary wind. She laughed so hard she wet her pants. I paid dearly for embarrassing her that way in public afterward because she refused to take me there again. It was worth it though.

Another afternoon while I was in the wheelchair at their dining room table reading, I felt a small, but heavy object drop on my head. Instead of staying there, it slid down and hit the rug behind me with a muffled thud.

I felt the same thing take place three more times before I asked, "Mom, what

are you doing?"

She replied nonchalantly, "I didn't want to bother Dr. Wells to ask whether the plate in your skull was plastic or metal. By the way, it's plastic."

Would you like to know how she figured this out? She stood behind me and dropped four refrigerator magnets on my head one by one to see if they would stick. I still wonder what she intended to do if they had.

Another morning after I finished eating breakfast I realized that both my mom and my dad had vanished. I finally realized that he must be in the garage and she had gone upstairs. I called their names repeatedly, but got no response. I wanted to return to my room to watch TV, however since I still only could use one hand I only managed to roll the chair backwards away from the table far enough to end up wedged between the wall and an overstuffed chair behind me.

Looking at my feet, I thought, "I wonder if I fold the foot pads up and scoot forward maybe I can take steps in the chair." I tried it and it worked. Relishing my newfound freedom I slowly "chair-walked" through the living room into the den. It was great!

I was sitting in my room thanking God for the impulse to try to help myself for the first time when my dad shouted, "Where's Kara?"

I heard her race down the stairs from their bedroom to find out. "What are you talking about? I left here at the dining room table."

"Well she isn't there anymore."

I covered my mouth to smother a giggle. For the first time in months, no one knew where I was and that thought was exhilarating. I realized that until that moment I had never appreciated the need to be completely alone by choice sometimes like while driving.

My mom asked, "What possibly could have happened? She can't move anywhere by herself."

"Well, she certainly didn't simply vanish. I was in the garage and no one came through there. Let's search the rest of the house."

They finally located my whereabouts, and were they ever mad! After listening to each of them admonish me for making them worry,

I asked, "Aren't you at least curious to know how I got here?"

Dad snapped, "Okay, how?"

I demonstrated my new maneuver.

Mom said, "Good, from now on you can use your slide board to get into the wheelchair by yourself and come to the dining room to eat every meal," and marched out of the room.

That evening I showed my new achievement to Brian and he was as thrilled as when I got my speech back.

"This is wonderful, Sweetheart! Now I don't have to push you everywhere in the house anymore." I reflected that being totally cared for every second might not have been such a bad thing after all.

Despite my very limited mobility I refused to go into an electric wheelchair, supposing that I would adjust to it too much and slowly relinquish my hopes to walk again. Although this conviction made my existence much harder, I was willing to sacrifice that freedom of effortless transportation for the need to have to concoct alternate ways to move my body from one place to another.

Fortunately, Brian and my parents shared my opinion and I still feel that this was one of the best decisions I ever made. I eventually bought a scooter though several years later and learned to transfer from the chair to it and either visit friends close by and run errands by myself.



CHAPTER 7



Before our next session, Brian told Gerald, my new physical therapist, how I figured out how to maneuver the wheelchair by myself. He was so delighted that instead of merely stretching and working my muscles on his blue mat as usual, afterward Gerald tried to take my rehabilitation even further by wheeling me to the end of a set of parallel bars and strap a gait belt around my waist. His obvious intention began to intimidate me so much that all I could envision was my right arm still curled to my chest, useless to help as I tipped over forward and smashed my face. Except for the tilt-table in the hospital, this was the first time I would be upright not being in at least 3' of water. I became so agitated that I almost wet my pants.

"Are you out of your mind? I'm not nearly ready for that," I insisted and repeatedly shook my head.

"Yes you are, Kara," he soothed standing between them in front of me. "You won't fall. I'm right here to catch you."

I looked up at him suspiciously. "If you're so sure I'm not going to fall, why are you ready to catch me?"

"Kara, quit procrastinating and just stand up!"

My heart started to beat so rapidly and forcefully that I actually looked at my chest to see if it was visible and I was astonished that it wasn't. My fingers dug into the left arm cushion of my wheelchair ready to resist if he simply grabbed the belt at my waist and forced me erect.

I gulped, "I can't do it."

"Why not? Your legs are strong enough again to support your weight."

I began to panic. "I said no! I can't! Stop trying to make me."

Gerald helped me back into the wheelchair, went to the door, opened it, and called to Brian in the waiting room.

"Is anything wrong?" I heard him ask.

The therapist answered, "Can you come here please? I just directed Kara to

stand up and she refuses even to try."

Brian advanced into the room.

"Sweetheart, why not? Don't you want to learn to walk again?"

I shuddered and bowed my head in humiliation. "I thought I did, but now I'm not so sure."

Brian took Gerald aside and murmured something to him. He left the room, closing the door. Brian came back and knelt at my feet on the wooden platform between the bars and lifted my chin. "Kara, I know you're nervous...."

"You think I'm only nervous?" I blurted out, laughing sarcastically. "Brian, that's the understatement of the year. I'm petrified! I wasn't going to tell you, but I tried standing up in front of the bathroom sink five times yesterday to see if I could do it. Even leaning on the counter and holding on to the basin I got so light-headed and dizzy that I almost fell sideways into the bathtub. I'd rather stay in this chair for the rest of my life than ever experience that feeling ever again."

"Shhh," he whispered. "Do you remember what the Bible teaches about faith?"

"At this precise moment I really don't care."

"Let me remind you then," he prodded softly. "It says, *'we persevere by faith, not by sight.'*" (*II Corinthians 5:7*)

"Brian, that particular verse doesn't apply to me at this moment. I wasn't afraid of what I saw; it was what I felt! I had no balance whatsoever! Nada! Get it? It was as if I was about to topple off a cliff, not just fall over several feet. Plus, my toes curled every time I stood up and that was excruciating."

"You never told me that."

"I was hoping it happened just because I was so nervous."

He tightened his jaw about was about to respond when there was a knock at the door and the therapist opened it. Brian turned to address him.

"Not yet, please. I'll call you when she's ready."

Gerald nodded in approval and shut the door.

Brian cupped my chin and said, "Kara, how about this? The Bible says that you have to build a strong foundation to make or do anything, right?"

"Yeah, and? What's your point?"

Brian took a small New Testament from his back pocket, opened it, and read.

"Whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them I will liken him to a wise man who dug deep and laid the foundation--built his house on the rock. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and the stream beat vehemently against that house and could not shake it, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the

rock. But, everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand without a foundation. And the rain descended, the flood came, and the wind blew, and the stream beat vehemently on that house, and immediately it fell and great was its fall. The ruin of that house was great." (Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49)

I asked, "Bri, will you stand in front of me if I try to stand again now?"

"Always." He grinned lovingly. "Just like Jesus, I will never leave you or forsake you."

I shrugged my left shoulder and gave a deep sigh. "Okay, then. I'll try to stand up once. I repeat, once, no more."

Brian smiled and gently kissed my lips. I pursed them and nodded silently. He stood, walked around the other end of the bars from where my wheelchair was positioned. He opened the door and called, "She's ready."

Gerald returned and took a second gait belt from a hook on a wall and gave it to Brian. He said, "Put this around her waist to ease her concerns. See, Kara, now we both are holding onto you."

I prayed silently and grabbed the left arm of the chair to push myself up while propelling downward with both legs. Nothing. It reminded me of my first time on the exercise mat and the memory made me wince.

I peeked at Brian and he mouthed, "*Do not be afraid. Only believe.*" (Mark 5:36b)

I clenched my jaw and said under my breath, "Okay, God, in Jesus' name, help me please."

I summoned all of my energy and concentration. I stood so rapidly that Brian dropped his hold on the belt and sprang to seize my trunk before I pitched forward and collapsed on his chest. Surprisingly however, I did not need his assistance because by quickly grabbing the left rail I managed to maintain enough balance to sway only slightly. The toes on both feet did curl, even with a full foot and ankle brace, but I resisted the pain.

Without hesitation I shouted, "Thank You, God!"

Brian hugged me so hard and fast that he almost knocked me back into the wheelchair, just as he had the exercise mat in the hospital. I made a mental note to ask him to refrain from doing that any more. The therapist looked dumbfounded at my words, but I did not care because, except for my experiment in the bathroom, I stood up by myself for the first time in months and I knew why.

The following session when he put on the belt and wheeled me over to the parallel bars I stood without hesitating, ignoring any discomfort. Soon afterward, I tentatively took one baby step with my right foot. I was gripping

the left bar so hard with my good hand that my knuckles turned white and the strain made my right hand and wrist curl even tighter into a fist on my chest. However, now I was determined to keep trying unless there was a risk of injury--no matter how much my toes hurt or dizzy being upright made me feel.

Only once did I panic and freeze absolutely again, unable to budge no matter how hard the therapist or Brian coaxed me. As we drove home, I read the following aloud as a reminder to both of us never to give up our dreams when they coincided with God's--like total health and restoration--for like it or not, doing so would be to arrest our faith and His capabilities.

"Therefore, it is of faith that it might be according to grace so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the Law but those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations') in the presence of Him Whom he believed--God, Who gives Life to the Dead, and calls those things which do not exist as though they did. Who, contrary to hope in hope believed, so ~~that~~ he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be'. And, not being weak in faith, he did not (even) consider his own body already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith giving glory to God and being fully convinced that what He had promised He also able to perform. And therefore, 'it was accounted to him as righteousness,' Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us." (ROMANS 4:16-24a)

Additionally, after a total of nine months wearing braces constantly on my right arm and hand I relearned how to unbend my elbow several degrees, as well as twitch those fingers. They still were completely useless, but I had become so efficient and dexterous with my left side that I was able to convince Brian and my parents to let me live alone again without constant supervision. I argued that like it or not, I simply had to learn how to cope in the real world without a baby-sitter.

All of this re-animation required very deliberate effort, and in all honesty I cried a lot when I was alone. Nevertheless, I prayed and thanked God even more for saving my life, because it was far more awesome to feel and see my body get well than it was arduous. The tenacity to persevere most definitely did not spring up from somewhere that already had been within me before I accepted God and Jesus. Nor did it come from any other people, although they helped me greatly, too.

"Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be dislocated but rather be healed." (Hebrews 12:12-13)

I was in physical therapy that first time three times a week for a continual thirteen months. After that, I was sent to the hospital gym for several years to work with both trainers as well as therapists. Weakness on my right side, an almost total lack of balance, and my toes curling on both feet continued, but I pressed on and became convinced that I would make a swell bird. I might not be able to walk, but I became increasingly certain that if somehow I was hoisted into a tree branch I would be able to perch.

Exactly eleven months into my recovery I finally agreed to set the date to marry Brian. The discussion I had avoided for so long took place at a picnic on the beach in front of his condo with Pam and Scot. To celebrate our return to where we had met, Brian bought a gift designed for us to enjoy the sand and surf together as we had before--a bright white rickshaw with huge iridescent orange inflated tires. It looked like some mutant, backward wheelbarrow and I absolutely hated it on sight, although I gushed over it and his thoughtfulness. It also was extremely low to the ground and had no arm rests, so once transferred and perched on the seat I recognized instantly that I would not be able to do anything in it but sit there. I was too stunned to say anything further as when he proudly scooped me up out of the wheelchair and deposited me on the seat.

Sara Lee absolutely loved what she obviously considered to be a new toy and ran circles around us barking wildly as we left Brian's patio and crossed the dunes. Scot and a now quite visibly pregnant Pam followed and I heard them smirking at the scene we caused in front of the other bathers. I returned each greeting with a wave and a smile, although what I really wanted to do was curl up and hide from the psychedelic contraption.

Brian chose a spot and Scot dumped the cooler on the sand. Pam began to spread out our towels. He shouted, "Let's go for a swim," and started running like a maniac, pulling me behind. "You're gonna love this, Kara," he yelled as he dashed and plunged us into the sea.

My fiancé had indeed chosen his gift wisely when it came to dragging a body over sand. However, as we hit the surf it became apparent that it was not such a good idea to actually take the apparatus in the water, because the same tires that made the rickshaw so easy to pull over the dunes also made it float. So, not only had Brian and I been quite noticeable getting to the water, I became even more so completely on top of it.

I screamed, "Brian, turn around!"

He did so at once and saw me bobbing completely on the surface in a bright white chair with huge iridescent orange bubbles attached to each side. He bit

his top lip to try to stem a chuckle but did not quite manage it.

"Get me out of this thing!" I yelled.

My frustration and fury apparently had the opposite effect than I had intended, for he began to laugh so hard that he doubled over at the waist. He let his grip on the rickshaw relax and I began to float away.

"Brian! Help me!"

By that time, my screams had reached many other people who now were having the same reaction as my beloved. Even Pam and Scot were howling and pointing at me drifting away like a huge blimp. The only being who even approached the wild spectacle was Sara Lee, clearly having the time of her life to be included in this new game. She doggy-paddled around me and somehow managed to climb into my lap. Our combined weight finally made the thing sink and I floated off of it.

I looked coldly at Brian, who was beside himself roaring. He lifted his arms as if to ward off an attacker and backed away still snickering. I lunged as far as I could and seized him with my good hand to shove his head under the water. Simultaneously, he grabbed my legs and yanked hard enough to force me under with him. We came up hugging each other and laughing together.

He whispered, "I've been waiting so long for something like this to happen, Kara. You felt normal for a moment, didn't you?"

I grinned and nodded. He grasped me firmly by both shoulders.

"Sweetheart, it's time for you to stop fixating on the past and marry me. You know it as well as I do."

I nodded again and covered his right hand with my left.

"Thank you for giving me this past year to adjust, Bri."

"Even if you don't get any better, which I doubt, I want to be with you from now on as man and wife. Will you marry me soon, Kara Morgan?"

I nodded a third time, my eyes stinging from salt water. "Yes, but only if you never make me ride in that thing again"

The people surrounding us started to applaud. Pam hugged us both.

"It's about time."

Scot followed her suit. I noticed he had retrieved the rickshaw, but I was too happy to care.

Brian and I decided to surprise my parents with our good news over dinner. When he drove me back to my place, we stopped at their house to ask if they still intended to meet us at my favorite restaurant that evening. When they pressed us for details of the afternoon, we only mentioned that we'd shared a delightful interlude with Pam and Scot at the beach. When Brian picked me up

I was just putting the finishing touches on my make-up.

He whistled, "Wow! You look fabulous, Sweetheart! Have I told you how much I like your hair that short?"

I turned from the mirror, scrutinized his ensemble, and replied, "Yes, but feel free to do it again. You clean up rather well yourself, Mr. McGovern."

He bowed deeply and came up to stand directly behind the chair so that both of us were reflected in the mirror. He nuzzled my neck and whispered, "You know, I really think I'm going to like being married to you, Mrs. McGovern."

"You know, I like the sound of that--Mrs. McGovern. If you want to kiss me do it now because I'm about to put on lipstick."

He complied most generously and it took my breath away. "There's more where that came from," he said softly.

"If you ever need to be sure a juror is on your side, do that," I gushed.

Brian raised his eyebrows quizzically. "What if it's a man?"

I fanned my breast with my left hand. "Even then. Trust me."

He chuckled smugly, "Shall we go? Our chariot awaits."

He wheeled me out the door and helped me into the car, carefully folding my wheelchair and securing it in the trunk of his car.

On the drive over he casually said without taking his eyes off the road, "So, when do you want to do it?"

I feigned innocence; "Do what, Bri?"

"Umm, let's see, get hitched maybe?"

"You want to go riding?"

"Yeah, in a manner of speaking," he replied and fondled my knee.

I put his hand on the steering wheel. "Stop trying to seduce me and just drive the car, Don Juan."

"Seriously, Kara, have you thought about a specific date you'd like to set?"

I pivoted my head and answered, "Uh-huh, I've been considering one for a long time, but I don't know if you will like it."

"Of course I will. Tell me. When?"

"The anniversary of the day I had brain surgery."

"What?" Brian cried out and he swerved off the road and stopped the car.

"You want to celebrate the day you almost died?"

"No, my love, I want to celebrate the day I lived."

He squeezed my shoulders and hugged me firmly. "I never thought about it that way, but you're right, it's perfect. We can start our life together on the day you were born again, so to speak."

We hugged until I noticed the time on the clock on the dashboard.

"We'd better get going or we're going to arrive late at our own party."

The following morning Brian called and woke me up very early. I grabbed the phone thinking that it had to be an emergency.

"I didn't wake you, did I"

"Brian, is that you? Of course you woke me up!" I said indignantly. "Why are you calling at this hour? Is something wrong?"

"What could be wrong?" he teased. "We're getting married, it's going to be a beautiful day, we're getting married, I love my job, we're getting married...."

I started to laugh but yawned instead. The luminous dial on the clock next to my bed caught my attention. "My God, Bri, it's only five thirty. Go back to sleep."

"Ah, but that implies that I went to sleep in the first place. Can I come over?"

"At this hour? Are you nuts? Wait until at least seven and bring breakfast. I'm hanging up now."

"Don't! I want to see you. I...."

I replaced the receiver in the cradle before he was able to finish. I smashed my pillow to get comfortable once more and then took the phone off the hook just in case he called again. I thought, "Life with him certainly won't ever be boring," and immediately became unconscious.

I awoke to someone tickling my feet and briefly panicked, remembering my first day of consciousness in the hospital. When I opened my eyes though, instead of seeing several people, I merely saw my fiancé dressed in a tuxedo. I blinked several times, rubbed my eyes, and reached for my glasses.

He twirled and asked, "How do you like it? Do I look good enough to be a bridegroom?"

I inquired sleepily, "Why are you wearing that?"

"This old thing? I put it on last night when I was too excited to sleep."

I yawned once more and stretched. "Brian, you're nuts. I may be the one who had brain surgery, but you're the one who's crazy."

He kicked off his shoes and leaped on the bed to lie next to me. He kissed my nose quickly and laughed. "I know. I'm crazy about you. Isn't it wonderful? We're getting ma-...."

"I've heard."

Brian jumped back off the bed and yanked the covers completely off of my body. "Get up, Sleepyhead! I have something to show you and I can't wait any longer."

He turned to leave and said over his shoulder, "Your muffins and coffee are in the car. You have twenty minutes to get ready."

He closed the bedroom door as he exited. Still groggy, I sat up and transferred to the wheelchair. I broke all previous records to clean up and get dressed, all the time wondering what could make Brian so excited. I fervently hoped that he didn't intend for us to elope because I had no time to style my hair or don any make-up. Plus, the best I was able to manage in such short notice were gym shorts, a T-shirt, and slip on loafers without my leg braces. I figured that he would remember that I had to dress myself one-handed lying on the bed and that he could put the handicap braces on my legs if I was going to need them.

When I appeared in the den he grumbled, "It's about time! Do you have any idea how boring TV is at this hour? It's nothing but news and farm reports."

I responded sarcastically, "Really? Whatever would make you think that I'd know anything about that?"

He ignored the irony. "Are you ready?"

"Don't I look ready?"

Brian scanned me up and down carefully. "Yeah, enough for where we're going."

I noticed that he had discarded his previous attire in favor of something akin to mine and that the tux was on a hanger flung over the back of the sofa. This made me even more curious to find out what he was up to, however I kept silent because he obviously was relishing his surprise.



CHAPTER 8



We drove to and parked directly in front of Brian's condo, whereupon he got my wheelchair out of the trunk and pushed it empty through the front door, leaving me sitting in the hot car. He returned moments later with Sara Lee bounding around him joyfully.

"Bri, why did you just do that?"

"Do what?" he asked innocently.

"Leave me here stranded. How do you expect me to get inside?"

"I'm going to carry you," he said proudly and scooped me up into his arms. I struggled for him to put me back down. "What's going on?"

He kissed me softly and began walking towards the entrance he had left opened. "Patience, Kara. All will be revealed shortly."

I leaned over and petitioned Sara Lee, "Could I have some help here please?"

She barked twice and licked my foot. She grabbed the shoe in her mouth that had slipped off it when Brian had lifted me out of his car. "Thanks. A lot of help you are."

She ignored my plea and raced ahead of us towards the door the two of them had just exited. I stopped squirming, crossed my arms, and accepted my fate. Brian merely smiled.

As we approached the portal he said, "It's customary for the groom to carry the bride over the threshold to welcome her into her new home, so welcome home, Kara."

I forgot about my missing shoe, as well as asking him to retrieve it from Sara's jaws before she shredded it.

"We're going to live here? I thought you wanted to find someplace new."

We crossed through the doorway and Brian gently set me into the wheelchair.

"I did, but property values around this area have skyrocketed since I bought this place. It is impossible to find anything even close to the ocean, let alone on it, that is even remotely within our budget, Sweetheart. Do you remember, when we met I hardly had any furniture so you helped me decorate?"

I nodded mutely.

"Do you agree that this place really is as much yours as it is mine and that you're as comfortable here as in your own home?"

"Yeah, sure. What are you trying to get at, Bri?"

"Well, I think we should move in here together." He held up his palm to silence my reply. "Before you answer, Kara, I want you to see the renovations I've had done. I didn't change much, simply what was necessary your special needs. What do you think?"

"Bri, I would absolutely love to live here!"

I reached up to him and he lifted me so I was standing braced against his chest.

"I always wanted that, but I never pushed my case because you were determined to find a house. Are you sure about this?"

He grinned and searched my face. "If I'm not, I just spent a fortune for nothing. Seriously though, I want to live where we both are still comfortable, as well as safe. A house would be nice and I'm not ruling that out for the future. However, I think we'd be more relaxed if we moved in here for at least awhile than add another upheaval to our lives right now."

He gently lowered me back into the chair and rolled me through the master bedroom into that bathroom.

"Look, Kara. I had this room completely gutted and redone from scratch. There's a new sink that you can roll under to brush your teeth, or do whatever. I also had them install a handicap toilet that's higher than a normal one that even has rails put on both sides so you can use it privately without falling."

He pushed my chair closer so that I could inspect the modifications.

"You have to see the new shower, too. It has grab bars and a bench, so you can transfer from the wheelchair there, too, and hopefully wash yourself one day, although I want it on record that I won't mind doing it. Oh, and a shower head that lowers or even comes off the wall if you want to hold it. Does everything look safe enough for you? I can order whatever else you need, if these aren't satisfactory, or if you need anything more. I want you to be happy."

"I'm very happy, Bri, not only with this room but with my future husband."

He remained standing behind me and reached around my head to stroke my left cheek. I held his hand and leaned into the caress.

"Great! Then you'll love this!" he exclaimed and whisked the wheelchair around to return to the living room. "Sara Lee! Come here girl!" The dog appeared wagging her tail with apparent delight. "Let's show Kara what you've learned so far. Please fetch her a cold drink."

Sara Lee wolfed softly and delicately padded several feet into the kitchen, where there was a small piece of rope with the end knotted tied to the refrigerator door handle. She gently bit it and walked backwards until the door was wide open. Then she advanced and took the strap of a small sack in her mouth, pulled it out, and came to place it in my lap. When I opened the cloth bag I saw a chilled can of my favorite juice.

Brian addressed her again. "Good girl, but you forgot to close the refrigerator door."

She returned to push it shut with her nose. I sat too astonished to speak.

"Well, Kara?" Brian asked eagerly. "Are you impressed? I know you insist on doing things for yourself, but since you're still only one-handed and can't carry both something else and a drink simultaneously, now Sara Lee can bring that to you so you won't have to make two trips."

"Impressed is not a strong enough word. How did...?"

"I looked into sending her to be trained as an assistance dog with a school I found and exchanged their services for legal aid. I realized that you'd want to live as independently as possible and I was going to give Sara Lee to you whether we ever got married or not. I didn't ever want to worry about your being alone, Kara even if you didn't want me around anymore. The school only let me bring her home when we went to the beach with Scot and Pam because I didn't want you to suspect anything. She's here again today just to show-off, then she goes back tomorrow for more instruction. Even if you don't need help doing anything, I'll feel much more secure knowing that she can assist you. She even has learned how to pick up the portable phone receiver and bring it to you when it rings. Do you want to see that, too?"

"Maybe later, Bri."

"Are you pleased?"

"Very much so--with everything, especially the man who loves me enough to transform his home."

The following week we began to transfer my personal belongings to Brian's and my now joint condo. As I was unpacking Pam stopped over to help, but instead of working we sat outside on the patio overlooking the ocean. We did not intend to spend the day idly, yet as soon as we got comfortable our plans changed. It was a beautiful morning and the breeze off the water was so warm

and soothing that we decided to enjoy the special time alone together instead of rushing to finish emptying boxes.

As we relaxed drinking our coffee she sighed and said, "Kara, I've really missed seeing you every day these past years."

I turned from gazing at the beach and looked at her fondly. "Me, too. Isn't it going to be wonderful living so close to each other again?"

She cupped her mug with both hands. "It sure is. It's a miracle really."

"You know, that's how Brian and I feel about it, too--a miracle from God."

She put her cup on the small table next to her arm and with effort swung her feet off the lounge where she was sitting to face me.

"Exactly what did you mean by that?"

"By what?"

"Define what you think has been a miracle from God."

"Exactly what I said."

She shook her head in disbelief and raked her fingers through her hair. "Let me get this straight, Kara; you believe in God now? That's not the person I know and love. Who are you really and what have you done with my friend?"

I giggled.

"When did you start believing?" she persisted.

"In the hospital actually. One day a nurse handed me a Bible from a drawer in my room, and having nothing else to do but sulk or watch more TV I started leafing through it."

"And?" Pam probed.

"And nothing really. I prayed and challenged God to reveal Himself to me."

Her curiosity was fully aroused. "Did He?"

"Most definitely, through multiple Scriptures. Brian even tried the same thing later and got almost identical results."

"Has He ever done that again?"

"Who, God or Brian?"

Pam shook her head. "God, silly. Has He ever spoken to either of you so dramatically since those two times?"

"Only once. We've asked Him to but felt resistance, almost as if He wanted us to stop looking for signs and grow up. You know, as a child matures into an adult. As we've increased our knowledge it's been quite obvious that God's increasingly expected us to be more responsible."

Pam twisted and leaned back on the lounge. She put her hand on her forehead and exclaimed, "Wow, Kara! I wish you'd told me before this." She closed her eyes and a single tear flowed down her right cheek. "I've been praying so hard because I thought you and Brian were going through this ordeal without God."

I cautiously inquired, "Do you believe in Him, too, Pam?"

She turned to me, astonished. "Don't you remember?"

I raised my eyebrows in confusion. "Remember what?"

"I used to try to share my faith with you the first semester we were roommates in college. I finally quit because it annoyed you so much and I wanted to keep our friendship."

I was stunned because I didn't recall anything about what Pam was telling me. Had I been so insistent in avoiding God at that time in my life that I had completely blocked out this part of my past life?

"Do you know why I hated hearing it? Did I ever explain my reasoning?"

"Once, the last time I attempted to share something. You said that you didn't want to have anything to do with a religion that was the cause of so much mayhem and carnage through the centuries. You gave me a big speech about the cruelty of the crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and killing doctors who performed abortions with the rationalization of murdering to prevent more murder."

"I did?"

"How could you ever forget that, Kara? You told me that you never were going to accept a God Who let these things happen, so I should just drop it. We never addressed the issue again and as far as I knew we never would." Pam paused and looked out at the surf again in wonderment. "Can you understand now why I'm so amazed?"

"Yeah, I can. Aren't you glad I changed my mind?" I ventured.

She arose and knelt by the wheelchair. She embraced me and murmured, "There's no single word to describe how happy I am. This brings our relationship to a much deeper level."

I laughed, "So, are you going to pay me more now for editing your doctoral dissertation?"

She smacked my left leg playfully. "Not a chance. Now I expect you to do it for free." She stood and dusted sand off her knees. "Com'on, we'd better start unpacking. I heard Scot telling Brian over the phone this morning how much fun it would be to surprise us and take us out to lunch."

Several weeks later, Brian and I foolishly had become lazy at praying or studying the Bible much, because we let other things--planning the wedding and moving take precedence in our lives over God and Jesus. As a consequence, we became not as vigilant anymore for my continuing recovery as we should have been.

"To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin." (James

4:17)

Since I still was on quite heavy dosages of medicine to keep my brain chemically balanced, I had to have blood drawn weekly to check the levels. One morning, my father drove me to see Dr. Wells at his office. As he was signing in, I noticed that my right thumb was twitching rapidly. It was not painful or annoying, merely curious.

I showed this to my dad and he asked, "Kara, do you want me to get the doctor?"

"No, I'm going to see him in a minute."

Instantly, my face and neck convulsed, throwing my head backwards. My entire right side began to jerk uncontrollably and my father's face went white as I stammered, "I think you'd better."

The receptionist witnessed this and yelled, "Dr. Wells, come here quickly!"

She grabbed the chair and wheeled me past his other waiting patients into an examining room. My tongue was choking me, but no one seemed to notice. I had to grab my head with my left hand to hold it upright so I did not choke. When Dr. Wells entered, my entire right side was convulsing and I began to wonder if it would remain that way for the rest of my life. He must have sensed my thoughts because he immediately knelt in front of me and took my left hand.

"Kara, you're experiencing a seizure. Don't worry. It's only temporary."

I squeezed his fingers in understanding and hoped that he got my message. I was shaking all over by this time, yet still acutely aware of everything going on around me.

I even was able to hear a door slam down the hall and Brian call out, "I got your page. Where's Kara? What happened?"

His cry was followed immediately by my mother's. Dr. Wells and my father left the room to attend to their needs, leaving only his nurse to console me.

Several minutes later, I was not anxious any longer because the shaking in my body began to settle down. Ironically, the only thing that bothered me was the nurse squeezing my fingers together in an attempt to be comforting. I tried to communicate for her to relax her grip, but could not utter a sound. Just like in the hospital, I wiggled my hand free and motioned that I wanted to write something. She went to a counter and brought back a pen and paper. It was like being on a respirator all over again.

After almost a year of being left-handed I was able to write intelligibly, although when I intended to print, "I'm okay now." what I put on the paper was 10101010101010. I endeavored to write other messages, but they all appeared identical to the first. As I was being mesmerized by my inability to communicate, the nurse crossed the room and opened the door to inform the

doctor.

I heard Brian yell, "No! We're finally getting married next week! You know this, Doc; you've even got an invitation! Tell me what to do and I'll do it, but Kara's not going back in the hospital!"

"Brian," my dad cautioned, "if she has to."

"I said NO!"

My mom soothed, "Brian, let's hear what Dr. Wells has to say."

"I am sending Kara to the hospital, but only to determine why she seized and what to do for her. If her blood work shows nothing more than a fluctuation in her medicine levels she can go home this afternoon, but only if you don't let her out of your sight for twenty-four hours, Brian. I want you to monitor her every second, ready to call an ambulance if she experiences another episode."

I heard my fiancé gulp and ask, "How serious is this?"

"It's probably just her medicine levels since she has been improving for so long, but I want to make sure."

Mom started to sob, "How can we ever tell her?"

I tried to say, "Don't worry, Mom, she already knows," but nothing came out.

Several minutes later they all filed into the examining room. Brian knelt on the linoleum floor in front of the wheelchair. My mother, father, and Dr. Wells stood waiting expectantly. Brian gently took my hands and said, "Kara,..."

I placed the fingers of my left hand over his mouth to silence him. I tilted my head sideways twice to indicate the door and nodded to show that I had heard their conversation in the hall. Then I shook it side to side emphatically.

Brian furrowed his brow and asked, "What? I don't understand." I pointed to my mouth and shook my head a second time. His eyes widened and he cried, "You can't talk? Again?"

I smiled wryly and put my left index finger on my nose as I had when I was on a respirator.

"God, no!" He spotted the pen and paper on the examination table next to my left elbow. "Sweetheart, then write what you want to say."

I picked up the pad and showed everyone the binary sequence.

Brian cried, "Kara, you mean you can't even write this time?"

I sighed and sadly touched the tip of my nose once more.

He jumped up and grabbed the doctor's coat by its lapels, just like in the hospital. "Dr. Wells, what's happening to her now? The truth and all of it. Just how serious is this? And, is it permanent?"

I listened intently because I had been wondering the same things myself. The physician carefully peeled Brian's fingers from his jacket and straightened

it.

"What Kara's experiencing is the aftermath of the seizure. As I told you in the hall, she needs to have blood drawn right away so I can determine what caused the convulsions. Tell you what, I'll have my nurse take the sample here and forward it to the lab immediately. In the meantime, Kara can remain where she is." He winked at me to reassure me, squeezed my left hand and added, "Don't worry, Kara. I'll take good care of you. Don't forget, I've already cleared my schedule to come to your wedding."

I reluctantly returned his smile.

Brian crouched in front of the wheelchair and asked, "Kara, do you want me to remain with you?"

I kissed him softly and shook my head no.

My mom said, "Kara, do you want me to stay?"

I mouthed, "Please."

Dr. Wells ushered everyone out of the room so his nurse could get the needed samples. She also took my vital signs because she had not been able to when my body had been shaking. My mom returned and she resumed reading a novel that she had brought in her purse. I propped my feet up on a chair and pulled out my new pocket New Testament to look for help in controlling anxiety.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:4-7)

After a few minutes, Dr. Wells poked his head in and asked how I was feeling, to which I automatically responded, "Fine."

Delighted that I was able to speak once more, I started to say something else but he held up his palm and said, "Save your breath, Kara. It's enough to know that your speech has returned. Don't be concerned if you have any difficulty with it for the next few hours. That too will pass. I just wanted to tell you that the wait shouldn't be too much longer."

With that he shut the door and I heard his heels on the linoleum floor as he walked away.

My mom stood up from her chair and walked over to hug me. "Let's hope that the rest is as good news as this. Why don't you try to write something to see if you can do that also."

I said, "Good idea, Mom," and reached for the pen and paper. I printed quite clearly--THIS SUCKS! She laughed and patted my back.

A half-hour later, Dr. Wells informed us that only thing wrong was that my medicine levels had been too low and adjusted the prescriptions. Mom and I

got them filled and went home to their house.

Brian came for dinner that evening as usual, but instead of leaving to go to his condo alone he requested to take me with him. Remembering how disturbed he had been when I had hallucinations in the hospital, they realized that he felt an urgent need to do so and did not protest.

After my fiancé settled me in his guestroom, he made a pallet for himself on the window seat and turned off the light. The sounds of a man trying to get comfortable on what was tantamount to an over-stuffed chair instigated fits of giggling and neither of us could fall asleep. I suggested that we approach God and ask Him the best way to avoid what we had experienced that morning ever transpiring again. Brian left the room to get his Bible and reclined on the bed next to me with his head on my right shoulder. I reached over my body to take his hand and closed my eyes.

"God, why did I seizure this morning? I know that You want Brian and me to search the Bible for ourselves now, but I'm asking You to speak to us one more time the way You did in the hospital. What caused my brain to seizure today?"

I turned to, *"Be vigilant because your enemy the devil walks around seeking whom he may devour."* (1 Peter 5:8)

I shot straight up and Brian's head fell against the headboard.

"Please show me how I can be more vigilant!"

"The tongue is a fire--a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire by hell." (James 3:6)

"Are You trying to tell me that it could have been instigated by something I said?"

"Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a man." (Matthew 15:11)

I shut the book and turned around to see my fiancé propped on one elbow rubbing the back of his head.

"Bri, what do you think about this?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I honestly don't know. According to these verses though, everything you ever voiced doubting your recover contributed."

I was offended that Brian, of all people, would dare to say such a thing. "Sweetheart, have you ever heard me say anything bad since the day I first told you what happened in the hospital? Well, have you?"

He gently took my left hand. "Not directly, Kara, although lately I've heard

you whine that you're tired of waiting for God to fulfill the promises we've located about healing and that sometimes you honestly didn't believe anymore that you ever were going to be normal again. Maybe that's what He's trying to communicate--not to do that."

I considered the possibility.

"Is that it, Father? Have I ever obstructed your will by voicing my anxiety?"

"If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless." (James 1:26)

Brian sat upright and gripped my hand even tighter. "Kara, whenever you've complained, those emotions have been the most abundant things in your heart."

He crossed his legs and pulled them to his waist. He took the book out of my hand and opened it.

"Think about it, sweetheart, *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."* (Matthew 12:34)

I whispered, "So, whenever I wavered in my faith in God, my speech began to reflect that?"

He drew me to himself and rested my head on his chest.

"After reading this, yes, I believe so, Kara. Listen to this, too.

'Assuredly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and cast into the sea' and, does not doubt in his heart but believes those things which he says will be done he will have whatever he says.' (Mark 11:23)"

I pulled away from him and slammed my good hand on the sheet beside me. "I hate this! I want to go back to before the operation and be normal again!"

Brian scooted over and cradled me in his arms. "Shhh, don't cry." As he comforted me, he quoted, *"Do not despise the chastening of the Lord nor detest His correction. For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights."* (Proverbs 3:11)

Still perplexed I asked over Brian's shoulder, "God, how can something with no substance like words be so important?"

I took the Bible from my fiancé's hands and read, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."* (Matthew 24:35)

I sighed profoundly. "Okay, Father, I ask Your forgiveness for anything and everything bad I ever said about my recovery and I'll try to monitor my speech more carefully."

Brian said, "I agree with her, Father and remind You that Jesus said, *'If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask it will be done for them by My*

Father in Heaven, for where two or three are gathered together in My Name I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:19-20)”

I had two more seizures due to fluctuations in my medicine levels. They occurred three months apart and each was slighter than the previous episode. I never lost the ability to speak again though.



CHAPTER 9



Brian and I got married on a perfect day at the beach in front of his condo. Scattered clouds made the sky seem like a natural cathedral with rays of sunlight peeking through its windows. A double rainbow over the ocean from a rain during the early morning completed the sanctuary. Brian, Scot, and the minister appeared to be standing almost under them as they waited for my entrance onto the patio.

Unbeknownst to everyone but Pam, Scot, and my dad, I was going to walk to my fiancé instead of being wheeled. I had been practicing doing so balanced on Gerald's arm during our regular sessions until I was able to move forward ten feet without toppling sideways. At first, even with leg braces and special shoes my toes still curled and I lost my equilibrium and fell, usually backwards. Nevertheless, I never gave up my objective by constantly keeping in mind and repeating a promise I'd located in God's Word.

"He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength. But, those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not go weary. They shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:29, 31)

When the guitarist started to play Pachelbel's Canon to signal the start of the ceremony, Pam walked through the open patio doorway and proceeded down the makeshift aisle. My fathers likewise stepped out and then turned to assist me descend. Brian's initial reaction was to run to me, but Scot held his arm firmly and whispered something that made him stop struggling. I flinched when I noticed Brian move, but my dad steadied my body and we continued our slow walk to meet my new husband. Tears began to well up in my eyes because the sensation was breathtaking. When we reached Brian and my dad transferred my arm, my beloved was crying unabashedly.

After the brief ceremony, when the minister said, "You may now kiss the bride," Brian framed my face with both of his hands and stared into my eyes in

wonder.

He whispered, "Kara, I love you so much. You'll never know how proud and blessed I feel to be your husband."

I fidgeted and replied, "I love you just as much, Bri, but may I sit down now? My toes feel like they're ready to snap off."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I didn't want to spoil the ceremony. It's over so I don't care anymore. I have to sit, now!"

"You are so romantic," he gushed sarcastically, kissed me, and swung me into his arms. He carried me directly to where my dad had left it in the living room and as he was setting me down I tried to maneuver into the seat as gracefully as I could muster in a wedding dress.

Mom hugged and kissed both my new husband and me, then demanded, "How did you two ever keep this a secret?"

Brian looked at her and replied, "Katty, I had nothing to do with it. I was as surprised as you were." He turned to face me again. "Yes, Kara, how did you keep this a secret?"

I giggled. "Every time I was tempted to tell anyone I envisioned what I wanted to happen, and it did. Bri, walking down the aisle was my wedding gift to you."

"I loved it," he said. "Anytime you want to surprise me like that again in the future, Mrs. McGovern, feel free to do so."

My mom nodded enthusiastically. The rest of our guests heard our exchange and applauded. Brian stood behind me and squeezed both shoulders as we basked in their toasts and congratulations for our future together. When the cake had been cut and everyone had departed, Brian wheeled me to the bedroom. Wordlessly, he knelt and took my shoes and brace off. Next he put a CD on the stereo, stood directly in front of me, and held his hands out to grasp mine. Perplexed, I questioned, "Brian, what are you doing?"

"I'm going to dance with my wife," he responded with a smile.

"My toes still hurt."

"Will you at least try, for me? I'll rub your feet afterward."

"Will you do it for a full hour?"

He pretended to consider the ramifications. "You drive a hard bargain, but sure."

"Promise me."

"Don't you trust me?"

I eyed him suspiciously. "I can always feign a headache if you renege."

Brian grabbed his chest as if he had been stabbed and staggered. "Ouch! That was cruel."

"Okay, you got me there. But I walked was less than 10 feet and I was holding on to my dad's arm like a vise. I'd be very surprised if he didn't have a black and blue mark on that arm."

"Well, now you can leave your mark on me. Put you feet on top of mine and use your faith." I did so and he lifted me so that we were face to face. "See, I told you so."

With Brian's arms encircling my body, he began to glide around the room. He whispered in my ear again, "I love you, Mrs. McGovern."

I nuzzled my head against his collar and murmured, "I love you, too, Mr. McGovern."

"Now that I've made an honest woman of you, will you sleep with me?"

I chuckled, "Will you still rub my feet first?"

"First?" he whined. "Come on, Kara, that's not part of the deal!"

"It is if you want me to think about you instead of my feet."

"Don't worry, I'll make you forget about them," he whispered nuzzling my ear.

"Trust me, no one's that good, Bri."

When we went to bed, Brian first set the clock to ring in exactly one hour. When we were finally making love, unexpectedly I stiffened and Brian noticed my reaction immediately.

He raised himself on one elbow and asked, "Kara, what's wrong?"

I feigned innocence. "Nothing, why do you ask?"

"You suddenly became rigid."

"No I didn't."

"Yes, you did, Sweetheart. Did I hurt you?"

I shook my head and caressed his face. "Of course not, Bri. In fact, quite the reverse."

"Then what caused you to withdraw from me?" he persisted.

"I told you, nothing."

"Kara, don't insult me. We both know you're lying."

I turned my face away from his probing eyes and tried to pull away, but Brian stopped me. "Tell me what's wrong."

I said shyly, "What if I can't do anything?"

Brian sat straight up and exclaimed vehemently, "Are you kidding?" He lay down again, stared deeply into my eyes and became very serious. "You're not joking, are you." He put his hand over his eyes and lay back down on his back. "I don't believe this," he said with his eyes still covered.

"I'm sorry, Bri," I confessed. "I didn't think this would happen since I've been moving easier. I just panicked."

Brian grabbed me and guided my head to rest on his shoulder. He gently

began to weave his fingers through my hair to soothe me and get rid of any apprehension.

"Maybe I'm going too fast. Why don't we just fall asleep in each other's arms tonight? The Lord will work out the rest."

"I'm sorry, Bri," I repeated.

"Kara, you don't have anything to be sorry about. Relax and go to sleep."

"But you wanted.... I wanted...."

"Shhh," he whispered and continued to stroke my hair. "God has helped us through much more serious situations than this one. Guiding us how to love each other again physically should be a piece of cake."

"I treasure you, Brian," I murmured as I slowly drifted to sleep.

I awoke sometime during the middle of the night to the gentle sound of waves lapping onto the beach and palm trees swaying in the wind through the screen of the patio door. Brian was still holding me exactly as he had been when I had fallen asleep. I lifted my head from his shoulder and gazed at him lovingly. Unconsciously, I casually began to trace his face with my left index finger, savoring the texture of his skin and the elegance of his features. He stirred but didn't wake up, so I ventured to explore his body further.

He partially opened his eyes. "Kara, what are you doing?"

I nibbled his ear. "If you can't tell I must be doing it wrong."

"No. You're definitely doing it right," he said and began investigating my figure, as intimately I was his.

Due to my disabilities, we discovered that we had to make certain adjustments, but we also reinforced the notion that necessity is the mother of invention. Twice.

One morning Brian went to work leaving Sara Lee and me alone for an entire day without him coming home for lunch to check up on us. I let her out on the patio to do her business in the corner of the patio reserved for that and rolled down the outside ramp to have my coffee with her when she came to lie down beside my chair. We only stayed there for about an hour before we both became restless and wanted some more recreation.

However, I could not think of a single thing that we could do by ourselves safely, except remain in the apartment. She could not manage the dreaded rickshaw for us to spend time on the beach, and it was impossible even for Brian to push the wheelchair over the sand. I wracked my brain until something hit me. Although it was on the beach, our complex had a pool and I knew that Sara Lee being an official trained assistance dog would not be denied entrance within its fence. After I cleaned up the breakfast dishes, I beckoned for her to

sit in front of me so we could discuss my idea.

"Hey Girl, what do you think about spending the day at the pool?"

She wagged her tail, placed her right paw on my knee and wolfed, obviously in agreement. I wheeled into the bathroom, where I put on my favorite bathing suit and sunscreen. I also gathered a big towel, my cell phone, her small water dish and some treats, as well as my new small Bible to take with us.

By this time, Sara Lee was openly shaking with excitement at the prospect of an impending adventure. In fact, I had to call her away from a ficus tree in the corner of the bedroom so that her tail would not tip it over. I shoved our things in a large satchel and instructed her to bring me her lightweight harness, so that she could pull me outside the front entrance and over to the pool area. We settled with her on a patch of grass in the shade under a palm tree, while I sat nearby next to a table with a big umbrella and propped my feet on a stool watching the activity.

I soon noticed that as I expected there was no lift like the one that had been installed at my parent's house. Therefore, I would not be able to swim that morning without Brian. Nevertheless, it felt glorious to be this free outside the condo and I savored the moment when I would relate our adventure to him. Since it had become my custom to read the Bible following a schedule as regularly as I took all of my regular medicine, I opened the bag and pulled out the small book with me in order to review several Scriptures that I had found recently.

As I basked in God's presence in the outdoors, He showed me the value of practice and perseverance--two things that I particularly needed at that moment to sustain my faith to ever get well. If I had not been open to His insight I easily might have overlooked how He was helping another girl--one that probably did not even recognize His guiding hand.

When I noticed her and her mother enter the pool area, she clearly was terrified even to go near the water. Instead of immediately running and jumping into the water like all of the other children present, she merely sat and played quietly at her mother's side on the cement close to me. After awhile, the mother got up and said that she was going in to cool off, but even that did not entice the child. When the mother coaxed the little girl to join her several minutes later the child merely ambled reluctantly to sit on the side and dangled her feet in the water.

They started splashing each other and laughing. The little girl soon asked if her parent would pick her up because by getting closer she could splash her mom better. Plus, she obviously figured that technically she still would not be actually in the pool itself--she would be safe in her mother's arms. I watched

them over my book, increasingly becoming interested in the interplay between parent and child. Finally, I stopped any pretense of reading altogether.

After a few more minutes the little girl took note of the fact that she was the only kid who was not immersed in the water. She asked her mother to carry her to the stairs and she climbed out, obviously planning her next move. She went and sat at the side of the pool again, with her feet dangling like before. Her mother casually asked if she could take her hand and pull her in the water, promising not to let her daughter's head go under it. The child was suspicious, but she did accede.

Next the mother instructed the child to watch her facial expressions as she went under and looked up through it at her. After several submerges, she asked if she could pull her daughter down with her to look at each other together. The child said that was okay if her mom promised to pull her head to the surface immediately afterwards. Ten minutes later, the little girl got bored again and asked her mom to think up a new game. As the parent carried her child over and she scrambled up the steps, the mom instructed her to remain standing while she pulled her into the pool holding on to both hands.

However, instead of agreeing the little girl stepped back and refused to even come near the edge of the pool. As soon as the mom said that in that case they had to go home, she agreed to try. Like before, the child wanted to repeat this feat many times. Then the parent suggested that she attempt jumping only holding one hand. Again, her daughter gave her a look of terror. Again, the mother said that it was time to go home. Again, the kid changed her mind. With the parent still standing in the water only holding the child's right hand she jumped in, even letting her head go completely under the water and keeping her eyes opened. To my surprise, the mother merely guided her child to the stairs, not carrying her totally in her arms as she had the past hour.

After another while, when the mother appeared to sense that her daughter felt at ease standing and jumping, she suggested that she stand in the pool directly in front of her little girl but not hold either hand. The child looked so scared that her mom did not repeat that proposal. They both got out of the pool and returned to the lounge beside me.

"Hello," I ventured to the little girl. "I was watching you swim and I was very impressed."

She put her finger in her mouth and backed away from me to stand behind her mother who said, "Thank you. Didn't she do well?" and extended her hand. "By the way, I'm Kathy and this is my daughter Kim. You must be Brian's new wife."

"Yes, how did you know? My name's Kara. Was it the wheelchair?"

She laughed. "No actually. We've known Brian and Sara Lee from when

she was just a puppy and he told me that he was getting married. Kim's always pestering me to get him a dog just like Sara. I see the harness; may she play with her now or not?"

I addressed the small girl, "Would you like that?"

Wordlessly, she nodded shyly. She looked at her mother who said, "It's okay. Be gentle though. Sara Lee's working."

Kim shrugged his shoulders in surprise. "Huh? Sara Lee doesn't work, Mom."

"Yes, she does," I offered. "Mr. McGovern had her especially trained to help me."

"How? Does she catch the Frisbee for you?"

Her mother and I both laughed.

Kathy explained, "Kim, Mrs. McGovern can't walk. Sara Lee pulls her wheelchair so she can come to the pool."

"Wow! Can I see her do it?"

"You will when we leave."

Kim considered this. "If Sara Lee has trouble, I can push you home. See my muscle?"

I squeezed her offered upper arm. "You sure are strong. You must be a big help at home."

"Yep, I am, aren't I, Mom," and sat down to pet Sara Lee.

Kathy she nodded seriously and turned to face me. "Kara, before we talk, I should tell you that I also know who you are because I witnessed Brian and you with your rickshaw. It was just about the funniest thing I ever saw."

I covered my eyes with my left hand and groaned. In the meantime, another woman with a little girl approached and said that she was taking her daughter home for lunch. While they were gone, Kim was free to use the pool toys that they were leaving behind.

"Can I, Mom?" begged Kim. "Sara Lee's sleeping."

Kathy fondly stroked her daughter's head and responded, "Will you be very careful?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Go ahead then, by stay close."

To my complete astonishment, Kim instantly went over to the toys, picked up two wooden spoons and with one in each hand jumped into the water. Instead of panicking, she laughed and paddled to the steps to climb out and repeat the feat. I saw Kathy's expression out of the corner of my eye and realized that she was even more stunned than I was. The fourth time, Kim looked at the spoons, evidently decided that they were hindering her and jumped way out by her. Without giving her mother a second glance, she began

to play freely in the shallow end of the pool completely unafraid to be alone. It was amazing! In addition, she began diving under the water and "swimming" better than other children did who were much bigger than she.

I realized that the Lord had given me more than one gift to share with Brian over dinner. Not only did He provide the means to get out of the house, I met a new friend, as well as recognized a bit of what God had been doing in my life. When I needed His comfort and guidance He always was ready to offer a hand or even catch me. However, as I matured He stayed ever present, only more in the background enjoying my progress. If Kim ever had been in trouble, Kathy would have run, dived in and saved her life in an instant. Even when she ignored her mother, she was still taking care of her child. I also realized that even if her daughter had never approached the water at all that day, her parent would have guarded her with the same love and attention.

"As a Father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him for He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass. As a flower of the field so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His Covenant and those who remember His Commandments to do them." (Psalm 103:13-16)

Several Saturdays later, Brian and I had a cookout on our patio and invited Kathy and Kim to join us. Seeing that Sara Lee did not have her harness on, the little girl immediately asked if she could play fetch with her on the sand.

"She's pretty big now," said Brian. "Are you sure you can handle her?"

"Yes, Sir. I can," Kim declared solemnly.

Brian looked Kim over from head to toe and pursed his lips. "If it's okay with your mom, it's okay with us."

"Mom, can I? Please?"

"Take your shoes and socks off first, son, and leave them here," she directed. "Be sure to stay where I can see you and don't get wet, either of you."

The child grabbed his mother's neck and gave her a big sloppy kiss. "I promise," and ran away with Sara Lee barking and bounding after her.

"She's a cute child," I said watching them go.

Kathy asked, "Are you two planning to have children?" She blushed and stopped short. "I'm sorry, that was rude to ask."

I wheeled several feet and squeezed her hand. "Don't be sorry. It's a natural question." I glanced at my new husband and he said, "We'd like to, but

we're not sure yet if it will be feasible."

"Why not?"

Brian said, "It will depend on how long Kara has to remain on certain medications. It may not be safe for her to get pregnant."

"When will you know?"

I suggested, "When we find out, you'll be among the first to know."

Brian came to stand behind me and squeezed my shoulders. "We're not going to attempt anything until Kara's neurosurgeon gives us the green light. Until then, we have Sara Lee--and each other."

After dinner was over and the dishes taken inside and put into the dishwasher, Brian and I were discussing the evening in the bedroom. He was in bed already and I was undressing in order to take a shower.

He asked casually, "How did you like our neighbors?"

"Very much. I'd like to introduce them to Pam and Scot."

"That will be fun," he agreed. Then Brian became quite serious, flipped the covers to the side and walked over to kneel before me. "Kara, I didn't want to ask you before, but since it came up this evening do you still want to have children?"

I responded thoughtfully, "I'm not sure any more, Bri. Do you?"

"Yes and no. No, if it means endangering you in any way, and yes if it won't and you think you'll be able to handle a baby."

I sighed. "If that's the case, I'm definitely not ready yet."

"Why not?"

"Brian, although my right hand has improved noticeably it's still very feeble and as you know those fingers are almost still entirely useless. If my wrist ever weakened by the weight of a baby's head I could drop it altogether."

"Oh," he said thoughtfully as I quickly spun around to wheel into the bathroom to take a shower.

I opened the sliding glass door, locked my brakes, and grabbed my water socks so I'd be able to stand for a moment to switch to the shower bench. I reached for a handicap bar with my good hand so I was able balance while transferring. After I reached for another grab bar with my right hand to pull myself upright and turned on the faucet, my fingers slipped and I fell completely out of the open shower door and landed on the tile floor with a heavy thud. I heard Brian run to me. Miraculously, I missed hitting the grab bar beside the toilet and was unhurt. However, the water was still running and everything was soaked.

"Kara, what happened?" Still lying on the floor, I explained.

"Talking about not being able to even hold a baby was starting to depress me, so I wanted to avoid the subject further. I wasn't thinking about being

careful as I normally am, Bri, and voilà, this is the result."

He reached in the stall, turned off the water, and bent down to cradle me in his arms. "Sweetheart, are you hurt? Did you break anything?"

"Just my pride," I complained.

"Let me help you back into the wheelchair,"

"No! I have to try again."

"Are you nuts? Not on your life. You could have just been killed!"

I stared at him in tears. "Don't you realize that I know that much more than you do. However, I have to regroup and stop feeling sorry for myself. If I don't try again right now, I believe that there's a good chance that I'll be scared to later. Please. I have to."

Brian tried to lift my slippery, wet body into the chair, but I resisted.

"I don't like this any more that you do, but you know as well as I do that I have to at least try. After all, I didn't die or break anything. Look, I'm not even bruised. Please help me do this. I'm going to have to get clean sometime and this was a fluke accident. Remember, I told you it would be hard to watch whatever I had to do to move freely again the very first day we swam together in my parents' pool almost a year ago."

Brian acquiesced grudgingly, "All right, but I'm staying in this room until you're finished."

I brushed away my tears with the back of my good hand and took my husband's chin. I kissed him and smiled.

"I wouldn't have it any other way. Since you're as wet as I am now you can't go back to bed anyway. So, why don't you come in the stall with me? We can wash each other."

He protested, "But I've already showered."

I shifted in his arms so that we were completely face to face. His eyes widened and his eyebrows shot up.

"You weren't just referring to getting clean, were you?"

"You have a good command of the obvious. No, Sweetheart, I wasn't."

He grinned lasciviously, "Well, I guess you could slip inside the shower as well as out so you should have protection, right?"

I began to kiss his neck and whispered, "That's true."

"If you won't be too crowded."

"I won't."

He sighed in mock resignation. "I guess you would be safer."

I began to caress his back.

"I would."

"All right then, but only if you insist."

"I do."

Brian helped me get back into the stall and we showered until the water turned cold.



CHAPTER 10



Brian and I had our first real marital argument one afternoon shortly after I began writing again after almost a two-year hiatus. Coincidentally, we recently had celebrated our first anniversary. Additionally, I finally had decided to share in my writing how the Bible had helped me endure a traumatic illness and subsequent rehabilitation. I was at the computer in the study putting the finishing touches on a proposed magazine article when it erupted.

As soon as I heard his key in the front door I knew that he would head straight to find me. However, I was working on the computer in the study and did not wish to be disturbed at that precise moment. So, I quickly unlocked my brakes, rolled to the door, closed, and locked it before he could intrude on me and disturb my concentration. He came down the hall and rattled the knob.

"Kara, why is this door locked? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Bri," I called. "Just give me a few minutes and I'll come out."

He pounded on the door. "I don't like not being able to get to you. Open up!"

I pressed the save button on the computer, turned around from the screen and yelled, "I have to finish this by Friday and I'm working out a section that I wasn't satisfied with. I told you, I'll be out shortly." I turned back to what I had been doing.

He demanded, "Kara, open this door right now or I'm breaking it down!"

I sighed, unlocked the wheels again and complied. I opened the door a crack and peered out.

"Brian, you keep saying that I should try writing again, so I am. Please just give me some time to wrap up for the day."

Disregarding my request, he pushed open the door and me behind it. He glared at me and said coldly, "Don't ever lock a door between us again, understand? I always have to be able to reach you quickly, just in case something happens. Remember the shower incident? If not, I sure do."

"Brian, I'm not a child, so don't treat me like one. If I feel the need for

privacy and that entails locking a door I'll do it."

"Then be warned, Kara. If you ever lock it to keep me out I'll break it down." With that remark he turned and walked away.

I chair-walked after him, furious. "Brian, come back here!"

He continued to ignore me and move in the direction of the living room.

"Brian!" I cried a second time. "Don't you ever treat me like a non-entity! I'm not just a servant or a pet like Sara Lee who lives here to do your bidding. I have my own career to think about and what I was doing is just as important as your work."

He stopped in his tracks and spun around on his heels to face me.

"When you start earning money and contributing to this household I'll respect your need to be alone, but not before. Until then, this place is mine and I'll enter any room I want to, whether you like it or not, Kara."

I refused to back down and shouted, "Where did this come from? What gives you the right to treat me this way? Don't take me for granted, Brian. I'm warning you, don't ever treat me with disrespect again."

"Or what?" he countered. "You'll walk out on me?"

We faced each other in the hallway and glared without speaking. Suddenly, it became apparent that we both realized at the same time how ridiculous we were behaving. Brian approached me, knelt down, and we embraced.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I had a rough day and I drove home expecting you to be here ready to see me like Sara Lee always is--ready for whatever I want to do. When you were busy, it hit me that you're your own person, Kara not my appendage and I panicked. That's why I lashed out."

Brian looked deeply into my eyes and stroked my face. I noticed that there were tears in his eyes. I kissed him and cradled his chin in my left palm. "I love you, Bri, but I'm not your pet."

He nodded his head and placed it on my chest. "Will you forgive me? I don't know what came over me."

"I do, frustration. I have to deal with the same feeling all the time."

Brian and I held each other shaking at how easily we had lost our tempers until Sara Lee started barking to remind us that it was dinnertime. Although we made small talk over the dining table, both of us recognized that the unconditional affection in our home could change in an instant, something we naively had thought we were immune from. Later in bed, as we lay not even touching I glanced at Brian without turning my head and noticed tears sliding silently down his cheek.

After several minutes he sniffed and said, "Kara, I truly am sorry about the way I reacted. I never realized that you felt that I sometimes treat you like a pet, but you have to realize something, too."

"What, Bri?" I asked softly in the darkness.

"That I don't want you ever to have to suffer again and I feel the need to keep you safe."

Without turning or lifting my head from the pillow, I reached for his hand and squeezed it. "Apology accepted. Where do we go from here?"

He sniffed again. "I do love you, you know, with everything that I am."

"I know that. I love you equally, Bri."

He shifted until he was holding my body, buried his face in my neck, and whispered, "I love you so much,"

I stroked his head with my good hand and sighed. "We just had a fight, that's all. It's not the end of our marriage, you know."

He squeezed me and turned my face so that it was only inches from his.

"It was just such a surprise to become so angry at you, Kara, and so fast. When you got just as mad at me back, well, I've never felt any division between us, not even when you were paralyzed and couldn't talk." His voice trailed off.

"I felt the same way, Bri. Even when we fought in the hospital and I tried so desperately to get you to leave me I never really felt a separation. But now that we've experienced it we can guard that it never happens again, just like the seizures."

He nodded his head against my shoulder. "Promise me that you'll always tell me about what you're feeling, Kara. No matter how upset we ever get with each other, promise that you won't ever shut me out the way you did in the hospital."

I kissed his forehead. "I already did, the day we got married. Don't you ever not share yours with me either."

"Never."

We fell asleep clutching each other as tightly as I did the Bible in the hospital the first time I spoke to God.

Life is not all roses and too often seemed as if there were many obstacles plotting to dissolve our union as bind it. Soon after Brian apologized for getting mad at me we fought again, this time definitely over my being handicapped. Almost six months to the day after that first big fight, I was in the kitchen fixing a salad when he came home from work and uttered a few choice words rather loudly.

He stormed up to me and asked angrily, "Kara, what are my golf clubs doing all over the floor? I can't even get to the hall closet."

Without turning around or stopping what occupied me at the moment, I replied casually, "They must have slid out of the bag when it fell over and I

couldn't pick them up because they were out of my reach "

"What was it doing there in the first place?" he demanded.

"I must have left my bag out the last time I played," I replied sarcastically.

"Oh, I get it, that's your subtle way of telling me that I can be a slob while you never forget to put your things away," he responded in kind. "Since we've established that it had to be my fault for not putting it in the closet where it belongs, tell me this. What caused it to fall over?"

"When I needed to run to the grocery to pick up a few things for dinner, I tried to move your bag from where you left it blocking my electric cart. As you are aware of, Brian, the store is way too far for Sara Lee to pull me. Everything turned out all right though, because I changed the menu, so you're having tuna casserole instead of spaghetti tonight."

He ignored this and continued to rant, "I don't want you trying to move them by yourself! They're too heavy."

I said calmly over my shoulder, "Don't I know it! By the way, since you're concerned, no, I didn't get hurt."

Just then the timer rang.

"Bri, would you mind too terribly much taking the hot casserole dish out of the oven? Silly me. I forgot that I can't do that either and I don't want Sara Lee to try and burn her mouth or spill food in the oven or all over the kitchen floor. The pot holders are on the counter right next to you."

Brian said icily behind me, "You're making me do this on purpose to make another point aren't you. Well, it won't work."

"Believe whatever you like. Meanwhile, I already ate, but your dinner's burning."

He not only complied, but immediately afterward I heard him pick up his clubs and put the bag where it belonged. We never discussed the matter further.

Additionally, on a Saturday morning after I transferred from our bed to the wheelchair I asked, "Bri, I'm going to wash our towels. How are the ones in the guest bathroom?"

He threw off the covers and swung to place his feet on the floor. Still sitting on the other side of the bed, he yawned and answered without turning his head.

"I'm not sure, Kara. You'll have to look."

"I can't, so I guess I'll have to ask Sara Lee to bring them to me."

He pivoted his head and looked at me, perplexed, "Why can't you do it yourself?"

"I haven't gone in that room since we were married, Bri. My wheelchair doesn't fit through the door. So, unless you want Sara Lee to possibly tear them with her teeth, or me to lock my brakes again so I can get back on the bed,

lower myself onto the rug, crawl in there, throw the dirty ones in the hall, crawl back in here, climb up on the bed, transfer to the chair again, unlock the brakes and roll in the hall to retrieve them, you'll have to do me this small favor."

Brian sat puzzled. "How often do you have to do that and why didn't you ever tell me?"

"Do what?"

"Have to crawl to get somewhere."

I chair-walked to cup his chin with my good hand. "Often, Bri. That's nothing, however. What's really bad is when something falls on the floor and breaks. Then, I have to be concerned about these wheels tracking shards through the house while I'm looking for something to clean up the mess. It's at those times especially that I'm grateful for you getting special training for Sara Lee."

He smiled. "I'm glad she can help."

I was stunned and said, "Sweetheart, truthfully she's much more of a hindrance than an aid, except she does obey my commands to stay put. Although once when I spilled some juice on the kitchen floor and it ran behind me, I directed her to lick it up so I wouldn't be stuck in front of the refrigerator with the door opened until you came home. I only moved backwards to get a rag to wipe the floor after I was sure she got it all."

Brian took both of my hands. "What did it take? A half hour?"

I shook my head.

"An hour?"

"You're getting warmer. Try two."

"Kara, I'm so sorry. I never even considered those things."

I kissed him gently. "You never had to."

Brian not only carried the towels to the washing machine, right after we ate breakfast he drove me to a specialty store where we purchased unbreakable dishes, drinking containers, and replaced everything else in our home that could shatter.

The strain of my being handicapped initially came to a head between Brian and me again soon after our third anniversary. It took place on a sunny Sunday afternoon on the same beach where I had agreed marry him. Coincidentally, Pam and Scot were visiting for a picnic.

After we were settled in our usual spot on the sand and the guys were playing Frisbee together in the waves, she propped herself on both elbows and casually asked, "So, how're things? I haven't seen you for over a month."

Sitting cross-legged on the sand I answered breezily, "Things are, well,

okay. How's it with you?"

She scowled. "Just okay with you and the love of your life? What are you not telling me, Kara?"

I shaded my eyes with my left hand and looked away from her toward the ocean. "I don't know what you're talking about. Oh, look, Brian just hit Scot in the head with the Frisbee. Owwww. That must have hurt."

"Quit avoiding my question."

Still not looking at her I asked, "What makes you think I'm avoiding it? Look! Scot just dunked Brian."

She snapped her fingers and whistled, "Over here. Remember me? College roommate who knows you like a book."

I recalled her tenacity at getting to an issue.

"I might as well tell you, Pam. You'll probably learn soon enough anyway. Brian's still having trouble adjusting to my condition. He swears he isn't, but I can tell."

She pulled her head back in surprise. "What? If there ever was someone excited to get married it was Brian! I never told you this, but he even told me how eager he was right before his bachelor party. When he came to pick up Scot, Brian confided that they only were going because the guys where they work insisted. He said that no matter how beautiful or sexy the entertainment was, no woman in the world could ever take his thoughts away from you for even a second."

I glanced at my husband romping in the surf. "Really?"

"Most certainly. Brian really loves you, Kara."

I patted her hand. "He tells me several times a day, but I think that the reality of life with me in this condition day in and day out has been harder for Brian to adapt to than he ever anticipated. I'm almost certain now that he expected the Lord to heal me instantaneously once we were man and wife. I'd love that to be true, but the more I've delved into the Bible the more I've become convinced that that's not going to happen to me."

She sat straight up, obviously very puzzled. "What ever makes you think that, Kara?"

"Here, I'll show you." I slipped my ever-ready Bible out of my tote bag.

"If we hope for what we do not see we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."
(Romans 8:25)

"Kara, that verse doesn't say that God's not going to perform a miracle on your body."

"I realize that, Pam and for the record, God's already performed many of them, starting with the fact that I'm even alive and sane. I'm not saying that I didn't believe that God doesn't want me to get well, only that I think that it will

take time, not to mention a wealth of patience. I just showed you a single shred of evidence out of many segments in His Word that I've connected."

She cocked her head. "So what do you think is going to happen?"

"My enduring being like this builds up more faith, not only within Brian and me, but everyone who watches us bear this trauma on a daily basis. Since my new trainer began taking me to the YMCA to start adjusting to being around strangers more dozens of people have told me what an inspiration it has been for them whenever they've given up hope about their own situations. Do you remember how Jesus said that He was the light of the world?"

"Of course. It's in *John 8:12*."

"Do you recall that He also taught that we were as well."

She shook her head. "No, I don't remember that. Where is it?"

I flipped pages in the book on my lap and read, "*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it in under a basket but on a lamp stand and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven.*" (*Matthew 6:14-16*)

"Okay, I get that, but I still want to know why you think you won't ever be healed miraculously."

"Listen to this next thing closely, Pam, for it demonstrates how one man did so. He was a testimony for God the Father and Jesus for the rest of his life, even if he never said a word."

"*Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there, and they came not for Jesus' sake only but that they might see Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.*" (*John 12:9-11*)

Pam conceded, "Kara, that's wonderful, but it still doesn't mean that God isn't going to heal you right away. For all we know, you could get up and walk this instant."

I looked at the ocean and sighed, "You have no idea how much I'd love that. Being handicapped is the hardest thing I've ever done, not only physically but also emotionally and mentally, too. Getting a Ph.D. as a piece of cake compared to it. I often even have to force myself to go out in public."

She looked at me in confusion. "Why? Don't you want to get out of the house?"

"Yeah, but I still have to prepare myself to have to watch the rest of you do things I haven't been able to for a long time. My mind still remembers how move automatically, yet presently my body only obeys it only slightly. I know what it's like to be normal because I've been there, but very few people can truly

comprehend what being disabled involves. That's what I want to share with you about Brian. He tries so hard, but I can tell that he's almost to the breaking point. Even with God's help he's having a hard time handling my limitations. The hardest thing for him is why I don't try to use the walker, not to mention that I hate it."

She looked puzzled. "I don't understand either, Kara. Why do you hate it?"

"Oh, let's see. One, I get dizzy and have fallen over and banged into furniture almost every single time. Two, it hurts. And, three, I don't have a free hand and can't carry anything."

"Isn't that part of Sara's job? Plus, what about a bag or basket attached to it?"

"They can be more trouble than they're worth. A bag can swing and upset my balance while I can't maneuver as well with a basket. Plus, it, too, changes my balance."

"I'm with Brian on this. It were me, I'd still use one of them."

"But it isn't you, Pam, and don't forget, it was a rain injury, not just a broken leg that I have to exercise. Plus, since I have to wear a brace for my ankle and shoes to cover it Brian doesn't believe that my toes curl so much. Nor does he accept that merely standing up, even just to transfer, like to the bed, still makes me dizzy or that my center of balance shifts constantly."

"What do you mean?"

"I can only describe it like a lava lamp; you remember those?"

"Um-hum."

"Well, I can sense that I don't have a stable center of balance anymore, but Brian can't see that either so he doubts it and thinks I'm faking because I want to stay in a wheelchair. Honestly, Pam, many times looking normal is bad for me because people, especially my husband, sometimes don't believe that I had brain surgery. Ironic, isn't it?"

"What?"

"That sometimes I wish my hair hadn't grown back or that my arm ever uncurled. Unless they're in the medical field, most people have no appreciation whatsoever of how hard I've had to work every single day to come as far as I have. But that's not the worst thing."

"Then what is?"

I let out a big sigh. "That the more I improve, the more I realize how sick I was and the more I lost. So, Brian and I are both frustrated. He wants me whole again so badly that he pushes me too hard and I think he should just accept things as they are for the time being and just be in my corner, you know?"

"Have you two ever discussed this?" she asked softly.

I looked at her askew. "Of course. Many, many times, Pam."

"Do you let God be there when you do?"

"Yes, but it's still hard. For example, recently when I've tried to talk about my concerns I can tell from Brian's body language and the speed that he tries to end the conversation or change to another topic that it really bothers him. He can't accept that I might be like this for a long time and his lack of communication has started to drive a wedge between us."

At that moment, our husbands ran up the beach from the water and dropped on the towels beside us. Scot opened the cooler, grabbed a drink, and tossed one to Brian.

My husband nuzzled my cheek and asked, "What are you two talking about?"

Pam said, "You."

Brian frowned suspiciously. "What about me?"

I caressed his cheek and said, "How much you claim to love me."

Missing the irony of my statement completely, he pulled my elbow to draw my face close enough to his to kiss me soundly on the lips.

"Aren't you roasting, Sweetheart? Com'on and swim with me."

I looked directly at Pam and raised my eyebrows as if to say, "You see? Absolute denial."

I then raised my chin regally and answered Brian's invitation.

"Not if I have to ride in the rickshaw."

He chuckled and said, "I'd have to run back to the patio to get it. How about I carry you the way I did to get here?" and raised his eyebrows twice teasingly.

I started to protest, but he quickly scooped me into his arms and ran towards the waves. When I noticed that they were higher than I was used to, I cowered and pressed my face into my husband's shoulder.

He whispered, "Sweetheart, if you don't think I can take care of you, at least trust God to do it. Remember, *'If God is for us who can stand against us?'* (Romans 8:31) I'm assuming that includes what can be against us, too."

"Do you truly believe that, Bri?"

He looked at me quizzically.

"I wouldn't have said it if I didn't," and raised my chin to add, "Hasn't He shown you over and over that He wants you to recover and remain healthy?"

I nodded mutely and considered that what I'd just told Pam had been inconsiderate and erroneous--my husband did have the capacity to bear up under pressure without buckling. Sometimes better than I did.

He kissed me. "Then you have nothing to fear, have you? And I'm right

here if you need help.”

I nodded my head silently once more and he carried me into the water and dumped me unceremoniously. I surfaced easily. However, although the current was insignificant to even the children playing nearby, it was like a flash flood to my body and my struggles against it were in vain. Instead of staying where Brian had tossed me, I promptly began to drift southward.

My husband was so taken aback that he did not react, except to say, “Kara, why are you floating away? Stay with me.”

“The undertow is too strong, Bri. I’m trying to resist it, but evidently I can’t enough to stay where you put me so gracefully. Unless this was a ploy to get rid of a disabled wife, you’re going to have to come here and retrieve me.”

He frowned and walked easily to my side. He grabbed my good hand and dragged me back to the spot where we had been originally, like a caveman with his mate.

“Okay, if you can’t stay where I want you floating, then stand up.”

Even with my husband’s arms still encircling my waist, my toes curled in the sand and my right ankle collapsed, sending me sprawling once more into the ocean, whereupon the current instantly carried my body away from his once more.

“Swim, Kara! Don’t just give let it take you; use both arms and legs!”

“What do you think I’m doing?” I yelled back. “Do you think I’m doing this intentionally? Just come and help me, Brian.”

He shook his head in annoyance, but approached. “I don’t understand why you’re not swimming. Here, grab my hand again.”

He towed and stood me up a second time with the same result as before.

“You’re falling and letting yourself float away from me on purpose,” Brian accused as he retrieved me a third time.

I was indignant and attempted to shake my wrist free of his hold. “If you really believe that I’m lying to you, just go away,” I said icily. “Either deal with reality or leave me alone! I’m fed up with you fluctuating so much.”

He took exception, “If you believe that I’m not a good husband, Kara, why haven’t you ever told me.”

I glared at him in disgust. “Tell you what? That you don’t back up your words by your actions? Just go away, Brian. Please, I’m begging you, go away and leave me alone.”

I lowered my chin and opened my eyes.

Brian and I stared speechless at each other until I turned away and shouted to the shore, “Scot, can you come here?”

Brian asked under his breath, “Why are you calling him?”

“It should be obvious to someone with any sensitivity. I can’t get out of the

water without assistance and I don't intend to ask you."

He was thunderstruck. "Why not?"

"I thought I made myself clear. I don't want to have to listen to talk about your faith in God and then turn around and complain about how I could do things by myself if I'd only try harder."

"You know I'd never do that," he protested.

I countered, "You just did."

"Kara, you're safer with me than anyone else," he said with his voice quivering.

I stared at him skeptically. "Am I? I'm not so sure anymore."

Brian stared at me speechless. Scot came jogging up to us.

"What's up," he asked innocently.

I turned away from Brian and answered, "Scot, can you carry me back to the condo? I need to go home and be by myself for awhile."

Scot searched Brian's face quizzically, but he ignored his friend. He simply walked out of the water, turned and continued to stroll down the beach. I grabbed Scot's arm to prevent him from following.

"I'll explain what's going on to you and Pam later. Please, I need to think some things over."

He nodded and picked me up. He carried me past where Pam was sitting up the dunes and set me on the wheelchair, which we had left on the patio. Pam quickly gathered our things and followed silently. I smiled weakly at both of them and squeezed their hands before I propelled myself backwards into the condo.

"We'll be praying for you guys," she said. "Whatever happened, God can fix it."

Brian did not return home that night. I neither expected nor wanted him to.



CHAPTER 11



When the phone rang early the next morning I did not answer it and held onto Sara Lee's collar so that she could not either. As I expected, I heard Brian's voice on our answering matching.

"I know you're home, Kara and that you're listening to this. We need to talk. Please pick up. I'm sorry."

I went to the phone, picked up the receiver as directed, and promptly let it drop back onto its cradle so my husband would realize two things: I had indeed heard his message and deliberately refused to speak to him. I needed God's help to know exactly how to respond without any residue hard feelings that might crop up later. I wanted to be able to come together with Brian without restraint and I needed time to sort out my emotions.

"Therefore, as the elect of God, Holy and Beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another. If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you so you also must do."
(Colossians 3:12-13)

After I straightened up the condo I dialed my parents' house.

"Hi, Mom. Brian's going to be away for a few days. Can Sara Lee and I spend several nights with you guys?"

She reacted surprised yet happy. "He's leaving on a Sunday?"

I was evasive. "It was unexpected."

"We'd love to have you. When do you want me to pick you up?"

"We can be ready in half an hour. How's that for you?"

"Better make it an hour," she said. "I have a load of clothes in the washer that has to finish before I leave."

"Perfect. We'll be waiting for you outside."

My mom arrived to pick up Sara Lee and me right on time. She stopped her car directly in front of us, but left it running and came around to tilt the front seat so that the dog could jump in the back. Next, she helped me transfer

and folded the wheelchair to secure it on the carrier they had installed behind the back bumper.

When she returned to sit beside me, she asked, "How long will Brian be away and where did he go?"

"I'm not sure of either, Mom," I replied. "His leaving was a surprise and his plans aren't fixed. I guess he'll be away as long as he has to."

She looked at me speculatively. "Well, I know you'll miss each other, Kara, but your father and I are happy to have you with us for a few days. We didn't know how much we took you for granted when you were living with us before, no matter how much trouble you are now."

She smiled and patted my left knee. "Let's hope that Brian feels the same way," I said and turned to stare out the window.

Pam visited me at their house two days later and as we sat on the back porch overlooking my parents' swimming pool drinking iced tea. I explained the rift that almost imperceptibly had been growing between Brian and me ever since we started living together and how much I wanted to fix it. She reached over and gently took my right hand on my lap.

"I already know, Kara. Brian spent the night he walked away from you on the beach with us and explained everything. He was really torn up about it. However, you guys will work this out. I've never seen two people more in love with each other. Look what you've had to overcome to be together."

"Love isn't the only issue, Pam."

She looked at me as if were speaking gibberish. "Yes it is, my friend. Unconditional love from both of you."

I smiled slightly. "The question isn't whether Brian loves me, but whether he loves me enough to put up with this every day for the rest of his life."

I gestured at the wheelchair. She shook her head.

"All marriages go through rocky spells, Kara. Give him time."

I sighed and looked into the distance considering how to explain. I bit my lower lip and replied, "I don't know if I can."

"Don't be foolish, my friend. I think you're misjudging your husband, as well as being too hard on him."

"Pam, maybe that was true when life with a handicapped person was a novelty, but trust me, that has wore off. What Brian says he accepts in theory he doesn't always in practice anymore. He'll deny this, but it's increasingly evident to me that he wants a normal wife, not one with constraints. He wants to be married to who I was, not who I am."

She squeezed my hand harder. "Kara, listen to me. God has warned us to

be very careful not to judge other people. Hand me your Bible and I'll quote it."

"Therefore, you are inexcusable, whoever you are, who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself for you who judge practice the same thing."
(Romans 2:1)

I pointed the index finger of my good hand at her excitedly. "That's exactly what Brian's been doing to me! Comparing my abilities to his and recently I always seem to come up short!"

"And you're not doing the same thing back to him?" she asked sarcastically.

I glared at her. "What he's doing to me is worse."

"How so?"

"It just is."

She nodded her head in approval. "I see. Then you must have found where God has different expectations for disabled people. I believe it's after, *'We dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves, but they measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves by themselves, are not wise.'* (II Corinthians 10:12)"

"You know very well that's not what I meant! You're my friend, Pam. Why are you taking Brian's side?"

Pam slid her chair closer to mine and rested her hand on my knee.

"Don't be so touchy; I'm not siding with either of you. Tell me this, are you thinking about divorcing him?"

I sat up rigid. "Never!"

"Then do something to fix your problems. Don't let them destroy your happiness. Fight them, not Brian."

"But what if...?"

"Kara, how can you be so blind?"

"Huh?"

"You and he are united in marriage exactly as you are covenanted to God. Hasn't it occurred to you to research to find His solution to this problem just as you have your health?"

I shook my head sheepishly. "Obviously not."

"Then start now. Remember, *'Stir up the gift of God which is in you.'* (II Timothy 1:6) and let Him take care of your marriage just as He has done with your body. You're alive and sane, Kara, despite all odds to the contrary."

"You're absolutely right, Pam. I know a lot of Scripture dealing with healing, but almost nothing concerning marriage. Will you help me?"

She smiled warmly. "Of course. What are friends for?"

"How and where do you think we should start?"

"I think I know two great places. Listen."

"If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (James 1:5-8)"

"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and you do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and battle yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your own pleasures." (James 4:1-3)

I swallowed and said, "Wow. Those are really applicable. However, I'm thirsty, aren't you? Would you mind getting us some iced tea before we get into this deeper?"

Pam stood up and asked, "No, I want some more, too. Would you like me to make you a sandwich also while I'm in the kitchen?"

"No, thank you. I don't want to be spitting food on my Bible."

She laughed, "Good point. I'll be right back. I assume your mom keeps the glasses in the same place?"

"Um-hum, but the ice is now in the oven."

"It's a good thing you said something. I would have looked in the dishwasher."

As I watched my friend go inside, I thought about how much I'd missed her over the years and how thankful I was that the Lord had brought us together again.

When Pam returned, she sat down and immediately said, "That was Brian on the phone. I told him that you'd call him back."

I shot her a dirty look. "I didn't even hear it ring. Why did you tell him that? I just finished telling you that I didn't want to see him yet."

"Ah, but you aren't going to see Brian, you're just going to talk to him"

"Cute, Pam. Real cute. Okay, let's begin. I see you took the time to get pens and a paper so we can take notes."

Immediately after Pam left, I went into my former bedroom and closed the door so I could call Brian and converse privately. He answered before the first ring even finished, so I knew that he had been sitting next to the phone waiting. I spoke before he had a chance.

"Hello, Brian. Pam informed me that you called."

"Please don't call me that, Kara"

I pulled my chin back and asked, "Call you what?"

"Brian. You only do that when you want to distance yourself from me."

I wedged the receiver between my head and shoulder and lifted my feet up on the dresser with my left hand to get more comfortable.

"Whatever. Was there anything particular you wanted to discuss?"

"You know what I want, Kara, you," he offered and I envisioned him trying to look like a little boy ready to be excused from culpability even though he had committed the offense. . .

I sighed. "You called me a liar and walked away, Brian, not the reverse."

"I never said that and you did it again."

"Did what?"

"Called me Brian, and I never called you a liar."

I gritted my teeth and said into the mouthpiece, "You most certainly did, every single then you have refused to accept my explanations of why I can't do something the way I used to, culminating last Saturday in the ocean. My life isn't some game that I can play only when it's convenient and ignore when I don't feel like being crippled, Brian. How could you ever dare to imagine that I was doing what you accuse me of Sunday, and three times!" I paused and we did not speak for several seconds. I finally asked in frustration, "Why did you call here this afternoon?"

"Kara, don't you think you're blowing this way out of proportion?"

"No. I don't expect you to be able to fully understand what I'm going through, because you can't. However...."

"At least give me another chance to try," he interrupted.

I hesitated but replied, "Sure, but first you have to do me a favor."

"Anything, Sweetheart. Just name it."

"Stay in my extra wheelchair, pretend it's raining, and do things the way I do them for forty-eight hours without cheating, which means only one-handed, or taking a break. Also, remember to lock the wheels every single time you stand up anywhere."

"Why can't I do that with you here?"

"Brian, part of the problem is being alone so much and having to entertain myself without leaving the house when I can't use my electric cart because it can't get wet. Plus, I can't use Sara Lee to pull me anywhere when it's raining."

"That's not true, Kara. She can pull you in the rain."

"Oh really? Explain how without tracking mud all over the rug. Even if I have towels ready for her, the wheelchair wheels will leave a mess that neither she nor I can clean up. No trip anywhere is worth that aggravation. So, I always end up deciding that it is far easier just to stay inside, keep warm, and read another book. And, I forgot to mention that if I do choose to go outside

and get wet I need to shower afterwards which creates a whole new set of obstacles, like slipping. Let's see how much you think it's worth it when you're in my shoes, Brian."

He asked in exasperation, "Will you please stop using my full name?"

"Sure, Brian, as soon as I'm confident that you really do understand my position. I've told you, I know what your life is like, but you don't have nearly as much insight into mine as you think you do."

"So if I do this, you'll come home?"

"After I'm satisfied that you truly did it, Brian, yes."

"How will you be able to tell?"

"By your reactions, the same way I know that no matter how many times you tell me that you understand me you really don't. Oh, there's one more thing. Do everything one-handed."

The phone was silent for a minute, but I could tell that he was still on the line, and as he normally did whenever anything about my being handicapped came up, Brian changed the subject as soon as he figured was polite and asked me shyly, "How are you?"

I sniffed and said sarcastically, "Fine, and you?"

He gulped loudly. "I miss you, Kara. Do you miss me?"

"I miss the sensitive Brian, but I have lately even when I've been with the person who just looks like him. By the way, when I asked my mom to come over here, I told her that I didn't want to be alone while you were away."

"So I'm supposed to be away, am I? And the reason is...."

"Work. Would you prefer that I told my parents that you can be an insensitive jerk sometimes? As far as they're concerned, Brian, you've gone away and don't know yet how long it will be."

"Where am I supposed to have gone?" he questioned sarcastically.

"You never said precisely where."

The irony in his voice became stronger. "Oh really? Why not?"

"You didn't plan on being away long enough for it to matter. However, plans have changed," I answered and gently hung up the phone.

I chair-walked back out onto the porch overlooking the pool, bowed my head and prayed, "Father God, please show me how You want me to act from now on towards my husband. I ask that you fill my heart with Your love and understanding so that I always see Brian with Your eyes regardless of his words or actions. In Jesus' name. Amen."

While reading the Bible I came across, *"Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you."*

(Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32)

I said to the air, "Thanks, Father. I also need some things more specific to marriage and I can't recall where I've seen them. Will You lead me to those please?"

After about an hour reviewing more Scripture what I found revolved around submitting not only to God but each other in love, always considering personal needs and desires to be of lesser importance than your mate's--without limitations or boundaries. I realized that in God's eyes, I had been just as wrong in criticizing and pulling away from Brian as he had been in judging me for my inadequacies

"Just as you want (people) to do to you, you also do to them likewise. Therefore, be merciful just as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:31, 36)

Brian's and my separation lasted two more days, in which time he did as I had requested and I learned the even more about the importance of forgiveness. However, I was human and my pride was hurt, so when Brian called again I childishly pretended not to recognize his voice.

"I miss you."

"Who's this?" I asked innocently.

"Very funny, Kara."

"I'm not kidding. Who is this?"

"Your husband."

"Oh, him. What do you want?"

"You know very well what I want. I did what you asked, so when are you coming home?"

My heart was racing at the sound of Brian's voice, yet I still feigned indifference. So much for complete forgiveness. Evidently, although I knew what God wanted I was not yet at a point to put it into practice totally.

"Why should I? Sara Lee and I are quite comfortable where we are now and no one argues with us or insinuates that we're pretending that we can't do things."

"I'm sorry about that. I realize now how much I've hurt you."

"Yes, Brian, and too often for me to ignore. I advised you not to marry me but you didn't listen. Being handicapped is hard on me, but it's tangible. What affects you isn't and never will be. Can you deal with that yet?"

After a pause he responded, "I admit that can be very frustrating to live with you, Kara, but it's much worse without you in my life. Please, come back now."

I sighed, "Bri, what you hated before isn't going to just vanish."

His voice brightened. "You called me Bri, Kara. You have forgiven me, haven't you."

"I guess so," I admitted reluctantly. "I've wanted to rush back a hundred times."

"Then why didn't you? Are you telling me we wasted this whole time apart when we could have been together?" he asked incredulously.

"First of all, it's only been a couple of days. Second, the time apart wasn't wasted if we learned to appreciate and understand each other better."

"So you will come home now?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, I will."

"Good. I just got back from my business trip."

"When do you want Sara Lee and me to be ready?"

"Yesterday," Brian replied excitedly and hung up the phone.

When Brian came through the front door he practically sailed into my arms. He grabbed and picked me up so fast that the wheelchair rolled backwards. Sara Lee jumped on the both of us and we would have fallen if Brian hadn't seen her leap and brace himself for the extra load that came crashing on top of us. He staggered under her extra weight but was able to steady himself. He squeezed me so hard and lifted me so high in his arms as he twirled around the living room that I felt my toes lift off the floor.

"I have missed you so much," he murmured over and over as he kissed my face repeatedly. "You said you'd never leave me, Kara. You promised."

"Technically, I didn't leave you, Bri. You left me when you walked away down the beach and didn't come home that night."

He blushed, "Let's not be separated ever again. Our bed was too cold without you."

I leaned back in the security of my husband's arms and playfully punched his chest with my good hand.

"So that's what I am to you huh--a bed warmer."

He smiled softly. "Among other things."

Just then my parents walked in the door and Brian whispered sarcastically over my shoulder,

"I thought we were done with people interrupting us when you left the hospital."

I giggled and greeted them. "Mom, Dad, look who's here!"

Brian set me in the wheelchair and said, "It's great to be back. How've you guys been?"

Mom answered as she walked by us heading towards the kitchen to drop her purse on the counter. "We went golfing and then a late lunch. How was

your trip?"

"Enlightening."

She turned around and arched her eyebrows. "How so?"

He moved behind me and squeezed my shoulder.

"I found out how much I missed Kara."

Sara Lee nudged Brian's hand and he knelt and rubbed hr head.

"Yes, I missed you, too," he said fondly.

My dad asked, "So, Brian, do you have to travel again anytime soon?"

"Not if I have anything to say about it."

"Just tell your boss that you want to stay with your family."

Brian answered and stroked the back of my head.

"Good advise. I'll do that. Kara, are you ready to go home?"

I reached behind me to find and squeeze his hand.

"As soon as you are, Sweetheart."

The drive to our condo seemed to take half the time is usually did.



CHAPTER 12



The first thing I noticed as we entered the door was an enormous bouquet of lilies in a crystal vase placed on the coffee table in the living room opposite the entry. Sara Lee went directly to the sliding glass door and sat waiting to be let out to play on the beach, so for the first time in several days Brian and I were completely alone.

As he returned to where I had chair-walked he knelt in front of me, took my hands and said, "I love you, Mrs. McGovern and I am willing to do anything so that we never misunderstand each other or argue ever again. I'm going to stop badgering you to use the walker, too, although I want you to know that I haven't given up believing that you will walk again, only that I'm content to wait for God's timing and not push you into doing anything you don't think you're ready for."

I caressed his cheek and responded with a grin, "Thank you. All you even have to do is believe that what I tell you about myself is the truth and if by chance, I ever disappoint you respect that I'm doing the best I can. And, FYI, I do still try to use the walker, but it still unnerves me too much to feel comfortable on it."

"Even if I stay right beside you so you won't fall?"

"Bri, my toes still curl, even with a full foot brace. So, until that changes, don't expect me to use it."

"Maybe if you used it more they'd stop."

"Bri, I've used it more than you think and they still do. So, are we in agreement to just keep believing and stop pushing the issue?"

He stuck out his hand. "Deal."

"Oh, and rub my feet at least once a day upon command."

"Sure, if you...."

"Bri, I already know what you want in return. Shall we? Better take the phone off the hook first."

Afterward, as we lay together with my head nuzzled in his neck, Brian took

my left hand and whispered, "You exhausted me, Kara. I won't be able to move for a week."

I lifted my head and said, "Well, we can't have that. I'll stop...."

He smiled and kissed the tip of my nose. "Not on your life. I want you to keep doing that for the rest of our lives."

We heard scratching at the sliding glass door and both raised our heads to see the source. It was Sara Lee eager prancing in a circle eager to come in. Brian mumbled an expletive and covered his face with his forearm.

"I can't believe it! Another interruption, and in my own home!"

I thought I'd burst laughing watching him throw off the covers and grudgingly open the door and Sara Lee come bounding in to greet her master.

A few weekends later we awoke late to someone pounding on our front door. Brian held me down when I tried to sit up and said sleepily, "Sweetheart, you stay here. I'll see who it is."

Sara Lee padded after him as he left the bedroom. I decided to transfer into the wheelchair anyway and start the day by making the bed so we couldn't be lazy and go back to sleep. I chair-walked into the bathroom next, washed, and got dressed. I had expected for Brian to come and tell me what was going on, but when I exited the bathroom he wasn't visible. I could hear him outside the front of the condo so I wheeled myself out the front door that stood ajar. Brian was squatting next to an oddly shaped object, blocking my view of it.

He turned when he heard me roll onto the asphalt and yelled, "Don't come out here, Kara. I'll be with you in a minute. Will you make us some breakfast?"

Puzzled, I answered, "Sure, "and retreated back into the condo.

He returned in several minutes and went to the kitchen sink where he casually washed his hands. He casually sat at the dining room table, took a sip of coffee, grinned and said, "This looks wonderful, Kara. I've missed your one-handed cooking "

"Thank you, kind sir" I answered, curious as to why he did not mention what had just transpired.

Brian bit into his toast. "Do you have any special plans for today?"

"Not really, Bri. Why do you ask?"

"There's something I want to show you after you get dressed."

"What is it?"

"Nothing special."

I put my good hand on his forearm and shook it on the table. "Then why won't you tell me what it is?"

He leaned over and gave me a buttery kiss. "Be patient. You'll see."

We finished the meal in silence with him looking very smug and me wondering why.

I was reaching for a plate after we finished and he patted my hand. "I'll clean up, Kara. You just get ready. It takes you much longer than it does me."

I eyed him suspiciously. "Brian, what's going on? What are you planning?"

He reached over, unlocked my wheels, and gave me a shove.

"Come on now, if you don't get dressed you can't see your surprise." He called after my back as I chair-walked into the bedroom, "Wear your ankle brace and special shoes!"

Extremely curious now, I washed and dressed almost as fast as I had the day Brian appeared in my bedroom one morning wearing a tuxedo. However, then he hadn't commanded that I wear my brace and special shoes.

As I was finishing putting them on, he came into where I was and said, "Will you wait for me in here? This'll only take a second."

"Can I wait on the patio instead?"

He knelt in front of my chair and placed his hands on the armrests, effectively stopping me from leaving the room. "No, please, stay in this room."

I pursed my lips and furrowed my brow. "Why? It's not as if I can roll down the beach and leave again."

"Please, just trust me and do as I ask."

I sighed and crossed my arms. "Okay, but hurry up."

He kissed the tip of my nose, stood, ruffled my hair, and spurted into the bathroom grabbing some shorts, a T-shirt, and tennis shoes as he went.

I began to count loudly, "One, two...."

Brian appeared precisely at the count of 50 and wheeled me outside, making "vroom-room" noises like a little boy. Once out the front door, I saw a shiny red contraption with a bright white seat the size and shape of a normal chair positioned between two huge wheels, with another smaller one in front attached to the handlebars parked next to his car. Remembering the rickshaw, I was hesitant, dreading what would come next. He stopped me and went over to stand next to it, flinging his arms like one of those models on TV showcasing prizes on a game show.

"Ta-da! How do you like it? I was going to give it to you for our third anniversary, but apparently I had to go out of town on business."

I ignored his sarcasm and said, "I'm not sure what you want me to say, Bri. Exactly what is that thing?"

He rushed to my side and knelt again. "Can't you tell, Sweetheart? It's a

handicap tricycle. Now we can ride together and you'll get some exercise instead of just being on your scooter."

I looked at him in shock. "This is for me? Are you crazy? I couldn't even get on that thing, much less make it go forward!" I paused and shut my eyes to compose myself, or at least try to. I glared at my husband and said very icily through clenched teeth, "Didn't it occur to you even once that giving me this thing might be fostering one of the problems that I left you for? My God, Brian! What were you thinking?"

He was surprised by my negative reaction and jumped up and away from the chair.

"Nobody's forcing you to do anything, Kara and I don't intend to criticize the way you move again. I admit that was wrong and you'll never know how sorry I am or how much I want to take back those words. I thought you'd like the fact that I've been contemplating ways for us to be able to exercise together. I apologize for considering that you still might actually want to get better."

We stared at each other in silence, both being too stubborn to make the first move towards another reconciliation. Me, because I didn't want to feel my hopes dashed again, and Brian because he didn't think that I appreciated his efforts to invigorate our marriage. Fortunately, God's Holy Spirit led me to swallow my fear and pride and appreciate what this special man meant to me. I put my hand over my eyes in embarrassment and rubbed my forehead.

"I am so sorry, Bri. I should have realized...."

He instantly knelt by my side crushing my ribs in a huge bear hug. He looked lovingly into my eyes and said, "I'm sorry, too for not anticipating that this gift might represent affliction to you. I'm still learning, okay?"

I brushed away the tear that was sliding down his cheek.

"No, this mistake was my fault. I should have trusted that you never would do anything intentionally but what you thought was in my best interest."

He smiled. "Blame it on PMS."

I slapped his shoulder.

"I never knew that men could suffer PMS."

"Only the ones married to you." Reacting to my frown, he added, "Please don't punch me again. I was only joking."

I expelled a loud breath, "So, how did you expect us to do this? And, I say us because you're going to have to help me big time."

I looked at the tricycle once more and shuddered. Brian wheeled me next to the bike and pointed the 18" break in the metal base right in front of the seat.

"See this gap? You go through here to sit down so you won't have to try to lift your legs over the pipe."

"How thoughtful," I muttered sarcastically. "So you can transfer me to that seat. Big deal. I still won't be able to make that thing move, and excuse me if I'm wrong, but isn't that sort of, like, the whole point of the gift?"

Brian shifted his weight and replied disgustedly, "See, Kara? That's what I hate, when you won't even try to do something!"

"Because even if I do put forth the effort, Brian, but can't do it you accuse me of not trying!"

He knelt in front of me again and took both hands. I attempted to wrench them free of his grasp but he increased his grasp even tighter.

"Let me go, Brian! You haven't changed. You still want a pet who obeys whenever you beckon. I'm not Sara Lee. I want to go back inside."

"And do what? Call your mother again to come and rescue you? It's too bad you can't carry around a call-button like in the hospital. Then, whenever you feel too challenged you'll always be able to press it and summon a nurse to comfort you and make you feel safe and secure."

He stood and cupped my chin. "You say you want to get better, but I don't think you mean it unless it's convenient. Since you only want to criticize my gesture, sure, I'll be more than happy to take you back inside your safe cave. Only don't expect me to wallow in your pity. You've learned how to do that by yourself quite nicely."

Brian started to walk behind the chair but I grabbed his forearm with my good hand to make him stay where he was.

"I'm sorry, Bri. I'm just more used to things not working out than going well now."

He knelt once more and we embraced. I whispered, "Why are you willing to put up with me? I seem to change moods every ten minutes."

He kissed my ear. "Because I truly believe that *'My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'* (Philippians 4:19) If we stop relying on God to keep you safe, who else can we rely on?"

I wiped the tears from my eyes and declared, "Well, let's get me on this contraption."

It seemed like forever to transfer to the wheelchair to the bike seat even though the space I had to move was less than a foot. First, we had to figure out the best spot and angle to park the wheelchair. Then I braced my hands on the chair arms to assist my body to stand. When I reached for the handlebars however, they moved and I lost the tentative balance I had regained after much intense therapy. Even when Brian grabbed the bars to give me a steady prop to hold onto and rotate my body onto the bike seat, I was unable to retain my equilibrium and fell backwards. Fortunately, my butt hit the chair so I was unhurt, merely frustrated and reluctant to try it again.

"Bri," I said, "please just pick me up and put me on the bike."

"All right," he conceded, "but remember the shower, Kara. You need to learn to do it yourself."

"That's altogether different."

He arched his eyebrows. "Oh, yeah? How so?"

"That I want to do. This I don't."

Brian transferred me to the bike and said proudly, "You can do this, too, Kara and just like everything else, if you practice and have faith, not only will it be easier every time, eventually you will like it."

I sat there feeling like a lump of clay. I looked up at Brian and said, "Have I ever told you one of the very the worst things about being paralyzed that I bet you never thought of?"

He said, "Probably I can't imagine you leaving something out."

I tried to adjust my shorts underneath. "Wedgies. Just about every single time someone picks you up for a transfer, as soon as your bum hits the new surface your underpants are stretched and go right up...."

"I get the picture," he said laughing. "You don't have to describe it further."

Still struggling with under my right leg I continued, "You don't want to tell the person helping you what's wrong, and even if you did they wouldn't want to fix it."

"Kara," he chuckled and kissed my nose. "You are one strange lady."

"I just thought you should know. Okay, smart aleck, I'm on the bike. How do you expect me to keep my feet on the pedals?"

"What do you think these bungee cords are for?" he asked dangling two of them. "I'm going to strap your feet to the pedals. Anything else you want to complain about?"

I said sheepishly, "No, I think that about covers it."

He next proceeded to push the bike from behind, encouraging me to close my eyes and feel the sense of movement as my feet began making circles.

"Kara," he shouted, "can you sense anything reawakening in your brain the way you have before?"

I felt like crying for sheer joy. "Yes, Bri, I do. I literally can feel some new activity, especially in my right leg. The only way I can describe it are small electronic impulses moving around trying to locate new pathways to connect to in order to send new messages to my legs. It's kinda like a pinball machine. I wish you could experience this. It's awesome!"

"So, I take it you like the bike and are happy I bought it?"

"I'll show my gratitude later. Just don't stop pushing!"

We probably crossed the parking lot and back ten times before Brian's arms

and legs needed a rest. He let go but I was so caught up in the motion that I didn't realize he wasn't there and continued to pedal for several more yards. Unconsciously, my brain had started sending signals to move and I kept going forward. I didn't recognize what had happened until I heard Brian shout for me to watch where I was going. I suddenly stopped, turned my head, and saw him laughing and clapping.

After that first day, I constantly begged Brian to go riding as soon as he walked in the front door. Finally, after several more trips around the parking lot, he decided that it was time for a test run around the rest of our condo neighborhood. Sara Lee ran alongside me through the quiet streets and he circled us on his own bike laughing.

Late one morning several months later, I was bored and none of my normal daily routines seemed satisfactory--neither reading a book that I had bought recently nor writing on our computer. In fact, not even reading the Bible or rolling onto the patio and playing fetch with Sara Lee chasing a Frisbee did the trick. She obviously loved it, but being so near to the ocean yet not being able to simply walk 50 yards and take a dip was more frustrating than refreshing. Unexpectedly, an image popped into my mind of me riding my tricycle alone but I reflexively tried to suppress it. However, the thought persisted and surprisingly seemed more sensible every second.

I whispered, "God, is this idea coming from You? Are You directing me to take out my bike alone?" I looked at the sky and felt a gentle breeze wash over my body.

Automatically, I called, "Sara, come!" and with my heart beating noticeably, I wheeled back into the condo and went to Brian's and my bedroom. I transferred to the bed, pulled the pillows out from under the bedspread and piled them on top of each other in next to the headboard. I then scooted over to prop my back on them and Sara leaped onto the bed next to me.

For the first time since he and I had been married, instead of reprimanding her and ordering her to get off the bed I encouraged her to lie beside me and began to stroke her soft fur. My heart was racing I wanted her there for comfort. She licked my right hand lying on my lap and put her head on that leg. I rubbed my left hand over my eyes and noticed that for some reason I was very apprehensive. I reached to that side, took our Bible from my nightstand, and placed it closed on my lap.

I began to pray, "Father, I can feel Our Holy Spirit fluttering all through my body right now and know that this means You're trying to tell me something. Since my thoughts are too scrambled to even know where to begin searching,

I'm just going to begin reading in the Gospel of John and as always ask that You guide me to find what You specifically want me to see. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."

I decided that a place to begin that was as good as any to start focusing my mind on God was with Jesus' last meeting with His disciples. Several verses with the word 'joy' in them stood out. For some reason I remembered from reading in the hospital that the Bible used the same term in *Nehemiah 8:10* and *James* in reference to strength, something that I surely would need if I were to venture out alone.

"These things I have spoken to you that My joy may remain in you and your joy may be full." (John 15:11) and "Now I come to You and these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves." (John 17:13)

I cross-referenced a note in the margin and located, *"And these things we write that your joy may be full." (I John 1:4)*

Finally, when I cross-referenced it, I was led back to something I'd missed before, *"Until now, you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:24)*

"Okay, Father, I ask for joy, that I might be strong enough to get on the bike by myself, let alone ride it. I also ask that if I'm wrong in what I think that You're leading me to do that I not be able to do it, so that I won't fall or be stranded somewhere and get myself in a position that either I'll get hurt or need to be rescued. I likewise ask for these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

After I was done praying, Sara enthusiastically thumped her tail on the mattress and leaped off the bed. I gulped, blew out a huge breath of air and decided to try to try to ride before I faltered in my conviction that God indeed had been directing me to try this experiment in increased faith and independence. I maneuvered myself to the side and transferred back into the wheelchair as she stood prancing in one spot waiting for me to get settled.

I harnessed her, locked the front door, and she pulled me out to our carport where both Brian's and my bicycles were stored. It was only then that I noticed that I had forgotten to carry my cell phone. I debated whether to have her guide me back inside out condo to retrieve it but dismissed the idea because I might lose my nerve to ride solo if I had more time to consider the wisdom of the action I was about to take.

I motioned for Sara to sit beside me and said, "We'll be okay without it, right, girl?"

She barked in agreement to reassure me that we would be fine. I scratched her behind the ears and considered how much I loved asking her things because, unlike Brian, she always agreed with my point of view. I carefully studied the

tricycle and angled the chair to what I thought was the best position for me to transfer seats by myself. After locking the brakes, I stood using my arms more than my legs to push my body upright. I got lightheaded and fell back into the chair.

I asked softly, "God, please guide what I'm doing, oh, and keep Sara and me safe. As Jesus did when He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, I thank You in advance. In His name I ask You this. Amen."

I stood upright a second time still holding on to the left armrest with my fingers and thumb. As soon as I felt certain that I was steady enough not to fall back into the chair again I grabbed both handlebars, taking into account that they would move and I would need to recover my balance once more. By this time my heart was pounding so fast and hard that I had begun to sweat. Thankfully, Sara stayed seated and did not interfere with my concentration.

Standing holding to the bars, I prayed again and this time said under my breath, "Jesus, I also want to remind You that You said, *'I am with you always, even to the end of time.'* (Matthew 28:20b), so I'm counting on Your being here with me right now."

I took a deep breath and lifted my right foot and slightly turned it and my body through the opening at the side of the tricycle. The handlebars wobbled yet not enough to upset my precarious equilibrium or cause my grip to slip or let go entirely.

Flushed and even more nervous than before, I said, "Thank You both," to the air, pivoted completely and dropped noisily onto the bike seat trembling from the exertion of that simple action. Sara, who of course had no notion of my anxiety jumped onto my lap and licked my face with joy. Shaky but satisfied I buried my face in her soft neck until she wiggled to free herself.

I composed myself, unlocked the wheelchair and pushed it under our carport, got the bungee cords from the basket behind my seat, fastened my feet to the pedals and said, "Okay, girl, ready when you are. Let's go exploring."

She barked twice and ran around in a circle in anticipation. Since I had not returned to the condo to get my cell phone, I decided that the best thing for us to do was take a few spins in the familiar parking lot before we ventured outside its boundaries alone. That way if I even supposed that I was not ready to continue riding solo someone was bound to come by and help me back into the wheelchair that I had left in Brian's any my guest parking space. After several successful laps I turned the front wheel and went out of the main gate onto the public sidewalk.

The weather was straight from heaven, complete with a breeze from the ocean to our right and a faint rainbow in the distance from a shower early that morning. It was so wonderful to be by myself without anybody knowing where

I was for the first time in over four and a half years that I wanted to ride off into the horizon and never return to the beautiful condo I had begun to consider a prison. In fact, I wanted to pedal all the way to the airport and jump on a plane going anywhere at all, but it occurred to me that I would have to cross the street. I passed by numerous people in cars that they probably had no inkling how much independence they had just to get so far away from their own homes, as well as be able to choose simply whether to turn right, left, or continue straight at the next intersection. I wondered where Brian was and if he ever realized how much freedom he had, even when he complained about going to work and being stuck inside an office.

Sara and I continued for several blocks until I realized that she was panting hard from the heat and needed water. I decided that we had come far enough for the day and turned around in a driveway.

As soon as we entered our complex once more, I prayed, "Thank you, Lord, for my new freedom. One more hurdle overcome, eh?" Then I easily transferred back into the wheelchair, maneuvered the bike to park it better, and took Sara home for a drink and ice cubes as a treat.

When Brian came home that evening he came into our den where I was working on the computer a book to organize and condense everything we'd learned so far about God and healing. He nuzzled my neck from behind as I scrambled to save the file before I responded eagerly to his touch. Dinner was quite late.

CHAPTER 13



As we were having coffee on the patio afterwards, Kim came over to play with Sara Lee. They were chasing each other on the beach in front of us when Brian casually asked, "How was your day?"

I responded proudly, "Sara and I went bike riding!"

To my surprise, instead of being proud of my initiative he was alarmed.

"You did what! By yourselves? You could have been hurt! I don't want

you riding without me ever again, Kara."

My emotions were crushed in one fell swoop. I reached for my husband's hand across the table but he pulled it away.

"Bri, I thought the whole idea of the tricycle was to give me more independence and exercise."

"It was, but with, not without me."

"Brian..."

"Uh-ho. My whole name again. You're angry."

I unlocked my breaks and wheeled to his side. I grabbed his forearm with both hands and said, "Brian, listen to yourself, will you? You're treating me like a child or a doll again. I knew that what I did was risky."

"I should hope so," he interrupted. "It was stupid, too."

"Sweetheart, please listen to everything that I have to tell you before you react in fear."

"Fine. Go ahead; I'm listening," he mumbled through clenched teeth. He crossed his arms over his chest.

I took his chin in my hand. He resisted at first by deliberately pivoting his neck towards the water, but gradually allowed my fingers to turn his head to face me.

"Bri, I admit that when I first thought about riding alone it was a rash decision made out of boredom. However, once I was in front of the bike it became a choice of whether I would let fear of faith govern my behavior."

"I don't follow your logic. Taking it out by yourself was just plain idiotic."

"I'd agree with you except for one thing."

"Which was?"

"The absolute assurance that washed over me that I would be okay as soon as I searched the Bible for guidance and prayed for assistance. I've often had the same feelings since I was in the hospital, so I recognize it was coming from the Holy Spirit inside me. Even way back then I knew somehow that I wasn't going to die."

Brian swiveled in his seat and grabbed both of my elbows. "Not dying isn't the same thing as being safe, Kara. What you did today was reckless and I don't want you ever to do it again without my supervision."

I jerked free of his hold and said, "You can't demand that!" I breathed deeply and looked out to the horizon, pursing my lips. I faced my husband once more and said, "Let's not do this again."

"Do what?"

"Be at odds with each other. Will you pray and read the Bible with me? We need to come to an agreement so we don't separate over another petty issue again."

"It's not petty to me. You could have been seriously hurt."

"Trust me. I don't want that to happen far more than you don't want it."

He made a scoffing noise. I squeezed his forearm.

"Please, Bri."

He conceded grudgingly. "Fine, whatever. I suppose you expect me to go inside and get it," he pouted.

"No, Sweetheart," I said sweetly batting my eyelashes. "I'll get it."

He snarled, "Don't be silly, Kara. You already know it will take you too long. I'll go."

Before he stood up I kissed his nose. "I am willing to go get it, you know."

Brian stood up and patted my shoulder as he passed. "No, I will. I don't want to wait an hour for you to return."

"Then is it my problem for being lazy or yours for being impatient?"

"Don't push me, Kara."

I was silent, thinking that maybe I was pushing my luck.

When he returned, I kept my place by his side when he put the Bible on the table and said sarcastically, "I'll pray to start, or am I being too bossy?"

I suppressed a grin. "No, that'll be fine."

"Father God, please tell Kara not to put herself in danger anymore and do whatever I tell her. In Jesus' name, amen."

He opened his eyes expecting me to challenge his prayer but I did not say a word. He opened the Bible and read loudly and smugly, "*Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is Head of the Church and the Savior of the Body. Therefore, just as the Church is subject to Christ, let the wives be to their husbands in everything.*" (EPHESIANS 5:22-24) Did you hear that, Kara? In everything."

"Read the rest of what it says there about the marriage, Bri."

"Why? It's pretty straightforward. You're supposed to obey me."

"It's might be straightforward, but it's not the complete idea of what God wants for the union between a man and a woman who follow Him. Hand me the book."

He resisted but I pulled it from his fingers and read the next verses.

"*Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word... So, husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself, for no one hated his own flesh but nourishes and cherishes it just as the Lord does the Church, for we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery but I speak concerning*

Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular love his own wife and see that she respects her husband. (EPHESIANS 5:25-33) One, you're supposed to love me exactly as Christ did the Church. Are you in this? And, second, I'm supposed to respect you, but not be your slave."

I gently closed the Bible and waited for his reaction.

He sat for a moment watching the waves crash against the shore and said after awhile, "Well, for the record, I still don't want you going out without me."

"Bri, I didn't do what I did today to go against you. In fact, I didn't even know how you felt. I thought you'd be thrilled that I showed some independence. However, now that we've discussed the matter, unless or until I can convince you otherwise I will acquiesce to your wishes unless they're at odds with the rest of what we know about God's will. However, I want to point out that even when you are with me, God's the one who takes care of us and that without His help you cannot protect me nearly as well. Without Him, I wouldn't even still be alive. Can I show you something else?"

Brian nodded.

I opened the book in my lap once more and read, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones.*" (Proverbs 3:5-8)

"So you still believe that God approved of what you did today?"

"Yes, Bri, I do."

"And not only that, you really think He instigated it?"

"Yes, I am. So, can I ride alone again tomorrow?"

"Don't push it, Kara. Even if I agree that God guided you today, you have to let me get used to that idea and go to Him myself."

I nodded. "I think that's a fair compromise. Sure, I can live with that."

Just then, we heard Kim and Sara Lee returning. The little girl ran up to us panting, "Mom told me to get home now before it gets dark. May I come back tomorrow?"

Brian tousled the child's hair and replied, "Sure, Kiddo. Did you two have fun?"

"Yeah! Sara's the best! She can catch the Frisbee almost every time."

"Really? You must have taught her well."

"I sure did," Kim said solemnly and turned to leave waving goodbye as she ran.

I asked chuckling, "Bri, are you planning to tell Kim that you taught Sara that trick years ago?"

"No way. Didn't you notice how happy she was when I suggested that she did it?" Sara barked and approached Brian to be petted.

"Mr. McGovern, have I ever told you that you're a good man?"

"Not lately, Kara, but I'll keep reminding you. How about if you get ready for bed and I'll clean this up and take care of Sara Lee?"

"Sounds like a plan."

"Want help going inside?"

I gave Brian my 'don't-you-dare-help-me' look and he backed away. "Sorry, I wasn't trying to curb your independence again."

"You'd better not," I teased. "And, for your information, I was planning a take a shower first—a long one, if you get my drift."

Brian grinned and puckered his lips. "I do like a clean woman. Want me to join you?"

I answered over my shoulder as I chair-walked up the ramp,

"That's another reason why I love you, Sweetheart. You have such a good command of the obvious."

That Saturday, Brian decided that we needed time alone. He asked me to get dressed and gather whatever we had at home to have a picnic while he dropped Sara Lee at my parents' house, as well as bought the rest of the food for the feast we had decided upon at a local deli. He returned home and we combined his stuff with mine in a basket and thermos. He rolled me out to our car with everything packed on top of me like a mule and I saw over the basket handles that he already had lifted and secured my tricycle on the luggage rack.

He lifted our provisions off of my lap so I could transfer to the car and placed them on the ground. I opened the door, positioned the chair, locked both brakes and stood holding on to the side window frame with my right hand for balance. I put my left forearm on the top of the car and said, "Brian, what's this?" and awkwardly lifted each foot several times. As usual, my right knee didn't bend so I looked like a wooden soldier; nevertheless I moved both legs up and down as rapidly as I could. Brian sighed and rolled his eyes.

"Kara, what are you doing?"

"That's what I want you to tell me."

"You look ridiculous. Stop it."

"Not until you tell me what I'm doing."

"I don't know. Marching maybe?"

I said proudly, "No, silly. I'm running in place!"

He chuckled, "You're a nut, you know that? Now sit down so I can take the chair. I have to put in the trunk."

I pivoted, sat down, lifted my left leg into the car and he helped me do the same thing with the other one.

"All secure?" he asked.

"Aye, aye, Captain."

He chuckled a second time, bent so that his head and shoulders were inside the car with me and buckled my seat belt. I grabbed his hand.

"Hey! I can do that myself."

"I know, but then I couldn't do this," he replied and kissed me.

I cupped his chin with my left palm. "You'll do anything for sex, won't you."

"Of course. Now let get your hand off me or I'll forget about the picnic."

I dropped it immediately. "Sorry. We can do that anytime."

"Good point, like even right now. Get back inside. The food is on ice. It'll keep."

"Bri-an! Don't you ever stop...?"

He grinned as he backed up and pulled his head out of the car.

"No, Sweetheart, when you're around I never do."

It took an hour to drive to the park and another ten minutes or so to drive around until we located the perfect spot—near the water but also near the bike trail that wound through the woods. We, I mean he, unpacked everything, as well as carried and set it on the ground where we had decided to eat lunch. Then he came to bring me the chair to retrieve me from the passenger seat. He pushed me on only the two back wheels to under a big oak tree and helped me unfold a blanket to sit on. Next, he lifted me out of the chair so that I could set up our provisions and of course had to, well, you know first as payment.

"Brian," I asked. "Not here! Someone could see us!"

"Let 'em," he whispered kissing my neck. "I've waited a whole hour for this."

I looked at my watch. "More than that. However, my objection still holds."

I pushed both of his shoulders and he rolled onto his side on the blanket. "Control yourself, Counselor. Pretend we're in court."

He stood and cuffed my chin. "Gee, thanks, Kara. Now I'll be thinking about you there, too."

I kicked at his heel but missed it as he walked back to the car laughing. We ate a leisurely lunch with Brian trying to paw me every single time he reached for something more to eat. After slapping his hands away and scolding him a third time for too much public affection, I finally set the basket between us, which of course elicited protests and promises to behave. We finished our watermelon with him pursing his lips evidently trying to figure out a way to get around my defense barrier without being too obvious about his objective and

my trying not to giggle at his furrowed brow and shifting eyes.

I shut my eyes in order to appreciate the fresh air and sounds of nature when he suddenly said, "I love you, Kara, even when you won't let me show it, I still love you."

With my eyes still closed I answered, "You can show me tonight. Right now, will you help me maneuver so I can lean my back on that tree and watch the stream? You can put your head in my lap and take a nap."

"Sure," he said and scrambled to assist me. "Will you rub my back as well?"

"Yes, Bri, as long as you don't try to get fresh anymore."

He stuck out his hand and said, "Deal. Let's shake on it."

I stupidly did so and he pulled me under himself.

I pushed at his shoulders while he lowered his head and whispered, "Changed my mind. I'd rather do this instead."

At that moment we both heard several twigs snap and turned to the source of the noise. It was a troop of young kids with a counselor of some kind hiking towards the woods. They must have been about seven or eight years old. The girls covered their mouths giggling while the boys made faces that clearly depicted that they considered what Brian was doing to me totally gross. I started to laugh so hard that I almost wet my shorts.

"I can't get a break," he muttered and jumped off me. "Come on, Kara, since we obviously can't do what I want let's at least get some exercise."

I continued to hold my sides and snicker as our audience continued their hike. Brian stomped off to get the tricycle. As soon as I was able to compose myself, I collected the trash and stuffed it back into the picnic basket. Brian brought the leg brace and special shoes to exchange for my slip-ons and dropped them on the blanket next to me. I put them all on while he gathered up our stuff and locked the wheelchair and all of it back in the trunk. He then helped me stand and get on the bike.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked. "I think the seat moved when I took the bike off the car, so I might need to adjust the length from the pedals."

I lifted my left foot to measure. "No, it's fine, Bri."

"Good. Then let's get your other foot strapped on and we're ready to go."

He pushed me off the grass until the tires were firmly on the trail and I could pedal by myself. We proceeded to enter the woods with me riding and him hiking beside me. The forest was glorious. It was cooler than where we had been and beams of light poked through the foliage to clearly unveil the dirt path through the trees. We ventured about a hundred yards with him holding on to the back of my seat just in case until I asked him to let go and allow me to continue completely unaided.

"I don't think that's such a good idea, Kara.

"Why not?" I protested. "I ride with Sara all the time. I'm sure I can do pedal here, too."

"Sweetheart, you're only used to flat cement not a bumpy surface like this.

"Brian, stop treating me like a child again. You know how condescending that is."

"I just don't want you to get hurt."

"I appreciate your concern, Bri. I really do, but you have to let me go sometimes. Remember, you can't be around 24/7 to keep me safe. I'll be fine. In fact, I'll prove it. Watch and eat my dust!"

With that, I shook of his hand and started to pedal away from my husband as fast as I could. I aimed for two big oak trees directly ahead of us and decided to maneuver between them before Brian could catch me. However, I did not know something vital--the trees stood at the edge of a small cliff with a drop of about three feet. Additionally, the roots of the tree on the right were above the ground so when my back wheel hit them the bike took off at a 45° angle leaning to the left. I soared about 25 feet in the air and landed on my good side with the tricycle sideways almost on top of my body. As I hit the earth, I slid on my arm and face about another 15 feet in the dirt and gravel.

I heard Brian's footsteps as he raced to my aid crying, "Kara! No! God, please let her be alive."

I lay sideways on the ground, stunned by what had just happened. Although Brian clearly thought I might be dead, probably from a broken neck, my body did not hurt at all, anywhere. Even my face and right arm smashed into dirt mixed with pebbles was not sore, just distorted due to being pressed. My body felt as if I just had fallen sideways from a sitting position, not recently been thrown a considerable distance. The only predicament I could perceive was that I was completely unable to move; yet it was due to the weight of the bike, not interior paralysis. Brian stopped short before he approached me. I detected rather than saw his presence because my back was to him.

He said cautiously, "Kara? Can you hear me?"

I mumbled, "Of course I can. You're right next to me."

He knelt and put his hand on my right shoulder, which was in the air. "Whew! Thank You, God. Sweetheart, where are you hurt? Is anything broken? What do you want me to do to help?"

"I'm not hurt at all. I just can't move. Untie my right foot. It's very awkward up in the air still tied to the pedal."

He did so and it fell so that I was completely lying on my left side.

"Did that hurt?"

"No, not at all."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, Bri. I'm sure."

"Are you positive?"

"If you ask me that one more time...."

"I get the picture."

Brian clapped and rubbed his hands together. "Okay then. I'm going to get the bike off of you and set it upright. Mother, may I?"

"That would be nice," I responded ignoring the sarcasm.

He did so, saying, "Don't move yet. I want to check for broken bones. I can't believe I left my cell phone charging in the car."

I attempted to sit up anyway.

"Kara," he admonished. "I asked you not to do that."

"Brian, I'm fine."

With my good hand free, I brushed the gravel off my face and neck. "See, Sweetheart, not even a scratch."

He stared at me in astonishment and fell backwards into the tricycle seat.

"You're not even bruised? I can't believe it. I saw the whole thing. It was awful. I think my heart even stopped beating when I watched you soar in the air. I know my lungs did."

"Well, as you see, I really am fine. I told you."

"God had to have protected you, Kara. There's no other explanation. I wish I had what I just witnessed on tape so you could see it, too."

I turned and looked back at the two trees, the root that my wheel hit as I went between them, the ledge that resembled a ski ramp, as well as the long trail of skid marks that ended at my behind. Then I perceived something else--if I had been thrown 5 feet to either side I would have sunk in a stagnant pond (which was behind Brian) or slammed into another tree. The miracle not only involved God's cushioning my body, but also His aim. Only then did I shudder at the tragedy that could have been my fate. When Brian noticed me trembling he got up, sat beside me, and enfolded me in his arms and warmth. I was too awestruck to speak, so I merely pointed to those places.

"I just saw them, too, Kara. I was hoping you wouldn't."

I began to sob quietly and whispered into his neck, "Do you realize He just saved me when I deliberately did something reckless, not to mention completely stupid?"

"I was wondering how many times He does that and we never even know it."

"God really is awesome, isn't He, Bri."

My husband squeezed me even tighter.

"Yes, I do believe He truly is."

We prayed and worshipped Him before we did anything else.

"Known to God from eternity are all His works." (Acts 15:18)

"There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:3)

"The very hairs of your head are numbered." (Matthew 10:30)

"He shall give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone." (Psalm 91:11-12)

Unlike the ride to the park, our trip home was quiet, except for a CD mix I had made of some of my favorite Christian rock music playing softly in the background. Every time we stopped at a red light Brian stroked my cheek with the back of his right hand and smiled so peacefully that his emotion spilled over to me. As we were nearing my parents' house, I decided to call them to ask if we could leave Sara there overnight. Thus, Brian and I spent even more interrupted time praising God, as well as savoring each other.

In spite of being reminded so strongly to grant God unrestricted access into my life, several years later I got so offended at my husband one morning that we had a huge argument about what I could and could not do. When our disagreement escalated, I deliberately began to defend my position with self-righteous anger as I increasingly allowed whatever he said about trying harder bruise my feelings. Instead of reacting maturely to what I perceived as disrespect, I responded more viciously every time I spoke. I was fixing breakfast when Brian came up behind me tying his tie.

He placed his suit jacket over a chair and asked, "Kara, why aren't you standing up to do that? You know, you need to do that more."

I turned my head slightly but continued to pour juice into two of our plastic glasses. "You know why."

I then chair-walked to the table carrying one.

He persisted, "No, I don't know why. Tell me."

I looked at him perplexed, "Bri, why don't you go finish dressing, hmmm? I'll take care of this."

He stayed where he was, obstructing my path to retrieve the other glass.

"I'm done. Did you have a bad dream, Kara? You're awfully grouchy this morning."

I sighed. "Brian, I really don't want to have this conversation right now."

"Why not? Is something wrong?"

"Yes, you're blocking me. I'm trying to do something here, for you I might

add."

"Did I ask you to?"

I shook my head in frustration. "Just let me through, all right?"

I tried to go around him but he put his hands on the arms of the chair, so not only was he in my path I could not move at all.

"Brian, let go. You would never do that to a normal person."

"Do what?"

"Grab their body so they couldn't pass you."

"I'm not even touching your body."

I started to go from merely annoyed to irritated. "You know that a wheelchair is supposed to be treated exactly as if it were indeed the person's body."

"That's nonsense. I've never believed it." He pinched my shoulder. "Now that's your body."

"Brian, stop it! Why are you asking me these questions now? You have to get to work and I need to...."

"To what, Kara? Exactly what do you need to do that's so urgent?"

I shook him off and wheeled toward the bedroom starting to get mad. "I don't know why you're trying to provoke me but I'm not playing. Whether you like it or not, my life is not a game."

"I just want you to get well," he pleaded. "I'm tired of you being in that damn chair."

I stopped short.

"Like I'm not? You're not the one stuck here all day with only a dog and a computer as company."

"You can do more than that, Kara. You just don't try hard enough."

I got mad.

"Brian, I can see where this is going. I think you'd better leave before we start saying things we'll regret."

"I'm serious, Kara. Why don't you get a job if you want to get out of here."

"Brian, how many times do I have to tell you that no one wants to hire a person with only one good hand who doesn't walk. I can't even be a cashier at a supermarket."

"Why not?"

I looked at him in shock. "Where have you been these past eight years?"

"Stuck in a rut."

I became furious.

I said through clenched teeth, "Let me get this straight, your life is bad because I, not you, are stuck in a wheelchair. I told you not to marry me. I told you that one day this would happen."

He shot back, "Oh, yes, everything's about you. It's always about you, Kara. What about me? What about what I want for a change."

"Brian, please leave. This isn't getting us anywhere." I turned around and started down the hall again.

"What are you going to do? Nothing? Why don't you at least try to walk," he shouted at my back.

"Go to hell, Brian," I responded dispassionately over my shoulder and entered the bedroom.

"Well, it'll be better than being with you!"

I stopped and turned to face him again, "Remember that's the last thing you said to me if something happens to me today," and shut the door.

I heard him head after me, curse, turn around and slam the front door. The Holy Spirit tried to get my attention to keep me within His jurisdiction but I ignored His gentle urging because foolishly I wanted to savor being mad. Even when my husband called as soon as he got to his office to make up, I merely listened to his voice on the answering machine and even held on to Sara's collar so she would not be able to move. Then, I took the phone off the hook and tossed in on the middle of the bed.

As a consequence, God withdrew Himself from me until I forgave the slights (*Matthew 56:14-15 and Mark 11:25-26*), which I adamantly refused to do. Therefore, my pride and emotional overreacting put me in a dangerous position outside of God's will. In other words, I tied His hands instead of freeing them to block another possible tragedy. Until I was forced by circumstances to review the entire situation calmly and rationally I stewed in indignation against Brian. Although this predicament was far less dangerous than flying through the air, my own words and actions instigated a chain reaction that due to my unforgiveness He was restricted from preventing.

I chair-walked back into the living room where I let Sara out for a run. Still fuming, I started some laundry and made the bed. I thought about calling Pam or Kathy but decided that I really didn't want to bother them with Brian's and my petty fight. So, I seethed at him alone and the more I did the angrier I got. How dare he keep judging the difficulty of my life when he had two perfect hands and could walk! I became so caught up in my blame and self-pity that I even thought how much he'd miss me after I divorced him for mental and emotional cruelty. I was on a roll.

Sara scratched at the screen in the sliding door in the bedroom as I was strapping my ankle brace so I let her inside. Since there was no other audience, I began to complain about Brian to her and I wedged and tied my right shoe over it. I slid on my left sock.

"Did you hear what Daddy said to me this morning? The nerve of him!"

"Woof."

I put on and tied that shoe.

"Do you agree with me that he was way out of line?"

"Woof."

I stroked her soft fur and nuzzled her neck with my chin. She put both front paws on my lap. "Good girl. I knew you'd understand. What do you want to do now? How about a bike ride?"

She thumped her tail on the rug twice, stood and spun around. I gathered our stuff and went to the front door. When I opened it, a wave of intense hot air breezed into the condo.

"Whew! Sara, it's way to hot. How about we go to the pool instead?"

She was game for that, too. I went back into the bedroom to get my bathing suit, etc.

"Hmmm. Where did I leave it?"

As I searched I spotted it hanging on the bar at the far wall of the shower stall.

"Crap. I'll just wear another one."

I bit my thumbnail.

"No, I really want to wear that one. I'll get it myself. I'll show Brian that I don't always take the easy way out. What are a few more minutes? Wait here, Sara. I'll be right back." Famous last words.

I positioned the chair in front of the shower, locked the breaks, and transferred to the bench normally, without a hitch. I scooped up my bathing suit and reached over to shut the toilet seat lid so I could put the suit there. I stood in the shower, grabbed the bar to my right, and set my left foot on the bathroom floor. When I tried to lift my weaker leg however, my brace caught on the seat. I discovered also that my shoe likewise was stuck under the rim of marble supporting the sliding door track. I held on to the door with my left hand, turned that toe to the left about two inches to dislodge it, and heard a sound like a dry twig snapping in a forest.

I thought, "Damn. I broke the brace."

Suddenly, I looked up and noticed that the stripes in the wallpaper had vanished and the wall was completely white. This was not good. I knew that I was about to fall and rapidly had to make a decision as to where. If I fell forward, my foot would remain in the shower and most likely break off. Bad. Plus, I would fall face-forward on the chair, which would fall backwards and smash my face against the hard tile. Worse. If I fell to the left I had three choices where to aim: the toilet, the glass door, or the faucet. Not much better. So, in a split second, I reached behind me with my left hand, grabbed the bench, tossed it sideways, and flipped myself backwards into the stall. Blessedly, my

stuck foot and leg went forward, missing the ledge, so I ended up on the floor of the shower with my legs sticking out over the door track outside, right in front of the wheelchair. Amazingly, I was completely unharmed, or so I thought.



CHAPTER 14



I attempted to lift my bottom up with only my good hand several times, but I could not get enough leverage to hoist myself onto the shower ledge. So, I tried several times using both of them. Again, not enough clearance. I looked up at the grab bar over the right side of my head and reached for it but could not grab it with either hand. Crap. That was not going to work either. I sighed with frustration and started to click my teeth together. I sighed again, puffed out my cheeks, and blew making my lips flap together. I hated this. Why did something so small--like falling down--have to take so much time and effort just to undo? I heard Sara whining and called to her.

"Sara, you can come here now. I'm fine, just feeling very, very stupid."

She instantly appeared at the door, but could not approach me for comfort because she could not squeeze between the wheels. So, she leaped over the toilet onto my feet.

"Owww! Get off me, Sara!"

She obliged and gingerly stepped into the shower stall to sit beside me. I scratched between her shoulders and she licked my face.

"Good girl. Now lie down. I want to see where the brace cracked."

However, it was untouched. That was strange; I was certain I had heard it break. Then I perceived that my ankle under it was slightly pinker than normal in one spot, but there was no pain there. So, what caused that noise? I tried to get up but could not reach the grab bar to my right above my head, nor get my knees under my torso in order to crawl of the shower. My calves began to become sore against the shower door bottom track so I reached forward and grabbed both towels hanging on the rack just outside the shower and stuffed them under my knees. I reached forward again, unlocked the chair and kicked it away from the stall.

I said, "Okay God, You know what just happened and where I am. Please have someone call so Sara will get the phone and bring it to me."

I suddenly remembered that I had taken it off the hook because I was so mad at my husband. Crap. How was I going to get out of here? Maybe she would understand retrieve it without hearing a ring. Worth a try.

"Sara, please bring me the phone on my night table."

She looked at me as if I were speaking Cat.

"Sara, phone."

She slowly got up and walked into the bedroom where she disappeared from sight.

I called out, "Nightstand, Sara," and crossed my fingers. She reappeared with something in her mouth but since I had left my sunglasses on the dresser I could not see clearly what it was. As she approached I perceived that it was not the phone but the small Bible that Brian had given me in the hospital.

"Sara, not my Bible, the phone. The Bible won't do me any good in here. I need a different kind of help. Go back and bring me the portable phone."

Instead of returning to the bedroom however, she dropped the book in my lap, gingerly stepped over my legs, and resumed her former position in the shower stall. I ordered her to bring me the phone again but she put her head in my lap a second time. I attempted a third command but this time she did not even budge. I thought, "Great. I'm stuck here with only a dog and a book and it's not even eight o'clock yet. Great. Just great, Sara. You understand that?"

Since she obviously was not going to do my bidding, I tried to convince God again to save me. "God, don't even pretend You're not listening because I know You hear everything. Since I can't call out and no one can call in, please get someone over here."

About a half-hour later I heard a familiar knock on the front door.

I said, "I'm impressed! Thank You. Kim, I fell in the shower and can't get out! Go get your mom."

Instead of answering, she continued to bang and I realized she could not hear my voice. I thought, "Not a problem; Sara can get Kim's attention."

I patted her head and said, "Sara, answer the front door. It's your friend Kim."

No response but a slight tail wag.

"Sara, Kim's here to play with you. Go to the front door."

She looked at me but **did** not move. I tried to lift her only left-handed, sideways.

"Sara, door!"

Again, nothing.

"Sara, at least bark, will you?"

Another tail wag. Finally the knocking ceased and we were alone once more.

"Thanks, Sara. Thanks a lot." Then of course she barked. "Thanks again. No, I'm not going to pet you. God, why didn't You let Kim hear my voice? Are You having an off day?" Only then did it occur to me how stupid it was to alienate the only Person Who knew where I was. I mumbled, "Sorry, will You bring her back?" and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

About another hour passed, while Sara lay still beside me and I kept trying to get out of the shower the ways I had at the beginning of this ordeal.

"Okay, God. What's the problem here? You mad at me or something? I need some help. I've fallen and I can't get up."

I always wanted to say that, but not for real--just as a joke. However, I was beginning to get uncomfortable on the cold, hard tile. I scratched Sara's ears and shoulders. I put my head on her back and waited some more, becoming increasingly annoyed at God--even more so than I had been at my husband. Oddly, I fell asleep. I sat up again after what I now know must have been at least another hour. My ankle was throbbing and red. It was apparent that only the brace kept it from swelling.

"God, joke's over. Please help me. I'm thirsty. I need something to drink."

Surprisingly, Sara had woken up with me and responded to that command. I heard her toenails click on the linoleum as she went to the kitchen and fetched me a soda from the refrigerator. When she returned, she unclenched her jaws enough to drop the sack on top of the Bible in my lap and when I loosened the drawstring I found a cold ginger ale. I rubbed her ears.

"Good girl, Sara. Now bring me the phone."

She ignored that command and left the bathroom entirely.

"Sara," I yelled. "Get back here," but she continued to walk through the bedroom until I could no longer see nor hear her.

"Sara!" I yelled. "Bad dog! Come back here!"

I waited.

Nothing.

"Sara, I screamed, "come back here!"

Again, zilch. I bit the inside of my cheek in frustration and drummed my fingers on the shower floor. I popped open the can and took a swig. My ankle began to hurt and I noticed that it was starting to get even redder.

"Oh, no. The snap must have been a bone. Crap. God, I must be in more trouble here than I thought. I wanted to cry. "Why won't You help me?"

I lay on my left side and tried to get comfortable again, but the floor was too hard without Sara as a pillow and the bench legs were crowding me. I sat upright again.

"God!" I whined. "Why aren't You doing anything? Are You busy or something?" I put my head in my right hand over my knee and yawned. As I sat there, now fuming, I remembered the Bible. I sighed and took another swallow out of the can. Stuck and having nothing better to do than rant at Sara or God, I opened the book at random and read.

"Now there was no water for the congregation so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron and the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying, 'If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness that we and our animals should die here? And, why have you made us come out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there any water to drink!' So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and they fell on their faces and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod and your brother Aaron and gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes and it will yield its water. Thus, you shall bring water for them out of the rock and give drink to the congregation and their animals.' So Moses took the rod before the Lord as He commanded him and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'" (Numbers 20:2-12)

Boy, were these people whiners. I was glad that I was not at all like them. No wonder Moses reacted the way he did. Wait a minute, God was furious at him, not the people who had been complaining so much. That didn't seem right. However, I faintly remembered something. Where was it? I began to leaf through the New Testament looking for what I had underlined. I found what I was looking for after about another half-hour. It was immediately after two of Jesus' major teachings--the Lord's Prayer and receiving from God.

"Whenever you stand praying if you have anything against anyone forgive him that your Father in Heaven may also forgive you, for if you forgive (people) their offenses (against you) your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if you do not forgive (people) their offenses neither will your Father forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15 & Mark 1:25-26)

I recalled another Scripture and looked it up in the back concordance.

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive a

stricter judgment." (James 3:1)

So, God judged Moses behavior differently than the others because he should have known better because of his closer association with Him. He held Moses accountable to a higher standard. Interesting. Moses should have forgiven them, no matter how petty and immature they were acting. Suddenly, the reasoning behind what had led me to where I was stuck hit like a ton of bricks. I had allowed selfish anger into my own actions this morning. I realized that I had been very fortunate not to be involved in more misfortunes than I had and started to praise God for His forgiveness and mercy towards me--the same I should have shown my husband. Instead of feeling mad any longer, I felt so ashamed.

Exactly when it had been vital that I let God direct my reactions I lashed out verbally in total disrespect for Him as well as Brian, childishly aiming to be cruel and causing a rift between myself and both of them. I had put myself entirely out of His hands when I reacted with deliberate malice just because my feelings were hurt. God wanted me to see how another person, Moses, did the same thing out of frustration and that single fit of anger denied him entrance to the land that he faithfully led his people to for four decades. His behavior let Satan have a hold in his life just as I had. The worst thing was that I had allowed him once again to "sucker-punch" me. I looked up another verse, whose margin notes led me to yet one more.

"Be angry and do not sin, nor let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:27)

"Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows that he will also reap. For, he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting Life. And, let us not grow weary while doing good for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." (Galatians 6:7-9)

"God, I am so sorry. Please accept my apology and teach me how to get out of this mess."

"Take firm hold of instruction; do not let her go. Keep her for she is your life." (Proverbs 4:13)

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6)

"Amen to those."

"To you has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God." (Mark 4:11)

"God has revealed them to us through His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yes, even the deep things of God for what man knows the things of a man except the spirit which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. These things we also speak not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which

the Holy Spirit teaches--comparing Spiritual things with Spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of God for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them because they are Spiritually discerned." (I Corinthians 2:10-14)

How could I have forgotten that I have the sum of it here in my hand? I hit my head with my left palm.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid. Get a grip, Kara. And here I've been sitting for hours, all this time with the solution in my lap. How could I have been so blind? Of course, the Bible can get me out of this particular predicament the same way it has for everything else. God, thank You for Your patience with me, again. Please remind me to apologize to Sara Lee as well as Brian. You steered her to bring me this instead of the phone, didn't You."

"I do not desire, brethren, that you be ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own opinion." (Romans 11:25a)

"Thank You for helping me, especially in a way I never would have imagined. I thought that my only problems were a possible broken ankle and needing to get out of this shower. However, You knew that these were only symptoms and that I needed to deal with them before You could help me, right? See, I'm starting to get the picture."

"Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes. In understanding be mature." (I Corinthians 14:20)

"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend, with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that you be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-18)

"Thank You, Father. I hear, understand, forgive, and will obey what You've just shown me. Will You get me out of here now? Please?"

I looked at my watch and could not believe the time. Five hours had passed.

As soon as I released my bitterness and restored the bonds that restored both my marriage and relationship with God, He revealed how I could save myself from this predicament. I suddenly recalled how Brian and I had practiced how to get my body out of the pool by putting both hands on the cool-deck behind my back and pushing off the step below where I was seated with my good foot. After rehearsing this action for hour upon hour over several years, one day I finally managed to lift my bottom enough to reach the edge of the pool and sit there.

However, imitating this involved pivoting my body completely around to face the opposite direction, something I was very reluctant to do since it involved moving my injured leg and more pain than I was in already. I

examined the brace considering that my ankle was as stabilized as it would be in a cast, so that if I moved it there should be no more damage than what had already taken place. I took a huge breath, lay on my back and gently pulled my feet into the shower stall with me, keeping them on the wall with my knees bent and sort of "walking" sideways. In that cramped and supine position, I guided my legs until my heels were completely flat on the back wall. I was sobbing with pain, yet I had an inexplicable calmness that what I was doing would turn out okay.

When my body was turned completely 180° to where it had been ten minutes before, I sat upright, put both hands behind my shoulders on the shower ledge and kicked the wall with my good foot as hard as I could. I managed to get my bottom off the shower floor, but now appeared to be in an even worse predicament with my back lying on top of the door tracks. Therefore, it, too, began to throb almost as much as my ankle. Due to the intense pain I almost let myself drop back into the shower and sob in frustration. Simultaneously though, I became mad, so much so that I kicked the wall a second time even harder with such force that I fully expected to break at least a few tiles. That final blow did the trick and I landed on the bathroom floor in front of the toilet and completely out of the stall.

I lay completely stunned, until Sara appeared at my head and began to lick my face. I waved her away and dragged myself to the phone in the bedroom, a trip that lasted about another fifteen minutes even though it only was about ten-15 feet. It was then that I remembered where I had left the phone and began to whimper in frustration.

"God," I cried aloud. "I can't take this any more. My ankle is throbbing and as You can see, after all I just did to get free I can't even reach the phone. Apparently, although it seems that I'm now safe, really I'm not much better off than I was in the shower. Please, do something or just let me die this time. I don't want to live in this condition believing that someday I'll be whole again by faith anymore, even for You."

I slumped leaning on the bed moaning and crying without any restraint. Sara sat to my left and put her paw on my shoulder in sympathy. I patted her head and she lay her head on my lap. I thought about how ironic it was that after eight years of intensely trying to recover that I just wanted to curl up and die.

At the precise moment I let go of my faith, Brian walked in the bedroom and spotted my tired and limp body on the bedroom rug. Unbelievably, neither Sara nor I had heard him come home. He knelt and cradled my weak and disheveled body. I turned into his shoulder so he would not see how red and swollen I imagined my tearstained face to be.

He gently lifted my chin and asked, "What's wrong, Kara?"

I shuddered, "Fine, Bri, other than a probably broken ankle.

He stiffened. "Oh My God, Sweetheart! How? When? Why didn't you call me?"

I moaned and pointed upwards to the bed.

"How long have you been here?"

"I'll tell you later, Bri. Please take me to the emergency room. I think I'm going to faint." I lost consciousness before I could add anything else.

My husband scooped me into his arms and carried me out the front door. Kim was playing outside and he yelled to her to please stay with Sara and that we would be in touch. She promised that she would and ran inside the door that we had just exited. The trip to the hospital probably took fewer than five minutes, but Brian told me later that it seemed to take forever.

I awoke to find myself once more in a hospital bed with my right calf and foot supported by two pillows. It was encased in an enormous white bandage with four metal spikes protruding vertically several inches and a square rod connecting them with big screws. I was dazed by what seemed to be drugs wearing off but still lucid enough to remember what had transpired in the shower stall. Brian was sitting on the bed next to me and I cringed when I saw him, remembering all too vividly a similar situation.

He kissed me, stroked my cheek and said, "Kara, you broke your leg in three places.

"When I gasped in surprise he continued, "They wanted to encase your leg in a cast that went all the way up to your waist, but I explained that you had to be able to bend your knee, which thank God wasn't affected, so I authorized an operation to insert four metal spikes in your tibia instead. We'll have to hire a nurse to help clean the wound every day, but at least I can get you out of bed sometimes and carry you into the den or wherever you want for a change of scenery. I know it'll be rough being bedridden again, but we'll get through this setback the way we have everything else."

"Fine, Bri, I trust you to have made the best decision. And, yes, for us this actually should be a piece of cake."

He laughed and hugged me. "So, Kara, exactly what did happen?"

"I think we might want something to drink. This is going to be long."

Being confined to bed this time was not nearly as bad, or boring, as after brain and lung surgery. My parents, Pam and Scot, Kathy and Kim, as well as all of our other friends visited regularly, so I had more entertainment than I needed to get through this monotonous ordeal. I had a visiting nurse named

Cindy and a therapist called Nina who visited daily to change my bandages and make me follow a regimen of bed exercises to keep my upper body as toned as it had been while I was in regular physical therapy. They both were quite efficient, as well as nice and funny. However, best thing about both of them was that they were chocaholics and used to bring me candy bars, something that I had to keep secret from my health-nut husband. Yeah, those were good times: chocolate every single day.

Although Brian was extremely busy with an important case, we knew that it was vital for us to be with and pray together every single day. So, we designated a set time every evening to be together with the phone unplugged, as well as total silence from the TV or any music. For the first time in years, we stopped coasting on our past belief in God and renewed our commitment to Him daily.

"We are children of God." (Romans 8:16b)

"Be imitators of God as dear children." (Ephesians 5:1)

"Most assuredly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do, for whatever He does the Son does also in like manner." (John 5:19)

"Imitate me just as I imitate Christ." (I Corinthians 11:1)

"The things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Corinthians 4:18)

"Be patient." (James 5:7)



CHAPTER 15



After ten years of therapy with numerous trainers, I decided that I'd had enough of them and that by that time I knew what my body still needed to recover more than anyone else did. However, I still need to keep in shape and had not given up the dream of one-day walking again. Since I had been wanting for years to find out what I would be able to accomplish safely by myself without the watchful eyes of a therapist, family, or friends I finally decided to take action, without first consulting Brian because of the episode with the tricycle.

Even though that was years ago, I still remembered it vividly and the crack it had caused in our marriage. So, without even consulting him I called and registered with a local service I'd heard of that transported people in wheelchairs for a nominal fee. They had a cancellation that morning and I made an appointment to be picked up at 9:00, taken home at 12:30.

Before I left on my new outing I reviewed specific Scriptures, as well as prayed and asked for God's guidance on what to and not to attempt. My heart was pounding with anticipation as I reexamined them, for I was acutely aware of the possible repercussions and pitfalls of my determination to recover certain actions. By that time, I had fallen many times while attempting to take even a single step without holding on to something, but I needed to do more than just sit in different places all day. Not only was I determined to put my marriage back on track, but expand my confidence in God's willingness and ability to heal my body.

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith alone save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to him, 'Depart in peace, be warmed, and filled,' and does not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus, faith

by itself if it does not have works is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without your works and I will show you my faith by my works.'" (James 2:17-18)

As I got dressed I vowed once more to let God guide my recovery, cell by cell, for as long as it took to see any more results. I packed my things in a gym bag, chair-walked out of my parent's home, and waited at the end of their driveway with my heart beating wildly for the bus to arrive. When the driver pulled up I almost balked. However, it was pretty hard to pretend that I was not the person being sought when I was sitting in a black wheelchair.

"Hello," he said as he rounded the bus to work the wheelchair lift. "You must be Kara. I'm Fred and I'll be your driver today."

"Yes," I responded. "What was your first clue? Sorry for being sarcastic, but I'm very nervous. This is my first time leaving home without my family or friends since I became disabled."

He laughed and opened the side-rear doors to expose the lift and push the button to lower it to the ground. "First time, eh? You must feel like a big girl."

"No, actually I feel like an idiot. I'm not sure this was a good idea."

"Kara," he said as he came up behind me and rolled the chair to hoist it into the bus. "You've got to begin sometime. God knows where you are and what you're doing. Just trust in Him."

With that remark, he pressed a button to activate the lift, closed the doors, and left me sitting at the back of the bus alone. When he reentered vehicle and approached to fasten the clamps that held the chair safely in place for the trip, he asked me something else that I wondered if God inspired Him to remind me about maintaining faith in His care, as well as ability to operate.

I remembered, "*Ah, Lord God, Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.*" (Jeremiah 32:17)

I looked at Fred in amazement, felt my confidence restore itself, and said, "I'm ready to go."

He grinned, winked at me and said, "Then let your faith do its work. Don't try to hinder what God wants you to do."

I nodded stupefied and we left for my new therapy. When we rolled up to the gym I began to worry again that I was acting foolishly by stepping out alone without a caretaker. After the driver had unfastened my chair and before he opened the back doors to lower me to the ground another sensation of terror swept over my body like a wave. For the second in under an hour I wanted to cry and go home and hide. Again, the Lord spoke to me by reminding me of another Scripture.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5b)

As I was pondering this verse, the driver let down the ramp and wheeled me into the building.

I stopped him from pushing me farther and said, "I can take it from here."

Fred saluted me with a smile. "Good luck. Play nice with the other kids."

I chuckled as I watched my lifeline to home depart and finally disappear through the gate.

"Okay, Lord. I'm completely under Your direction. Lead the way."

I began to chair-walk and suddenly realized that I'd never really done it before an audience and that people were staring at me. I remembered the first time I saw my reflection in the bedroom mirror doing so and how I had cried because I looked like a hunchback wheeling with only one arm and the other resting useless on my lap. I started to panic yet once more and whispered, "Help me, Father. I can't do this."

Instantly, a voice asked, "Kara, is that you?"

I could not believe it. I ask God to conceal me and He makes me even more obvious than I was previously.

I looked at the source of my new irritation and stammered, "Kathy? What are you doing here?"

"I come here three times a week during my lunch hour to use the weights, but today I had to take an early break. I never expected to see you, Kara. How are you?"

She stood straight and searched the room. "Where's Brian? I don't see him."

"I'm here by myself."

She knelt in front of my chair, puzzled. "How did you get here? Did he just drop you off and leave?"

I touched her shoulder. "Brian doesn't even know what I'm doing. It's a surprise. Please don't tell him, or anyone else for that matter, that you saw me."

"Sure, but will you be okay? I was just leaving, but if you want me to stay with you I will. I just have to call my boss."

I pulled her ear close to my mouth and whispered, "Please don't. This whole experiment is for me to find out what I can do alone. However, before you go would you mind wheeling me to the weight room? I feel too conspicuous. I know I'll have to get used to it, but not today. Not yet anyway."

"Of course. Where do you want to go?"

"That's part of the problem, Kathy; I don't know and I don't know whom to ask."

"I do," she said and wheeled me down a long corridor into the weight room.

I saw at a glance that I already was acquitted with the machines because my therapist had me using some of the same ones at his office. However, although I was familiar with the mechanisms themselves, I had no idea what settings to use or if I even could get on or off anything without assistance. .

A pretty petite blonde woman about my age approached me. "Hello. Can I help you with something?"

"I have an appointment with Lenore. I'm here for my initial consultation."

She looked puzzled. "I'm Lenore, but I don't understand. Consultation for what?"

"To work out."

She shifted her weight, from side to side, obviously uncomfortable. "Are you sure you have the right place? This is an exercise room; we don't have a physical therapist on staff here. Why aren't you at the hospital facility?"

I looked her squarely in the eye. "I was discharged from there a long time ago after I was told that I'd reached a peak and would not get any better. So, I came here."

She grimaced. "I don't understand. If you're not going to get better why do you want to come here?"

"To continue therapy by myself. Since insurance won't cover it I have to do it alone now."

"Ma'am, this is a regular sports complex. It would be far too dangerous for you to exercise here, even with a partner."

"Believe me, by this time I know what I need. I just have to do it and I'll be very careful. I won't even attempt a thing unless you approve it first. Please give me a chance."

Lenore gave me a polite artificial smile and said, "I have to go and get the manager. Wait here, please."

She rushed away to find assistance and I realized that I was going to have to convince whomever came back with him to allow me to work out.

"Lord," I whispered as I watched the other people train, "help me please."

Lenore returned with a solemn man who immediately went on the offensive. "Ma'am, I'm sorry, but we cannot allow you to exercise in this facility by yourself."

"I understand. I just hope the attorneys for the ADA do."

"The ADA, what's that?"

"Americans with Disabilities Act. They'll love this."

I wheeled around to leave. He caught my shoulder.

"Why don't you go somewhere that will be easier for you? I'm very concerned about your safety. Please reconsider."

"I have. I want to work out here. I have to get used to normal situations, because the world didn't change just because I did. I promise not to attempt anything too dangerous and I know my limits. I just need a place to push them. And consider the ramifications if I'm successful. It would be great PR."

"Fine," he gave in, "you can work out here, but we'll be watching."

"I hope so. I want witnesses," I said as he walked back to her office.

I turned to Lenore. "Since I'm going to be here three times week, we'd better get started. Time's a wasting."

That was the beginning of a new level of recovery--independence in 1999. Presently, in 2004 I am still working out there and have retrained my brain to be able to exercise almost totally by myself. I have learned to set up and transfer to most of their machines and rarely fall over any more. I still have to hold on to something stable in order to balance, but am continuing to improve, cell by cell.

Additionally, this past year I went back into physical therapy--for gait training--and have been attempting to use a walker for small distances where I do not need a free hand to carry anything, like laundry or food. Simultaneously, I have had several sessions of botox injections in my feet, ankles, and recently my right knee--in order to prevent muscle cramping and the intermittent pain of just standing. I still can get quite dizzy at times, but the rewards have far exceeded the pain of the shots. So, although the journey has been quite tedious at times, but also unbelievably extraordinary because God has continued to help me get healed. As I add this adendum, this is the fifteenth anniversary of the last day I walked. Tomorrow will be that of my brain surgery and the next the anniversary of the morning I woke up as a semi-quadruplegic (unable to move from my neck down, except for my left arm).

My faith and respect for God, as well as Jesus, has increased and my respect and love for Them Both multiplied by leaps and bounds. I wish that you might experience the same peace and comfort, without any discomfort or adversity of course.

"For, our light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do not look at the things seen but at the things which are not seen. For, the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Corinthians 4:17-18)

"For, we walk by faith not by sight." (II Corinthians 5:7)

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:3)

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning (Genesis 1:1) with God. All things were made through Him and nothing without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:1-3)

"And, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14a)

"He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary and young men shall utterly fail, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not go weary. They shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:29-31)

"Who Himself bore our sins in His Own Body on the cross, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by Whose stripes you were healed." (1 PETER 2:24, See also Isaiah 53:4b, Matthew 8:17)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow." (Hebrews 13:8)

"I am the Lord; I do not change." (Malachi 3:6)

"My words are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh." (Proverbs 4:22)

Amen.

