

— SECTION I —

If Only...

Where does a story truly begin? In life there are few clear-cut moments when we can look back and say, “Everything started here.” Yet, there are those times when a one minute decision can trigger a sequence of unforeseen events that set disastrous and irrevocable consequences into motion.

All is quiet in the house. I stare at my blank computer screen. The blinking cursor scolds me for not writing something, anything. It’s 2 a.m. My husband is asleep upstairs. I wish I could join him. I have to work tomorrow morning. But alas, I’m wide awake.

It’s not because I’m uncertain of my story. I know that all too well. I’ve lived with the agonizing memories for 31 years. The events are seared into my mind. I’m discovering that dragging so much pain from the deepest recesses of my consciousness and putting it on paper is proving to be more difficult than I could ever have imagined.

I’ve never told anyone outside my family the details of what happened to me. It would be so much easier to forget about it; to let it go; to move on. But I can’t. Many don’t realize just how terrible sin really is. Satan’s goal is to bring us pain, heartache, guilt, and shame. Jesus died to give us life—and to give it to us more abundantly!

The time has come to speak out. I am convinced that I must tell my story, not to parade my past before a curious crowd, but to glorify and honor my Father’s holy name. For if He can bring beauty out of the ashes of my life, you can be assured that He will do the same for you.

— CHAPTER I —

Little Decisions, Big Consequences

How fragile a life can be—so easily broken, so hard to mend.

Unknown

I was in love with life. I had grown up in a very conservative but loving home. I loved the Lord, but had never really given Him first place in my life. Looking back, I realize that I didn't have a close personal relationship with Him. I thought I was a good Christian though. I even played the organ and piano at church and sang with my sisters for special music. I would go to the nursing home on Sabbath afternoons to sing and visit with the old people, but I was far too busy living, working, and studying to spend very much time with my Savior. I thought I could handle things. I thought I knew best. After all, I was eighteen.

Basically, I had decided to do things my way. I sailed through my freshman year of nursing at Southern Missionary College, had my first car, and loved my first real job. Earlier in the year, against my parents' wishes, I'd entered the "Miss Kentucky" beauty pageant and won both the talent competition and "Miss Congeniality." But it was the bathing suit competition with its infamous walk down the runway that was to come back and haunt me. Interesting, isn't it, that it was that very part of the pageant that my father was so against. But I'm getting ahead of my story. All I can say now is that fateful summer, while living with my sister Linda and her husband, I felt very grown up.

One evening, after I'd finished my shift as a student nurse at a small drug and alcohol rehab facility, I slid behind the wheel of my cherry

red 1969 Pontiac LeMans, eager to head home for a good night's sleep. I rolled down the windows and cranked up the volume on the radio. A warm summer breeze blew a lock of my shoulder-length, light brown hair about my face as I eased my "baby" out of the parking lot onto the empty street in Crestwood, Kentucky. Brushing the lock aside, I harmonized with the pop vocalist on the radio. I glanced at the clock on the dashboard—12:30 a.m. Fifteen minutes and I'd be home.

I'd been working double shifts, covering for a night nurse whose attendance was spotty at best. On the nights she didn't show, I couldn't leave the floor until the morning nurse arrived. When I complained to my supervisor, she explained that the nurse had personal problems and asked me to be patient. After a few weeks even though I was exhausted, I was unable to fall asleep once I got home. When I told my supervisor of my problem, she went to her office and returned with a bottle of pills called Quaaludes.

"Take one or two of these immediately before leaving work. And by the time you get home you'll sleep like a baby."

I'd never before taken any pills to make me sleep, but I trusted her. She was not only a nurse, but also my supervisor; she ought to know. I had completed only one year of nursing school, which had not included pharmacology. I had grown up in Christian schools and even though I was in the midst of the "hippy days of drugs," I was totally untouched by it. In fact I had never heard about illegal drugs much less been offered them. It never occurred to me that taking prescription drugs without a prescription was illegal! I was just grateful that she had something to help me.

I did as she said, and it worked for a couple of weeks. But soon my body grew tolerant of the medication, and I needed to increase the dosage to acquire the same effect. On this particular night, the pills I'd taken were already weaving their dreamy cocoon of sleepiness in my brain when I exited the parking lot.

Zippering along the empty, tree-lined street, I tapped my fingers on the steering wheel. Not a soul was about; not another automobile

drove past. Only the headlights from my vehicle pierced the mantle of darkness in the sleepy Southern town.

As I approached a stop sign, I slowed down and looked both ways. Since no one was around, I rolled through the intersection. My foot had barely touched the accelerator when blue lights flashed in my rearview mirror. My heart sank.

“Great! This is all I need—a traffic ticket.” I sighed and eased to a stop beside the road. Once I’d shifted the car into park, I removed my driver’s license from my wallet and rolled down my window. Where had this guy been hiding? How had I missed seeing him? The police car’s headlights reduced my view of the approaching patrolman to a giant shadowy figure.

The officer bent his six-foot-four-inch frame down and peered into my car. A wide grin filled his strikingly handsome face. Whoa! What a hunk! This is definitely encouraging.

“Did you see that stop sign back there?” His voice oozed with charm.

“Er, yes sir.” I batted my eyelashes and smiled helplessly up into his face.

“Miss, I need to see your driver’s license and registration, please.”

“Yes, officer.” I handed him my license and retrieved my registration from the glove compartment. I silently watched as he examined the documents.

“Hmm, a Tennessee license—Collegedale.” His friendly demeanor gave me courage. Perhaps there was hope. “Are you a student?”

“Yes, sir. I’m studying nursing at Southern Missionary College. During the summer I’m living with my sister and working at the drug rehab.” I gestured in the direction from whence I’d come.

As he handed my license and registration back to me he flashed me a gigantic smile. “Well, I couldn’t possibly give you a ticket, you being my neighbor and all.”

“Neighbor?” I blinked in surprise.

“Yep. I live across the hall from your sister’s apartment. I’ve seen

you going in and out of her place all summer.”

“Really?” I was flattered that he remembered me.

“Yeah. Maybe we could date sometime. How about dinner Saturday night?”

I wasn’t in the habit of dating strangers and I knew it wasn’t a good idea to date a non-church member. But what’s the harm of dating a guy that wasn’t a member of my church—after all it was just one date! It wasn’t like I was going to marry the guy or anything! I thought for a moment. The man is my neighbor, and he did let me out of a ticket. Who’s safer to date than a policeman? And he’s so-o-o cute. I’d been working such long hours at the rehab. I quickly convinced myself that I deserved a break. “Sure. I’d love to go out with you on Saturday night.”

“Terrific! I’ll pick you up at seven.” He flashed me another smile.

“Seven it is.” I tipped my head to one side and smiled coyly.

“Drive carefully, you hear. It isn’t safe for young girls like you to be out and about at this hour.”

“Thanks. I will. Oh, I didn’t catch your name.”

“Dave. Dave Logan.” I

“OK, Dave. See you Saturday night.” I drove home, parked the car, and floated into Linda’s silent apartment. Tossing my car keys onto the dresser in my room, I prepared for bed. I felt very pleased with myself as I drifted off to sleep.

On Saturday night Dave arrived at my door looking more dashing than I’d remembered, and oh so charming. He took me to a quaint little Italian restaurant, complete with red-checked tablecloths, wine bottles for candleholders, and a fire crackling in the hearth, though it was mid-summer. As we followed the maitre de to our table, the women in the room stared openly at my handsome escort. Even the waitress couldn’t stop staring long enough to make eye contact with me as I placed my order. Flattered that he was interested in me, I basked in the attention.

On the way home, he drove in silence while I bounced from topic to topic in a typical eighteen-year-old fashion, chatting about my work,

my studies, my love of music, and my family. Parking his car outside our apartment house, he turned off the engine and looked soulfully into my eyes. I'd dated enough in high school and college to know that this was the moment in the evening where I had to take control of the situation. With a light-hearted enthusiasm I assured him I'd had an absolutely delightful evening. Instead of immediately hopping out of the car as I knew I should, I lingered.

He smiled then draped his arm across the back of the car seat and trailed his fingers along the line between my blouse and my neck. The mere thought of this man holding me in his arms and kissing me sent tingles of excitement up and down my spine. Reluctantly I placed my right hand on the door handle, preparing to exit. I whispered, "I've got to go."

"Wait." His eyes softened. "Brenda, I think I'm falling in love with you."

I laughed nervously. "In love? You don't even know me."

"I know you enough." He inched across the seat until I could feel his breath on my face.

Why can't I think of something wise or clever to say? He can't be serious. I searched his face for the hint of a smile. There was none.

He twirled a lock of my hair around his finger. "Spend the night with me. Maybe by morning you'll love me too."

"Listen, Dave, I'm not the kind of girl who goes in for that sort of relationship. I'm a Christian. I believe that sex was sanctioned by God. And He designed it to be between two married people." I noted the look of confusion on his face. "Long ago I vowed to save myself for the man I would one day marry."

His mouth dropped open; he drew back in surprise. "Are you saying you're a virgin?"

"Absolutely." I couldn't hide the note of pride creeping into my voice. Most of my college friends had long since lost all pretense of purity. At school I sometimes felt like Elijah when he lamented to God how all of Israel had bowed their knees to Baal. Dave stared incredulously at me,

as if I were a mutating specimen in a Petri dish.

“I want to wait until marriage because I believe that when two people have sex outside of marriage, they are married in God’s eyes, whether or not there is a legal document to prove it.”

“You’ve got to be kidding!” His burst of laughter filled the car. He pounded the steering wheel with the palm of one hand and shook his head as he laughed. “I can’t believe it!” He got out of the car, came around, and opened my door. As he took my hand and helped me to my feet, he gently kissed me on the cheek. “Strange as it may sound, you’ve made me want you all the more.”

Concerned that he might not understand how important my views were to me, I hastened to assure him. “I am serious about this.”

He laughed again and gave me a brotherly hug. “Don’t worry, princess. I like you enough. I will respect your wishes.”

Several nights later I came home from work after midnight. My body had become so accustomed to the sleeping pill routine that I had taken three before leaving the rehab. As I eased into the apartment building parking lot, Dave’s patrol car pulled up beside me. He leaped out of his car and dashed to the driver’s side of mine.

“Brenda!” He flashed me a disarming smile. “I just got the latest Doobie Brothers album. You’ve got to hear them! They’re fabulous.”

I wrinkled my forehead in consternation. “Who are the Doobie Brothers?”

“You never heard of the Doobie Brothers?” If a flying saucer had landed in the parking lot beside his patrol car he couldn’t have been more surprised. “Where have you been living?”

I laughed. “I’m afraid I grew up listening to religious music. We didn’t even have a television in our house. Dad calls it ‘devil-vision.’ He felt the same way about the devil’s music.”

Again Dave shook his head in disbelief. “Well, ya gotta hear them. Come on, you’ll love them.” He guided me from the car.

Though the pills I’d taken were beginning to spin their magic, I allowed his enthusiasm to overpower my craving for sleep. “OK, just for

a few minutes. But I really do need to get some sleep.”

As we walked toward his apartment, he told me about someone he'd pulled over that day for speeding. “You wouldn't believe the excuses this guy made.” He laughed and recited a few of them. “I think I've heard them all.”

He paused to unlock his apartment door and turn on the lights and then gestured toward the open door. “Come on in.”

I stepped inside and glanced about the neatly kept room, hardly the typical bachelor pad. I was pleasantly surprised.

“Make yourself comfortable.” He strode to the stereo and put on the album. I sat down on the sofa and leaned back to listen to the music. The phone rang. He picked it up and spoke in low tones. Covering the mouthpiece with his hands, he said, “This is police business. I have to take it in the other room.”

I stood up. “Maybe I should go. We can do this tomorrow.”

He gently took my arm. “No. Please don't go; it will only take a minute. I'll be right back.”

As I think back on that pivotal moment in my life, I've asked myself hundreds of times, why didn't I leave? I had the opportunity—he was on the phone and I was dead tired! I knew the dangers of being alone in a strange man's apartment, especially at that time of the night. Yet, the devil had set me up to fall into his trap by dulling my mind with drugs and then dangling in front of me a handsome hunk that lured me into his apartment! I fell hook, line and sinker!

So, instead of doing what I knew I should, reluctantly I agreed to stay. As pleasant as the music was, all I really wanted was to sleep. I sat down again on his couch to wait for him . . .

The next thing I knew, light from a window was shining in my face. I started in surprise. One quick gaze about the room and I realized I was in a strange bedroom. Stupefied, I glance at Dave's sleeping form beside me. His clothes lay strewn across the floor, and I could see mine draped on a chair on the far side of the room. What had I done? I was devastated beyond words. I had no memory of anything after sitting

down on the couch to wait for Dave to finish his phone call.

Filled with shame and horror. I burst into uncontrollable tears. I cried so hard that the bed shook. This awakened him.

“What? What’s wrong?”

I couldn’t speak. All I could do was sob.

“Why in the world are you crying?” He drew me into his arms. “Last night was absolutely wonderful. You sure weren’t crying then.” He gave a meaningful snicker which reduced me to another bout of tears. “Come on, don’t be upset. You were the one who wanted it!”

I pushed him away, gathered the sheet about my body and turned away from him.

He continued, “Is this about that virgin thing in the Bible? Well, don’t worry. I’ll do the right thing by you. I’ll marry you.”

At the mention of marriage, I wailed again. How could I marry this stranger? We’d only dated the one time. I didn’t know anything about him. Yet, I wondered, do I have a choice? In God’s eyes we’re married anyway!

I grabbed my clothes and ran into the bathroom. From outside the door, he continued to comfort me with promises of making an honest woman out of me. I dressed as quickly as I could and then waited until I saw my sister’s car leave the parking lot. She wouldn’t think anything about my not being home overnight because of my crazy work schedule. As soon as I was certain the coast was clear, I dashed across the hall and made a beeline for her bathroom. Dave ran after me, banging on Linda’s apartment door that I’d slammed behind me. Locking the bathroom door as well, I vomited into the toilet. I continued to vomit until I had only dry heaves. I felt weak all over when I staggered to my feet and stepped into the shower.

Guilt washed over me. If only I hadn’t gone to his apartment. If only I hadn’t taken the sleeping pills. I could hear my father’s voice: “The wages of sin is death.” I wished I could die. That would be the easy way out!

“Lord, what have I done? This has to be a nightmare. Make it stop!

Please, make it stop!” Feeling filthy and dirty, I scrubbed and scrubbed until my body was raw and sore. Yet I still felt unclean. I dried off, stumbled to my bedroom, and threw myself onto my bed. I sobbed until I had no more tears. Sliding to my knees, I pleaded with God to forgive me, to take my life.

My head ached from the medication’s hangover. My mouth felt like I’d swallowed a handful of cotton balls. If only I could think straight! If I married him, would I finish my nurse’s training? I’d wanted to be a nurse for as long as I could remember. When I told my parents, what would they say? What about the warnings in Scripture about marrying a non-believer? Could I deny God’s commands? Was there no other way?

By the time I arose from my knees, I knew what I would have to do. I would marry this man. I would pray that God would fill my heart with love for him. And maybe, just maybe, it would work out.

Today, I realize that we always have a choice. Two wrongs never make a right. Even though I prayed, I didn’t listen for God’s answer and I was about to make the biggest mistake in my life!