

Lifted

Given a New Song to Sing

by Katie Payne



DARE 2 SHARE

Lifted

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This is for the ones who are looking
for hope, for love, or a future.
This is written for you.
Your story's not over.

Dare 2 Share Book Preview

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*He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire...
He has given me a new song to sing.*

Psalm 40:2-3

Dare 2 Share Book Preview



Prologue

Usually, the prologue is the place where the author (me), is supposed to tell the reader (you), all about his/her credentials, intellect and skills, and why they are qualified to write a book.

But here's the thing... I'm not qualified.

I don't have a college degree.

I don't have a stellar resume.

I'm not anyone really that influential.

I'm just some random, 18-year-old kid from Illinois.

I'm really not anyone special on my own.

That's the thing, really. This book isn't actually about me. It's about God. I just get to play a part in His big story.

For years I ran away from Him, trying to make sense of things by myself. I couldn't. I found myself in a lot of trouble because of my pigheadedness. But I'm standing here today because God loved me too much to let me continue on my own way. And I'm writing to you today because I want to let you know God loves you too much to let you continue on your own way.

I'm not a prodigy. I'm a prodigal. I'm not qualified, but neither were many of the young people in the Bible that God chose to use—like Gideon, David or Peter.

I'm telling you God's story, lived out through me. I'm telling you about the collision between the holy and the haggard. I'm relaying how a dead person came back to life, lifted out of the pit of despair and put on a new road of hope.

But I should probably start at the beginning.

Shattered Innocence

I wish I could begin my story with a "Once upon a time, in a land far away..."

I wish I could say my story began with a celestial premonition or a godmother's gift.

But no. My story is far from a fairy tale. Mine is the all-too-common story of innocence ripped away. Filled with pain and doubt and struggle. And with redemption.

It started out ordinary enough. I was born to ordinary parents. My dad had an ordinary job, and my mom stayed at home to take care of me.

I learned to crawl, talk, and walk. For three years, it was just my parents and me. Then I got a little brother. I also started preschool around that time.

My mom taught me the alphabet; I quickly found I loved to read. Soon I was reading the *Magic Tree House* series and *Junie B. Jones*. Every night Dad would come home, and I would hide behind the curtains for him to find me. He would thank Mom for dinner, and we would sit down and eat together as a family.

When I was four, my dad got a new job. He proved to be really good at it, and quickly moved up the corporate ladder. He started spending more time at work, and less time with us. He began coming home stressed and short tempered. He stopped playing hide and seek with me. He would grunt at dinner, and would head back to his bedroom to watch TV.

I think that was when things started getting hard. Mom was always strong willed, and she had little patience for Dad's attitude. Most nights she would either seethe over dinner while he sat in another room, or she would follow him and throw down the gauntlet.

It wasn't always like this. Not every night. On the weekends, we would take drives and go to the zoo and have picnics and be happy. But when Dad went back to work, we went back to the old pattern. We had good times, but we also had bad times. It was a mix of both.

I don't remember doing a lot of church when I

was young. I mean, we went to the Sunday morning service for a little while, but that was it. My parents' faith wasn't displayed throughout the week, and we didn't make a big deal about God in our house.

When I was five, I started kindergarten. It wasn't the best experience for me. As I mentioned earlier, I already knew how to read, and when the teacher found out, I became the teacher's pet. The other kids caught on, and began bullying me as compensation—if I had the teacher's good attention, then I could have their bad attention.

Initially, I'd had two friends—a boy (so I couldn't really play with him, since everyone knew that boys had cooties) and a girl, who would drop me the instant the bullies told her to. So it wasn't long before I was spending recess alone with my nose in a book, instead of playing with the other kids.

It was a rough year, but eventually kindergarten passed, and I moved on expectantly to first grade. But the emotional distress was the same. Despite the grade change and a new teacher, the kids were still mean and excluded me on every level.

I felt isolated and rejected, making me a vulnerable target when a man came along who offered me special attention.

"Hey, sweetie, are you okay? Why aren't you off playing with your friends?" he asked me one day.

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In the blunt honesty only a six year old can possess, I answered him, "I don't have any friends. All the kids are mean to me."

He stayed silent for a minute before proceeding. "You don't have any friends?"

"No, no one likes me."

"Well, I like you."

It started with him just being my friend, telling me stories and talking to me about things that interested him. He told me about history. He told me about ancient Egyptians, and how they enslaved the Hebrews to build the pyramids. He told me about pirates, and how they sailed back and forth across the ocean. About King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. About friends and enemies and wars and peace and everything in between. He wove words together in a tapestry.

I began trusting him. When someone would make fun of me, I would confide in him. When my

parents would have a particularly bad fight, he would listen. And when I felt lonely, he always had a story ready.

He made me feel special. Sometimes he would pull me onto his lap as we would talk. He would give me little things—little dollar beanie babies, a flower, stickers for my folder, trinkets that might make me smile. And every time I smiled, he would tell me, “That’s what I’ve been waiting for!”

And he would laugh and give me a hug.

And I would be happy.

He warned me not to tell anyone that he was spending time alone with me. He would wink at me and say that it would be “our little secret.”

I trusted him; he wouldn’t let me get in trouble. One day, he looked at me with a strange brightness in his eyes and said, “Katie, I have a special surprise for you today. But it’s too big to carry out here. Would you come with me and see it?” He smiled like he had a great present for me, grabbed my hand and led me away.

He stopped in front of a large, foreboding door. He pulled out a key from his pocket, pushed it into the lock, and jangled and turned it until the door clicked. He leaned into the door and slowly opened it.

“Is this your office?” I asked him as I walked into

the small space. It had a small table in the corner with a moth eaten swivel chair. Metal cabinets stood next to the door. The whole space was only about twelve square feet. There was a bigger open space in the middle of the floor. Various supplies stood like soldiers around the perimeter of the little room.

Once we were alone in this private space, he looked at me silently for a moment before getting on his knees in front of me. "Katie, this will be our little secret, right? And we've gotta be really quiet, okay?" I nodded silently. My mind raced; what could he possibly be talking about? He said he had a big surprise for me. I had told him the week before about a book that I had wanted to read. Could it be that? Or maybe he had made me something himself. That would be cool.

"Katie, I need you to close your eyes."

I eagerly consented. I didn't suspect what happened next.

Rough hands grabbed my shoulders. Pushed me down onto the floor. Elbows held my chest down, and I felt my clothes being removed. I couldn't open my eyes; I was too scared.

What was happening?

An arm lay across my chest. A hand covered my mouth. Hot breath was on my cheek, in my ear.

What was going on?

Hot, heavy tears came. I couldn't breathe, and I tried to push him off. I felt dirty. Blood pounded in my ears. I inhaled quickly, shallowly. I stopped trying to fight. I didn't know how to react.

Then it was over. Hands came off of me. He pushed himself up. Stepped back. Stood up over me. Helped me up. He looked at me and smiled. Winked.

"Our little secret, sweetheart."

I looked to the floor. I nodded. Our little secret.

This continued. Not every day, but many days. He knew how to get me alone, and used that to his advantage.

No one could know, because he had said this was to be "our little secret." If he didn't want anyone to know about what he was doing to me, it must be because he was protecting me.

I didn't want to cause problems for the grownups, lest they get angry with me. I wanted to be the good, obedient little girl, so that others would be happy with me. If I told, someone wouldn't have been happy and I thought I would get in trouble. So I stayed quiet.

I took the blame upon myself. When I was hurting, I assumed it was because I wasn't strong enough or smart enough or because something was wrong with me. I wanted to make my friend happy, so I surrendered without a fuss and just stayed quiet.

I trusted this man because I thought he truly was my friend. But he broke that trust.

Eventually, circumstances changed and he moved out of my life. But the hurt he'd inflicted stayed with me.

It's still something I'm working through—I'm still dealing with the fallout of this man's choices. I've had to learn to recognize that this wasn't my fault. What he did, those were HIS decisions, not mine. But back when I was a child, I believed that I was responsible. I didn't realize that I was the innocent victim of an adult with evil intent, and so I took the blame upon myself. Truth is, I was deeply wounded. It affected every part of who I was.

And I don't care who you are, everyone has been hurt by someone about whom they cared deeply. And these kinds of wounds last for a long time.

Maybe you were hurt by someone you trusted, like I was.

Maybe you were hurt by a classmate who made fun of you.

Maybe you were hurt by your parents, who got a divorce.

Maybe you were hurt by society, telling you that you weren't smart enough, pretty enough, fun enough, good enough.

Hurt happens a lot. It's tempting to try and diminish the pain. You say, "At least I'm not starving, or at least I'm not living in poverty," and you try and ignore the hurt you're feeling now. But your pain is real, too. Your hurts matter to God.

God is a compassionate God. And when He sees you hurting, even if it's over a bad grade or a rough breakup, He hurts WITH you and FOR you.

Hebrews 4:14-16 says this:

Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let's not let it slip through our fingers. We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So

God is a
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and **FOR** you.

let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.
(The Message)

This means that Jesus knows what it's like to feel hurt. He knows what both emotional pain and physical pain feels like—and that means that He can comfort us and love up on us in the middle of all our hurts. He cares so, so much for you. He wants to help you, and He has a big plan for you in the midst of all the bad.

It may be hard for you to see that now in the middle of your hurt. It's still sometimes hard for me to see that truth when I reflect back on what happened.

There's a well-known Bible verse in Romans 8 that a lot of people pull out and unfortunately sometimes use as a kind of band-aid to try to patch things over when something really painful is going on in life. But if you read to the end of this book, I'm hoping that this Bible verse will begin to make more sense to you. The verse is Romans 8:28, and it talks about how God can take everything that happens, and use it for the good of those who love Him. That means everything—both the good and the bad. The things that we can control, and the things that we can't.

It's a sometimes painful, sometimes beautiful truth that God is big enough to redeem *everything* in our lives.