

Romantic
Rendezvous
for the
Soul

Ashley Thompson

(Nourishment
Through
Words Press)

“Through vivid descriptions and thought provoking stories, Ashley invites us to experience deeper intimacy with our eternal Bridegroom. *Romantic Rendezvous for the Soul* inspires us to throw off the complacency of busy lifestyles and passionately seek the heart of Jesus. This book is a beautiful reminder of the ever-present love, steadfastness, and mercy He offers to each of us throughout our covenant relationship.”
– Keely Metcalf

“Ashley has a very talented gift for weaving words together that display tenderness, compassion, and purity. Each story reveals the heart of Jesus towards His children. As you read each one you can see past the characters and feel the depth of Jesus’ heart, as well as the longing for a deeper relationship with Jesus inside yours.” – Everesta Hannon

“The stories in this book will invite you into a marriage relationship with Jesus, showing you what it looks like to be loved without condemnation. Ashley brings you into personal conversations with the one who’s very name is Love. As I read this book, Jesus reminded me of His great love for me, reminding me that He actually longed to spend time with me. If you are longing to know what it means to be loved and romanced by your creator, read this book and allow Jesus to romance you like only He can!” – Rachel Sklenicka

“Ashley Thompson’s *Romantic Rendezvous for the Soul* is simply wonderful. Deliciously descriptive, it nourishes the soul with fresh revelation of God’s love for humanity. This collection of short stories may challenge your thinking about what true intimacy looks like, while making your heart yearn to daily experience the Perfect Love described within its pages.

Romantic Rendezvous invites you into a world created by Love Himself, where there's no mistaking that His love for every individual is not only unconditional and never-failing, but also deeply personal and precious to Him. Get ready to experience the purpose, pleasure, and power of real love!"

– Danielle Y. Sanders

"Ashley depicts such a level of intimacy with Jesus so poignantly that it will arouse hearts with passion to pursue a new depth and commitment in their relationship with Him.

"Ashley gives hope to those who feel they have sunk too low in their depravity. She demonstrates and enables us to believe that, no matter how vile our pasts, we can be washed white as snow by the blood of the Lamb and be made beautiful new creations. She conveys with a refreshing rawness that nothing is beyond His power and His desire to redeem and restore. She illustrates the amazing grace of God with its power to enable us to live holy lives by His Spirit and not the letter of the law and religion. Through her writing she gently urges readers to come to this place of trust with the Father who loves us beyond comprehension.

"The stories are heartwarmingly honest. Ashley's beautiful gift of using descriptive language instantly creates pictures in the mind, as she relates her stories and makes them real and alive." – Celina Haywood

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Romantic Rendezvous for the Soul

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Dedicated to Jesus, the *Lover* of the human soul...

His voice and speech are exceedingly sweet; yes, he is altogether lovely [the whole of him delights and is precious]. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!

—Song of Solomon 5:16 AMPC

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Preface Prayer

Dear amply, loved and treasured (by Father) reader, welcome!

Welcome to *Romantic Rendezvous for the Soul*. As a woman, I know what it's like to desire to be wined and dined by a beautiful man. There's something inside a woman that is made alive when she feels loved. I believe God formed us with tender hearts that blossom by love. He built in us an ethereal need to be savored, valued and pursued. He created us to be cherished warmly and affectionately, not because we are weak, but because we are meant to gestate and give birth to the most powerful force in existence...heavenly love. However, unconditional love is not the average consistent experience many women have in life and often many women are left aching or hardened because of it. This is because Jesus was meant to be the lover of our souls. Only He can love us endlessly without fail. And only He can touch the deepest places of our hearts, where no one else can reach, with rejuvenating life. I pray that as you read these stories and devotions, your experience of it would be like going on a date with the Lover of your heart. May the words you read blur in your mind until your imagination is tickled with scenes of beauty; may your spirit be stirred and awakened to the love of God. I pray that as you read you will freely pick of the supple, life-giving fruit of the Holy Spirit who inspires me to write. He is the groomer of the Bride of Christ. More so I pray that your relationship with God may be deepened and sweetened by your companionship with our Lord Jesus Christ. May He give you His perfect peace, love, and joy. May you freely receive all that He has for you. Let yourself

be deeply loved, healed, seen, delighted in and lit with the fire of God's heart by our Savior.

One story recounts an actual event that happened in my life: A Date with God's Son. Another story that I want to mention is: I Do. I wrote it when I was eighteen, it was born out of my deepest pain, but God took my ashes of longing and unfulfilled desire and gave me an oasis of His love. He bandaged my wound with the ointment of His Spirit and I pray you feel the power of His aching heart in that story. For in that tale He showed me that my yearning was nothing compared to His, and yet it was everything to Him. Once again, I pray that this book will bless you as you take the time to enjoy a romantic rendezvous with Jesus. May it be like enjoying a candlelit dinner across the table from your Savior. I pray that you will have the deepest personal relationship with God, and that you will surrender every area of your life to Him out of His love growing in you.

I also pray that this book will touch the hearts of teenage girls all around the world. The majority of the stories in here were birthed from intimate encounters that Jesus invited me to. If it were not for my experiencing His bridegroom love as a teenager, I would have fallen into the pit traps that I believe are set for many young girls in today's world. Jesus loved me so deeply in the places in my heart that were aching with feminine maturity. I saw that His nature was good and only good. Because I trusted His heart, I waited with expectancy for a husband. At sixteen I invited Him wholehearted into my romantic life. I was lead in a dance with my Savior and He introduced my husband to me.

Stephen was the first man I had ever dated and we later married. I could not have picked a better spouse. Stephen's attentive love has a way of melting me inside. His compli-

ments and affirmation quicken my soul with encouragement and his kindness draws me close to him. I thank God for a husband who chases after loving me like Christ loves the church. But before Stephen ever came along, I went on dates with Jesus.

Young one, your heart is not only worth being pursued...but cherished for all of your days. Let Jesus show you how to be a wife before you are married and also while you are in marriage. He cannot fail and His plans for you are only good. Once you've rested in trusting His hand because you've gotten to know His heart, you will experience such peace.

*Warmest Thoughts,
Ashley*

Acknowledgments

The mental list that I have is endless. There are so many people that I want to thank whose names will not be mentioned on this page, but will always have a special place in my heart: for that space in time where they took a moment to read my work and encourage me.

First and most importantly I'd like to thank my God in the form of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)—my thoughts toward You are endless. You are my reason for living and loving. Nothing good could ever come out of my life without You. This life is Yours. You touch me in a way no one ever could.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my family.

My little brother Alex, who is my joy and delight, your subtle compliments and your ravishing love are what I crave most ardently.

To my mom, who is Christ's truth and grace enfolded in a beautiful form to me. You are my most ethereal source of comfort, and there's no other place that I'd rather be than laying beside you in bed with my head on your chest. My fondest memories with you are around Christmas where you and I would buy cinnamon spice and pumpkin bread candles and laugh over a warm drink and a good movie. I love you so tenderly.

To my sister Azania for your beautiful soul, and sweet honey dripping words. The deep times that I've had with you always amaze me. You are a torch of fiery light inside and it inspires me.

To my sister Ashanti for being a spiritual rock. You nib-

ble away my comfort and tug me to do greater things. Your faith astounds me and your selflessness has taken care of me most of my life, and takes care of me now. You are the most reliable person that I've ever met. If ever I'm in trouble you're the first whom I call. I can never thank you enough for everything that you've done for me.

To my dad for always believing in me, and for voicing your pleasure in my work. I thank you most for delighting in me. So many girls and women that I know never felt or never knew if their dad was proud, or *even* approved of them. You have made this clear by your actions. Thank you for every "I love you" over the phone and for every father-daughter moment that we've shared.

To my 12th grade journalism teacher Mrs. Audino, for some reason your approval always meant more to me. I'll never forget the hope you gave me with your words after reading my poem "Land of Peace."

To my friend Christine Lenia, you are my number one cheerleader. Your encouraging words give me life. And my most heartfelt laughter has been laughed with you ("aye papi"). Thanks for being my tutor with Chemistry, you truly are a genius! (Don't forget our career deal. Wink, wink.) I'll never forget your affection toward me in the first months of our friendship, the way you'd slip your arms around my shoulders while we walked, or case my hands in yours when we'd greet. You have the kind of affection that reflects my heart.

To my dearly cherished friend Eunice Diaz, thank you for every moment that I've had with you. Your candor shakes off the erected walls of pretense and perfectionism that sometimes suffocate my soul. I love how you never once presented a false self to me, but truth are the doors to your

soul. Thank you for the tears, the laughter, the frustration, and the adventure of our friendship. Our tales at the many different “camps” that we’ve been to with Youth can be a book within themselves. And thank you for birthing this glorious friendship by pursuing me. You have my love.

Thank you to my church family at MBCC. My gratitude for this body of believers cannot be expressed enough. I’ve grown so much and have been so blessed to be apart of this family.

Thank you to Alice Paige, the woman whose love for me reminds me of Christ. For the most part, you’ve seen the worst of me, and in the seasons of our relationship I’ve been selfish, sometimes rude, but mostly just shuttered from you. Yet every time you responded with such grace and love! You are the most giving woman I know! It’s one thing to say “I love you with the love of the Lord” in church, and its another thing entirely to take in a poor college student and treat her like she’s your daughter. You have done this kind thing to me, and in the words of Jesus when Mary anointed Him, “You have done a *beautiful* thing to me.” I’d never heard our Savior say the word beautiful before He beheld Mary’s offering. Thank you for every meal, for every “How was your day?,” for every kiss good night, and for our famous teatime at night. Your love broke the walls of pride that choked my heart. Your love chased me down like Christ, and you cared for me when I was acting good for nothing.

Thank you to Jocelyn Reyna—your hospitality opens up the deep depths of every woman around you like a book. Never have I been in a room where thirty or more women pour forth the bottomless waters of their hearts. The words that I chew on from the hearts of my sisters are like thick honey, almost crystallized with wisdom, vitality...with *life*

itself. You have a kindred spirit that is drastically missing in this world, where hearts are made to believe they have to hide or harden to survive. In our meetings (that you started) I feel like we are universes or rather stars, and in the room where we worship our stars collide to create a super nova of something so spiritually fantastic that I'm sure the angels enjoy our light show as we offer up the sacrifice of prayer and worship to Yahweh (Hebrew for God). You are healing.

Thank you to all my grandparents, especially my grandmother Patsy, whose prayers have canopied me over the years.

Thank you to my husband, Stephen McClelland, for being a wall of grace and truth that surrounds me like a fortress. Your soul is that of a king and your spirit is that of a priest. Thank you for making me a wife...and now a mother to our daughter Eden-Rain.

Eden, thank you for growing like a seed of love within me...and leaving a permanent plant in my soul of the self-giving love of God. You have inspired me to dream, pursue and enjoy.

A Date with Jesus

“You wanted to go out tonight?”

It was 8:30 and I knew He was coming. It was a cold brisk fall night and the sun had melted like dripping butter across the distant mountains. I was in my room, and my heart was alive. I had ached, longed, and desired for so long, and now He was coming...

I knew I could very go out in pajama pants and a big t-shirt with Him and He would still call me beautiful, but I wanted to doll myself up tonight. I quickly dressed. After pulling up my Devi jeans I slipped into my caramel winter dress and bundled a fluffy lime green scarf around my neck. I ran to the mirror and smeared wine-colored lipstick on my lips and shook my hands through my hair to create volume. He was almost here, something in my quiet spirit told me so. I put on my chestnut boots, grabbed my Bible and coat and ran to the front. He was in the driveway when I opened the door.

A bright smiling face greeted me from the driver's seat. Even behind the glass, in the dark of the night He still shone like the sun to my eyes. I felt the waves of His love warming my soul in a continuous overlapping rhythm. I barely closed the door behind me. My hand slipped twice on the knob before I finally shut it. Suddenly I felt bashful in the Presence of my Savior. My eyes were glued to His beautiful face. As I approached He got out the car and moved to the passenger's door. He held it out for me and I dipped my head shyly before looking up at Him.

He was in dark jeans, a black trench coat, and a royal blue

scarf, and His curly brown hair made smooth waves atop His head and at the tips of His ears. His rich eyes soothed me as He looked into me. They were like chestnuts carrying the scents of cinnamon.

“Peace to you,” He said and took me in His arms for a squeeze. I melted in the warmth of His embrace and hugged Him back. I fixed myself comfortably in His enfoldment and I felt as if I were sitting in front of a fireplace. “I love you,” He whispered to my ear. He gave me a kiss on the cheek before His arms loosened. I never wanted to let Him go. Reluctantly I dropped my arms down before moving into the passenger’s seat. Jesus closed the door behind me and got into the car.

“Where to?” He asked, already knowing the desires of my heart.

I shrugged.

“Come now, tell me.”

“You’re Jesus. You know everything,” I said quietly.

“I want to hear your voice.”

I turned towards Him. In His eyes burned a flaming desire far deeper than my own. His words were coated with sweetness and longing.

“That’s one of the purposes of prayer most people don’t talk about. Hearing your voice gives Me pleasure. It’s not all about efforts or works. The greatest commandment is to love Me.”

Stricken with a new wave of love I breathed, “The lake.”

“To the lake,” He said with a charming smile and fastened His seat belt. I fastened mine and He turned on the heater for me. It blew at just the right temperature. Soft instrumental music played and it was the kind of music that steamed the air with hope, kindness, love, compassion, mercy, and truth. The night was clear and a show of glittering stars sparkled in the sky. The moon was luminous and

it hung like an ornament above our heads. The city was a gleaming web of lights, each boulevard and street was a portal to a new world and I felt like a little girl during Hanukkah. Jesus asked me if I wanted something from my favorite cafe shop before we headed to the lake.

I nodded and He made a left turn at Star street. I was quiet as He drove. Although no words were uttered I was basking in His Presence and healing was taking place in my soul. He didn't have to speak, just being with Him cured me. His very ambiance was like a sauna of internal ointment. I felt like I was home. He was my home—the embodiment of Heaven's love. I wanted nothing more than to be with Him.

Jesus smoothly parallel parked the car. After unbuckling His seat belt, He looked up at the twinkling sky, "It will snow soon."

"That's my favorite," I said, "the first snow fall. It's so pure and white."

Jesus grinned, "I'm glad you like it, darling."

A sheepish smile lifted my cheeks, "Thanks for making it. By You all things were made."

"Through Me, to Me and for Me," He breathed. "I like it, too."

I chortled, "I imagine if You made it You would."

His smile became endearing, yet a faint glint of sadness gleamed in His deeply rich eyes, "Then why do so many of my children feel bad about themselves and hinder my love and affection?"

I fell silent.

"An artist cherishes his art. If human artists who create care so much about their work, how much do you think I care about you?"

I wanted to stretch out my hands and give Him a picture

of what I thought the answer might be, but instead I voiced, “I could never describe how much.”

“Then perhaps you’re beginning to understand. It’s beyond human comprehension without divine interpretation from my Spirit. My sweet, the core of all insecurity is security in anything or anyone else other than Me. If people really knew how much they were loved by Me and my Father, they would have no insecurity, no fears, no mental or emotional torment.”

I was quiet as we walked into the cafe. My mind was in deep thought about what He had said.

Why did people feel bad about themselves? If all of creation was art by the Master Artist then shouldn’t we all rejoice? Especially we, as mankind, because we were the only creation created in the image of the Artist.

Vaporous spicy aromas licked the air with heat. Warm ginger mingled with clove. Pine kissed ground coffee scents. Chai danced with vanilla, and nutmeg blended with buttery pear, creating a bath of incense. A group of teenagers sat on a plush, ruby red sofa drinking piquant drinks from decorative mugs. They shared headphones and watched videos on their laptops, which they rested on their legs. An old couple sharing a booth, sat across from one another talking. The wife reached a pale, trembling hand over her husband’s tan, leathery one. His opaque eyes misted as he looked upon her, and I felt his ripe love for her like hot honey in my chest. Some young adults were seated around a wooden oval table doing homework. I guessed they were all a part of a study group. Still there were others scattered about. I passed by a small girl happily eating a lemon tart dessert.

When Jesus walked in, I expected Him to stand on a table and evangelize. Instead, He walked right up to the counter

to greet a comely barista. Her thick, brown hair was weaved in the back and hung like glossy rope. She had eyes like olive oil and lips the color of crushed raspberries.

“Good evening, sir. How may I help you?” she asked perfunctorily.

I could tell she was on her last leg and that her day must have been long, for although she looked at Jesus, she didn’t see him. He was just another customer. It was almost as if her pretty eyes were shuttered by the repetitive routine of work. She glanced at me and asked the same question before her eyes fell to the cash register, ready to proceed with her normal protocol.

I ordered an apple spice tea with sweet buttercream drizzle. “Good choice,” she said without feeling.

Jesus remained silent for a few seconds. His eyes scanned her as she stared at the cash register waiting for Him to order next. She glanced up at Him when He said nothing.

“What would you recommend, Diane?” He asked with deeply compassionate eyes and a warm smile. I knew He asked that question only to rouse her.

Her eyes quickened slightly, and her shoulders perked up, “That depends. How are you feeling?”

Jesus answered with a bright smile, “I’m feeling like I could use something with a kick of zest in it.”

The corners of Diane’s lips slightly lifted at His charming and welcoming visage, “We have pineapple tea with ginger root? That usually provides a nice kick.”

“That sounds good, but I’d like to hear other options.”

Diane began to read off to Jesus a list of other teas and coffees that were energy boosters. She went through the entire list before He asked, “Which ones are your favorites? For those nights where you need a booster?”

Diane chortled softly. “It would be the spiked cider,” she said with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes, “but if you’re looking for a nonalcoholic solution, I’d recommend the hot chocolate supreme. It has a few shots of caffeine.”

By this time my tea was finished being made, and I picked up my order before finding a nearby table. I knew Jesus was ministering to Diane.

“What if I didn’t want anything with alcohol or caffeine in it?” Jesus asked, His demeanor still warm.

“Then the pineapple ginger is your best bet, but you can choose from these other teas,” she said fingering a few, her eyes fixed on the list. “Like I said it really just depends on how you feel.”

“How do you feel?” Jesus asked her.

His question surprised her, and I noted a flicker of shock cross her face before she masked it with her customary employee visage.

“I feel like I could use a booster myself,” she said politely.

“I know a booster that you can’t get in a tea or a coffee or anything material but, it always works. And I’d like to give it to you if you’re willing.”

Her eyebrows lifted, “It always works?”

Jesus gave a gentle laugh, “It hasn’t failed yet. Millions of people who’ve had this would tell you so, from centuries ago to modern day, from all around the world to right in this city.”

“How much is it?”

“It’s completely free.”

Diane’s eyebrows creased slightly, and she tilted her head trying to discern Jesus. Nothing but waves of love came off of Him. She glimpsed around. Everyone had been served, and her fellow co-worker had gone into the kitchen.

“What is it?” she asked partly suspicious.

“Not what, but Who.”

Misunderstanding His intent, Diane stated, “I have a boyfriend.”

Jesus nodded, “I know you do, and I’m not coming onto you if that’s what you’re thinking...at least not in that way.”

Diane pressed her lips together, “Then...?”

“It’s Jesus.”

Diane rolled her eyes, “Please, sir, I’ve had enough of religious jargon. And I’m too old to believe or be humored by fairy tales.”

“I would disagree,” Jesus said kindly.

“What would you like to drink?” Diane asked cutting Him off.

“Humor Me for a moment, Diane.”

Diane gave an audible sigh and then shrugged. She stared Him up and down again before her demeanor softened. “Okay,” she said cautiously.

“I don’t doubt that you’ve had enough of religious jargon. I’ve had enough of it myself. But I do question whether or not you’re being truthful about fairy tales.”

Diane arched an eyebrow at Him and crossed her arms.

Jesus continued, “Think of it. Most movies are composed of fairy tales, even the action ones. There’s some level of magic in them—of superhuman strength, of beauty, of endurance, of ideal romance, of triumph and adventure beyond common life. Most songs consist of a yearning for superhuman love. Many best-selling books are littered with these noble ideas that are often fleeting in human experience yet they are an ever-constant source of ache and desire in the human heart.”

Diane’s lips untightened and her arms slowly uncrossed.

Jesus prolonged, "If those aren't fairy tales, then I don't know what is. Every human heart longs to experience something more than the dreariness of life. That's why people stuff themselves with fancies, be it food, relationships, temporary thrills like theme parks, drugs, movies, vacations, promotions, possessions, whatever it be. The soul of man knows there's something more that it was created for, and so most people numb this yearning by stuffing it with entertainment. The only problem is," he paused and his eyes deepened, "is that they're trying to fill an eternal ache with temporary things. Worldly things can never mask heavenly desire. Many have tried, and all of them have failed. Do you not find yourself entertained by these things, Diane?"

When Diane didn't answer, Jesus replied, "I know you do." His tone was thick with bowls of compassion that rose like sweet fragrance.

"Well, religious people entertain themselves with rules and criticizing others. At least 'secular' people seek happiness over hate," Diane retorted. Although her facial expression was defiant, her voice was strained and I caught a glimpse of sorrow in her eyes before she drew it back.

Jesus reached out to Diane with such a passionate compassion that I felt a lump rise to my throat. "Religious people do. You're right. And I'm sorry for everyone that has hurt you. Truly, I am. Many people are so busy making religion their god that they don't allow God in their religion. Turns out religion is much more easily manageable than God. Those people whom you speak of are afraid. They may not even know it, but they are. Pride is a form of fear. They seek control, perfection, a way to escape chaos. They are desperate to measure up for fear of rejection, failure, exposure, whatever the fear is. They have so many layers of behavior

modifications and thought processes piled on top of their fear that they can't even detect it. They look to somehow redeem themselves. But there is only one Redeemer. There is only one love that casts out all fear and those who have that are not religious. That's what I want to offer you tonight." Jesus paused and stared deeply into her eyes. "Diane, the happiness that people seek is Jesus. Eternal happiness can be found in nothing else."

Diane's eyes watered and she closed them. Her breath shook a little as she tried to compose herself, "You speak as if you know Him. No Christian has ever spoken to me like that."

Jesus reached out and gently touched her arm. She collapsed into tears at His warm touch, and I knew she was feeling His love for the first time. It was as if the pores of her skin opened up to His liquid love. Diane covered her face with her hands and tried hard not to weep so loudly.

Customers noticed and passed curious glances. Some seemed concerned that whoever was touching her had somehow hurt her, but their thoughts quickly turned when He lifted His hand and caressed the side of her face. Diane grabbed and then pressed His hand against her cheek with hers. Her teeth clenched as she sobbed. "Do you feel that?" Jesus asked, His voice rough with emotion.

"It's like fire in my heart," she sobbed, choking on tears. Her skin became damp with sweat from crying so hard and from the heat of His love. Her smooth skin reddened until her nose was like plumb sauce. Her tears, snot, and saliva got on Jesus' hand but it didn't bother Him. He was smiling. He was happy and content.

Diane's olive oil eyes widened and the clearness in them was like arctic water dripping from melted snow. "I know

who You are,” she whispered. “Will you accept Me?” Her eyes shifted all over His face.

“I already have. Will you receive Me?”

She moved her face and pressed her lips against His hand, “Yes, Lord.”

In that moment, she reminded me of Mary who washed Jesus’s feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She became a worshipper like the woman who poured out her richest treasure from an alabaster jar and anointed Jesus with the sweetest perfume before His burial. I knew in that moment that there was nothing she wouldn’t give to Him. My eyes were opened and it was as if I could see through her. A white light came into her heart from Jesus’s heart, and an invisible darkness fled from her body. I saw something like chains break off her torso, and I knew she was experiencing the greatest miracle—being born again.

Her eyes shone as she repeatedly kissed his fingers. “I’ve never felt this way before...I feel completely new.”

“You are,” Jesus responded with reassuring words. “You are completely free. No longer bound. Just as the Father and I would have you.”

A few people in the café shop averted their eyes from the scene. Their faces were flushed with rosy hues from the unabashed way Diane and Jesus touched. I could only imagine the level of embarrassment and discomfort the Jews felt thousands of years ago when Jesus entered into such unorthodox rendezvous with women. “You are new now and those chains will never have power over you again,” Jesus continued. “I have loved you with an everlasting love my, dear Diane, and, therefore, with unfailing love have I drawn you to Myself tonight. I will never leave you nor forsake you, I will be with you forever.”

Jesus spoke with Diane for several minutes, pouring promises of protection, guidance, and eternal life over her from the Word. He then gave her specific instructions about how to walk and abide in freedom. Without hesitation, Diane nodded her head to everything that was said. Only once did she bow her head and sigh. Out of curiosity, I inclined my ear. He was exhorting her to give up drugs and to walk away from the unhealthy relationship she had with her boyfriend.

“It will be a little hard at first,” Jesus spoke honestly, “but shortly afterward, I promise goodness will so flood your life it will be impossible for you to contain your joy.”

Diane looked up into His promising eyes and smiled, “I believe You.”

Before parting with her, Jesus cupped her chin and placed a soft kiss on her cheek, “Remember I will never leave you.” Fresh tears pricked her eyes, and she squeezed Him tightly.

I was already finished with my drink before we left the tea shop. Jesus strode a little faster than me and opened the door to the passenger side of the car. I thanked Him and entered in, still in awe of what had just happened.

A strange discomfort pricked at my heart and I wondered what was going on as we drove off. Diane had just received salvation. It was the greatest gift anyone could accept, and yet something was aroused within me that was not jubilant at this momentous occasion.

Jesus was silent as we drove to the lake. The city was disappearing behind us, leaving a clearing of pine trees bathed in silver moonlight. The light shimmered off the needles like tiny Christmas ornaments illuminating the forest.

The uneasiness in my chest grew, and as I searched inside my heart for the answer, the stunning realization of

what had happened struck me. I was *jealous!* Jealous of Diane's encounter with Jesus. I wondered why this ugly emotion had risen within me at such a tender scene. My eyes shifted and I tried to appear calm and hide the distress I was feeling within. With my own will power I tried to rebuke the feelings away knowing deep within my conscious that they were ungodly.

Knowing my inner thoughts, Jesus asked, "Ashley...you know you can talk to Me about anything, don't you?"

I remained silent for a long time, contemplating how I would answer Him. If I were to say yes, would that be the full truth? Sure, I knew theoretically I could, but in practice my heart had not reached that level of restful assurance.

I answered as honestly as I could, "I think so..."

"You may always share anything with Me," Jesus said, His voice inflection rooted with sorrow at my distrust. "I love you unconditionally. I desire for you to be free with Me—not free to abuse our relationship—but free to be yourself. I love who you are, and I will always accept you. I paid everything I could to have...*all* of you."

My soul warmed at His words, and I dared to glance at Him from the corner of my eyes. What I saw was a clear, wet trail streaming down His cheek. Had I hurt Him so badly? Did He love me that terribly? I chewed on my bottom lip.

"I'm sorry," I said, finally reaching my hand out to touch His arm. "I don't know why I doubt."

Although His tone was kind, His countenance was smeared with the deepest pain I had ever seen. "You are like so many of my people. You doubt because you do not fully know my character or the nature of the One who sent me. God is love, and he who dwells in love fears not. There is no fear in Me...there is no fear in my Father. You are created in

our image, dear one...there should be no fear in you either.”

I furrowed my brow, thinking of the ‘impossibility’ of living a life without fear. “My dear, don’t think this is impossible with God. Do you think Peter felt fear when he told that man at the gate beautiful to ‘rise up and walk?’ Do you think Stephen felt fear when he was stoned to death? His eyes were on me. Painful to his flesh as it was, he lived in courage and boldness from the Spirit of God. Some of my people died singing praises to me with heavenly joy in their hearts. My dear...the real pain in people’s lives is fear. The enemy feeds off of it in the human soul and gives you ample opportunity in life to give in to fears, be they big or little nags. They all are rooted in one thing and one thing only—a distrust of Me based upon *lies*!”

He continued after a moment, “Unbelief is rooted in lovelessness—the lack of accepting the full measure of my love. Without love there cannot be faith, for faith works by love. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. You cannot receive what we yearn for you to have...what I paid a dear price for you to have.” Jesus sighed heavily.

His words bit at the philosophy in my mind, and thus damaged my pride with healing grace.

We were nearing the lake. As I looked ahead, I discerned glimmers of its moonlit waters behind the tall pine trees. I began to be thirsty, and without me verbalizing my desire, Jesus reached in the back and grabbed a cold bottle of water, “For you, love.”

I took it with a small thank you.

“Don’t be hurt by my words...they are only meant to heal you and set you free.”

He extended his arm and stroked my cheek with his right hand. “I love you just as the Father loves me. You mean more

than the world to us. What I am saying to you now is the same thing I dealt with my disciples about. They were often fearful. Think of when I walked on water and they imagined I was a ghost, or when they feared after my death and hid? Even after I told them I would rise again. What has tempted you is common to man. But I Am the door of escape.” There was a great inflection of hope in His voice, “You will see great things. I will perform wonders in your life.”

My heart lit up with warm joy at His words. It was as if the Spirit of God inside me poured a cup of warm oiled water over the table of my heart’s imagination, scenting everything with hope. I was so awed by the deep intimacy of having the very Spirit of God indwell me and bear witness to the words of Christ.

However, without warning my reverie was soon interrupted by the accusatory thought that miracles could never be performed in my life or by my hands. My emotions began to sink. Jesus’ face wrinkled as He sensed the enemy.

“What’s this?” He asked, prying for me to confess a truth He already knew.

I stammered, “I...I...”

“This is the real enemy love. Not the devil. He is already defeated. But the entertainment of thoughts that are not of faith is the enemy. It’s the only enemy that has the possibility of stealing what is rightfully yours by grace. It’s the only enemy of physical and emotional healing, salvation, deliverance, and wholeness. Don’t you see? You already have everything in me. How could Father spare not even me from you... yet deny you anything else? He has graciously given you all things for life abundant and godliness. You are not your own righteousness, you are not your own salvation, you are not your own qualification for our blessings. You will never be

your own deliverance. Every good and perfect gift comes from above...from our Father. He is light. He doesn't change His mind. These promises do not shift. They are a constant reminder of our unshifting grace and unmovable love for you."

I sensed that my soul was knit to His, and that I couldn't hide in any way. I became aware of His Presence within me like concentrated love easing every hurting place. I felt undivided acceptance and affection and peace that produced confidence.

Jesus smiled in delight, "You are now thinking under grace and not under law. This is the New Covenant that I earned for you and every one of my children. Complete union and oneness with me. Father never sees us apart."

He turned into the parking lot. We had a full view of the lake. The moon and stars were seen, dancing on the calm waves that rolled in.

"Ashley, you can feel this way all the time. You simply have to abide in the truth." Jesus rolled down the windows so that I could hear the lapping water.

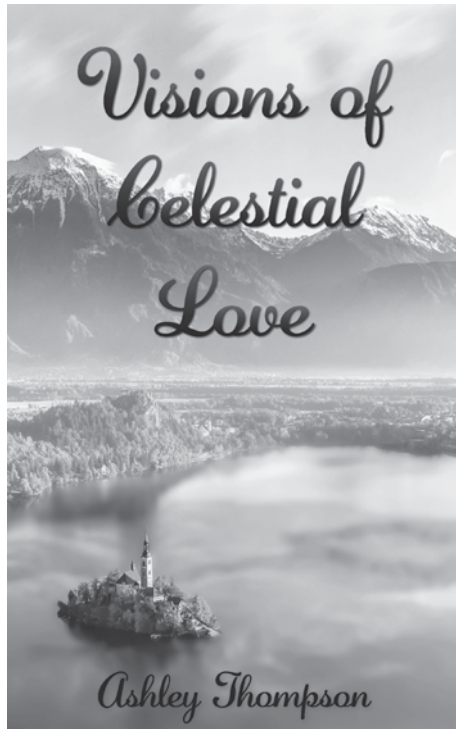
I let out a relieved sigh, "I would love to feel this way all the time." His Presence within me was like fresh air to a suffocating heart.

"I would love for that as well."

Jesus reached over and put his hand over mine. The heat from his skin entered into me and my whole body tingled.

"You wanted to go out tonight, and I obliged you to tell you this...you are never alone. Love, you asked me for a date tonight because you still have not realized that I am always with you. You were feeling separated, and thus drained. But you don't have to feel that way. There is no place in my heart that isn't intimate with you. From the day, you asked me

into your heart...I came...and I will always remain. Not even death can separate us. I have conquered everything that I could because of my deep love and desire to be with you. Never beg me for me. You have me.”



If you enjoyed *Romantic Rendezvous for the Soul* be sure to read *Visions of Celestial Love*, a book designed to be like an intimate dinner between you and the Father, where all emotional and mental stresses can be massaged away for taking up Jesus' yoke and learning of Him.

"A delightful book that reflects the praises from a heart that desires to abide closely with our Heavenly Father. Written in a style that summons us to experience a journey of deeper intimacy with a loving God. Ashley covers the foundation of the Christian faith that brings encouragement and assurance of God's promises when faced with life's challenges. Embracing our uniqueness and the safety of transparency before our Maker who cares about the most intricate details of our life. Yes, an invitation indeed from the One and only who can fill what our heart's ache for." — *Jocelyn Reyna, Entrepreneur*



Ashley Thompson is a joyous wife, mother, and artist whose passion is to see people enter into a freeing relationship with Jesus Christ. After receiving her Bachelor's in Biblical Studies at Charis Bible College, she authored *Visions of Celestial Love*, a rich cornucopia of poems, short stories, and words of inspiration. Ashley is the founder of Invested in Families Christian Preschool and is a certified Christian Life Coach. When she's not spending quality time with loved ones or playing with children, Ashley's lost in a good novel or engaged in some new artful adventure. To read more about Ashley, visit www.nourishmentthroughwords.com.