

A “Feary” Tale

Once upon a time, in a land of rolling hills and quiet creeks, there lived a man and a woman. They loved each other as much, and as best, as they knew how. They believed in the values of hard work and perseverance. They believed in church attendance and maintaining extended family ties. And, they very much wanted children with whom to share their lives.

To this union, a baby girl was born. There was much joy and celebration after the months of anticipation of her arrival. Her grandparents adored her, her aunts and uncles doted on her. She was warmly welcomed and deeply loved by all. In subsequent years, 4 more children followed—all wanted and loved in similar ways. The big sister loved her role as eldest for the first few years. She had babies to hold, rock, cuddle, care for, and love. She was very responsible and could be trusted to do anything her parents asked. She loved to please them and relished their praise.

But amidst all the light in her life, there were deep areas of darkness. She was born with a problem on her inside, and doctor’s visits and hospital stays became routine beginning at 2 ½ years of age. The hospital quickly became the ‘worst’ thing that could happen in her little mind—it was a place of pain and loneliness, away from her precious Jo-Jo (the 2nd born, her brother), a place she didn’t understand. It was there that she learned to be afraid. Afraid of what was going to happen next. Afraid of not being able to do what was asked of her. Afraid of being forever away from home and those she loved. Afraid of all she could not control.

And the fears grew. She became afraid of storms; afraid of mice; afraid of getting sick. Afraid of dying and going to heaven—where she was sure she would be bored to death singing for all eternity. Only her maternal grandma, who had helped to pass some of them on to her, understood her fears. The little girl’s daddy laughed at her and mocked them. He told her not to be afraid, and tried various ways of ‘curing’ the fears. None of them helped. They only made her feel more alone with her feelings. Feelings she quickly learned that were not okay to voice.

She didn’t like disappointing her daddy; she tried every way to please him. She worked hard at school, bringing home all A’s...but her daddy wanted to know where the A+s were. She tried hard to listen in church so she could give an accurate recounting of the pastor’s sermon. But when she explained what she thought, in addition to the retelling, her daddy always disagreed and found reasons why she was wrong. She quickly learned that no matter how hard she tried it was never good enough. *She* was not good enough, yet, to deserve his love.

So she tried harder. The little girl listened as her daddy talked about how fat her mommy had become after having 5 children. Her mom didn’t look fat to her, but she understood her daddy liked thin. She was glad that’s how she was, and felt proud inside anytime her daddy would make fun of her mom, knowing that she was better in that area—and maybe secretly daddy liked that part about her.

By the time she was 10, her worries and fears had begun to eat a hole in her stomach. She was convinced her daddy didn’t love her and never would, and had long talks with her mom—who always tried to reassure her that he did indeed love her, he just didn’t know how to show it.

She was not convinced.

A few years later, after it seemed the hospital fears and stays were a thing of the past, she was confronted with a new challenge, by the name of scoliosis. Major surgery, with a possibility of life-debilitating complications, was her fate. On the eve of this new hospital admittance, the old fears reared higher and stronger than ever before. She thought about paralysis and death. She thought

about her inability to control any part of the situation. And, in her utter despair, something miraculous happened. She cried out to God and admitted her helplessness and utter dependence on Him. She asked Him to be with her. And, He came. He flooded her with a sense of peace she had never known before. He became her Life, her Love, her Solace and Strength, her very Best Friend.

With Him at her side, she recovered, finished high school and went off to college. She was still often afraid, and didn't want to be far from her family, so she chose a college not far from home. And she still valued thin, and vowed to stay that way. She called home very often, begging her parents to come and get her, to let her leave, return home, and find a closer school. But her dad made her stay—refusing to come—building in her the knowledge and understanding that she could persevere and get through very hard things. It too was within her.

Along the way she recognized a love for teaching and a God-given desire to work in another land. She studied long hours, worked several jobs, and graduated with honors. Her mom was there to witness the event, but her dad couldn't leave the farm. She was sad, but had long ago learned not to let it show, but instead, to just try harder.

Eventually her dream came true, she found herself living in a far off country, working in a school she was helping to develop, with students and families she came to dearly love. Her heritage of hard work, responsibility, and independence paid off. She was highly valued and commended. She was promoted, asked to be on new and different teams, and finally...finally she heard pride in her daddy's voice when they talked on the phone. She had arrived, but so had the darkness. It had stalked her for years and was not about to let go now.

Suddenly, her sweet little world was inundated with paralyzing fears and terrorizing nightmares. She was plunged into a world of darkness so deep she despaired of ever finding a way out. But help did come—more help than she had known she needed. As a kind man and woman, with much experience with the powers of darkness, talked and prayed with her, she began to realize the depths of her fears, and the power they had held over nearly all of her life. The path of deliverance had begun! It held the grief of being wrenched from her far off country and being moved to a place she had never known, and the realization that the years of living to be thin had exacted their own toll—in the form of an eating disorder. The young woman felt like a tree—pruned of all that had defined her (profession, position, location, many possessions, even relationships). All that she had worked for, to make her identity, was stripped away...and she began to discover who and how she was truly created to be.

In the ensuing years she was overjoyed to return to her far off country, more real and whole and happy, than she had been for a very long time. Relationships were renewed, her position was restored, and she was well. But she sensed there was more healing to be done. And she was right. Another kind man helped her to see that her happy, joyful feelings were good, but she would never be truly whole without also experiencing the sad and angry ones. Suddenly, the feelings she had learned to stuff decades past came barreling out of her—painful, wrenching, unexplainable feelings that seemed to pour out at will and with abandon. It was embarrassing. They were uncontrollable. But at the same time, it felt good. She learned to cry. She learned to be angry. She learned to *feel*...and in the process, granted her body, mind, and soul the comfort that it had so desperately craved—and had been forced to find in food and perfection. She was finally free. And she could not believe how good it felt.