

# ignite

Bliss. Hope. Coffee.



KADEE CARDER

# *Ignite*

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by  
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*Thanks, Charlie, for being my logic and steady support.  
This is me, "stopping it." Wink.*

# On The Menu

## **1 ★ Pumpkin Spice Latte**

Pumpkin spice season is a shifting of the senses. Changes sweep through the air. Endings blend with beginnings, peppered with alacrity. Pumpkin spice season is crisp and fresh. It ushers in jovial tidings of peace on earth and favor in the affairs of men.

## **2 ★ Iced Coffee with Heavy Whipping Cream**

Ah, a refreshing drink in the heat of the day. Reliable and simple, this drink serves as a solid go-to for any thirsty soul.

## **3 ★ Breve Latte**

Rich and hearty, the Breve Latte, a house blend latte with half-and-half, bears the grunt work as a tingly treat. This drink shows up when you need it most, simple, appealing, and enduring. Well, until you down it and follow up with a scone.

## **4 ★ Americano with Heavy Cream & Skinny Mocha Syrup**

This one's bound to trip up the barista, but it's healthier than the sugary drinks while fulfilling to the core. AHCSMS sticks around for those going the distance.

## **5 ★ House Blend with Steamed Cream**

Breathe in the sweet aroma and exhale joy. What's the best brew of any great café? The house blend. Can't go wrong with a well-crafted, delicious roast. Through the roasting process, only the best part of the drink remains.

## **6 ★ The Biggest Caramel Macchiato You Got. With an Extra Shot(s).**

The bigger, the better. Where temerity meets audacity, the caramel drizzles and the macchiato elevates. Basically, it's like the glitter of the coffee world.

## **7 ★ Mocha Frappe**

Simmered, shaken, stirred, pressed, blended, and poured out for all to enjoy. Dessert never tasted so sweet. Reward never settled so rich as those remarkable adventures and drinks along the way.

# Thanks for coming in!

## How may I serve you today?

– *An Introduction* –

Her shoulders slumped. The skin around the edges of her eyes crinkled and creased under the weight of care, absolution, and deciding whether or not she should get up and refill her coffee cup for the third time that morning.

Those green eyes flickered wider, a glimmer of hope sparkling like sugar glitter on the top of a cream cheese frosted cupcake. Yes. Just. Coffee.

Hey.

Hey, you!

You're pretty awesome, you know that? Just wanted to start this off with the truth.

Do you ever feel like, well, maybe you just weren't cut out for this thing called "Life"? Do you ever feel stuck? Are you trying to accomplish Very Big Things? Are you just trying to get out of the bed in the morning? Preach, yo.

What do you love doing? I like to write. I dig a great movie, I hoard cheesecake, and I adore new purses, but I come alive when I write. What makes you feel blissful? Are you trying to kickstart a new venture, pursue long-term goals, or basically weather the storm? All of those things which make us feel alive,

they are so valuable, are they not? What would life be without bliss and passion and fulfillment?

You know, I've noticed that those undertakings, while bringing sparkle and adventure and pink polka dot fuzzies, come with a side of heartbreak and an extra shot of the tears of your ancestors. Adventures aren't always fun. Behind the light, shadows lurk. The good news is...we're in this together. And we have coffee.

I believe in hope, I hope for trust, and I trust in faith. Faith powers tenacity. And with faith in a loving God, we can do amazing work. Good work. Excellent work. [Break for a sip of coffee.]

Now, first of all, I'm going to be terribly honest with you. That means I'm going to smudge those rosy-colored shades a smidge: All of this is hard. It's all hard. But while it is challenging, it's also filled with hugs, and laughter, and blue skies, and soft breezes, and chocolate.

Recently, at a particularly low moment, I shuffled along the road. I just *had* to get out of my house, away from technology, and away from the goals I was trying to pursue and having only overwhelming, looming walls blocking me from advancing. My shadow reflected my wounded spirit. Praying, hoping, and absorbing the golden sunlight, I wound through the neighborhood. Countless sighs drifted toward the ether. And then a Fed-Ex truck pulled up beside me, and the driver, smiling, called out to me, "No! You cannot stop! Keep walking."

Laughing, I nodded and agreed with him, and he wished me a good day and an enjoyable walk. "You look like you're ready to be done with your walk," he added as he drove away. "Keep walking." I thanked him and shoved my hands in my pockets.

Even Batman can puzzle the implications as to why on this particular day this particular girl slumped along and a particular Fex-Ex driver felt the need to say that. But he did. He dared venture to speak the words I desperately needed to hear.

Do you need to hear them, too, friend?

No, you cannot stop. Keep walking.

Life is an accumulation of shared gifts. You or I may not always be the best at something, but you are best at the one gift you have to give. You are in your space to help those within your reach. Only you can offer your love in your quirky manner, so go get it out and dish it up.

Now let's discuss the walking.

I've got an extra mug poured for you.

Cream? Sugar?

# ★Pumpkin Spice Latte, Please★

– One –

What are sweeping generalizations? Sweeping generalizations are statements that cover a blanket of people without faces, names, specifics, or facts. Sweeping generalizations disregard the singular person and shove her into a crowd of tired clichés. *People these days! The world is filled with hate! Nobody does this certain thing! Everybody does that certain thing! Everything is going to burn!*

Ah! Help!

Those statements above are sweeping generalizations, and sweeping generalizations make my blood boil. Sweeping generalizations are often incorrect. I keep repeating the phrase so you will remember it and ponder. Many of my students use sweeping generalizations in their writing. Many media outlets and social media platforms unknowingly encourage sweeping generalizations. I quite often find myself thinking in sweeping generalizations. Usually those sweeping generalizations are statements of lost hope, anger, or depression. Sweeping generalizations can be obliterated by using specific facts supported by truthful, unbiased opinion, and detailed discussion.

All truth and hope is found in God, our creator, the great provider and keeper, the knower of hearts, the fabulous finder of lost souls. God knows who you are; he made you, he discovered you, he placed you together piece by piece, and knows your deepest,

darkest wishes, hopes, and talents. He sees YOU, as well as the masses. He sees YOU, maybe even more than the masses. Maybe there are no such things as masses. Maybe that idea is something mankind has created so we can stand ourselves because we are so limited. Just like time. And lightbulbs. And Jamberry nail wraps.

I hoard/sell Jamberry nail wraps. Hey, keep reading. I love 'em. I love my pretty nails and I love the company. Home Office sends out encouraging emails with a theme for the month. One month the theme was, "Find Your Inner Unicorn."

"We love that our Jamberry Consultants have coined the word "unicorn" to mean their favorite wrap [design]. We decided to play off this word to encourage you to find your inner 'unicorn' or your own unique self. Find what makes you unique and use it to set yourself apart or make yourself memorable... Challenge yourself — use this month to find your inner unicorn and embrace it — you never know how memorable it might be to someone" (JamGram, October 2015).

Today I have an answer for all those questions about the negativity. Forget about everybody else. Put down the remote control, the phone, and yes, even the coffee cup, and embrace The One who sees each person and soul. He is Love, He is Truth, and He is greater than you or I can imagine. He sees you as his unicorn.

Maybe that sounds silly. But He made you. So that means something *huge*! Because He made you and put you where you are, He will make it awesome. He will bring the strange. And the funk. The uptown funk. The funky monkey? The Chunky Monkey. Ice cream? Ice cream!

I come from a family of crafters. My mom and sisters can sew, knit, crochet, cross-stitch and hem and hook and hitch almost any item that would be created with a type of string. I, however, have never been able to catch the fever. I've had a minimal desire to pull out my still-in-a-box-after-ten-years sewing machine. The desire was there, but has been put on the back burner pretty much all my life. I've made a random item here and there, including a bright yellow trenchcoat for this creepy three-foot tall doll my fraternity friends found in college and for some reason kept it around and took it places with us. It needed some clothing, after all.

So here I am, a crackerjack thirty-something who of course needs something else to do. After all, teaching online classes, pursuing a writing career, and raising children are small things that require almost no time or mental capacity. Note my sarcasm. Note the presence of a pumpkin spice latte in my hand.

But there's a small desire in the back of my mind, the one that says, "You should be able to do this. Your mom can do it. Your sisters can do it. All these other people you know can do it. That Proverbs Thirty-One chick could do it. Come on, pansy! Buck up and make your girls some fluffy ruffly dresses!" I shake my head at myself, and shrug with a sigh.

However, then a friend offers me the chance to whip out my machine with a new group of friends who also want to learn! I'm not the only thirty-something who doesn't know a selvage from a serger. We gather materials, meet, and after three three-hour meetings (Nine. Hours. Y'all.), I have created a shopping bag. Miracle of all miracles!

My courage has been gathered, my feathers have been tousled, and now we *must* make a baby blanket! Because a baby blanket should be easy. Because a baby blanket...should...be...easy...

Two hours later, I finished the blanket, older and wiser.

The blanket is still in the dryer, fluffing.

I don't know who will receive my fancy gift.

It's fancy.

Stop laughing.

Who knew straight lines were so hard to create? Who knew flannel warped so much when moving in a straight line?!

As I was yanking, tugging, grunting, and stitching and un-stitching and re-stitching, flashbacks of my random previous desires — to learn the drums, attempt to play the soprano saxophone, ballroom dancing, cheerleading, aerobics instructing, interpretive dancing, basically any time of dancing, and baking cookies from scratch — whirled through my mind. I could list even more activities that were flops. See, I like to try new things. Maybe I get bored easily, I don't know. I like NEW. I like new flavors, scents, weather, and projects. I'm not great at

sustaining projects. But I can hang in there with the best of them, even when the ship is going under. I never let go, Jack. There are a few activities in which I engage that fuel my passion and duel for my time, and those projects continue. Like writing. I can write a pretty decent sentence from time to time. Like that one. And that one. Wink.

We are not all meant to star in the same show. Each human is uniquely shaped and gifted. I have my green eyes, you have your blues. I've got my shifty blond eyebrows and you've got your rosy cheeks. The conclusion to which I am drawing with my projectastrophies are that I don't have to sew well. I don't have to be a master housekeeper. I don't have to be a tasty baker. I don't have to be The Best At Everything. I don't even have to know how to do everything. Although that's another project for another time. #tryeverything

For sanity's sake, DO try the new projects. If you want to craft, then grab some string. If you want to build a media room, start comparing projectors. Be not afraid to try new things, for that is where passion begins. If I'm afraid, or if you're afraid, to advance upon new paths, then any journey will be dark, dreary, and dangerous. But if along the journey you discover you don't like riding a bicycle, and if you keep falling off the bicycle, and the bicycle makes you mad, then by all means try a scooter, or roller skates, or a motorcycle, or a car, or even just walking. You may be the next greatest Oarsman who was trying to ride in the Tour de France. Put down the bicycle and don't be too proud

to say, *"Well, that wasn't for me."*

As I work with students in online classes, I read all sorts of sentences. I come across writers and I come across let's-just-step-away-from-the-keyboarders. As a sewer.... Ha ha ha, let's just enjoy that sentence fragment, eh? My gift is not in sewing. My passion is not in running marathons. My goals are not involved in fixing the innards of computers. But I do care about words, and how fun they are to manipulate. I do tip my hat at those who mend, who dance, who bake, who barter, who fix what I cannot.

However, I tip my hat with a smile instead of an anxious, thudding heart. I appreciate the stops along the journey that show me I should indeed hone my capabilities instead of pander in the fabric aisle. What aisle are you wandering? Let us instead follow the prickings of our hearts rather than the sticking to our pride.

I need to write. For me, to write is to breathe. Writing intensifies the joy in my life. Writing is a challenge, and writing will never be perfect, and I will never be the perfect writer. But I'm glad I have found my niche. Life is tough when you haven't found your niche; and I've been there, so I know the dull ache. I've found my boat, although at times I look longingly toward the shore.

Have you found your boat? Or are you still wobbling on the bicycle?

Pound across the ground, oh runner.

Thunder through the waters, oh oarsman.

Careen through those forests, huntsman.

Slay those dragons, brave knight.

Use your opportunities to embrace individuals you meet, share the gift of love, and utilize the unicornious gift God has given you. Sharing that gift doesn't always come easily, but it will benefit you and the receiver. Intentionally focusing your gift and honing your gift is one of the great blisses you crave. Using your gift creates actual magic. No slight-of-hand can replicate it. Even the most talented movie director can't capture it.

Every story needs a start. Every story needs a good foundation, an intriguing story arc, and memorable characters who rock their worlds.

You are your story's protagonist. And, friend, no matter where you are, where you've been, or where you think you're going, you've got quite the adventure approaching. Forget about failing, fumbling, falling, or thinking you can't do this adventure. Forget about fear or disillusioned disappointment, and instead look up.

“For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of  
the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in  
your book  
before one of them came to be.  
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you...  
Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”  
Psalm 139:13-18; 23-24

The way everlasting is a long journey. Therefore, we ready our weapons and sharpen our tools. We toss a handful of glitter into the air in celebration.

Do not focus on the masses, (or sweeping generalizations!) but for now, focus on The One. God works in you, around you, and through you, you weaver of magic. Life is tough. You are tougher. Expect to rock it.

# ★Iced Coffee with Heavy Cream★

– *Two* –

One August I started a thirty-day nutrition and fitness program by waffling between lethargy, doubt, overwhelmed determination, and then downed a pizza.

Well.

Then Day Two began.

See, I have all sorts of excuses for why I wanted that pizza. Mainly I was lazy, worn out, tired, and hungry. My HEC (Hunger, Energy, and Cravings) were not in check. Hunger kept running around the house, chasing the kids, tossing toys about, snatching birthday decorations off the walls. Energy twisted her ankle earlier and pulled every muscle in her legs when we were doing jump squats with twenty-pound weights and the instructor asked why she was flopping around on the floor. Cravings stood in front of the pantry asking about the expiration date on the graham crackers, shoving chocolates down her throat because she wasn't sure how many rejection emails she could take.

And that is why my HEC was out of check, and why we move forward with a kiss into the air and a half-hearted shrug.

You see, I am one self-doubting little person. (Or not so little, as some recent pictures would whisper and nudge, nudge.) I am quite shy and have almost zero percent faith in my abilities to do anything more

than make a cup of coffee in the morning. I can push a button on the Keurig. So far, I haven't messed th—well, except the one time I forgot to put a mug under the dripper, so...

So whenever I set off, throwing my pink polka-dotted satchel over my shoulder and attempting to whistle any kind of tune, I am very aware of the crowd that is not watching. I'd like to be Someone Respected. I'd like to be Somebody Who Makes A Difference. I'm super awesome at being Someone In The Background. Ever feel that way? Not sure if that last one can get us where we want to go. I've written millions of words in my life but I don't know if they are doing anything that matters. What matters?

What if we let the winners win? What if we give up? What if we never get where we want to go? What if we adore pizza? What if I fail? What if I discover what brings me bliss, but it's painfully difficult to accomplish? What if I don't have the time? Or money? What if I'm simply too small?

Perhaps your greatest fault is your beauty, nestled securely beneath your doubts. You have a uniqueness, a gift, which is a source of joy for you. May you claw your way into the dirt and mire to recapture that treasure, and with sweat dripping down your temple, glisten beneath the scathing sun. That gift can only be used by your precious hands and others need to see it. You need to appreciate it. You need to feel connected to your Giver Of Life by using that gift.

When you use that gift, the voices in the background should grow dimmer, the light above

ought glimmer, and the ether must tilt in your direction.

What if they don't?

The stoics teach internal strength. The stoics teach independence. The stoics teach objectivity. The stoics have a good point. Growing up in churches, I was often taught that I was broken, that I needed to wait on God, that I basically couldn't do anything on my own. As an adult, I'm wrestling with the two ideas and how they intermingle. Because I believe in a strong, amazing God who works through me for good, and when we work together, we conquer. I am never stronger than when I rely on my Creator. I am never more alive than when I surrender to the work He's put before me. And He has never let me down.

Also, he created coffee.

So.

There's an illustration I've heard about a rock falling along a path. The rock blocks the entire passage. A man ventures along this path and comes to the place where the rock has fallen. Should the man curse the rock? Should the man shake his fist at the rock, angry that time has ebbed away naturally against the façade of the mountain pass? What then shall the man do? Does it do any good to shake his fist, or cry, or scream, or fall to his knees, spent?

No.

The rock fell. The rock will not move. The rock has no feelings. Don't be mad at the rock. Work around the rock. Find a way around the rock. The adventure

unfolds in climbing over the rock. I think I've heard it said that the obstacle is the way.

If the plans are not working out, make different plans.

We have no guarantee that the journey will be easy. In fact, the experts I admire say straight up that the journey is harsh, yo. "Anyone who says differently is selling something" (William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*). You will get dismissed, rejected, and forgotten. You are still awesome. The journey will be harsh, but you don't have to be. You cannot move that boulder, but you can move yourself. You cannot control others, their belief in you, or their actions, but you can create bliss. Focus on your good. Focus on your goal. Focus on the thing you can do, and weave your magic.

Because the journey is such a challenge, intentionally discover those gifts which bring you joy, and treasure them. Study them. Invest in them. Bestow them upon the downtrodden. If you have a talent, trusted, knowledgeable sources tend to note about you, pursue it. If you have a goal, lunge toward it. If you have a restless yearning, seek the source.

Today will not last any longer than today, so please, let's explore the path while we still have time. My daughter will often say, "I'll do it next time," like when we were indoor skydiving and she was petrified to enter the chamber for the second whirling ride. Honey, there may not be another time. Sweetpea, this is all we have.

You might as well do what you love, regardless if anyone else is watching. You might as well love what you do. It is your life, after all.

Now I can tell you in all honesty it's much easier to say these things, or even type these things. That's one reason I write it down – so I can read it when I step in gum on the sidewalk. Hey, it's even easier to type these things with ten broken fingers sitting on a rolling chair missing one wheel, in a roofless outhouse on the edge of a cliff in the middle of a blizzard in the Alps, than it is to do some of these things. In their season, the wounds will heal, and the snow will melt. Find the good. Be the good. As I remind my children every morning: be loving, be wise, be kind. Those things I can control.

Thanks for coming along with me this far. It's nice to have a friend along the journey, someone who needs me just as much as I need them. We can travel together, sharing those last bites of birthday chocolates, and giggle about how stinking delicious Cinnabon coffee creamer tastes. Stand in the light with me. The ether stretches before us. This is what we got, this is what we gain, and these little moments strip away the darkness.

## ★Breve Latte★

– Three –

Some months ago, my family and I were eating dinner at the newest Chinese food restaurant in town. The obligatory fortune cookies were offered at the end of the meal. We wiped the teriyaki sauce off our lips and broke into those delightful cardboard-esque treats. The friendly server handed my daughter her own cookie and I helped open the package. After cracking it open I pulled out the paper strip to read the anticipated fortune. “Do not fear failure,” it read. The sentence made me pause then, because that is something I want to teach my kids, and myself as well. I was going to keep it and maybe put it in her baby scrapbook when she stuck it in her mouth and then spit it onto the floor. Oh well.

See, I’m at a point where there are a few branches coming up in my pathway, and there’s that quiet, unsettled and apprehensive voice in the back of my mind continually cautioning, “Are you sure you want to do that?” Whether it’s picking which shirt to wear to work out in, buying a book, or asking my husband to take out the garbage, it’s always there. She’s gotten quieter over the years but sometimes starts to disturb the peace upstairs. She’s really started to affect the amount of adrenaline pulsing through my veins at any given time. It *may* be the coffee...But I’m blaming Doubt instead.

“What if—” she begins to say.

“Hush,” I reply.

“What about—” She falters, her hands fluttering in the air.

“We have already thought about that, and I don’t want to worry right now.” I shake my head.

“But what will people think?!” she asks, slapping her cheeks, eyes widening.

“I don’t have time for you right now, I need to figure out what’s for dinner!” I turn my back on her, and increase the volume of the television.

“Fine!” she yells, stomping into the bedroom. “But I’ll be back in eight minutes to discuss this with you then!”

I was sitting at church today and saw a tiny spider on the floor by my feet. *I didn’t see that spider when I sat down or I would not have sat here*, I thought. And then that made me think about all the things I *cannot* see around me, like bitten-off fingernails or dust mites or skin flakes. Yeah. Gross. But then it also kind of made me think, you know, there’s really a lot more we cannot see. There is a spiritual world around us we don’t usually notice. And if we could see those life-sized spiders before they were next to us, some anger, frustrations, and trip-ups would be so much easier to avoid.

What if we could see others’ pain as color? What if sadness had a smell? What if suffering came with a soundtrack?

We see so little.

We have our own insufficient perspectives, our own petty fears and emasculations. We are feeble. To have any fear at all almost seems to fear everything. And that's not how it's supposed to be.

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world... We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:4; 13-18).

A quick search on BibleGateway.com brings up eighty-three verses for the search, "Do not be afraid." That's crazy, those.

Because, you know, sometimes it's easier to be afraid of spiders. Sometimes it's easy to forget you've won the battle when the bombs begin dropping. When the mortar bursts and shrapnel scrapes across your

heart, it's easier to give in to the darkness. But we aren't supposed to let the shadows win. The children of God have overcome, are complete, and we discard fear. We know the enemy's plan. We defeat it.

It would seem God, in fact, does care about our acts and our hearts. He instructs us to seek His heart and do right by those surrounding us. He reminds us of the bigger picture. Big houses, new cars, perfect children, loaded bank accounts, a closet full of shoes and millions of followers on Twitter are nice, but are they the goal? Although — it *would* be *rad* to have a booth dedicated to my art at Comic Con... But no, that's not the goal. That's not the mountain. That's not what keeps you going when the storm begins to rage.

I wish all of this wasn't so hard. I wish my memory worked better. Yeah? You too? I wish families stayed in the same places and rejection wasn't an issue, and we could more easily hold on to an eternal perspective. But our humanity gets in the way. Our mold, our dust, and that gripping tightness in the chest feel more tangible in the moment. We trod, as with feet slugging through thick, deep mud. We can't always see the sun.

But we have the promises shielding our faces and pulling us up out of the mire, declaring a hope and a future, and guaranteeing we will walk in high places with a shield and salvation.

“I took you from the ends of the earth,  
from its farthest corners I called you.  
I said, ‘You are my servant’;

I have chosen you and have not rejected you.  
So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:9-10).

We cling to these truths, brushing off the falling ashes, walking through the thunder, and recognizing his shelter. If our God is with us, we do not fail. When God completes us, we are closer to his heart; and we cannot be in any better place.

Along the way we will be idiotic, silly, and forgetful. We will literally fall, twist our ankles, club ourselves in the head with the car door because the carport is rusted and there’s a waterfall right outside the passenger side, cry out when our children refuse to obey, and hoard chocolate bars in a hidden cupboard. We will fail to maintain perfection on this earth, to be on time, to budget correctly, and to find the good in others. What do we do then?

“The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs... so that people may see and know, may consider

and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it" (Isaiah 41:17-20).

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth" (Isaiah 42:16).

We have to stick with Him, because he's got this. We must trust him to forgive our inner failures. We have to give up our stubbornness, and we have to choose to leave behind My Way Of Doing It. He will work out the kinks, even if it hurts a little, even if we thought they were okay to have around.

God shows up in ways we don't expect and usually at what seems like the last minute. He is right there with you the whole time. Communicate with him before anyone else and watch your moments change before your blind eyes. He brings peace where it seems illogical. His peace surpasses our understanding and it sticks around. It seals up the cracks. Like caulk.

There are many ways to tell a story, and there are many types of stories to be told. Legend and autobiography, tragedy, comedy, and the popular hero tale are an industry encompassing literature, art, film, and our children's toy shelves. In the hero plot, the protagonist must face a challenge or series of obstacles in order to change his destiny. The hero usually starts off as someone forced into making a decision. Then the

stakes are raised. Quite often the hero experiences a great loss. Spider Man was only Peter Parker until his Uncle Ben was killed; Batman watched his parents suffer and die at the hands of a thief; Elizabeth Bennet didn't give a rip for Darcy until her sister ran off; Katniss took her sister's place in a battle to the death. Even Jesus, in a real-life example, had to allow his work to be completed: "Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me'" (John 18:11)?

So what do *we* expect?

I don't consider myself a hero. I was proud of myself for being able to do thirty-five girlie pushups the other day; also I got one basket away from being caught up on the laundry. Hoo haa. This is not really exciting. But my story — and your story — are important. You are your own protagonist. Don't be your own antagonist. What is your challenge, your series of obstacles?

What will you lose?

And can you overcome?

Yes, you can.

The reward is much greater when the loss has a noble purpose. I've heard it said that, "Oftentimes the most difficult task is the correct task" (Tara Webb). On this blue planet we are drifting closer to eternity every moment, so don't let the moments go to waste.

"In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;

Let me never be ashamed;  
In Your righteousness deliver me.  
Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly;  
Be to me a rock of strength,  
A stronghold to save me.  
For You are my rock and my fortress;  
For Your name's sake You will lead me and  
guide me...  
For You are my strength.  
Into Your hand I commit my spirit;  
You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of  
truth...  
I trust in the LORD.  
I will rejoice and be glad in Your  
lovingkindness,  
Because You have seen my affliction;  
You have known the troubles of my soul,  
And You have not given me over into the hand  
of the enemy;  
You have set my feet in a spacious place.”  
Psalm 31:1-8

I battle with myself over a lot of shortcomings. I contemplate contentment and consider the falling stars and I see my incapacity to react in the right way so often. My toddler gets frustrated at the littlest upset when she attempts to try something – linking together toy trains, putting on her shoes, eating broccoli with her fork; she screams, her face turns red, she often throws her fork or knocks over the project at hand. And am I like that? Are you? When we don't get our

way, when the schedule is disrupted? When we feel like we are failing? Sometimes, yes.

We are half and half. Sometimes sassy, sometimes sweet, we raise our chins high. Breathe in deeply.

We don't look back. We don't throw ourselves onto our beds and give up. Not today, anyway. Into his hands we commit; we commit to letting ourselves be molded, letting our stories be shaped, letting our pathways be wrought as they may. Maybe the pathway is financial success or new houses or shiny cars or full cupboards or smiling hugs from friends. Maybe there is loss or upset expectations. Regardless, we don't fear it. We kick the spiders out of the way. Maybe this is read in a small room or on a small screen, but He has set your feet in a large, spacious place. It's wide open, soft green grasses, with large, leafy trees in the distance; small yellow flowers flutter around your feet in the soft breeze, as two birds soar overhead, the sunshine beaming down on your shoulders. You are chosen; you are strong; you are in the hands of a very capable Author.

Walk on.

# ★Americano with Heavy Cream & Skinny Mocha Syrup★

– Four –

Once upon a time we lived in an apartment with a green refrigerator. It clunked occasionally. I don't know why. As I'd scan its contents to prepare lunch, the loud *THUNK* would startle me. In the middle of the night, we'd awake to the thunderous *CLUNK* from the kitchen. That fridge was ancient. It was kind of ugly. It was a little bit too small. It's what you call an EGR.

In fact, I bet you know someone who is an EGR. You know — that person who has a ridiculously loud voice and you wonder if he knows just how loud he is talking. Or the girl who has her own correct opinion, even if it's not. Or the kid at the grocery store who cuts right in front of you to buy a soda. Hello, I have been standing here with my full cart for ten minutes and my toddler is screaming because it's naptime!

An EGR is a complainer, a snide commenter; an EGR is a short-sighted, close-minded, self-absorbed, and just-plain-difficult-to-be-around kind-o-person.

The EGR.

My sister let me know about this term: Extra Grace Required.

Yeah. Now we're on the same page.

There is always an EGR in the room. And if you can't seem to locate this person, it is probably you. I know quite often I'm the EGR. It's in my genes and I can't always help it. I do spend a lot of time trying to

overcome this genetic mutation — you know, XEGRX. I am fantastically inclined toward finding pebbles in the carpet, mold on the cheese, and dog doo in the field. I can spot an awkward moment like nobody's business. I can say the exactly wrong thing at the wrong time. How 'bout you? Reckon some days are better than others? Do you have some of that EGRness in you? Can you forgive me for mine?

One Tree Hill is one of my favorite shows. OTH has some spectacular writing. In Season Four, one character, Nathan, plays basketball and has received a full scholarship to Duke University. For some difficult reasons he ended up borrowing money from men who turned out to be loan sharks and he shaved some points off an important game. Because he was a guy who did have quite a bit of integrity, he came forward when it was all said and done and admitted his behavior, to which there were consequences — his basketball scholarship was rescinded. Talking with Coach Whitey on a cloudy day with graduation and the unknown future drawing nearer, and panic setting in, the two had a discussion on the basketball court by the river:

*Whitey:* When somebody says you can't do something you fight back. You prove them wrong.

*Nathan:* They took away my scholarship coach. They don't want me anymore.

*Whitey:* Then find somebody who does. Nathan, where is the fire that made you the best player I ever coached? Show me it's still

there. If it's not, put down that ball and walk home. People love a guy who rises from the ashes. Remember that.

I was kind of thinking about what one can do to erase past mistakes, current troubles, and dream of hope toward doing better in the future. How do you make changes within yourself and stick with them? I tried making a list of, "How To Not Be An EGR," and didn't get very far.

1. Don't be a know-it-all.
2. Don't look for mistakes in others.
3. Don't be a nonconformist.

And then I thought, well, sometimes it's okay to stick with your guns on a subject. There's nothing wrong with committing to a cause. After thinking a little further I noticed my list was a bit negative, with all those "don't" words. So then I tried changing the list for instructional purposes, for Activities To Do. Then I realized every person is different and what really is the opposite of being a know-it-all? Be a learn-it-all? And what, should I tell everybody to conform?

The only viewpoint I have is my own; I made my mistakes, I retain my lessons, and I walk my singular path. On cloudy weeks and rainy mornings, often I can only see the lacking in my personality rather than my accomplishments.

God wants us to believe in his goodness, his bright hope, and his ability to overlook who we used to be. Actually, he can even see who we will one day

be and still holds us close to his heart. Sometimes we just need to slow down and listen to his heartbeat instead of whispers from the enemy. Rising from the ashes is more important. Sometimes it takes one moment at a time, one battle at a time, one victory at a time.

Keep believing in yourself. God does. He wouldn't have put you here if he didn't.

Let's continue with some sports analogies. At a football game, the guy with the ball gets the points, right? That is essentially all I know about football. In baseball, the guy with the ball has the power. The man with the ball determines the actions of the game — if he's throwing it, if he's caught it, if he's hitting it, the guy with the ball determines who's out, who's running, and forcing others to strategize around him. The guys watching, even if they're on the field, are important, but the guy with the ball moves the game forward. Don't wait for life to happen to you. Get the ball. Did someone steal the ball? Chase it. Are you waiting for the ball to come to you? Go get it. Run, my friend, and run hard. In baseball, the point of hitting the ball is to hit it where nobody is standing. You're in the field. Go get the ball.

If you wait for good things to happen to you, you will be disappointed. This isn't tee-ball. The ball is not waiting for you to hit it. You must swing until you connect. Make good things happen. You can do that, even when the game feels like a forfeit. Even when your game feels like an inconsolable loss, be your own

cheerleader. Love yourself, EGR and all. Love your neighbor, EGR and all.

Maybe we can reevaluate the list:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

“But [the Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Life offers its bountiful offerings of pain, harsh winters, deep mud puddles, and poopy diapers. Sometimes we fall in the fire, we succumb to temptation, and criticize when instead we should uplift. Instead of focusing on the fire, look instead toward the next victory. Even if you fall into the category of being the person for whom extra grace is required, or if you have a whole address book full of people who need some extra grace, keep in mind that our God is always lavish in his grace and power.

Now go, pursue the ball, keep playing, and show your audience the power of God within you. People love a guy who rises from the ashes. Remember that.

# ★House Blend with Steamed Cream★

– Five –

I slept on my head funny last night. I'm not sure how or why or for how long, but today my neck is as stiff as a broomstick and the inside feels like the rough, thick trunk of an old, dead tree. And the kids keep talking, and the tummy keeps gurgling, and the chocolates keep whispering from the cabinet. We're three cups in, yo, and it ain't helpin' yet.

When the challenge becomes overbearing, distraction is the key.

If the task seems impossible, you may be looking at the wrong side of it. The art of illusion is a seriously under-discussed ability. Publicists do it all the time, along with magicians, media writers, and politicians.

I was recently introduced to this mastermind TV show called *The Carbonaro Effect*. In it, magician Michael Carbonaro assumes roles in normal jobs and performs the impossible before his unsuspecting audience. He can pull a bowling ball out of a pizza box, create a living being from a 3D printer, and freeze-dry a dog. He performs these tricks in front of an everyday person, and the person entirely believes the trick. Seeing is believing, I guess. You and I know that a toilet cannot be pulled out of a flat box, but the moving guy *just saw it happen*.

Carbonaro shipped a kid from Germany to some small-town children's play eatery, and the delivery guy almost passed out. The toy store clerk ran in terror as the bear she just stuffed began to chase her around the room. I guess I would too. We know it is impossible. But it happened! We saw it happen.

Watching this show has really boggled my mind. What else happens that is impossible, but we believe it because we saw it?

And what do you think we could accomplish if we believed in the impossible?

I've heard from the experts: Work smarter, not harder.

I'm all for working smarter and not harder, by golly. When you face that moment where your goal seems too far away, too hard, or just plain impossible, do two things:

- Snap a prayer out and ask for help. God sent that fabulous little verse in Philippians 4:13: In the strength of the Lord, I can do all things.
- Indulge in illusion. Do not mistake this with "delusion." Illusion is "a thing that is or is likely to be wrongly perceived or interpreted by the senses" (Dictionary.com). Delusion is, "an idiosyncratic belief or impression that is firmly maintained despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality or rational argument, typically a symptom of mental disorder; the action of deluding someone or the state of being deluded. synonyms: misconception, misunderstanding, mistake, error, misinterpretation"

(Dicionary.com). Illusion is a façade and the actor knows it. Delusion is believing in things that are false or incorrect. There's a fine line between the two, and it's called Wisdom.

- Keep editing.

Illusionists languish in distraction to make their tricks a reality. Behind the curtain, somebody is squished into a tiny space, someone is moving very fast with precision and skill, and somebody else is getting all the attention. When the going gets tough, put down science and feeling and hope and those gut-twisting nerves, and pick up the cards that say This Thing Can Work.

Illusions occur in many steps, such as: creation, learning, practice, and implementation.

### **1) One Is The Loneliest Number: Creation Of The Idea**

Step One: We've started with our goals. We have created the idea and decided to throw ourselves toward it, so we are on the right track! Woo hoo! Holla at ya! High Five! Mic drop!

Pick up the mic, though, 'cause we are just starting. So.

I'll wait.

### **2) Take A Look, It's In A Book: Learning**

The harder part comes next, where you have to learn about what you are doing. This helps with distraction, though. If you are changing your eating habits, read up on Why You Are Doing This, and What Can Help. If you are learning a new skill, read up on it, watch videos, flip through picture books, and talk to someone else who knows how to do it. Learn. Use that glorious gray matter! Take some Gingko! Yay for herbs!

### **3) All You Gotta Do Is Work, Work, Work, Work, Work**

Now act. Use that knowledge. This is the even HARDER part! Ugh! Take more Gingko! And like maybe a big swig of...water. Yeah. Water. Nah. Let's have some House Blend.

What was I saying?

Oh yes. You may be wondering, "Hey, she just said that there was a harder part, and then a HARDER part, so where's the downhill?"

Friend, my friend, o Captain, my captain, I'm not sure there's a downhill or easy part. Life is hard. It's all hard. What a great fact that we have these other fabulous human beings around us to help distract from it, right? And God knew, he just knew, we would be challenged, so he gave us the ability to learn, to appreciate all of the good, and to experience the joy in the success. So take the joy nuggets when you make it through another moment, and appreciate your ability to retain knowledge, spark creativity in your mind,

and implement these abilities. And also, be grateful for illusion. Be grateful you can only see one side of the trick at a time. We might not want to see the other side.

So back to it. We have learned and are moving forward. Now it's lunch time, and you're hungry, and you want a flippin' cheeseburger. But you know you should have a salad and a chicken breast. Buuuuuut.

Distraction.

Illusion. Look past the challenge and instead do the opposite. Here's where personality adds flavor. Some people can power through. Some can be like, "Psh. I like salad. I think it's awesome and I can eat it every meal every day, no big deal, yo." I am not that person. I love muffins. I am short-sighted. I love cheeseburgers. I blame my second child on the cheeseburger thing. When I was recovering in the hospital after that C-Section, I craved like no tomorrow a bacon cheeseburger from Whataburger and the feeling has not let up since. I can always eat a bacon cheeseburger from Whataburger. Nom nom.

Some people can reason and use logic: "I know that this fat bomb is a fat bomb, and therefore I decide to do what is best for myself. And that makes it an easy choice."

Sometimes I can do this, but I'm somewhat of a wishy-washy person who is highly susceptible to advertising. And cheese. So I need distraction.

Sometimes I need to run around the yard twice, and then slug down a cup of water, and then maybe take a shower, before I can sit down and say, "I am

totally happy with this chicken breast.” And while I eat it, I watch my favorite TV show or read a fabulous book or write some ridiculous blog about magicians and unicorns.

But I’ve also noticed that while I am distracting myself, I’m not sitting there thinking about how hungry I am, how much I don’t think I can change, and how much I doubt my abilities. Instead of looking at the challenge, I’m working. Instead of crying about the height of the mountain, I’m placing one foot and one hand in a crevice and shoving upward. I’m allowing the close-up tasks to be the priority. The small tasks build upon each other. The close-ups create the larger illusion.

Now that we know we can make a choice to put our feelings aside for the moment, then we work on making the skills click. This takes time and patience. This takes meal after meal of choosing what is right. This takes hours of whittling, flossing, painting, writing, twisting, cutting, climbing, clipping, running, stretching, or whatever it is you are trying to do.

I like commas. Commas give us the ability to do a little bit more while we are in the sentence that we are in.

Practicing what we want to excel in takes time. I’ve had students ask me what the key to success truly is. The key is to create a plan, set up a schedule, and plan for success. Set aside time every stinkin’ day to practice the task in which you want to excel. Set aside thirty minutes every day, every day, every day, to do

that task. Writing 200 words every day eventually writes a story. Running thirty minutes every day has innumerable benefits. Drawing a sketch every day improves your skills. Climbing the mountain, thirty minutes at a time, conquers the mountain. What you spend your time doing is what you excel at. If you want to binge-watch television, you'll be great at that. But if you want to do something remarkable with your life, you'll create the time to do the thing your heart craves. This one thing I do know to be true. I earned my Master of Fine Arts degree in my second year of marriage, working full time as an office manager, while pregnant. I know exhausted, I know busy, and I know despair. So instead of giving in to despair, turn on some 90's punk music, say a prayer, pour a large cup of coffee, and Do That Thing Your Heart Craves. Ignite your fire. Thirty minutes. Every day. (Maybe don't drink coffee right before jogging. Bad things.)

Now, we are going to hang out on Step 3 for quite a while.

Do you know why?

Because Step 3 is where we want to give up. Step 3 is the bummer. Step 3 is the waiting and the treading and the outcropping of rocks upon the cliff. Step 3 is where we must continue learning, searching, improving, and sloughing off the not-up-to-par stuff within us and our work. Step 3 is where we have no end in sight. Step 3, yo. Reheat the coffee. Add a splash of cream. Step 3 is what I like to think of as Editing.

Editing is hard work.

As I was editing my first novel, I spent half an hour one morning fixing ONE PARAGRAPH. Four sentences! I rewrote the thing several times, trying to get my point across in just the right manner. The great theme behind all good writing is to show and not tell. Sometimes showing is much harder than it looks. Showing up can be harder than it sounds. Refining skills, honing in on excellence, takes a little bit of moxie and days of resilience.

Don't quit.

Even after I worked and re-worked that paragraph, I guarantee that after it went through my editing, and editing from some beta readers, and then three professional editors, it continued transforming.

Students in my composition classes learn to write essays, starting with a basic paragraph and working up into an essay. They must complete a list of steps to start from "idea" to get to "final draft." Step 2 is writing a rough draft, and Steps 3 and 4 are editing. Often students do not complete the Step 4. Often they copy and paste from the third to the fourth. But friends, Step 3 and Step 4 require different edits.

Keep looking for ways to improve. You've got great content. But you want to publish the best work possible, right?

The journey to finding the perfect sentence continues. What I love and hate about writing is that, within English grammatical guidelines, any sentence can be written in numerous ways. I get caught up in the rules easily. Watch out for lazy words, write in active voice, use the most effective, succinct word.

Writing is an art. The more I write, the more challenging I find it, and the more my mind races, pulse pounding, eyes blinded, fingers flying. Usually there is a lot of nibbling upon nails or munchies, and binge coffee-drinking. Step 3 and 4 in the assignment are challenging because once a revision had been made, we often think we are fine and move on. But Step 4 is crucial. Step 4 is finding an even better way to get the point across. Step 4 is preparing for the final presentation. Step 4 is where the editor must make even further new changes. The author must put aside pride and seek the best for the writing. This final set of revisions pushes the writing to a new level of effectiveness.

Imagine a purple crayon. It's been well-loved by some creative mastermind of a seven-year old. That crayon is excellent at being purple. That crayon fills pages and pages with beautiful creations. But by the time the purple crayon has drawn this much, it's worn down to where the wrapper begins. The wrapper must be pulled away and discarded in order for the purple crayon to continue illustrating. Imagine if the purple crayon held onto its wrapper. It's not too usable, is it? Yank away those wrappers, purple crayons! Draw! Don't just be the tip of the crayon. Be the full crayon. Have you ever used an entire crayon? That purple crayon has a long way to go. The tip is just what it sounds like.

I have a Roomba and her name is Blueberry. I love her. She is one of my BFF's. On her underside, she

has a brush that catches the hairs and dirt and stuff. I honestly don't know how the Roomba works, but whatever. If I don't periodically clean out the brush, it gets filled with grossness. Three girls, a guy, and a cat. Picture it.

This brush, capturing hair and dirt and strings and carpet fibers and dust and gunk, gathers ideas and takes away our junk. That is Blueberry's job. That is what she was created to do. But she has to get cleaned up every once in a while or else she is ineffective and, let's face it, just plain funky. There's a red error light that won't even let me press Go because the brush is too clogged. She can't even do her job. She must be cleaned out. She must allow her brushes to be removed from her, given a thorough scrubbing, and be replaced.

Be willing to polish your gift, so it can be used most effectively in a world that desperately needs some sparkle.

Invest in yourself. Whatever your art is, whatever your calling, be willing to edit. Use these moments to clean out the junk that doesn't need to be there. It takes time, patience, and tenacity. Stick with it, purple crayon. The rainbow isn't complete without you.

#### **4) If You'll Look Over Here At This Hand: The Implementation**

Glorying in the illusion also means letting someone or something else take credit for the accomplishment. This part is hard, too, yo! So often I

want to get the thumbs up or the high five, but sometimes we don't see the win. Sometimes the win is an aftereffect. But if Madeleine L'Engle hadn't written her works in the 1960's, and if my friend hadn't suggested her book *Walking on Water*, then we wouldn't be sitting here chatting. You may not see the big results you crave. But you can make small, realistic goals and accomplish them. You can inspire, you can create, you can help, you can encourage, you can say, "I will intentionally talk to two people about the project I'm working on." And those connections lead to others, which draw relationships closer to your heart and your project because you are being intentional with your life. And loving it.

The road to accomplishing big tasks is not fancy and sometimes it's not the typical idea of fun. It's work. It's weighty. It is gritty, and nail-biting, and sweaty, and tear-filled, and late nights and jitters, and heartbreak. But it doesn't have to be miserable. Enjoy the learning. Celebrate the wins you DO experience. Perceive editing as education, and glory in the ridding of second-rate work.

The behind-the-scenes work is what makes all the difference. Your attitude, your commitment to being positive about it all, is what changes the experience. Quite often, even when you achieve your goals, The Work itself gets the glory. And that is okay, because you know the story, and you made it rock.

**It Really Is Like a Box Of Chocolates**

My kids compare fairness and whine when they feel as if I've been unjust. One gets a cupcake on Tuesday and another gets pizza on Friday. While they each wanted what they got, they wanted what the other got as well. Sometimes you just get the cupcake, darling. Though the pathway may not end where we expect, it's a fabulous path. It's part of your story. It's your cupcake.

In all of your work and editing and desire and passion, aim high, friend, and seriously hustle. But keep your eyes on things above. You may not need the pizza. Good or bad, necessary or not, our unique paths exist because we are too limited to fully see the other side of the trick. Remember to consider that what you hear from others, or even yourself, might not be the entire story.

Then again, what do I know? I slept on my head funny last night.

# ★The Biggest Caramel Macchiato You Got. With an Extra Shot(s).★

– Six –

What are you waiting for?

Waiting. The waiting game. The waitlist. The weight gain. Ha ha.

Here's a surprising thought: being a writer is like being a Lego door piece. You think you'll be part of constructing a house or some sort of car. You have to be flexible. You have to be willing to end up in pieces, as part of any sort of building, or even closed in by other bricks. You'll be used in a manner you never imagined. When I sit down to work on writing a book, I have to consider all of the other aspects – promotions, advertisements, and ways I can convince people that my words are worth paying for. Super fun. (Translation: Super bummer.) Just because I like constructing stories doesn't necessarily mean I like to harangue people about buying them. So I'm waiting for one person to like how my cover looks, and then another, and then another. I'm waiting for the people who need my story to find it.

Several of my friends are searching for answers. Several are working on big projects, working toward success, striving toward building life. Several of my friends are waiting to adopt or to get pregnant. If you have a child you'd like to be rid of, I know a girl. Hit

me up. Winky face. The waiting for a child holds countless expectations and preparations and crushed heartbeats. Waiting for a child to arrive brings out the worst in a person, and ultimately the best. Waiting for the people who need us gives us time to become the people who need them, in more ways than we ever know. That person you're waiting for will challenge you and maybe drive you to your limits. Take this time to store up knowledge, aptitude, and perseverance. You'll need it.

How's that job market looking? Enjoying the grind? Is your boss awesome? Do you want a boss? Do you want to be your own boss? Are you also binge-watching Netflix and hoping for some more employable skills to come your way? I getcha. Heartbreaking is the journey through Indeed.com.

Just because you're waiting doesn't mean you're holding still. The term 'waiting' insinuates a lacking. Lacking what you want, unable to fulfill, incapable of movement. But let's change that. Waiting needs to be constructive. Waiting is the training period.

Just because you're waiting doesn't mean you're useless. Just because you're waiting doesn't mean you've got no purpose. Just because you're waiting doesn't mean you're faulty.

While you wait, take time to rest.

While you wait, take time to hustle.

While you wait, take time to clean up. Clean up your house, clean up those projects you've been avoiding, clean up your spirit. Clean up your game.

Clean up your focus. What do you really want? *Will you be ready when the waiting ends?*

While you wait, strengthen. Go to the gym. Go for a run. Go for a walk – every single day.

While you wait, enjoy the scenery.

While you wait, take time to dance.

While you wait, jam out to some awesome music.

While you wait, act in gratitude.

One recent Monday, I sat at my computer and had nothing to do. I didn't have a class to teach, any project to work on, no deadlines, no due dates, no nothing.

N.O.T.H.I.N.G.

Some 'nothing's are good. Some 'nothing's are bad.

I DON'T DO LAZY WELL.

DOES ANYONE DO LAZY WELL?

I'm a task-oriented, obsessive-compulsive, driven, crazy sixteen-year-old-at-heart. My first job at a dry cleaner's imbued the importance of Always Doing Something, because there's always something to do. Don't let Joe see you sitting around! Find something to do!

And I've been given the gift of having a hearty work ethic. It's in my genes. My people were at the Alamo, folks. We were settlers and foragers and builders.

Turn and burn, people. Move it, move it!

There's always something to do. There's always something to work on. There's always something to improve.

But on that Monday morning, I had nothing to offer and no spirit to shove onward. I think I experienced all the seven stages of grief as I sat at my computer. I binge-watched a Hallmark show on Netflix, ate a lot of chocolate, and key lime pie, and ... I colored. One of my fabulous sisters gave me a coloring book and this fancy set of colored pencils for my Christmas gift, and honestly I thought it was a neat thing but didn't know I'd use it because I've been so incredibly busy. I like busy! I like bustle! I like it, honestly, because if I stop moving then I have a hard time starting back up. Starting back up is a whole new monster in itself, yes?

While I colored, I yelled inside. I was mad at myself for my lacking, mad at Everyone Else for having what I wanted, mad at my pencil sharpener for being dull. Mad at the coffee for being bitter, mad at the writers of the TV script for being so blasé, mad at myself for having chosen WRITING ABOVE ALL USELESS THINGS to do for my vocation! I felt useless. I felt pointless. I felt like at my core I lacked essentiality.

Oh, that we may show more gratitude for these waiting periods. May we have a higher perspective.

Maybe you want to move on, move out, move up, move laterally, move in, move less, or move more. This life is a package of unconditional realities and unmanageable circumstances.

You're doing a good job. Hang in there.

Our unmanageable circumstances are like a box of plastic toy building block parts. Big, long ones, short singles, flat skinnies, and the awkward three-prong fill this box. Some of us sit waiting much longer than we expect or hope. Maybe you expected to wait. Maybe you didn't. Maybe you're a red three-prong, and the Maker needs a red three-prong, and he picks the red three-prong across the box. Of course you're fully qualified to fulfill that red three-prong role. But now's the time to enjoy the box. You're not broken. You just need to hang out until the next three-prong slot comes along.

I don't know all that you're going through. Maybe you want more, or less, and maybe can't get where you want to be just yet. That's hard, yo. Cheers to the waiting! Cheers to you for sticking it out!

The heart is where all these matters twist and shout. Underneath the waiting, there's a heart wrestling with something deeper. Waiting is great, honestly. You get to chill out, there's a sofa, and lots of television to watch and books to read. We all say there's never enough time, so in the waiting, we get to fill our time how we like. But in the waiting, those ribbons of heartbreak tangle and snarl even the most patient of us. Maybe you feel as if you've done something wrong. Maybe you feel afraid. Maybe you feel unprepared or bored or restless or exhausted. Oh, you know you feel exhausted. Here's an idea. Whatever you are feeling, act in the opposite. Are you lonely? Go find a friend. Text. Call. Hug. Feeling tired? Go for a walk. Feeling afraid? Go do something

thrilling. Feeling broken? Seek the one who has made you whole.

In this waiting period, you and I, we aren't alone. Don't give up. Be an open door. Be your proud three-pronged self. Be useful in ways you've never imagined. Don't just fill time to fill time. Fill your time with unconventional joy.

The people who need you are waiting, too. Live now in gratitude of all you have, and for the people who need you where you are, as you are, right now. Celebrate.

Defy despair.

Exist colorfully.

Dwell richly.

Smile deeply.

Hug firmly.

And while you wait, be your best self possible. Bust out the fun music and dance around the living room, waving your arms like the awkward three-prong you are. Cause you're pretty amazing. You're the best awkward three-prong I know.

# ★Mocha Frappe★

– Seven –

Let's go back to discussing the show *One Tree Hill*. "You gotta open up your heart to somebody," Keith says to his love, Karen. "You gotta let someone discover how staggering you are."

We all deserve this reminder. We spend so much time trying to improve upon the current state that sometimes we don't see how fabulous we are. We are fashioned by flawless hands. We were created in the depths of perfection, in the shadow of unspoiled eyes.

You are staggering.

Name your faults or claim your failures: they are beside the point. Before he was a king, David was a kid going up against a nine-foot tall sack of muscle and hair. Look what he did. He owned his place with his Creator, saying, "Then all the world will know that Israel has a God, and this whole assembly will know that it is not by sword or by spear that the Lord saves, for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:46b-47). I'm guessing he said it rather loudly. I would.

The battle is the Lord's. The insurmountable guilt, melancholy, potty training, and dusty floorboards, eh, those are just a little housework to the One who made it all. As we continue to wipe shelves and highchair legs, so the Father wipes away tears. He mops up our scandals, and melts away fears.

This journey is not about our abilities. We can't earn the privilege of being staggering. Jaw-dropping. Compelling. We are God's workmanship, created to do the good works he prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). The good works may not always feel like fun works or easy works, and they may not be in the manner you expect or in the location you want, but they are prepared specifically for you. Remember that this world isn't the last word.

Pick up a rock and throw it. God will aim and finish the task.

Sometimes those imaginary monsters like The Laundry Pile or Asking For Forgiveness or Getting Out Of Bed need to be told who's boss. Regardless of the adversary, they wilt in the gaze of the Lord of Hosts.

David also said, "You come against me with a dagger, spear, and sword, but I come against you in the name of Yahweh of Hosts ...The Lord will hand you over to me" (1 Samuel 17:45-46). Take that, Toilet Grime. Take and eat it, Clumsiness, Ache, Loneliness, Fear, and Loss.

Remember this proclamation, tuck it inside your heart, and do not lose grip on the most powerful weapon we have to face the day. The Creator, the Great Love, is staggering. And he designed you.

He designed you with two eyes, ten fingers (hopefully!), a sense of smell, and a memory that captures your essence and perspective. He gave you those gifts which you can spin into magic. He'll help you use them. He'll send you people who need them from you. Use them for good. Use them to create life.

Use them to share life. Pass along those gifts to those who cross your path. For we are often paid in fulfillment, resonating hearts, and are carried along by hope. He'll provide. What will you pass along? What can you give to others that makes them feel alive? What will you do today that swells your spirit?

No, you cannot stop. Keep walking.

Whether caught between a grassy oasis and a desert, drowning under the waves, wedged into a dark hole, or gazing from a spacious place, look up.

Take the hand of the One who made you and walk in his steady stride, until the giants fall away.

## ★About The Barista★



Kadee Carder resides with her husband and daughters deep in the heart of Texas. Carder earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations at Howard Payne University and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from National University. She teaches English courses on the university level and plans her schedule around coffee availability.

Writing and language have been her life-long pleasure, wordsmithery offering the ability to twist emotion into sense and cosmos. When she's not dancing around the living room with her kids, she helps at church activities, writes encouraging blogs, and orders pizza like a boss.



A huge thanks to the wonderful handful of people who gave me drink suggestions. You're the best. Enjoy your next favorite and know I'm thinking about you.



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