

# THE GRAND ILLUSION

Kimberly Kirk

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I dedicate this book to my daddy, who always  
wanted to write a novel – and would have written  
a great one. Wish you were here to see it.  
Love and miss you so much.

## Special Thanks

*More than anything I have ever written, this was a group project, and in so many ways, a family affair...*

**Gary Kirk** ~ My amazing husband! Thanks for catching timeline issues and helping me keep the storyline real. Your love and support overwhelm me.

**Andrew Kirk** ~ Your list of *things to consider* when I began writing was invaluable! It helped set a framework for the entire project. Thanks also for your thoughts and ideas along the way, which really shaped the narrative, and made it so much better. Your excitement for this book is contagious!

**Alexa Schlichter** ~ Thanks for helping me understand the fiction genre, and the mindset from which this project needed to be written. They enabled me to take what was in my head and put it on paper, in what I hope is a relatable and captivating way. I'm also grateful for your insights, encouragement, and the idea for the front cover.

**Nathan Schlichter** ~ I so appreciate your willingness to read through the book as I wrote it.

**Lori Coles** ~ Thanks for your wonderful grammatical input, for helping me soften the tone, and for being my cheerleader.

**Jacqui Curley** ~ Your input helped me tighten the story, and gave me things to consider as I wrote. Thank you so much!

**Stephanie Cobb** ~ You did such a fantastic job with the covers! It was fun working with you, and I really appreciate all the time and creativity you invested in this project.

**Tammy Fuhr** ~ Thanks for taking the time to read through the book, for catching some mistakes, and for your enthusiasm.

**Amy Steinhart** ~ Your medical knowledge was invaluable! Thanks for sharing your expertise with me!

**My Prayer Warriors** ~ Thanks for consistently bringing every aspect of this project before the throne of grace.

Cover concept: Alexa Schlichter ★ Cover design: Stephanie Cobb

## OVERLOAD

CONTROL IS AN ILLUSION. That's what I'd been told, though I never wanted to believe it. Much of my time and energy was spent trying to do what I could, to make things go the way I wanted them to go. I had little to no success but that didn't deter me. And then I was sitting there, holding the book and the pen, trying to decide what to do next. It seemed unreal, and yet it was happening. My tear stained face, and the fear and anger I felt over what we were about to lose, assured me of it. I wished Glen were there. We make such a good team, and I have always relied on his wisdom. But it was just me. What I so desperately wanted was now mine. The only question was – how was I going to use it?

For as long as I can remember, I wanted the power of control. It wasn't because of hardships or devastating experiences. Like everyone else, I had my share of disappointments and trials, but nothing you'd see on a Lifetime Original Movie. In fact, my life was kind of ordinary. Maybe that was the problem. I was just a face in the crowd. Someone with fair skin and freckles – two things I wished I could have changed. When I think about how self-conscious I was about my appearance, I remember my mom's words: "Katherine, when you were a baby, people would stop me and tell me how beautiful you were." Apparently, dark brown hair and bright blue eyes were an unusual combination, so they drew some

attention. My hair color faded over the years – as did my freckles – and my eyes turned green. No one would call me striking these days except for my husband Glen, and his opinion is the only one that matters.

I never wanted to be famous – just significant. Someone who made a difference. And now I was given the ability to have greater impact than I could've ever imagined. Our situation had become desperate. I knew that some of the decisions I made along the way led me to where I was. There were also things over which I had no control, that caused my life to go in directions I never wanted or anticipated. On my own, I couldn't even *make one hair white or black*<sup>1</sup> – at least not without chemicals. But the power to exact real and lasting change had been given to me, and I used it to solve our biggest and most immediate problem. Oh the weight that was lifted from mine and my husband's shoulders – although he didn't exactly realize it. To explain what I did and why, I need to back up a bit.

Glen had been out of work for over a year. There were no real prospects, even though he was doing everything he could to find a job. It was hard to believe that Todd Walters – his boss who goes to our church – laid him off from the small accounting firm where he had worked for over twenty years. We owed money on our tax returns which were due the following week, and also had a stack of unpaid bills. Our savings account was dwindling so rapidly it was terrifying. There was no relief in sight.

Our daughter Andrea was getting married in just over four months, and the second deposits for the wedding expenses were almost upon us. It wasn't like we overextended ourselves intentionally. When we started making plans, we

had no idea that Glen would lose his job. Andrea was contributing as much as she was able, but since her bakery business was just getting off the ground, that didn't amount to much. Now we were stuck.

Our second born, Nicholas, had recently moved back home to save money so he could begin working on his Masters in Psychology. We were also trying to help our oldest son Alex, whose medical school bills were astronomical. Since most of his surgical residency paycheck was going towards them, we did what we could to help him make ends meet.

All these money problems made me feel completely out of control – like a story had been written for me in which I had absolutely no say. It didn't seem fair. I had always tried to do the right thing. When I was a child, about the age of five, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I was pretty consistent in reading and studying the Scriptures, and tried to put them into practice. I wasn't always as faithful in setting aside time for prayer, but I would try to *pray without ceasing*<sup>2</sup> by talking with the Lord throughout the day. I even volunteered in the nursery and led a Bible study or two along the way. I believed that God was in control and that He always had my best interest in mind. But as things began to fall apart, I started to doubt.

Since looking ahead was too difficult, and seemed so dark and hopeless, I began to think back over my life. I started to wonder if some of the choices I had made – and ones that had been made for me – had taken me down paths that led to the mess I now found myself in. I wished that I could somehow rewrite my story, or at least alter portions of it. This seemingly ridiculous line of thinking did not bring me comfort. It actually made me even more anxious. And then it came – the

letter that changed everything. I'll never forget hearing the mail truck pass by that day. I had hoped it would bring good news, but that was not the case. I felt the long trek down the driveway to our mailbox might be a welcomed distraction, so I made my way towards it.

Everything somehow always seems better when I'm outside. We lived in the country for all but the first couple years of our marriage, but not too far from civilization. We had built a log cabin on a small piece of land – only two acres. Our favorite part was that it was surrounded by woods on three sides. As the years passed, the area became more developed, and the trees gradually began to disappear. First there was a neighbor on our right and then on our left. Before we knew it, we were living on a street with ten houses.

The forest behind our home had been left untouched until just a few months ago, when we heard that a developer had purchased the land that was adjacent to it. Fifteen houses were slated to be built, with roads and sidewalks. We did everything we could to stop it. We got all of our neighbors to sign a petition against it, and brought it to the township meeting, but to no avail. I was thankful that we had left the back half of our property wooded, so they couldn't touch that. But I knew before long there would be kids running through our woods, and the solace I gained from strolling through the forest would soon be no more.

I loved walking the well-worn paths behind our home and being surrounded by nature that had been untouched by the outside world. I would often bring my Bible with me and find a rock to sit upon as I read it. I am geographically challenged, so I would stay on the trails I knew. Since there were lots of them, I never got bored. Hearing the rustle of the wind in the

trees and the birds chirping; watching the chipmunks run and play together; being alone and yet not alone as I could so strongly feel the presence of the Lord – these were little slices of heaven for me.

But those days were basically gone. The serenity was broken by the machinery that felled the trees and dug up the land in preparation for the new development. If I got up early enough, I could have my quiet time in the woods before the work began. But I missed being able to wander in the forest whenever I felt the urge. Although I could have done it while the construction was taking place, there was no point, because I couldn't even hear the thoughts in my mind with all the noise.

As I headed to the mailbox that afternoon, part of me was mourning the loss of the sanctuary of what I considered to be *my* woods. I sorted through the letters and there was one from a bank I didn't recognize. I walked back to the house, grabbed the letter opener, and began to slice through the envelopes. Bills and junk mail – that was pretty much all we had gotten. I hate when solicitors make things look important in an effort to trick you into opening them. I've gotten pretty good at distinguishing the significant from the useless, and nearly discarded the envelope from the unfamiliar bank. Something within led me to open it, just to be sure.

As I began to read what was inside, my heart started pounding so hard in my chest that I almost passed out. The letter was informing us that the note on our home had been sold, and the new holder would not honor the agreement we had made with our former bank. It allowed us to only pay a portion of our mortgage each month until we got back on our feet. The letter said that we had to resume full payments. It



also informed us that the unpaid portion, which had been growing steadily over the past several months, was due. They were giving us sixty days to catch up on our mortgage, or they were going to start the paperwork to foreclose. How could that happen? How could they simply discard the arrangements we had made? We were doing our best, and paying at least a little each month, when some people just stop payments altogether. And what about Nicholas? If we lost the house, where would he live?

It was too much to handle. I felt like the walls were closing in on me, which made it difficult to breathe. Crying hysterically, I ran aimlessly out of the house and into the woods. I was so overwrought that the sound of construction – which usually kept me out of the forest – had no impact whatsoever. I don't know how long or far I ran, as I had lost track of time. At some point, out of sheer exhaustion, I fell to my knees and continued to weep. My head was pounding from all of the crying, but I couldn't stop the tears from flowing. This seemed to go on for hours.

Although my eyes were blurry, I could tell it was starting to get dark. As I looked around, I had no idea where I was. Nothing was familiar. I stood up with the intent of heading back to the house, but wasn't sure what path I should take. When I reached for my cell and discovered it wasn't in my pocket, I began to panic and started to pray.

It was then that I heard a voice calling my name: *Katherine, Katherine*. It seemed familiar, and yet in some ways was not. At first I thought it was my husband trying to find me. Maybe he had seen the letter on the kitchen floor and with night beginning to fall, was worried and started looking for me. I then considered that it might be the Lord guiding me home.

Up to that point, I had never heard His audible voice. I had only, yet often, sensed His whisper to my heart. But I knew actually hearing Him was not unprecedented. I always loved the Bible story of Samuel. God had called Him by name and at first, he didn't realize it was the Almighty.<sup>3</sup> Was that happening to me? I then remembered that Jesus said something about His sheep hearing and knowing His voice.<sup>4</sup> I was one of His sheep, so perhaps He was speaking to me. I followed the voice, believing it would lead me out of the forest, and back to my home.

As I walked, I expected to see the plants and large rocks that were on the outskirts of our property. Instead, it felt like I was going farther into the woods. It was getting harder to see, because the sun was sinking over the horizon, and there was a chill in the air that I hadn't noticed before. Just then, I saw a soft glow, a glimmer of light ahead of me. I ran to it, and found a small campfire. I called out frantically for help, but no one answered. Since I couldn't venture from that spot because of the darkness that had enveloped the forest, I sat down on a log and warmed my hands near the flames. A peace came over me – one that I couldn't explain.

The woods didn't frighten me; they had always been a place of solace and meditation. At some point, I resigned myself to the fact that I'd be spending the night there. I would try to find my way back home in the morning. In one way, I felt like this was a gift. It allowed me to put aside the weight of all I was carrying, and instead focus on my immediate needs. But in another way, it was disturbing because I knew Glen would be worried about me. Since my car was in the garage, he would probably assume that I wasn't too far from the house. As time wore on, he may have tried my cell, then discovered it was on the kitchen table. I could picture him making phone calls,

desperately trying to find me. I was sure he would have contacted our kids and was sad to think of the fear they would be feeling. I wondered if he would call the police.

Thinking about these things made me so upset, that I was ready to venture into the darkness to spare my loved ones the terror they must have been feeling. I stood up and tried to determine in which direction to go, when I heard the voice again: *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*<sup>5</sup> I believed that was God's way of telling me that He was taking care of my family, and that I was to stay by the fire. I prayed that in the midst of whatever Glen and our children were feeling, Jesus would grant them His perfect peace.

I knew I needed to make provisions for myself, so I investigated the surrounding area. I gathered some sticks to keep the fire going, then made a bed of leaves and brush to lay upon. While I was setting up my makeshift campsite, I noticed something peering out from under the log on which I had been sitting. As I got closer, I realized it was a book. I joked to myself that perhaps God had left me something to read during my night alone in the woods.

I tried to pull it out, but it wouldn't budge. I grabbed it with both hands, put my foot on the log, and pulled as hard as I could. Before I knew it, I was flying in the air. I landed on my back on the cold hard ground, with the book firmly in my grasp.

## ALL THE DAYS

THE BOOK WAS VERY LARGE and rather heavy. It looked old – like an antique – but was in wonderful condition. It had a sweet, almost floral smell, and I wondered if that was because it had been in the woods. The cover was leather and had a beautiful pattern etched into it. On each of the corners was a gold square which added to the richness and the weight of the book.

It wasn't until I held it closer to the fire, that I could read the title: *All the Days*. I thought it was kind of general but intriguing, and was eager to check it out. As my eyes fell to the bottom of the cover, I was startled and confused. I stared at it for a while and didn't know what to think. There, engraved into the thick brown leather, was my name – *Katherine Connors Quinlan*. The letters were filled with a gold colored substance which cause them to be raised. I ran my fingers over them again and again, as I tried to make sense of it. Where did this come from? How long had it been there? What exactly was it? I knew I needed to look inside the book, but was fearful about what I would find. Curiosity finally got the better of me. I took a deep breath and slowly flipped open the cover. Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw.