

# Captivating

UNVEILING THE MYSTERY of a  
*Woman's Soul*

JOHN AND STASI ELDREDGE



**NELSON BOOKS**  
A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers  
*Since 1798*

[www.thomasnelson.com](http://www.thomasnelson.com)

Copyright © 2005 by John Eldredge and Stasi Eldredge

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, LLP, Attorneys and Counselors, Orange, California.

Nelson Books titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail [SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com).

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted *Alter* are from *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. Copyright © 1996 by Robert Alter.

Scripture quotations noted NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NASB are from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

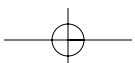
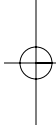
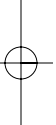
Scripture quotations noted NKJV are from THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN 0-7852-6469-8 [CIP to come]

*Printed in the United States of America*  
05 06 07 08 09 QW 5 4 3 2 1



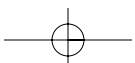
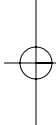
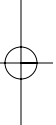
To the captivating women we  
are blessed to call our friends.



# Contents



<i>Introduction</i>		ix
CHAPTER ONE	The Heart of a Woman	1
CHAPTER TWO	What Eve Alone Can Tell	20
CHAPTER THREE	Haunted by a Question	43
CHAPTER FOUR	Wounded	60
CHAPTER FIVE	A Special Hatred	76
CHAPTER SIX	Healing the Wound	92
CHAPTER SEVEN	Romanced	111
CHAPTER EIGHT	Beauty to Unveil	128
CHAPTER NINE	Arousing Adam	148
CHAPTER TEN	Mothers, Daughters, Sisters	168
CHAPTER ELEVEN	Warrior Princesses	186
CHAPTER TWELVE	An Irreplaceable Role	202
<i>About the Authors</i>		219
<i>A Daily Prayer for Freedom</i>		221
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		225
<i>Excerpt from Wild at Heart</i>		227
<i>Other Books from John Eldredge</i>		239



## Introduction

Now we are on holy ground.

Writing a book for men (*Wild at Heart*) was a fairly straightforward proposition. Not that men are simpletons. But they *are* the less complicated of the two genders trying to navigate love and life together. Both men and women know this to be true. The mystery of the feminine heart was meant to be a good thing, by the way. A source of joy. Yet it has become a source of shame—women almost universally feel that they are “too much” and “not what they should be.” And men tend to pull away from the deeper waters of a woman’s soul, unsure of what they will find there or how to handle it. And so we have missed the treasure that is the heart of a woman, missed the richness femininity was meant to bring to our lives, missed the way it speaks to us of the heart of God.

Rest assured—this is not a book about all the things you are failing to do as a woman. We’re tired of those books. As a new Christian, the first book I (Stasi) picked up to read on godly femininity I threw across the room. I never picked it up again. In the twenty-five years since, I have only read a few I could wholeheartedly recommend. The rest drive me crazy. Their messages to women make me feel as though, “You are not the woman you ought to be—but if you do the following ten things, you can make the grade.” They are, by and large, soul-killing. But femininity cannot be prescribed in a formula.

We have women friends who love tea parties and china, and

## INTRODUCTION

friends who break out in hives at the thought of them. We have women friends who love to hunt, bow hunt even. Women who love to entertain and women who don't. Women who are professors, moms, doctors, nurses, missionaries, dentists, homemakers, therapists, chefs, artists, poets, rock climbers, triathletes, secretaries, salespeople, and social workers. Beautiful women, all.

So—is a true woman Cinderella or Joan of Arc? Mary Magdalene or Oprah? How do we recover essential femininity without falling into stereotypes, or worse, ushering in more pressure and shame upon our readers? That is the last thing a woman needs. And yet, there *is* an essence that God has given to every woman. We share something deep and true, down in our hearts. So we venture into this exploration of femininity by way of the *heart*. What is at the core of a woman's heart? What are her desires? What did we long for as little girls? What do we still long for as women? And, how does a woman begin to be healed from the wounds and tragedies of her life?

Sometime between the dreams of your youth and yesterday, something precious has been lost. And that treasure is your heart, your priceless feminine heart. God has set within you a femininity that is powerful and tender, fierce and alluring. No doubt it has been misunderstood. Surely it has been assaulted. But it is there, your true heart, and it is worth recovering. You *are* captivating.

So we invite you to take a journey with us, a journey of discovery and healing. For your heart is the prize of God's Kingdom, and Jesus has come to win you back for himself—all of you. We pray that God will use this book in your life, in your heart, to bring healing, restoration, joy, and life! And if God does that, it will be cause for a wonderful celebration. With teacups and china. Or paper plates. Whatever. One day, we will all celebrate together. In anticipation and hope, may this little book draw you closer to God's heart—and your own.

CHAPTER ONE

*The Heart of a Woman*



*Sometimes it's hard to be a woman.*

—TAMMY WYNETTE

*He saw that Fatima's eyes were filled with tears.*

*"You're crying?"*

*"I'm a woman of the desert," she said, averting her face.*

*"But above all, I'm a woman."*

—PAULO COELHO

*You belong among the wildflowers*

*You belong in a boat out at sea*

*You belong with your love on your arm*

*You belong somewhere you feel free.*

—TOM PETTY

*L*et's do it." Dusk was settling in. The air was cool, fragrant with pine and sage, and the swiftly moving river beckoned. We were camping in the Tetons, and it so happened that our canoe was on top of the car. "Let's put in." John looked at me as if I had lost my mind. In less than twenty minutes night would be upon us and the river and the woods. All would be pitch black. We'd be on the river, alone, with only a general idea of which way to go (down), where to take

*Captivating*

out (head for the road), and a long walk back to the car. Who knew what dangers lay out there? He looked again at me, looked at our young sons, and then said, "Okay!" We sprang into action.

The evening was stunning. The river's graceful movements caused the water's colors to shift from cobalt to silver to black. No other person was in sight. We had Oxbow Bend to ourselves. In record time we had the canoe in the river, life vests securely fastened, paddles at the ready, boys installed, and off we went, a race to drink as deeply of as much beauty as possible, together.

An old wooden bridge hung low across the river, its broken remains looked as though they would collapse at the next strong breeze. We had to duck to pass underneath. Carefully, we navigated the winding channels of the Snake—John in back, me in front, our three boys in between full of wonder and delight. As the stars began to come out, we were like the children present at the creation of Narnia—the sky so clear, the stars so close. We held our breath as one fell slowly, slowly across the sky and disappeared.

A beaver slapped the river, the sound like a rifle shot, frightening two ducks into flight, but all we could see between the darkened water and sky were the white ripples of their wake, like synchronized water-skiers. Owls began their nightly calls in the woods above, joined by sandhill cranes along the shore. The sounds were familiar, yet otherworldly. We whispered to one another about each new wonder, as the paddles dipped almost but not quite silently in and out of the water.

Night fell. Time to take out. We planned to go ashore along a cove closest to the road, so we wouldn't have to walk too far to find our car. We didn't dare try to take out where we had put in . . . that would require paddling against the current with little ability to see where we were going.

As we drifted towards the bank a bull moose rose from the tall grasses, exactly where we had planned to come ashore. He was as

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

dark as the night; we could see him only because he was silhouetted against the sky, jagged mountains behind. He was huge. He was gorgeous. He was in the way. Blocking the only exit we had. More people are killed in national parks by moose than by any other animal. Remarkable speed, 1,700 pounds of muscle and antlers, and total unpredictability make them dangerous indeed. It would take about two seconds for him to hit the water running and capsize our canoe. We could not pass.

The mood changed. John and I were worried now. There was only one alternative to this way out, now closed to us, and that was paddling back up river in what had become total darkness. Silently, soberly, we turned the canoe and headed up, searching for the right channel that would keep us out of the main current. We hadn't planned on the adventure taking that turn but suddenly, everything was required. John must steer with skill; I must paddle with strength. One mistake on our part and the strong current would force the canoe broadside, fill it, and sweep our boys off downriver into the night.

It was glorious.

We did it. He did. I did. We rose to the challenge working together, and the fact that it required all of me, that I was in it with my family and for my family, that I was surrounded by wild, shimmering beauty and it was, well, kind of *dangerous* made the time . . . transcendent. I was no longer Stasi. I was Sacagawea, Indian Princess of the West, a valiant and strong woman.

## A WOMAN'S JOURNEY

*Then the time came when the risk it took  
To remain tight in a bud was more painful  
Than the risk it took to blossom.*

—ANNAIS NIN

*Captivating*

I'm trying to remember when I first knew in my heart that I was no longer a girl, but had become a woman. Was it when I graduated from high school, or college? Did I know it when I married? When I became a mother? I am forty-five years old as I write this, but there remain places in my heart that still feel so very young. As I think back on what would be considered rites of passage in my life, I understand why my journey has felt so unguided, uncertain. The day I started my period, my family embarrassed me at the dinner table by breaking out in song, "This girl is a woman, now . . ." Hmmmm. I didn't *feel* any different. All I felt was mortified that they *knew*. I stared at my plate, suddenly fascinated by corn.

The day I got my first bra, a training bra, the kind with stretchy material over the front, one of my sisters pulled me into the hallway where, to my horror, my father stood at the ready to take my picture. They said I would laugh about it later. (I haven't.) Like so many other women I was left alone to navigate my way through adolescence, through my changing and awakening body, a picture of my changing and awakening heart. No counsel was given for the journey into womanhood. I *was* encouraged, however, to eat less. My father pulled me aside and told me, "No boy will love you if you're fat."

I joined the feminist movement in college, searching, as so many women did in the '70s, for a sense of self. I actually became director of the Women's Resource Center at a liberal state university in California. But no matter how much I asserted my strength and independence as a woman ("hear me roar"), my *heart* as a woman remained empty. To be told when you are young and searching that "you can be anything" is not helpful. It's too vast. It gives no direction. To be told when you are older that "you can do anything a man can do" isn't helpful, either. I didn't want to be a man. What does it mean to be a *woman*?

And as for romance, I stumbled through that mysterious terrain with only movies and music as a guide. Like so many women I

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

know, I struggled alone through the mess of several broken hearts. My last year in college, I fell in love for real, and this young man truly loved me back. John and I dated for two and a half years and then became engaged. As we made wedding plans, my mother gave me a rare bit of counsel, in this case, her marriage advice. It was twofold. First, love flies out the window when there's no pork chop on the table. And second, always keep your kitchen floor clean; it makes the whole house look better. I caught her drift. Namely, that my new position as "wife" centered in the kitchen, making the pork chops and cleaning up after them.

I somehow believed that upon saying, "I do," I would be magically transformed into Betty Crocker. I imagined myself baking fresh bread, looking flushed and beautiful as I removed the steaming loaves from the oven. No matter that I hadn't cooked but five meals in my entire life, I set about preparing dinners, breakfasts even, with determination and zeal. After two weeks of this, I lay on the couch despondent, announcing that I didn't know what was for dinner and that John was on his own. Besides, the kitchen floor was dirty. I had failed.

My story is like most women's stories—we've received all sorts of messages but very little help in what it means to become a woman. As one young woman recently wrote us,

I remember when I was ten asking myself as well as older females in my life how a woman of God could actually be confident, scandalous and beautiful, yet not portray herself as a feminist Nazi or an insecure I-need-attention emotional whore. How can I become a strong woman without becoming harsh? How can I be vulnerable without drowning myself in my sorrow?

There seems to be a growing number of books on the *masculine* journey—rites of passage, initiations, and the like—many of them

## *Captivating*

helpful. But there has been precious little wisdom offered on the path to becoming a woman. Oh, we know the *expectations* that have been laid upon us by our families, our churches, and our cultures. There are reams of materials on what you *ought* to do to be a good woman. But that is not the same thing as knowing what the journey towards becoming a woman involves, or even what the goal really should be.

The church has not been a big help here. No, that's not quite honest enough. The church has been part of the problem. Its message to women has been primarily . . . you are here to serve. That's why God created you: to serve. In the nursery, in the kitchen, on the various committees, in your home, in your community. Seriously now—picture the women we hold up as models of femininity in the church. They are sweet, they are helpful, their hair is coiffed; they are busy, they are disciplined, they are composed, and they are *tired*.

Think about the women you meet at church. They're trying to live up to some model of femininity. What do they "teach" you about being a woman? What are they saying to us through their lives? Like we said, you'd have to conclude that a godly woman is . . . tired. And guilty. We're all living in the shadow of that infamous icon, "The Proverbs 31 Woman," whose life is so busy I wonder when does she have time for friendships, for taking walks, or reading good books? Her light never goes out at night? When *does* she have sex? Somehow she has sanctified the shame most women live under, biblical proof that yet again we don't measure up. Is that supposed to be godly—that sense that you are a failure as a woman?

### UNSEEN, UNSOUGHT, AND UNCERTAIN

I know I am not alone in this nagging sense of failing to measure up, a feeling of not being good enough *as a woman*. Every woman I've

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

ever met feels it—something deeper than just the sense of failing at what she does. An underlying, gut feeling of failing at who she *is*. *I am not enough*, and, *I am too much* at the same time. Not pretty enough, not thin enough, not kind enough, not gracious enough, not disciplined enough. But too emotional, too needy, too sensitive, too strong, too opinionated, too messy. The result is Shame, the universal companion of women. It haunts us, nipping at our heels, feeding on our deepest fear that we will end up abandoned and alone.

After all, if we were better women—whatever *that* means—life wouldn't be so hard. Right? We wouldn't have so many struggles; there would be less sorrow in our hearts. Why is it so hard to create meaningful friendships and sustain them? Why do our days seem so unimportant, filled not with romance and adventure but with duties and demands? We feel *unseen*, even by those who are closest to us. We feel *unsought*—that no one has the passion or the courage to pursue us, to get past our messiness to find the woman deep inside. And we feel *uncertain*—uncertain what it even means to be a woman; uncertain what it truly means to be feminine; uncertain if we are or ever will be.

Aware of our deep failings, we pour contempt on our own hearts for wanting more. Oh, we long for intimacy and for adventure; we long to be the Beauty of some great story. But the desires set deep in our hearts seem like a luxury, granted only to those women who get their acts together. The message to the rest of us—whether from a driven culture or a driven church—is *try harder*.

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

And in all the exhortations we have missed the most important thing of all. We have missed the *heart* of a woman.

And that is not a wise thing to do, for as the Scriptures tell us, the heart is central. “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the

## *Captivating*

wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23). Above all else. Why? Because God knows that our heart is core to who we are. It is the source of all our creativity, our courage, and our convictions. It is the fountainhead of our faith, our hope, and of course, our love. This “wellspring of life” within us is the very essence of our existence, the center of our being. Your heart as a woman is the most important thing about you.

Think about it: God created you *as a woman*. “God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Whatever it means to bear God’s image, you do so *as a woman*. Female. That’s how and where you bear his image. Your feminine heart has been created with the greatest of all possible dignities—as a reflection of God’s own heart. You are a woman to your soul, to the very core of your being. And so the journey to discover what God meant when he created woman in his image—when he created *you* as his woman—that journey begins with your heart. Another way of saying this is that the journey begins with *desire*.

Look at the games that little girls play, and if you can, remember what you dreamed of as a little girl. Look at the movies women love. Listen to your own heart and the hearts of the women you know. What is it that a woman wants? What does she dream of? Think again of women like Tamar, Ruth, Rahab—not very “churchy” women, but women held up for esteem in the Bible. We think you’ll find that every woman in her heart of hearts longs for three things: to be romanced, to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure, and to unveil beauty. That’s what makes a woman come alive.

### TO BE ROMANCED

*I will find you.*

*No matter how long it takes, no matter how far—I will find you.*

—NATHANIEL TO CORA IN *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS*

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

One of my favorite games growing up was “kidnapped and rescued.” I know many little girls who played this—or wished they had. To be the beauty, abducted by the bad guys, fought for and rescued by a hero—some version of this had a place in all our dreams. Like Sleeping Beauty, like Cinderella, like Maid Marian, or like Cora in *The Last of the Mohicans*, I wanted to be the heroine and have my hero come for me. Why am I embarrassed to tell you this? I simply loved feeling wanted and fought for. This desire is set deep in the heart of every little girl—and every woman. Yet most of us are ashamed of it. We downplay it. We pretend that it is less than it is. We are women of the twenty-first century after all—strong, independent, and capable, thank you very much. Uh huh . . . and who is buying all those romance novels?

Think about the movies you once loved, and the movies you love now. Is there a movie for little girls that doesn't have a handsome prince coming to rescue his beloved? *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*. A little girl longs for romance, to be seen and desired, to be sought after and fought for. So the Beast must win Beauty's heart in *Beauty and the Beast*. So in the gazebo scene in *The Sound of Music*, the Captain finally declares his love to Maria by moonlight and song and then, a kiss. And we sigh.

Isn't something stirred in you when Edward, *finally*, returns at the end of *Sense and Sensibility* to proclaim his love for Elinor? “Then . . . you're not . . . not married?” she asks, nearly holding her breath. “No,” he says. “My heart is . . . and always will be . . . yours.” Or how about when Friedrich returns for Jo at the end of *Little Women*? Or the sunset scene at the bow of the *Titanic*? And we can't forget *Braveheart*, how William Wallace pursued Murron with flowers and notes and invitations to ride. She is captured by his love, riding off bareback with him in the rain. (Come now. Wouldn't *you* want to ride through the Scottish Highlands with a man like Mel Gibson?)

## *Captivating*

When John and I began to “date,” I had just come out of a three-year relationship that left me wounded, defensive, and gunshy. John and I had been friends for many years, but we never seemed to connect in the romance department. I would like him and he would want to remain “just friends.” He would feel more for me and I would not for him. You get the picture. Until one autumn after he had become a Christian, and I was desperately seeking, our spiritual journeys, and the desires of our hearts, finally met.

John wrote me letters, lots of letters. Each one filled with his love for God and his passion for me, his desire for me. He spent hours carving a beautiful heart out of manzanita wood, then attached it to a delicate chain and surprised me with it. (I still cherish the necklace.) I came out to my car after my waitressing shift ended to find his poetry underneath my windshield. Verses written for me, to me! He loved me. He saw me and knew me and pursued me. I loved being romanced.

When we are young, we want to be precious to someone—especially Daddy. As we grow older, the desire matures into a longing to be pursued, desired, wanted as a woman. “Why am I so embarrassed by the depth of my desire for this?” asked a young friend just the other day. We were talking about her life as a single woman, and how she loves her work but would much rather be married. “I don’t want to hang my life on it, but still, I yearn.” Of course. You’re a woman.

Now, being romanced isn’t all that a woman wants, and John and I are certainly not saying that a woman ought to derive the meaning of her existence from whether she is being or has been romanced by a man or not . . . but don’t you see that you *want* this? To be desired, to be pursued by one who loves you, to be someone’s priority? Most of our addictions as women flare up when we feel that we are not loved or sought after. At some core place, maybe deep within, perhaps hidden or buried in her heart, every woman wants to be seen, wanted, and pursued. We want to be romanced.

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

## AN IRREPLACEABLE ROLE IN A GREAT ADVENTURE

When I was little girl, I used to love World War II movies. I imagined myself being in them. I dreamed of growing up, braiding my hair, and then tucking it up under my helmet. I planned to disguise my gender so that I could join in. I sensed that the men in these movies were part of something heroic, valiant, and worthy. I longed to be a part of it too. In the depths of my soul, I longed to be a part of something large and good; something that required all of me; something dangerous and worth dying for.

There is something fierce in the heart of a woman. Simply insult her children, her man, or her best friend and you'll get a taste of it. A woman is a warrior too. But she is meant to be a warrior in a uniquely feminine way. Sometime before the sorrows of life did their best to kill it in us, most young women wanted to be a part of something grand, something important. Before doubt and accusation take hold, most little girls sense that they have a vital role to play; they want to believe there is something in them that is needed and needed desperately.

Think of Sarah from *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. A man and his young children need her; their world is not right until she becomes a part of it. She brings her courage and her creativity to the West and helps to tame it. We are awed by the nurses in *Pearl Harbor*, how in the midst of a horrifying assault they bring their courage and strength to rescue the lives of hundreds of men. The women in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are valiant and beautiful—women like Arwen, Galadriel, and Éowyn change the fate of Middle Earth. And what about women like Esther and Mary and Ruth? They were biblical characters who had irreplaceable roles in a Great Story. Not “safe” and “nice” women, not merely “sweet,” but passionate and powerful women who were beautiful *as* warriors.

Why do I love remembering the story of canoeing in the dark

## *Captivating*

beauty of the Tetons so much? Because I was needed. *I* was needed. Not only was I needed, but like Arwen, I was irreplaceable. No one else in that canoe could have done what I did.

Women love adventures of all sorts. Whether it be the adventure of horses (most girls go through a horse stage) or white-water rafting, going to a foreign country, performing on stage, having children, starting a business, or diving ever more deeply into the heart of God, we were made to be a part of a great adventure. An adventure that is *shared*. We do not want the adventure merely for adventure's sake but for what it requires of us *for* others. We don't want to be alone in it; we want to be in it *with* others.

Sometimes the idea of living as a hermit appeals to all of us. No demands, no needs, no pain, no disappointments. But that is because we have been hurt, are worn out. In our heart of hearts, that place where we are most *ourselves*, we don't want to run away for very long. Our lives were meant to be lived with others. As echoes of the Trinity, we remember something. Made in the image of a perfect relationship, we are relational to the core of our beings and filled with a desire for transcendent purpose. We long to be an irreplaceable part of a shared adventure.

### BEAUTY TO UNVEIL

*The King is enthralled by your beauty.*

—PSALM 45:11

Lovely little six-year-old Lacey was visiting our ministry outpost the other day, going from office to office, swinging on the doorframe, and asking with a smile, "Would you like to hear my song?" Her face kissed by the sun with charming freckles, two front teeth missing, and eyes dancing with merriment, who could refuse her? She didn't really care if she was an interruption. I doubt the thought

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

crossed her mind. She sang her newly made-up song about puppies and kitties, fully expecting to be delighted in, then skipped down the hall to grace the occupant of the next office. She was like a ray of summer sun, or, better, a garden fairy, flitting from office to office. She was a little girl in her glory, unashamed in her desire to delight, and be delighted in.

It's why little girls play dress up. Little boys play dress up, too, but in a different way. Our sons were cowboys for years. Or army men. Or Jedi knights. But they never once dressed up as bridegrooms, fairies, or butterflies. Little boys do not paint their toenails. They do not beg to get their ears pierced. (Some teenaged boys do, but that is another story.) Little boys don't play dress up with Mommy's jewelry and high heels. They don't sit for hours and brush each other's hair.

Remember twirling skirts? Most little girls go through a season where they will not wear anything if it does not twirl (and if it sparkles, so much the better). Hours and hours of endless play result from giving little girls a box filled with hats, scarves, necklaces, and clothes. Dime store beads are priceless jewels; hand-me-down pumps are glass slippers. Grandma's nightie a ballroom gown. Once dressed, they dance around the house or preen in front of a mirror. Their young hearts intuitively want to know they are lovely. Some will ask with words, "Am I lovely?" Others will simply ask with their eyes. Verbal or not, whether wearing a shimmery dress or covered in mud, all little girls want to know. As a young songwriter recently wrote,

*I want to be beautiful  
And make you stand in awe  
Look inside my heart  
And be amazed  
I want to hear you say*

*Captivating*

*Who I am is quite enough  
I just want to be worthy of love  
And beautiful.*

—BETHANY DILLON, “BEAUTIFUL”

Last summer John and I attended a ball at the beautiful, historic Broadmoor Hotel. It was a stunning affair. Black tie. Candlelight. Dinner. Dancing. You name it. The courtyard where the hors d'oeuvres were served was filled with fresh flowers, flowing fountains, and the music of a gifted pianist. It was an evening long planned for. For weeks—no, *months* ahead of the affair—I, like every other woman who attended, asked the all-important question: “What will I wear?” (As the special night drew closer, I also wondered if it was possible to lose twenty pounds in seven days.)

The evening turned out to be glorious. The weather was perfect. Every detail attended to and lovely. But the highlight by far was the women. Above the sound of the splashing water from the fountains, even above the music that floated through the air, was the sound of delighted exclamations. “You look beautiful!” “You are gorgeous!” “What an amazing dress!” “How lovely you are!” We were delighting in each other’s beauty and enjoying our own. We were playing dress up for real and *loving* it.

These women were normal women, women just like you and me. Women you would run into at the bank or the grocery store or the office. Women whose battles against acne have left their faces marked and their souls scarred. Women whose struggle with their weight has been the bane of their lives. Women who always felt their hair was too thin, too thick, too straight, or too curly. Ordinary women, if there is such a thing. But women who, at least for a few hours this night, took the risk of revealing their beauty. Perhaps better, whose beauty was *unveiled*.

Think of your wedding day—or the wedding day you dream

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

of. How important is your dress as a bride? Would you just grab the first thing in your closet, throw on “any old thing?” A friend of ours is getting married in six months. Now, this young woman has seen her share of boys and heartbreaks. Her tale of beauty has many hurts to it. But as she told us about trying on wedding dresses, and finding just the right dress, the weariness faded away, and she was radiant. “I felt like a princess!” she said, almost shyly. Isn’t that what you dreamed of?

One little girl who is being raised in a home where her feminine heart is welcomed told her mother about a wonderful dream she had.

My daughter Emma—nearly six years old—came to me all aglow this morning. She lay at my feet on my bed all stretched out as if she hadn’t a care in the world. “Mommy,” she said, “I had a wonderful dream last night.” “What was it about?” I asked. “I was a Queen,” she answered. And as she did her cheeks blushed pink. “Really!” I replied. “What happened in your dream?” “I was wearing a long, beautiful dress,” she said with hands gesturing downward, flowing. “Was there anything on your head?” I wondered aloud. “Yes, a crown.” “Hmmm, why was that such a wonderful dream?” “I just love feeling that way!” “What way?” And with a sigh she spoke one word . . . “Beauty.” (Emma’s Dream, as told to her mother)

The desire to be beautiful is an ageless longing. My friend Lilly is in her mid-eighties. As she descended the stairs of her home one Christmas season, I was captured by her beauty. She was wearing a green corduroy jumper with a white turtleneck that had little candy canes all over it. I said, “Lilly, you look lovely!” Her face lit up, wrinkles and age spots disappearing as she put her hands out at her sides like a ballerina and did a delightful little twirl. She was no longer

## *Captivating*

eighty—she was ageless. God has set eternity in our hearts. The longing to be beautiful is set there as well.

Now, we know that the desire to be beautiful has caused many women untold grief (how many diets have you been on?). Countless tears have been shed and hearts broken in its pursuit. As Janis Ian sang, “I learned the truth at seventeen, that love was meant for beauty queens, and high school girls with clear-skinned smiles.” Beauty has been extolled and worshiped and kept just out of reach for most of us. (Do you like having your picture taken? Do you like *seeing* those pictures later? How do you feel when people ask you your age? This issue of beauty runs deep!) For others, beauty has been shamed, used, and abused. Some of you have learned that possessing beauty can be dangerous. And yet—and this is just astounding—in spite of all the pain and distress that beauty has caused us as women, the desire remains.

During the midst of a talk I gave on the heart of a woman last year, one of the women in the audience leaned over to a friend and said, “I don’t know what this whole thing is about—twirling skirts and all.” The words had barely left her mouth when she burst into tears and had to leave the room. Little did she know how deep the desire ran, and how much pain it had caused. Many of us have hardened our hearts to this desire, the desire to be the Beauty. We, too, have been hurt so deeply in this area that we no longer identify with, perhaps even resent, the longing. But it’s there.

And it’s *not* just the desire for an outward beauty, but more—a desire to be captivating in the depths of *who you are*. Cinderella is beautiful, yes, but she is also good. Her outward beauty would be hollow were it not for the beauty of her heart. That’s why we love her. In *The Sound of Music*, the Countess has Maria beat in the looks department, and they both know it. But Maria has a rare and beautiful depth of spirit. She has the capacity to love snowflakes on kittens and mean-spirited children. She sees the handiwork of God

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

in music and laughter and climbing trees. Her soul is Alive. And we are drawn to her.

Ruth may have been a lovely, strong woman, but it is to her unrelenting courage and vulnerability and faith in God that Boaz is drawn. Esther is the most beautiful woman in the land, but it is her bravery and her cunning, good heart that moves the king to spare her people. This isn't about dresses and makeup. Beauty is so important that we'll come back to it again and again in this book. For now, don't you recognize that a woman yearns to be *seen*, and to be thought of as captivating? We desire to possess a beauty that is worth pursuing, worth fighting for, a beauty that is core to who we *truly* are. We want beauty that can be seen; beauty that can be felt; beauty that affects others; a beauty all our own to unveil.

## THE HEART OF A MAN

As I (John here) described in *Wild at Heart*, there are three core desires in the heart of every man as well. (If you haven't read that book, you really should. It will open your eyes into the world of men.) But they are uniquely masculine. For starters, every man wants a battle to fight. It's the whole thing with boys and weapons. Over the years our house has become an arsenal—pirate swords, Indian knives, light sabers, six-shooters, paintball markers, “air soft” guns (that name had to have been invented for moms). You name it. Our boys wrestled and hit and slammed one another up against the walls and that is how they showed *affection!*

And look at the movies men love—*Braveheart*, *Gladiator*, *Top Gun*, *High Noon*, *Saving Private Ryan*. Men are made for battle. (And ladies, don't you love the heroes of those movies? You might not want to fight in a war, but don't you long for a man who will fight for *you*? To have Daniel Day Lewis look you in the eyes and say, “No matter how long it takes, no matter how far, I will find

## *Captivating*

you”?) Women don’t fear a man’s strength if he is a good man. In fact, *passivity* might make a man “safe,” but it has done untold damage to women in the long run. It certainly did to Eve (more on that later).

Men also long for adventure. Boys love to climb and jump and see how fast they can ride their bikes (with no hands). Just look in your garage—all the gear and go-carts and motorcycles and ropes and boats and stuff. This isn’t about “boys and their toys.” Adventure is a deeply spiritual longing in the heart of every man. Adventure requires something of us, puts us to the test. Though we may fear the test, at the same time we yearn to be tested, to discover that we have what it takes.

Finally, every man longs for a Beauty to rescue. He really does. Where would Robin Hood be without Marian, or King Arthur without Guinevere? Lonely men fighting lonely battles. You see, it’s not just that a man needs a battle to fight. He needs someone to fight *for*. There is nothing that inspires a man to courage so much as the woman he loves. Most of the daring (and okay, sometimes ridiculous) things young men do are to impress the girls. Men go to war carrying photos of their sweethearts in their wallets—that is a metaphor of this deeper longing, to fight for the Beauty. This is not to say that a woman is a “helpless creature” who can’t live her life without a man. I’m saying that men long to offer their strength on behalf of a woman.

Now—can you see how the desires of a man’s heart and the desires of a woman’s heart were at least *meant* to fit beautifully together? A woman in the presence of a good man, a real man, loves being a woman. His strength allows her feminine heart to flourish. His pursuit draws out her beauty. And a man in the presence of a real woman loves being a man. Her beauty arouses him to play the man, it draws out his strength. She inspires him to be a hero. Would that we all were so fortunate.

## THE HEART OF A WOMAN

## BY WAY OF THE HEART

The longings God has written deep in your heart are telling you something essential about what it means to be a woman, and the life he meant for you to live. Now we know—many of those desires have gone unmet, or been assaulted, or simply so long neglected, that most women end up living two lives. On the surface we are busy and efficient, professional, even. We are getting by. On the inside women lose themselves in a fantasy world or in cheap novels, or we give ourselves over to food or some other addiction to numb the ache of our hearts. But your heart is still there, crying out to be set free, to find the life your desires tell you of.

*You can find that life—if you are willing to embark on a great adventure.*

That is what we are inviting you to. Not to learn one more set of standards you fail to meet. Not towards a new set of rules to live by and things you ought to do. Something far, far better—a journey of the heart. A journey towards the restoration and release of the woman you always longed to be. This book is not about what you ought to do or who you ought to be. It's about discovering who you already are, as a woman. A woman who at her core was made for romance, made to play an irreplaceable role in a shared adventure, and who really does possess a beauty all her own to unveil. The woman God had in mind when he made Eve . . . and when he made *you*. Glorious, powerful, and captivating.