

Changes
From a
Sunset

BY:

Aileen Friedman

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By Aileen Friedman
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Author's Note

When I completed the first draft of this book in November 2010,
I could never have imagined how similar certain events in my own
life would turn out as it is written in Chapter 22.

After discussing this turn of events with my daughter Nadine,
I do, with all sincerity & love dedicate chapter 22 to;

Eugene Du Plessis

14.03.1984 – 06.09.2011

This world lost a beautiful soul
But Heaven has gained an angel.

With Love to;

My husband - Ali

My daughters - Tamara, Cara & Nadine

My sons in law – Neil & Duval

Anja & Eddie Murphy

My Grandchildren – Senna, Shyre & Annelie

I love you all so much and I am so grateful
God has blessed me so immensely with a family
that is united in His Grace and Love.

To My mom Lucille

Alzheimer's may have taken your memory,
but it will never take my love for you

Special Thank to:

Avril Hattingh & Hayley Janse Van Rensburg
& so many other friends
Who have constantly encouraged me.

PREFACE

If we know the path our life is going to take, will we change it? Will we allow the hurt and pain to follow us on our journey through life? I doubt it. We will take only the happiness – consume it, multiply it, engulf it, relish it. But will we grow in such a perfect world? No, I believe we will become stagnant, immature and unchallenged creatures, unworthy of the Lord and unable to be His servants.

Throughout our lives, filled with love and happiness and tragedy, we all have a story to tell. But, what will the ending bring? Will we hear the words, ‘Welcome home good and faithful servant,’ or will we hang our heads in shame, and regret not having used our fleeting lives to strengthen our faith in God? Whether we are happy and in love, or faced with uncertainty and death, who do we rely on for strength, guidance and comfort? Who do we surround ourselves with? With whom do we spend our time? When our journey concludes, will it have the ending we desire?

There is no map to guide us on how to react to obstacles interrupting our desired peaceful existence. No matter how many times we imagine how we will deal with tragedy, when the occasion arises, there are no rules. Our emotions run riot, taking control of our senses, and we cannot but submit to them – whether they compel us to panic, be calm, be hysterical or be silent.

How do we move forward from deepest despair? Do we try to overcome it on our own, or do we wallow in self-pity, hindering any chance we might have of finding happiness again? Or do we immerse ourselves in the love of our family, friends and God?

The choice is yours!

My life was perfect, happy, and simple. I was content and felt that nothing could go wrong in my world. Well, it did. My life was torn apart and I was thrown into a conundrum of turmoil – uncontrollably spiraling downwards and completely unable to keep everything from falling apart.

Now, what choice do I make?

CHAPTER ONE

Every Thursday evening, Cole, my partner of three years, my brother Eric, and I have dinner with my parents, Leon and Rose. They live just around the corner from my home in Gordons Bay, and on top of our regular family dinners, we see one another almost every day. Thursdays, however, is family night, and we are all expected to attend.

Eric is 24 and an utter nerd, permanently glued to his computer and understandably single. I have often tried to set him up with a friend, but he makes any excuse to avoid the date and I've subsequently given up. Like me, he is average height and dark, but unlike me, dresses more sloppily than anyone else alive! My poor mother moaned at him throughout our childhood, but to no avail.

Cole is striking next to Eric – with his blonde hair, cheerful brown eyes and big smile and as an avid surfer, he is brown as a berry all year round. An accepted member of the family, he attends dinner on Thursdays without fail.

As always, when I walk into the house I am greeted by the Jack Russell, aptly named Jack. My mother is busy in the kitchen and my father is watching the news in the lounge.

'Hi Mum,' I say as I give her a hug and plant a kiss on her forehead.

'Hello love! Eric isn't coming tonight. He phoned and gave some kind of excuse about working. He knows its Thursday! Can't he just tell those people he works for that he has to have dinner with us?'

I hear the disappointment in her voice. She has never understood that people work longer than from nine to five these days.

'Is Cole coming? Don't tell me he's also working? What is this world coming to that no one appreciates family dinners anymore?'

'He'll be here, Mum,' I assure her before she feels the need to pop a pill or two.

I walk with her into the lounge and she sits down across from my dad. I stand in the doorway and look at him, admiring what a genuine gentleman he is. Leon brims with kindness and a love for Christ. He is very involved in the church and is always visiting members, conducting Bible studies or assisting various charity groups. On top of this, he still manages to run his own business.

GB Tours is a tour company that takes tourists on daily or national tours and often does business with the company I work for.

While I completed my degree, I worked part-time for him. Once I graduated as an accountant, he asked Mr. De Luca at Rio Adventures if a position came up, whether he would consider me. As it happened, a position was immediately available and hence I started my career at Rio Adventures. I suppose I could have worked for my dad, but I wanted to see what else the world had to offer. Not much so far, but I'm happy. And besides, had my dad employed me, he would have had to get rid of someone else and he'd never have been able to do that. He would rather starve than let an employee go, and in turn, his employees are equally loyal to him.

'Hi Dad, how was your day?'

'Busy as usual, but someone has to pay the bills, and fortunately, I have God on my side.' His usual reply.

I just smile and cross the room to give him a hug and kiss, and sit down next to him. We stare at the TV, but don't take much notice of the news. He puts his arm around me and I snuggle into his chest. *I can never get too old for this.* If there is ever a place I feel safe and secure, it is here, in his arms. I don't even feel this safe with Cole. He kisses me tenderly on my head and asks how my day was.

'Okay,' I sigh.

Their home does not have an entrance hall; it is open plan and you walk straight into the lounge from the front door. You'll see only the basics; no fancy furniture or ornaments.

'Material things don't get you into Heaven,' my dad always says.

It's still very cozy and homey though, with family photos all over the place, and I love coming here.

Someone taps on the door, opens it and walks in. Jack is the first to greet Cole.

'Hey Jack, come here boy,' he laughs, while he picks Jack up and let's him lick his face.

'Argh no man! Cole! That's so disgusting!' I groan as I get up to greet him.

'Why? He's just saying hello.' He always lets Jack do this.

'Go and wash your face and hands,' I scold him like a school teacher.

He ignores me and greets my parents.

‘Hi Rose, how are you today?’ he asks, hugging her.

‘Hello Cole, Eric isn’t coming tonight! He has to work! Isn’t dinner more important than work?’ She looks at Cole reproachfully.

‘I’m sure he would rather be here,’ Cole replies politely.

He puts the jacket I asked him to bring for me over an armchair, and moves in front of my dad to shake his hand.

‘Hello Leon, how are you doing? Anything good happening in the world today?’

‘Hello Cole, just negative news. Why they can’t concentrate on the positive in the world is beyond me.’

Cole sits down in the armchair. My mum has made her way back to the kitchen and yells at me.

‘Talia-May, get Cole and your father something to drink!’

My parents are the only ones that don’t call me Tali. I wish they would; I’ve never liked my name.

‘What do you want to drink Dad, Cole?’ I keep an eye on the TV.

They both ask for orange juice, and I force myself from my dad’s arm to fetch their drinks.

As I walk into the kitchen, my mother continues to complain about Eric’s lack of commitment to the family. It is at times like this that I want to shake her and scream, ‘So freaking what if he cannot make it! It’s not the end of the world!’

I know I could never do that; she will dissolve into hysterics. She’s been enjoying theatrics lately and I’ve convinced myself it’s because Eric and I aren’t at home anymore and she wants the attention.

I give my dad and Cole their orange juice when my mum announces that the food is ready. As always, there is food for a nation. Honestly, I think she cooks the entire week for this one evening – there’s leg of lamb, roast potatoes, mixed vegetables and rice – all cooked the real old-fashioned way and served with thick gravy and a side salad. Then, after you can’t eat another thing out comes the dessert – ice cream and chocolate sauce today. She cooks like this regardless of the season.

‘You’ve got to eat in the summer and the winter,’ she will argue when we try to explain to her that it is just too hot for her food in summer.

‘Looks good Rose, I’m starving so don’t expect any leftovers. I never get food like this when I visit Tali,’ Cole grins at me and my mum beams.

‘I taught her how to make food; she had to help make dinner every night as well as when we had guests. Don’t let her tell you she can’t cook!’

‘I can cook,’ I interrupt, ‘I just choose not to!’

My mother gasps. ‘Talia-May, how could you? I didn’t raise you to neglect your duties. A woman’s duty is to cook food for her man; what will Cole’s parents think of you?’

Cole looks at me with a smirk and I know he is going to use this as ammunition later on.

My dad looks at my mum, ‘Let’s eat and discuss Talia-May’s cooking skills later, shall we?’

We sit down, and hold hands as my father says grace. Dinner at home is always pleasant. We chat about our respective jobs, my mum continues complaining about Eric’s absence, and finally, when all of us have eaten far too much, I muster up the energy to clear the table. Finally we relax in the lounge and once more, I snuggle into my dad’s arms while Cole and my mum settle into the armchairs across from us.

We chat a little longer and when my mum starts dozing in her chair, Cole and I use the opportunity to head home. We say our goodbyes and walk to our respective cars, mine is a light blue Ford Fiesta and Cole’s a white 4x4.

‘Think I must go straight home; got to get up at 03:00 to get to Mossel Bay,’ Cole grumbles.

‘Oh yes, I forgot you have to see your clients there this week.’

I sigh. He puts his arms around me and holds me as if he will never let me go, then he kisses me gently. We know my parents are watching.

‘I’ll drive behind you; phone you when I get home.’

He kisses me again then slowly lets me go, and opens the car door for me.

Once I have my seat belt on and the car started, he gets into his 4x4 and follows me home. On the way home I cannot help but think what a good guy he is. There are not many men who will wait until marriage to move in together. We spend most nights together but he knows what I want and never pushes the issue of

moving in. I don't think I could be happier with anyone else. There weren't any sparks or fireworks, as some would insist, when we met on the beach at a New Year's party. We discovered we could talk easily and have been together since. My dad always told me God will find you your soul mate and you just have to trust in Him.

I pull into my driveway, get out of my car, and walk over to him. With his head out of the car window, his floppy blonde hair framing his face, he smiles.

'When I get back we need to talk about your cooking duties Tali,' and he bursts out laughing.

'I knew it,' I say laughing too, 'you've probably been thinking about this all the way home.'

I lean into the window and kiss him goodnight.

'I love you,' he says.

'Love you too, please drive safely tomorrow.'

I park my car in the garage, let the automatic door close behind me and go inside my homely rented cottage through the garage.

It can't be more than ten minutes when my cellphone rings.

'Just checking you're okay. Sleep tight my love, I love you.'

'You sleep well too, I love you too.'

I can't help smiling. Trust my mother to give him some ammunition to get me to make food for him. He is always hungry.

CHAPTER TWO

It is 03:00 and my cellphone blares out a song. I have a message. Reaching to find it, I grab the alarm clock, then my cup and eventually something that feels like my cellphone. The message is from Cole to say he is leaving, he will see me tomorrow; he hopes I have a good day and that he loves me.

Now it's the alarm clock that is blaring.

'Huh? No way! It can't be 06:30 already?' I mumble to myself, 'No not yet, how did it get to now so quickly? I still want to sleep, not fair...'

I groan, trying to find a reason not to get out of bed. I love my sleep and am most definitely not a morning person. I've fallen asleep with my cellphone in my hand and the message from Cole is still open. Reading it again, I manage a smile and hit reply:

Drive safe, luv you so much have a great day.

I suppose I had better get up. I realize it's Friday and immediately I feel better – nothing much ever happens at the office on a Friday. All the tour guides and sales staff are usually out on weekend camps and trips and the office is peaceful.

I shuffle into the kitchen, put the kettle on for coffee and then go to the bathroom. What to wear is occupying my half-awake brain, as is the case most mornings. Luckily for me, as long we dress neatly, the De Lucas aren't fussy. While I wait for the kettle to boil, I look in the mirror. I am of average height; my best feature is my long brunette hair, complemented by my green eyes. My mind wanders to the weather – it's going to be a fine 28 degrees, with a slight breeze. I'm in an office all day so I won't really feel the heat. My pair of three-quarter black pants, an embroidered green sleeveless T-shirt and black sandals should be perfect. Feeling comfortable after I've dressed, I have my coffee and leave for work. Just as I'm driving out of the driveway, I realize I've left my phone behind.

'You can be so stupid!' I reprimand myself.

It is almost 07:00 and if I waste any more time I will be late for work.

Oh please let there be no traffic today, I say a silent prayer.

Eventually I am on my way to work and fortunately the traffic is okay. I allow myself to daydream a little. I wonder what I am

going to do tonight without Cole. My parents have church commitments, Sondra has her wedding to plan, and Cheri's husband Tian is home for a change.

Where does this leave me?

'Mm, maybe a movie and popcorn night all by myself,' I say aloud.

I'm sure I could call Garth and Merle and spend some time with them, but the idea of an 'alone night' sounds too good to miss. On my way home I will stop off at the DVD store and rent loads of movies. Yes, this sounds like a great plan. Cole and I love watching movies, mostly comedies. As I completely avoid films with swearing in, it is rather difficult for me to watch most movies.

Cole always says, 'That's the way it is today.' and I guess it is, but it still annoys me. Maybe an old classic is in order, something like *An Affair to Remember*. That sounds like a good one to watch on my own.

I am still listing movie options to myself when I reach the office. It is surrounded by high walls and a massive gate. The entrance has to be big to let the huge adventure Overlander trucks in and out. On days like today, there are three in the big cemented parking area, as well as two Jeeps. We all park our cars to the right of the building, under a shaded cover. I have to wait while one of the trucks reverses to load food, bedding and equipment onto it. I giggle and blow my hooter, not once, but three times. Some people jump in fright, while others yell at me and I laugh harder. Then I see Josh De Luca, the owner, and my good humour vanishes instantly.

What will he think of my childish behaviour?

As soon as the Overlander gets into position, I park my car, and tell myself that that was not a very clever thing to do. I reach over to the passenger side, grab my laptop and bag and get out slowly, hoping Josh will have left by the time I have to walk past everyone. It's not my lucky day. He is standing at the truck, watching it being loaded and chatting to the tour guides and Brett from marketing. I can never decide who is better-looking, Josh or Brett. Josh is dark with brown eyes and a lopsided yet lovely smile. About the same height as Brett, he is very well-built, but not so that you would notice immediately. He is exceptionally neat, very well-mannered, and has a quiet and kind air about him. Brett has

similar features but is a real ladies man. He cannot understand why the women at work are not interested in him, whereas out there in the world he claims they fall at his feet.

My cheeks redden as I scurry to the entrance.

I mumble, 'Hi,' as I pass the truck.

'Hey, Tali!' They all laugh at my embarrassment.

I don't look up, and head straight for the door, trying desperately to contain my own laughter.

'Thanks Tali, you certainly woke everyone up!'

I look up, shocked to realize it's Josh who's spoken. He never joins in with any staff silliness and I'd always thought he was far too aloof.

'You're welcome,' I reply, and it's out of my mouth before I know it.

What is wrong with me? I think, and cannot help but laugh out loud. I put my head down and push open the door.

Stupid, stupid woman, I think to myself.

Trust me to make Josh sociable.

'Morning Miss Medeck,' says Booker as I whizz past him. His smile is also bigger than usual.

'Morning, Booker,' I mutter, hurrying on.

Mr. Booker, fondly known as Booker, is our security officer. I cannot think of a day when Booker isn't smiling. I asked him one day what his secret is, and he just smiled and said there's no point in complaining.

'If the first person you greeted was miserable in the workplace then how are you supposed to have a good day, Miss Medeck?'

He is small for a security officer but can run like the wind, even if he is 59 years old. I once saw him run at a teambuilding event in a race against the rest of the male staff and he beat the pants off them. I wait for the elevator in the foyer of Rio Adventures. It's a spacious room, airy and light, and filled with healthy-looking tropical plants. The building consists of four floors, and I'm on the third. The first three floors are all open-plan offices, except for the fourth – the De Lucas' offices – Mr. Gavino De Luca and his son Giosia, whom everyone calls Josh, are on the top floor.

While I wait, I play my usual guessing game – which of the two elevators will win the lucky prize and take me to my floor. To further amuse myself, I add a different accent to my thoughts each

time. The Italian accent I attempt does not go down well, but at least I can laugh at myself. I don't dare look around and at the same time battle not to laugh. Elevator Number One arrives.

'Too bad Number Two,' I say, and step in hoping no one will join me.

My luck is just not in today, I think, as Shelly, one of the tour guides, comes running to catch it.

I'm just grateful it's not Josh. Shelly is so tiny that it's hard to believe she could guide anyone anywhere, but she has a surprising amount of strength and stamina.

'Oh Tali, that was so fantastic!' She laughs.

'Glad I can amuse you,' I say, half sarcastically.

'We all got such a fright, but to top it all, Josh joined in! Bet you didn't see that one coming?'

She's so bubbly it's hard not to laugh.

'I was there, remember? If only I had seen him, I think that would have changed the whole story. Oh my word, what a start to the day. Suppose I will get a memo from the De Lucas, "NO HOOTING" it'll say.'

Shelly bursts out laughing again, and as the doors are about to shut, Greg glides into the elevator. He is well over six foot, prematurely grey and always wears jeans, a golf shirt and sneakers, no matter the weather. You never notice him until he is right next to you – he never seems to walk; he glides, and so softly too. Shelly gets out on the first floor where all the tour guides and sales staff work and Greg on the second, the marketing department.

Sondra and Cheri are at the coffee machine already and I throw my laptop and bag on my desk and make a beeline to join them. They both look at me with surprise written on their faces. Sondra is our receptionist and Cheri's assistant – she is 25 years old and will be getting married in a few months' time. Her wispy blonde hair and freckled face, matched with grey eyes and her average height and build, make her far from perfect – but to her fiancé, Neville, and me, she is. Cheri, our payroll manageress, is 32 years old, married, with a five year old son. Her husband Tian is always away on business so Cheri and little Tian are usually alone. She is stunning – a brunette with dark eyes and the longest lashes I've ever seen. In her younger days she must have had men lining up for her.

‘What on earth’s wrong with you, what happened?’ Cheri asks, full of concern.

‘Cole proposed?’ Sondra is always ready to pop the champagne.

‘Oh I wish,’ I grin and tell them what happened.

‘Oh my word, and Josh actually made fun of you and joined in with everyone’s laughter? That has got to be a first!’

‘Thanks for reminding me I’ve corrupted the boss.’

Back at my desk I realize it’s really not such a big issue, but because Josh hardly speaks to anyone about anything other than business, it’s a surprise. I jump with fright when the phone rings and my heart starts racing as I immediately think it might be De Luca ready to scold me. Sondra and Cheri have shared my thoughts and freeze as I lift the receiver.

‘Tali speaking,’ I say as calmly as I can.

‘Hello sunshine!’ Cole! My heart skips a dozen beats just at the sound of his voice, but at this point it might just be from relief.

‘Oh I’m so glad it’s you,’ and I tell him about my eventful morning.

Sondra and Cheri look puzzled until I point at the phone and mouth, ‘Cole.’

‘Oh my goodness love, I wish I’d seen that. I can just imagine what shades of red your face was. Good way to start your day! And here I was thinking you weren’t going to have any fun without me.’

‘So how’s your day going?’ I change the subject.

‘Well, clearly not as good as yours but I’ve got to see old Frederick in about 15 minutes. He is the first on the list for the day – best to get the worst over and done with.’

Cole is a freelance sports writer which means that he is often away for interviews. Not surprisingly, he focuses mostly on surfers.

‘How come you didn’t phone me on my cellphone?’

It has dawned on me that he is calling my landline, which is unusual.

‘Take a look and you’ll probably find it’s flat; I’ve left you a few nice messages,’ he teases.

I take my cellphone out of its cover and sigh.

‘Oh no, I’m such an idiot, this is so typical of me.’

‘What’ve you got planned for tonight? Big girls’ night out while the cat’s away hm?’

‘No it’s a one-girl-night tonight. I’m going to get some real old classic chick flicks, a huge bowl of popcorn and spend quality time with my couch. I’m going to have some real alone time.’

‘Can’t I crash your party?’ He laughs, says he has to go and promises to leave some more sweet messages on my phone.

‘You know he is the nicest guy in the world,’ I coo to Sondra and Cheri.

‘So when are you going to tie the knot?’ asks Cheri, ‘It’s about time!’

‘Oh I don’t know. It’s good the way it is, why mess with it?’

I know this is not exactly true. Deep down I want the whole wedding day thing, but I’m comfortable with the way things are and I would rather have Cole this way than not at all.

‘Ooh, talking about weddings...’ Sondra’s eyes light up as they always do when she’s going to talk about hers. ‘The bridesmaid and flower girl dresses are finished. They are so gorgeous. Just about everyone we invited is going to be there, so we’re looking at about 70 guests – which is just about what we budgeted for!’

‘Have the De Lucas replied?’ Cheri asks.

We were very surprised when Sondra said she’d invited them, because just like the rest of us, she has no interest in them outside of business.

‘No, they still haven’t. But we know they won’t come, so we haven’t even added them to the guest list.’

‘It still confounds me as to why you invited them in the first place, Sondra,’ Cheri raises her neatly shaped eyebrows.

‘Well, if they did come I would get one very expensive present!’ Sondra grins.

‘You’re evil,’ I laugh.

‘Hey, do you know if the fax from Select Foods has come through yet?’ I turn to Sondra, suddenly realizing I have something called work to do.

CHAPTER THREE

On the way home I stop at Just DVDs and take out *An Affair to Remember*, *Hope Floats*, *The Lake House*, and *Chocolat*.

Definitely an alone night, I smile to myself.

One of the reasons I rent my cottage is because it provides good security. It is surrounded by a wooden fence and has an intercom for visitors, and the door from the garage leads directly into the open plan lounge, kitchen and dining room. I put my bag, laptop and keys down on the table by the door and head for the kitchen. It is a one bedroom house, so there is a very small passage that leads to the bedroom on the left and to the bathroom through a door on the right. The house is bordered by a quaint garden in which I spend lots of my time tending to the flowers. I've tried growing vegetables but can't seem to get the hang of it. The house is small but cozy, and like my parents, I have photos gracing almost every wall.

While the popcorn pops, I make my way to the couch, a huge sofa bed decorated with comfy cushions. There's no space for other chairs, and just about enough room for a coffee table in front of the couch and a TV on a stand by the wall. Big sliding doors on either side of the room mean it's well lit and probably my favourite spot in the house. Just as I'm getting comfortable, I realize my cellphone is flat and still in my bag. I get up again, put it on charge in my room, grab the popcorn off the stove, put it into a bowl and finally snuggle up on the couch to watch *Chocolat*. I have a light throw at my feet for when it gets colder.

Ah, bliss, I think to myself.

In the early hours of the morning I finish watching the last of the DVDs. I am not very tired but I know that if I don't go to sleep now, I never will.

At 09:00 I jump from fright when I hear the front door opening. Groggy and half asleep I am suddenly being held. Cole is home.

'Mm this is the best way to wake up,' I murmur, 'why didn't you call to say what time you were getting here?'

'Put your cellphone on and check how many messages you have, my dear.'

'Oh goodness I forgot about it, oh I'm so sorry.'

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