

***THE
SPARKLE
IN HER
EYES***

plus

Six More Short Stories

BY

Aileen Friedman

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ISBN – 13 978-0-620-64433-4

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(The eyes on the cover were created from
a photo of my mother)

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*Thank you, Lord Jesus,
for your love and mercy
and for blessing me
with my family whom I love so much.
I am truly blessed.*

***Phil 4:13 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens
me.'***

*A very special
THANK YOU
to
ANGIE EYBERS
For her support and for taking the time
to read these little stories before editing.
For your love and friendship, that is so
dear to me.
Love you forever
xxxxx*

*To
FRAN DENTON
A better editor one cannot find.
Thank you for your work and
above all your friendship.
Love you always
xxxxxx*

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Published 2014

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*BEAUTIFUL
SCARS*

1.

There were few women, or men for that matter, more beautiful than I was. I had luscious blonde hair and a silky olive complexion emphasised by dark blue eyes and a perfectly shaped nose and a rosebud mouth. My legs went on for miles and I had a body most woman would die to have. I was irresistible to anyone I considered encapsulating into my web. I got taught from a young age that my beauty was all I required to obtain fame and fortune. From the age of four, I was entered into local beauty pageants by my mother. It took only two entries until I won the first of my large collection of crowns. From then on it became an obsession for me to win at any cost. At six, I began modelling, and within a month, I had an agent and was being sought after for fashion shoots and TV commercials. By ten I had achieved great fame; my exquisitely beautiful face graced the cover of a young society magazine, and naturally I was noticed by the influential socialites. By the age of just twenty, I was being flown across oceans for photo shoots and fashion shows.

My parents, both average looking and from poor backgrounds, relished my popularity and the new world I gave them entry into as the parents of the most beautiful girl in the fashion industry. Needless to say, I was an only child, spoilt beyond any form of control and I knew how to throw a tantrum anywhere and at any time to get my way.

At one stage in my life, I wanted nothing more than to win the title of Miss World. However, once I started modelling it was no longer necessary for my career and I felt it beneath me since I knew I would win the title at any rate. While taking a break on a shoot, a less important model challenged me that perhaps I did not have the guts to accept losing the crown and that was why I did not want to enter the Miss World competition. How dare she test my beauty! Or my power to win! And so I entered. I put my modelling career on hold for a year to concentrate on the Miss World title. I was fully aware of what being Miss World meant and how it might benefit my modelling career. Not that it was necessary, as my beauty alone was sufficient.

The end of the year at the Miss World finalist competition I stood on stage amongst the last five finalists. The other contestants stood nervously smiling wondering if they had done enough to win the crown. Not me. I knew I had won it; I had done enough eye flirting and trapping of anyone important in my web to get assured of that crown. They announced the fifth runner-up, the fourth, the second princess and then they exclaimed in a fake hype that I was indeed the new Miss World. How had anyone doubted that I would win? The rehearsed tears rolled down my cheeks and I exclaimed in false astonishment that I had won. The other contestants surrounded me with hugs, kisses, false adoration and congratulations. No one dared me and then didn't expect me to achieve the highest accolade, especially if it involved my perfect body.

The year of being Miss World went by so quickly that it hardly affected my modelling career. If anything, I was as I thought I would be, even more, sought after than ever before. I was the perfect Miss World – a patriotic South African who fought the plight of whatever the international politicians thought was important. After I had handed the crown over to the new Miss World, I knew nothing would stand in my way of one day being the most sought after model spread across the covers of every high society magazine regardless of its genre.

Besides using my incredibly perfect body to advance my career, I used it to gain the adoration of any male I desired. It often happened that after a day of working from the early hours of the morning until late into the night all I wanted was to be comforted and told by a poor adoring man that I was the most beautiful woman he had even seen. I knew this to be the truth at any rate, but it was good to hear it. There was, of course, a lot of envy from the other models. Shame, they could not be blamed for it. I was difficult to beat. I had been trained from an early age to detect any competition and eliminate it. Every model was competition to me, and so every model got the same treatment – don't mess with me!

I frequented nightclubs and as I was almost always in a different city the men did not know me. They thought I was simply too good to be true and that they were the luckiest men on earth to have even the pleasure of speaking to me. Totally

unbeknown to my colleagues I would watch every man's eyes and take note of to whom he was taking a fancy. Once I figured it out, I would make every attempt to win him over simply so that I won and the other model would go home empty-handed or with a second prize. At times, the poor girl was almost in the man's arms when I joined the conversation, and within fifteen minutes he was mine. He had won the trophy woman for the night, and he counted himself lucky.

If I did go on a proper date, the privileged man was in his element, the poor sucker was actually under the misconception that it might lead to a second date. Usually, I ordered a salad at dinner, as maintaining zero percent body fat was a priority, but there were those dinners where the man had so much to say about my meal choice I agreed to have an actual meal. I picked at the food on the plate in front of me feigning a lack of appetite or making up any feeble excuse. By the time we left the restaurant, I had been to the bathroom and vomited the few bites of food into the toilet. The unsuspecting date thought he had, in fact, had a meal with me.

I never went back to my hotel room or apartment with a date; it was always back to his place. I left before he woke up and that was the last time he would ever see me or hear from me. It was all just so easy. The lack of female friends did not have any impact on me at the time. I was sadly under the misconception that everyone loved me.

Being a model meant that someone was always touching you. From hours before the shoot began someone was messing with your hair or your face and depending on the type of shoot it was possible that even your body got painted. And then there were the people that clothed you, fiddling with the garments on your body until they fitted perfectly. I employed my own personal stylist and makeup artist to eliminate strange hands always touching my perfect body. I demanded my space in the always crowded dressing rooms. That this meant others had to get inconvenienced did not bother me. That was their problem, not mine, I was the one in demand and the main attraction and therefore, I demanded what I wanted, and got it. I insisted on my changing area to get sterilised before I entered the building. The only brand of water I drank and whatever else my mood

demanded was to be readily available at the snap of my perfect fingers.

2.

Along with the celebrity status that I adored, came the endless media, always around to take a photo of whoever I was with or wherever I was going. Whether it be a gala event, a party or even the shop around the corner from my apartment – there was always someone close by with a camera. I fed off it; it gave me such a high that I wanted it more and more. It came to a point when if I were attending a function, any function, I would tell whoever was outside my apartment where I was going and being sure to spread the word. Sometimes I phoned the newspapers under a false name and gave them the details of where Miss Jade Burnstein was going to be. It never failed, the media went crazy and usually I stole the limelight for the evening. I was beyond ecstatic facing the flashing cameras with all the attention focused on me.

During the filming of a TV commercial in Mauritius, I had a brief break from the cameras and sat alone away from everyone. It was most unusual but this place touched a nerve I had not felt before. I wanted nothing but peace, no flashing cameras, no media, no journalists asking the same boring questions – which I had never minded before – no staff standing by my side waiting for my next demand. I just wanted to sit alone under the enormous umbrella, lie on the sunbed and figure out what this odd sensation was that had suddenly come over me.

Alongside me in the commercial was a mini me. A young girl, eight years old, and beautiful. Almost as beautiful as I was, but don't forget there was no one more beautiful than me in the world! But she was very similar in looks and physique. I imagined if I'd had a sister she would have looked just like her. But she had a gentle nature and the kindest smile. She never demanded but asked and never failed to say thank you. The only time I ever said thanks was if I was faking it to the press or someone of importance.

She had an endless flow of questions about my career and, in particular, my reign as Miss World.

I asked her if she would enter one day and she simply replied, 'No, never.'

'Why not?' I asked in surprise.

Who would not want to be Miss World?

'Mommy always says you don't have to wear a crown to be beautiful and to be Miss World. If you are loved and in return, you can love others, you are the world to those around you.'

That this came from an eight-year-old little girl who possibly was the next me floored me.

'Well, I suppose there is some truth in that but if it means that you can have a wonderful career from being Miss World, then why not?'

'Different strokes for different folks,' she said and before I could ask if that was also what her mommy said she was whisked away by the costume department.

What she said meddled with my head for some time but once I was in front of the camera again her words dissipated into the confines of my memory. Whether I would ever have them resurface was not important right now. I was important and the cameras were on me.

In the evening, I sat on the porch of my five-star chalet a stone's throw from the edge of the ocean. The peace and calm of this place were strangely overwhelming. I wanted to soak it in and remember every second I was alone in it. It was such an odd feeling, and sitting alone on this paradise island I began to wonder if I would ever have any children one day. I was still young enough at twenty-two to have this fabulous lifestyle for a few more years before contemplating marriage, let alone children. But I couldn't help but wonder if my child would be as beautiful as me. Of course, she would, what was I thinking? But maybe not quite as beautiful as there had to be male genes involved, but she would be beautiful nonetheless. I also naturally assumed my child would be a girl. What was I to do with a boy?

My hands fell limply onto my firm flat belly and on impulse, I imagined a round belly that could one day encase a baby. I shuddered and felt like vomiting. What had come over me, what could possess me to delve into that part of my mind? If that ever happened, it would destroy my goddess-like body. I got up from the chair, feeling gingerly for my sandals and then made my way back inside and to bed. It was a restless night

with babies popping in and out of my dreams, all of them grossly ugly and reaching out to me, their mother, for dear life. I held them for a short while then threw them into the arms of the first person that walked past me, grateful those people did not have faces.

When I arrived on set the next morning, my makeup artist dared comment on the dark shadows under my eyes.

'I don't need your comments this morning, just do your job and get rid of them,' was my harsh reply.

She adhered to my demand and the next hour or so got spent in silence. I was insulted at the slightest suggestion that I was less than perfect. Still, that previous evening's strange emotions and dreams bugged me right up until I was in front of the camera, and then the memories were thankfully gone and forgotten. I was where I belonged and I was the most adored and most important person that existed.

That evening I found an adoring fan that satisfied my desire to be worshipped and denied any repeat of the previous evening's oddities. Not sleeping in my bed also helped. Still, I made sure to leave his house before he woke up.

A day of filming in the small harbour was the assignment, the fishermen had left very early in the morning, but one trawler's crew was paid handsomely to skip the day's fishing. The captain was a rugged man with messy grey hair and an even messier beard. His voice was as rough as his appearance, and I think he last had a bath in the seventeenth century. The captain's son too was a fisherman by heart, there was no doubt about that, but he was neatly shaven, and his hair was cut short, so it had no chance of becoming windswept. He smelt pleasant and fresh; even his hands were clean and void of fish scales. He had a nice smile that cracked the skin around his eyes into suntanned wrinkles. He had long eyelashes that protected his warm brown eyes from the sun. I noticed these things because when we got introduced, he shook my hand for the longest time and stared straight into my eyes.

'Mercia, get me the hand sanitizer,' I demanded when he finally released my hand.

The man walked away after grunting something about the fact that he did not carry any germs. Unperturbed I wiped my hands and waited to begin shooting in my dressing area.

We were on the sea just within the entry points of the harbour walls. The wind was warm and the air humid. It was difficult to stand still on the trawler as it rocked from side to side over the lapping waves, made worse every time another boat passed our boat. We had to do take after take and with each new take I became more and more irritated and frustrated. The young man, I forgot his name, was kind and tried very hard to appease me and limit my complaining by controlling his boat as much as was humanly possible. It was not good enough for me.

'Can't you keep this stupid thing from rocking? It's ruining my performance.'

He simply smiled back, 'Cannot control nature, ma'am.'

'Well you can damn well try a little harder to control this stupid ugly boat,' I grunted for the hundredth time.

'It's a trawler ma'am.'

I was infuriated.

'Serge, get me off this thing now. You use what we have or do something else. I won't do this out here, and this man is not helping at all. He is probably rocking the boat on purpose.'

Serge and all the crew tried to convince me that I was unreasonable, and we should try the scene once more. I refused, put my gown on and went and sat inside the boat. The man and his father just smiled at each other and returned the boat to the dock. I stormed off in a huff refusing any more shoots for the day.

Without having to do another shoot on the sea, we finally finished filming three days later, and I returned to my apartment in Cape Town exhausted. It had been a strange few weeks and the worst in me had surfaced, not that that bothered me much, though, as I was the star and the important one and could, therefore, behave however I liked.

When I viewed the commercial for the first time, I was surprised and jealous at how good the fisherman looked in front of the camera. People not knowing any different would think he was a model or an actor.

'Well he will never become a model or an actor, he is a common fisherman,' I replied when asked my opinion of the man, 'I was incredible considering the conditions I had to work under.'

My life in the city resumed again. I forgot my horrid ordeal with the fisherman and even forgot his face. If the ad came on the TV, I changed the channel and it hurt me for that meant I would not see myself and my performance. My agent phoned me one morning with news of a photo shoot in Argentina. The timing was perfect; I needed to be surrounded by new fans to adore me. We were on the plane and back home within the month.

3.

Long days and even longer nights of partying left me surviving on as little as two to three hours sleep; this meant that I had very little patience and was extremely irritable. It was also the reason I had on this particular day overslept by an hour. I flew out of bed, jumped into my jeans and grabbed the first shirt in my closet. I brushed my teeth on the way to my car. My hair had not seen the hairbrush. The makeup artist and stylist certainly had their work cut out for them this morning.

It was an hour's journey to the set in a small farm town in the middle of nowhere. Regardless of how close to a larger town it was situated, it was in my opinion in the middle of nowhere. I swerved between cars like a Formula 1 racing driver fighting to get to the front of the pack and only slightly yielding at stop streets. My Porsche had the chance to show off and in a 120km/hour speed zone, I was whizzing by at nearly 240km/hour. I knew how to handle my baby, and she knew how to obey my command.

I glanced at my phone for a second when I heard it ring, my left hand immediately let go of the steering wheel to pick up the phone; a reaction that took possibly less than a second. Still within that second my eyes glanced back at the road ahead of me, and I observed a cow crossing the road about hundred metres in front of me, travelling at the speed I was, a hundred metres were as useful as one metre. With my right hand still on the steering wheel I pressed hard on it pulling the wheel to the right, the car swerved and at the same time both my feet slammed the brake pedal. I missed the cow by an inch.

But my car propelled skyward, it whirred as the tyres spun without any traction and after another second it started to roll. It flipped over and over several times before landing with a thunderous smash, at least, a hundred metres away from where the cow was now merrily walking to greener pastures, oblivious to my predicament. Once the car met with the ground, it bounced tossing itself over repeatedly, banging every inch of the body on the road surface, over and over again. The sound of metal crashing against the asphalt was so intense it echoed through my head, the shattering glass sprayed out

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