

The
SHAKEN
SNOW
GLOBE

FINDING HAPPINESS BEYOND
MY WHITE PICKET FENCE

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For my "Forever and Always"

CHAPTER 1

Time For Me To Fly

I am a “good girl,” a strong girl, a girl who feels guilty wanting more out of her so-called picture-perfect life. But, I do. I crave so much more.

But, what do I need?

I had been asking myself this question for years, yet I filled my time with more and more stuff to perpetuate the busyness and ignore the emptiness I felt. As a stay-at-home mom with my youngest of three children off to preschool, I had time on my hands.

Time is what I didn't need or want!

Having another baby was out of the question. Three was more than enough for this only-child to handle. How was I going to ignore the guilt that my life felt unfulfilled?

Stop the mind wandering!

I should be relieved to be sitting on an indented cushion in cramped quarters, breathing stale air, not dwelling on my unsatisfied and lackluster life. I was escaping, even if only for another weekend.

“Kristy, how am I going to fit this? The compartment is full.”

Chloe was still standing, trying to find space in the overhead compartment for her Louis Vuitton carry-on. She was my best friend and the one woman that understood me—and I her. Despite our vastly different upbringings, we were both stuck at the same point in our lives—housewives. Or was it stay-at-home moms? I couldn’t keep track of the labels. All I knew was that we were both on the same spinning hamster wheel desperately trying to get off and find meaning—or at least excitement—in our monotonous lives.

With our children being in school full time, Chloe and I began enjoying the luxuries of our bank accounts. After all, we deserved a little break from the houses we were managing to be someone other than wife and mother.

Didn't we?

Lunches, pedicures and shopping were meaningless mind escapes, a way to feel alive. When these escapes were not enough to fill my “happy quota,” I graduated to “Girls’ Night Out” and ignored the guilt of leaving my husband, Patrick, home alone with our three small kids. Maybe ignore wasn’t accurate, it was more like numbing the guilt with the first cocktail. Either way, Girls’ Night became my one joy outside of my children. Patrick, being the supportive husband he was, encouraged my girl time. As he put it, “No one’s happy unless mamma’s happy!” And he was right!

My life after cooking, cleaning, paying bills, chauffeuring kids and tending to my husband became all about the temporary escape of Girls’ Night. The once a month outings became more and more frequent, until once a week wasn’t even enough. Girls’ Night was the one time I was happy and free from the unappreciated life of a homemaker. Don’t get me wrong. Time together with girlfriends is important, but, when you’re only happy planning the next escape, that’s a problem, even if I didn’t see it like that at the time.

Those nights surrounded by girlfriends made me feel like *the girl* I once knew—a vivacious, head-turning woman who could discuss more than kids, PTA and PMS. Not that I didn't love being a mom, I just yearned for the break of being someone other than *the wife* and responsible mother of three. I was convinced my husband, Patrick, reaped the benefits of the woman that went out with the girls. At least she wore something other than sweatpants and the scent of fresh pine and bleach. If he was lucky, the sexy, sassy woman he had fallen in love with would awaken him upon her tipsy return. Meanwhile, the tired out stay-at-home mom was nowhere to be found. I think we both longed for this woman more, and, thus, Girls' Night became routine.

How did I get here?



My first crush was the summer before my freshman year of high school on Brooks Lake in a small Michigan town. Brian was two grades ahead of me. He had motored over with his best friend, Patrick, who stepped one foot off the wobbly aluminum craft onto the dock to stop from crashing into it. Despite a few dirt smudges from working in the Christmas tree fields earlier in the day, Patrick seemed to be a clean-cut, skinny kid with piercing green eyes, sun-streaked locks and full, kissable lips.

Brian tried to introduce us, but Patrick was preoccupied with securing the boat so the wind wouldn't take it away. He remained determined, though appeared a bit frazzled from their less than graceful approach.

He glanced up, flashed a boyish grin and eventually stood up and said, "Nice to meet you."

As I moved forward to show off my best flirtatious smile—I was young and still perfecting that—my hip nudged his side, knocked

him off balance and plunged him into the cool water—clothes and all.

As Patrick came up for air, I giggled.

“Nice to meet you, too. You OK?” I asked.

Brian shook his head.

“So, now you’ve met Kristy!” he added.

We spent the rest of the summer on or near the lake water-skiing, swimming and just hanging out talking on the docks. I didn’t have to worry about impressing Patrick and Brian, as they both were the epitome of the boy-next-door persona. I could just be myself, unlike the girls who were always changing friendship rules and expectations. Life always seemed to be a competition with girls, but not with Patrick and Brian. Both could handle me winning almost every jet ski race or scurry out to the raft. After that first summer, reliable Patrick became a fixture in my life—the fixture.



The captain’s announcement lurched me back to my mundane reality.

“Our flight to Texas will last approximately three and a half hours. Weather in Houston is currently a comfortable 75 degrees.”

The passengers in the cabin seemed to collectively sigh in relief at just the thought of the warmth to come.

It was the last weekend of a snow-filled February. Actually, all Februarys in Northern Michigan are snow-filled. Chloe and I were escaping the frozen tundra for an eagerly anticipated, hot weekend to visit our friend, Danielle, who had moved to the Lone Star State. “Escaping” was an interesting word choice, but I wasn’t quite ready to address that. Instead, I focused on my excitement to wear my staple wardrobe item—cowboy boots—without being a spectacle. What better place than Texas?

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Danielle moved there when she lost her lucrative job up north. In order to keep her family in the lifestyle to which they had grown accustomed, Danielle felt she had to accept another high paying executive position, even if that meant moving without her family. Chloe and I knew Danielle's adjustment would be difficult and wanted her to know that, even if the miles separated us, she was still a valued friend. It was just the excuse we needed for another girls' weekend. Escaping the dead of a Michigan winter was an added bonus.

My mind drifted to our last unforgettable outing a few months earlier.

CHAPTER 2

Don't Cha

“How have I never done this?” I inquired to Chloe as she waltzed past the mile long line wrapped around the corner leading to a Chicago nightclub.

“You have been sheltered, haven't you? Stop worrying and stay close,” she replied, while confidently strutting to the front of the line.

She whispered to the stone-faced man dressed in black behind the red velvet rope, while handing him something. Before I realized what was happening, we were whisked under the rope and escorted up a back stairwell by another equally intimidating guy. The tall, dark and handsome twenty-something, who brought up the rear, grabbed my waist to steady me from falling when my platform shoe missed the step.

Where did he come from?

He, too, was in all black with one of those secret service-like spiraled wires running down the back of his ear. I felt like a celebrity, a far cry from wiping noses and serving spaghetti the night before.

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A stunning woman appeared in a trendy black pantsuit. She extended her hand to Chloe, as she met us at the top of the stairs. We were now inside a dimly lit room with clean lines and shiny metal rails. Bass pounded—thump, thump, thump—and lights flashed all around us. The woman escorted us up a second winding staircase. At the top, four more beefy men in black with ear pieces stood at attention next to a wall of smoky glass. On the other side of the thin walkway was a gold rail that saved clumsy me from falling two stories to the dance floors below. Below us was quite an aquarium of creatures, oblivious to the over-sized fish bowl in which they were displayed. The men stepped aside, and an opening appeared in the glass. Then, we were escorted into another dimly lit room with a long glass bar, circular leather couches and an area set-up for a band. Our attractive female escort introduced Chloe to our two personal waitresses who brought us full bottles—not drinks—and the attractive, “hot” guy who helped me earlier stood guard at our roped off table, preventing unwelcome guests. The eye candy acting as our bodyguard was a bonus, but this prissy girl knew better than to touch. Ogling this exotic land, I wondered why I hadn’t done this before I was tied to a ring.

Who lived this kind of life?

I was thirty-five and had never been exposed to this scene, not even in college which was only an hour or so drive from here. Well, maybe that doesn’t count as I did attend the *ever Catholic* University of Notre Dame where dorm buildings are still separated by sex and the code of conduct states fornication by a student will result in expulsion. As the consummate “good girl,” I would never break that rule or any other. I had worked too hard at playing it straight so I could escape my hometown of 1,500. Life was a simple philosophy for me—follow the rules and life will reward you. So far, so good.

“Are those two Chicago Bulls players over there?” I inquired.

“How would I know? You’re the basketball fan, not me,” Chloe responded, while she mixed her vodka red bull. “It’s my birthday

and we're here to celebrate! I'm not worried about anyone else, unlike you. Have a drink and relax."

She knew me all too well. I was anxious, noticing everyone and everything.

Did I miss something? People my age and older were hanging out in a club, spreading money around, partying. This is what celebrities did on television, NOT Midwest housewives!

Based on the attention we were drawing, I did not feel like a housewife, and, I must say, my ego was getting a much needed boost.

Despite Chloe's comfort, she wasn't a regular in this scene either. Chloe came from humble beginnings and just so happened to marry a tie-dye wearing surgeon. He was gifted in his profession and loved what he did—maybe too much. His career did provide loads of discretionary income, and, since he had no time to spend it, Chloe spread enough wealth for the both of them. She was a generous soul, which was probably why we had been treated like royalty from the start of the evening. A part of me envied her worldly experiences and sense of adventure.

Chloe led an intriguing life in her twenties—traveling around the world with the military, putting herself through college, working as a paramedic and dealing with some tough family issues. She embodied the term "strong girl." Chloe's strength came from living hardships, whereas mine came from Catholic rules.

Rules had been my compass. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong, but my Catholic guilt made me question being in this nightclub, drinking and sharing the life of these people. The Chicago nightlife was a far cry from the usual small bar that is home to our Girls' Nights. There I felt in control with my harmless flirting and bold personality, but this place was much more unpredictable. Thank goodness I was with Chloe. She was fearless and didn't care what other people were doing or what they thought. She was comfortable with herself, and I loved that about her. Chloe

was my safety harness, giving me the freedom to explore without breaking any rule. It was exhilarating!

Had the destination of my righteous path been worth not exploring this wild side of life during my single days? Hadn't I earned a right to peek at the wild side of life I had avoided? I wasn't doing anything against my Catholic values. I was merely getting a glance at the glamorous chaos of a fast paced life.

After some drinks, mindless dancing and eye-popping scenes, I slipped into the guarded bathroom to call Patrick. Yes, guarded. That was a first for me. A burly bodyguard-type stood near the entrance of a long hallway with multiple ornate steel doors guarding single bathroom units and one line for both men and women. I wasn't sure I wanted to know why there was a guard or unisex accommodations, but the private marble escape did provide a quiet place for a quick phone call.

"Hey, Hon. You still awake?"

"I am now," Patrick answered, yawning into the phone. "How's it going?"

"This place is crazy...private bathrooms, pro basketball players, money and a bunch of old people. I feel like I'm in a movie. These places really do exist. It's wild! Beautiful, young, half-dressed women everywhere, and, surprisingly, men are still talking to me, Miss Boring Housewife," I said jokingly.

"Of course they're talking to you. They're not blind!" Patrick responded. "You getting your dancing fix?"

"Like you have to ask."

"Good. Get it out of your system so I don't have to dance for a long, long time. And save me some money, while you're at it, as I'm sure those men who can't have you are trying to buy you drinks."

"You're funny," I spouted, wishing sometimes that Patrick had at least one jealous bone in his body.

"How are the kids?" I asked.

"Sleeping, of course. It's 3 in the morning!"

“Oh, yeah. Sorry. Forgot the time change thing.”

“Kristy, it’s still 2 o’clock in the morning there,” Patrick added.

“Oh, you’re right! I guess the time got away from us. It’s just so interesting to watch the people...young with old...old with young... girl hanging on girl...the outfits. It’s beyond my scope.”

“Well, be safe, and stay out of trouble. I’m going back to sleep. Love you.”

“Love you, too,” I whispered before hanging up.

Patrick was dependable—my best friend—even before Chloe. Patrick and I had known each other since we met at the lake when I was thirteen years old, and he was your typical “boy next door” in most every way, including his boyish good looks. I confided in him about everything.

As I exited the bathroom, Chloe pushed her way to the front of the line. The guard reached out to stop her, but Chloe dismissed him with a simple “I’m with her” as she pushed me back into the bathroom. What she didn’t see was the beautiful, late twenty-something blonde in a pinstriped skirt and a one-too-many-buttons-undone blouse who stumbled in behind us. The blonde shut the door.

“Thanks. I just couldn’t wait any longer,” she noted.

“No worries,” Chloe replied, un-phased that another woman was sharing the bathroom with us.

The blonde continued to converse with us like she had known us for years. Now, I know women often go to the restroom in groups, but, to me, this time felt a little too close-quartered. Chloe went about her business, while the woman rambled on about how she worked in the loop of Chicago, had a kid and ended up here after work with her boss and a few co-workers. As she continued fussing her fingers through her wild mop of tangled blonde waves, she kept repeating how stunning the two of us were. She was shocked that we could have six kids between us and insisted we had to be her age. I observed a sad edge to her and, despite her smiling face, her skin looked more distressed in the bathroom lighting.

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“C’mon...join me. We could have a lot of fun together,” she said, as she reached to stroke Chloe’s sleek chestnut locks, envying its color.

She seemed a bit desperate to be with us as she parroted her invitation to have a drink with her. Chloe, seemingly unaffected, deflected her invitation and coolly moved past her toward the exit yet still engaged her in chatter. I looked up to follow her out and the scene in front of me played out in slow motion as the woman stuck her well-manicured, extra-long fingernail up to Chloe’s nose.

I sobered at the reality of what was happening. My pulse skyrocketed.

Is that cocaine I am seeing mounded on her nail? What have I gotten myself into?

This small town girl had never even seen weed—maybe smelled it at a concert—but I had never come this up-close and personal with an illegal substance. The closest I have been to drugs was hearing about Chloe’s experiences trying to rescue people from hardcore drugs before her life as a surgeon’s wife. This was more than I bargained for.

I wanted out.

Nonchalantly, Chloe said, “Put that away. That stuff will kill you.”

The woman stared at her with inquisitive eyes.

Chloe continued, “You don’t need that. Let me tell you something...I have a friend that did stuff like that, and it ruined her. I don’t touch it and neither should you.”

I had never seen Chloe so convicted, so opinionated. That was always my job. This was different. Her objection didn’t reject the woman. In fact, her tone was nurturing, showing disapproval of the act but not of her. I don’t know if I would have been able to distinguish the two even if I had tried sober. Chloe’s passion and pain on the subject were transparent—a rare glimpse into my friend’s

heart. This was a world she had escaped and a world I could not understand.

It was a trip I didn't necessarily want to repeat. However, I must admit I enjoyed being out of my well-constructed box and was excited for another escape from my mundane life. I was able to forget the monotony of being a stay-at-home mom, if only for the weekend.

I could handle the drinking, the aggressive men and watching other's immoral behavior. However, I was unprepared for the bathroom encounter. I was left feeling a bit dirty, as if I had read a tabloid and didn't want anyone to witness my guilty pleasure.