



CHAPTER ONE

WHEN I KISSED A TOAD

Brave settlers slashed through the thickness of the Amazon Forest using only machetes and hatchets, and making way for the few natives to build and grow their crops near the Madeira River. Mud huts eventually turned into solid brick homes. After years of deforestation under the unforgiving heat and humidity, the small town of Humaitá was established in 1890. Nearly sixty years later, my missionary grandparents were the first in my family to discover this little town tucked away in the vast state of Amazonas, Brazil.

Missionary work around the world, part of my family legacy for over seventy years now, began when newlyweds Jennings and Sarah (eventually my dad's parents), decided to set sail in 1948. These two forged into the unknown jungle with little more than the clothes on their backs. Faith-filled and obedient to the call of God, they were first in the line of

KISSING TOADS

courageous missionaries on the Williams family tree, and because of their work, Humaita was a town where many came to a new-found life in Jesus. This city cradles my grandmother's burial site, she went to be with Jesus on October 16, 1976. I don't think she would want it any other way.

Because of my grandparent's valor to trailblaze uncharted territories, the door was open for the next generation to follow in their footsteps. My Dad, like my Grandpa, said yes to the harsh missionary life in the 1970's and was willing to carry on the much-rewarded work.

My Mom and Dad never do anything half-way (I'd like to say I inherited this trait). In a period of five years as they started their journey in the jungles, Mom gave birth to FIVE kids! Can you imagine raising all those babies in the middle of uncultivated surroundings? I don't know how she did it. As a mom of only three young kids, I struggle when my social media feed takes more than half a second to load. I know: #first-worldproblems. My parents were far from first world...I'm wondering if jungle living even makes the cut for third world?

I'm a twin, and there is exactly one year between my oldest brother and "the twins." Mom said it was as if she had triplets. We lived in the Amazon jungle for many years, and I was blessed to work alongside my parents as they taught many people about the love of Jesus. Eventually we left the primitive life and moved to Humaità. My grandparents had shared the Gospel of Jesus in this same town.

Like Tarzan when he moved to England, city life seemed a bit foreign, but as a young teen it didn't take too long for me

to adjust to my new way of life. I do remember having a lot of power outages in our home, because the local officials would sell off the fuel for personal gain, leaving residents scrambling for their kerosene lamps. How frustrating it was for the settlers, but I was a teenager, and it didn't bother me too much. I was more interested in having friends and trying to fit in than worrying about going to sleep in the dark or the food spoiling in the refrigerator.

The main reason we moved to the city of flickering lights, was to start a new church plant. My parents were passionate about raising up the next generation, launching young and thriving churches wherever we settled. Soon after our start-up meetings, news spread across town about the new up and coming church (our church), which of course attracted a ton of young people. Because my parents were one of the Lead Pastors, a huge target was placed on my back as the next available Bachelorette in town. I was no longer in the obscurity of the rainforest with critters as my neighbors, but instead I was now in the spotlight. It was like living in a gigantic glass bowl, my every move (good and bad ones), became known to everyone. And so, this brings us to my very first kiss, on my very first date. All in the attempt to date me, one gutsy guy pressed through the crowds of acquaintances, into my inner circle and my family. Unfortunately, this first date did not play out as I had imagined. Sadly, my fairy tale dreams of falling in love with a prince were squelched by a toad. Without any further ado, I must share my first failed attempt at dating.

KISSING TOADS

Walking with my friends, I was careful not to lose my footing on the road of uneven soft clay. I tried my best to avoid the large pot holes that always accompanied the heavy rainy season. The last thing I wanted on this first date was to embarrass myself with a face-plant into the mud puddles. I pressed on for another ten minutes with clenched toes gripping my sleek but soggy sandals, and red mud splashing all over the hem of my dress. Despite my nerves and the internal state of doubt, I couldn't help but notice the surroundings. I saw the tall grass moving gracefully in the cool of night, and marveled at the beauty of the dense jungle. It was a majestic backdrop for a couple's night out. I could hear the croaking of toads and the multitudes of annoying crickets competing against the parakeets as they nestled in the trees for the evening. And I couldn't help but gaze up as the brightness of the stars began to take the place of city lights in the streets (power outages). It was a perfect lamp unto our feet guiding us through the uneven, broken path. Walking on, I could almost feel the "capim santo," translated "holy grass;" beckoning me to grab a bundle for some hot tea later in the evening.

Suddenly, my friends stopped walking along side of me as my date pulled me away from the group. He dragged me by the hand to the side of an abandoned building. What was happening?! My eyes widened with panic and I looked back at my friends, hoping they would get the signal that I needed rescuing. But, they were smiling and nodding their heads in approval. "Just go! It's going to be ok!" was their cheerful reply in the native language of Brazil. I could hear their giggles in the

background as I faded into the dark with this stranger, someone I had only known briefly. He was not interested in small talk as he had one thing on his mind: making out. His tall figure overshadowed my petite frame as he gripped my narrow shoulders, giving me no room to wiggle my way out. He aimed his lips towards mine and began kissing me, and kissing me again, all without my consent. My thoughts went wild. *Why are you kissing me? You gave me no warning...no chance to give my permission? Why are you slobbering all over my face???* If this is what kissing is all about, then I'm outta here.



I pulled my head back and marched away. Away from the kissing. Away from that guy. And away from my “supposed” friends who just betrayed me and let me get pulled into this mess. All I wanted was to dive into the safety of the thick woods and trace my way back home...where I could wash my face with soap.

That was the last time his lips ever touched mine. In fact, it was the last time I kissed any boy until my wedding day. We broke up a few days later, or I broke up with him. I did hurt his feelings, but he had made me so angry. He was the perfect example of how not to win a girl's heart, especially mine.

So what went wrong? Was the kissing so terrible? Was he a bad guy? The answer to all these questions is NO. Kissing is not bad. It's God-made, and now speaking as a happily married woman, let me tell you this: it's fantastic! So then, why did my first kiss end up on a sour note and a quick break up? This is where toads come into play.

TOADS VS. PRINCES

With over one thousand species of frogs found in the rainforest my all-time favorite is the Red-Eye Tree Frog, considered one of the planet's most beautiful amphibians. Its beauty is iconic as seen on posters, billboards, and calendars across the globe, but its exotic feature does serve a purpose—survival. When resting, the Red-Eye Tree Frog keeps its eyes closed until threatened by a predator. Then it will suddenly open its large, bright-red eyes for a second or two, startling whatever is posing as a threat—enough time to take off and escape into safety.

Like frogs and trees are a part of a tropical backdrop, I'd like to use "Kissing Toads" as my symbol to describe what girls go through in their romantic pursuit of finding Prince Charming. There is a saying that goes, "You must kiss a lot of frogs to meet your prince." But I would like to shout as loudly as I can, "This does *not* have to be the case!" In fairy tale stories, toad-kissing can turn into the discovery of a prince. In the real world your toad-kissing just winds up being, well, toad kissing! Usually you just have to live with the fact that you kissed a nasty amphibian

This is exactly what I had to face as I was squashed up against that rusty building. Wouldn't it have been awesome if I had a set of those bright-red eyes like my fave tree frog, and could've popped those babies open as that guy went in to steal

my first kiss? He would have FREAKED OUT and probably ran for the hills!

But far from the fairytale I had always imagined of kissing a dreamy prince on a starry night, it felt more like I had kissed a slimy toad...that did not turn into a prince. There's a quote from the movie *The Princess Diaries*: "You know, in the old movies whenever a girl would get seriously kissed, her foot would just kind of pop." This definitely did not happen for me.

I don't know where you are in the "First Kiss" arena, whether you've had none, or one, or many. But I don't believe it is God's best that we go about kissing toads, hoping they will turn into princes, when in fact, they are simply toads. Now hear me out, friends: I'm not saying boys are bad or gross or never to be trusted. God made them to be valiant, strong, and honorable young men. It's just that some of them haven't learned how to properly treat God's girls, and we need to be able to recognize the character of a boy before we go around kissing them, and ultimately binding our hearts to them. We need to love and value ourselves as God loves and values us so that we can recognize when a boy (who also loves and values God) is ready to be our prince.

I also realize I'm pushing against social norms. I see the social media, the YouTube and the Snapchats. In today's culture, we go about kissing like it's no big deal. It's a throw-away, almost a race to get it checked off our list so we can move from the "never been kissed" crowd to the more experienced "definitely been kissed" girls. But if we would just be brutally

KISSING TOADS

honest for a second, all of us girls wish we could have a magical first kiss with a handsome prince, not a slimy toad. How do I know this? Check out almost every popular rom-com or fairy tale. How does it end? The guy is sweeping the girl off her feet with a passionate lip-lock.

When I was fifteen, I caved into these social norms. My friends had insisted it was time I had a boyfriend, and I reluctantly agreed to go on that date with a guy whose name I can't even remember. In my brain, I convinced myself of the need to connect with someone in a romantic way; after all culture demanded it. I did not want to be put into the "prude" category by my friends so I gave away my very "first kiss." Oh, what I wouldn't do to go back in time, and advise my fifteen-year-old self what to do: to stand up against peer pressure. But I can't go back to my past, nor live in regret; I can only learn from my mistakes.

And I can go much further than that. I can knock on the door of your heart and ask you to let me in, because I have so much to tell you. Once I have your trust, I promise I won't hold anything back. I will be completely transparent with you. As I pour out my heart, my goal is for you to see your worth in Christ as I found mine. And you don't have to give away your first kiss as young as I did, much less give it away to the wrong guy. There's no time limit on when you must give away your kiss. You are timeless. You are more than just hugs and kisses.

Giving away a kiss may seem like no big deal, but it's the start of giving away pieces of your heart. You don't have to be someone else's object of affection just to meet THEIR

physical cravings. Don't allow anyone to use you to meet their personal needs.

I know you desire to fall in love with that someone special, and not to be partnered up with a toad. And here's a beautiful promise: A prince is exactly what God has intended for you! He has fashioned a wonderful "happily ever after" that is within your reach...but only when you embrace God's way (not our culture's way) for dating and giving kisses. I want to teach you how, and you will discover many ways in the following chapters.

My desire is to prepare you before you enter the world of "Toads vs. Princes." If you are already in that realm, I want to help mentor you through the journey. I'm going to shed light on the roots of dating, how it came about, and why girls and guys date. Also, you will learn the importance of creating a strategic plan that can help you set healthy physical and emotional boundaries before you tackle dating.

In addition, I will dedicate an entire chapter on how I met my prince charming, and give you an update on my present happily ever after. You can read this book, as a devotional, in your personal quiet time with God as, or in a small group Bible Study with your girlfriends. You will be able to apply what you've learned as I'll be leaving you with some useful application at the end of each chapter.

First, I'll have some questions to help you evaluate where you are in regard to what each chapter just talked about. These questions are a great way to reflect, if you answer them honestly. Being honest with yourself is always the best policy.

These questions can also be used to help small group discussions keep the conversation going.

My Confession sections at the end of each chapter are life-giving statements for you to confess out loud, either to yourself, or to be read out loud in a group setting. I've learned over time there is so much power in speaking words of life over yourself; it does wonders for your faith and spiritual growth. Creating a habit of confessing the word of God over yourself is one of the most powerful things you can do. Don't just rely on someone else to give you positive affirmation... speak over your own life!

Lastly, I'll end each chapter with a solid prayer. Did you know God hears all your prayers, every single one? There are some prayers I have prayed and then totally forgot about them. Some prayers in my life didn't come to pass until years later. It always amazes me how God is very interested in hearing my prayers, and how He takes notice of them. Over the years of walking with God, I've journaled hundreds of prayers that have been answered for me. Some people speak English, some speak Portuguese, but as Christians we must all speak in *Prayer*. Pray without ceasing.

Girlfriend, I believe in you. The life your Creator has for you is big and spacious as you become the woman you are meant to be. You will live your life knowing who you are and how priceless your worth is in Christ Jesus. You will be able look in the mirror and see how much you look like your "Abba Daddy." After all, you are made in His image and likeness. You don't have to settle for mediocre, for average, or for the

WHEN I KISSED A TOAD

patterns and the ways the world is unapologetically forcing on you. You can resist and push back.

My desire for you is that you will make a commitment, a pledge before God that draws a line in the sand to be pure and live set apart. That purity will become your daily wardrobe. Join the sisterhood of godly girls whose eyes are fixed on Jesus and who are on a mission to accomplish great things. You can do this!

Together we can do this! Let's begin the journey.