

I WANT TO
KNOW
MY
FUTURE

Linda Difman

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Outskirts Press, Inc.
Denver, Colorado

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Outskirts Press, Inc.
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN: 978-1-4327-7352-6

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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A Battle Over Custody

ELIZABETH'S HEARTBEAT QUICKENED and her breathing took on an accelerated pace. "Oh my God, help!" she pleaded in prayer. Before her eyes only a short block away were Tori and her parents being handcuffed outside their former rental home in an upscale suburb of Denver, Colorado.

It was a perfect autumn day with the aspen leaves changing to beautiful fall colors of yellow and orange. The brilliant sun was slowly ebbing behind the snowcapped front range of the Rocky Mountains. Elizabeth would have enjoyed the glorious sunset if it weren't for the constant fear of being caught for running away with her children. For the past year she had been fighting for fair custody of her three children in a small rural town in the middle of Kansas. She had won residential custody at first, but her ex-husband, Eric, his family, and church fought back, forcing the court to reconsider its original custody arrangement. They still stung as she recalled the devastating words from the phone conversation she had with her lawyer; she was given two weeks to turn over her children to her ex-husband. He was given sole custody and complete control over visitation. He was not required to let her see her kids at all.

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Shocked over the severity of the verdict, Elizabeth pleaded to her attorney. “Can you file an appeal and schedule a new court date immediately?”

Fred, her lawyer, hot with anger fired back. He was still reeling inside from utter disbelief over Judge Ferguson’s decree. “It will take up to two years to file an appeal,” he said empathically. The conversation ended and the phone went dead.

Fred was fed up with the judge and his outrageous, unfair verdict. Even though he liked Elizabeth, he’d lied to her about the appeal process because the decree proved that she would never get a fair custody arrangement in the prejudiced small town of Winfield. Silently he plotted that tomorrow he would make up an excuse to quit as her attorney. This case just wasn’t worth the money she was paying him or the headaches he was feeling from the injustices in the court. It was an election year for Judge Ferguson. Eric, her ex-husband, had too many eligible voters on his side pressuring the court to rule in his favor, and Elizabeth would never win, Fred reasoned as he planned his excuses for resigning as her attorney.

The judge’s words rang loudly deep within Elizabeth’s soul, igniting an urgent plea for help to the Almighty God. She couldn’t just hand over her children. She desperately pleaded for her Savior to intervene on her behalf. She knew that Eric would do everything possible to prevent her from seeing them.

Tori was her best friend and confidant. A year ago she divorced her husband and gained sole custody over her four-year-old son, Brad. Alan had admitted in court that he abused their son, so she was granted an emergency divorce in less than a month. She was in her mid twenties, a tall, slender

blonde who was not only a knockout, but she had a warm and caring personality to boot. She was also highly intelligent, graduating with a 4.0 grade average in high school and continuing the tradition into college. Elizabeth trusted her with her life and of course she ran to her with the news of the judge's decision.

They embraced and cried together over the judge's cruel verdict. Elizabeth was about four inches shorter than Tori, with short, curly brown hair. She was in her early thirties, with an average build and a caring and loving attitude toward everyone she met. She had always been well liked by friends and family, but everything changed when she divorced Eric. No one remembered the unconditional love she had shown to everyone she met. They were only shocked over her divorce and they were convinced that she had lost her mind and changed.

But Elizabeth hadn't changed! Her entire life she had played by the rules, obeying all laws and telling the truth completely. She never drank alcohol and there was never even a remote possibility that she would try smoking. She loved God and was dedicated to following the Christian life to a tee. In fact her bright blue eyes sparkled and her radiant smile lit up her face every time she committed to a new job in church, proving to others that serving God brought out the best part in her.

Through the years her faith inspired her as she taught the women's Bible study. It enhanced her ability as the choir director and soloist and gave her added enthusiasm as the children's director for kindergarten through second grade, a program designed to teach children Bible verses to help them grow in their Christian faith.

Elizabeth felt her body shaking as she looked with concern

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at her little daughter clutching the handle of her new purple lunch box with bright, sparkling silver stars adorning the cover. Inside, a sugar cookie waited to be eaten after supper. Her twelve-year-old son, Rich, was attending an after-school program, and her protective mothering instincts immediately took over. She couldn't just turn herself in to the police; she had to get to him first. She quickly came to a complete stop and backed up her car in order to turn around. Within moments the police spotted her retreat. They jumped into their cars and headed to cut her off before she could depart. Two police cars surrounded her car and directed her to proceed back to the house, where Tori and her parents stood watching her arrest. Knowing she could never outrun the police, she resolutely submitted to their command.

"Get out of the car!" a police officer sternly cried.

She pulled the car into the driveway of the rental house and turned off the ignition. With one quick swoop she grabbed her seven-year-old daughter from the backseat, holding her close to her chest. Crystal's curly blonde hair framed her blue-green eyes and pretty face. She was small for her age. Her daughter was not at all alarmed by the police. Her leaving Kansas with her mother and Tori was just like being on a grand adventure, with fun surprises everywhere they went. She was more curious over the police and why her mother was being pursued by them. She loved her mother, and all of the fighting over her and her brother's custody didn't make any sense at all.

Elizabeth stood quietly, clutching Crystal. A police officer stood beside her to prevent any kind of escape, while the other one asked for her driver's license and car registration. She handed them to the officer, and he quickly confirmed her identity by going to his police cruiser and giving the dispatch her driver's license and Social Security numbers.