



**"I will rise now, and go about the city in the
streets, and in the broad way;
I will seek him whom my soul loveth ..."**

—Song of Solomon
Chapter 3, Verse 2
King James Version

THE PLAZA

Barbie lived on Park Avenue with Ken, her wardrobe, a French poodle, Maybelline products, hair stiffener, and five dozen pairs of shoes—not necessarily in that order. Now she was tapping her pointed toes into the wall, leaning over a red studio chair, looking down, down onto a swishing-wet boulevard strewn with holiday shoppers. Christmas in New York! But still she crossed her long legs (the stirrups under her feet made her red tights stretch) and called up a pout.

"Ken, darling, why am I so miserable?"

A well-built man with short, rock-hard hair emerged from the sauna, wrapped in a terry bath towel. He was rubbing the left side of his face with his right hand, testing its smoothness.

"It's starting again, isn't it, dear?"

"Oh, yes, Ken, I'm afraid so. It happens every Christmas. Only this year it seems worse. Why, Ken? Why is it so?"

Ken threw back his square head and laughed. "You knew from the start that being fashion dolls would not be an easy life. We talked about it, Barb. We talked about it before we signed. We wanted things. We wanted a Park Avenue lifestyle, and now we've got it. There was a time, if you've forgotten, when we couldn't even have tipped the bellboys at the Plaza. Now we live here. You're overreacting again. Why don't you come to bed?"

Bed! *That* was Ken's answer. Barbie swung her pretty head around to face him, but her hair did not move. "I *can't* come to bed with you," Barbie whimpered. "You don't understand me. Sometimes, I feel—sometimes I feel as if my happiness has been sold separately!"

Barbie wept quietly into her long fingers. Ken walked over to her, knees popping, and put a hand



on her shoulder. “You’re the perfect woman, Barbie,” he said. “You know that. That doesn’t make you happy?”

Barbie looked up. Her mascara had not even smudged or flaked.

“Yes, of course it makes me happy. But the pressure builds every year. It’s so hard being flawless, don’t you understand that? I must always be—*Barbie*.”

“But you *are* Barbie,” Ken said. “You are! You are everything a girl wants and hopes to be. You are the epitome of womanhood.” Then he added, becoming sing-songy, “Why do you think I married you, silly?”

“Why, of course you married me because you love me.”

“You *are* being silly,” Ken joked, removing his hand from Barbie’s shoulder and walking back to the sauna. “You know I married you because your mascara never smudges or flakes.”

“Ken!”

In a whisk of perfumed tress that still never moved, Barbie ran out the door. Ken stood in his terry bath towel the way men with bad marriages who don’t want to admit it stand, rubbing a cheek that was now red from where Barbie had slapped him. Ken could not stop Barbie, nor did he think it wise to try. She had been this way before—last Christmas, in fact—and would get over it at Macy’s.

At the street, Barbie donned her sunglasses. No one must see Barbie cry. No one.

PARK AVENUE

Outside, behind her glasses, Barbie’s tears became cold, then fell onto Park Avenue. Instinctively, she reached for her compact and removed her glasses long enough to inspect her make-up. Her mascara was grief proof.

Barbie threw the free end of her cashmere scarf behind her and strode as briskly as her heels would allow. She pulled her gloves tight, held up her chin, and effected her haughtiest pout. None of it worked. The haughtiness would not come. She caught a heel on a sidewalk seam and, for a moment, imagined she would stumble. It was a little thing, but Barbie felt as if her world was falling apart.

Barbie decided that a workout was what she needed; a few minutes on the indoor track, a sauna, a massage, yes; that was the answer. She would go to the all-new Barbie All Stars Sports Club on East 42nd Street. Everything would be all right then. She would go back to Ken. Maybe she would go to Macy’s.



THE ALL STARS SPORTS CLUB

Barbie entered the All Stars Sports Club and found her friend Midge at the mirrors. Midge was wearing red Lycra shorts and a lime green stretch halter. When Barbie



entered the gym, Midge was busy inspecting her bustline. Barbie watched.

Hands on hips, yes, now turn on the balls of the feet. Perfect. Now, pull back the shoulders, stand on the toes, then suck in the belly and throw out the breasts. Turn a little to the left, now to the right. Also, check the buttocks. Very nice. Contract them. Good. Now relax. Very pretty.

"Oh!" Midge said. "Hi, Barbie!"

"Hi, Midge. How's the workout going?"

"Just fabulous, Barb. This all-new All Stars Sports Club of yours is really great. I'm, like, so much more disciplined here because of the mirrors and everything. Are you going to work out?"

"I thought I would, but I don't really feel like it now."

"Bummer. How about a Power Shake?"

"I don't know."

"C'mon, Barbie. It'll give you energy. Christie's in the calf room. Let's go see if she wants one."

Barbie and Midge found Christie in the calf room, at the Calf Cruncher. A padded weight bar rested on Christie's shoulders, her toes rested on a block. Christie lifted the weight bar by pushing up on her tip-toes and expelling

pretty grunts—like silent whistles—through pursed lips. Whenever she pushed, she leaned her head back, making her extremely long hair brush the gym floor. Christie was halfway into her second set of fifteen calf crunches, but when she saw Barbie and Midge, she quickly squatted out from under the bar and joined her friends.

"Hi, guys!" Christie said, grimacing. "That Calf Cruncher is killing me!"

"Your calves are looking great, Christie," Midge said. "Barbie, don't you think Christie's calves are looking great?"

"What?"

"Christie's calves. Aren't they looking great?"

"Oh. Yes."

"Well, c'mon, everybody," said Midge. "Let's go get a Power Shake."

"I'd like to," said Christie, "but I'm just now getting a good pump. Could we do it in about a half-hour?"

"Sure," said Midge. "Looks like just you and me, Barbie. C'mon."

Barbie looked at Midge and wanted to talk to her. Barbie wanted to go with Midge to the shake bar and talk to her woman-to-woman until at least one of them cried and they touched hands gently and promised to meet in a corner restaurant booth off the Avenue for coffee. There was a good restaurant Barbie knew where she and Midge could share their lives, their hopes, their dreams. But Barbie knew she could not do that with Midge, no, not even with Christie. The girls would not understand Barbie's look, her touch. They would not understand Barbie's pain. If only they would. But the talk would turn to fashion, Barbie knew that; it would turn to hairstyles, to men, to hips, calves, mud packs and pumps. The coffee would never come, Barbie knew, but other drinks would, so that there would be laughing and the tossing of hair. Midge could not even tell that Barbie was sad.

"Not today," Barbie said. "I need to walk. Can we do it another time?"

"Sure," said Midge.

ORDINARY LIVES

The rain had stopped, but it was getting colder, and the wind was picking up. There were fewer shoppers on the street now and Barbie was becoming depressed.

You do not believe that fashion dolls can become depressed. They can. They are just made so that it will not show. They are made in molds that are invariably



happy, bright and alluring, but not even the molds, or the tiny, tiny holes where the hair goes, or the paint on the lips and the eyes and the cheeks, can keep small feelings from coming to the fingertips and small movements from coming to the heart. The dolls' creators have quality control experts to make sure this does not happen, but some dolls evade detection. And if a doll leaves the factory and a little girl takes her to a birthday party, or leaves her in a bedroom where the little girl is hugged and tucked in at night, the small movements can come on their own.

How odd that Barbie now wanted to talk to a stranger. A stranger would understand. Barbie wanted to rush up to someone, to some plain and ordinary someone carrying a shopping bag in the rain, and introduce herself as Susan Mae (she often fantasized about being named that) and sit down with them on a wet bench and talk to them. She would learn about where they were born and how they lived. She would learn of their hopes and dreams. Barbie wanted to do that. But she could not do it.

Her heart, which had been fluttering so slightly, had become still again, so Barbie strode past the strangers on the street, remaining aloof from the ordinary lives of people carrying shopping bags in the rain, people who had come from somewhere, who had lives, hopes and dreams.

Barbie was now near her Wet 'N Wild Pool & Slide World on East 59th (where there was also a beach). The thought of going there brought some color back into her pale cheeks. The Pool & Slide World had never failed her. She hurried there.

THE POOL AND SLIDE WORLD

Barbie opened the door as quietly as she could. She saw her friends Skipper and Kira. But her friends did not see her. Skipper and Kira could not see Barbie because they were on their backs, pulling the strings of their swimsuits higher up onto their hips, letting their dark sunglasses receive the sun. Their eyes stayed closed and their eyelids were warm from the heat of the sun.

The tans of Skipper and Kira were perfect and even, making their bodies a rich bronze. The sunlight reflected off their bodies because there were tropical oils on their bodies that made those soft, feminine figures glisten in the sun. And the smell of that tropical oil was of coconut, and that smell was everywhere—on the girls, off the girls—drifting like ribbons through the salty air.

And away, but not too far away, were the men of the beach, throwing Frisbees, pretending not to look at Skipper and Kira, but always coming near them and looking at their bodies. Skipper and Kira knew when the men were near, and knew when the men were looking at them, because that's when they would adjust their swimsuits, or turn, or apply more oil to the backs of their legs. The men lusted after Skipper and Kira. The men lusted so strongly after them that they wanted to have sex with them on the beach, deep into the hot sand. When the men became aroused looking at Skipper and Kira, they threw the Frisbee again to try to forget about the women, so as not to embarrass themselves. But they would always come near again and the coconut oil would entrance them, and the sight of the women's bodies would arouse them once again.

Barbie watched. She had created this world. It had everything a man or woman could want. The weather was always perfect; the waves always came into the shore with foam; the bodies on the shore were ever bronzed and oiled for sex. The world even had a mail-in factory rebate. But the more Barbie watched this world, the sicker she became. This, she did not understand. It was a warm world where everyone was

happy. It was a world in which the sun never went away. It was a world in which the lotion was applied evenly and the upper legs of the women shone so well in the sun, and the men were cut to perfection, their abdomens ripped and their chests sculpted like rock. Still, Barbie was sickened.

No one had seen her, so she turned slowly away and let the door close behind her. The door closed noiselessly.

OTHER WORLDS

Evening was coming. There was urgency now in the steps of the few shoppers on the street. Barbie knew that she must go back to Ken. But she could not go back. The coming darkness could not even make Barbie go back, and Barbie was afraid of the dark. But the dark did not frighten her now as much as it pushed her on. Barbie did not know what she was looking for, but she felt compelled to find it, whatever it was. She could not rest, or return to Ken, or see her friends, or share her life, her hopes, her dreams with them (or even try to), until she found what she was seeking. Where else could she turn?

“It was a warm world where everyone was always happy. The world even had a mail-in factory rebate.”

There was the all-new Barbie Flight Time Airport. Barbie could board a plane and fly away from it all. She could leave Ken, Midge, Christie, Skipper, Kira, even her own wretched flawlessness behind. She could go to Paris, London, Rome—to the ruins of Athens.

The ruins of Athens! She had gone there with Ken on their honeymoon. They had kissed beneath the Acropolis, at dusk. No one had seen them. The ruins had made her happy then. The rocks had looked so enduring. But now, the thought of the broken rock brought a catch to Barbie's throat. For some reason that now eluded her, the thought of the ruins of Athens saddened Barbie beyond any sadness she had ever felt.

Now, Barbie was crying again. And again, instinctively, she withdrew her compact and examined her make-up. Her mascara still had not smeared or flaked.

There were other worlds. There was the all-new Barbie Townhouse, and the all-new Western Fun Motor Home.

Barbie had spent many happy weekends with Ken at the Townhouse, eating late breakfasts, reading magazines,

making love to Ken in the gardens. Barbie and Ken had collected some paintings, and they took the paintings to the Townhouse to enjoy. They hung the paintings in the living room where the sun came in softened by white drapes and where shadows cast from louvered shades fell across the hardwood floor, to be walked upon by bare feet. The paintings had looked so fine in



that room. But in her growing depression, watching the rain, being careful of the sidewalk seams, not being able to sit with a stranger on a bench, remembering again that Christmas was near, Barbie could find no pleasure in the Townhouse world, no, not even in the gardens there.

The Western Fun Motor Home was out of the question. Ken had devised that world and Barbie had never liked going there. Thinking of the Western Fun Motor Home made her think of Ken, and thinking of Ken made her heart move. It was not a good feeling, so she let her heart become still again.

WANING HOPE

Now it was dark. The lights of Park Avenue glistened off the rain-wet street, but they did not amuse. The lights were artificial. The glistening was a reflection of falsehood. The skyscrapers surrounding her were artificial also, while the sidewalk and the street were figments of reality. These were but hard things that supported a mean city where she could not talk to Ken, or sit on a bench with a stranger, or touch Midge's fingertips over coffee, or become happy about Christmas. The sidewalk and street had no softness and neither, strangely, did the grass of Central Park. It, too, supported the illusion of grandeur and happiness, pretending to be green beneath the halogen lights, but doomed to be tortured grass that longed for a meadow or a yard beneath a picnic table, or a hill where at least the moon would have reflected real light.



Barbie felt her hope waning. The depression that had been gnawing at her for weeks (years, rather) bit at her bones and vitality. Barbie wished she could kill herself. Death, she thought, was the only satisfactory thing. It startled Barbie that she could have thought that, and now she stopped suddenly to look at her hands (or the form of her hands) inside of her black, leather gloves.

Barbie withdrew her hands from the large pockets of her coat, brought them slowly to her face, then spread each finger, isolating each one. Barbie's tear-streaked face never moved. Only her eyes moved, rolling beneath their

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black lids, first to one hand, then to the other, first to one finger, then to another. She drew a large breath then, but it did not come evenly. Her breath came in spasms. When she let out her breath, she did not purse her lips. Instead, she let the breath come quickly through her open mouth, for her mouth had involuntarily opened in shock and disbelief. There was malice in her hands. There was malice in her hands so that she did not even recognize them. They were beautiful hands, graceful, swathed in rich, expensive leather, warm inside the leather—but Barbie knew now that they were betraying hands.

She would have buried her face into those soft, graceful hands, but she was now afraid of them. In this agony,

Barbie thrust her hands, now balled into fists, into her pockets. She drove the fists down into the pockets so hard that the coat seams at her shoulders stretched, strained, and threatened to tear. As Barbie did this, she craned her head heavenward, straining the muscles in the front of her neck. And she groaned. And she shut her eyes as tightly as she could.

Barbie had seen the hands of death.

Barbie would have killed herself that very night (she knew where she could get some pills), but she was afraid. Barbie was afraid of death. She was afraid of pain, too, and of the dark, and of every unknown thing. And now she was afraid of her hands.

It was in this way that Barbie's fears saved her; her fears brought her to desperation. And desperation brought to Barbie a new thought. As a man cornered by a wild beast will entertain a new thought, becoming suddenly imaginative in the grip of so great a fear, so did Barbie entertain something new, and this thought was the first thing in several years that gave her a thread of what you and I would call hope.

A NEW WORLD

There had been an all-new world in the works since April, but the project was abandoned by the designers in late October. The executives had given a tentative go-ahead to the project, but balked when their test-marketing (and several polls) indicated low sales potential. It was a controversial world (the toy executives reveled in that) scheduled for release at Christmas. But the thrill of controversy (in plush, Madison Avenue offices, anyway) was subordinate to sales; the only thrill on that boulevard was profit.



Barbie knew of the world, for the designers had consulted her about it. (Barbie's contract had a clause that forbade the production of any new world without her approval, and she often helped design the sets herself, as with her all-new Wet 'N Wild Pool & Slide World.) Barbie had voiced doubts about the new world, but had given the designers the go-ahead. She had not even thought about the world since April, and the designers had to jog her memory when they told her in October that the new world had been scrapped. ("What new world?" Barbie had asked.)

But now that world was all Barbie could think about. The thought of seeing it consumed her so that even her fears were allayed. Barbie remembered the address of the Madison Avenue studio where the world lay abandoned. With a resolve foreign to her, Barbie hurried there.

She would always remember the doorknob to that world, she said, that it turned so easily. She would always remember the quiet of the warehouse (when she had opened the door), so utterly different was it from the noise of the street. It was not the quiet of a library, she said, or of a tomb, but the quiet like the mist that settles on angel wings. Those were the exact words Barbie has used to describe the quiet. "It was like the mist that settles on angel wings," she said.



The light was different, too, she said, so that she would always remember the light. It was light, not of luminance, but of warmth. It was sourceless light that did not throw shadows, but rather dissolved them.

The aroma of the place was sweet, Barbie said, but it was not an aroma she could place. It did not smell like anything she knew of, yet she was sure of a scent, a sweet scent. Barbie has tried to describe the scent, but has never been able to do it to her satisfaction, so delicate and mysterious was it. "The scent had something to do with the light," Barbie said, and that was all she could say about it.

A PRESENCE

As soon as Barbie stepped into the warehouse and closed the door, she sensed a Presence. The Presence had everything to do with the quietness and the light and the aroma, she said, but it was not those things. Those things were a result of the Presence.

"And I walked," Barbie said. "I walked toward the Presence. I did not know where I was walking, but I did not need to know, because the Presence was drawing me." People have asked Barbie, "Weren't you afraid?" and Barbie has said, "No. I wasn't afraid at all. That was the strange thing. It was impossible for me to be afraid. There was no fear there, no fear at all. There was only the sweet Presence, and I would have walked forever toward it."

MOVEMENT

Then Barbie saw movement in a corner of the warehouse. The warehouse was vacant, except in the corner of the warehouse (the northwest corner), where Barbie saw movement. And for the first time since entering the warehouse, she perceived light as she knew light, and the light hovered over the movement.

"The movement, at first, seemed very far away," Barbie said. "Perhaps it was only a hundred yards away, maybe closer. I couldn't tell. But I kept walking toward the movement. I kept being drawn toward it, and toward the light. I walked and walked but, strangely, I did not get tired. Instead, I was becoming stronger. And as I got nearer to the movement, the light became brighter, but it did not hurt my eyes.

"Very soon I saw that the movement was people. I couldn't see the faces of the people, but I sensed that I didn't know them. Even then I was not afraid, but I kept moving toward the people, and the light continued to hover over and in front of them.

"It may have taken me an hour to reach the people, or maybe it was only several minutes; time didn't seem important. But only when I reached the people did I realize that I had not walked toward them, but had been carried. Only when I had been set down with them did I feel my legs. Only then did I know that I had been carried to where the people were standing.

"I could not see the people's faces, but I saw that they were poor; they were dressed like peasants. Their clothes were dark. The clothes looked old, also, but they were not worn and did not smell. I was close enough to one of the people that I could have smelled the clothes had the clothes been old, but the clothes were odorless. The sweet aroma that I smelled at the beginning was still there, and it was stronger, but it still didn't smell like anything I knew."

DRAWN TIGHTER

Barbie said she will always remember what happened next. "One of the people turned to look at me.

The person had to turn to look at me, because I was still behind everyone. The people were gathered in a semi-circle and were looking at something. They were so absorbed in the thing they were looking at that they didn't notice me. But when I had been set down, one of the people noticed me and turned to look at me. I looked right into his eyes. It was a man.

"I could not take my eyes off the man. His eyes were so gentle. Then he spoke. He spoke so smoothly and quietly that it was as if he hadn't spoken. I can't remember hearing words, but I knew the man had said, 'Come. Come and see.' After he said that, he turned to extend his arm. Then his hand came behind me and settled upon my back so gently that it was as if an angel had settled there. I couldn't move. Then the man said, 'Come and see,' as quietly as before, except this time I felt his hand and heard his voice. And as I felt his hand, I felt myself being moved into the semi-circle. And as I was being moved into the semi-circle, the other people there turned to look at me. They were smiling at me, all of them. But the smiles were not smiles as I knew them. These smiles did not show on the face. The faces made me feel very, very warm. And I noticed that the other people were women.

"I was drawn tighter into the semi-circle. It was then that I turned toward one of the women and opened my mouth to question her about what was happening. But when I saw her face, I didn't speak. I didn't speak because her eyes left mine and went down to a place in front of her, where I had not yet looked. And when her eyes went down and away, mine followed them.

"Then, as my eyes moved toward the thing but had not yet seen it, I felt that I would be looking into the Presence I had detected earlier, into the very Presence that had carried me to this place. I knew then that I could not look directly at the Presence. So I tried to divert my eyes. But my eyes would not be diverted. They kept moving toward the Presence.

SOMETHING HAPPENS

"Then something happened to the Presence—in a split-second—that allowed me to look at it. I didn't know what had happened, but I knew that whatever had happened had allowed me to look at the Presence. Suddenly, the light that had been above came down into where my eyes fell, and I was looking at a child. There was a child there, tucked into a white cloth and lying in a rough, wooden cradle.



"The child transfixed me. It was the loveliest, most perfect child I had ever seen. I did not know why it was here, or where its mother was, but that didn't matter because I could not take my eyes off of the child's eyes. All I can say is that the child's eyes were not the eyes of a child. They were the eyes of a man. They were the eyes of a man in the body of a child. They were eyes that looked through me as if I were a wisp. Everything I ever did or ever would do was open to those eyes. My entire life, my hopes and my dreams, were exposed before them.

"Next, I felt a warm and overwhelming love come into my heart for the bearer of those eyes. My heart leapt to life within me. I knew, as I looked into those eyes, that I would never be the same because of them, and neither would my heart ever be still again.

"Then I fell to my knees. Ken, Midge, Christie, Skipper and Kira all said that I fell to my knees. The people I did not know at first were Ken, Midge, Christie, Skipper and Kira. They said that I fell to my knees and began to weep tears of joy. I don't remember the tears, but I do remember the joy, because it has stayed with me. I know it will be with me forever.

"Ken said that when he picked me up to hold me, a piece of my mascara came off on his finger. Isn't that strange? That had never happened before." ■

Thank you to everyone who supported this work in 2014. Whether through Scriptural commentary, or stories such as this one, or videos, or audios, hundreds of people have been reached with the message of the grace and peace of God. Many have heard and believed the evangel for the first time in their lives. *This is because of you.* So please, all of you, accept my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. It could not happen without you. —MZ