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GREEN



FANTASY

COSMETIC SURGERY

FANTASY BY BETTY CHURCHILL • CHAPTER EXCERPT

Fantasy is a collection of insights from several contributing writers, about all the stuff women talk about and some they don't, but should. Sex, dating, relationships, the "m" word (not marriage, the other one), but, of course, we talk about marriage, too, as well as the beautiful people, the need to be in control and how God, Jesus and the Spirit fit into it all.

Like its male counterpart, Flesh, Fantasy is divided into three sections: small group discussion material, topical articles, and a month of daily devotionals.

Partial List of Topics: Masturbation, How Far is Too Far, The Role of Fathers, Confession-Forgiveness, Community, Filling of the Spirit, Cosmetic Surgery, Worship, Singleness, Faith, Homosexuality, Why Wait?, Body/Self Image, and Pornography.

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MAC and the Knife

I wonder what Adam and Eve looked like when they were freshly created—just out of the oven, so to speak. I mean, if they were God’s original creation, without the ramifications of sin in their gene pool just yet, they must have been perfect, God’s idea of beauty in the flesh. I wonder if they looked anything remotely like our idea of beauty. Was Eve the buxom, smooth-skinned magazine model with exotic eyes? Was Adam tall, dark, and ripped? Or were they maybe short and a little pudgy, as some artists have rendered them over the years? Hard to know, really.

You know they had to be disappointed after they were kicked out of the garden and they started to notice signs of aging. Eve was probably freaked out the first time she noticed a bit of cellulite, a few gray hairs, or varicose veins. Then again, they lived for a few hundred years back then, so who knows at what point that all kicked in (“You don’t look a day over 234”). Not to mention the uncorrupted ozone and organic diet. I’m guessing they held up pretty well.

I think it’s interesting that we aren’t told anything about Adam and Eve’s physical appearance, other than the fact that they were naked. In fact, there are few people in the Bible about whom we’re told the specifics of what they looked like. We know Esau was “red and hairy” even from birth—“like a hairy garment.”¹ *iAy caramba!* (“He’s precious, so cute in a ... rodentlike way.”) David was “ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.”² Esther was “lovely to look at.”³ Zacchaeus “was a wee little man and a wee little man was he” (see the vacation Bible school version of the story in Luke). But ironically, the prophet Isaiah describes the Messiah as having “no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”⁴ Satan, on the other hand, is described as a beautiful angel of light, at least before he made some poor choices.⁵

God created the idea of beauty, yet He never defines it in Scripture. The closest thing we get is the Song of Solomon—a comparison of teeth to newly shorn sheep and hair like goats descending a mountain. Lovely.

PLUMP WHITE GIRLS AND LONG-NECKED WOMEN

It’s intriguing to observe the changes in the perception of beauty throughout history, cultures, and fashion. Just a few hundred years ago in

Europe, plump, pale women were the models of the day. (I could have been their Heidi Klum.) Even in our own country and recent history, the iconic sex symbol of the twentieth century, Marilyn Monroe, vacillated between sizes 14 and 16. Weight didn’t seem to be an issue for her. We’ve all looked at *National Geographic* enough to know that some cultures value things we find blatantly unattractive, even freakish—women with really long necks or lips stretched over saucers. Future anthropologists may say the same about our own subculture of those who prefer body modification via tattoos and piercings. Or maybe they will be totally modified and they’ll think the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue is the equivalent of *National Geographic* for us. Okay, doubtful ... but maybe.

Probably what is more consistent throughout history and cultures is what is considered unattractive—pretty much any sort of deformity or irregularity or asymmetry. All of us have our imperfections. Even model Cindy Crawford reportedly has different-sized wrists. (I know—how embarrassing for her.)

My point is not to talk so much about what is considered beautiful, though I do find that fascinating. Rather, I want to discuss to what the value of physical beauty is in the bigger scheme of things. As with most things, Satan has taken what

God created as good and corrupted it to mess up our heads and hearts.

VANITY FAIR

Our culture is obsessed with beauty. The recent wave of extreme-makeover shows on TV—*The Swan*, *Dr. 90210*, *Extreme Makeover*, and so on—prove that. Plastic surgery is not the norm just in Hollywood anymore but has moved into the mainstream, and it is no longer just for the middle-aged sector.

- According to research, last year there was a 400 percent increase from 2002 in the number of women eighteen years or younger getting breast augmentation. Apparently that's the graduation gift to covet these days. No longer the traditional set of luggage or trip to Cancún—"They're called boobs, Ed."
- Between 1997 and 2003, there was a 293 percent increase in cosmetic procedures overall, according to www.plasticsurgeryresearch.info.
- A recent news story on NBC reported that in 2004 there were 9 million plastic surgeries performed and \$8.5 billion were spent on those surgeries. That is not including nonsurgical cosmetic procedures.
- One in four women on college campuses admits to bingeing and purging to control her weight.

The pressure to fit the mold is overwhelming. But I don't need to tell you any of that. You live smack dab in the middle of that pressure cooker.

We all suffer the ramifications. Those among us who are considered attractive experience great notice, value, and influence but often struggle with insecurity and fears to maintain that outward appearance, because truly that is why the world values them. In January of 2003, Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep—three of the most beautiful and talented actresses in Hollywood—discussed their insecurities with Oprah. "The attention to how you look is so cruel and unrealistic," according to Meryl. Those of us who aren't so "blessed" struggle with insecurity because we are often overlooked, marginalized, underappreciated, and even blatantly rejected because we don't measure up to the magazine-model standard.

The truth is that in the world's economy beauty is a commodity, and if you have it, you're wealthy. You're treated differently, somehow made to feel more valuable and desirable. Studies have proven that point. One study published in April 2005 by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis shows that beautiful people make more money than the not so beautiful—on average, 5 percent more. Less attractive people make 9 percent less than the average person.⁶ Other studies propose that beautiful people are more intelligent. Also, beautiful people are more likely to get help from strangers and assistance in a crisis. And let's hope you don't end up in trouble with the law, but if you do, you're less likely to be convicted or will at least receive more leniency in the court if you're beautiful or handsome.⁷ Attractive people are just that—attractive. People are drawn to them in general and want to please them, at least until their character or personality dispels the mist of beauty. Even then, some are so entranced that they fail to see a person objectively.



Eleanor Roosevelt, when asked if she had any regrets, she replied, “I wish I had been prettier.”

Before she was first lady, she established and ran a school for the poor as well as a factory for the jobless. She was the first woman to speak in front of a national convention, to write a syndicated column, to earn money as a lecturer, to be a radio commentator, and to hold regular press conferences. She helped shape the New Deal social welfare program, helped found UNICEF and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and was asked to be a delegate at the first general assembly of the U.N.

Most of us bear wounds from being slighted or even rejected at some point for not measuring up to the standards. Even Jennifer Aniston admits in *Vanity Fair* of February 2004 that she still carries some hurt and insecurities from having been overweight while growing up.

IT'S A CONTEST

So, where do you fall on the scale of relative beauty? Admit it: in your head you have your own scale. Some supermodel, movie star, or sorority sister is at the top, and some slovenly creature who gives little concerted effort toward her outward appearance is at the bottom. Where you fall on any given day is a cumulative effect of multiple factors—menstrual cycle, humidity/hair ratio, past and recent comments made by friends/family/male interest(s), wardrobe selection, numbers on the scale, past self-perceptions about your own attractiveness, how attractive others in the room may be, and so on.

The overwhelming consequence is that we women struggle with constant comparison. Nancy Etcoff states the reality well in her book *Survival of the Prettiest*. “Why so much self-denigration and envy? Because every woman somehow finds herself, without her consent, entered into a beauty contest with every other woman. No matter how irrelevant to her goals, how inappropriate to her talents and

endeavors, or how ridiculous the comparison, women are always compared to one another and found wanting.”⁸ That last part is the kicker—we will always be found wanting. There will always be someone prettier, thinner, taller, funnier, smarter, more graceful, or whatever. Always.

In the same way that men look at beautiful women with lust, so we look at those same women and measure ourselves against them. We want to be them. We envy them. We catch ourselves thinking *Girl is cut or Those cannot be real or I could probably get my hair to do that with a little color and some serious product or If I had her money, I could look like that too*. We look at less attractive people and find comfort in the fact that at least we don't look like that; we judge and criticize them to make ourselves feel better. Confessions of my own thoughts this very week while grocery shopping: *At least my bum's not quite that flat* (I often speak with a British accent in my head—too much Jane Austen and the BBC). *Who told her she could wear leggings in public—really, leggings, period?* *So Sarah Jessica, circa 1988*. If my mother was in my head (and she often is), she'd say, “Don't be ugly!” referring to my evil thoughts, not the other person's appearance.

Comparison: it's a treacherous trap of discontent. It's one thing to appreciate another's beauty,

gifts, or character, but when comparison turns into envy, criticism, and judgment, it leads only to self-consumption, insecurity, and heartache, not to mention sin.

13021 LEGENDARY DR.

I moved into a fabulous home about a year ago, one that I rent. Finally, I have a place where I can unpack and decorate like I want to decorate. The plan is for me to buy my own house in a couple of years, but in the meantime I take great delight in sewing drapes and bedding, buying artwork and accessories, rearranging the furniture, and so forth. I did put some minimal effort and money into paint, and I do certainly keep it clean and maintained, but for the most part I'm not investing much time or energy in the home itself as far as tearing down walls, replacing carpet or cabinets, or landscaping goes. It makes no sense to invest in things I won't be able to take with me when I move into my own more permanent home.

The Bible says that beauty is sort of like that. "Beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised," according to Proverbs.⁹ The thirty-first chapter describes the qualities of a godly woman, much of her character, and little or nothing of her outward appearance. Investing in this temporal body has a limited and short-lived return—it's fleeting, it's not going to last. Certainly

we can care for our bodies and present ourselves as attractively as possible, but we're aging regardless of how many products we use and how many procedures we submit to. Instead, it seems wiser to focus on what's on the inside, the things we can take with us. Our character is a much wiser investment and offers an eternal return. Paul says it well when he talks about the fact that our outward bodies are "wasting away" but our inner self is being renewed daily (2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV).

However, that's not to say there's no value in outward beauty. Peter says, "Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry or putting on dresses, but let it be the person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, this is precious in the sight of God."¹⁰ He says let it not be *merely* external, meaning there is value in external beauty. We are to add to external beauty a heart attractiveness—in personality, attitude, and character—which has far more value in God's economy.

If a person has a strong and mature character, then she will have an appropriate and balanced perspective of outward beauty. Her beauty becomes more of a reflection of who she is than an attempt to become someone she isn't.

AN OLD RED BLANKET

Once again I'm risking my credibility with you, the hip college chick, but I confess to watching *Antique Roadshow* on a regular basis. (I promise, PBS and public radio are on the rise as far as the hipness scale—you just wait.) Everyone who comes on that show hopes to be the next old man from Oklahoma. This guy brought in the blanket he's kept on the back of his sofa (or "divan," as his generation calls it) for the past fifty years and finds out it's worth half a million dollars because it's some rare Indian relic. I confess I still get weepy every time I see that episode. (I can't stand to see an old man cry, even if it is tears of joy. "Why, we're just dirt farmers.") The blanket itself is not remarkable or beautiful. In fact, it is pretty simple, really, with its wide red and white stripes and a few black V's woven in. But the value lies in who made it: our Indian predecessors. You're just like that. You may be that blanket or a painting by a famous artist or a rare coin issued by a now-defunct government—your value lies not in how beautiful you are but in who made you.

One of the Bible poets wonders at being God's creation:

You created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well. (Psalm 139:13-14)

It's interesting to note what the passage does and does not say. It does say God was intentional: there is design and purpose in each person. It also says that anything created by God is wonderful. The word translated "fearfully" literally means "with awe, astonishment, and reverence." You are an awesome creation—a masterpiece, if you will—that deserves respect because of who created you.

If you showed up at the roadshow with some wacky painting you've kept in a cheap plastic frame hanging in your bathroom and then found out it was a Picasso, I guarantee you would give it more respect. It may be described more as "interesting" than as "beautiful," but once you got the insurance taken care of, you would be quick to frame it well and display it with pride and prominence, not so much because of the painting itself as because of who created it. The passage does not say that God

made everyone beautiful by the current standards, but it clearly says you are created wonderfully.

HAMMERTOES AND ACNE

Everyone is knit together with some "imperfections" that make us unique, ranging from big ears, astigmatism, or a flat chest to deformities and disease. Does God have a purpose in all this?

Yep.

Not because He's cruel and heartless but because He has your best interest in mind. Like any good parent, He's far more concerned with your heart and character than with your shallow and momentary happiness. I truly believe He has a purpose and plan for you that fits into the bigger plan of history and for which you are perfectly designed.

I don't want to make light of serious health issues. All of it, from acne to serious birth defects, is the ramification of sin in the world. The problem of ugliness and deformity is, in fact, the problem of evil, and the reasons for it are not always easy to discern and are certainly not fully disclosed to us. But Scripture does affirm this: God, in His wisdom (that's admittedly hard for us to understand at times), does often choose to allow sin to run its course. But even when it includes tragic

consequences, He can still bring His good and glory from it.

Ephesians 2:10 gives me great confidence at times when I feel the pressure to conform or measure up to someone else's standard. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

He made Esther beautiful because He knew she would have to please the king to save her people, the nation of Israel. But He made a man blind from birth because he would bring glory to God when he was healed (Luke 18:43). Everything about you is for a purpose and a plan—your physical appearance, your family, your life experiences, your gifts and weaknesses. Though tainted and warped by sin, all of it is ordained by God to conform you to Christ, to help others, and to bring glory to the Father.



WHERE THE PLASTIC MEETS THE KNIFE

So, if that's the case, then it seems I should embrace who God made me to be. Does that mean it's wrong for me to try to fix my imperfections? Well, pass me the can opener (best read with a Dolly Parton twang). There are all sorts of worms in this can—contentment, vanity, identity, control, idolatry, insecurity, confidence, stewardship, self-consumption, and health. And then, if you start bashing plastic surgery, where do you stop? Waxing? Coloring your hair? Using Crest White Strips? Getting manis and pedis? Using makeup? You see how this is a slippery slope and you can quickly end up with your hair in a bun, no makeup, unshaven legs, old sweats, and \$2 flip-flops (not to be confused with me doing a little late-night shopping at the Wal-Mart).

So there's this guy—"Catman." Maybe you've seen the show about him and others like him on the Discovery Channel. "Catman" wants to become a cat. He has had cheek implants, a brow implant, lip clefting, teeth sharpening, ear pointing, all sorts of tattooing, and next on the list—whisker implants. Well, I don't know exactly where the line is for any individual, but I do know this—that's way past it. If God meant him to be a cat, he'd have been born in a litter.

On the other end of the spectrum, in the not too distant past, I was in a room with four or five women in ministry leadership planning a women's conference. It came out through our discussion that only two of us in the room had not had plastic surgery. I confess the option had never crossed my mind, but it certainly led to some interesting "what if's." Now that we are all well versed in the lingo, thanks to *Extreme Makeover*, I'd go for some microderm abrasion, Lasik eye surgery, varicose vein laser treatment, breast lift, liposuction, and tummy tuck. And throw in a little Botox while we're at it. But would that really make me happy?

Actually, yes, it probably would. It would be nice to feel better about myself and more confident and perhaps have the attention of men and reap the benefits of the more beautiful people. But is my circumstantial happiness the point? Is that really the goal or purpose in life?

There is a web of tensions to consider in making such decisions. Whether it's plastic surgery or just a cut 'n' color over at the Curl Up & Dye, it's an opportunity to examine your heart. As all sorts of procedures become more accessible and more the cultural norm, I can only imagine we're going to have many options and opportunities. In fact, maybe you already have—you may have already

gotten that graduation gift. But here are some things to think about when the time comes.

1. MOST OBVIOUSLY, WHY DO YOU WANT TO DO IT?

Heart motive and expectations are big concerns. Any good plastic surgeon is going to ask you about your expectations and hopes before he or she takes you on as a client. If you have unrealistic expectations of how this will change your life, solve all your problems, or turn you into a completely new person, they are not going to put you under (or at least they shouldn't).

2. CAN YOU AFFORD THIS, AND IS IT REALLY A WISE FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP OF WHAT YOU'VE BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH?

This is probably the greatest concern. Contrary to popular belief, debt is not a wise option, and though plastic surgery has become more affordable, few people have that kind of discretionary income. And even if you do, is it wise to invest gross amounts of money in the temporal and fleeting? I know this whole area is relative to individual values, lifestyle, and experience. But before you decide to make an investment, do me this favor: read through some passages about stewardship and then make a decision (Matthew 6:19-24; 25:14-30). This is not just about the \$10,000 boob job. This is an issue I

have to wrestle with when it comes to buying my \$20 shampoo rather than the generic wholesale knockoff. The money thing is a bigger area of your life that you're going to have to process sooner or later. You might as well start here.

3. IF YOU HAVE THIS DONE, WHAT'S THE NEXT THING?

Is this going to start you down a path of pursuing perfection? Once you fix this one thing, are you going to feel compelled to fix the next thing and the next? Oprah and others have certainly done enough shows about those addicted to plastic surgery—those in pursuit of ever-evasive youth. You've seen the sixty-five-year-olds with taut, wrinkle-free faces, swollen lips locked in a perpetual smile, and eyes oddly unable to blink. I know you're only twenty-something, but you're just as susceptible. Perfection is a futile pursuit and only spirals down the rabbit hole of the discontent.

4. IS THIS ABOUT GAINING THE ATTENTION OF MEN OR THE RIGHT MAN?

I know that it seems every guy out there is in pursuit of a woman with a perfect body. And unfortunately, that's mostly true. (Oops—is my cynicism showing?) However, are you motivated to catch a wink and a whistle from the general population of red-blooded men in order to feel good about yourself for the moment? Or is it really your desire to capture the heart of the man whom God has created as His good and perfect provision for you?

5. ARE YOU STEALING GOD'S GLORY, OR IS HE USING YOUR IMPERFECTION TO BRING GLORY TO HIMSELF?

Whatever your area of physical self-dissatisfaction is—your thorn in the flesh, so to speak—is the enduring of it something that is building your character or enabling you to connect with or help others? Or could it be that God, in His kindness, is providing a means of fixing it in a way that is bringing glory to Himself?

6. IS THE PURSUIT OF BEAUTY AN IDOL IN YOUR LIFE?

Okay, so maybe you don't have a little shrine in your room with pictures from *In Style* and *Cosmo* surrounded by your MAC makeup and Bed Head hair products, with candles and incense. But then again, you may actually have some version of this. Anyway, the point is, does how you spend your time, energy, and money, or your words or your heart attitude, reflect a higher value placed on outward appearance as compared to honoring and obeying God?

7. WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS?

This is just plain common sense. Weigh the risks involved. Do the research. Don't just take your doctor's word for it. I'm sure *People* magazine has an archive of procedures gone awry to make anyone think twice, but you probably want to consider some more reliable sources. That's what the Web is for.



8. ARE YOU VALUING THE WORLD'S ECONOMY OVER GOD'S?

What have you done to focus on your heart and character lately? How do you see your outward appearance as a reflection of your inner self?

What are the issues that connect the two for you?

For me, it's certainly issues of discipline and self-control. There are issues of insecurity and choosing to find my confidence in who I am in Christ rather than what the world thinks about my outward appearance. What's on your list?

HEY, PINNOCHHIO!

"Go ask that big-nose girl over there." Out of the mouths of babes, such cruel words. Bambi (obvious fake name, though I went to High School with a Bambi) endured all sorts of cuts about the size of her nose when growing up, and her mom was the first to remind her that she could have that problem fixed one day when she had the money. In fact, for a long time that was the first thing on her list for "one day." In the meantime, however, she became a Christian. One of the things she wrestled with the Lord over was the size of her nose. But she came to terms with the fact that God had created her that way on purpose and trusted that He must have had a plan for it, so she let it go.

A few years later her sister, a local news anchor, called and asked if Bambi would have her nose fixed if it was paid for. As she prayed about it, she sensed this was a gift from the Lord (via WIS-TV, the news station, and the doctor who would provide her surgery if they could do a news story about the surgery). So Bambi did it and had her fifteen minutes of fame.

She would admit that, had she not become a believer, she would have had the surgery as soon as she could have—and for all the wrong reasons. What before would have only given her a false sense of security, built up her pride and ego, and further convinced her to look for affirmation from men now didn't really change her life at all. She'd already found her security and contentment in Christ. It was much more like a sweet gift that reminds her of a Father who delights in giving good gifts to his children—just for fun.

The truth is that I have several friends who have had procedures done. Several of these procedures I would even say have been a miraculous provision and gift from the Lord Himself, like Bambi's—a testimony of His kindness. And I wouldn't be telling the truth if I denied spending my fair share of time, money, and energy fighting the ravages of time and searching for the next miracle product. So I am in no way saying that all cosmetic procedures or products are wrong or evil. God does care about our outward appearance, especially as it relates to our character and relationship with Him. I think it's important for you and me to wrestle with the related heart issues and pray for God's wisdom and insight to have a true perspective, holding this issue of personal beauty in balance.



SIZE 8 FOREVER AND EVER, AMEN

For those of us who have a relationship with God, we're promised that one day we will have a perfect and beautiful body for eternity (1 Corinthians 15:42). For me, that means life without the wobbly bits, without the hideous scar on my ankle, without astigmatism, without turkey wings or crow's feet—a body without the ramifications of sin (not to mention a character without sin). That's what we all long for and, frankly, what we were created for. No wonder we're ever in pursuit of it.

The truth is that God, in His wisdom, has allowed the ramifications of sin to take their toll on my body. I don't like it anymore than I like the ramifications of sin in my character. *Blick!* And I do want to take care of my body, but rather than at the expense of my character, to do so in a way that can build my character and draw me closer to Christ.

Like my current home, I think I'll do the best I can with what I have for a body. I'll make it as attractive as possible in a way that gives honor and respect to its God. And then I'll spend my time and energy on what goes inside—the heart and character and relationship with my Creator. I can take those things with me to that new and perfect size-8 body I'll have for eternity.

REAL BEAUTY

Beauty, by the world's standard, is an elusive concept—always changing from era to culture to fad. It's mildly humiliating to think that we obsess over something so fickle, comparing ourselves with others in a contest that doesn't really exist. Someday we'll see how the term "Vanity Fair" was quite an appropriate commentary on our lives.

The truth is we haven't seen or experienced real beauty. It's not just that our perspective has been so skewed; it's that our perspective is so finite to begin with. Because no one has seen God, no one can begin to imagine the depth and mystery of infinite beauty. Our sense of beauty is just a taste, really, of what is truly beautiful—God Himself. The value of beauty lies in the fact that it is a reflection of Him. He created us in His image as a means of pointing people toward Himself. The value is shortchanged when beauty becomes an end in itself.

The beauty that God values is the reflection of a godly heart that manifests itself outwardly—in your demeanor, in how you carry yourself and how you care for and present your body, as well as in your words and actions. With the Spirit of God within, anyone can have that kind of beauty.

¹ Genesis 25:25

² 1 Samuel 16:12

³ Esther 1:11

⁴ Isaiah 53:2

⁵ Isaiah 14:12

⁶ http://money.cnn.com/2005/04/08/news/funny/beautiful_money/?cnn=yes

⁷ all statistics in this paragraph <http://weattract.com/ASPhysBeautyHaveEasy.html>

⁸ *Survival of the Prettiest* by Nancy Etcoff (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000)

⁹ Proverbs 31:30

¹⁰ 1 Peter 3:3