

PREFACE TO THE CATHOLIC EDITION

Chastity, like me, has long suffered from a bad reputation—only in chastity’s case, it’s undeserved.

Those words, opening the introduction to the first edition of *The Thrill of the Chaste*, went farther than I ever could have imagined when I wrote them in my apartment in Hoboken, New Jersey. Judging from the hundreds of responses I have received from readers, they reached every continent of the world except Antarctica. (I still hold out hope that some joyfully chaste person down there will dip a penguin feather in ink and drop me a line.)

The more memorable responses to *The Thrill* included an invitation to the wedding of an Irish reader (she credited the book for bringing her back to Catholic faith) and dozens of fan letters from seminarians thanking me for encouraging them in their vocation. The seminarians’ reaction was what surprised me the most. Given that, at the time I was writing the book, I was hoping for marriage, it wasn’t exactly the kind of male reaction I was looking for—but it was deeply gratifying nonetheless.

When I wrote *The Thrill*, in late 2005, my life was much different than it is today. Then, I was in my mid-thirties, working full time on the editorial staff of the *New York Daily News*. My spiritual journey to Rome was not yet

complete—I was a Jewish convert to Protestant Christianity, preparing via RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) to make the final leap into the Catholic Church—and I now know that my vocational journey was not complete either.

Today, I write and speak on healing from childhood sexual abuse—the message of my second book, *My Peace I Give You* (Ave Maria Press, 2012). In my personal life, I am working to complete a pontifical doctorate in theology (which, by some cruel joke on chaste people, is called an STD) and have done something I would not have imagined in 2005: I made a personal consecration of my celibacy to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The invitation from Ave Maria Press editor Kristi McDonald to do a new edition of *The Thrill* was like the answer to an unspoken prayer. I had long wished I could revise the work, for several reasons.

First, practically from the moment the book went to press, I regretted filling it with references to the television show *Sex and the City* and other pop-culture fads that very quickly became dated. Second, the response not only from seminarians but also from other male readers made me wish I had addressed the book to men and women, rather than just women. (The focus on women also opened me to accusations that I was promoting a double standard for chastity, which was certainly not my intention.) Third, as a Catholic (since 2006), I wanted to show readers how the richness of the sacramental life of the Church gives strength and inspiration to those seeking to live according to God's plan. Finally, I wanted to speak more directly to readers who suffer sexual wounds, drawing upon the spirituality of healing that I developed in *My Peace I Give You*.

I remain grateful to everyone I acknowledged in the first edition, including especially my family and my agent, Janet Rosen of the Sheree Bykofsky Agency, and also my former *New York Post* colleagues Col Allan and Susan

Edelman, without whom this book would not exist (see chapter 7 of *My Peace I Give You* and Gn 50:20). For this edition, I would like to also thank Kristi McDonald and everyone at Ave Maria Press, Wes Yoder and everyone at the Ambassador Agency, and Lyle Brooks.

NOT THE SAME OLD SONG

Late one night in the fall of 2004, walking home from the underground rail station after putting in a shift at my newspaper job, I passed by a restaurant as it was shutting down for the evening. Casting a sideways glance into the windows of the eatery—a burger joint meant to evoke the 1950s, when rock and roll was born—I could see the bored waiters in their starched white uniforms and matching caps as they wiped the chrome tabletops. One last tune crackled from the outdoor speakers onto the deserted streets: the Shirelles' "Will You Love Me Tomorrow."

To say I knew the song well would be an understatement, even though it was a hit years before I was born. I knew all the statistics about it, the way a sports fan knows all the statistics about the players on his favorite team. I knew who wrote the song (husband-and-wife team Gerry Goffin and Carole King), what company released it (Scepter), when it came out (1960), how high it got on the charts (number one), and how the Shirelles got their name (from

lead singer Shirley Owens). I knew that the Beatles admired the song and had performed it onstage—with John Lennon singing lead!—before they became a worldwide sensation. All this I knew because, in a previous career, I had been a rock historian, writing for music magazines about the stories behind old pop songs.

Hearing Shirley Owens's plaintive voice took me back to those days when I sought fulfillment in the exhilarating highs of rock concerts; in attempts to win love through giving my body; in cynical efforts to get pleasure from men who I knew in my heart could not love me—really, in almost anything except the love of Jesus Christ.

The words of "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," too, brought up bittersweet memories—more bitter than sweet. Like many songs from that more innocent era, the song expresses feelings that most people would be too ashamed to verbalize. There's something painful about the way its vulnerable heroine leaves herself wide open. She's not looking for affirmation so much as absolution. All her man has to do is say he loves her—then a night of sin is transformed into a thing of beauty.



We hear a lot today about "human rights," but did you ever stop to think about what exactly is a right? Is a right simply something that the government gives us? Or is it something that people are due by virtue of being human?

As a young, unmarried woman before I knew the "thrill of the chaste," I used to think of having an active sex life as a basic human right. I had the right to vote, the right to free speech, the right to freedom of religion (or, in my case, freedom from religion), and the right to seek sexual pleasure however I wished.

It's safe to say I wasn't alone in my sense of entitlement. Practically all the popular movies, television

programs, electronic media, books, magazines, and songs urge the unmarried to take the sexual pleasure that's due them. While love is celebrated, we are assured that a satisfying sexual encounter does not require love. If the Shirelles tune were written today, the singer would likely have to lower the bar down to "Will You Respect Me Tomorrow"—if even that.

The fruits of this accepted single-person lifestyle resemble those of a drug habit more than a dating paradigm. Unmarried men and women become caught in a vicious cycle. They feel lonely because they are not loved, so they lend their bodies to "lovers" who do not love them.

That was my life.

When I was twenty, my boyfriend left me for a friend of mine who—unlike me—had sexual experience. A rock musician (as was pretty much every man I liked back then), he had been a long-distance beau for two years, and I had dreamed of having him live nearby. When he finally moved to New York City, just across Central Park from my Upper West Side apartment, we celebrated together. But only a month later, he told me it was over between us, without giving a reason. More time passed before he could gather the courage to admit that my own friend—who had recently stopped calling me—had become his new love.

What I took from that rejection was that I had to gain sexual experience if I wanted to have any chance of keeping a man. In theory, the task would be laughably easy. I was living in the heart of New York City—not exactly a bastion of prudery—and was immersed in the freewheeling world of rock nightclubs.

Yet, although I saw nothing morally wrong with engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage, it was hard for me to convince myself that my virginity was not worth saving for someone special. However much I told myself it didn't matter, I wanted my first time to be with someone I could be sure really *would* love me tomorrow.

But I couldn't hold out forever. Not one of my friends from the rock world was still a virgin (or, if they were, they weren't admitting it). What's more, nothing I saw—be it movies, television shows, or my experience of New York City nightlife—suggested that love would wait for sex. If anything, it seemed to be the other way around. Both in fiction and in the real world, people seemed not so much to fall in love as to slide into sexual relationships that perhaps turned into love somewhere along the way.

I ended up losing my virginity at age twenty-three to a man I found attractive but didn't love—just to get it out of the way.



Instead of becoming supremely self-confident in the wake of my newfound experience, I only became more insecure. It was soon clear that, while getting a man to take a sexual interest in me was easy, getting him to think of me as a serious girlfriend was not.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't transform a sexual encounter—or string of encounters—into a real relationship. The most I could hope for was a man who would treat me with “respect” but who really wouldn't have any concern for me once we split the tab for breakfast.

That's not to say I didn't meet any nice guys while I was casually dating. I did, but either they seemed boring—as nice guys so often do when you're used to players—or I inadvertently snuffed out the budding relationship by trying to rush things.

Don't get me wrong; I wasn't insatiable. I was insecure.

When you're insecure, you fear losing control. In my case, the main way I thought I could control a relationship was by either introducing a sexual component or allowing my boyfriend to do so.

Either way, I would end up alone and unhappy, but I didn't know how else to handle a relationship. I felt trapped in a lifestyle that gave me none of the things that the media and popular wisdom promised it would.

Some friends and family, trying to be helpful, would counsel me to simply stop looking. I did manage to stop looking, sometimes for months at a time. But then, when I would meet a potential boyfriend, I'd once again bring the relationship down to the lowest common denominator.

I hated the seeming inevitability of it all—how each of my attempts at a relationship would implode—yet, in some strange way, it seemed safe. By speeding things up sexually, I was saving myself from being rejected—or worse, ignored—if I moved too slowly. After all, if I was eventually going to be rejected anyway, I thought I should at least get something out of it—if only one night of enjoying the illusion of being wanted.

It all sounds terribly cynical as I reflect upon it now—and it was. I was lonely and depressed, and I had painted myself into a corner.



In October 1999, at the age of thirty-one, my life changed radically when, after being an agnostic Jew for my entire adult life, I had a religious experience that convinced me of the truth of Christian faith. Having read the gospels, I had long believed that Jesus was a good man. What changed me was realizing for the first time that he was more than a man—he was truly God's Son. (A few years later, after trying to live the Christian life as a Protestant, my faith would undergo a new transformation as I learned that Jesus remains really present on earth through the Eucharist, but I'll save that story for chapter 3.)

With my newfound faith came a sudden awareness that I badly needed to “get with the program”—especially

where my sex life was concerned. But even being aware of what had to be done, I had a long way to go between realizing what was wrong with my behavior and actually changing it.

Thankfully, over time, I found that whenever I was tempted to return to the vicious cycle (meet intriguing guy, offer my body, dump or be dumped, repeat), a new thought would emerge to give me pause—an antidote to the pleasure principle. I call it the tomorrow principle.



I discovered the tomorrow principle at a time when, having made the decision to be chaste, I was struggling each day to overcome damaging habits—the fallback behaviors that might temporarily assuage my loneliness but ultimately left me feeling empty. Every day, it was a trial to resist contacting an ex-lover or scouring the Internet personals to find a new one. At night, when my loneliness hit hardest, I had to fight the temptation to put on my most revealing clothes (which I could not yet bear to throw out, even though they made me look like an epidermis buffet) and go to a party or nightclub where I could feel sexy—if not lovable.

Staying up through the wee hours one morning—during that fleeting window of time when everything is quiet, even the online social chatter—I typed out a reflection on where I was and where I wanted to be:

All my adult life, I've struggled with my weight. When I'm walking home at the end of the day, there's nothing I want more than a bag of fried cheese-flavored snacks or malted-milk balls. If I'm trying to slim down—which is most of the time—it's hard, really hard, to think of why I can't have what I'm craving.

The little devil on my left shoulder is saying, "Get the Cheez Doodles. You'll be satisfied, and

you won't gain weight. Even if you do gain, it'll be less than a pound—you can lose it the next day."

And you know what? He's right. If I look at it in a vacuum, one indiscretion is not going to do any damage that can't be undone.

Then the little angel on my right shoulder speaks up. "Uh-uh. If you buy those Cheez Doodles, you know what's going to happen."

"I'll get orange fingerprints on the pages of the novel I'm reading tonight?" I reply.

The angel lets that one go by. "You'll buy them again tomorrow night," he nags. "And the next night."

"Remember what happened during the fall of your freshman year of high school," the angel goes on, "when the student clubs held after-school bake sales every day? Remember how you discovered that if you waited around long enough, all the goodies would be discounted 'til you could get a lemon square and three chocolate-chip cookies for fifty cents?"

"Please—" I groan. I know where this is going. The devil on my left shoulder is pulling my hair in the direction of the snack-foods aisle.

"And remember," the angel continues, smelling victory, "how your jeans kept getting tighter and tighter? And you had to—"

"I know," I say, exasperatedly.

"You had to lie down to zip them up," he says triumphantly. "Finally, one by one, you busted the fly on every pair of jeans you owned."

By that point, the devil has usually fled, and I am left looking for a nice, dry, fat-free, high-fiber bran muffin. But I am not happy. Quite the contrary—I feel deprived.

That's how I used to feel before I understood the meaning of chastity—when I was following friends' and relatives' advice to "stop looking."

I knew some of the negative reasons for forgoing dates with men who were out for casual sex—such encounters would make me feel used and leave me lonelier than before—but I lacked positive reasons.

To lose weight without feeling deprived takes more than just listening to the warnings of the angel on my shoulder. It takes a positive vision. I have to imagine how I'll look and feel far into the future—not just tomorrow but tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. I have to widen my perspective and see the cumulative effect of temptation: every time I give in, it wears down my resistance, but every time I resist, I grow stronger.

The tomorrow principle requires that vision to be able to see how chastity will help me become the strong, sensitive, confident woman I so long to be. I hate acting out of desperation, feeling as if I have to give of myself physically because it's the only way to reach a man emotionally. And I hate feeling so lonely that I have to take caresses and kisses from a man who essentially views me as a piece of meat—a rare and attractive piece of meat, deserving of the highest respect, but meat nonetheless. I long with all my heart to be able to look beyond my immediate desires, conducting myself with the grace and wisdom that will ultimately bring me fulfillment not just for a night but for a lifetime.



The value of the tomorrow principle became real to me late one night in the spring of 2002, as I was preparing to leave a party in a Brooklyn apartment. The host, Steve, was a singer and songwriter I'd known for years, though never very well. We'd long had a mild flirtation going, but