



ANOTHER WAY: SAME SEX ATTRACTION

TANYA WALKER

KATE'S STORY

Kate¹ and I sat across from each other in the café, talking. The topic of conversation had turned to rejection—the kind we'd faced from those closest to us. Although I'd known Kate for a couple of years now and had figured from her life that she was living as a lesbian, she'd never before shared her story with me.

As Kate described a family who had not expressed a lot of affection and acceptance during her childhood, a sense of the pain of emotional distance and the struggle to meet impossible expectations became all too palpable. But the year she went away to summer camp, Kate encountered women who loved her and expressed the affection and acceptance she was so desperately hungry for—a hunger that had been growing for years. The continuing struggle to sort out conflicting desires and feelings culminated in a discovery Kate made on the Internet. A Web site she'd come across had (almost psychically) described so many of her feelings and desires. At the end of the long list of "If you feel this way ..." the conclusion came:

"You are a lesbian."

I left the café, hugged Kate, and headed home sad and angry. Not angry at Kate—how could I not feel compassion for her struggle?—but mad at the reality of a world that had given her only one way to sort through real needs and desires. It had offered her only one explanation and only one solution—embrace lesbianism.

Kate took a courageous step in telling me her story. After experiencing so much rejection from her family, how could she know that I wouldn't reject her as a friend?

Talking about our sexuality, especially homosexuality, seems to hit so many hot buttons. It's a mess of complex feelings—pride, anger, relief, fear, confusion. ... Often there seem to be more questions than answers and no place to safely talk about them.

Does it have to be wrong in God's eyes—can't it just be an alternative lifestyle as long as it's filled with love? How can someone change if she has always felt this way? What am I supposed to do with the feelings I have for other women? Did God make me this way? What will people say or think about me?

Kate's certainly not alone in her story. I don't have enough fingers to count the women I've known over the years who have felt the pain of rejection by society and family as they've sorted through their own issues of sexual identity. As public acceptance of homosexuality has grown in our culture, the conversation has unfortunately grown more heated and polarized. Sexual identity is complex and personal. If you (or a friend) are sorting through your own feelings and thoughts about sexual identity, this is simply a place to start, a few foundational thoughts to illuminate your path as you come to understand who you are.

I DIDN'T DECIDE TO BE A LESBIAN

Perhaps you are a woman who has feelings and desires for other women.² What do you do with that? They are real feelings and desires. Is it possible that the heart of those feelings is not really a desire for a sexual relationship but instead a need to be known and accepted? To be exposed, warts and all, and still be loved? A desire for intimacy?

As children and teenagers growing into adulthood, we go through universal emotional and sexual stages of



development. As girls, our sense of our

own gender identity hinges on identification with our same-sex parent, our mother. It's from her that we first get our sense of what it means to be feminine and how relationships between the sexes work. (In an age of conflicting messages about what it means to be feminine and masculine, you can imagine how hard this is.) Our fathers, and other male and female figures, also reinforce our gender identity. And the kids at school, by their acceptance or rejection, influence what we conclude.

What if my mother is emotionally distant and unaffirming? What if my mother smothers me with her expectations and control? What if my father or uncle or baby-sitter sexually abuses me? What if the girls at school call me a "boy" because I prefer playing with trucks rather than dolls?

If our same-sex affection, affirmation, and acceptance needs aren't met, they don't just go away. We try to have those legitimate needs met some other way. While we had no control over what was done to us by family and others early on in life, we continually make decisions (often unconsciously) about how to deal with those hurts and unmet needs. Often we'll settle for substitutes that mask the pain but prevent the healing process. When we reach puberty, those unmet desires are all set up to become eroticized.

Enter confusion, rejection, experimentation.

IT FEELS NATURAL

It's not surprising that over time we can't imagine being any other way. The behavior choices we make reinforce and authenticate our feelings. It becomes normal—the way it seems we've always been.

What's normal has to do a lot with how often something happens (e.g. it's normal for cars to cut me off in traffic). But what's natural is intrinsically linked to design (e.g. it's natural for the follicles of curly-haired people produce curly hair every time). Of course, something can be both. But even as a society, we recognize that our normal (usual) desires are not necessarily what they are supposed to be. We have to teach children to play fair and share—being selfish comes naturally to them. Left to their own devices, they'd always take the bigger piece of cake instead of letting their sibling have it. (In fact, to ensure fairness, my mom would give one sister the task of cutting the two pieces of cake and the other

the task of choosing first. I never found a way around her foolproof method.)

WHAT IS NORMAL, ANYWAY?

For a number of years, I lived in a small Massachusetts town where the uncommon and the unusual became the norm. Due to the high number of those who practiced pagan religions, such as goddess worship and Wicca, it always remained a point of confusion for some when Halloween came—is this how he usually dresses, or is it a costume? It also wasn't unusual to walk down the street and see women who were virtually indistinguishable in appearance from the men in the town. My favorite coffee shop was home to teens, college students, and adults who pursued and experimented with alternative lifestyles of various kinds.

So it wasn't surprising when a pregnant man crossed in front of my car one day as I drove down Main Street. At the first of two pedestrian crosswalks, I stopped to let him cross and thought, He looks almost nine months along, about ready to *give birth*. When I reached the end of Main Street, my nonplussed reaction became a startled realization of *Hello, wait a minute! A man can't be pregnant!* (The mystery was solved later when I saw the man again, one of the town's homeless, and concluded that his nine-month basketball-like belly must be some kind of tumor growth that was strangely pregnancy shaped.) The point of this story is the fact that it took me until the end of Main Street to recognize the inherent problem with a man's being pregnant. Even though intellectually I knew the truth about how pregnancy works (middle-school sex ed was not wasted on me), I had become desensitized by my environment to anything out of the ordinary. Everything had become possible and normal.

Normal: "conforming with or constituting an accepted standard, model, or pattern; esp., corresponding to the median or average of a large group in type, appearance, achievement, function, development, etc.

Normal implies conformity with the establishment norm or standard for its kind.

Natural implies behavior, operation, etc., that conforms with the nature or innate character of the person or thing.³



BACK TO THE BEGINNING

So, how *do* you sort out what's natural? Sometimes there seem to be so many cultural and religious voices saying so many different things that it's hard to know which end is up. When the ground beneath my feet feels shaky, I've found some advice from *The Princess Bride* to be particularly helpful.

Do you remember the scene in *The Princess Bride* after the Man in Black has defeated the giant Fezzik, the "You killed my father ..." master swordsman Inigo, and the (now dead) Sicilian genius Vizzini? Fezzik is separated from the others in the confusion, and so not knowing what to do next, he joins the King's Brute Squad. Inigo ... well, Inigo drowns his confusion in alcohol and waits for Vizzini to come and tell him what to do now. I am waiting for you, Vizzini. You told me to go back to the beginning. So I have. This is where I am, and this is where I'll stay. I will not be moved. ... When a job went wrong, you went back to the beginning. And this is where we got the job. So it's the beginning, and I'm staying till Vizzini comes.⁴ If we're going to say anything in the midst of the confusing messages about our sexuality, we've got to go back to the beginning. You've got to have a starting point; otherwise, you might as well shift your thinking to whatever happens to be trendy and culturally acceptable at the moment. Past fashion trends have already left us with photos we'd rather burn, so let's not go down that route. (If you haven't experienced that feeling yet, wait a few years—you will.)

As a Christian, I've got to go back to the one place where I can get it sorted out: the Bible. Never one to leave us hanging, God lays out what He's thinking in the Bible. It conveniently begins, "In the beginning ..." Let's start there.

"In the beginning God created ..." (Genesis 1:1).⁵ God's the originator of it all, the Designer who has an incredible creative masterpiece in mind. An artist with a plan.

"God created man in his own image, ... male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). God makes us, specifically two kinds of us, men and women. Similar, yet different. But both of us bear the marks of the unique character of God. "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man" (Genesis 2:22). "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both

naked, and they felt no shame" (verses 24-25). The relationship between men and women—it's a closely connected one. Adam, the first man, describes Eve, the first woman, as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (verse 23). You can't get more intimately connected than that.

Consider what it was like to be Eve at the very beginning (before everything got messed up). Naked and without shame. No demeaning comments from Adam. No "I wish you'd lose a little weight." No *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition defining the perfect woman. No wondering if Adam was being faithful. No jealousy. No lusty catcalls that reduced her to an object. No rape. No fear. Imagine if you'd been their daughter.

PARADISE LOST

Doesn't the story of Adam and Eve's relationship strike you as nothing more than an idyllic fairy tale? Last I checked, divorce lawyers and talk-show hosts were making a killing off our relationship and family problems.

Everything was paradise. That is, until Adam and Eve listened to Satan and decided that they wanted to usurp the Designer and make up their own rules about how things should be. Cut to reality. Now shame, fear, and selfishness mar God's perfect design. That's a lot closer to my reality in the twenty-first century. A reality where "Adam" treats me as a sexual object, where my brain is still seen as less intelligent than a man's, where a toolbox belongs to the dominion of guys, and where I can't walk down streets at night without fearing for my safety.

SOLID GROUND

Here's the foundational point that will bring clarity to the confusion of "fairy tale" versus "real life." It's the bottom line that I come back to time and again. In Genesis we get God's picture of how this relationship design is going to play itself out. Biologically, socially, emotionally, and relationally, God designs marriage (the two become one)—a sexual, emotional, relational union between a man and a woman for as long as they both are living. Out of that relationship comes children, and the whole process continues as the children grow up and marry. It's an intimate, secure, loving, enduring design that provides for and protects us as we live in this world. God hasn't changed His design even through people distorted and dismantled it and tried their own hand at redesigning relationships.



When we go outside God's original design, we call ourselves god. We deny His right to decide how we should have been made. Since this is God's perfect design, any sexual activity outside a lifelong marriage between a man and woman—adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia, and incest—messes with His intended design.

Okay, you may be feeling pretty angry with me right now. "Are you telling me that the way that I feel about women is rebellion against God?" Stay with me for a just a bit longer. Remember, this is our starting point. It's the firm ground we need to start from. There's a whole lot more to the story.

WILL THE REAL ME PLEASE STAND UP?

If you've been struggling with same-sex feelings for some time now, it's probably pretty hard not to say, "This is the way God made me: I'm a lesbian. This is normal." There's probably a lot of relief in finally being able to have an honest cultural identity that matches your feelings and desires. This is who I am.

In society our sexuality has become our identity. The gay community, as it works for public acceptance of homosexuality, has elevated this label to the forefront of its members' identities. Lesbian tennis player. Gay mayor.

But if you're a Christian, your primary identity (no matter what you struggled with in the past or in the future) is that you are "in Christ" and Christ is "in you." Satan wants you to believe that your essential identity is lesbian or bisexual. He wants to reduce your identity to sexuality. That's like reducing your identity to your shoe or bra size. We get enough of that kind of objectification from the world, thank you.

But you are a new creation in Christ (1 Corinthians 5:17). God can transform all aspects of your life (not just your sexuality) into the wholeness of your identity in Christ. That's why the apostle Paul, himself a former killer of Christians, urged believers from Corinth to live out the true freedom of their new identity in Christ. He reminded the Corinthians that they once were "homosexual offenders"—among a long list of other things—but that they "were washed, ... were sanctified [made holy], ... were justified [made right with God] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Jesus asks you, as His child, to live out your new identity so as to reflect the ways of His kingdom, even when they

look nothing like the ways of the world around you. A child of this kingdom seeks her love and acceptance from the One who gave His life for her. In her human relationships she lives out sexual intimacy within the boundaries God has set up (a man and a woman within the context of a lifelong marriage). She practices sexual purity and celibacy outside that relationship.

KANSAS IS FAR, FAR AWAY

When David Letterman hosted a lesbian standup comic, her routine about her relationship with her girlfriend didn't strike the audience or even the media as something out of the ordinary.⁶ That's not surprising, considering the tremendous cultural shift that has taken place in just a few years. Campuses across the nation offering LGTBTA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Alliance) or similar groups are the norm. In 1991 the first lesbian kiss was shown on U.S. television.⁷ The phenomena of LUGS (Lesbians Until Graduation) was launched by trendy experimentation. And in 2000 Showtime launched *The L Word*, the first television series devoted to the relationships of lesbian/bisexual women.⁸ Advancement in lesbian visibility in media and cultural institutions has done much to normalize lesbian culture.

Because our culture is constantly changing, we've got to face the fact that our environment is not neutral territory as we seek to live out God's plan, design, and purpose. It presses in around us and defines our reality in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Every day we hear messages defining "normal" for us. Some of the cultural change is good—women are just as smart as men—but our culture also wants us to accept and live lives that are not God's best for us. The phrase "alternative lifestyle" makes our sexual decisions seem no different than choosing our favorite flavor of ice cream. Do you prefer vanilla, chocolate, or Neapolitan?

We're in the midst of a tremendous cultural shift, especially in the area of our sexuality. While our culture accepts these cultural and moral changes as signs of progress, we are called to not conform to our culture.

DON'T SQUEEZE ME IN

God had the apostle Paul write these words in Romans: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will in—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).



If you're struggling with your sexuality, the messages in our culture are increasingly telling you to pursue whatever feels right to you. In fact, each of us, because of our own unique life experiences so far, are particularly vulnerable to certain temptations that our culture will encourage. But lest any of us think ourselves immune, it not a bad idea to consider this folk wisdom: "Little drops of water wear down big stones" (Russian proverb).

If you put a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will jump out. It knows when it's in danger! But if you put that same frog in a pot of normal, pleasant water and slowly heat the pot until the water boils, the frog will not realize it's in danger until it's too late.

It always struck me as ironic that the teenagers in high school who most wanted to rebel against the system and against conformity all dressed the same. If being a frog caught in boiling water isn't your idea of a good time, you might want to explore these questions:

- What are the environments that define "normal and acceptable" for me?
- How have I been influenced by my cultural environment?
- How am I using God's Word to renew my mind about my sexuality and the messages in my culture?

I WANT ANOTHER WAY

"I was really confused, and in despair. I was still going to church, but afraid to tell anyone about my secret struggles. I felt very much in love and happy with the person I was with. But, I also had a deep sense of the loss of my personal relationship with Jesus. I was really unhappy deep down. I was still hidden behind a wall of shame and denial about my sexual attractions and behaviors."

"I was very confused. I assumed all the old stuff from my past would just 'be gone' after I gave my life back to the Lord. I was wrong. Within the next year, I met yet another woman, and ended up in a similar relationship."

Even our desire for God—the key relationship for which we were created—waxes and wanes. Sometimes the desire to stay in bed on a Sunday morning or the endless entertainment distractions win out.

But desires can change. Women who have known

only attraction to other women have found complete freedom from their same-sex orientation. Others have learned to identify the triggers that push them toward meeting their needs through lesbian or bisexual relationships and have found appropriate and healthy ways of meeting those needs. There is hope.

Change is possible. You can know the transforming power of God in this area of your life. But God often does this over time. Even the apostle Paul talked with hope about his own transformation process (Philippians 3:12-14) because he knew that God finishes what he starts in a person's life (1:6). God doesn't necessarily take away our desires for other women overnight, for essential to long-term growth is the process of understanding how we got to be where we are. It is only then that we learn to meet the needs behind those desires in appropriate ways. After all, a desire for relationship and intimacy is a desire He created us with. But what all the research (and I suppose common sense) highlights are two critical factors: (1) You have to want to change. (2) Change usually involves a process and a community.

There are complex reasons why attraction to other women is something you deal with. You've formed habits and paths of thinking over the years that need redirection. And you need other people who love and accept you right where you are as you seek to live out your true identity in Christ. The church hasn't always been a safe place, but there are people who are filling that gap. There are many others who have walked this path before and have found healing and wholeness. Their stories and help for your journey are found in these resources. I wish my friend Kate had discovered these Web sites during her search. Her story might have taken a different path. But the story's not finished yet. ... You might want to check them out.

APPENDIX

A WORD ABOUT WOMEN IN LAB COATS

You can't get far in the conversation about homosexuality before the topic of science comes up. "Isn't there a gay gene or something?" "Aren't people born that way?" Not being a scientist myself, I'll defer to the experts. (See the resource list at the end of this chapter.)

Nothing I have read points that way. No "gay gene" determining behavior has been found. The statistics about homosexuality don't bear out the claims that



are being made. Instead, the facts seem to be a lot more complex than what can be contained in a media sound bite. (How can you accurately condense pages and pages from scientific journals into a three-word phrase?) But urban science, like Internet urban legends (they're harvesting kidneys from unsuspecting travelers!), gets passed around our culture until most of us have a vague "Haven't they proven that?" kind of scientific knowledge floating around our brains. We've ingested all sorts of ideas about what science has proven to be "true," but unless our degree is in something like genetics or biology, our knowledge about science and sexuality is really only the sum total of what we remember from eighth-grade science (not much) and attention-getting media sound bites.

By all means, read the scientific research. But even the scientists don't have it all figured out. (Just look at the conflicting diet advice.) Science, by its nature, is always changing as scientists learn and discover more about the world God created. And all of us—me included—are biased by our own assumptions about the world and the way we want it to be. (I always pay close attention to any scientific study that tells me that chocolate is good for me.) So again we're still left with a choice of where to sink our foundations. I'd suggest that the design God has revealed to us in the Bible is the safest way to go. Today's science news (the earth is flat) may be tomorrow's myth. (Though I sure hope the chocolate one isn't proved wrong.)

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AFTERWORD

JUDY'S STORY — BY JUDY DOLHOF

As a little girl growing up, I felt twinges of things being not quite right with my interests. Dolls seemed lifeless and boring, as did playing house. My best friends were the boys in the neighborhood, and we played all kinds of sports and exciting cops-and-robbers games. On the other hand, I enjoyed learning to cook and playing jump rope with the girls at school. Who am I, really, I wondered, a girl or a boy? When feelings of being different would surface, I'd just push them back down, because they made me feel badly.

As I continued to grow up, I was more and more aware of how different I seemed from my sisters. I couldn't imagine myself being a teenager who would giggle and read magazines about boys like they did. In the neighborhood, I was sometimes made fun of for playing sports or for acting or saying something goofy. And it felt like my dad pulled away from me the older I got; it seemed to me that he liked my sisters better. But mostly I loved being a child and enjoyed being outside and being active. So if I felt badly about myself, I'd just push it aside. But, because of these confusing feelings, I put up a wall to keep from being hurt by other people. Unfortunately, the wall also kept out the love I needed. During my first year of high school, I was mortified—and yet fascinated—by my attractions to two different girls at school. It didn't make sense, but I felt drawn to something about each of them. I was very confused. I dealt with it, of course, by pushing it down and trying to ignore it. I even allowed myself to become sexually involved with an older man during that period, perhaps partly out of a desire to seem somehow more normal to myself.

About this time, one of my sisters shared the gospel with me and I became a Christian. When she went back to college, however, I didn't have others to help me grow or understand what my new commitment meant. And being a Christian did not magically change how I felt about my gender identity. So I was glad when I finally went off to college, imagining the freedom I'd have. I thought, "If I get a good job, I'll be independent, people won't hurt me, and I'll be happy!"

I was surprised to meet a girl at college who became a good friend. It seemed like she got past the wall I had built, and it really felt good to be "known" by someone.

Our close relationship turned sexual over time. As much as I loved her, we went our separate ways after graduation, and I headed off to become "happy." I was jolted by the reality of how much I missed my friend and how the world of work was not all it was cracked up to be. I was "successful" but depressed. Fortunately, I met a nice young Christian couple at my job. They had me over for dinner several times, and we would talk about the Bible and our lives. But I never told them about my past, because I was too ashamed. Because of them, though, I again hungered for a real relationship with God.

But then I was transferred to a new city, where I met a woman at work who was a lesbian. Eventually we grew



close and ended up in a secret sexual and emotional relationship. Again I was very confused. I assumed all the old stuff from my past would just be gone after I gave my life back to the Lord. I was wrong. Within the next year, I met yet another woman and ended up in a similar relationship. Now I was really confused and in despair. I was still going to church, but I was afraid to tell anyone about my secret struggles. I felt very much in love and happy with the person I was with, but I also had a deep sense of the loss of my personal relationship with Jesus. I was really unhappy, deep down. I was still hidden behind a wall of shame and denial about my sexual attractions and behaviors.

I had an opportunity to move to new city again, and I knew I needed to do that. This time, though, it was painful to leave my latest friend. But in my heart, I truly knew that I needed to get away from that relationship. As much as I felt for her, I knew I was putting her above God. I was also discouraged about my ability to live a Christian life. This time I decided that I'd be obedient no matter what. I didn't care if I ever had friends again or even if I was happy.

This was much harder than I thought it would be. During the first few months, I cried and cried and felt so much sadness. I almost chose to come out as a lesbian during one particularly dark stretch, but in the end I could not convince myself that God didn't care what I did. And I could not get away from the truth I saw in the Scriptures. Looking back, I see that this major step of obedience changed the pattern of failure in my life. I did not decide based on feelings but simply on what I believed to be truth. Again, I had to make the same choice—I would do my best to live as a Christian, regardless of what I felt.

From then on, I felt God leading me, and I started to understand how to follow Him better. I learned that I needed to be open and honest with the Lord about what I was feeling. I started talking to Him about my past girlfriends and my current sadness. God used Psalm 51:6 to open my eyes more:

“You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.”

That was it! God wanted access to my “hidden part”—my heart. God wanted to reveal to me why I felt like I did, and He did just that. I was amazed at the sense of His love I felt as I came out of denial, talked to Him honestly about my attraction to women, and read my Bible.

I began attending a church that majored in excellent Bible teaching, with an equal amount of grace, mercy, and love. The pastor was like a father figure, and I felt protected by him, even if it was from behind the pulpit. I also realized that there were other things in my life besides my sexual identity, and I loved receiving that knowledge. I actually looked forward to going to church—something I never would have imagined.

Finally, I had to learn how to be comfortable with other Christians. My “wall” had kept others out over the years, until my inner needs were so great that I latched on to any woman who seemed like me. This changed for me when I met a group of young Christians who loved God and were very “real.” I became good friends with one of the women who was not gay but who had her own sexual issues. At first I wrote her off because she hadn't dealt with homosexuality, but she was kind and pursued a friendship with me. Over time, we were surprised to learn just how many core issues we shared: fear of people, lack of confidence, anxiety in new situations, and so on.

I was amazed at how rich a same-sex friendship could be with someone who loved God and who was willing to be gut-level honest about her shortcomings. So much better than any of the sexual relationships I'd had with women! I had not known that I was really looking for a close friend, not a lover. I also came to trust the guys in our group, who loved God and were kind and respectful. Now, through obedience, honesty, and good friends, I was armed with an understanding of how to live out my Christian life. I could more easily resist temptation and grow from it, rather than be shipwrecked by it.

For the last twenty years, I have continued to grow as a person and as a Christian, and I have been involved with several ex-gay ministries. However, this time has not been without trials. Several years ago, during a particularly stressful time, I gave in to sexual temptation with another woman. Fortunately, my church had a Living Waters program. It was a place where I could talk freely about my sin, the pain I felt, and the anger I was experiencing. The group leader was not condemning, nor did she condone what I had done. Instead, I received grace from her to again be honest before God and fellow believers. I received prayer from the group, not advice, and was restored in my soul.

Living Waters is a great program for anyone on the road to sexual and relational wholeness. It is for the person just starting on her healing journey or the person (like



me) who finds that she blew it after many years on that road. Today I am part of a Living Waters leadership team, and I continue to receive God's grace through teammates and others within the body of Christ. (Find Living Waters at www.desertstream.org.)

ENDNOTES

¹ Not her real name

² Thoughts gathered from interview with Beth Geary, from *My Genes Made Me Do It! A Scientific Look at Sexual Orientation* by Neil and Briar Whitehead (esp. p. 72), and from NARTH (National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality) articles.

³ Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd college edition, s.v. normal.

⁴ *The Princess Bride*, 1987, directed by Rob Reiner

⁵ All Scripture references in this chapter are from the New International Version.

⁶ See www.afterellen.com.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See www.afterellen.com Ibid.

Chapter excerpt taken from "Fantasy" (CruPress).

