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Opening extract from  
**Through a Glass  
Darkly**

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The title of this novel was inspired by the scripture One Corinthians, chapter thirteen and verse twelve. A verse which has always fascinated me.

***‘For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know, just as I am known.’***

Scripture quotation taken from The Amplified Bible.

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## INTRODUCTION

It's truly miraculous sometimes the way things happen and being a committed Christian, I don't believe in coincidences or chance. I truly believe there's a plan and purpose for all our lives. When my family and I moved next door to an elderly lady called Emily. Little did I know, in the years to come, the profound effect she would have on my life.

So, if you will bear with me, I would like to briefly share my inspiration for this novel.

Emily was not a well lady and couldn't get about very much, so I would do her shopping and a little bit of cleaning. In her tiny front room on a deep window sill, she had a lot of small ornaments, which I would wash for her. Among them there was a lovely glass horse, which was coated with something that changed colour according to the weather. Due to this I was never allowed to wash it as the coating would come off. Very carefully and gently I would dust the little glass horse.

Being mad about horses I was naturally attracted to this small ornament. Emily was aware that I liked the glass horse and one day she smiled and said that it would be mine.

Although she warned me not to bank on it, as she knew if anything happened to her, that her estranged family might not honour her wishes.

A year or so later Emily sadly passed away and as predicted the estranged family took everything. However, amazingly, the little glass horse had been left all alone on the windowsill. I rushed in and retrieved it, thanking God and my dear friend for it with tears streaming down my face. It really was a miracle as I know Emily had no contact with her estranged family before she passed away.

Now when I look at the little glass horse and pick it up I think of dear Emily and the miraculous way God enabled me to receive what Emily had promised.

The little glass horse became the inspiration for this novel, which I dedicate to Emily with gratitude and affection.

# THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

## Prologue

The narrow tunnel seemed to go on forever, and the darkness was all embracing. It was so dark that Irene could hardly see Stagman as he crawled along ahead of her. She struggled against an intense desire to panic. She hated closed in spaces, even more than she feared heights. The sharp stones and gravel on the tunnel floor bit into their hands and knees, making their progress slow and torturous.

Stagman grunted with frustration as he tried to secure the small torch between his teeth. The metal casing was unpleasant in his mouth, and it kept slipping, but without it they would be in total darkness, which was not an option either of them would welcome.

“Are you okay?” she asked him, desperately trying to stay calm, but with a mouthful of torch, all he could do was grunt a reply. So keeping her head down, to avoid the low roof, she crawled along behind him, praying that soon they would escape this dreadful tunnel, and emerge out into the light.

As she struggled along, her thoughts went back to that fateful day in her small studio. The day she completed the painting that had ushered her into this amazing and yet frightening world.

## CHAPTER ONE

Irene put her paintbrush down and stood back from the canvas; wiping her hands on a piece of rag she surveyed her work. The painting was nearly finished, just a few little touches left to do. For some reason she always felt sad when a painting neared completion. She loved the excitement mixed with apprehension as she faced a blank white canvas and then the thrill as the inspiration came and the canvas was filled with colour and life.

She put the messy rag down and went into the kitchen. She needed a break and a cup of tea would go down well.

As she waited for the kettle to boil, she stared out of the kitchen window. How beautiful it was here, how drastically her life had changed. It was almost as if her past life had never existed, but it was good to recall it sometimes, for whenever she did she would be overcome with gratitude.

She pushed a piece of hair back off her face and smiled. She was an attractive young woman, in her early twenties, tall with long auburn hair and warm hazel eyes. A successful artist, her work could be seen in a number of top London galleries, but it had not always been like that.

Her childhood had not been particularly happy, due in part to the rather tense relationship she had with her mother Emma. It saddened her as she adored her mother and struggled to understand why she kept her at a distance.

It wasn't until some years later, while on holiday with her beloved grandma Ruby that it came out in a conversation they were having. It seemed that when Irene was born she was the spitting image of her father, even down to the same colour hair, bright red! Not at all like her mother Emma with her light brown hair that fell in soft waves to her shoulders and large blue eyes, that sparkled when she smiled. Not that she smiled much since marrying Irene's father, as there was not an awful lot for her to smile about.

So when tiny baby Irene was placed in her arms by the midwife, looking so like her father, Emma instantly recoiled inside. The fact that within a few days all the red hair had fallen out made no difference. The baby's resemblance to her father was like a slap in the face. Emma had always wanted a baby and to have her first born look so like the man she had grown to despise was too much to bear. He cared nothing for either of them and made no attempt at any time to see his baby daughter.

When they eventually left the hospital, it was to go and live with Emma's mother Ruby. What little Irene remembered of those early years, was that it was a happy time. She loved her grandma, and their relationship was as close as the relationship with her mother was distant.

They didn't see or hear a thing from her father and by the time Irene was two years old, he and her mother were divorced.

A short while after that, her mother met and fell in love with Ralph, a busy and successful doctor. He was quite a few years older than Emma and had recently been divorced himself. He was the sort of man who probably looked old even when he was young, with his short stocky stature and grey thinning hair and large glasses, but he adored Emma and gave her the love and security that she needed. Her whole life revolved around him, she had no time for anyone else, least of all Irene. In fact, as the years went by, they became more and more distant. Irene was an unwelcome intrusion and they both made it perfectly clear that the sooner she grew up and left home, the happier they would be. In fact Ralph had an expression he used quite frequently: "children should be seen and not heard."

And so Irene became adept at being invisible, she soon learned that it made for a quiet life. Her greatest joy was to go and stay with her grandma Ruby in the summer holidays and it was during these early years, that she found her gift for drawing and painting; she would sit for hours practising. By the time she was seven, she was an excellent

artist, but her parents were not impressed; they considered all artists to be bohemian and a total waste of space.

They would constantly tell her that there was no future in it, and that she would always be poor.

Ralph in particular was very hostile to her artistic desires, but both her parents managed to make her feel totally inadequate and a failure. Irene knew they didn't expect her to amount to much, but she was determined to prove them wrong, even if it took the rest of her life to do it.

From the age of ten it had been her dream to study art at the Royal Academy in London and so encouraged by her grandma Ruby, she worked hard and achieved all the grades that were needed and to her delight, she was accepted by the Academy and awarded a scholarship to study fine art. During her last few weeks at home, she got the distinct impression that her parents were secretly impressed, although they didn't say very much. Her grandma Ruby, on the other hand, never ceased congratulating her, she was so proud.

In a way she was sad when the time came to leave home, mostly because she knew how much she would miss her grandma. However, she loved life at the Academy and embraced wholeheartedly all that it had to offer. She acquired a reputation for being a little wild, as she threw off all the constraints of her childhood, but she excelled in her work and no one had any doubts, especially her tutors, that she was an extremely gifted artist. Sometimes she wondered where her artistic ability came from, certainly not her mother. As she was the first to admit, that there was not an artistic bone in her body.

Irene had no idea who her real father was as no one would talk about him, not even her grandma. She could only assume that her love of art came from him.

Sadly her time at the Academy came to an end, but one thing at least consoled her; both her parents were able to attend the graduation ceremony. She loved them and

desperately wanted their approval, but she knew that their only reason for being there was to bask in the glory of her achievement. They had not expected her to be accepted by such a prestigious establishment, let alone graduate. So Irene was thrilled to get the opportunity she craved, to prove to them how wrong they had been about her. All their negativity had not held her back from achieving success. She had played hard, but she had also worked hard and her reward was for them to watch her graduate with honours. Her one major sorrow was the sad loss of grandma Ruby, who had passed away a few months before. Irene knew how much she would have loved to see her graduate. How proud she would have been. Irene missed her terribly and it made the day even more emotional for her, especially as her parents seemed quite untouched by her success. In fact it made little or no difference to their relationship. It saddened her as she did love them, despite their attitude towards her.

On leaving the Academy she moved into a small studio flat in Chelsea. As far as she was concerned, London was the only place to live, nowhere else really existed outside of the city. Her flat was situated over some trendy boutiques and expensive restaurants. Chelsea was the place to be: the whole area was alive with artists, actors, authors and the like.

Her life was a whirl of socializing and she was having a ball. When she was in a fit condition to paint, what she produced reflected the state she was in. Some of her work sold, but not enough to please her agent Sandra, who knew how gifted she was and hated to see her wasting her talent.

They had become close friends and would occasionally socialize together. Sandra was an attractive woman. In many ways she reminded Irene of her mother, being similar in height and build and with the same light brown hair and bright blue eyes.

But Irene's often wild behaviour was beginning to trouble Sandra more and more and she would find herself

having to remind her that the business side of their relationship had to be kept separate. Irene was under contract and was obliged to honour that.

Then one day disaster struck. Irene, having had way too much to drink, had collapsed on her bed. In her drunken haze she thought she could hear banging on her door. She struggled to get up, and that was when she smelt it. Even in her drunken stupor she knew it was smoke. The banging got louder and now she could hear voices screaming and shouting her name, the smoke was affecting her badly. It burned her throat as she struggled to breathe and she could feel herself fading. The last thing she heard was a loud crash as the door burst open and then strong arms scooped her up as though she were a feather, quickly followed by a mask being placed over her face. Then the delicious relief as oxygen filled her burning lungs. She gasped for air and eagerly sucked it in. She could hear the siren wailing, as the ambulance rushed her to hospital.

Two days later as she sat up in her hospital bed, Sandra told her what had happened. Irene could hardly believe it, she felt awful and so ashamed.

“The police will be in to see you soon. It seems that you lit a candle, which fell on to the carpet and started the fire. Your apartment is completely destroyed and the one above is badly damaged.”

Irene stared at her blankly; as she struggled to comprehend what she was hearing.

“You are very lucky to be alive,” continued Sandra. “Sadly most of your possessions were destroyed, all your paintings, everything, it’s all gone.”

Tears streamed down Irene’s face, it was devastating news.

“What am I going to do Sandra? I have no home and not much money in the bank.” Now she was sobbing uncontrollably. Sandra put an arm round her.

“Look don’t worry, I’ll make sure you’re okay. I have a cousin John who owns a small cottage in the country and it

just so happens he's had to go abroad with his job. He will be gone at least two years, possibly more. What I'll do is send him an email, and see if you can use the place while he's away. I'm sure it won't be a problem, I'll do it as soon as I get home." Irene was so grateful she hardly knew what to say, she squeezed Sandra's hand.

"Now try not to worry," ordered Sandra. "It'll all work out, and in all honesty I think it will be better for you to get away from London, and make a fresh start. You need to get your life back on track and I need you to get down to some serious painting." She gave Irene a cheeky grin, which at least brought a smile to her face.

"I'll let you know as soon as I hear from John," she said, putting her coat on. "I'll come and see you in a couple of days, just rest and try not to worry."

It turned out as Sandra had said; John was more than happy for Irene to have the cottage and once she got the all clear from the hospital, Sandra picked her up and drove her to the cottage.

It was a lovely bright sunny day and the further they got away from city, the more Irene could feel her spirits lifting.

She loved the village of Zeal from the first moment she saw it. Nestled in a valley, it seemed to glow in the late morning sun.

Sandra broke in on her thoughts.

"I don't know about you, but I am starving, how about a bite of lunch in the pub? My treat." Irene readily agreed. So they parked the car at the front and went inside.

The White Horse pub was a quaint and cosy place. They chose a table near to a large inglenook fireplace; the burning logs filled the room with the fragrant smell of pine. The landlord, a big man with ruddy cheeks, came over to them.

"What can I get you?" he inquired with a friendly smile. They both asked for a glass of white wine. He returned with their drinks, "will you be eating?" he asked as he put the drinks on the table. "We have some very nice salmon

today, or perhaps you would like the lamb, it's fresh from the local farm in the valley here.”

They decided on the salmon, which came with baby potatoes and fresh seasonal vegetables. It was a delicious meal and the landlord, whose name was Frank, proved to be a mine of information. Irene learned a lot about the village during that lunch time and met a few of the locals, who made her feel very welcome.

Later as they left the pub and got into the car, Irene felt almost high, but this time it was due to the elation of knowing that she was in the right place. She couldn't really explain how she felt. She just knew the village of Zeal was where she was meant to be.

Six months had passed since Sandra had dropped her at the pretty white cottage. She had showed her where everything was and then left her to settle in.

The place was small, but full of character, as you went in through the front door, you found yourself in a cosy sitting room. The main feature that caught the eye immediately was the beautiful stone fireplace. Stacked up in a basket beside it was a pile of logs, facing the fireplace were two small armchairs. On the opposite side of the room was a dining table and at the back of the sitting room were patio doors, which opened out into a small conservatory.

Next to the sitting room was a surprisingly spacious and well equipped kitchen, complete with something she had always loved, a wood burning aga. It heated the whole cottage, as well as being wonderful to cook on. All she had to do was keep it well fed with logs. Upstairs there was one large bedroom, with views out over the woods, and next to that was the bathroom, which to her delight had a shower. She loved the cottage and right away felt at home and in no time at all was soon producing some good artwork.

Whether it was the peace, or simply the beauty of the place, she had no idea. All she knew was her artistic block was gone. Each day when she woke up she couldn't wait to start painting.

She gazed out of the window, watching the trees sway gently in the autumn breeze. She loved how the cottage nestled at the edge of the woods, surrounded by its unruly garden, filled with sweet scented climbing roses, and elegant silver birch trees. What really thrilled her though was the conservatory. As soon as she saw it, she knew it would be perfect for her studio. She was right, it was well shaded by trees and the light was soft and seemed to make her paintings come alive and the view was lovely. To the right were the woods and on the left stretching away into the distance was lush farmland.

About half a mile from the cottage, was the pretty village of Zeal, which had everything she needed. In good weather she loved to walk to the small post office, which was surprisingly well stocked. It was a real godsend for her, as she didn't have a car and so couldn't get to a large supermarket, as the nearest town was a good six miles away.

A short way down from the post office was The White Horse pub, where Frank the landlord and his family always made her welcome.

Then at the other end of the village, set back a bit from the road was the church. It was an attractive building, with its soft grey stone and stunning stained glass windows. It was very much at the heart of the village, with lively services and challenging preaching from the minister, Rev Paul Richards. He was a tall man with dark piercing eyes and great charisma, a man full of passion for his faith.

Irene was amazed at how frequently she attended the services and how much she got out of them. She could feel that she was growing spiritually.

Rev Paul's wife Allison, or Ali as she liked to be called, shared her husband's passionate faith. She was a short petite lady, very pretty and vivacious, with her short curly blond hair and twinkling green eyes.

She and Rev Paul had met and married while on the mission field in Africa. When their term was up, they left

Africa and came back to England, where they accepted the post in Zeal. They settled in well and were instantly welcomed by the villagers, who had been without a vicar for many years. Sadly during that time the little church had fallen into disrepair, but since their arrival the congregation had grown from a mere seven or so, to pretty much the whole village and now the building was looking well loved and cared for.

Zeal was a good place to live and Irene was happy. Possibly the happiest she had been for a long time and her paintings reflected this. She was overflowing with inspiration. When one picture was finished she could hardly wait to start the next. It was as if they fell out of her paintbrush, almost as though she had no part to play in their creation. There seemed to be some sort of spiritual cord that tied them all together, it really excited her.

She took a mug out of the cupboard and popped a tea bag in it. Her thoughts went to the painting waiting for her on the easel; it too had flowed from her brushes and even though not quite finished, seemed to glow with a life all of its own.

Suddenly the shrill whistle from the kettle made her jump. She poured the hot water on to the tea bag and stirred it around, before removing it and adding a little milk and sugar. Then grabbing a couple of digestives, she hurried back to her studio.

She always painted with a large mirror behind her, positioned in such a way, that she could see the painting she was working on reflected in it. She found it very helpful, especially with perspective.

The conservatory was bathed in the glow of early evening light. The warmth seemed to wrap itself around her. Feeling tired she decided not to do any more to the picture. After all it was five thirty and she had been working hard since early morning, without having had a real break.

Putting her mug of tea on a small table, she gratefully flopped into a large comfy old armchair. From the chair she could see her painting reflected in the mirror.

She dunked a biscuit in the tea and gazed at the picture. As she looked at it, she could clearly see what she would need to do tomorrow in order to finish it. They were only small things, but she knew they would annoy her until they were done. For an artist she was quite a perfectionist, but she always knew when a picture was finished and this one still needed some small touches, before she could say it was completed.

So far she was pleased with it. She had chosen to work on a big canvas, as she enjoyed the challenge of working to a large scale. For a change she had used a limited palette of colours, which she also enjoyed, as it forced her to practise her mixing skills. Somehow it gave the picture an abstract quality, yet at the same time made it seem eerily real. Maybe it was the evening light playing tricks with her eyes.

She sank back in her chair and gazed at it, taking in every detail.

Standing elegant and tall to the right of the canvas was a silver birch tree. Its thin delicate branches bedecked with vibrant emerald leaves. Flowing beneath that was a small stream, bubbling and tumbling over smooth rocks and stones. Before the stream reached the birch tree, it flowed under a quaint little bridge only big enough to carry walkers, or someone on horse back. As you went over the bridge away from the tree and allowed your eye to go into the painting, the narrow lane, led you on through the beginnings of a dense forest. It was spring and the ground under the trees was covered with a carpet of bluebells. It seemed so real, Irene felt she could almost smell their sweet scent. She adored the smell of bluebells, perhaps because they heralded the arrival of summer.

Then the lane split in two, one disappeared into darkness among the trees, while the other came to rest at

the gate of a small white cottage, not dissimilar to Irene's own cottage.

Once the viewer reached the cottage, the trees thinned out a bit and meadows could be seen to the left of the canvas, stretching away into the distance bathed in a soft light. The cottage was well cared for, with a neat well tended garden. If you looked closely, the figure of a woman could be seen inside through a window.

At the back of the cottage, the forest threatened to encroach, overpowering the small building like some great brooding beast. This whole area of the painting was dark, and quite menacing. The dense forest covered a large part of the canvas, stretching into the distance and becoming the main core of the picture. Away on the horizon, it was just possible to see the top of a snow covered mountain. She was not really sure why it was there, as the cottage and the forest were the main focus of the picture, but all she could do was copy the vision as she saw it in her mind. The whole painting had a dark mysterious quality about it and in a strange way it seemed to draw her.