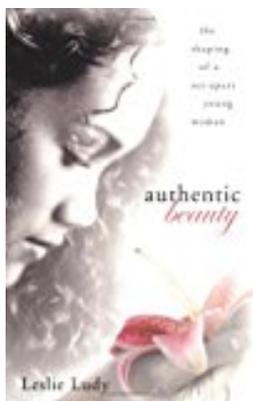


[PDF] Authentic Beauty: The Shaping Of A Set-Apart Young Woman

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Books Details:

Title: Authentic Beauty: The Shaping
Author: Leslie Ludy
Released: 2003-07-02
Language:
Pages: 256
ISBN: 1590522680
ISBN13: 978-1590522684
ASIN: 1590522680

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Description:

About the Author Leslie Ludy has a powerful message of hope for her generation. She and her husband, Eric, are internationally known speakers and the bestselling authors of ten books, including *When God Writes Your Love Story* and *When Dreams Come True*. Leslie and Eric's passion is to challenge young adults to pursue a life completely devoted to God. The Ludys live in Windsor, Colorado with their son Hudson.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The Erosion of a Feminine Dream
IT HAPPENED WHEN I was six.

Somewhere between my encounter with the breathtaking heroine in Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and my introduction to Malibu Barbie (who came complete with five evening gowns and a hot-pink convertible), I made my decision. Somewhere between watching the lovely Sugar Plum Fairy twirling around on stage during a local production of *The Nutcracker* and trying on my mother's satiny wedding dress, I decided beyond a shadow of a doubt exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up...a beautiful princess. The fact that princesses were unheard-of in modern-day America did not bother me. I was convinced that somehow, someday I would become one. It was not that I considered myself especially beautiful or princesslike. In fact, staring into the bathroom mirror one morning at my stringy hair and crooked teeth, I decided that the only remedy was a makeover, which I skillfully applied after digging in my mom's makeup drawer. (The story of my memorable venture out into public that day with my bright pink cheeks, dark green eyelids, and vibrant orange lips is quite an unfortunate tale.) That was the end of my makeup escapades for the time being, but I held out hope that one day I would grow into a dazzling beauty like Cathy Henderson (my all-time favorite baby-sitter), with her supercool, neon pink nail polish and Barbie-like locks.

But much more than polished nails and eternally good hair days, it seemed to me that the *really* necessary requirement for becoming a princess was to find a noble prince: a knight in shining armor who would consider me the most desirable girl in the world, sweep me off my feet, rescue me from peril, carry me away to his castle, and cherish me forever. *Sleeping Beauty* had Prince Charming. Malibu Barbie had Ken. The Sugar Plum Fairy had the Nutcracker. The Beautiful Bride (a.k.a. my mother) had the Handsome Groom (a.k.a. my father). Even Cathy Henderson had the curly haired Scotty Darnell wrapped around her finger. Finding a prince of my own seemed like a reasonable goal.

It was a childish dream, a girlish desire that budded in my heart long before I knew anything about the real world. But for some inexplicable reason, it was a dream that I longed to come true more than I had ever longed for anything in my entire life. I desperately wanted to become a princess. It was a dream that I treasured, even as I grew older. It was a desire that remained rooted deep within my heart long after Malibu Barbie and her convertible were packed away in Styrofoam peanuts up in the attic. But things were about to change, and change dramatically. In my early childhood innocence, I had no way of knowing the weighty price that would soon be demanded of a young girl who dares to enter the real world holding on to the foolish dream of becoming a princess...

THE DREAM BEGAN to fade when I was ten. I was standing by the water fountain with Mandy and Katie, my two fifth-grade bosom buddies. We were deeply engaged in an animated discussion about the many virtues of Sour Patch Kids, the latest candy craze to hit Crestview Elementary since Nerds had come on the scene a year before. Then, seemingly from out of nowhere, a small group of fifthgrade boys surrounded us, laughing obnoxiously and jolting Mandy out of an awe-inspiring tale of her recent attempt to eat *five* Sour Patch Kids all at the same time. Katie rolled her eyes and looked at the boys in annoyance.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

The ringleader, Andy Archibald, only smirked at Katie. Andy was a loud, skinny kid in baggy Levi's who brought three or four Twinkies in his lunch nearly every day of the week. (I had noticed this fact with great envy, since my mom was a health nut, and the "treats" in my lunchbox were usually carrot sticks and sugar-free granola bars.)

"Go away!" Katie ordered in an irritated voice. Andy didn't budge. His sly grin grew wider. He stepped a little closer to her. The rest of the boys began to snicker.

"Timmy *likes* you," Andy finally announced triumphantly, as the snickering grew louder. Timmy immediately shoved Andy against the water fountain, protesting loudly with a swear word. I quickly looked around to see if any teachers had heard him. Fifth graders were not allowed to cuss in school

(we were told that once we reached middle school we would be grown up enough to say whatever we wanted in the halls). I expected the Cussing Police to come rushing over, grab Timmy by the earlobe to drag him off to the principal's office, and force-feed him a bar of Dial. But no adult was anywhere in sight. I found myself strangely disappointed that Timmy's great sin had not created more of a scandal.

My thoughts on this were short-lived, however, because Andy had recovered from Timmy's outburst and seemed to be gaining momentum. "Timmy thinks you're a *babe*," he crooned to Katie in his grating, prepubertized voice, as Timmy yelled, "Shut up, dude!"

Katie's face had turned bright red, and she was staring at the floor.

"Yeah," piped in Jason Smits, a squirrely kid with oversized glasses, "Timmy thinks you're hot, cuz you re *de-vel-op-ing*!" He pointed at Katie's chest. "You have to wear a *training bra*!" At this, the entire group of boys burst into wild, uncontrollable laughter. Katie pursed her lips together in humiliation and hugged her science book tightly against her chest. Mandy glared at the boys but remained speechless. I looked around the hallway again, realizing that there were still no adults anywhere near us to come to the rescue. I decided it was up to me to defend Katie's honor.

"Leave her alone, you jerks!" I burst out. I immediately wished I had kept my mouth shut. The hyper group of boys suddenly turned their full attention on me, and I went from feeling like Wonder Woman to Minnie Mouse in a matter of seconds. Andy curled his lip cynically and looked me up and down.

"Hey," he said, nudging the kid next to him, "check out *this* ugly chick—she's flatter than the plains of Kansas!" The boys howled. Jason quickly opened his mouth to outdo Andy's insult, but before any more verbal abuse could occur, our teacher decided to appear.

"Okay, boys and girls, let's get back in line. Our break is over. It's time for our science lesson!" she called out happily, oblivious to the drama that had just unfolded. The snickering group of boys quickly dispersed, and we were herded into the classroom to learn about the exciting process of metamorphosis.

While Miss Thompson began her lecture on the larval stage of a caterpillar, I was vaguely aware of new, confusing emotions dancing around in my heart. Since I was only ten, I hadn't had much experience being scrutinized, criticized, and discarded by members of the opposite sex. It was a strange sensation, and it created a knot in my stomach that seemed to linger there all afternoon. Andy Archibald's words rang over and over in my ears. It wasn't supposed to work this way, I told myself in bewilderment. There was a marked difference, I noticed, in the way Andy Archibald had treated *me* and the way the beautiful princess was treated by her prince in all the stories I had grown up with. The men in the fairy tales treated women as valuable treasures, to be prized and cherished. The "men" in the fifth grade at Crestview Elementary seemed to treat us the same way they treated their soccer ball—like something to be roughly kicked around for fun, then tossed unnoticed into a corner of the playground. The longer I sat thinking, the more I found it hard to believe that boys actually *noticed* which girls were wearing training bras and which were still wearing pink cotton undershirts, like me. I had never been insecure about it until that day; in fact, I had never really given it much thought. My friends and I were usually too busy discussing Sour Patch Kids and Care Bears to obsess over our bodies. And until that day by the water fountain, the boys in my class had always spent most of their energy trading baseball cards and telling the latest Peewee Herman jokes. But now, they seemed to have found a new, more exciting pastime—tormenting us about how we looked.

Boys like Andy, Timmy, and Jason had always tried to irritate the girls by flipping their eyelids inside out or cracking all their knuckles at once. But now, overnight, they seemed to have realized that they could get a far bigger reaction from us by brutally teasing us about the fascinating new phrases they had learned last week from Miss Thompson in health class. They had started using new words like *developing*, or Katie's most recent downfall, *training bra*. Though Miss Thompson had emphatically explained that these matters were nothing to giggle or be ashamed about, the boys hadn't seemed to catch the part about not laughing. As for not being ashamed about it, I found

myself suddenly wanting to ask Miss Thompson how a ten-year-old was *not* supposed to feel embarrassed while facing a group of boys howling about the fact that she had not yet developed. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that Miss Thompson and our new workbook called *My Body* were partly to blame for this strange and unwelcome change that had come over the Crestview Elementary fifth-grade boys. Another possibility I considered might somehow be related was the magazine that Andy Archibald had discovered under his older brother's bed. I had heard Andy telling Jason Smits all about it during Susie Montgomery's oral report on the planet Jupiter a few days before. From what I could tell, it was a magazine with nothing but pictures of women who apparently were not wearing very many clothes, and the boys used the word *babe* repeatedly as they whispe...

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