

LOVE IS by Kim Sorrelle

Chapter 1

Love is Patient

Love is everywhere, from sitcoms to reality shows, tee shirts to best sellers. Heart-shaped this, and kiss, kiss that. Raymond gets it from everybody; Patty wants to find it for her millionaires, and the new Bachelor is trying to uncover it somewhere in a hot tub full of bikinis. Love: “little word, little white bird,” says Carl Sandburg. Love, “little word, little pain in the neck,” says me. I thought living love as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13 would be simple: just walk in love, speak in love, and act in love. But for such a small word, love is hard to do. It’s also multi-layered. Take patience, for example, love’s first requirement.

In the last couple of days, I have yelled at a space-hogging car and showed frustration with the Chatty-Cathy cashier at the grocery store. *All I wanted to do was go home and eat, dagnabit!* I was short when a staff meeting veered from my personal agenda. Then the word hit me, and love slapped me across the face: Patience—love’s first definition in the passage.

Patience: 1. the quality of being patient, as the bearing of provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or pain, without complaint, loss of temper, irritation, or the like. 2. an ability or willingness to suppress restlessness or annoyance when confronted with delay: to have patience with a slow learner. 3. quiet, steady perseverance; even-tempered care; diligence: to work with patience.

Is impatience genetic? If it is, I am in trouble. One time, my spitfire, type A, go-to-work-with-the-flu father told me that he “prided himself on his patience.” Huh, really? I loved my dad to pieces, and he had many excellent qualities, but patience was not one of them. He taught me if

you want a job done right, just do it yourself; poky people should not be allowed in the fast lane, and that eleven items at the ten-items-and-under check out are unacceptable.

Hurry! Get it done. Do it faster. Slow is useless. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. No whining. You're fine.

So, between my possible genetic predisposition and my somewhat harried, hurried personality, it would not come naturally if patience came. God is patient. I am not. But I can't just skip over love's first definition, can I? My goal for this month is to walk, speak, act, and be patient. I will even pray for patience, which scares me to death because God will likely answer that prayer. *How* He will answer it scares me. Still, here goes:

Oh, Lord, help me acquire patience. Help me to learn and act in patient love. And please be gentle.

Welcome to Haiti

Flying over Haiti is like flying over Jurassic Park. You see the lush mountains slowly rolling out into gorgeous, green plains and finally the sandy fringe of the turquoise Caribbean, but you don't see the carnivorous monsters waiting to devour whoever dares to land.^[1]

On my first visit to Haiti in 2000, I vowed never to return. The thickness of the poverty was so suffocating that it made the fumes from an oil-guzzling diesel truck seem like pure oxygen. But Haiti had my number and my heart. People say it's an addictive country to visit: once in Haiti, there's something about the Haitians, the history, and even the air that can get in your blood and draw you back time and again. Within six months of returning home, I was tasting the perpetually dusty air again. Today, the poverty is thicker, the oxygen is thinner, and so are the people.

After seeing so much need in Haiti, my spitfire dad and I started a nonprofit organization called Rays of Hope International. First, under the umbrella of the organization I was directing, Careforce International, then independently when a diagnosis required my resignation. Pancreatic cancer gifted my husband an early ticket to Heaven in March of 2009. Breast cancer gifted me a new bust line the very same year. By late December, having finished all surgeries, treatments, and Grey's Anatomy episodes, it was time to get off the couch and get back to work. As fate would have it, Rays of Hope needed a bookkeeper making for an easy transition from potato to productive. But what began as part-time bean-counting morphed into twelve hours a day, seven days a week marathon when an earthquake shook Haiti like a paint mixer. Within a couple of weeks, my ~~boots~~ Keds landed on what used to be solid ground in Port au Prince. Even losing my husband did not diminish my passion for Haiti and Haitians. Somehow taking a cannonball to the heart galvanized the steely part of me that wanted purpose in my life. Widowhood at 47 brought me to my knees, but love for the wrecked little nation lifted me back up in the bluest of waters. But even on my first visit, when I fought falling in love with Haiti, I knew my love would require patience such as I had never needed before.

Patient love. Love is patient. Longsuffering. Unwearied. Unflappable. But what if a situation makes you prickle like a freaking hedgehog with irritation? Or what if the spiky circumstances just don't change for a really long time, longer than you think you can humanly handle? And how can someone practice patience in a country where horns are continually honking, dogs are forever barking, and a five-mile drive can take an hour? My beloved Haiti has weathered my patience over and over, but maybe never so much as during January's Mixed-Up Shipping Container Incident.

Rays of Hope fills and ships 40-foot containers full of resources in a country in drastic need. Medical supplies take up the majority of the 2250 cubic feet of space. School supplies, dental tools, and mattresses for orphanages usually take up the rest. Everything we ship goes to organizations that are working to show compassion and love to others. The container gets loaded on a 40-foot long chassis then pulled by a semi-truck to Detroit. From there, the container rides the rails to New Jersey, where a crane takes it off the flatcar and loads it onto a massive ship with lots and lots of other containers full of lots and lots of stuff. The ship sets sail and eventually pulls into Port au Prince's port, where another crane picks it up and sets it down on Haitian ground.

Shipping is the easy part. Getting the container released by the Haitian government? Now that requires unflappability, the likes of which most humans are not naturally blessed. Over and over, my patience has been tested, fried and fricasseed, in the fires of Haitian Red Tape (capitalization required, trust me). But this incident was award-winning (... "and the Oscar for Patience goes to...").

The plan was that Patrick, our Haitian manager, would pick me up at 9:30 a.m. We would then make our way to the port, get the container, and have it hauled to our warehouse, where we should arrive about

11 a.m. We planned to finish unloading the cargo by 3:00 p.m. and then head up to Borel, arriving shortly before sunset at 6:00 p.m., meet up with friends and work partners, and crash for the night, so we could start a project there bright and early the next morning.

The reality was different from those best laid of plans. I woke up in the wee, dark hours to the tormented sounds of Jude, one of the young boys at Notre Maison Orphanage, my home away

from home in Port Au Prince. “Aaaaa!” he cried out. Notre Maison is a home for children with disabilities, and it also has a few beds for visitors.

“Aaaaaa...” Three seconds long, plus a one-second pause.

“Aaaaaa...”

Poor little guy. I felt for him, but I decided there was no sleeping through Jude’s sounds in the dark.

I gave up and perked up a bit over my breakfast of coffee, watermelon, and supremely tart oranges. Miraculously, the power was on, so I grabbed my laptop to return emails for the next couple of hours.

By 9:17, I had freshened up, applied a little makeup, stuck some Bobby pins in my hair, and packed my backpack. Ten minutes later, the power went ‘poof,’ to no one’s surprise, and so I joined my friend Shirley on the roof of the orphanage to wait for Patrick.

Shirley had already been in Haiti for ten days and planned to stay and serve for three months. We swapped stories and talked about faith, love, and our beloved Haiti. We talked about the power—would it come back on within the next hour, day, or week?

Patrick arrived a little after 11 a.m.

“Good mornin’!” He all smiles. “The container is all set. The broker is getting it right now, so we can go straight to the warehouse.”

“Great!” I am thrilled. “Let’s go.”

I turn to help Shirley figure out an app on her iPhone, and when I swivel around again, Patrick is gone.

“Patrick!” I bellow his name to the surrounding area, my heart sinking just a little. Something in me knows he’s not waiting in the car or using the bathroom.

“He left to go get Minutes,” I hear a disembodied voice from street level say. My heart drops a few more inches.

As in mobile phone minutes, Minutes resemble lottery scratch-off tickets, and, like phone chargers, cold drinks, and plantain chips, are available on most street corners. You trade the street vendor 100 gourdes for a card he retrieves from his red apron, scratch off the entry code with a coin, and punch the code into your cell phone. Voila! You can make calls.

I have no idea why Patrick left to get Minutes now. There is a sea of red aprons full of scratch-off cards and mobile minutes in the twenty miles between Notre Maison and the warehouse. I sigh, but on the scale of one to ten, with rasping, guttural sighing being a ten and the slightest exhale being a one, I’m only at about a four. However, the day is young. Haiti has taught me to be reasonably calm in the face of aggravating circumstances, at least those that occur before noon. But at this point, we are already hours behind schedule.

Patrick returns just before noon; we jump in the car and head out for the day. (Haiti time: 9:30 a.m., 11:51 a.m. = What’s the difference?) . *Love is patient. Patience is love.*

“Hey Patrick, did you call everyone on the distribution list to meet us up at the warehouse?”

“Yeah, Kim, I did all that already.”

I have an instinct. “OK, so did you get ahold of everyone?”

“Well, not everyone.”

I skim the distribution list to see the names of those anxiously waiting for the goods that left our dock in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in April, nine months beforehand. They will be happy that customs finally released the container.

It doesn’t always take this long.

It usually doesn’t take this long.

It's painful that it has taken this long, but now--praise God--the container is on its way to the warehouse, cleared by customs, and ready to be unloaded.

I read off names and phone numbers, and Patrick calls those among the "everyone" yet to be notified. After several calls, everyone knew.

At nearly 1 p.m., I notice that we are on Delmas 33, headed west towards The Neighborhood instead of east toward our warehouse.

The Neighborhood is an unexpected patch of land surrounded by small cement block buildings and a power plant. A twelve-foot opening serves as the entry point from the main road. On January 12, 2010, Haiti's earthquake destroyed one-third of the houses in Port au Prince. The following day tent cities mushroomed across the capital. One of the tents in The Neighborhood protected Patrick and his beloved, Gardine, from the elements and gave them a flimsy place to belong though their foundations had been shaken. Patrick and Gardine eventually found a rental house and moved a few blocks away, but the neighborhood's bonds remain strong.

Suffering such a tragedy together created a strong relationship among the neighbors, and they became as close as family. Family watches out for each other, so Patrick tries to extend work opportunities whenever possible.

"Do you have to pick up some guys?" The guys usually find their own transportation to work.

"Yeah, the guys have these big scissors to cut off the seal, and they can't just go around with 'em," Patrick says as if this is a regular occurrence. We hire ten day-workers to unload all 38,000 pounds of cargo by hand. Each worker receives a U.S. twenty-dollar bill, as many bags of water as they need to stay hydrated in the hot sun, and a Styrofoam container full of rice, beans, and chicken purchased from a street vendor.

The “big scissors” turn out to be the biggest set of box cutters I have ever seen, easily as tall as my four-year-old granddaughter. “Can’t just go around with ’em” indeed! The police would surely mistake the giant box cutter-toting workers for car thieves or kidnapers.

Two workers get into the car with the giant scissors, and by 1:30 p.m., we finally arrive at the warehouse, two-and-a-half hours after our expected time. I take a deep breath and make myself smile. *Well, we’re here, so let’s get this show on the road.* Miss Plucky tries to look on the bright side! My stomach grumbles. *Must have protein in the morning,* I make a mental note. Citrus and coffee are not cutting it, and I feel my nerves getting tetchy.

Love is patient. Patience is love. Jesus, help me show love. Help me be patient.

There seems to be a tree service operation in the way of our container. And by “tree service operation,” I mean a large truck with a hook on a boom and a man with a machete. It takes a while to convince machete man to move his vehicle, but by 2:15 p.m., the container is in its place and ready to be unloaded. Patrick takes the giant scissors, cuts the seal, and opens the container doors.

I rejoice as the first boxes come off the container. Finally! I have tried to be easy-going about the delays and am so happy that we still have three-and-a-half hours before sunset. We can do this!

This patience thing is paying off. See--The reward of living patient love is things going smoothly! I could hug all ten day-workers, Patrick, and the machete man.

I rejoiced too soon. A hiccup reveals itself almost immediately. Practicing patience, I want to let Patrick be in charge. This is his job, after all. He has done this umpteen times before. But I notice the labels on the boxes say things like “St. Vincent de Paul,” “Redeemer Church,” and “Sisters of Charity,” organizations I distinctly remember not calling out to Patrick in the car. I looked at

the container number, TGHU-5471 . . . Wait! Mediterranean Shipping Company shipped this container; hence the container number should start with M.S.C., not TGHU.

This was the wrong container. We had the wrong distribution list. We had called the wrong people to pick up their supplies. The wrong people were this very minute on their way to do just that.

So many thoughts were ricocheting through my melting head.

It is Patrick's job to know which container we were unloading.

The containers are as big as train cars, 40 feet long, 8 ½ feet high, and 8 feet wide. The laborious process of unloading the container is made more strenuous by lugging box by box up an incline to the chapel-turned-warehouse. However, when we call people who run the organizations on the list, many of them come to receive their boxes right as they are coming off the container.

As I mentioned, the wrong people are coming for their stuff.

My lips straighten, and my jaw tightens. "Patience, Kim, patience," whispers the voice in my head. I take a deep breath as I notice my fingers drumming on the container's side—aggravation bristles as I focus on trying not to fire or throttle my employee. If there was a cartoon bubble over my head, you could have roasted marshmallows in the flames.

"Could this be the June container, not the April container?" Patrick says, innocent as a lamb.

What!! Really!! Lord, I know that I am praying for patience, but really!?!? I could have flown into Haiti tomorrow. The container could have been released by customs last week. Yet here we stand--me on the brink of exploding and Patrick nonchalant.

"We have to call everybody on both lists," I say, as nicely as I can through gritted teeth. *Jesus, help me. Please!* My tank of human patience is running on fumes, and I need a filling of divine strength. I know this fiasco reflects poorly on Rays of Hope, and me, too. Many of the folks that

we called on the wrong list will have rented trucks, hired day workers, and would start arriving at any minute. They will be frustrated, even aggravated, by this mix-up.

I breathe in and out. My stomach rumbles, reminding me that I haven't eaten in hours. I could buy some street food, but I picture the hanging raw chicken buzzing with flies and decide a foodborne illness won't improve my patience. The right distribution list had to be found and fast so that we could call the correct recipients of this shipment.

"Where's Patrick?" I ask, suddenly noticing he's vanished again. I feel a little bit faint.

"Patrick *pa la*," one of the guys says in Creole. (Haitian Creole is the language of 90–95% of Haitians. The language developed when African slaves decided to revolt against their French owners and needed to communicate without being understood by the slave owners. It is a mix of French, Spanish, and a couple of West African languages.)

"*Pa la?* Not here??"

"*Toilette?*" No.

"*Dlo?*" Did he go to get water? No.

I slump against the container and pray some more.

After about half an hour, Patrick reappears with a printout of the distribution list.

See, he did it; I knew he would! I exhale a bit. *Patient love.*

I try and infuse my voice with goodwill and tolerance as I recommend that Patrick first call those from the wrong list. Some of them have already shown up and left, but perhaps we could save a trip for others if we act fast.

Don't micromanage. Let Patrick do it. Stop talking.

"That's what I'm doin',," he softly mutters. "That's what I'm doin'."

Apparently, Patrick was getting as frustrated with me as I was with him. I realize that my sighs were louder than I thought, and my face was not smiling but showing exasperation.

It's 4:49 p.m. and we are burning daylight. I begin to hustle a bit more in my efforts to aid the unloading process.

"My phone's losin' charge," Patrick says as he walks away from the container and towards the car. "I'm gonna charge it up."

"How are the phone calls going?" *Breathe. Patience.*

"Well, the list I have is not the right distribution list."

What?! "So, do you have the right distribution list?" *The one sent to you seven months ago when the container left Rays of Hope's dock. The one that has been sent to you repeatedly since.* Now we need a third list? There is not enough patience in the world to keep me from screaming, but by some miracle, I stifle my anger.

"I am going to go print it." *Patience. Love is patient.* Patrick is still learning. I am still learning. We are all trying to do it the right way.

I grunt as I lug boxes off the container and snag my skirt on an old chair, inexplicably sitting in the way. When Patrick returns in half an hour, we are still unloading.

"You broke the chair?" Patrick asks.

"It was me or the chair," I said. "I won."

The good news is that no one else from the wrong list turns up. The bad news is, there are just 40 minutes left before total darkness. Patrick instructs the guys to start putting everything into the warehouse. Thirty-eight thousand pounds of boxes, tubs, pails, and crates spread over the pavement now had to be picked up again, carried up the incline, and put into the warehouse.

By 6 p.m., the gentle hum and loud roar of generators start to fill the air. It's as black as tar out there, and we're still moving boxes and crates. I remember the flashlight app on my phone. Now we can move boxes by little tiny light instead of no light at all.

"Kim! Come here!" I hear Patrick call to me out of the inky sky. My phone reads 6:20 p.m.

"Can't you come here?" My voice is no longer infused with tolerance but with something sour.

"I'm looking at somethin'," he calls back. *Oh yes, that explains it. Of course, I need to go there.*

Patience!

I daydream about throttling him with my bare hands and step gingerly through the dark to the Guest House 100 feet away. The lights from the generator assault my eyes as I behold Patrick, smiling, holding a plate full of chicken, rice and beans, and fruit. On his last vanishing act, he had arranged for a meal for me. I smile back at him, sincerely this time, and slide gratefully into a chair to eat.

An hour later, Patrick appears and tells me he finished all of the paperwork. When we pull out of the compound, into the noisy, congested, smoky street, I feel euphoric. Something in me had feared we would never untangle ourselves from the container mix-up, and I'd have to live out my days on the dock, suppressing wrath.

Things look brighter now, having been fed, with the container unloaded into the warehouse and leaving—especially leaving.

"Kim, I'm starving. We should get something to eat, then drive to Borel."

Borel? But Borel is three hours away! We can't possibly still be going to Borel.

"That was the plan! Oh, and I have someone picking up stuff from the warehouse at 7 a.m.," he says, swerving to avoid a crater in the road. "We'll have to leave Borel by 4 a.m."

I know I asked for it, but even patience has its limits. I insist that the three-hour drive just to sleep a few hours and hit the road again wasn't worth it. So, we drive back to Notre Maison, where Patrick eats and we make a plan for the next day.

It's 11 p.m. when I shower off layers of sweat and grime. As the ice-cold water dribbles on my shoulders, I wonder why I thought it was a good idea to pray for patience. As it turns out, patience is a much more powerful word than I thought. I dry off with a scratchy rag of a towel and climb into bed.

"Help me, Jesus. Thank you for saving me today, from myself, from doing something I'd regret. Help me understand patience better. Help me understand love." Tomorrow was another day and another chance to live love.

As I drifted off, scenes from the trying hours which had passed flit through my mind, and I had a revelation. Patrick knows patient love; he lived it all day long. He never flustered, yelled, or snapped. Patrick was present, aware, unwavering. So consumed in this quest to discover the meaning of patient love, I didn't see it demonstrated through my self-indulgent haze. Now that the fog had lifted, it became so clear. Patrick lives such patient love. It is part of his being, weaved in the fabric of his soul. My naked soul will have to deliberately work on living love that is patient. Maybe if I had recognized this sooner, I would learn the meaning of patient love while there was still daylight. I had one last conscious thought: *Patience, I desire you, sort of.*

Haiti is a gifted professor. Haitian culture schools my patience, or at least my previous understanding of patience. Before this year of living love, I thought that waiting without complaining was patience, that not expecting everyone to be in an American hurry was *extra* patience. And I thought not caving into frustration during a traffic jam in a city of nearly two

million people--with infrastructure for only 40,000 people—was top drawer, gold medal
longsuffering patience. But I am pretty sure I had it wrong.

That day with Patrick at the warehouse revealed something to me: that the essence of patience is
being present in the moment. I had been entirely *absent* from the moment, racing ahead in my
mind, worried about the consequences of Patrick's mistakes. Being in the moment is *not* thinking
ahead about that long to-do list or the mass of emails that need returning. It means being more
concerned with showing love to a slow check-out clerk at the grocery store than getting home
after a grueling day. It means living love in the moment with a human being, not an obstacle to
my plans.

Patient love realizes that people are more important than agendas. Everything else will wait, can
wait. Had I practiced being in the moment with Patrick, I would have been calmer, more
accepting, less put out, less perturbed.

Being present in the moment, body and soul, mind and spirit, the moment takes on a new reality.
A fullness. A wholeness. Senses heighten, minds open, and hearts engage.

Person to person.

Mother to child.

Husband to wife.

Friend to friend.

Stranger to stranger.

Love is present in the moment while patient love embraces and encircles the moment. It listens,
sees, feels, and because of that, it waits. Patient love waits, knowing that this moment is the most
crucial moment of your life. What is in the past stays there. What is ahead isn't here yet. Besides
right now, right here, nothing else matters.

In understanding love that is patient, I also understand that first, it is not natural for me. Second, it is going to take a lot of work and a whole lot of focus. To just be in the moment and not be distracted by the thousands of interruptions vying for my attention. This love will not be a one-day follow the directions and put the Ikea coffee table together kind of learning. This would be more like learning how to surf in crazy high waves with great whites waiting for their dinner to take a nosedive kind of learning. Ignoring the squirrel, the shiny object, and the vibrating cell phone takes some time.

It all sounds right, but what is the reality? What does practicing patient love look like to a Type A raised by a Type A+? Focusing on focusing, intentionally putting on blinders, tuning out all other sounds, a gold medal-worthy stare-down contest with the moment. Maybe it's like that tracking device we all carry around in our pockets and purses. The one that sounds like wind chimes, an alien spacecraft, or the first bar of a favorite song. Now that gets all of our attention. You can be midsentence, and if that thing covered in the Otter case makes a sound, the whole world stops while your eyes immediately move to look at the screen. Isn't there an off button, a silence mode,

Lord Jesus, I think of all of the times that I have not shown patient love, nodding my head as if I was listening while my mind was already on the next task. Lord, help me to live in the moment, help me to have patient love. I desire patience, patience that waits, patient love—and this time, I really mean it.^[3]