

Star of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*

DESIREE HARTSOCK SIEGFRIED

with Autumn Krause

Heartbreak, Hope,
and Finding Strength
When Life Doesn't
Go as Planned

THE ROAD TO ROSES

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*Heartbreak, Hope, and Finding Strength
When Life Doesn't Go as Planned*

DESIREE HARTSOCK SIEGFRIED
WITH AUTUMN KRAUSE

 ZONDERVAN
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The Road to Roses

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ONE



REJECTED!

“Rejected!”

—US WEEKLY

This was the one-word headline slapped underneath my photo after my breakup with Brooks. It was right on the cover. Sometimes being a cover girl sucks!

I sat on the dock. Stunned. The only sounds were the lapping of gentle waves against the dock and my sobs. I wiped tears from my cheeks and pushed windblown hair out of my face. Cameras circled around me, silent but present.

To explain how I got here, let’s revisit the most embarrassing

moment I've ever been blessed with (or more like plagued with) . . .

I thought it was just another day in the Bachelorette fairy tale and that I would be going on another date from the producers' playbook of epic dates. It would involve a sweeping view, some cool mode of transportation (horses, maybe, or more likely a helicopter), champagne toasts, and a perfect red rose waiting to be handed out or withheld.

The cast, crew, and I were in Antigua. I was down to my last three guys: Brooks, Chris, and Drew. I'd already had dates with the two other guys and was dying to see Brooks again. I hadn't seen him in the week since meeting his family, and while I still had questions for him, I wanted our date today to solidify our feelings. I hoped I would be pinning a rose boutonniere to his suit jacket that night. I worried, though, that something might go wrong.

Of the remaining guys, Brooks was the only one who hadn't expressed his love for me. "It's just the show," I thought. "He'll be more comfortable now that there aren't any other group dates and the end is in sight."

We'd been on several dates by this point, each one leaving me intrigued to find out more about Brooks. During the first date, I dressed up in a wedding gown and a veil, and he wore a tux. He picked me up, wedding gown and all, to lift me into the Bentley. It's safe to say he swept me off my feet, literally and metaphorically. My nerves, which had been jittery since the beginning of the show process, calmed at that moment because I knew I could relax in his arms . . . er, company. Afterward, we hiked to the Hollywood sign and sat on a grassy slope with the glittering panorama of Los Angeles spread out at our feet. I talked about

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how the sign reminded me of people chasing their dreams. Like many other starry-eyed idealists, I'd come to La-La Land to pursue some dreams of my own. Brooks confided in me about a past relationship. His face became pensive as he spoke about his last breakup, and it was apparent that the rejection had left a deep scar. But I could focus only on his fun-natured spirit and hope the past rejection wouldn't come between us.

A vivid sunset filled the sky, and I started the kiss count of the season right there below the Hollywood sign. Up until then, I intentionally hadn't kissed anyone. To this day, it still surprises me when the Bachelor and Bachelorette leads kiss the candidates on the first night. You've known them for only about five minutes! Maybe I'm more traditional than the other leads preceding me, but by the time I kissed Brooks, I not only knew his name (first and last!) but also, most importantly, that we had a connection we could build on.

Kiss completed and deemed very good by both parties, we went off to dinner. We were hand in hand and giddy with the childlike excitement you feel before Christmas morning because we didn't know what to expect next. We walked onto a bridge with a sparkling chandelier suspended over our table and a private concert playing just for us. Silly eighth-grade dance moves ensued, and those, combined with the sweet warmth from the bubbly, left me with a schoolgirl crush. I knew then that this date was setting high expectations for my other dates to come.

On paper, Brooks was everything I loved in a guy: sensitive, adventurous, creative—not to mention his shaggy-but-in-an-artsy-way hair. If only I could have read between the lines. As I mentioned, he was everything I was always drawn to. And that was the biggest problem of all.



Now, just a few short weeks from a possible proposal, I headed to my last date with Brooks (catamaran ride to Great Bird Island, followed by a candlelit dinner—don't mind if I do!). I waited by the blue-green water in a loose top mirroring the colors of the sea and with the ever-present mic tucked into the back.

Though I was excited for the date, I was exhausted, not only from the never-ending filming and relentless travel schedule but also from the emotional weight of the show. I'd been whittling my way down from twenty-five relationships to three, all while feeling horrible about sending really nice, genuine guys home. As the guys confessed their affection for me, fears I thought were buried came alive again. Because I'd lacked reciprocated validation for so long, its sudden appearance made me cling to what was safe.

My empathetic nature prevented me from focusing solely on my emotions, and I constantly considered the guys' feelings too. I'd been a contestant on the show before, and I knew what it was like to stand in an elimination ceremony, heart in your throat and your fate tied to a long-stem rose as cameras angle to capture the fear in your eyes. I thought being the one handing out roses would be easier. Though I was now an expert at pinning boutonnières to lapels, I was overwhelmed, confused, and worn out.

Brooks made his way through a grove of trees, and I beamed, my heart leaping at the sight of him. I wanted to savor each moment together. But my excitement quickly faded when I saw the solemn expression on his face as he walked across the sand. Something wasn't right. As we reached each other, his body language was off and instead of holding me close, he quickly let me go after a half-hearted hug.

“What’s wrong?”

“So hard . . .” he said. “Can we go over there?”

Immediately, my stomach plummeted, and we walked over to a bench out on the dock. My thoughts raced. I wondered if he was about to end our relationship, but I couldn’t wrap my mind around that. We’d come so far and it’d been so hard. There was no way he could just throw that all away. Each step toward the bench felt like a step closer to doom.

We sat the way we always did: I draped my leg over his knee, and he held my hand. Slowly, he began.

“I just want to talk to you about how I feel. It’s been hard. The whole thing.”

“Talk to me,” I said. *Talk to me.*

Those three words encapsulated a deep and old hurt: that I’d been searching for love for so long and no one could tell me the simple things I craved to hear. My family wasn’t very open, even with each other. Feelings weren’t expressed in words but in hard-to-decipher nods and one-liners. But I wasn’t fluent in my family’s particular language. I wanted to be told I was valued, and I carried that sentiment—*talk to me*—into every prior relationship with guys who couldn’t express their affection for me, leaving me wounded and confused. My whole life, I silently begged for others to be open and honest with me, but I didn’t know how to vocalize my needs either.

I’d given this hurt to God, but in the context of the show, it came back, and instead of turning to my identity in Christ, I fell into my old ways of seeking outside approval. I needed Brooks to affirm my value, and the more he withdrew, the more I wanted affirmation from him.

Brooks kept going.

“I really want to be madly in love with you, you know? This is even harder because you were so excited about us.”

Cue ugly cry.

“Please. Don’t cry. Why are you crying?”

I sobbed, pulled my knees up to my chest, and buried my face. Brooks kept talking. He said that he was sorry, that he wasn’t feeling it, and that I was the best person he knew—but not for him. Blah, blah, blah. The same script from every breakup since the dawn of breakups.

When I spoke again, it was the old me talking—the one who’d been so hurt and lost and craving love. I said, “I don’t know how it feels to have my feelings reciprocated. That’s what really sucks. For once in my life, I was hopeful. I’ve never felt completely loved, and it sucks.” Then I gave him the vulnerability I so deeply wanted but never got from him. I told him exactly how I felt. “I don’t care that you just broke my heart. I love you.”

Saying those words was hard. No one had ever given me the space to be vulnerable. But for once, I needed to be heard, so I made that space for myself.

Afterward, we walked back to the shore.

“I’m sorry,” he kept repeating as we slowly headed down the path to the van that would take him away. Forever. “I’m sorry.”

None of it made sense. I stared at him in disbelief and said, “I’ve done everything by myself, and that’s why I was hoping to meet someone I could share my life with.”

We lingered on the path, and he hugged me one last time. For a moment, I was stiff against his embrace, and then I wrapped my arms tightly around him as though I could hold on to what we had and undo everything that had just happened.

Then he walked off to the van, and that chapter closed. I

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was surrounded by cameras and producers but so alone. I rushed back down the dock, sobbing and trying to shield my face with my hand as the crew chased after me. I was done, done with it all, and only wanted to be alone with my heartbreak.

But the show must go on.

I came into *The Bachelorette* confident. Despite being an introvert who never sought the limelight, I was flattered that I'd been offered the role and grateful for the rare opportunity. Before agreeing to be the lead, I devoted any spare time I had to praying for God's guidance on the decision and felt not only his peace but also confirmation that he'd opened these doors for me. Yet doubts crept into my mind, and they grew stronger as the show progressed. Did I deserve this attention? Did I deserve to find love at the end?

When I sat down on the dock, grief washed over me, followed by anger at myself. I'd fallen into my old ways, when I knew I deserved so much more. I'd been swept away by the handsome guy who gave me only crumbs of affection while I tried to maintain the relationship for both of us.

Staring into the green-blue water, I was crushed. I felt like Cinderella when she runs away from the ball at midnight and her gown turns back into sooty rags. My so-called Prince Charming had dumped me, and I was once again the hurting young girl from my past.

The Road to Roses

Heartbreak, Hope, and Finding Strength When Life Doesn't Go as Planned

By Desiree Hartsock Siegfried with Autumn Krause

When Desiree Hartsock was offered the opportunity to star on *The Bachelorette*, she thought she was finally getting the life she always longed for. Yet her reality TV dreams gave way to rough roads of unexpected twists, public scrutiny, and rejection. Now for the first time, Desiree tells all in this rivetingly honest book about how she found her resilience and love after all--and you can too.

For anyone who is looking at the pieces of their lives and losing hope that they can be put back together again, *The Road to Roses* offers an authentic guide for finding your grit to keep going and make yourself proud no matter what pressures you face. Whether your heart has been broken, your dream has been put on hold, or your character is being put under pressure, following Desiree's journey will give you courage to stay strong on your own.

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