



EXCERPT



The Unhiding of Elijah Campbell A Novel

October 18, 2022 | \$18, 336 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0228-5

"Tuesdays with Morrie meets The Shack in The Unhiding of Elijah Campbell. A pitch-perfect page-turner of a story about one man's dismantling and reconstruction as he collides with his past. Authentic, heart-rending, absorbing, and wise, this book hits the bull's-eye of psychological and spiritual relevance. I closed the cover with new clarity, new conviction and, I hope, new capability to forgive and love."

—Cheryl Grey Bostrom, author of *Sugar Birds*

A New Formatio Novel from IVP's Kelly Flanagan

THE PAST IS BEHIND US, BUT IT IS ALSO, ALWAYS, WITHIN US. Which means the past can feel dead and gone one moment and then, in the next, it can be very much living and breathing and *here*. My past came back to life in the form of a nightmare I hadn't dreamed in over thirty years.

When I was a child, the nightmare always began the same way, with me standing at a river's edge, watching it rush by, brownly opaque with mud, swollen with storm debris, and foamy with turmoil. It was the kind of cataclysmic river in which a kid could disappear without warning, carried downstream to rot in some unpredictable destination.

An old wooden bridge spanned the river. Though it had probably been a feat of humankind at its creation, its glory days were clearly behind it. The railings were gone. Most of the walkway had been torn away by storms long forgotten. The remaining planks were rotted and loose and spaced out, some resting where they'd been originally placed, some resting at angles. Large gaps in the walkway revealed the roiling waters just a few yards below it.

Beyond the bridge, the other side of the river was always cloaked in fog. I had no idea what the fog hid, and yet—with the kind of certainty that can only be called faith, the kind of anticipation that can only be called hope, and the kind of longing that can only be called love—I wanted to find out. So I'd look down, preparing to take my first step, and I'd see on my feet a pair of worn-out blue sneakers with yellow trim. They were so dirty the yellow looked almost brown and the blue looked almost black. The shoe on my right foot had a hole at the front of it, and my big toe protruded, covered by a dusty sock.

Every night, the dream seemed to contain all its previous renditions, so I knew exactly how it was going to end. I knew I would step out onto the bridge and the water would rise and it would be impossible to escape it, and as it reached me, I would silently scream myself awake. However, I also knew I'd step out onto the bridge anyway, yearning so much for the opposite shore that I was willing to endure the familiar terror at least one more time.

Sometime around middle school, the dream seemed to die. I went to sleep one night, and it didn't go with me. Weeks passed. No nightmare. Then months passed, then years, and somewhere along the way I forgot about that old nightmare altogether. It turns out, though, it hadn't died. It had simply gone dormant. Or maybe it had died, and almost three decades later, on the cusp of my fortieth birthday, it was resurrected.

I don't think the future is ever predetermined, but I do think our futures are *eventually* determined by what we do with these moments of resurrection, especially when such moments cluster together, forming a sort of bridge in the middle of your life, one you may cross to new ground, or one you may turn back from, retreading the ground from which you came. My bridge was made of that old nightmare. It was also made of a secret I kept from everyone so long I eventually began



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



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Kelly Flanagan (PhD, Pennsylvania State University) is a clinical psychologist, popular speaker, and the author of *The Marriage Manifesto*, *Loveable*, and *True Companions*. He has also written for publications such as *Christianity Today*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Huffington Post*, and he has appeared on the *TODAY Show* with his daughter. He lives in Dixon, Illinois, with his wife who is also named Kelly, and their three children.

to keep it from myself, and a secret that was kept from me for so long I never knew it existed. My bridge was made of a bunch of people I once loved and lost who came to life again within me. It was made of a God I once loved who went silent and then one day started speaking to me again through those beloved ghosts of mine.

In the Bible, Jesus dies on a Friday, and there's a lot of talk about that. Then he's resurrected on a Sunday, and there's even more talk about that. No one talks much about Saturday, though. Death and resurrection. No one talks much about the *and* that bridges the two. Sometimes, though, all of life can begin to feel like an *and*. Every day can start to feel like the Saturday between what happened to you and what you will—or will not—do with it. And once you recognize your bridge for what it is, you have to decide if you'll cross it, with no guarantees of surviving the passage, just the merest of hopes that it will deliver you to more graceful ground. It took me a long time to recognize my *and*—my Saturday, my bridge—for what it was. Too long. It began with a leg in my lap more than a decade before the nightmare resumed.

My name is Elijah Campbell, and this is the story of my unhiding.

—From the prologue



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