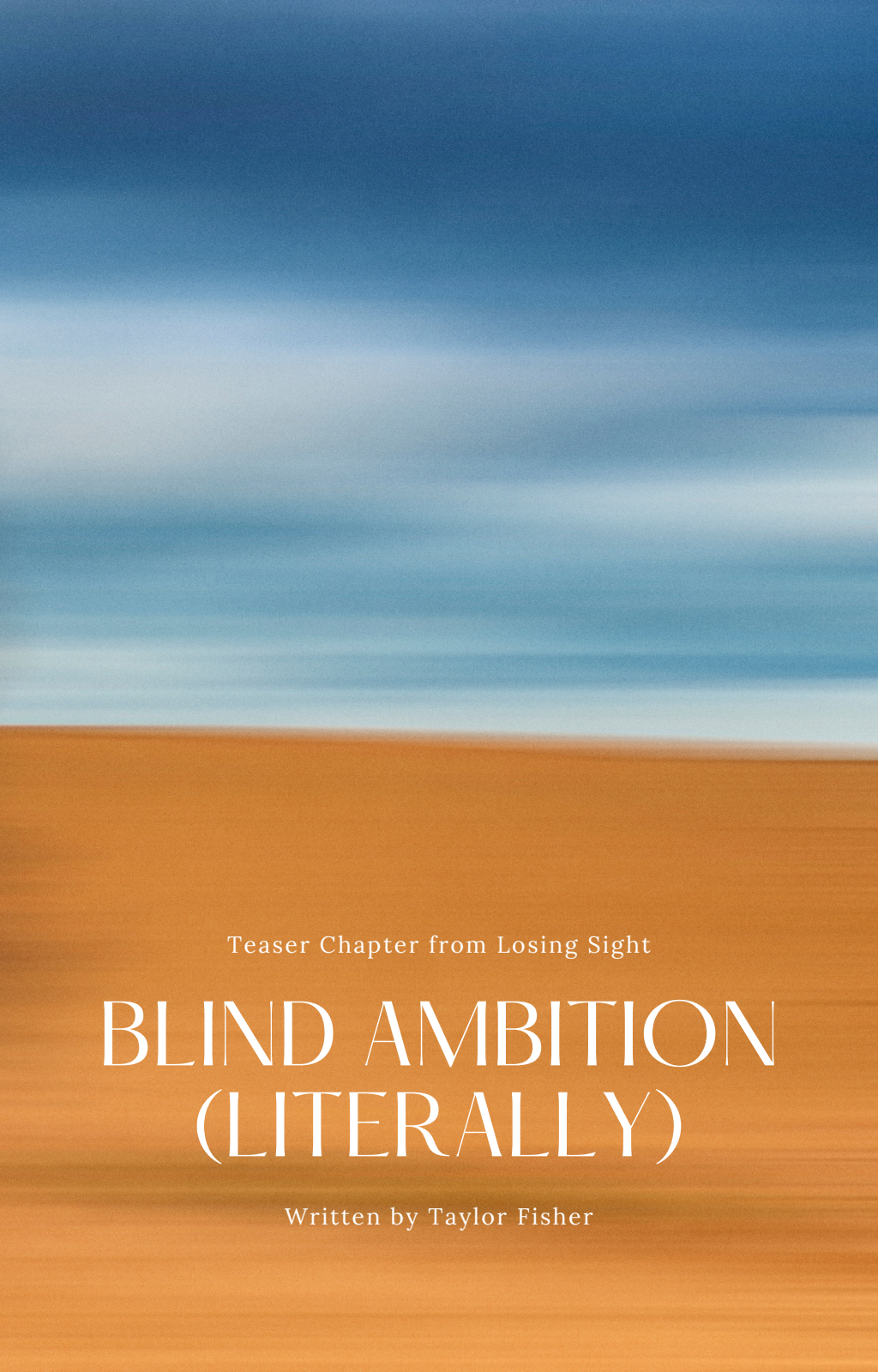


The background of the entire page is a blurred landscape. The top half shows a sky with horizontal bands of blue and white, suggesting clouds or a light gradient. The bottom half is a solid, warm orange-brown color, representing the ground. The overall effect is a sense of motion or a long-exposure photograph.

Teaser Chapter from Losing Sight

BLIND AMBITION (LITERALLY)

Written by Taylor Fisher

Fast forward seven years: it's post-pandemic, 2021. The world is still half in shambles, people are baking sourdough bread like their lives depend on it, and I'm deep in the trenches of creating my first course for photographers. Somewhere between wrangling my two tiny humans, shooting weddings, and surviving off of Advil, I had discovered a deep passion for teaching. I loved it. It felt like I had unlocked a whole new level in the game of entrepreneurship.

At this point, the photography education space was becoming about as competitive as the Olympic trials, and yet, I wasn't intimidated. In fact, I was fueled by it. There was no scarcity mindset here! I wasn't trying to fight for a single slice of pie because I knew damn well that there was more pie than any one person, or even a hundred thousand people, could ever eat. And if there's one thing I've learned, it's that business success isn't a carbon-copy formula. No one could replicate exactly what I had done because no one else had lived my life, lived my trials, and come out the other side. In the same breath, I couldn't replicate the unique circumstances that would lead someone else to their own version of success.

But here's where shit hit the fan. While I was recording the final lessons of my Launch to Livelihood course, coaching my first group of photographers, shooting weddings, nursing my youngest son, and generally holding my entire business and life together with sheer willpower and dry shampoo, I was simultaneously neglecting every single one of my own needs.

Sound familiar?

It wasn't the first time I'd thrown myself headfirst into work without a life jacket. Back in 2016, I'd hit my first six-figure year, and the dopamine hit was stronger than I imagine any drug could ever be. The rush of it, the validation, the feeling of "holy shit, I did this" was intoxicating. I was hooked. And then, the universe did what the universe always does when you refuse to slow down: it smacked me across the face with a brick.

A few weeks before my 33rd birthday, I found myself hiking with a new girlfriend. She's one of those people whose energy crackles like a 4th of July sparkler and who can pull profound meaning out of, I swear, a grocery receipt. I adored her then, and I still do.

As we trudged up the trail, she asked me what birthdays were like in my house growing up. Without hesitation, I launched into an enthusiastic retelling: in my family, birthdays weren't just a day; they were an event. A full week-long festival of spoiling, indulgence, and over-the-top love. Naturally, when Mike and I started our own family, we kept the tradition alive. Seven full days of cake, surprises, and celebratory excess for every single person.

She grinned, soaking it in, then casually hit me with: "You know, Jesus was crucified at 33. This is going to be a big year for you."

And just like that, the universe chuckled. Little did I know,

my 33rd year was about to unfold with the ominous weight of a biblical foreshadowing (minus the actual crucifixion) but certainly with enough trials to make me wonder if the prophecy held some truth.

The morning after my birthday, still in celebration mode, my mom called with news that felt like someone had pulled the floor out from under me. My grandmother had passed away. The funeral was the following week. Her death wasn't unexpected as she had been battling Alzheimers for way too long with many broken bones along the way. What felt shocking was the timing of it all.

I needed to be there. I wanted to be there.

But before I could even think about hopping on a plane, I had to wrap up my course recordings, finalize a workbook, shoot a wedding in Vail, edit a backlog of photo sessions, and mentally prepare myself to leave my husband and two very young boys for the first time since the pandemic. This was before vaccines, before people had stopped dying from this sickness, and before I knew how my tiny humans would respond to the germs if they were exposed. Was going to the funeral an impending death sentence for my barely one and three year old kids or my four-month-old nephew I was about to meet for the first time? The stress was sitting on my chest like an elephant in stilettos.

By the time I landed in Pittsburgh, my body was already waving the white flag. My right eye was aching a dull, annoying ache that I chalked up to scratching it while taking

my contact lens. I ignored it. Because that's what I did. Pain was an old friend, and I had learned how to function through it. In fact, I had mastered that shit.

I'd been getting migraines since I was five years old, always in the aftermath of stress; an argument, burning a hole in a veil on a wedding day, an emotional fallout. It was like my nervous system never learned how to regulate itself, so instead, it sent out a five-alarm fire response in the form of searing headaches, dizziness, and nausea. I had spent years, nay decades just dealing with it. Popping Advil, chasing relief with coffee and stubbornness.

So, yeah. A little eye irritation? Not exactly a cause for concern.

I chalked it up to exhaustion, to stress, to the fact that I'd spent the last few days ugly-crying over my grandmother's passing and years of watching Alzheimer's steal her away. Then, at the funeral, my childhood friend Casey, practically an adopted sister, the first kid I ever babysat despite being only six years older than her, and now a full-fledged nurse, took one look at me and frowned.

"What's going on with your eye?" she asked, tilting her head like she was already diagnosing me in her brain.

"Oh, I scratched it," I waved her off. "Took my contact out weird."

She squinted at me. "No. You have *uveitis*."

“You-vee-what?” I blinked.

“Uveitis,” she repeated, crossing her arms. “It’s serious. You need to get that checked.”

I, of course, did what any stubborn, overworked, chronically exhausted entrepreneur would do...I brushed it off. I didn’t have uveitis. I had shit to do. I was just tired. Just dehydrated. Just grieving.

Spoiler alert: I was very, very wrong.

The next morning after the funeral, I woke up in the kind of pain that makes you question every life choice that led you to this moment. To say it was was brutal would be an understatement. Sharp, relentless, and all-consuming. The only thing I could compare it to was the unmedicated birth of my second-born son, Dawson, who, at nearly nine pounds with a barrel chest, got himself gloriously stuck in the birth canal like he was debating whether or not he truly wanted to be here. But this pain—this blinding, stabbing, unbearable pain—was different. It was in my eye.

At first, I didn’t even open it. I just lay there, willing it to be a bad dream. But when I finally braved the light? Holy hell. The moment I transitioned from dark to light, my eye went into a full-blown rebellion, sending an electric shock of agony straight to my temples. My vision wasn’t just blurry; it was disappearing. I ferociously blinked, somehow convinced that if I blinked fast enough and hard enough my vision would magically reappear. I could make out silhouettes against the light, but they were hazy, shifting shadows, and every second

of trying to focus felt like someone was dragging a hot wire through my skull.

Now, I was scared.

This wasn't just a scratched cornea or dry eyes from crying. This was something much worse.

One of the things I miss most about living in my hometown is the sheer vastness of my extended family. I'm talking hundreds of relatives, many of whom I only vaguely recognize at weddings and funerals. But the perk of being part of a large Appalachian clan? We've got people in every profession. And they don't care if you haven't talked in 20-some-odd-years, it's true Hatfield and McCoy life there. If you're blood, say less. Need a plumber? Jim will be over in 20-minutes. Emergency cupcakes for a birthday? Debbie was already on it. Leaving your husband because he's incarcerated? Yeah, we've got a lawyer for that. My mom, in true I-know-someone fashion, quickly reminded me that one of my third cousins was an optometrist with an office just ten minutes away.

Boom. Last minute emergency appointment scheduled.

There was just one small problem: I couldn't drive. Not only because of the searing pain but because, at this point, I couldn't see. Even attempting to open my eye felt like someone was stabbing me with tiny needles. So, like an invalid, I was chauffeured by my mother to my cousin Caity's office, where I hoped she would roll her eyes, tell me to slap on some eye drops, and send me on my way.

That's not what happened.

Within minutes of seeing me, Caity's casual, chatty demeanor shifted into something far more serious. The concerned furrow of her brows, the sharp inhale as she examined my eye. Not good.

"I can't, in good faith, let you get on a plane in two days with this condition," she finally said.

I blinked (with my good eye). "Are you serious? What kind of eye issue prevents someone from flying?"

Caity wasn't playing. She immediately pulled some small-town strings and secured me an appointment that afternoon with a uveitis specialist at West Virginia University.

"A specialist?" I scoffed. "Is that really necessary?"

Caity gave me a look that suggested she was debating whether or not to smack some sense into me. She took a deep breath, clearly reminding herself that some of her family members, specifically the ones of Slovenian descent, were insufferably stubborn, and then proceeded to explain: Uveitis isn't just some random eye irritation. It's an inflammatory condition that often signals an underlying autoimmune disease. And if I didn't get the swelling under control immediately, I was at risk of permanent blindness.

And that's when my world stopped for the second time in my life.

Blind?

Blind.

As in, I'm a highly successful photographer, the primary breadwinner for my family, and I have 34 more weddings to shoot this year and might not be able to see them, blind? As in, My entire identity is wrapped up in my ability to capture the world through my camera lens and I might be permanently losing my vision, blind?

I sat there, gripping the arms of the chair, trying to comprehend how I had gone from an eye irritation to a full-blown medical emergency. It wasn't just about my vision. It was about who I was. My career, my creativity, my independence, my worth.

This was my breaking point.

And yet, as I would come to learn, it was also my awakening. This forced pause, albeit terrifying, gut-wrenching moment, became the catalyst for something I had ignored for years: my own healing. Not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. For 33 years, I had sprinted through life, through business, through success, without ever stopping to ask myself if the way I was living was sustainable. Turns out, it wasn't.

I had built a business that I loved. One that gave me financial freedom, creative expression, and impact. But I had done so at the expense of myself. My body had literally shut down in protest. My body was in battle, my right eye the casualty.

This was my reckoning.