



# Searching for Spice

Megan  
DiMaria



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*Searching for Spice*

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## Praise for *Searching for Spice*

“Be careful what you pray for. . . . Megan DiMaria’s *Searching for Spice* is an entertaining tale of an Everywoman who yearns for the Extraordinary—as we all do on occasion. Filled with humor, zest, and real life, this charming romantic tale will charm and delight.”

—ANGELA HUNT, author of *Doesn’t She Look Natural?*

“*Searching for Spice* is a wonderfully refreshing story of one wife’s refusal to let romance be held hostage by married life. I loved the voice, the characters, and the humor was terrific—everything was just so fresh. It was the perfect book for me to read at the perfect time.”

—MAUREEN LANG, author of *The Oak Leaves and On Sparrow Hill*

“A great look at the ordinary things that make up an extraordinary life. DiMaria shows us that sometimes life itself can be the best seasoning for love.”

—MARILYNN GRIFFITH, author of *Pink and Made of Honor*

“*Searching for Spice* is a fantastic read that I couldn’t put down. With a grabbing main character, a cast of friends and family that makes things interesting, a story line to keep the pages turning, and writing that brought both laughter to my lips and tears to my eyes, *Searching for Spice* is a novel not to be missed. I’m looking forward to reading more from this new author.”

—ROSEANNA WHITE, senior reviewer, *Christian Review of Books*

“Debut author Megan DiMaria breaks new ground with *Searching for Spice* by putting a unique twist on one woman’s desire for a bodice-ripping, lip-flaming affair . . . with her husband! DiMaria taps into the inner longing of every married woman. *Spice* stands apart from other chick-lit novels by fearlessly tackling faith-breaking trials and temptations all readers can relate to. Sharp writing and dialogue put you in Linda Revere’s head, building your faith, along with hers, as she faces mountainous obstacles to her dreams and finds peace in Jesus.”

—DARCIE J. GUDGER, reviewer for [www.titletrakk.com](http://www.titletrakk.com) and host of [www.joyinthelitterbox.blogspot.com](http://www.joyinthelitterbox.blogspot.com)



*For Carl.*

*Your love warms me,  
your humor tickles me,*

*and*

*your encouragement  
fuels me.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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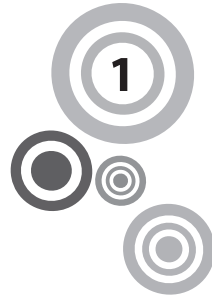
A big thank-you to Jan Stob and Lorie Popp, my editors at Tyndale, for bringing my dream to reality.

And thanks be to my Lord Jesus Christ, the author of life and love and dreams.

Come away, my lover, and be like  
a gazelle or like a young stag on the  
spice-laden mountains.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:14





Jerry looks at me as if my head has sprouted petunias. “Linda, the half-and-half isn’t cold.”

I regard him through bleary eyes and swallow a yawn. His silhouette appears soft and gauzy, framed by the daylight pouring through the kitchen window, glowing like a Thomas Kinkade painting. I should have given myself an extra dose of eyedrops when I got up this morning. Ever since my LASIK surgery, I’ve applied a thick, Vaseline-like ointment to my dry eyes at night before dropping into bed. “What?”

He’s standing in the middle of the kitchen, the questionable carton of half-and-half in one hand and a mug of steaming coffee in the other. His plaid robe hangs partway open, the belt loosely tied over wrinkled pajamas. A look of perplexity transforms his intelligent features into a caricature of a hapless sad sack. But truly nothing could be farther from the truth. My husband is a PhD chemist. So who *is* this clueless schmo standing before me?

Jerry raises the hand holding the half-and-half. “Warm.”

“Is the refrigerator broken?” I launch from my seat and open the door of our five-year-old GE side-by-side fridge that I just *had* to have and, by the way, got at a fabulous discount at the scratch-and-dent sale at Sears.

The interior of the appliance is dark, the first clue that something is amiss. And come to think of it, the refrigerator’s typical hum of

electrical activity was absent from my morning symphony of appliances that serenades me while the coffee brews and the microwave heats my favorite tall latte mug.

I peer inside. *Oh, rats.* Condensation coats the exterior of a large jar of dill pickles on the top shelf. I put my hand on a glass casserole dish to confirm my diagnosis. “It’s not working.”

My dear husband is still rooted to the floor. Some people are dependent on that caffeine jolt to get them going in the morning, and he’s their poster boy.

“Pour some half-and-half in your coffee, Jer. It’s probably okay.”

He follows my instructions and takes a seat at the table. “Well, I don’t think I could stomach warm milk with my shredded wheat.”

I open the freezer door and root around until I find the Sara Lee pound cake I was saving for the weekend. This cake would have been so delicious with some fresh strawberries and whipped cream. I console myself with the knowledge that I really don’t need the extra calories; I’m fluffy enough. That’s the loving word the Revere family uses to refer to those dreaded unwanted pounds. As in, “Don’t you love to hug Grandma? She’s so fluffy.”

“This will have to do for breakfast. Can you run down to the basement and get the picnic cooler? Maybe we can salvage some of the frozen meat.”

Jerry takes a deep swig of his legal stimulant and disappears into the basement. While I pour my tea and set the table, I hear him muttering amid the noise of boxes being shifted across the cement floor.

“What’s Dad doing?” Emma stands at the top of the basement stairs, her ear cocked to the sounds coming from below. At fifteen she’s still my little girl on some days, but on others I see the lovely young woman who’s emerging from within.

I fill her in on the morning’s tragedy.

She flips a strand of light brown hair behind her shoulder and saunters to the table. “Whatever.”



Okay, so today I see that snotty teenage brat who's hijacked my little darling. Obviously she doesn't feel my pain and is clueless about the cost or inconvenience of a busted refrigerator. Ah, the bliss of youthful ignorance.

Em picks up the knife and slices a piece of cake. "No juice?" "Help yourself."

She pushes to her feet, grabs a glass, and opens the freezer to retrieve three measly ice cubes.

Just as Jerry's emerging from the basement with the dusty cooler, our son, Nick, joins us, wearing a pair of green sweatpants and a faded T-shirt. His eyelids are at half-mast, and he has a bad case of bed head. Emma's only too happy to give him our news.

I begin to load the picnic cooler with frozen meat and toss the few anorexic ice cubes left in the freezer on top of our chicken breasts, pork tenderloin, ground beef, and frozen vegetables. "Well, this won't do the trick." Too bad it's springtime. Otherwise I could toss my food in the snow.

No one responds to my comment, so I turn to my college-age son. "Nicky, would you please run to the store and get a bag of ice?"

He grimaces, but he's maturing nicely and agrees to drive the few blocks to the store to run my errand. Emma plops herself down in front of the computer, no doubt relieved for once that she doesn't have her driver's license yet.

I paw through our junk drawer in the kitchen for the stack of business cards to find a repairman. Mechanic. Insurance agent. Day spa. Where did that come from? My nerves begin to dance like a cat on hot pavement. I don't have time for this. "Jer, who should I call?"

My honey squeezes my shoulder. Ah, marital solidarity. He moves toward the desk that sits between the kitchen and family room. "Em, may I use the computer?"

She glares at him but silently gives up her seat. In a moment,

Jerry has the telephone number of the Sears repairmen. He passes the scrap of paper to me. “Here ya go.”

*Great. So much for marital solidarity.*

I dial the number, navigate the menu, and plead my case to the dispatch associate. “Two o’clock? Um, okay. Thanks. Someone will be here to let him in.” I disconnect the call and secure the handset on its base. “Jer? What’s your schedule today?”

He grunts out a reply with his back toward me while he pours another mug of coffee.

“What?”

He turns and takes a careful sip of the hot liquid. “Sorry. Faculty meeting. No can do.”

Anxiety builds in my chest. Swell. As usual, *I’m* the one who has to make the appointment and alter my schedule to accommodate this fiasco.

I’m loading the breakfast plates into the dishwasher when Nick walks in bearing a twenty-pound bag of ice. He opens the back door, then drops the bag onto the brick patio.

“Nick?”

He retrieves the bag of ice and beams his killer grin—the one that made my sensibilities melt nearly twenty-six years ago when his father favored me with the same endearing smile at a gas station off the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

I have to confess it’s as though Jer saw my heart soar toward the heavens in that moment and caught it in his hand. And that’s where it’s been ever since. I had run out of gas, and he was fueling his 1973 Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. Both Jerry and his cute little red car were about the best thing I’d seen in forever. He offered to drive me and my gallon of gasoline to my stranded car, and the rest of the story, as they say, is history.

The grandfather clock chimes from the living room, reminding me that I’m behind schedule. Being late for work at Dream Photography is a major transgression. My stomach knots to think that not

only will I be late, but I'll have to leave early too. A hive of angry bees bounces off the inside of my skull, clamoring to escape, and a deep sigh drains from the bottom of my lungs.

"Mom?" Nick lays his hand on my shoulder. He is so like his father, bless him. "Chill. It's only a refrigerator."

He makes me smile in spite of my poor attitude. "I know. It's just that I'll have to leave work early, and—"

"What time is the repairman coming?"

Praise God—we must have done something right to deserve this child. "Two o'clock. Will you be home from school?"

He shakes his head. "Sorry. I need to buy a book for my history class."

*Are you kidding me?* My hands ball and land on my hips. "Can't you buy the book another day?"

"I really need to get going on my term paper. It's due in three weeks."

My anxiety level rises again. "Won't the bookstore be open tomorrow?"

Nick rolls his eyes. "I won't have time to stand in that line at the bookstore tomorrow." He pours the ice cubes onto the meat, ending our discussion.

I toss the lid on the cooler and scurry upstairs to get ready for work. So what's our new family slogan? Every man for himself?



I walk into the organized chaos that is Dream Photography—one of the best-known portrait studios in metro Denver. The ringing telephone provides nerve-jarring background noise for the pandemonium playing itself out.

A well-groomed toddler makes serious work of tossing neatly arranged brochures onto the floor, while his mother wipes baby spit from her infant daughter's dress. Another client is tapping her foot

and checking her wristwatch. Add to that the family being escorted to the lobby to schedule their image presentation—aka sales session—by none other than Luke Vidal, my surly boss.

My tardiness is noted by Luke with a raised eyebrow and a brief tic of his head, one that goes unnoticed by our clients but hits pay dirt in my always-too-willing-to-accept-guilt gut. “Linda, can you schedule an image presentation for the Murrays?”

Sure, Luke *would* have to enlist me to wait on clients before I get the chance to clock in and get my bearings. That must be my punishment for coming in late. I hurry behind the reception desk and smile at the Murray clan—the ones who think Luke is the greatest thing since the invention of the daguerreotype.

Luke pumps the outstretched hand of Andy Murray. “The shoot went well. I think you’ll love the images.” He gives a peppermint-sweet grin to the rest of the family and struts from the beautifully appointed lobby of his home away from home.

I take care of business and trot to the break room to clock in and catch my breath.

My coworker Traci looks up from a pile of five-by-sevens. “Hey, girl. Where have you been?”

“Don’t ask.”

She puts down a print of a gorgeous bride and waits for the information she knows I’ll spill. I unburden my tale of woe, and she nods and gives me the expected platitudes.

She smiles her Pepsodent grin and pats me on the back. “Isn’t life grand?”

I really love Traci, but sometimes she can lay it on too thick. She passes me the day’s schedule, then exits the room.

I glance at the list of appointments. *Rats*. I better get moving. The bees have begun to swarm in my brain again.

After grabbing the necessary client files and slipping into a salesroom, I power up my Mac and access the network. Within moments I’ve loaded my client’s images and have chosen an appro-

propriately sentimental song to accompany the slide show. I turn on the projector and dim the lights. Clients go gaga over our well-designed salesrooms—I mean, image presentation rooms. They look more like an elegant home theater than a place of business.

I race back to the lobby, discover that my nine-thirty sale has arrived, and paste a smile on my face. “Heidi, Ken, it’s good to see you again. If you don’t remember, my name’s Linda.”

They greet me, and I escort them to the salesroom, chatting with them to break the ice.

The freshly baked cookies placed on the coffee table make my mouth water and hopefully put our well-heeled clients in the mood to take an emotional journey while gazing at the incredible images produced in our high-end studio.

“Can I get anyone a bottle of water before we begin?”

“Yes, I would love some water.” Heidi claims a seat in one of the overstuffed chairs. She glances toward her husband, who is inspecting the frame on one of the portraits that adorn the walls. “Ken?”

“Oh yes. Please.”

I excuse myself and go to the fridge to get some of our private-label water bottles. From the first moment our customers call to schedule their appointment and until they have their portraits delivered, they’re treated like royalty. Fortunately, most of them deserve such treatment.

Heidi and Ken are clients from way back. They’ve been through everything with us, from the old days of film to the current high-tech, all-digital studio we’ve evolved into.

When I return, I distribute the water and start the viewing program. The swell of sentimental music explodes from the speakers in the ceiling, and images of two adorable little girls move across the big screen. They sit in a wicker swing under a towering oak tree in a field of tall, natural grasses. The lighting illuminates the canopy of green branches above them, while they are perfectly shaded from the bright morning sun. The girls are wearing off-white linen

dresses and holding lovely vintage rag dolls. The camera changes perspective, and the girls are in the foreground, framed by the leaves from the branch of a nearby tree. In the next scene they're sitting at a small, white bistro table enjoying a tea party with a rose-patterned porcelain tea set and a teddy bear for a guest.

The music plays on as the girls pose by an antique baby carriage. They both gaze off into the distance, their expressions a paragon of youthful innocence.

I'm so sick of these types of saccharine images, I could puke. But day after day, they provide the all-natural, nitrate-free bacon I bring home to my family.

Heidi sniffs and reaches for the box of tissues that sits on the table. The last image fades from the screen, and the music stops. Heidi grasps for her husband's hand. He nods and smiles.

I hand a price list to Ken, and we get down to business.

Heidi appears to suffer heart-wrenching torment as we narrow the number of images down from thirty-nine to fifteen. You'd think I'm dishonoring her cute little daughters by deleting some, but unless you've got a huge bank account, you can't buy them all.

She clutches a hand to her heart, and her husband says, "I love that expression on Olyvia's face."

I slip into sales mode. "That image is gorgeous, but look at the subjects. Your girls are beautiful."

They smile in agreement. We continue to weed through the images to find their favorites. I'm getting dizzy from comparing similar poses and going back and forth while Heidi hems and haws about the merits of each picture.

"Ah, can you pull up number twenty-two?"

I maneuver the program to display an image of the girls sitting at the bistro table.

"And can you compare it to number twenty-four?"

Could this woman say *please* just once? Would it kill her to treat me with a modicum of respect?

She turns to her husband. “What do you think?”

Poor Ken looks as though he’s pulling himself out of a stupor to respond. “Uh, I don’t like the way Trynity’s hand is curled on the table.”

Heidi stands and moves closer to the screen. “Really? I think that’s cute.”

He sighs. “Okay, keep that one.”

“But Olyvia isn’t looking in the right direction.”

“Heidi, sit down so I can see the screen.”

She flashes him a look that could take the merry out of Christmas. *Uh-oh*. This isn’t good.

I clear my throat and try to maneuver the sale in the right direction. “What if we take Olyvia’s head from image twenty-five and put it on this image?”

They both study the pictures that I put side by side on the screen.

“And, Ken, didn’t you say you love that expression on Olyvia’s face?”

He jerks in my direction, and I don’t know if he’s pleased that I’m asking for his input or annoyed. “What will this cost?”

*Oh, so that’s the way we’re going to be, huh, Ken?* “Well, there will be an extra art fee to swap out that head, but if you both love the images and you’re purchasing a wall portrait, it’s well worth the charge.”

“How much?” Ken insists.

Heidi shifts in her seat. “Oh, it will be perfect. We could hang it in the dining room across from the china cabinet.”

That Heidi, she’s my kind of gal. *Press on, full steam ahead.*

“How much will it cost?”

I wave my hand to minimize the bombshell. “Oh, only about fifty dollars.”

If the room were brighter, I’m sure I’d see steam floating from his ears. “Can you show us what that would look like?”

I don't know why he's giving me a hard time. He's bought images with head swaps from us before. "Sure, this is down and dirty, but it will give you an idea." My artistry is crude at best, but I do a quick swap. "Of course our imaging artists will make it look 100 percent natural. No one will know this isn't the original image."

Ken leans back in his chair, a movement I take for acceptance.

I go in for the close. "Now what size portrait were you thinking of?"

Heidi clasps her hands. "Maybe a sixteen-by-twenty."

"Okay. What size is the wall it's going on?"

She looks confused, as if I'm speaking in Mandarin.

I stand and grab a twenty-by-twenty-four-inch frame that holds a white piece of foam core. "Let's look at this size, and tell me what you think." I step into the middle of the room and center the image on the blank canvas.

They respond with the usual sigh of desire.

"You may even want to see the next size up." No sense in not trying.

"Okay, let's see. . . ."

*Cha-ching.* Looks like I'm well on my way to exceeding my weekly goal. By the time they're ready to leave, I can tell Heidi wants nothing more than to go home and hug her little darlings. For the amount of money I collected from their mom and dad, I want to hug the girls too.

If only the rest of my day goes as well. After the refrigerator crisis, I could use a break.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan DiMaria has fond memories of the days when her mother would pile the kids into the car to take their weekly trip to the Troy, New York, public library. There under the mural of *Gulliver's Travels* and amid the stacks of books began a lifelong love of the written word.

Megan is an active member of several writers' groups and enjoys encouraging other writers in their pursuits. She volunteers her talents to her church and local nonprofit organizations and speaks to writers' and women's groups. When she's not tapping out another story on her computer, she loves to hang out with her husband and three adult children.

Megan holds a BA in communications, with a specialization in mass media from the State University of New York at Plattsburgh. She has been a radio and television reporter, a Web content editor, a contributing writer for local newspapers, and has worked for a weekly newspaper. Megan has sold magazine articles locally and nationally. In her day job, she works in the marketing department of an upscale Denver portrait studio.