

Love From Both Sides



A True Story of Soul Survival and Sacred Sexuality
Stephanie Riseley

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By
Stephanie Riseley



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I love you.

Chapter One

Free at Last!

I had my hand on my husband's heart when it stopped beating. To feel his big, strong heart come to a complete and utter stop under my hand was so shocking, I didn't have time to even think or react; because, just as his heart stopped, I felt "him" whoosh through me like a wind, and then from behind I heard, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!" What? Had Dan become Martin Luther King? I turned to look behind me. Was he on the ceiling? No. Where then? What? Free? Free! Free of me...of our life?

This is not what you want to hear after you've just spent six manic, exhausting months doing everything possible to save a man. I turned back to look at the face I loved. The man that I'd married just twelve years before, the love of my life, the man I'd waited for so long to come. That man. The man who asked me to marry him on the fourth date, the man who worshiped my body when he made love to me, the man who could make me scream. The man whose soul I thought I knew so well. The man I fought with, the man I hated sometimes, the man who hated me. The man whose smell I couldn't get enough of. That man? And the asshole died? He died! How could that be? He'd leave me? I wanted to scream, "No! Don't go! Come back!" But all I could do was whisper, "No, no, no. Please, no."

Samuel, my straight-arrow, twenty-eight-year-old stepson, who stood stock still next to the bed in the Intensive Care Unit at Kaiser, would say later that Dan, my husband, had whipped into him and said, "Sam! Sam! I know it looks like I'm dead, but it's okay! It's really okay. I mean, I'm dead, but it's all right."

That night as I roamed the rooms of our little duplex, just screaming in the unbelievable pain of loss (thank God, my neighbors are Russians because they understand wailing grief), I thought that this was the end of our particular "love story." But I was wrong. Completely wrong, for it was really only a beginning. It was a reclaiming of our own authentic love, and a reconnecting to a love story that began a very long time ago.

It took me months to understand and to trust that what I experienced that night in the ICU wasn't just shock, grief, and utter craziness. It is why I write this

book. My experience with my husband after he died was very specific, but was as real to me as oxygen. Can you see oxygen? No. But you know it's there because you continue to breathe and you continue to live. And so it is with your own "connection" to the source. You may not see it, acknowledge it, but you know it's there just the same.

If you were drawn to pick up this book, then these words were meant for you to hear. You have a love – a husband, a wife, a lover, a sacred sex partner – and it is my job to share what I *thought* was the reality of our own love story and then to tell the "truth" of what was really going on. For what was going on with us might just help you to understand and appreciate more about your own sacred, sexual, eternal relationship. Unfortunately, don't think for a moment that it means uneventful and blissful. When you meet the love of your life, you've got business together and Sacred Agreements that need to be fulfilled.

I started out to write a book called *The Married Girl's Guide to Hot and Sacred Sex*. The book you're reading is still about the sacredness of sex, but it's also about death and our connection with the "In Between," as the Buddhists call it. Sex and death go hand-in-hand: one creates life, one takes it away. When sex is good, we feel connected with "a oneness"; we feel connected with the "All That Is," the Godhead, the Sacred. Since bookshelves at Barnes and Noble's and Borders book store simply overflow with how-to sex books, I realized I didn't need to write another one. Anyone can tell you what goes where, how to have multiple orgasms or how to give great head – all valuable information.

My book is different, because my experience is different. In the months after Dan died, he gave me first-hand, personal awareness that a specific consciousness survives after death, at least for awhile. If I can share my own experience, it might help to remind you that it's the relationship with that sometimes exasperating, challenging, frustrating mate who shares your bed that counts. It counts now, and it counts in the "In Between."

My own journey to awareness began the night Dan died and continued for more than a year. In that year, I discovered what agreements we made with each other, what we were meant to achieve together, what we managed to accomplish, what we didn't and why. Yes, my husband died that night, but truth be told, he died so that our love would live. For in the months before his dying, we'd almost lost each other and we'd almost lost our love. We simply weren't "paying attention."

Since I wasn't paying attention, it's amazing how much I knew yet refused to acknowledge. The morning Dan died, for instance, I woke up at four a.m. with the bitter taste of adrenalin in my mouth. I knew this day was different. It was Wednesday, the day after Christmas 2001 and Dan was in the hospital at Kaiser

Permanente in Los Angeles. Some things you get used to, and I'd gotten used to Dan being in the hospital. He'd had a "nasty" case of acute leukemia for more than six months by then. Lots of people get leukemia and they get over it, right? I was sure that Dan, my big, strong husband, would get over it too. I, myself, had gotten over a condition that the doctors fully expected me to die of and I assumed that Dan would get over this. I knew he would.

He'd gone in on Saturday with just another case of pneumonia (if you don't have platelets, you're prone to infection). So today they were going to do a thoracentesis – a lung tap – to see if they could drain off any of the accumulated fluid. As far as I was concerned, this was a simple procedure. When I was young, I'd had lots of them performed on me, and they were not a big problem. From my memory, I told him they would stick a big needle into his lung and they'd draw out the amber fluid so he could breathe again. It was a snap, and I'd told Dan just that.

But as I dressed that morning, I saw my own blood-shot, red-rimmed eyes in the mirror, and I knew I was terrified. Our two "alternative" doctors said Dan was getting better, but thought that we'd have another six months before he would be well again. Sick people are not always at their best, and Dan was no different. Since I'd once been a very sick person myself, I knew how awful it feels to be in pain all the time. Still, I knew we'd get through this – it was just a matter of time.

Wrong again. By the end of that day, Dan was dead. Death is so final, or that's what I thought. After all the screaming and crying I was capable of, I finally collapsed into bed around four-thirty in the morning. But just two hours later I woke up, startled. It was as if someone screamed in my ear, "Get up! Get up! Go outside!"

Okay! I thought. All right! Stop it! It was barely light, but I got up and dragged myself outside, then looked east. I stood in the chill of dawn, and watched as the sun burst through the clouds, and the horizon filled with streaks of deep reds, blues and golds. Then I heard a disembodied voice say, "It's a new day. You will go on."

It would be an understatement to say that I was not in a good mood. Go on? Why should I? Who'll care? So I sullenly went back to bed and to sleep. Four months of unrelenting hell passed as I mourned the love of my life – the stubborn, immovable, impossible man I'd just lost, but whom I still loved beyond endurance. Grief can be so intense, and I was simply sure I was losing my mind. At least that's what I thought when I woke up climaxing one night and *knowing* that my dead husband had just had sex with me. Sex in the afterlife, you say? You bet. Sex is the "cosmic connection," and weird as it seems, our own sacred, sexual connection didn't end with Dan's death.

That's why in April, I decided to go back to the book I was thinking of writing before he got sick: *The Married Girl's Guide to Hot and Sacred Sex*. I wanted to write it because most of my married girlfriends were either not having any sex at all, or if they were, it certainly wasn't the kind they used to have when they were wild, single babes: the "tear off your clothes, throw you down and fuck you silly" kind of sex. I wanted to find out why, and then figure out how, and even *if* we could reclaim our "authentic" sex life.

I'd gotten married late, and I had my own very specific opinions on how to keep the home fires burning. I felt the "wife job" had to be taken seriously. I fussed with dinners and we ate together whenever possible. I insisted that Dan and I take time for one another; we scheduled "dates," time spent just talking. We'd light a fire, sit on the couch, talk and laugh. Sometimes we'd have sex, sometimes we wouldn't – but at least we had the option and the energy.

So I gathered a group of friends together – mostly over-extended, professional working moms – at a friend's house. They would be my focus group. We all sat around talking about how hard marriage was in the first place, but when kids come along? Sex? Forget it! "Lying down is enough of an orgasm for me," one friend said.

I asked them questions like, "How do you deal with grievances?" "Do you schedule sex?" "Dates?" As they bitched, moaned, and complained about their husbands, I realized that of the fourteen women there, I was the only one who wasn't married and was *never*, ever having sex – at least with anyone still among the living. And it hit me like a ton of bricks once again – Dan's dead? My husband's dead? I filled up with an achy heaviness and I simply had to go lie down. By now I knew that this was what "physical mourning" felt like, so I just went to bed and left everyone else to chat away about their sex lives and marriages.

The next day was a Sunday, and Sundays were the worst – no husband, no hugging, no sex. I'd endured four hard months without Dan, and once again, mourning crashed into me like a tsunami and I went down. As I sat in bed crying, I picked up a journal and started writing:

Sunday, April 14, 2002 – It's 12:30 daytime.

I'm in bed. Crying and crying because my heart still aches. My insides heave and I miss Dan.

But I miss the Dan that "might have been" more than the Dan that was actually here.

It's Sunday, if he were really here, face it, he'd be watching a God-damned football/baseball/basketball game on TV or staring at his stupid computer. He'd ignore me – make me furious!

Humph! I thought, That'll teach him to die! Finally, I got mad, and because I got angry, my energy shifted.

I sat there thinking about the night before and my book, when something like a focused buzz drilled into my ear and someone yelled: “Put the pen in the other hand! Put the pen in the other hand!” I looked around, Oh, God! I’m going crazy. But I did it anyway. I put the pen in my left hand and it slowly started to move, first forming letters, and then words:

From Dan the man –

You are my goddess now and forever. We walked a life together that allowed me to experience my own ability to love so profoundly and deeply because of you. You must honor what we had together and forget the *rest*.

I was an idiot much of the time and for that I am truly sorry. Please forgive me. And forgive yourself for not being superwoman.

I stopped and stared at the awkward writing. I could feel “Dan,” his energy, blasting through me. I could feel his delight and relief that he could finally reach me. I knew it was Dan and not just my longing for him.

Samuel, his son, had been “hearing” from Dan for months. Actually, to hear Sam tell it, Dan was simply chatting up a storm. “Dad’s trying to explain how it all works. He can speak to me, but I have to provide the words. I don’t hear his voice, but it’s him. I know it’s him.” So if Samuel – logical, practical Samuel who unlike me had no experience in “alternative” anything, could hear Dan – maybe I wasn’t going crazy after all.

Actually, Sam and I both experienced Dan’s “coming back” at the same time when we had to go to Callanan’s Mortuary and Funeral Home to arrange for his cremation. It was as if Dan just tagged along.

In real life, Dan’s favorite TV show was the first season of “Six Feet Under,” which was about a struggling mortuary owned by a dysfunctional family. The first season’s villain was a Big Corporation that was trying to drive them out of business. The show always started out with a death and the Dead Person usually had a speaking part.

When Sam and I got to Callanan’s, the funeral director, Cindy, was blasting the top tunes of 2001 throughout the place, but that seemed fitting. Cindy sat us down in her office and started to explain our options. I told Cindy that Dan’s favorite show was “Six Feet Under.”

“Oh, mine too,” she laughed. “Some funeral directors hate it, but they just have no sense of humor.”

“We must be in the right place. How accurate is the show?”

“Oh, it’s spot on. Whoever writes it must have worked in a funeral home.”

“Dan would want to be with a small, family-owned mortuary just like on the show,” I said.

“Sorry, you’re too late for that,” Cindy said. “We were bought out three years ago. If you want a privately-owned mortuary, you’ll have to go outside Los Angeles; everyone else has been bought out. Of course, the corporations can’t break into the black mortuaries. You could go to Inglewood, Compton or Watts if that’s what you really want.”

Suddenly, Dan yelled out, “Okay! Let’s go to Watts! I’ve really always been a black person. I need to be with my people!”

Sam squeezed my hand – he heard him too. We were about to stand up and head off to Watts. Obviously Cindy couldn’t hear Dan, because she was still talking, telling us that this mortuary was now owned by the Catholic something or others.

“The Catholics?” Dan said, “Okay, I’ll be with the Catholics.”

Since Dan was Jewish that might seem odd, but we both adored the women (and former nuns) who run the Immaculate Heart Center for Spiritual Renewal in Montecito, Calif., just south of Santa Barbara. It’s a beautiful estate that once served as their novitiate, and Dan and I loved it there.

So Dan stayed at Callanan’s.

A few days later, I decided to head to Immaculate Heart and get myself renewed. As I drove along the coast toward Santa Barbara, glancing at the sparkling blue Pacific, I could hear Dan “chatting” to me. It felt as if he could see the beauty of the ocean through my eyes. I heard him wondering why in the hell he was so damned depressed all the time. He simply couldn’t understand it; I felt his sheer frustration and annoyance. But because his chatting merged with my addle-brained grief, I didn’t know if it was actually Dan or my own inner monologue. His real voice was so fresh in my consciousness that I couldn’t separate it out.

While I stayed at the Retreat Center, I continued to “hear” Dan, but like many people, I discounted it. For all I knew, it could have just been my own hallucinating mind. When I hiked to a waterfall we both loved, only days after he died, I felt him there with me. When I walked through the library, I passed a book about Chartres, the cathedral in France, and it was as if Dan screamed, “Stop! Look! The book! Take my ashes to Chartres. I need to be in Chartres. I want to be mixed with the stones.”

Okay, fine. I knew he loved Chartres. He’d been a blacksmith in the 70s, and talked about its magnificent stained glass windows and its bells and ironwork. Since I’d always wanted to go to France, I thought, “Great, I’ll go to Chartres. Someday.”

But on that day, his body hadn’t even been cremated.

A few mornings later, however, when I was still in bed, it felt as if I were standing next to Dan, holding his hand, as we watched his body being cremated. He just wanted me to be there with him. So I stayed put, ethereally, and held his hand as we watched his body burn. Still, as far as I was concerned, it was all up for grabs. I wanted to stay grounded in “reality,” but my reality was pretty shaky since

losing a husband completely undoes you. My brain was in shock and it stayed that way for months – until that Sunday in April, when I got sick and tired of being in so much pain, and I finally just let his energy move my hand.

I began to ask him questions. I asked about a dream I'd had the night before where a disembodied penis came floating toward me, trying to pat my cheek. He wrote:

I tried to reach you but couldn't.

That would be my Dan, thinking a “floating penis” just might appeal to me. It's not as if people change. Then I burst into tears again, because I felt his presence so intensely. All at once, a rush of frustration shot through me and the pen began to move again:

Cry as much as you want my beautiful, you won't bring me back. The only thing you can do to communicate with me is this. Believe it is *authentic*. Because it is.

We are on the same team now. What's really amusing about the whole little drama is that I am better off dead. I had lost my reason to live and you knew it was killing you. You have your own time frame, babe and you ain't through yet.

Later, I asked him about what happened on the night he died.

When you crawled into bed with me, I knew I could let go and to show you how much I loved you – and to *make up* – I let your hand feel my last heartbeat. Then I whooshed past you. You felt it – I knew you'd felt me go through you. But then your own *shock* kicked in and that horrid night...I was there, unable to get through until you fell asleep – I saw the sunrise and woke you up. I screamed.

This is from my journal:

Dan? I miss you so much. The pain feels unbearable sometimes. The deep hole in my heart...but why, I try to ask myself, why wasn't I happier with you? Was it me? Was it you? Was it us?

You forget our perfect moments – the moments when we loved each other beyond the limits of our world.

(I started to cry and I felt him get frustrated again.)

Don't go being crazy. My best times were with you. You gave me much joy. Don't dwell on all we didn't give to each other. We did a great job being married. The problem for you now is to find the course you want to follow from now on. You need to honor the emptiness of your life. Embrace the quiet. Sit in silence. Believe that you can communicate with me, or at least the familiar part of me. We have more business together.

That was the beginning of my “Dan channeling.” It continued for almost a year, and in that time he led me on a journey through the In Between like my own personal Virgil.

Fortunately, I learned to channel on the computer, which was much less draining, although Dan’s “presence” did take an energetic toll every time he “came in.” In more than two hundred pages, Dan narrates his way through his “re-education.” I meet his “oversoul,” and I meet my own. Dan tells me about viewing his “soul progressions,” and then like a kid, he wants to show me mine, but my own “guides” stop him. He tells me about our pre-planned “agreements,” which, much to my chagrin, he stubbornly refused to fulfill. He makes amends, and more amends. He makes me laugh – something he loved to do in life – and he makes me cry. He yearns for sex, which seems strange since he has no body. He longs for my body and he longs for his own.

Finally, he chooses his next adventure and he takes flight. He’s conceived into a new body and he tells me about his altogether new and challenging situation.

Yes, Dan died that night. But ultimately what I discovered and understood deeply was that my husband died so that I would live. He died because he betrayed himself, he betrayed me, and he betrayed *us*. That’s why he had to come back to make things right. And he did. He gave me back the love of my life – his true, authentic self.

He encouraged me to tell this story – our story – because it is a story of true love. As it turns out, it’s also a story of unrequited love that began more than four hundred years ago in a tiny town in France. And that town has a cathedral, and the cathedral has a bell. So in December of 2002, when I found my way back to France, to Chartres, and threw Dan’s ashes onto that bell, it rang for a full ten minutes.

I hope that by sharing this journey with you, the processing and postmortem of our hard fought marriage, it just might help you to pay attention to how deeply you and your mate – your *sacred* sexual partner – are connected...connected to each other and connected to the “In Between.”

Chapter Two

Welcome to the In Between

Dan's dying was not my first experience with the "In Between." I'd had others, but since I desperately wanted to be normal, I chose to ignore them.

My first happened when I was 19. I had pericarditis with bilateral lung effusions, or in English, the sack around my heart, the pericardium, got inflamed and both my lungs filled with fluid. As one doctor would say, "You've got a literally weeping heart. It's actually very poetic." Poetic perhaps, but it made it so painful to breathe that I couldn't lie down flat. My parents had no interest in my health or anything besides their own passionate dance of destruction; so consequently, I sat alone and upright in a darkened room for almost two weeks. When one of my mother's friends opened my door, looked in and saw me, it was almost too late. They rushed me to the hospital, but after the nurses got me settled into bed, I simply wanted "out." I remember closing my eyes, and it felt as if my hands were holding onto a bar just overhead, then I simply let go. Like magic, I slid easily down toward a warm, amber light. I knew exactly what was happening; I was dying and I felt relieved. But then out of nowhere, something grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and yanked me back. It felt as if my body screamed, "Hey, wait just a damned minute! You're nineteen. You may not want to live, but all of us hundred-twenty trillion cells do! So get a grip, girl!"

As it turns out, according to "Dan," it wasn't just my body, it was my "over-soul" and my "guides." It didn't matter to me who or what brought me back, because there I was, in searing pain, and knowing that I would live, which at the time was not good news.

That was in April of 1967, long before Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published her book on death and dying, so like many people, I kept that experience to myself. But it changed me; it gave me the courage to ignore the doctors who told me I had five years to live. So I had systemic lupus...so what? People got over worse things, and somehow I knew I'd get over this. The following March, I managed to get myself into University of California, Berkeley, which still amazes me, since I'd barely bothered to show up at Hollywood High School. After three years in Berkeley, I moved

to New York City to study acting. I lived there eleven years, moved back to Los Angeles for seven, then back to Berkeley to finish up my degree in 1988, so UCLA would be kind enough to let me into their graduate school of film.

In the twenty years in between, I flirted with the alternative world, but kept my distance. It seemed too flaky, airy-fairy, and filled with far too many spiritually smug people. Although, to be honest, Jane Roberts's channeled books, *Seth Speaks* and *The Nature of Personal Reality* changed my life. Her books not only gave me doable exercises that helped me heal my damaged body; they also gave me a dynamically different perspective on day-to-day living.

Looking back on it now, I was connected to the alternative realm whether I wanted to be or not. For instance, while I still lived in New York, I heard a man on the radio talk about past life regressions. So I sat right down, followed his instructions, and wham! I saw myself as a nun – an ugly, French nun – sitting in my little cell, writing and looking out onto a beautiful garden. I knew the time period was late Middle Ages and I saw her life then, but I didn't take it seriously.

Besides, I was too busy supporting my acting addiction, so on weekend nights I drove a taxi to pay for the acting, dancing, and singing classes that went along with it. One snowy, slippery night, when I got home at three a.m., completely exhausted, I put Beethoven's Ninth on the stereo and curled up on the couch to unwind. I was still in my twenties, so I sat there wondering, "What was life all about? What was its purpose: to do good work? Be a success? Find happiness?" When suddenly my whole insides filled up with that same radiant, amber light. Only this time a voice – a distinctly male voice – boomed out, "Life is to be loved." Implicit in that message was the realization, the deep understanding, that life wasn't to be figured out or fretted over (my own unending "inner monologue") – life was simply to be *loved*. Since I come from a background steeped in American Protestant self-denial, "life is to be loved" was real news to me. I thought life was simply to be suffered through. I assumed my ability to stoically withstand pain was the path to spiritual redemption. It's the "Brownie Points in Heaven" view of reality that most good little Christian girls are taught.

Did the "life is to be loved" message solve any problems? Did I pay attention? No, I had more important things to worry about. I studied acting with the amazing Stella Adler, and so I only asked the Big Questions, the questions that mattered – What is Art? Truth? Beauty?

Life goes on (unless, of course, it doesn't) and mine continued for years without any more nudges from the "In Between." Then in June of 1988, my baby sister Gheri-Llynn committed suicide. She was eleven years younger and only twenty-nine. During her downward spiral into despair, I tried desperately to get her help. I finally managed to get her into UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute

(NPI), where I'd worked for four years, but all they could do was drug her into a shaky-handed stupidity. She hated how that made her feel and consequently, she was determined to do what she wanted. And she wanted "out."

The month before she died, while I still lived in Berkeley, finishing off twenty-eight units of undergraduate work, Gheri-Llynn drove up to say good-bye. It was my birthday and she handed me a beautiful pair of blue teardrop earrings and said, "These stones are three million years old. Some things last and some things don't."

I'm five-foot-eight and she was just barely five-three; I grabbed her by the shoulders, looked down into her deep brown eyes and said, "Gheri-Llynn, if you do this, I will never forgive you. I swear. I will hunt you down in the afterlife. I'm serious. You cannot do this." She looked away, hugged me and kissed me good-bye.

The night before I was due to drive back down to LA, (where I was going to try to get more help for her) my father called at one a.m. All he said was, "Steph?" and I knew she was dead. I threw the phone across the room and started screaming, "My baby! My baby! My baby!" I screamed for five hours.

I drove back to Los Angeles and stayed in a friend's guest house the next night. As I lay there in the stunned disbelief that goes along with death, I turned and looked through two tall French glass doors out into the darkness. Suddenly, amorphous, scary figures of black men began to sail through the doors toward me. One held a knife, the next one held a gun, the next a rope, but they evaporated just before they reached me. Each one looked so real, so threatening; they were very specific people. I knew they weren't real – I knew it, yet I didn't know it.

I'm not afraid of black men. As I said, I drove a cab in New York City for seven years, and since I was just out of Berkeley, I drove with my belief system in tact. Which means that I was one of the few taxi drivers who would pick up black people – black men in particular – and take them to more challenging areas of the city: to Harlem, the South Bronx, Bed-Sty, East New York, to the places where many African American people lived. And believe me, in the late 70s at the height of the drug epidemic, those were dangerous destinations. But I drove in and out of these places all the time, so fear of black men was not an issue for me.

Gheri-Llynn, on the other hand, had been raped by a black man. She was only twenty-one when he climbed through her bedroom window at three a.m., and held a knife to her throat while he raped her.

As I continued to watch these flying black men, I wondered what the hell they could be. Since I did field research evaluating the incidence of mental illness in the population at large when I worked at NPI, I knew that one of the key indicators of schizophrenia was seeing things that aren't there. I kept my eye on these black phantoms, these threatening men, trying to think clinically, unemotionally. "Well, this is interesting. This must be what it's like to be crazy." Until finally it

hit me. I'd finally broken. I *was* crazy. Then I filled with fear. I would be like Lily Tomlin's character Trudy, in the stage play "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe" – one of the crazy people who roam the streets, chatting to the phantoms who keep them company.

And that's when the leaping stream of black men stopped. They simply evaporated. Then Gheri-Llynn "came through." In real life, she was a tiny, determined, fireball of energy with a wicked sense of humor, and it was Gheri-Llynn, all right. "Wow! This is nothing like what I expected. You were right, damn it! That was so stupid of me. Nothing to do about it now. But those black guys? I just needed you to experience my reality. I needed you to understand why I couldn't go on living. I was too scared – all the time." This happened in a flash, not in words, but in images and feeling tones. I tried to ask her what the Other Side was like, but she couldn't tell me. "Too complicated," she said. This was all she could do now.

Then she wanted to be held. I was lying still, my arms at my sides, and yet it felt as if I held my chubby, cuddly three-year-old baby sister. I hugged her and she hugged me. My body filled to the brim with so much love that I felt throbbing love-tingles in my fingernails, and then she was gone.

I didn't hear from her again or directly from anyone else, even though my mother died just a few years later. My father died in 1999, and then my older sister, Valrie, died the February just before Dan. But I didn't hear from any of them.

When Dan died, I dropped into the deep despair of mourning. I'd fill up with an intense energy, and all I could do was cry. But I kept getting strong urges to turn on his computer and pick up his e-mail. Finally, I sat down at his desk, got his e-mail, and found some old e-mails to me. One reminded me of our life when Dan would be in the front room at his desk, and I'd be working in my office in the back, trying to finish a script.

He wrote this one while the Democratic National Convention of 2000 was in session:

----- Original Message -----

From: Daniel Wax

To: Stephanie Riseley

Sent: Monday, August 14, 2000 9:48 AM

Subject: Date

The Bcc is for your subconscious.

I just wanted to tell you in a non-verbal way (sometimes the medium does get in the way of the message) how much I still am so madly in love with you (most of the time - the lil' imp speaks) and speak into your ear sweet whisperings of love and invitation - to a date tonight, starting right after Yoga. The date will take on the meanderings it

freely must do for it must not be too scripted, but it will definitely involve a massage from my hands on your beautiful body, should you desire it. I would suggest that you select a snack of your choice, light and preparatory to love. I will cool the glasses and open the champagne and toast you, about 7:50 PM. Depending on the heat factor, we will commence the evening at our usual locale, the couch.

This message is brought to you in part by the Democratic National Committee of Hope, betting that we can enhance our ability to live in the moment, (the one seeming constant purveyed by all the sages and sagesses thru all cultures and time - as the key to salvation, and probably even fortune) if we can concentrate and so honor these moments of our love. It will get us home just fine, as long as we honor it.

My sweet Stephanie - I love you. Please accept my heartfelt invitation.

Dan

I read that, sitting there at his desk, and just wept. The desk where for almost four years he worked on “Conflict Solvers,” a mediation Internet start-up venture that simply ate up the time of his life – and mine.

And then I found a file, marked “To Steph.” I opened it, but it was empty, except for the words, “Twelve years.” Dan died four days before our twelfth anniversary, and for our anniversaries, I would always ask for one of his letters. I knew that empty file would have been my “anniversary letter.” I closed the file, and went on putting one foot in front of the other, my only expectation of myself during that time. But then a few weeks later, I plunked myself back down at his desk. I opened the file, and rested my fingers on the keyboard. It was as if he just started typing through me.

Anniversary Letter – 2001

Twelve years. When I wrote those words I remember the exhaustion of our life together – the push and pull, the frantic battle to save me – but even though that seems like reality, it wasn’t. Reality – our reality – goes on... continues whether I breathe air, fart, annoy you, love you, want you, yearn for you, hold you, fight with you, want to murder you, want to save you, want to leave. It goes on, my sweet Stephanie. It goes on. We are a couple now. We are a team. You gave me your magic and I believe in it now. I have no doubts now because your “magic” is my reality.

The twelve years we spent together as a married couple were the best years of an otherwise unremarkable existence. Your grief is so tangible to me – so painful to me that sometimes I marvel at your ability to feel.

We didn’t celebrate our last “first date” or our last anniversary. But we celebrated our love and I continue to feel the love you have for me. You

must believe this...you are not crazy...even though if it weren't for the fact that you were channeling *me*, I'd be sure – completely sure – you were.

Let this not be the last love letter I write to you. Sit with me...let me feel your love. It will do us both more good than you understand. Forgive me for not letting you love me more. Forgive me for pushing you away. Forgive me the pain I caused you. I can't undo that...I can only love you now, and truthfully forever. We have many lifetimes to annoy each other, to fight with each other, to love each other. I only wish I could do the dishes for you...me.

And so did I, because I hate doing dishes.

* * *

That was in March. I knew that was Dan, yet it seemed way too strange for my taste. Maybe it was just the mourning. Maybe I was delusional. But by mid-April, when the channeling just flooded my circuits, I connected with him quite easily. Sometimes, however, it drained my energy so completely that I would just conk out. Dan urged me to go back to his computer and type there, rather than do the left-handed channeling. But I hated sitting at his machine, for all kinds of reasons. I didn't like his chair, and there was an anger in me about how many hours of our life together he spent focused on more important things. When I finally sat down and put my fingers on the keys, I could feel his frustration with me. It was just like in life – he was downright annoyed with me. This is what he said:

April 25, 2002

We need a schedule to talk. Cannot be called "away," unless it's an emergency.

Let us decide when it is you want to communicate and I will make the time for it. I suggest you do it first thing in the morning when your mind is not filled with the events of the day. But you know this already. I just wanted to reinforce your own beliefs. Your body is still in mourning, which I find amazing. As I said, I had no idea how deeply you loved me. Of course, there is a part of you that didn't understand that as well. We were both pretty unconscious. But still, we did a damned good job of it! And I will be *eternally* (underline that) grateful to you for standing up to me as best as you could. I was a knuckle-headed dope for much of our marriage.

Now, re: your book. Yes, you will write it. And I will help. I always was such a writer. Thank you for insisting I write you those letters. My god, to be forced to say on paper what you meant to me. That was the gift. That was your gift to me. And don't think it didn't pass my awareness that I gave

you anniversary presents, but you never gave them to me. And we both understood why. You celebrated our marriage everyday, in every way. From the flowers you fussed with, to the shopping and dinners you insisted we eat together. I am so grateful that you cared enough for me to continue to do that all the days of our lives together. No one else – and I mean no one else – would have had the determination to continue on with me.

So from that April on, I couldn't pretend that the channeling wasn't real and I couldn't ignore the In Between any longer. It screamed too loudly for me not to pay attention. I started out to write a book to help married girls get more sex into their harried lives. The real quest for all of us, however, is to connect with our own "core selves" – the sacred. And here's the good news: sex is sacred. Your relationship is sacred. Here's what Dan said to his newly widowed wife while trying to encourage her to write:

In your book, if you can communicate the beauty of animal, smelly, joyous sexual expression to only *one other* soul on this plane of reality, your effort will be worthwhile. But your time, once again, is limited. I don't say this to scare you. Only to make you focus on what is important to you. The book, and the information contained in the book, will help many, many other souls who are in the same kind of pain.

It will lead them to make the journey to connect with their lost loves, children, parents and then connect with their own source. And that, my dear, is your *true mission*. You are part, a small part, of the working whole that is set in place. But you have to commit to do the work. If you don't do the work, it won't get done. No one up here can type!

But I could type, and so I did.

Melvin Morse, M.D., the pediatrician who wrote *Closer to the Light, Transformed by the Light, Parting Visions*, and *Where God Lives*, scientifically documents experiences like mine, as have Raymond Moody, M.D., and the late Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Still, I feel it's a bit like trying to explain blue to a blind person, but since you're still reading, you probably know what "blue" is.

Chapter Three

“When Harry Met Sally”

If this were a movie, this would be the flashback. For to make sense of what Dan reveals about our marriage and “agreements,” you need to see where we started. How Dan asked me to marry him on the fourth date – only two weeks after we met – used to be my favorite story, and I’d tell it at the drop of a hat. I was forty-two and terminally single, so it was an extremely popular story with single girls over forty, because it filled them with such hope. If I could find the love of my life after forty, then maybe they could too. It’s still a good story, but now it doesn’t seem like the great leap of faith it once did. Back then I thought that I married a complete stranger. As it turned out, Dan was anything but a stranger.

In the summer of 1987, I read Shakti Gawain’s *Living in the Light*, and I decided it was time to take Joseph Campbell’s advice seriously and “follow my bliss.” I wanted to be a screenwriter, so I decided to get myself into UCLA’s graduate film school. I filled myself with “determined optimism,” overcame obstacle after obstacle, and I got myself in. When I met Dan in October of 1989, I was doing exactly what I wanted – at long last. I had just started my second year at UCLA and I loved my life. I lived with the wonderful, acerbic character actress, Eve Arden, or “Our Miss Brooks,” for anyone old enough to remember her TV show. My job with Eve was to relieve Ana, her longtime, devoted housekeeper on Sundays and Mondays, which meant cooking a couple of meals, taking Eve to church on Sunday mornings, then out to lunch and to the movies. It was a great job, because as we drove around Beverly Hills, Eve would tell me all the Old Hollywood gossip, like how she’d go dancing with Greg Peck, or how she turned down Clark Gable because he had bad breath. (“Eve! You turned down Clark Gable?”)

I also headed up my own goddess group, where once a month I gathered a bunch of girlfriends together and led them through a guided visualization based on the “Seth” book exercises and *Living in the Light*. For those of you who know

those books, we sent our “pink bubbles up into Framework Two.” My “pink bubble” always included my winning an Academy Award, finding “the love of my life,” and having a baby girl. I filled my heart with big dreams and quite magically, they seemed to be coming true.

I’d just won “The Women in Film” screenwriting award and finished a rewrite on a “Made for TV” movie, but I longed to meet the love of my life; I *knew* he was out there somewhere. In early July, I’d met a sexy, talented art director named Jim, who was out of town working on “Back to the Future III,” the Western. He drank too much for my taste, and told me straight out he would never marry again, but hey, no one’s perfect. The movie was shooting up in California’s gold country near Jamestown, and I drove back and forth all summer long. Now it was mid-fall, and I hadn’t heard from Jim in weeks and weeks. Finally, I decided that it was only a summer romance, so when Dan called, I agreed to go out with him.

Dan was forty-nine the night he showed up on my doorstep. He’d just finished law school, and as I used to say, “had just stepped off the boat from Mendocino.” For even though it was 1989, to Dan it was still the Sixties. He’d met my tall, beautiful friend Valerie at a party and asked her out. She was engaged to her future ex-husband, but told Dan that she knew someone he’d like. She called me, told me about him and I said, “I don’t want to go out with a lawyer.”

“But he’s an *environmental* lawyer. He wants to save the redwoods. Besides, he’s cute and when’s the last time you heard from Jim?”

“Okay, give him my number.” A girl has to keep her options open, especially at forty-two.

We went to dinner – nothing fancy – we split a pizza and a salad. When I worked for the Neuropsychiatric Institute, I interviewed people to determine the incidence of mental illness in the population at large, and I still tend to interview everyone. So I interviewed Dan. He was from Brooklyn – a “red diaper” baby. Both of his parents, a postal worker and grade school teacher, had been idealistic Trotskyite Communists in the 30s, as a lot of New Yorkers were in the Depression years. Did they know Stalin was on his way to killing 30 million people? No. They believed that the Soviet Union was the most advanced society to ever grace the face of planet Earth. Dan told me about how his mother worshiped him, and how his younger sister resented him because of it.

“I peaked at eight,” he said, and smiled. “I was president of my first, second and third grade classes. But then, I don’t know what the hell happened. I got really shy.”

In 1948, when Joseph McCarthy’s House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings were in full swing, and the great Red Scare swept the nation, both his parents came under suspicion and surveillance.

“My dad had to sign a loyalty oath to keep his job,” Dan said. “My mom made me promise I would never tell *anything* I heard at home,”

As he talked, I could picture the cramped, row house street he grew up on, because I knew Brooklyn cold. I also knew his mom. Brooklyn overflowed with feisty, opinionated little dynamos who ruled their own private universes.

Dan said he moved to Berkeley in 1969.

“Really?” I said. “I was there then. Where’d you live?”

“Parker and Ellsworth.”

“That’s weird. I lived just around the corner.”

“No kidding. We must have passed each other all the time on the way to campus.”

“You couldn’t have missed me,” I said. “I’m allergic to the sun, so I had to wear big hats all the time. And since I wouldn’t wear hats with jeans, I wore dresses – short dresses – up to my ass. In that world of jeans and blue work shirts, I stood out like a sore thumb.”

“Oh, my God! You’re the girl in the hat? Of course, I remember you.”

We both laughed, because of how funny I must have looked.

“Me?” he said. “I went for the big, earth mother types – they didn’t wear make-up or bras.”

“That would have left me out. I wouldn’t be caught dead without either. You must have been, what? Twenty-nine then,” I said. “Were you still in school?”

“Briefly,” he said. “I’d transferred from a Ph.D. program in Philosophy at Santa Barbara to Berkeley. I mean, Berkeley was the only place to be, wasn’t it? I spent a couple half-hearted semesters in grad school studying Maoist thought, but I was really just waiting for the Revolution to begin.” He laughed and shook his head. “When the Revolution refused to begin on schedule, I quit school to become a welder. I wanted to be part of the proletariat. And then I met Maggie – my ex-wife – and we got married. I was thirty-two.”

“How long were you married?”

“Depends on what you call married. We were legally married eight years, but our marriage fell apart pretty soon after my son, Sam, was born.”

“How come?”

“I was her fourth husband – she was five years older – she didn’t have a whole lot of patience. And do you remember the O’Neil book? *Open Marriage?*”

“Where everyone sleeps with everyone else?”

“Total nonsense, of course. But, we tried it.” He turned away, and stiffened. “That’s not quite true. What really happened was that Maggie fell in love with her pottery student. He was only seventeen. A shy kid whose mother asked her to bring him out of his shell. She brought him out, all right.”

He tried to smile, but his eyes shot away – the pain of that memory.

"You got divorced then?"

"No," he said, "Maggie kept telling me that she still loved me. She convinced me that if I really loved her, I'd let this passion burn itself out. I wanted to be 'leading edge, far out,' so I went along. I mean, what was I going to do? I didn't want to take Sam away from his mother. I was bored stiff working for General Electric anyway, so we sold our house in Livermore and moved to Mendocino. Together. As a unit."

"Excuse me?" I put my fork down and stared at him.

"I know it sounds strange now, but it was the Seventies. What can I say? When I realized she was never going to love me again, I finally moved out."

"Wait. Stop the presses. You lived with your wife while she was sleeping with another man?"

"Look," he said, suddenly defensive, "I was an idiot. But our little household was nothing out of the ordinary in Mendocino. People experimented with everything, pushed the envelope over the edge. I mean, Jim Jones was the superintendent of the school district, for Pete's sake."

"The guy who moved his flock to Guyana and then Kool-Aided everyone to death? That Jim Jones?"

"Right. You see? We were almost conservative by Mendocino standards."

"When did you leave New York?"

"Sixty-seven. Everyone was heading to California in the Sixties, and I knew I had to be a part of it. I had friends in grad school at UC Santa Barbara, and they said, 'Come on down!' So I applied and got in. What heaven! I lived way high up in the hills, near Painted Cave. I rode my Harley down this wild, windy road toward the Pacific Ocean every single day. I had a big bushy beard with hair down to my shoulders that blew straight back behind me in the wind. I got to study philosophy with Huston Smith. Man, how sweet does it get?" He smiled at the memory.

And so did I. He lived the quintessential "California Dreamin'" ideal. But "The Times, They Were a-Changin'," and then we both sighed, because things had certainly changed, but not in the direction we'd once hoped for. By the late Eighties the size of your bank account was what mattered most, and on that score, Dan and I were pretty much in the same boat – neither of us had a spare nickel.

When the check came, Dan fumbled with it. I could see that he expected me to pay for half, but I just smiled at him. He'd asked me out on a date, and I'd be damned if I wouldn't be treated like a girl – finally. The Sixties were over in my book.

After dinner I took Dan up to the bar at the Bel Air Hotel for a drink. It's a cozy piano bar with wood paneled walls done up in hunter greens, rich reds and when it's cool enough, there's a fire burning. We sat next to the fire and talked

some more, then I paid for the drinks with my American Express card. (I didn't know it then, but I would be married by the time I paid the bill.)

Then, under a full harvest moon, I led Dan through the hotel's lush gardens, and it was so romantic, he tried to kiss me. But his bushy mustache felt like a brush, so it was just a peck.

As he drove me back to Eve's, he said, "Do you want to come to my place?"

I turned toward him, "Are you out of your mind?"

"Oh, right. I didn't want to insult you by not at least asking."

And that might have been all she wrote. Dan said later that he wouldn't have called me again, since he thought I wasn't interested. (Read: I didn't want to sleep with him.) The following night though, I had tickets to go see a guitarist perform in Pasadena. My friend Valerie was supposed to go with me, but she wanted to stay home, so I called Dan instead. After the concert, I decided I would show him my Los Angeles – I'm a native, and I like the place. New Yorkers and Northern Californians, on the other hand, seem to hate LA on sheer principle, and since Dan was both, he was no exception. I wanted him to see how beautiful the city looks at night, so I took him up to the Griffith Park Observatory.

The entrance off Los Feliz was blocked, but I know LA, and I still had my taxi-driver's heart. So I whipped my little Nissan around the barricades and took the back way up through the hills.

It was a clear, gusty October night and the city looked like a blanket of sparkling lights stretched out before us. I pointed to a long, straight-arrow street just below.

"That's Western," I said, "it goes almost to the harbor."

"Look at that." He pointed to where the street jogged to the right. "See? The engineers made a mistake."

"That's not a mistake. That's just how it goes."

When I got home that night, I wrote in my journal, "How anyone could find fault with all that beauty is simply beyond me. This guy isn't for me."

But up there under the stars, I continued to interview him.

"How old were you when you had your first sexual experience?"

Dan looked away, somewhat embarrassed.

"Hey, not fair," he said. "I went to an all men's college – Brooklyn Polytechnic. No girls. I graduated in 1961 – things were different back then. No birth control pills, and good girls didn't. Well, they did, but not with me. I was really shy."

"So what happened?"

"Three buddies and I swore we weren't going to graduate as virgins. So the night before graduation, we got on the subway, came into the city, got off near Times Square and found Consuelo – or rather she found us. She walked up to us,

and said, 'I fuck, I suck, I do everything.' She took us back to a seedy little room, and she did us one by one."

"You stood around and watched?"

"No, the other two stayed in the bathroom with her boyfriend. It was pretty creepy. Hey, but what did we know? We had a professor who always called us 'fuzzy puppies,' and that's what we were. Big fuzzy puppies. But oh, my God! When she lowered herself down on me? Man! I must have lasted all of ten seconds, and all I could think was, 'Yes! Yes! Yes! What have I been missing?'"

"And you were...?"

"Twenty-one."

We laughed and turned back to look out over the city lights as the warm Santa Ana winds blew around us.

"How about you?" he asked. "How old were you?"

"Seventeen. That's the average age for girls. First boyfriend. Still know him, and he's still a teenager."

"What'd you do about the draft?" I asked.

"I applied for Conscientious Objector status, but they denied my petition. I turned twenty-seven just before my draft board hearing, and that was the end of it. Of course, I've always wondered if it wouldn't have been a good thing to have just enlisted."

"And have your legs shot off?" I told him how I'd spent four months in a military hospital in San Francisco's Presidio, surrounded by boys with no beards and no legs.

"Yeah," he said, "but men go to war. And I'll never know if the C.O. stuff was bullshit, and I wasn't just afraid."

Dan told me that after Samuel was born, he took the job at General Electric as a nuclear engineer, and I remember thinking, "Well, that can't be a good thing." So when the French oncologist-hematologist said, "Your blood, it looks like you've lived in Chernobyl," I knew the reason why.

In Mendocino, Dan became a blacksmith, and then worked as a wine maker. When I asked him why he stayed living in such a crazy-making situation for so many years, he shrugged. "To stay near Sam."

"Why did you become a lawyer?"

"I'm Jewish. Jewish boys become doctors or lawyers, everyone knows that. Besides, when I was cellar boss at Fetzer, I only made six bucks an hour. I knew I couldn't send Sam to college making six bucks an hour."

What a good man, I thought. He did everything for his son.

Dan lived in Burbank at the time, so for convenience, I'd met him in the valley, in Toluca Lake, close to where I grew up. When I drove him back to his

car, we stopped in a parking lot. And now he interviewed me, or rather, he cross-examined me for more than two hours. I was still infatuated with Jim, so I didn't care what Dan thought of me. I was absolutely honest about everything: This is me, who I am. Take it or leave it. We talked for a couple hours, until I finally said, "Well, this must be getting pretty tiresome."

"Nope," he said. "Only game in town."

As I drove back to Eve's that night, I realized that Dan knew more about me than Jim did, and I'd been seeing Jim for more than three months.

Dan called me during the week, but I was too busy. Besides my "Eve job," I worked in the film school production store twenty hours a week and I had a script due. I couldn't go out until the following Saturday night. When Saturday came, Eve told me that her daughter Connie (whom Eve had adopted because Joan Crawford was having such a good time with her own adopted daughter, Christine) was coming to visit and she was bringing a new boyfriend. Connie was my age, and wanted any possible competition out of the house. Luckily, my friend Valerie had just moved in with her boyfriend, so her little house up in Laurel Canyon would be empty until January. I figured I'd move in there on Sunday, and work out what to do next, later.

When Dan arrived that night, I said, "Why don't we just go out to the beach and have a picnic?"

"Fine," he said. Since his Brooklyn driving sent my heart into my throat, I drove. But as we headed out Sunset Boulevard toward the beach, the fog rolled in. Okay, no picnic? No problem. I made a fast left turn, and we wound up at the old Aero Theater in Santa Monica, where they still played double bills. That night it was, "When Harry Met Sally," and "Parenthood," both movies about love and relationships. In "When Harry Met Sally," during the scenes when all the old married couples talk about how they met and fell in love, Dan took my hand and kept squeezing it.

I knew I had to tell him about Jim.

On the way home, Dan said, "You know, I talk to you all the time in my head."

"Oh, yeah? And what exactly do you say?"

"Mostly I say, I love you."

What? But before I could say anything, Dan asked what I was doing Sunday.

"I have to move," I said, and I told him why.

"Let me help you."

He wanted to help? "Great, thanks."

So the next afternoon, our fourth date, Dan came over and moved me to Valerie's, but once I got settled, I said, "There's something I've got to tell you."

He looked at me as if I were going to tell him I had AIDS, so I quickly said, "There's another man."

He nodded, and then slowly sat down at the table. "I thought so." He waited, and then looked up at me. "How long you been seeing him?"

"About three months."

"So why are you going out with me?"

"I'm not married, he's out of town, and I haven't heard from him in almost a month."

"Sorry. This isn't going to work for me. I'm falling in love here."

I knew I didn't want to close the book on this one, so I grabbed a yellow legal pad and said, "Look. Do me a favor. Take a test for me?"

I gave him what I call the "container test." It's an association game that exposes a person's inner self in about fifteen minutes. It consists of visualizing three different sized containers, then placing inanimate objects inside each one, and imbuing each object with an emotion.

Dan took the test. He chose a dumpster for his large container and he put a wine goblet inside. So I asked, "As the wine goblet inside the dumpster, you wish...?"

"I had a mate," he said.

"You will...?"

"Do what I'm made to do."

"You fear ...?"

"Being broken."

The test went on, and I looked down at the results. I'd done a lot of these, and I'd never seen such a genuinely good-hearted result. He had a strong ego, wanted to do the right thing, be of service, and be mated. Who could ask for more in a guy? I looked up at him – he seemed too good to be true.

I explained the results, and how the test worked. Then Dan said, "Okay, now you take it."

So I did. For my large object, I chose a big glass bowl, and placed an imaginary Teddy bear inside it.

Dan said, "So as the Teddy Bear inside the glass bowl, you feel..."

"Protected."

"You need...?"

"To be cuddled."

"You want...?"

"To make a baby laugh," I said.

Dan stopped and looked up at me. "Hey, you really want to have a kid, don't you?"

“I used to. But I’m forty-two. It’s too late.”

“No, it’s not. Marry me. We’ll do that.”

Marry him? I barely knew him! I was stunned speechless, but at that exact moment the phone rang. I looked at Dan and picked it up. It was Jim, calling from Jamestown. “Hey, Babe!” he said, “I’m done! I’m coming home!”

“Jim,” I said, nodding to Dan.

Dan stood up, walked outside and sat down on the porch.

I walked into the kitchen. “I haven’t heard from you in weeks and weeks.”

“I know, it’s been crazy here. I’ve been working fifteen hours a day since Zemekis left. I was first in charge, and...”

I knew I’d have to make a choice right then. And I did.

“Look, Jim, when you didn’t call, I figured it was over and I went out on a blind date. And, well... he just asked me to marry him.”

“What?” he yelled.

“I can’t talk now. Bye.” And I hung up.

Dan came back inside. “What do you want to do?”

“Before I can make any decisions, I’m going to have to try out the merchandise.”

Dan’s eyes lit up and, guy that he was, he made a step toward me.

“Not now. I’ve got to go direct a scene, but you wait right here. I’ll be back by ten.”

“Okay.” Then we hugged for the first time. And as we hugged, we both made the same guttural animal-like sound, simultaneously. We pulled back and looked at one another.

“That was weird,” I said.

Dan explained that sound after he died:

That funny noise we both made? That was our *code*. You remembered.

But that night I was late for a rehearsal and I rushed off to UCLA.

When I got back, I was still in director’s mode. “Come with me,” I said. I took him by the hand and led him into the bedroom, sat myself down at the head of the bed, pulled my knees up to my chest and said, “Okay, you’re on. You undress first.”

He laughed. I still remember watching as he yanked off his sweater, then like a stripper, he unbuttoned his shirt, stepped out of his pants, and kicked them into a corner. He turned around, peeled off his underwear, twirled them over his head and tossed them over his shoulder.

I sat there in awe, marveling at what I saw. Who knew this could be hidden under a suit? He had massive shoulders and perfectly chiseled strong, long legs. I’d never seen such an amazing body.

"Wait a minute; I don't need to sleep with you. I should sculpt you. Where's my clay? You look like Atlas. Turn around."

I was serious. I couldn't believe how perfect he was. When he'd worked for Fetzer, he said that all the guys would toss huge, heavy wine barrels back and forth all day, and he had the back and shoulders to prove it. But still, he looked so shy, as he stood there naked with nothing on but a pair of glasses.

"So take off those glasses," I said.

"No way. Now you."

So I pulled off my sweater and jeans, and he crawled into bed next to me. When his lips met mine, he trembled, he was so nervous.

"So what did you think?" he asked afterward.

"Well, to be honest," I said, "you were kind of tentative and I like wild."

"Wild? Honey, I can do wild. I just didn't want to scare you."

And, bless his heart, he could do wild.

"Wow," I said, luxuriating in the sweaty afterglow of sex. "I knew you were out there. What the hell took you so long?"

That question and many others would be answered – but not for a very long time.

Chapter Four
“Moonstruck”
or
“Meet the Parents”

Falling in love is a lot like dying – you just have to let go. So I let go and fell in love. The night after Dan proposed, a newly married girlfriend flew in from New York to show off her husband. She gathered her LA crew together, and I brought Dan along. He sat down among a roomful of complete strangers and was chatty, charming and adorable. My friend Nancy pulled me aside and said, “He’s great! Who is this guy?”

“I don’t know, but he asked me to marry him last night.”

“Wow! What did you say?”

“I didn’t say anything. I mean, I only met him two weeks ago.”

She grabbed me by the shoulders. “Oh, just do it!”

“If we were to get married,” I said, thinking out loud, “we’d have to do it between now and January.”

“If you do, I’ll fly back out – and you can wear my wedding dress.” That would solve the wardrobe problem.

By the following week, Dan and I were in the glorious delirium of “hot, new, never-get-out-of-bed lust/love.” When it became clear he was never going home again, I said, “Okay, I’ve decided I can marry you. But first I want a real proposal – the real thing. On your knee – the whole nine yards. And I want a ring.”

I wasn’t in film school for nothing. I’d seen “Moonstruck,” so I knew I needed a ring, or it would bring bad luck.

“A ring?” he said, as if this were big news.

“Didn’t you ask me to marry you?”

“Yes.”

“Okay then, I need a ring. I’ve waited a long time for this.” I extended my empty ring finger.

“I can’t afford a ring.”

“Wait a minute,” I said. “How much money do you make?”

“Right now? About thirty thousand a year.”

“Thirty thousand? Good grief! You can’t afford to marry me or anyone else.”

“It’s my first lawyer job,” he said. “I’ll make more. You’ll see. Trust me.” He shrugged his shoulders, like “What’s to worry?”

“I’ve got another year-and-a-half of grad school,” I said. “I don’t pay for food or rent now, so I don’t expect to if we get married. Will that be okay with you?”

He looked me over, and mock stroked his chin. “I think you might be worth it,” he said. “Let’s go find you your ring.” And we fell back into bed.

The following Thursday was Thanksgiving and I wanted him to meet my family. Everyone knows that when you get married, you don’t just marry a person, you marry the person’s family too. If he survived that ordeal and still wanted to marry me, then I’d plan the wedding. Considering my family, I knew it was an iffy proposition. I figured I’d just better get it over with. As we drove down to my sister Melanie’s house in Long Beach, I gave Dan a fast thumbnail sketch: Dad was a womanizing lawyer and Mom drank to deaden the pain. If I were to use my NPI lingo they would “code out” as narcissistic personality disorders. Big time.

My older, ex-hippie sister Valrie (not to be confused with my friend, Valerie) would be down from San Francisco. I told Dan that she and I had never been close because the night I was born, when she was not quite three, my father left her all alone, locked in a parked car, asleep on a dark street. She woke up terrified and screamed until dawn. Consequently, she never forgave me for being born. To make matters worse, my mother, who wasn’t particularly interested in parenting, made her my primary caretaker. I was an extremely busy baby, got into mischief constantly, and my mother punished my poor sister because of it. So Valrie simply hated me, and who could blame her?

As Val, Dan and I sat outside Melanie’s house in the warm November sun, I watched her size Dan up. He was closer to her age than to mine, and she wanted to make sure he knew that she was cooler, hipper and “farther out” than I was or would ever be. We sat side by side on a narrow brick ledge, with me in the middle. Val leaned into me, asking him questions until finally she said, “And when are you two love-birds getting married?”

Dan got that “deer caught in headlights” look, so I answered, “Well, it’s got to be between December fourteenth and January fourth, because that’s when school starts up again.”

“What?” said Dan, “I thought we’d live together a while first.”

I could feel my sister’s glee from beside me. She stood up to face him directly. “Now, don’t you let her talk you into anything. She always gets everything she wants.”

Excuse me? I sat there, stunned. I turned to Dan. “We don’t need to get married at all,” I said. “But we will not discuss it now, okay?” I knew enough to close down the topic and get us out of enemy territory fast.

As soon as we pulled onto the freeway to head back to Los Angeles, I calmly said, “There must be some confusion. You asked me to marry you, right? And I said I would, right? So I thought we’d just do it.”

“I assumed we’d live together first,” he said, “for at least six months.”

“Oh,” I said and focused on the sea of red tail-lights straight ahead. “I didn’t understand. I lived with a man for eleven years and I won’t ever make that mistake again.”

“But I want you to get to know Sam first.”

“Why?” I said. “He’s sixteen. He’ll either like me or he won’t. And if we do get married, he’ll never live with us. It’s how you feel about me that counts.”

Dan was silent.

“Look,” I said finally, “why don’t we just date until June? We can make the decision then. That’s fine with me, but once again, I will not live with you.”

“Okay,” Dan said, “then we’ll get married.”

He had survived my family – but now it was my turn. The following day he called his mother, Riva, the little Brooklyn dynamo. I stood next to him, ready to say “Hi” to my soon-to-be-mother-in-law. “Guess what, Mom,” he said, “I’ve fallen in love and I’m getting married.”

“Is she Jewish?” I heard her say.

“No,” he said, and walked away with the phone gripped tightly in his hand.

“Another *shicksa* you’re marrying? Maybe on your fifth marriage, you’ll ask your mother’s permission first.” That’s everything you need to know about Riva Goldberg Wax – Empress of Ocean Parkway, iron-fisted ruler of her tiny fiefdom.

His face turned red. “I’m forty-nine years old. I don’t need anyone’s permission to get married!” He slammed the phone down. “She’s not coming to our wedding.”

He stormed away, brooding and angry. When he calmed down, he said, “Why don’t we just go to Las Vegas?”

“No. I want a wedding. If we’re going to get married, I want the ceremony of it. I want to know I’m getting married. I want you to know it. But again, we do not need to get married. I’m not Jewish, and I’m never going to be Jewish.”

“She ruined my first marriage,” he said. “She won’t ruin this one.”

Not the best way to begin our journey, was it? But since I didn’t take my own parents’ craziness seriously, I certainly wasn’t going to let someone else’s nutty mother ruin my day. I figured she was his problem; I was utterly wrong about that, of course.

Okay. We’d get married. I had two weeks to plan the wedding after I turned in my final script. I wrote out the invitations by hand and mailed them off. A good friend’s mom said we could have the wedding reception at her house; an-

other dear friend offered to cater the reception as her wedding gift, and Nancy sent me her gorgeous “Paris 1900s” antique lace dress. Since I’d spent a year-and-a-half taking Eve to what I’ve come to think of as the Church of Old Character Actors on Sunset Boulevard, I called Reverend Dominique, the gay, defrocked Catholic priest who presided there, and asked if he would marry us. “No problem,” he said.

I found a rent-controlled apartment in West Hollywood, got the gas, lights, telephone and water turned on, so that as soon as we got back from our honeymoon we could move right in.

Christmas came and went. Things happened very fast, and suddenly I noticed that Dan was eating like a lunatic – he’d gained almost ten pounds. What was that about? Nerves? But I was too busy to think about it.

Samuel flew down from Mendocino three days before the wedding, and I fell in love with him at once. He was whip smart, cute and funny, and since I’d just recently been a college undergraduate myself, I felt completely comfortable with him; he felt like an old friend.

All went well except for one telltale glitch. The following day, what with all the wedding preparations, my nerves and body just needed a time-out, and took it in the form of a vomiting migraine. Charming, but back then I was used to them. (I no longer get migraines because I do Iyengar yoga.) Dan wanted me to come to a party at his cousin’s in Glendale, but I said, “No. You two go. I’ll be fine.”

He called from the party around seven and asked if I needed anything. “If I sleep,” I said, “it’ll go away.” He pressed. “Well,” I said, “if you’re leaving soon, you could bring me some Matzo ball soup. It makes the vomiting stop.”

“Fine, then we’ll leave in a couple minutes.”

“Great. Thanks.” In my taxi-driver’s brain, that put him at my front door at about eight. So instead of going back to sleep – the only form of pain relief – I waited for my soup. Eight came and went – nine o’clock came and went. By ten-thirty, I was in pain, hungry, and now furious. So when he knocked on the door with the soup in hand, instead of being grateful, I exploded.

“I thought you’d be here by eight. No one forced you to come! You offered.”

“I got to talking. We got sidetracked.”

“Sidetracked? Your only excuse would be you got hit by a train!”

Then I saw Sam, standing on the steep steps below, cowering in the shadows. Clearly, he didn’t want to hear anyone yell at his father like that. He turned and darted down the stairs.

“Perfect.” I looked at Dan. “You go inside. Let me deal with him,” I said.

I ran down the stairs, and found Sam sitting in the car, in tears. “I’m sorry you saw that,” I said. “But Dan said he’d be here and I waited and waited.”

“You don’t know my dad well enough to marry him,” he said, wiping his eyes. “He does this stuff all the time. It’s just how he is!”

“You’re absolutely right. I don’t know him well enough to marry him, and if that’s really the way he is, then I won’t. But we’re going to walk upstairs and we’ll talk this over. If he’s going to continue to do this, I can’t marry him. I’ll tell him that.”

We walked back upstairs, and I told Dan that if this is the way he ran his life – said one thing, and then did another – I couldn’t marry him. We were both adults, right? He promised it would never happen again, and I believed him.

So on December 30, 1989, when Reverend Dominique said, “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” I turned around to all my assembled friends and said, “Hey, I’m a *wife!*” My new job had begun, and I was ready to attack it with the same determined optimism, energy and enthusiasm that had worked so well for me up to that moment.

But first, we would go off to Huntington Lake, just on the western slope of the Sierras, for our three-day honeymoon. When we got there, the place was completely deserted. In winter the lake’s a skiing resort, but California was in the final year of a five-year drought; there’d been no snow so far, and none was expected. We stayed in a funky, old-fashioned cabin, with no phone, no TV, nothing to distract us from our exhausting job of being newlyweds. It seemed odd to me, however, that if we weren’t actively involved in honeymoon activities, Dan kept hiking down to a pay phone to “call home.”

Then on New Year’s Eve, like magic, the skies opened up and snow began to fall. The moon was full that night, so I wanted to go and walk in the falling snow. We walked along an old logging road, under the tall pine trees in the moonlight. The only problem with this romantic scene was that suddenly Dan just wasn’t “there.” His body was there, but he simply didn’t respond to anything I said. He completely shut down. I remember my own sudden anxiety. I didn’t understand what was going on, so I thought, Well, you did just marry a stranger. Maybe he’s nervous.

Almost a month after I started the channeling, that scene popped vividly into my mind. Dan explained that he was “in session” and was forced to “watch” the major events of his life in order to understand his own decisions. He said that our honeymoon walk was a pivotal moment, for in that instant, he chose not to give me what he had “agreed to.”

May 10, 2002

You just went back to our honeymoon. You were right. I wasn’t even completely present there. I wanted everyone to know what a good time I was having,

that’s why I kept calling home. Made you feel second fiddle intentionally. That walk? Preoccupied with my own bullshit. I’d won you, now I could ignore you. Crazy isn’t the word I would choose. There’s another one I know you won’t want to hear – that was evil, my darling.

They made me watch that scene: you and me walking in that beauty – the first snowfall. You wanting so desperately to love this *stranger* you’d just married – and there I am, pulled back, pulled in – not responding to you. No wonder you loved Sam more at first.

Oh yes, I knew. But since I loved him more too, that was okay. It was only later that it drove me crazy. The easy way you had with each other; the way he made you laugh, the *direct*, clear communication...

Now do you see why I need to clean this up? I don’t especially want to face you here – exposed – without being honest first.

When Dan and I got back from our honeymoon, I made him carry me over the threshold of our new apartment. I wanted to do everything right. I’d finally become “Sadie, Sadie, Married Lady,” and I was ready to start my new wife job. I was determined to create a marriage filled with love and lots of hot and sacred sex. I was also looking forward to getting what Dan had offered to me: a baby and a family all my own.

According to “Dan the Man,” that baby was looking forward to being a part of our family too. Unfortunately, Dan had other plans.