

Too Much  
Gold to Flush  
The Gift of Infidelity

Pat Grissom

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Patricia Ann Grissom  
c/o Dedicated to Empowering Women, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2235  
Friendswood, Texas 77549  
www.Dedicated to Empowering Women, Inc.com

#### Disclaimer

The names of the people in this story have been changed to protect the innocent and the not so innocent.

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Summary: Pat, a college educated professional woman of fifty-seven, marries, and while she is away on vacation, her husband of only three months begins an affair with a girlfriend from his past. To insure she is never victimized again, Pat starts a journey of self-examination where she finds healing from a lifetime of abuse and neglect.

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**D**edicated to those for whom abuse has dimmed  
the perception of your Inner Light.





# Table of Contents



<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Vii</b>
<b>Prologue</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Chapter One:</b> Fall – Trying Out a New Swing	<b>1</b>
Family Reflections..... 13	Nuggets of Gold..... 14
<b>Chapter Two:</b> January – A New Year, a New Love	<b>17</b>
Family Reflections..... 30	Nuggets of Gold..... 32
<b>Chapter Three:</b> February – March, Red Flags Are Waving	<b>35</b>
Family Reflections..... 47	Nuggets of Gold..... 48
<b>Chapter Four:</b> March – April, Getting to Know You, Getting to Know All About You . . .	<b>51</b>
Family Reflections..... 64	Nuggets of Gold..... 65
<b>Chapter Five:</b> Fall – Return to Reality, Both Personally and Professionally	<b>67</b>
Family Reflections..... 85	Nuggets of Gold..... 86
<b>Chapter Six:</b> Winter - A Move, a Trip to the Emergency Room, and Two Deaths	<b>89</b>
Family Reflections..... 102	Nuggets of Gold..... 104
<b>Chapter Seven:</b> Fall – Living in Sin	<b>107</b>
Family Reflections..... 111	Nuggets of Gold..... 113

<b>Chapter Eight:</b> Spring – Get Ready, Get Set, Get Married	<b>115</b>
Family Reflections..... 124	Nuggets of Gold..... 125
<b>Chapter Nine:</b> Week 1: May 15 – 21: South Africa, Here I Come	<b>127</b>
Family Reflections..... 151	Nuggets of Gold..... 153
<b>Chapter Ten:</b> June 6 – 7: Home at Last to My Loving Husband	<b>155</b>
Family Reflections..... 173	Nuggets of Gold..... 174
<b>Chapter Eleven:</b> June 8: One Flew Out of the Cuckoo’s Nest	<b>177</b>
Family Reflections..... 188	Nuggets of Gold..... 190
<b>Chapter Twelve:</b> June 11 – 24: I’m Out of Here	<b>193</b>
Family Reflections..... 206	Nuggets of Gold..... 208
<b>Chapter Thirteen:</b> Summer – Fitting the Pieces Back Together	<b>211</b>
Family Reflections..... 233	Nuggets of Gold..... 235
<b>Chapter Fourteen:</b> Spring – Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned	<b>237</b>
Family Reflections..... 257	Nuggets of Gold..... 259
<b>Chapter Fifteen:</b> Spring After DIVORCE – Endings and Moving On with My Life	<b>261</b>
Family Reflections..... 283	Nuggets of Gold..... 287
<b>Chapter Sixteen:</b> Fall – The Last Few Pieces Fall into Place	<b>289</b>
Family Reflections..... 304	Nuggets of Gold..... 306
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>309</b>

# Introduction

*Had I known what I was getting into, I doubt I would have gone there, but I sure am glad I did.*

**~Patricia Ann Grissom**

Long, long, ago, in my early twenties, I stood chatting with a young mother after church while her two daughters, ages four and five, ran gleefully up and down the center aisle. She looked at her children and smiled. Then she offered a morsel that oozed with truth and remains ripe with wisdom today. “You know, before I had kids, they would never have done that.” If someone had prophesied the story contained in this book, I would have vehemently denied the likelihood that I would follow such an insane course of action. Not me. I am a responsible, college-educated woman with a good head on my shoulders. When my marriage fell apart after only three months, I feared re-creating the same scenario further down the road of life. Therefore, I promised myself I would analyze the situation and understand what had happened, my part in it, and how to stop myself from traveling that path again.

My story covers the last five years, but it includes my other fifty-five years, since what I did during the events of this account hinges on who arrived on the scene, including the experiences I brought to the table. Two and a half years have passed since I spoke to my ex-husband, who, at this writing, resides in prison. It has taken that long to get the perspective needed to see what happened and where, when, and how I wandered so far off base to make such self-destructive choices. Why had I pursued a lifetime commitment with someone who repulsed others? What compelled me to ignore their reactions and my own gut instincts? In exploring this story, I gave myself permission to answer those questions and to mine all the gold this experience has to offer.

Writing this honest account of my part in this saga has felt like undressing in public, revealing aspects of myself that I neither want to see nor to show others. It has shown me fallacies in my thoughts and actions that I would never have seen otherwise. It has also revealed strengths that I did not know I possessed. I have seen myself shift from a victim in a self-made prison to the creator of an incredible life.

*“All right, Mr. DeMille, I’m ready for my close-up.”* **SUNSET BLVD, 1950.**



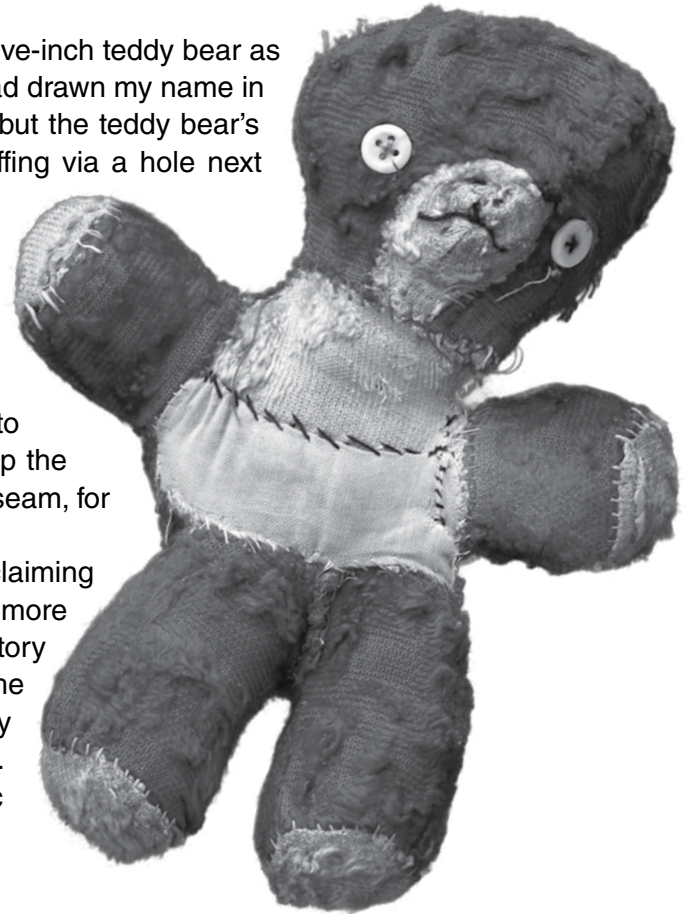


# Prologue

**W**hen I ask what my early life was like, Mother says she does not remember. Not, she cannot recall that far back; she literally does not remember the first year of my life. She had me seventeen months after giving birth to my brother. I was born right after my parents moved to a two-bedroom house with a bathroom. Before that, they had lived a couple of hundred feet from my grandparents' house in a one-bedroom with an outhouse. Knowing how overbearing my grandmother could be, and how easily intimidated Mother is, I can only imagine the hell she went through as a young mother with an emotionally unsupportive husband. Plus, this was a time before postpartum depression had been recognized as a legitimate medical condition.

At eighteen months of age, I received a twelve-inch teddy bear as a Christmas gift from a cousin, one of many, who had drawn my name in the family gift exchange. I doubt I had many toys, but the teddy bear's real appeal started after I discovered his silky stuffing via a hole next to his ear. I was hooked, and My Bear became a part of me. The smoothness of his filling between my tiny fingers lulled me to sleep at night. Mother said she often found evidence that I had been up in the middle of the night playing, so she probably welcomed something that would help me sleep. Of course the hole grew bigger, and My Bear began to leak, so Mother stuffed him with rags and sewed up the hole – to no avail. I would simply find another weak seam, for I could not drift off without rubbing his silky guts.

My sister was born when I was three, claiming much of Mother's time. As a result, I became even more attached to My Bear. Grandmother used to tell a story about the time I was in the hospital, and she and the nurses turned the room upside down looking for My Bear, who had somehow ended up behind the bed. According to Grandmother, I was in a virtual panic



by the time they returned him to me.

With time, Mother tired of my dependency on My Bear. She had enough to do without adding my irrational attachment to a teddy bear to the mix. I begged and begged her to perform further surgical repairs, lest I lose all of My Bear's insides. While she stitched, she reminded me that I was too old for such things. Then she made me promise I would not work another hole in him. None of his original stuffing remained, she reasoned, so why did I continue to poke my finger inside him? But habits die slowly, especially when they are so well ingrained.

When I was four, we traded houses with my grandparents. They had a two-story farmhouse, and Grandmother, always the planner, had a vision of building onto our little house and making it big enough for them, which they eventually did. The day we made the big move, my siblings and I stayed at my aunt's house. That night our new home was a jumble of boxes and stuff. My Bear was lost in the mess. I thought I could not sleep without him, but I did. Knowing how I currently struggle to fall asleep, I can only imagine what a challenge it must have been then. I believed My Bear would surface once things were in order. But he never did.

I'm not sure if it was only a few days later or maybe it was weeks, but I remember deciding that he was on the top shelf of the living room closet. I managed to drag a dining room chair to the closet, but when I realized I couldn't begin to reach that high, I asked my parents to help me. Dad was watching TV, and Mother wouldn't be swayed from cooking supper. Again and again, I returned to the closet, convinced that My Bear was in one of the boxes on the top shelf, probably the small green one. It looked like a good fit for him. Though I could hear him calling to me, I could not convince my parents to help me.

The heaviness in my chest as I type these words reminds me of the helplessness I felt then, knowing that what I desperately needed was obtainable, but I could not convince the people at hand to help me. Connecting the dots between where I was then and what I grew up believing about myself, I can only surmise that many of my negative core beliefs solidified around losing what represented security at the time. The seeds of unworthiness and abandonment were already there, but losing My Bear created a shift, a marker of exactly when I decided it was not safe to have feelings. It hurt too much to love something dearly and then lose it. Along with that, I decided that I had to please others in order to get what I wanted. I could not be myself. I needed to be who they wanted me to be. So I started a lifelong obsession with trying to second-guess what others expected from me in exchange for them giving me what I so desperately wanted – attention, support, and love.

My Bear showed up again when I was in my forties. Mother gave him to me as a Christmas present. He was still in that little green shoebox that I had spied at the top of the living room closet forty years earlier. Ten years later, I was going through a grieving period after the guy I had been dating

broke up with me. Finding it impossible to sleep, I got up in the middle of the night and ritualistically drained My Bear of his rag stuffing. Then I gave him a sudsy bath, gently dried him with a hair dryer, and restuffed him with fluffy white polyester. Associating him with loss, I cried as I stitched his gaping neck. Next I got out my journal and created a list of credentials for what I would demand in a man. No more dating guys who would break my heart. I had dealt with enough of that. Next time I would get what I wanted – a kind, sensitive man who would recognize what I had to offer and treat me well.

I began dating Rael (pronounced rail) a month later. When he lovingly delivered soup to my back door following my day surgery, I found that list of requirements, written just two months earlier. When I e-mailed it to Rael, he responded that what I was holding out for was such a close fit that he could have written the list himself. To add emphasis to his conviction that this was the Universe's way of showing us how fate had brought us together, Rael pointed out that I wrote this entry on the day he had attended his ex-wife's funeral. He said, as he drove away from the church, he had felt a burden of responsibility lifted from his shoulders. Jill had battled cancer for over a year, and while they were not together, there was a part of him that felt connected to her. His sales job concerning his qualifications to fit my requirements fueled my conviction that he was the person who could symbolically retrieve My Bear from the top of the closet.

Recently I made My Bear a coat of velvet with a satin lining. He sleeps with me again, and I drift off with the luscious feel of his coat between my thumb and forefinger. All the love I need is within me. I don't have to look for it outside myself. I just have to learn how to give it to myself. That is the real challenge – learning how to love myself.

*We should say to each [child]: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique... You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything.*

**~ Pablo Casals**





# Chapter One

## *Fall – Trying Out a New Swing*

*Love many, trust few and always paddle your own canoe.*  
~American Proverb

**A**t fifty-four years of age and as a college professor, it would seem I had a clue about life in general or, more particularly, relations with men – but I did not. Several years earlier my thirty-two-year marriage had ended in divorce after my husband and I grew apart and our kids were nearly out of the nest. Full of trepidation, I decided to reenter the world of dating. Self-help books and women’s magazines concurred that my maturity level when resuming dating would rank close to the maturity level I had attained when I left off that activity thirty-five years earlier. Do the math. Yes, I married at nineteen – young by today’s standards, but largely acceptable back then.

Did I know what I was doing? Absolutely not! Clueless about where to turn for help, I asked my therapist, whom I will call Dr. Humor. Wit and comedy permeate his practice, from the notebooks of cartoons that lie in the lobby to the humorous stories he shares with his clients. When I told him of my dilemma, he told me the following anecdote:

“Early in my career, I worked with a college tennis coach, helping him address the psychological state of his players and how that affected their game. In exchange for my input, I received private tennis lessons.



*Love as if you liked  
yourself, and it may  
happen.*

*~Marge Piercy*

After assessing my swing, the coach showed me a different grip on the racket and a new posture to use as I moved through the swing. Then he told me to practice these until our next lesson the following week.

“When I played my regular tennis partner, I awkwardly tried my new swing, but it didn’t take long for me to realize that I felt more comfortable with my old method. Under the stress of the game, I reverted to it and played as usual. At the second private lesson, the coach observed that I had not made the prescribed changes, so he redemonstrated the techniques. With my regular tennis partner, I once more attempted to implement the new swing, but again it felt like a handicap rather than an asset, so I again relapsed.

“At the third private lesson, the college coach said he could not continue to work with me if I refused to change to the new swing, so I promised to stick with the new technique – no matter what. At our next match, I told my regular partner I was learning a new swing and might not do as well as usual, but I wanted to stick with the fresh strategy. My partner delighted in my plan; in fact, he quite enjoyed trouncing me. The next time we played, my performance improved and within a month of using my new swing, I was consistently beating my partner.”

My interpretation of this story was that I should date a number of guys without getting serious about any of them. By the time I had dated a dozen men, I would, supposedly, get comfortable with the whole issue of dating. Plus, I wanted to avoid the trap of falling head over heels for someone just because we had dated. Nor did I want to lose myself in a relationship, as I had in my marriage.

Rael was number eleven on the “dated list.” I met Rael on an online dating site, the same place I had met the rest, except for the one introduced by my divorce lawyer. At the time, I marveled at the uniqueness of having the person who had helped me get out of my marriage act as matchmaker. Her candidate was above average, but in the end, he became one of the guys who took a number and moved on through my life.

Once we started dating, Rael and I discussed the fact that we had checked each other out on the dating site for about a year before we started exchanging e-mails. His two kids and an ex had kept me from what

looked promising otherwise. For my part, I had frumpy-looking pictures. About the same time I posted better photos, he changed his marital status from divorced to widowed, which prompted me to send him a note asking why. He explained that his ex had just died, which, of course, elicited sympathy from me. It also made a difference in how I saw his situation – free of the typical baggage that having an ex entails. We e-mailed for a couple of weeks before he invited me to his Democratic house party for a showing of *An Inconvenient Truth* and *The Death of the Electric Car*. I asked Cheryl, a girlfriend, to go with me, lest this guy ended up being a pervert who had tricked me into coming to a house party minus the party.

About twenty people showed up. From his online profile, I knew Rael was vegetarian, so at the snack table, I consciously selected food that he would not find offensive. Yes, I was already monitoring what I did to please him – even before we started dating.

As I left that evening, Rael asked if he could call me for a date. I was not impressed with his looks, and we had talked only briefly because he had spent his hosting time moving from group to group. But I had this numbers thing going, and I was eager to get my dozen men dated. So I told him sure, and we agreed to meet a few days later at a restaurant close to my house.

The evening of our first date, I dressed in my typical first-date apparel, a long skirt with a fitted blouse. As I approached the entrance of the café, Rael was sitting outside at a table. He appeared distracted and pensive. Seeing me, he jumped up and declared, “You look beautiful.”

His positive assessment of my looks started the evening on an optimistic note. Inside, we ordered at the counter before we sat down. I chose fish, thinking that would be nonoffensive to a vegetarian. When I hesitated over the wine list, and finally decided on the cheapest red wine on the menu, he declared I was only choosing it because of the cost. How did he know that? We had not had a conversation of substance, and he already perceived things about me that I had not shared. We sat down and began to talk.

While we talked, I noted one oddity about Rael. For no apparent reason, a wave of energy periodically moved through him, which resulted

*Love yourself, accept yourself, forgive yourself, and be good to yourself, because without you the rest of us are without a source of many wonderful things.*

*~Leo Buscaglia*

in his spasmodically jerking his head and shoulder together. Rael seemed oblivious to the involuntary contraction, so I discounted it as first-date jitters. His otherwise relaxed manner lulled me into a marathon conversation.

*Conversation has a kind of charm about it, an insinuating and insidious something that elicits secrets from us just like love or liquor.*

**~Lucius Annaeus  
Seneca**

By the time the waitstaff began stacking the chairs on to the other tables and vacuuming the floor, I had shared too much about myself, including the fact that my parents had only been divorced for a few years, following a fifty-four-year marriage. When he asked me why they had separated so late in life, I replied that my dad was a recently convicted sex offender. Due to Rael's attentiveness, I had pegged him as a sensitive and caring person – a perfect match for what I wanted. Still, I was not sure I should test him with the details, so I hedged, saying I had already shared too much. In the parking lot, we stood by my car, and I gave him what I considered a safe kiss for a first date, an ounce of tongue.

The next day I received the following e-mail. Rael's words reflected many of my own feelings of attraction.

To: Pat  
From: Rael  
Date: Tuesday, December 19, 12:36 PM  
Subject: Our First Date

Hi Pat,

I truly enjoyed meeting and talking with you last night. We surely clicked. When I stood outside the restaurant waiting for you to arrive, I had one of those moments of dread flash through me that our meeting would go nowhere. I felt "my life is too complicated"; "I don't have enough time to give to a new relationship" – i.e., the fear that this is not going to work. Then, suddenly I see the waitstaff cleaning the restaurant, all the other patrons leaving, and I wanted to be with you much longer. That was three hours? No way, it seemed only minutes.



Driving home, I realized how much I miss having someone to talk with, someone to get to know, someone to excite and be excited about, someone who attracts me . . . someone like you. And in the parking lot...that little kiss... perfect! In your lips I felt no hesitance, no apprehension, no separation. To the contrary, I felt a total connection, as if I could fall into you through our kiss.

Thank you so very much. The pessimist in me thinks, "We're going to have a hard time meeting this standard in the future," but my heart thinks, "Wow, I can't wait to do this again." I look forward to talking and being with you again, Rael

*A baby is born with a  
need to be loved and  
never outgrows it.*

*~Frank A. Clark*

The next day another e-mail arrived, this one even more open and caring. I found his willingness to bare his soul irresistible.

To: Pat  
From: Rael  
Date: Wednesday, December 20, 7:07 AM

Good morning Pat,

I want to wish you a safe trip to Wimberley and Lubbock. Hopefully you read this before you leave, and if not, I hope you have Internet access on the road, and if not, "Welcome Home."

As I sit here this early morning, I notice a malaise creeping over me blanketing that wonderful feeling of exhilaration I felt while with you. Examining it, I guess I'm playing those same old messages I use to accept my aloneness. I have dread-messages playing in my head.

*How delicious is the  
winning of a kiss at love's  
beginning.*

*~ Thomas Campbell*

“Rael’s a bad person.” “Rael will never find love.” “Rael only hurts those who care for him.” As you talked about, I need to develop and practice some positive affirmations. “I deserve having someone special in my life.” “I am worthy of Pat’s love.” “Me loving Pat is good for her.” I’m sitting here feeling like Gollum in *Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers* when his child-self, named Sméagol, has an internal argument with his evil self named Gollum. He won that argument and Sméagol emerged, only to disappear when doubt challenged him. It is that, or maybe I just need a cup of coffee, ha ha.

I sure look forward to being with you again. I like how I felt when I was with you. I want, I need, I deserve to have someone to connect with and share life. I want someone to call when I have something wonderful to share or when doubt/fear challenges my affirmations and fertilizes my dread-messages. I want someone who loves me enough to share her wonders and trusts me enough to share her dreads. Jacob does that but on a six-year-old’s level. I also need it on an adult level. I need someone wise and intelligent to see through my balderdash front I use to avoid my dread-messages, and to pull me back to my affirmations.

Oh well, I’m going to go make some coffee and get back to that exhilarating buzz of accomplishment. Today is Christmas shopping with the kids and cleaning a garage.

Talk soon, love,  
Rael

I forwarded these and other e-mails I received from Rael to my friend Lilly, along with notes about how smitten I was with this guy who

was not afraid to share his feelings. With Christmas only a few days away, I packed my car to drive to Lubbock to see my mom. On the way out of town, I called Rael to say good-bye. He asked me to stop by his house to see him and to meet Jacob. Wanting desperately to see him again, but hesitant, I admitted I had not put on makeup, and also that I had a dog companion, Poncho, that I was pet-sitting. Rael easily persuaded me, saying he would eventually see me without the façade of foundation and mascara, and I only needed to stay a little while before I took off.

Shortly after I arrived at Rael's home, he and I walked Poncho, staying within a block of his house, lest Jacob became alarmed if he could not find his dad. I did not realize it then, but at that point Jacob and Rael had only lived together about six weeks, following Jacob's mother's death from cancer in late October. Rael and Jill had divorced when Jacob was two. In the four years since Jill's moving out, Jacob had never spent the night with his dad.

Eager to let Rael know I found his short stature desirable, I commented on this. He replied that he was the "perfect" height because the average woman is a little shorter than him and the average man is a little taller, so he saw himself as the best of both. I was captivated by his positive self-image, although I also wondered if it was a front for insecurity.

When I stood in the driveway and told Jacob I had to go, he replied, "You just got here." He sounded like an adult, and I wondered if he was saying what he had heard his mother say.

In Lubbock, I shopped with Mother and found the perfect gift for Rael, a daily tear-off calendar with a "Bushism" on every page. Rael was/is what my granddad once confessed to being, a Yellow Dog Democrat—he would vote for a yellow dog as long as it ran on the Democratic ticket.

While I drove back to Houston from Lubbock, Rael drove to Ft. Worth. We talked on our cell phones, exchanging pleasantries and anticipating our next date. He and Jacob rode with Jacob's half-brother, Christopher, and his step-dad, Richard, the man Jacob's mother, Jill, had married on her deathbed. Later, Rael revealed to me that Jill had done this to keep Rael from getting her first son even though she could not legally keep him from taking custody of his own child, Jacob.

*"Why don't you come up  
sometime and see me?"*

**SHE DONE HIM  
WRONG, 1933.**

*The advantage of love at first sight is that it delays a second sight.*

**~ Natalie Barney**

To: Rael

From: Pat

Date: Wednesday, December 27, 10:14 PM

To my cute, cute, clever guy,

What a lovely e-mail. And to think it has been sitting here waiting for me for over eighteen hours.

My only concern about the New Year's Eve get-together is that you might feel awkward being the only guy. It will be a small gathering – two other ladies and me. I am planning on making a broccoli dish that has sunflower seeds, Ramen noodles, green onions, and I'm not sure what else. The other vegetable dish I am making has a black-eyed pea base. It also has cilantro, carrots, celery, onions (you have to have onions in stuff to make it taste good – I'll also have breath mints available). I brought three jars of home-canned black-eyed peas from my mom's house. Those dried ones and canned ones you buy in the grocery store cannot compare with home-canned. I was raised on home-canned veggies. We always had a huge field garden where we grew green beans, corn, peas, okra, watermelon, cantaloupe, and squash.

Let me know when you get home. I love hearing from you. It was so nice to talk while driving, although we had to contend with poor connections and road noise. Hugs and kisses, Pat

We continued to exchange e-mails while we traveled. Rael came to my condo the day after he returned home. We immediately began kissing. When we stopped to catch our breath, he commented that this was his favorite part of a relationship – the initial kissing stage before the real sexual stuff started. It comforted me to think he did not expect sex from the get-go. What he said and what he did were two different things because, within a few minutes, he had me pinned to the couch, rubbing his whole body against me in a motion that went beyond passion. His actions made me think of a ten-year-old at a school sports event. And how did I react? Well, I kissed him back with all the fervor I could muster, attempting to match his vibrating enthusiasm.

Why, you might ask. Because I thought he expected me to. Too young to remember or comprehend the lesson being drilled into my head, I had learned that if a woman is attracted to a man, she must do what she thinks he expects or wants her to do – even if it is not particularly enjoyable to her. It is the cardinal rule I grew up believing about relationships.

*“Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”*

**CASABLANCA, 1942.**

To: Rael  
From: Pat  
Sent: Saturday, December 30, 10:02:55 AM  
Hello Mr. Great Kisser,

I woke up at 8:00 this morning, of course, thinking of you. Hey, I went to bed thinking about you. I'm off to walk with a friend at 10:30. Just wanted to say last night was really, really nice. Thanks for being you – spontaneous, free, funny, zany, clever, affectionate, and open – a very nice combination of traits to find in a cute guy.

Love, Pat

P.S. I have beard burn on my face, a little reminder of our marathon make-out session.

*Love takes off masks that  
we fear we cannot live  
without and know we  
cannot live within.*

*~ James A. Baldwin*

To: Pat  
From: Rael  
Sent: Saturday, December 30

Good morning, Ms. Greatest Kisser in the World,

I never have stopped thinking about you. I feel like I'm still there in your arms. I can't stop smiling. I can't wait to see you again and hug you and be next to you and just be with you. I picked up Jacob and got to bed about 4:00. I woke at 8:30. At 9:00 a friend called me to come down to the Pearland Democratic headquarters to help move out the final furniture. Jacob went with me, and we had good ole donuts for breakfast. We stopped on the way home, and I bought all this food I plan on cooking today – a vegetable stew with okra and rice. I also bought some portabella mushrooms to grill.

I gave Jacob your present and all my spare change while in the car. He really enjoyed placing the coins in the device and watching them go to their respective slots.

I called and left a message. I'm sure you can hear the smile on my face.

Sorry about the beard burn on your face, but it surely is worth it.

I want to see you today, so I am going to call later and invite you over for supper tonight. Jacob will be here and maybe the three of us can play Uno or Skip-bo or watch a movie together.

Well, I have to find a sitter for tomorrow night, and start cooking.

Talk soon, love, love, kisses, hugs, caresses,  
love, love, Rael

P.S. Also throw in a little passion and desire.

Above, Rael says the beard burn was surely worth it – but for whom? His response should have clued me in on his narcissistic personality, but it did not. After a florist delivered a dozen roses of various colors to my condo, I called his home phone and left a blithering message about how flattered, overwhelmed, and awed I was by him. Then I sent the following e-mail.

*All the beautiful  
sentiments in the world  
weigh less than a single  
lovely action.*

*~ James Lowell*

To: Rael  
From: Pat  
Date: Saturday, December 30, 3:42 PM

Wow, double wow, no, make that a triple wow. In case you did not get my phone message, or to go along with my phone message: THANK YOU! You are one sweet, cute, boy. I am so impressed. If that was your objective, you accomplished it. I'm sitting here typing this in my birthday suit, having just gotten out of the shower, so I need to get dressed and out the door, but I just had to say it one more time. Thanks.

Electronic hugs and kisses, Pat

P.S. I can't wait to see you tomorrow night. If you are having second thoughts about leaving Jacob with Christopher, you could bring him and let him go to sleep upstairs. I have a few kid books, and I'm sure he has portable electronic stuff, Game Boys, etc.

P.S.S. Thanks again for the beautiful roses. I can't wait for you to see them. I can't wait to see you again.

To: Pat  
 From: Rael  
 Date: Saturday, Dec 30, 1:28 PM  
 Subject: Wow, Great Phone Message

I just love your phone message. Those flowers truly left you speechless. If I knew you were going to be in your birthday suit, I would have delivered them myself. I just can't wait to see them tomorrow. I just can't wait to see you tomorrow. Gosh, isn't this fun, falling head over heels for each other. Pleasant dreams. Your "lip" service man, Rael

*If somebody says, "I love you," to me, I feel as though I had a pistol pointed at my head. What can anybody reply under such conditions but that which the pistol-holder requires? "I love you, too."*

*~ Kurt Vonnegut*

The next evening Rael joined two of my friends, Cheryl and Lilly, and me for a New Year's Eve party. As we played card games, Cheryl, who had accompanied me to the Democratic house party at Rael's house, said something negative about dating. I honestly did not hear what she said, but it apparently offended Rael because he declared, "I would never ask you for a date." Throughout the evening, he had that nervous twitch that I'd seen during our first long conversation. Lilly and I talked about it afterward. As I recall these issues that put me off about Rael at the beginning, I am forced to ask myself what kept me so locked into the relationship. Attention and flattery, perhaps. He charmed me with his enthusiastic e-mails, phone calls, and apparent inability to get enough of me. It was what I had always wanted – someone who thought I had hung the moon.

As for his rude behavior toward Cheryl, I told myself that no one is perfect. It came with being human, right? Actually, Rael's rudeness was a stronger correlation to my father than I wanted to admit. I had witnessed my mother explain away Dad's insensitive behavior on numerous occasions. It did not occur to me that my oblivion to Rael's remark was reviving the behavior I had witnessed as a child. It felt too natural to question or even notice.





## Family Reflections

Now that I've introduced Rael, allow me to introduce my family of origin. There were four of us kids, all born before the first one went to school – two boys and two girls, with the boys being oldest and youngest, and us girls in the middle. Mother said she wanted girls and Dad wanted boys, so she seemed pleased with herself that she had finagled what they both desired. We lived in the Texas Panhandle, in Smyer, where, in 1930, my father and his sister garnered Grandmother the distinction of giving birth to the first recorded set of twins in Hockley County. During my formative years, the Smyer population sign touted 254 residents. I never figured out if that included my family since we lived five miles out of town and our mailing address was a rural route out of Lubbock. While I attended it, Smyer High School boasted around forty students, making my thirteen-member graduating class one of the larger ones. Remarkably, eight of us started first grade together.

My father farmed cotton with his father. And when Granddad retired after a heart attack, he remained closely involved in the production of the crop. I recall seeing my dad and Granddad in the spring, squatting among the cotton that had barely worked its way past the sandy surface. Each man scratched at the dirt and studied the red haze on the horizon, no doubt debating whether or not to spend the fuel or the labor on running the sand-fighter, a plow that broke the crust of the soil and, with some luck, would reduce the amount of sand that would blow in the building sandstorm.

Periodically my dad talked about loading his sand-fighter on a flatbed trailer and hauling it up-country. He said he would know it was time to stop and put down stakes when someone asked him about that strange contraption he had with him – like Homer hauling his boat inland until someone asked him what it was. Dad never stopped talking about finding another way to make a living, and he adamantly discouraged us kids from following in his footsteps.

*No one hates his job so  
heartily as a farmer.*

*~H. L. Mencken*



## Nuggets of Gold

*Never dull your shine for somebody else.*

*~Tyra Banks*

Since my original intention in writing this book was to learn from my experience, I decided to shake the sieve at the end of every chapter. Much of what I saw glistening among the dirt and rocks showed up early in the story, but that does not mean I learned the lesson right away. So don't hold me to automatically assimilating these gems of wisdom. The first truth that appeared is that, when I am trying something new, I need to make sure why I am doing it and what I hope to achieve. As I plunged into dating, I was determined to "try a new swing," as Dr. Humor suggested, but I lacked direction. Playing the numbers game seemed to satisfy the concept of persisting until I improved, although I had not established what enhancement in that area looked like. So the next time I decide to change my grip on a particular behavior, I am committed to determining what my desired result should be, and to define a more direct approach to achieving it.

Next, I'd like to be myself. This goes hand in hand with defining my swing. That is what my new swing was supposed to have gotten me – the ability to be authentic in intimate relationships with men. Knowing what I think, what I like and don't like, being brave enough to stand by that no matter what – in other words, all that constitutes me, which is not who I was from the beginning of my relationship with Rael. So while I mention it here, I certainly do not give myself credit for having learned this lesson at this point in the story.

Lastly, save the family drama for after the let-me-get-to-know-you stage. I'm sure that Rael was attracted to more than the fact that my dad was a sex offender, but throwing that on the table in our first real conversation changed the dynamics of everything. It told him things about me that I did not need to tell him immediately. Plus, blurting out family history, especially when it is colorful and involves the police, drives away healthy guys, the ones I want to get to know better. At this point, I

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doubt I would have recognized or been attracted to a healthy guy. On the other hand, advertising my family history on the first date attracts men on the lookout for gals with vulnerable self-esteem who will fall for a little attention.

*A kiss is a lovely trick designed by nature to stop speech when words become superfluous.*

**~ Ingrid Bergman**

