



**Excerpt from:**

**Discover the  
3  
Secrets to Living  
Happily  
Ever After**

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# Introduction

Take a deep breath...relax... SMI-I-I-LE for the camera... One more time... and... YES!!

You've finally DONE IT!

At last, you're MARRIED. Somehow both of you got through the ceremony. You did everything you were supposed to—you remembered what to say and said it at the right time... the wedding rings actually landed on each other's ring fingers—you even got some great photos of the two of you laughing with Uncle Fred. What fun! What merriment!

That was already a year ago. Now to celebrate your anniversary, you are about to uncork the champagne and toast to your continued happiness.

Your eyes meet. *It's been quite a year, hasn't it?*

You would have gone out for dinner but money's tight. Andy just lost his job and Anne... well, Anne's been having afternoon coffee dates with Randy, the divorced principal at the elementary school where she teaches second grade. Last week Andy borrowed Anne's cell phone just as one of Randy's text messages flew in.

Neither of you dares suggest that you re-watch the wedding video to re-capture that moment when you stated your vows.

How innocent you were. How could you have been so confident that you knew each other well enough to decide to spend a lifetime together as husband and wife?

## **"I'll be so happy when..." and "If Only..."**

How many times have you heard young people say, "I know the right partner is there for me... I'll be so happy when I meet him." Or, "If only the right person would come along... life would be so perfect!"

Another variation of the same theme suggests that “once we find each other and get married, life is bound to be blissful forever after.”

The hidden message is, “The real work was finding a partner. Now that *that* chore is finished, we can relax!”

Don’t we all wish this could be the case. However, according to the 2002 U.S. Census Bureau divorce statistics, almost 50% of the North American population gets divorced every year. Almost 65% of divorces are initiated by women.

## **Disposable marriages**

Today everything is disposable, even marriage vows. When things start to fall apart, doesn’t it make sense to simply walk out and start all over with someone new?

Yes, and no. The problem is, you take yourself with you wherever you go. The challenges you experience with your new partner may not be the same ones, but eventually you’ll come to realize that every relationship is bound to have them. Challenges are part of the human experience. They serve as “grist for the mill,” giving us opportunities to grow and get to know ourselves better.

Instead of running from the latest relationship crisis, why not deal with those issues NOW, so you won’t go through the same heartache all over again with yet another partner?

I think almost everyone will agree that the most difficult part about acquiring new tools is not learning how they can be used but ***actually applying them to your life on a daily basis.***

## **Love is a commitment**

Love isn’t just a feeling. It is a commitment, a decision to “do whatever it takes” to make a relationship work.

One of the top reasons that marriages end is because people don't make their relationship enough of a priority. They don't spend enough quality time together. They forget how to have fun, how to enjoy and appreciate each other. They start taking each other for granted.

It's not how often you argue that determines the happiness in a relationship; it is *how you argue*. How you handle conflict and express yourself and your needs, how you communicate and solve problems, and how willing you are to "let it go and move on."

Like a garden, love has to be tended. Once we neglect our love with our self, our partner and others, it starts to sprout weeds. Eventually the weeds will overwhelm the flowers and choke off their growth. Nurturing requires a conscious effort.

Love isn't about how many times you say "I love you" after you've finished yelling or hurting each other. It is about acting in loving ways... appreciating and cherishing your partner. It is about focusing on their positive aspects. And that's what my "3 Secrets" are all about.

# 1

## Keeping It Simple

*It is so important to go to the source of the conflict.*

After 25 years of counseling and achieving a high success rate for helping people achieve happier, healthier and more fulfilling relationships, I realized that all the tools, tips and techniques they needed could be condensed into three powerful tools, or “secret rules.”

Once you’ve learned these three secrets you will be able to apply them to every relationship in your life that may need special attention.

I’ll also show you how to go inside and “look under the hood.” It is so important to go to the source of the conflict so you will know how to prevent future collisions.

If you’re reading this book because you’re in the midst of making an all-important decision about whether to leave or stay, these tools will help you sort things out.

The goal is to learn how to mend and maintain your relationship so you can start to see your partner as a well-intentioned friend instead of an Outsider with an Agenda.

As a therapist and counselor, I am solution-focused. I believe in long term results within a short term period of time. This is probably the most important reason why I scaled down my tools and techniques to **The Big 3**.

The other reason is because I had to. During the past 25 years of practicing privately, I’ve also worked for social service centers,

employee assistance programs and community organizations. Most of these organizations focus on offering short-term therapy.

## **Marital Stages**

All marriages go through stages. Do you know which stage you are in right now?

**Stage 1 – Infatuation.** You are completely in sync, soulmates forever. You finish each other's sentences.

**Stage 2 – Disillusionment.** Little things really start to bother you. You really are very different; you seem to focus on those differences.

You start to argue. You never thought there would be times when you didn't feel love for your partner. Disillusioned, you wonder if you made a mistake.

**Stage 3 – Power Struggle.** "If you really loved me, then..." Each person thinks they are right and cannot figure out why their partner is so stubborn and controlling. They feel angry, hurt and frustrated. Little or no attempt is made to see the other person's point of view for fear of losing face or losing the argument. The problem with this stage is that most people think they will be stuck here forever.

**Stage 4 – Acceptance, Forgiveness, Letting Go.** The partners come to accept that they will never agree about everything and just want to live in peace. Ready to forgive and let things go, they are more mature and willing to accept responsibility for how they've contributed to their problems. They show more compassion and understanding and are open to looking at issues from the other's perspective. By making a conscious decision not to "push the other's buttons," they stop being opponents and learn to become teammates again.

**Stage 5 - Happily ever after.** Peace and harmony reign.

# 2

## It's All About Feelings

*What do I need to do to make my partner happy?*

As I mentioned earlier, statistics tell us that most divorces are initiated by women—but do you know why?

Let me introduce you to Molly S., a stay-at-home-Mom, a wife who is introduced as “the wife of Joe S.” or “Ms. S.,” and, well, a—what? *What is her title? What does she DO?*

### **The ‘Vent & Resent’ Downward Spiral**

Could it be that after years of being the primary caregiver, Molly starts to “vent and resent”? This expression refers to the spiral of venting her frustration and resenting not being heard. Molly may also be feeling ignored, undervalued and manipulated. Joe only hears her unhappiness as “complaints and nagging.”

It doesn't take long for Joe to either minimize and ignore, attack or withdraw. This creates even more bitterness and resentment, and the vicious cycle begins.

Feeling alone and unloved, Molly fantasizes about her escape. Joe is clueless about Molly's V & R syndrome. (It's possible, if the children have left the nest, he's blaming it on rites of passage, menopause or some other quik'n'easy explanation.) That it could be the dynamics of the marriage itself that are at fault doesn't occur to Joe. He's a busy man, often working overtime for an electronics company that values his management and engineering skills. He

loves his work, loves Molly in his own way, and surely loves returning each night to a home-cooked meal and quiet evening sprawled out in front of the TV.

Suddenly Molly stops nagging. The silence is deafening, but after years of tuning out Molly's complaints, Joe is already deaf. He's secretly pleased about the silence and thinks he's finally getting the peace he wants.

"Joe, I've made an appointment," says Molly as soon as he's forked down the last bite of her "secret recipe" lemon meringue pie.

"Yes? An appointment for what?" asks Joe, reaching for the pie server to cut another slice.

"With a divorce lawyer," Molly bravely forges on.

"WHAT?" The server clatters onto the table. **"You did WHAT?"**

By the time the Vent & Resent syndrome reaches this point in a relationship, it's usually too late. Most Mollies have already given up hope that their Joes will "change."

Even if Joe pleads with Molly, promising her that "things will be different," Molly is no longer hearing him. The tables are turned. She hears nothing and believes nothing except that it's time to end the marriage.

## **Joe's Story**

Why is she always "too tired," Joe wonders, rolling over on his side of the bed away from Molly. *"What am I, anyway? An ATM machine and a name on a checkbook?"*

What do I need to do to make my wife happy, wonders Joe. Molly has become such a nag lately. When he doesn't do the dishes or forgets to stop at the store—even when he brings her fresh flowers—nothing he ever does seems to make her happy. Okay, so the flowers were from the supermarket and they were on sale (starting to wilt, which Molly was quick to point out). Flowers are

flowers. Why pay florist prices when you can buy them cheaper at the same place you buy your groceries?

"What difference does it make?" is the program running in Joe's mind. *Molly always finds something to criticize or pick apart... or she thinks it's only because I want a little sex that I'm nice to her. Is there anything wrong with that?*

## **What's really going on?**

It's not the dishes left undone or the garbage that still hasn't been taken out. It's not the "I have a headache tonight," or yet another shouting match over the in-laws; or the insensitivity of Joe's best buddies or Molly's gossiping girlfriends. It's not even that overcharge on the credit card or failure to notice Molly's new hairdo.

Molly and Joe are no longer **feeling** accepted, heard, safe, acknowledged, respected, understood or, most of all, loved.

Those are the qualities we look for in that cherished relationship known as **friendship** and that now seem to be missing in that most important friendship of all: marriage. It is lack of these qualities that causes the rifts.

## **Sue and Jack**

Sue and Jack have been married for nine years and they have two sons. Jack recently moved out because he says he "just can't take it anymore." (What? What can't he "take" anymore?)

Sue, also upset, tells Jack, "I'm glad you moved out." Secretly she feels hurt and rejected. She thinks she is a very good wife; after all, she takes care of the boys and the house. She has never cheated on Jack or overspent money.

Jack says he's tired of Sue's constant criticism and demeaning behaviour. He feels she makes a mountain out of a molehill and overreacts to everything.

"Here's an example," he recants during our counseling session, gripping the arms of the chair so hard his knuckles turn white. "A couple days ago I came home to see the boys and I was serving them breakfast. I accidentally spilled Brian's orange juice... Man oh Man... It was an accident, okay? *I really didn't do it on purpose!*

"Sue gets this look on her face and then she goes silent. Dead silent. I cleaned up everything—the table, the floor—nothing sticky anywhere, and then I poured Brian a fresh glass of juice. But that wasn't good enough. Oh no! You know what? I've simply had it with that woman. She ALWAYS finds something to criticize."

**Sue's story:** "When the full glass of orange juice spilled over, I tried not to say anything... but honestly, Jack's always causing more work.

"And Jack might have thought the table and floor weren't sticky anymore after he cleaned up the mess. His idea of cleaning... (!! ) I really tried to hold back my anger, even though I knew I'd be on my hands and knees as soon as he left, cleaning the floor and then the table and chair, *to get the job done right.*"

**Question:** How much of this conflict is about the spilled orange juice and how much is about the way each person feels they are valued and appreciated? Jack is feeling criticized "again" and Sue is feeling disappointed that Jack doesn't "measure up." (Measure up to what? A professional floor scrubber?)

## The Dance of Intimacy

It doesn't take long for Vent & Resent and Blame & Pain to move from the kitchen and living room to the bedroom.

Ellen (to herself, not to Charles): *You don't want to make love. You're cold. You turn away from me. What did I do? What's wrong?*

Charles (to himself, not to Ellen): *I'm so angry, I am SO angry, you are so demanding, so difficult, so cold and unfeeling... I don't think you really care if I'm here or not.*

Ellen and/or Charles are feeling hurt, rejected and abandoned. And now we're back to childhood. Our emotional wounds start to bleed when our partner does or doesn't do something that reminds us of how we were wounded as children.

When we were young we couldn't do anything about it, but now things are different. We are adults and we have power. We will never let someone—especially someone who says they love us—treat us that way.

Pushing “childhood wounds” buttons causes the other person to pull away and protect himself from being hurt again. Why are these couples *really* angry at each other? Why are they feeling disappointed or sad?

A partner's assaults chip away at loving feelings for each other and when these incidents happen often enough and are not counteracted with an equal amount of love and play, the relationship starts heading downhill. Now each partner feels he has to “watch his back” and/or get even. Neither partner feels safe, so the dance begins.

## **Unexpressed Feelings**

What are the feelings that are not being expressed by Molly & Joe, Jack & Sue, Ellen & Charles? Someone is afraid. It could be fear of: loss or lack, isolation, abandonment, failure, rejection, or ridicule. Feeling unloved, unimportant, excluded or alone is gut-wrenching. Some people compensate by needing to win at any cost and some withdraw or retaliate. Now you are in a power struggle with your partner who complains, “I feel numb, a failure. Why should I stick my neck out and try to communicate only to have my head chopped off again?”