

Chapter 2: It's Never Too Late

What matters is precisely this; the unspoken at the edge of the spoken.

—

Virginia Woolf

I stared at the grapefruit, mouthwatering but not in a good way. My gag reflex was on high alert. I hated grapefruit, but that didn't matter. "I'll pick us grapefruit for breakfast," he'd said the night before, looking out the window at his grapefruit tree. And with just those six words, I imagined us staring into each other's eyes over shared grapefruit and finally falling in love. I'd do anything to make this a reality, including forcing grapefruit down my throat.

'He,' was Ken, a 43-year-old, single dad divorcee who I'd met a year earlier on chemistry.com. Ken had warned me on our first phone call that I should run for the hills. All I heard was *catch me if you can*. Our first date consisted of a Ferris wheel ride on the Santa Monica Pier, a drink, and lots of making out. As far as I was concerned, I was done, and he was *the one*. Our chemistry was instant and powerful. With his hands on my hips, pressing me against him, I was on fire and I wanted to burn more, to be devoured and released from what had become my life — raising my son alone, a corporate job, and dealing with my baby-daddy. I was on automatic pilot on a dullard's flight. Ken was adventure.

We dated, cooked, and went to concerts. We meditated on the beach and did yoga. We hung out with Cole, my 5 year old son, and went to parties with my friends. We connected and disconnected; I never felt he was "all in," and I struggled with his distance. He knew I was hooked and kept the leverage by monitoring my doses. My friends didn't like him, and Cole was cool towards him. I was in deep, but he treaded water —preferring the surface while I dove down.

After six months of nearly drowning, I stopped communicating with him and suffered in silence, missing the smell of his Calvin Klein cologne, his touch, and the anticipation of seeing him. I met a nice guy, an all-in guy, and started dating him. Months passed, and I was able to ignore Ken's one or two texts until he emailed me a picture of his son. My stomach sank.

During our time apart, Ken had moved from Long Beach back to Lake Elsinore and was working as a skydiving instructor and photographer again. He had also been allowed to see his son. But I wasn't sure that was the only person he was seeing. He also said his ex-wife was living with her mother. She'd lost her house and her car. She sounded desperate. And, in a way, so was he. And so was I.

Ken landed on my doorstep less than a week later. I opened the door and wrapped my arms around him, held his face in my hands and breathed him in again.

I continued to pick at my grapefruit while I watched Ken scarf his down. There was no gazing into each other's eyes. We weren't falling in love. In fact, the air was chilly.

He sprang to his feet to get ready for his day of skydiving. I looked around his sparsely furnished, doublewide mobile home. Did I really want this life? A mobile home in an abandoned suburban area? I glanced around for signs that other women had been there. The sheer purple curtains were suspect.

I buried my grapefruit in the trash like I used to do as a child, hiding food I hated from my father. Ken walked back into the kitchen half dressed. *Damn he was hot*, I thought as he pulled the coffee pod from the espresso machine to make a second cup.

"Oh, I'd love one," I said.

Ken slammed the pod down, "Can I get some help here?"

I shot up like a little girl getting yelled at by her father.

"Maybe I can do the eggs," I asked paralyzed by fear.

"No, just sit down," he barked at me. I withdrew and sat again.

A few minutes later, I was standing by my car, hugging him good-bye with a feeling I'd never see him again. On the drive home, it became clear that I was recreating my childhood home of emotional abuse. I wanted none of it, but my feelings for Ken did not go away. I spent the next two weeks bouncing between heart and head.

It went from, "...if I hadn't lost myself, he'd have loved me...", to, "He's a jerk, you don't want him anyway...", and "you're going to live in the IE (Inland Empire), really?" These thoughts went on and on until finally, my heart won and I called him.

"I love you and I think we have a future together," I said, simply and clearly.

“I love spending time with you,” he said.

I hung up the phone, freshly wounded. Again.

It was time to cut the ties. But one night, a couple of weeks later, after drinking some wine, I sent a flirty text.

“I’m dating my ex-wife again...thought I should tell you,” he replied the next day. “After all, you’ve been a great teacher and an influence on myself.”

I couldn’t breathe.

“Be well, good luck.” I replied. “Just remember a leopard doesn’t change its spots. This woman kept you from your son for vengeance. Now you are in bed with her. It’s not love. It is ego in its truest form... Give my love to your son, who is being used as a pawn.”

“LOL!...” he replied.

But then I softened: *What if they really did think they were back in love?*

I backed off and wrote: “I do pray you both heal through your love for one another...”

“Whatever Stacey...see you,” were his last words to me.

Summer turned to fall, Christmas came and went, and I never heard from him. I assumed he was living happily ever after, but I never gave up hope that he would call and tell me he loved me.

Around the first of February, I decided I was brave enough to go on his Facebook page and possibly see the happy photos of his new life. Sitting at work, with my insides churning, I went to his page. I clicked on the first picture I saw of him. The text beneath read, “I will miss this smile.”

I continued to scroll down. What was I looking at? It was like witnessing a horrible accident—a bumper here, a mirror there, the burn of tire tracks over there. I couldn’t piece together what I was reading. Ken was dead? It couldn’t be true. I collapsed under my desk, gasping for air.

I spent the rest of the afternoon shattered, slowly piecing some of the information together. I emailed his mother.

She replied and told me that Ken had died on Sunday, July 18, 2010. (Just five weeks after our last text). It was his fifth jump of the day. He had been using a new rig (the one we went

to look at the night we were together) and hit an air pocket about 200 feet up, causing the chute to collapse with no time to recover. He had two broken legs, a broken pelvis, ruptured spleen and massive internal bleeding. He died five hours later on the operating table.

It's been eight years since Ken's death. I have mourned him on multiple levels throughout the years. It's been quite the journey — one full of mystical coincidences. Aside from Ken's passing, telling this story again in such detail makes me cringe. It's so obvious I was lost, horribly lost.

I wish I could have taken my younger self out for coffee to tell her a few things. First I would tell her to heed a man's words, if he say's 'run for the hills,' do it. Know what you want, don't settle for less, speak your truth, and if you don't like grapefruit, say it. Stay out of fantasy, it's your worse enemy. And no drunk texting!

So how did I go from the emotional level of a little girl, eating much-hated grapefruit, to a strong woman, not desperately seeking relationship?

By learning that my relationship with myself is the most important relationship. If I do something that isn't caring for me, showing up for me, the rest doesn't matter. I learned to have my own back and trust my gut.

In other words, yes, I'm talking about self-love. But I also hate that term. And what does 'self love' really mean? Sounds like a bunch of BS. I sought self love for most of my adult life. It was the proverbial carrot always dangling ahead of me, illusive. I truly believed that once I loved myself (whatever that meant) the gates of heaven would open up, but it wasn't like that. It was more like, *shit, this is who I am and this is how I've been showing up (or not showing up) for myself?*

In real terms, how does one realize self love? If we take a look at the grapefruit story, where do you think I stopped showing up for myself? Maybe when I ate the grapefruit? Nope, it was actually the year before, when I first met Ken and he started playing games with me. I thought I was cool, twisting myself up into pretzels trying to make it work for me, telling myself that I just wanted sex like he did, that I didn't need a full on commitment, that crumbs were better than the whole loaf, etc.

The truth was that I thought I was completely in love with Ken and wanted to build a life with him, maybe have a baby with him, but he wasn't available. I allowed myself to be tortured for a year, believing he was the only man in the world that could offer me great sex and adventure. If I had loved myself, I would have seen all the red flags and moved on a little faster.

Let's flash forward 7 years — I'd been dating a guy for about six weeks. I had a feeling he was not going to be *the one*, but I liked him. He seemed like an alright guy. One evening, we made plans for dinner. Around lunch the day of our date, he found himself in my neighborhood, so I invited him over. Yes, it was for a nooner and once we were 'done,' he left quickly. There was something about his good-bye that had my gut twist in knots.

About an hour later, he texted me that he needed to cancel dinner plans. What? My pulse raced. I texted him that it was totally uncool to come over, have sex, and then cancel dinner plans. 'I knew I was going to receive a text like this,' he texted back.

I thought to myself, *then why would he even cancel plans? This isn't the guy for me.* I broke up with him. You can only imagine his shock. I'm sure he'd gotten use to women sticking around, even with this sort of behavior. He was in control, getting sex for as long as he wanted before moving on. This wasn't going to work for me. I had gotten to the point where I knew what I wanted and wasn't going to mess around with someone. I showed up for myself. I showed more love for my *self* than desperately trying to make it work with this guy.

Again, you are probably asking how did you go from a woman eating grapefruit, which you hate, to a woman who could easily say good-bye to a man that just canceled a dinner date? First, let me explain, that it wasn't the canceled dinner date that was the main problem, everyone makes mistakes, changes plans, etc. What made me break up with him was his response to me. I have very little experience in committed relationships, but the one thing I do know is that I need a partner who is willing to discuss and show interest in my point of view, especially when it differs from theirs. This is the foundation of a healthy relationship. This guy showed no ability or interest in communication.

This book is a divine romance between, you, your Self, me, and your future partner, who, by the way, can't wait to meet you. Remember you are special, but you are not so special that you are going to be the unlucky one out of all your girlfriends to die alone without children.

The first step to all great romance is to date.

Open All The Doors and Windows, Sage the Place

The key to finding love is to open yourself up. To find love, you must date. There is no other way around it. As Dr. Pat Allen, one of my favorite dating gurus, calls it, *duty dating*. The man of your dreams is not going to just knock on your door. It's a lovely fantasy, but it's not going to happen. If you have a strong negative opinion about online dating, dating services, dating, or men in general, this could be why you are single. But don't worry, I got you. We'll go deeper into all of this and rediscover your true essence, that little girl inside you that once believed in true love. She's there, just a little worn out. I'll show you how to make dating fun, easy and an adventure. Every date is an opportunity to fall more in love with yourself.

Time to Get Real!

Fantasy is your worst enemy while dating or in relationship. The sort of relationship you truly want cannot be founded in fantasy. It will leave you unhappy. Imagine building a house on sand — that's what fantasy is to a relationship and/or dating. I know this because fantasy was my drug of choice. Usually, when I first start working with clients, they would often think their 'meh' date will turn into prince charming. Remember, Cinderella was the one who changed, it wasn't the prince. The prince was always the prince. Its time break the cycle of fantasy and denial. The mana of life is in the trenches —reality. One of my clients just sent me the following quote from Terry Real, "In order to be intimate you have to bring yourself up from shame and down from grandiosity. This is an essential skill to master in relationships." Magic is always happening. Are you open to it? It's hard to experience when you are in fantasy or denial.

Ready to Find Your Lotus Flower?

And I'm not talking about your vagina ... or am I? Ha! Often, when I first start working with a client, I tell her that to date successfully, she needs to imagine herself as a queenly woman lounging on a lotus flower, ready to receive. Feminine energy is not a woman seeking out a man, focused, determined, almost frightening in a predatory stance. A woman receives. What your mama didn't teach you is that this is true feminine power. Don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about the office! Please, be strong and focused at the office but then leave it there. I'm also not

talking about being a pushover. Being empowered and mysterious comes from being more committed to yourself than anyone else. You want a man who cherishes, provides, and protects. If your date isn't interested in these things, he's a boy, not a man. Move on.

The Reluctant Princess

I was a tomboy. I never thought of myself as a princess. Princesses made me want to throw up. When I became engaged in 2006 and bought a wedding dress with a pink and ivory beaded halter, satin-ribbon-lined tulle bottom, and a pink bow in the back, let's just say I was shocked. Perhaps, subconsciously, I wanted to be a princess and to be saved. I didn't see it until that moment, staring at myself in a pool of pink and white. What I knew was my rebel. My rebel was very strong and would not give up her freedom for anything. These two worked against each other. Do you have a reluctant princess inside you, or an overzealous rebel?

Why Relationship?

I've been single for 48 years. I've garnered lots of dating experience and very few long-term relationships (and by long term, I mean, a year being the longest). I've always felt like a caged bird in relationship. I truly believed that a committed relationship would hold me back from living out my destiny, while simultaneously holding it up as the answer to all my problems. It reminds me of the aforementioned quote that my client sent to me; my grandiosity kept me single. No one was special enough, and I wasn't sure that I wanted anyone to see how not-special I actually felt in my day to day life.

So why a relationship? Why do you want a relationship, what is the purpose of relationship, and how do we set one up free of resentment? It's important to answer these questions because, even with the best intentions, your thought process can get muddled.

I recently thought I had fallen in love. This man showered me with love, affection, and gifts. He promised me everything a girl could ask for, and I believed it because I craved a change. I wanted to learn, grow, and expand. We moved quickly, moving in together and blending our families. However, he then revealed more of his essence, which was very different than mine. Our morals and values did not align, and we could not find a compromise, even with the help of a therapist. When this happens, there is only one thing to do: pull up your big girl pants, and make a decision that is best for you —move on.

Stacey J. Warner

Walls or Boundaries?

As children, we are often not taught how to set healthy boundaries. But healthy boundaries are key to any relationship being successful. If you are a strong and successful woman, you are most likely tough. Your toughness has gotten you this far and is awesome, but it can be a deterrent while dating. Ever wonder why the sweet, little girl type of women seem to always get the guy? We'll get to the bottom of the difference between walls and boundaries and how to let down the walls.

Owning the Wound

Rarely do I hear from my clients that their childhoods were filled with easy love. Everyone in the world is wounded. Learning to have compassion for our own wounding will free us up to have compassion for our date and partners. Later in this book, we will take a deeper look at the common wounding, how to own it, and how to use it as a source of empowerment.

Igniting the Magic

Vision boards and talismans have always left a bad taste in my mouth. I believe there is magic everywhere and anything can be turned into a mystical experience by setting clear intentions. With that being said, it was in 2017 that I decided for myself to find a relationship and infuse a few items with that intention to help me along. I'll share with you a few tricks that will keep your search for love fun and magical.

We are going to cover a lot of ground, creating a synergy for you to attract the right partner by going deep into the labyrinth of your soul, loving all those forgotten parts, bringing to light the best part of you, and reminding the hardened parts that *you* got this and you are co-creating a life that is extra, not one dictated by your subconscious.

We are all capable of creating expansive and amazing lives. We just have to get out of our own way.