

Diary of a Beverly Hills Matchmaker

Hi Marla,

I don't want you to think that I'm one of those lecherous... I go to church every Sunday, but I'm also a red-blooded male, so my life has got to be exciting. I require a slim blonde with at least a double D and preferably, who to go to church. I don't believe in living in sin, so she's speaking the terms of a prenuptial contract. I'd spring for an allowance, but not over a thousand dollars a month. Why don't you try starting at five? Blessings on you and yours,
Wynne.



Marla dishes with candor and humor about what goes on behind the scenes in the business of happily-ever-after. Insightful—and hilarious.

—Kristin Harmel,

The Art of French Kissing

Marla Martenson

Dear Marla,

I had dinner reservations at La Dolce Vita. Karly arrived very late so I had to settle for an appetizer at the bar. Greta was supposed to go to the Elton John concert and sourly delighted with that on the phone. She pulled a no-show. Rita joined me in Spago, I have heard no response. I only tolerate these girls because they're stupid. Still, do you have any real nice women? What's wrong with these girls? Like, just call the damn guy already. If he took you to dinner, and paid the dinner tab, call him and thank him—he creeps you out. If you never want to see him again, tell him you're going to be



In *Diary of a Beverly Hills Matchmaker*, Marla takes her readers for a hilarious romp through her days as an L.A. matchmaker and her daily struggles to keep her self-esteem from imploding in a town where looks are everything and money talks. From juggling the demands her out-of-touch clients . . . to trying her best to meet the capricious demands of an insensitive boss . . . to the ups and downs of her own marriage to a Latin husband who doesn't think that she is "domestic" enough, Marla writes with charm and self-effacement about the universal struggles that all women face in their lives.

Readers will laugh, cringe, and cry as they journey with her through outrageous stories about the indignities of dating in Los Angeles, dealing with overblown egos, vicariously hobnobbing with celebrities, and navigating the wannabe-land of Beverly Hills. In a city where perfection is almost a prerequisite, even Marla can't help but run for the Botox every once in a while.

Marla's quick wit will have you rolling on the floor.

—Megan Castran, International "YouTube Queen"

Sharper than a Louboutin stiletto, Martenson's book delivers an insider's look at the image-obsessed world of Los Angeles dating.

—Nadine Haobsh, author of *Confessions of a Beauty Addict*



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by Marla Martenson

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Disclaimer: This is a true story and the characters are real, as are the events. However, names, descriptions, and locations have been changed, and any similarity of the characters in this story to a known or living individual is purely coincidental. Some stories have been altered and or combined for story-telling purposes. Time has been condensed for narrative purposes, but the overall chronology is an accurate depiction of the author's experience.

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What Others Are Saying about This Book . . .

Martenson's irresistible wit is not to be missed.

—Kyra Davis, *Lust, Loathing, and a Little Lip Gloss*

A fun, wry, and truly eye-opening
look into real-life world of matchmaking.

—Joanne Rendell, *The Professors' Wives' Club*

Marla's quick wit will have you rolling on the floor.

—Megan Castran, International "You Tube Queen"

Imagine this: a professional matchmaker giving us a witty,
often hilarious, insight into the fascinating underbellies
of dating and making it in Beverly Hills. Priceless.

—F. G. Gerson, *21 Steps to Happiness*

Sharper than a Louboutin stiletto,
Martenson's book delivers an insider's look at the
image-obsessed world of Los Angeles dating.

—Nadine Haobsh, *Beauty Confidential*
and *Confessions of a Beauty Addict*

I absolutely love this book! A witty, smart read for anyone
who's ever wondered what the other half is really thinking.

—Lisa Daily, DAYTIME TV dating coach
and author of *Stop Getting Dumped*

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Matchmaker, Matchmaker! Make Me a Match

Achichi decorator came up with the color of one of the walls in my Beverly Hills office by matching paint swatches to the silky dark chocolate Godiva heart-shaped ganaches that sit in a crystal dish alongside Teuscher Irish Cream truffles, and chocolate cordials of cherries soaked in black port and wrapped in gold foil. We do pamper our clients. I mention this so you'll know that there are many aspects of my job that I absolutely adore. Such niceties distract me from fantasies of . . . dismemberment.

Hi Marla, Scott, here. I'm so glad I joined your dating agency; I can see this is going to be verrrry interesting. . . . Hey, the gal you lined me up with last evening was gorgeous, but I would really like my matches to be a 10 or, ideally, a 10+. And the gal needs to back up her beauty with an income of her own and her own living quarters. No roommate situations. I don't waste my time with someone who doesn't live up to my expectations—you know, long legs, firm small butt, double-D's, thin arms, blonde hair.

SCL

Ahem.

Dear Scott,

To paraphrase the deathless sentiments of Roseanne Barr, I'll get my wand. Oh, wait, it's in the repair shop, utterly depleted. I'm having to make do with our back-up magic lamp, but the genie keeps

laughing and muttering about peace in the Middle East being an easier request as he disappears in a puff of smoke. He's such a joker. But since you have so much to offer, it shouldn't be too difficult to find the woman of your fantasies since all the 10+s in our database say that a man willing to plough up his bald scalp with those cute little tufts of implanted hair is a real turn-on. And most "gals" don't mind giving up their stilettos to avoid towering over a man of your stature.

Of course, I don't write this. This is my first email of the day at Double D Dating Service here in Beverly Hills where I'm the head matchmaker. Double D is not the company's real name, as you may have guessed, just my own special pet name for it. I dash off a breezy professional response to Scott as if diplomacy were my mother tongue.

Dear Scott,

I'm so glad you enjoyed your evening with a gorgeous woman. A new and interesting experience, huh? Well, we do have an ever-growing list of many stunning women, eager to meet you. I'll get back to you later in the day with another name.

Marla

Something is nagging at me. Oh, my conscience. It's not bothering me at all about the direct lie: *eager to meet you*. I've left in a little dig. I change that one snarky line about dating gorgeous women being a new experience to simply "An interesting experience indeed," and hit send. Next email.

Dear Marla,

I really found Sandy to be attractive, fun, intelligent, and cultured. We had a great time. The only thing is, I am wondering if she has a big butt. She was wearing one of those puffy dresses. She says that she does all kinds of activities like dance classes, working out at the gym, and hiking, but I just can't be sure how big her butt is. Is there any way you can let me know if it's big or if the dress she was wearing just gave that illusion?

Joseph

Joe, don't you know that when we bring a woman into our service, it means that we have carefully inspected her butt from every angle and therefore certify it is also a 10 along with the rest of her? I'm so glad you asked though, because you must never ever consider dating a woman with flesh on her butt. Oversized curves belong above the waist only. Makes perfect sense. How could nature have created such a serious design flaw?

Sigh. I find it so comforting to type out what I truly want to say to some of these clods before writing the response I must write. God forbid Gary should ever see this stuff. I am, after all, good at what I do. Pictures of my successes hang on the chocolate-colored wall above fresh pale pink hydrangeas: two of happy couples at their respective posh wedding receptions and several more couples on honeymoons at places like Bellagio on Lake Como in Italy, or snorkeling with humpback whales off Vava'u, Tonga, in the South Pacific, or skiing in Aspen. I do still believe in love—the soul-mate kind of love. I think deep down, the Scotts and Josephs do too. They just rarely know it.

Dear Joseph,

Sandy's dress probably created the wrong illusion. Call her for another date; I think you will be pleased to find that in addition to being beautiful, intelligent, and a most remarkable woman, she's also fit and trim.

Marla

I polish off my vanilla soy latte, ready for the next email, when I hear Gary, my boss, barking at Charlotte, the other matchmaker in the office. She hangs her head as she follows him into his office. He doesn't usually come in on Thursdays, so this isn't looking good for Charlotte.

I step outside the artistically etched glass double doors of my office to check with Alana at the front desk. "What's going on?" I ask in a stage whisper.

Alana, a petite blonde in her twenties with big brown eyes and a gorgeous smile, is just about to say something when Gary strides over. "Back to work!" he tells me. Then to Alana he says,

“Find the Harrison file. . . . And never wear those shoes here again. If you want to look like Peter Pan, work somewhere else.”

I can't help but turn to check out Alana's shoes. Ohh, they're darling: green flats with little cut-outs of stars.

“Marla, I hope you have some makeup in your bag,” Gary says. “You're looking washed out again. Do you go to the gym before work or something? Don't you two get it that we're all about glamour and sex appeal here? Our clients don't want Peter Pan and Miss Grundy lining up their matches.”

“Right,” I say, feeling my face redden to the roots of my already red hair. “I'll touch up.” Gary can be a nice guy, but he does go on rampages.

Back in my office, I pile all my black matchmaking catalogues on my desk to hide from Gary's view. I eat a chocolate. Then another. One more. Call it an early lunch. Mmmmm. Better. Deep breaths, a few affirmations. *I am young and hot-looking. I am a terrific matchmaker. I am lucky to have this job.*

Back to work. Next email.

Dear Marla,

Denise looks like she's pushing forty. Not to say there's anything wrong with that. I live in Newport, so I can't help but date forty-year-olds occasionally, but when it comes to being set up with someone through an exclusive agency such as yours, I don't want to waste “matches.” And we need to talk about Natasha, the last gal you lined me up with—a bit low-brow, don't you think? I will send you a few photos of females that I find attractive so hopefully that will help you see the caliber of beauty I'm seeking. I want to date **ONLY** beautiful women, and I just won't settle for anything less.

Let me know if anyone in your stable meets my criteria.

Thanks, Dave.

I had matched him with Natasha because of the astonishing bounty of her bosom. But as to Denise—she's nowhere near the accursed four-oh. But if she were, how could any man in his fifties possibly be expected to tolerate a crone of such advanced years?

His comment reminds me that I haven't "touched up" yet. I pull out my compact and scrutinize time's deepening etch in the tiny lines around my eyes. I pat them over with mineral powder, add a dusting of blush to my cheeks, a brighter lipstick, and heavy gloss.

I sit back and ponder the photo of Denise, a gorgeous twenty-eight-year-old woman, and all I can do is shake my head. This beautiful young woman is Dave's fourth reject. Before I worked in the matchmaking field, I honestly had no idea how shallow, picky, selfish, and entitled some clients could be. After six years of feedback, demands, and expectations, I'm still thrown for a loop now and then. I don't want to pass judgment on people; I want to keep an open heart, but geez.

It's times like this when I need an anchor, a sane voice, someone who lives far away from the zany nuttiness of Beverly Hills. I call my friend Shelly in Federal Way, Washington, where we both grew up—it's a little suburb of Seattle, a land far away from this town's obsession with age, looks, and perfection.

"Listen to this," I tell her and then read her Dave's email—*anonymously*, of course.

I hear a gasp on the other end of the line.

"My reaction exactly," I tell her.

"What is he? Some rich stud?"

"Well, rich anyway. I'm supposed to find matches for these guys. They all want perfect 10s—even if they're dweebs who'd be lucky to rate a 5!"

"What about the women?"

"Yeah, some days the gold-diggers and airheads get to me too."

"Guess I don't have to envy you anymore, thinking that you have the perfect life in Los Angeles," Shelly teases. "At least you're not still a waitress in Chicago."

Shelly is referring to my life seven years ago. Memories of my fourteen years spent waiting on tables jolt my sense of perspective, spurring me to work ever harder and continue with the exasperating emails.

I see Charlotte walk past my door, head held high, but I can tell she's gotten the ax. She starts cleaning out her office. We

weren't close, so I won't be going over and chatting. I'll get the scoop later from Alana. After Charlotte leaves, Gary sticks his nose in my door.

"You look better," he says. "You'll have to meet Charlotte's noon appointment. I'm not replacing her, so you'll be taking her people." He closes the door and leaves before I can say anything.

In other words, double the work, same pay. Oh boy!

Dutifully, I meet Andy and take him into the "selling office" with its stunning wall fountain sheeting water over pink-veined slabs of granite and pooling in a pink copper basin beneath two spotlights angled to form a soft heart-shape. The arty painting on the opposite wall captures dancers, hungry with passion, a slash of pink light falling on the woman's tan face and cleavage. Its subtle eroticism is designed to inspire rich guys to pay top dollar for what they imagine will be the world's classiest women. I offer the new client something to drink, and we settle in to chat about what he is looking for in a lady and what his lifestyle is like.

Andy has just flown in for the day to buy a sex life, I mean meet someone, and then he'll jet back to Dallas. He has the most charming Southern accent.

He's forty-six years old with three kids: aged eight, ten, and twelve. He explains that he would like to meet women under thirty because he'd like the option of having another child.

Uh-huh. Right. He's eager to go through diapers and babysitters and soccer games for the fourth time. I've found that men usually claim to want one more kid as an excuse to date younger women.

I learn that Andy likes riding horses, racing cars, playing golf, working out at the gym, and traveling. He says that although he isn't a redneck, he's a redneck at heart—whatever that means. "Do you prefer a fresh-faced girl-next-door look, or more of a Pamela Anderson type of look?" I ask him.

He mentions blonde hair and nice legs, then pulls on his goatee and says, "Well, now I'll tell you, my ex-wife wears a C-cup, but she has nice nipples."

I stop taking notes. *And so . . . ?*

Then I get it. This guy expects me to know what a woman's nipples are like! I focus on my clipboard and remind myself that he will be paying \$40,000 to find the right woman. Maybe more. I manage not to hiss at him.

After the meeting, I walk Andy down to the taxi stand. He turns to me and says, "I want you to be honest. Do you think that I have a chance to meet the right girl? Am I going to be too difficult to match up?"

"Not at all, Andy! You're a great catch with a wonderful lifestyle." Lots of gorgeous L.A. women are closet rednecks. "I'll start looking for matches for you this week. Have a safe trip." I want to add: and I'll be investigating nipple potential for you, sir!

I'm also remembering a recent client who broke up with a thirty-two-year-old woman he really liked because he said that she had big areolas. Yes, big areolas! She was perfect in every way: sweet, charming, financially secure, intelligent, cute as a posy with a rockin' body, but he said that he dreaded when she took off her blouse. After dating him, she felt so insecure that she called a plastic surgeon to see if he'd take a look at her areolas. Yikes!

I guess I should change our questionnaire to include nipple preferences. I could put in something subtle like, "How do you feel about headlights on a Duesenberg?" I've seen older guys fall over themselves laughing at this line. I had to look it up. Fabulously snazzy old car with, you know, big headlights, wink, wink.

Something has gone too far though.



I don't mind telling you that when I first took this job, I considered myself young and hot-looking, but after working with some of these guys and hearing their smug criticism over every aspect of a woman's body, I'm a bit crestfallen. Getting bombarded with male mating preferences is very disconcerting. Now that I'm fortyish, I look in the mirror, and I see someone who looks pretty darn good looking back at me. So why are so many men obsessing over the extra ounce of flesh, the telltale frown line, and nipple perfection? Gimme a flippin' break!

I push past the clueless effrontery of these men every day, but once in a while, I catch myself judging my most intimate anatomy by their standards. I get so many of these emails every week, they slither around in my head nagging at me about how I'm officially "undesirable"—according to what most of my male clients think they want and *must* have. How could these idiots close themselves off to the wonders of love for something so damn insignificant?

I take a deep breath or two. I'm already a little wired with caffeine, but I *cannot* get through the rest of this day without another soy latte. 'Bucks is just down the street, and I still have a few minutes left of my lunch break.

I need this job, I remind myself while in line for my midday fix. And, I mean, who doesn't want an ideal mate? A dream lover is the stuff of fantasies. Yet, who among us is ideal? The pain of being dumped or disappointed is what keeps people going to shrinks, buying self-help books, bravely enduring elective surgery—and hiring us.

Bolstered by another caffeine infusion, I slog through the rest of the day, interviewing men who are willing to spend up to \$100,000 to get the woman of their fantasies. (The women do not pay. This figures: If you're a gorgeous woman, it is unlikely you are going to need to pay anyone to find you a date.) I keep current on the feedback. Both the man and woman are to report on how they found their date: strong mate potential? Problems? Did everyone "behave" themselves? I think you know what I mean.

Gary has left for the day, and Alana comes into my office with the scoop. "Charlotte was fired because two clients complained she didn't pay attention to what they were looking for. You know what *that* means!"

"Yeah. They'll now be my problem," I say.

At six o'clock, I still have an hour to go before quitting time. I grab my cell phone and call my friend Bobbie in Del Mar. I'm not going to whine, I just want to hear her upbeat stuff. Her life is exciting. She usually picks up on the first call. I love that. Hate phone tag.

“Hi, it’s Marla.”

We chat a bit and Bobbie invites me to an upcoming social event—something to do with farm animals?

I’m so tired, I just say, “Sounds wonderful.”

“Are you at home yet?” she asks.

“No. Everyone else in our building gets off at five, but I still have another hour of work.”

“You work till seven? Marla, honestly, you deserve combat pay! Especially with the bizarro demands from some of your clients! Do something fun tonight!”

“I should finish chapter 4 of my new book, but I just don’t have the juice. Maybe I’ll do some window-shopping down on Rodeo. That’s always good for a lift.”

“Is Adolfo working?”

“Of course. My nights are pathetic, I know.”

“Marla, you should just open your own matchmaking service. You’d be fabulous and then you could make your own hours!”

“Thanks. People have suggested I do that, but honestly, I like being able to hand over the big problems to Gary.”

There is a pause. “Sweetie, something’s wrong. I can tell. I’m a little worried about you,” Bobbie says. “I mean, excuse me, your soul is limping.”

I chuckle. She’s doing a little riff off the title of my first book, *Excuse Me, Your Soul Mate Is Waiting*.

The office line is ringing, and Alana is long gone.

“I gotta go,” I say. “I love you. Talk to you soon.”

I pick up the office phone, schedule an appointment, and get back to the emails, back to the guys who are looking for gorgeous, starving waifs with double D cups—“tits on a stick,” as Bobbie calls them.

Affirmations

I am a terrific Beverly Hills matchmaker happily playing Cupid all day long.

I have many wonderful friends like Shelly and Bobbie whose friendship keeps me from screaming at highly inappropriate times.

Heaven has blessed me with perfectly lovely areolas, thank you very much!



Magnets

I've taken off my Jimmy Choo eight-strap platform pumps that originally cost seven hundred dollars—and that I bought online for only a hundred fifteen bucks after I got my signing advance on my first book—and put on my walking shoes from Target. I'm just about to shut the computer off when my email chime sounds. Why do I even bother looking in my inbox at this hour?

Hi Marla, Scott here.

I'm still waiting for the 10+ lovelies you promised.

SCL

Oops.

Dear Scott,

Our 10+ young women are very popular and booked well in advance, or they often date one client steadily—which is what we want for you too, right? I'm sure I can have a name for you by tomorrow though.

Marla

There's a second email. It's cc'd to me, but primarily addressed to Gary.

Gary and Marla,

None of the twenty-three women I've dated through your service are up to my standards. I demand that you cancel my contract and give me my money back immediately or I'll see you in court.
Nathan

OgodOgodOgodOgod. I blow my breath out about a dozen times. I know Gary will handle this if it gets really ugly, but I'll have to try to talk the guy out of it first. *Shit!*

Dear Nathan,

Picture if you will the jurors listening to you plead your case: six horny guys slobbering over the gorgeous women you turned down, and six women who must be restrained from forming a lynching party. See what I'm saying, Nathan?

I start to write a foray into an amicable resolution, but you know what? I can't deal with this tonight. Nathan will just have to wait. I shut down the computer, turn off the lights, and lock up.



Do I really need this job? I ask myself as I head up Rodeo Drive toward Wilshire. Enough to put up with all the crap?

I hated being a waitress. I made a solemn vow to myself that I would *not* still be waitressing at forty. My thirty-five-year-old self would think I was so dang successful now, I should stand up and cheer. I make good money and have sold two books. The first one is just about to be released, so it hasn't earned enough yet to allow me to focus on writing full time.

Is Bobbie right? Is my soul limping? Right now, I'm fondly remembering my waitressing days in Chicago, where I had more time for creative pursuits before and after work. Or are my Oakleys too rose-tinted as I glance into the past?

Wow! Isn't that Reese Witherspoon in that Rolls driving by? I walk a little faster and almost catch up at the light at Wilshire. The Rolls turns and I follow. I can see it turn again onto North Canon. I bet she's going to Spago. I walk a little faster and am half a block away when I see a swarm of photogs, their cameras

flashing like firecrackers. I can see a blonde making it inside the restaurant before being totally mauled.

I have to smile as I head back to Rodeo. She's living the life I was pursuing. At the age of twenty, I left Washington and moved to Los Angeles to pursue my dreams of an acting career—along with thousands of Kelly McGillis wannabes and Don Johnson posers. People used to mistake me for Molly Ringwald and even ask me for my autograph. I would walk down the street and hear, "Hey, Molly!" I'd wave and blow kisses. When I was waiting tables, a few customers thought I was Molly. I went along with it at first and signed their napkins. Finally, I asked the obvious. "Why in the heck would Molly Ringwald be waiting tables in West Hollywood?"

I have pictures of me playing up the Molly look, but I also loved Madonna. The photos of me dressed in her "like a virgin" days: hilarious! None of this got me anywhere in show biz, however. So to pay the bills, I moved on to waitressing along with the rest of the dreamers—just until I landed a part in some big movie that would make me famous. And rich. And allow me to live in Beverly Hills.

Not that doing anything in Beverly Hills isn't a trip, if you know what I mean. In one of the first of my many stellar jobs, which was just across the street from where I'm right now, fogging up a window—sighing over a red Louis Vuitton handbag that I've already priced at \$1,110—I often worked the busy Saturday lunch shift where I lost some of my naiveté very quickly. Ron, the manager-host, told us to seat the "beautiful people" outside on the patio so that passers-by could see them frequenting his dining establishment. The "less attractive" tourists were seated inside upfront, and the uglier ones, as he called them, were "positioned in the back." I felt sorry for those poor schmucks—because they also got the slowest service. And the smaller portions. Sometimes they even got the least appealing or slowest selling food items. "What do you recommend on the menu?" the ugly folks would ask in good faith. "Oh, the dirt sandwich with onions and sauerkraut is my favorite. You'll enjoy it."

I begged to wait on the outdoor diners—celebrities, the rich

and famous, the spoiled patrons juggling Chanel, Gucci, and Armani shopping bags. I was a bit jealous, of course, of all these privileged people, shopping and dining in Beverly Hills while I worked my ass down to a size zero at two restaurant jobs just to get by. I was waiting on Joan Collins, who came to the restaurant with a party of six. *Dynasty* was a top-rated TV show, and I did my best to please its star villainess, pouring more of *this*, fetching another *that*. And then disaster struck. She called me over to her table. Her fork was missing. “This is an outrage!” she barked.

For all my work, she left me a \$2 tip on a \$120 tab. The woman was clearly typecast as Alexis, right?



My dream of getting work as an actress got squeezed into the crannies as the years flew by, and I accepted—but never liked—the restaurant work. I mean *I* should be the one wearing fabulous designer suits at power lunches and dripping with bling at dinner—not serving these hoity-toities. I mostly just got lonelier and felt worse about myself. By age twenty-seven, I was still living alone, away from my family, and struggling financially.

But I was about to ride off into the smoggy sunset with Mr. Fabulous who would, I hoped, save me from the drudgery of two jobs so I could return to acting. I was working in a French restaurant in West Hollywood. Neither Tom Cruise nor Rob Lowe had taken notice of the adorable cashier at Le Bistro Brasserie, so I flirted with Bruno, the cute French sous chef who didn’t speak much English. I spoke French, so he chatted me up *tout suite*. I let him talk me into letting him crash at my place a few times—he lived forty-five minutes away and knew I walked to work from my little apartment. Success story that he was, he had no car and spent a fortune on taxi fares at night after work.

I must confess that I suffer from RAA syndrome, Rescues Abandoned Animals, and so I helped the guy out. Like, four times a week. He camped on my sofa. You can see where this is going. I mean a bed is so much more comfy than a lumpy couch.

Bruno soon had an epiphany: Marriage would save us money. Somehow, it sounded sexy in French. Deep down I knew that he was using me, but I was so lonely. I said, *oui*.

What *was* I thinking?

A few years later, Bruno had a chance to work with two brothers who were opening a restaurant in Chicago. He asked me if I wanted to move so far away from sunny California. The only thing I knew about Chicago was that Oprah and Phil Donahue were there, and as one of my guy waiter friends who had visited many times told me, "It's colder than a witch's tit." I had also heard that there was acting work available. I was sick of L.A. and said *oui* once more.

I loved the Windy City and made some good friends, but the restaurant partners turned out to be very bad people, so, after a year and a half, we broke off our association with them. Bruno decided to take a job in Beverly Hills and move back to L.A. We didn't have enough money to pay a moving company, so he went ahead of me; I stayed the summer, working two jobs waitressing in order to save enough for the move. I was so exhausted from waiting on tables day and night that when I came home, I often collapsed on the floor in tears, my three-and-a-half-pound Yorkshire terrier, Daphne, my only comfort. But at least I looked good. According to my friends, the fifteen pounds I dropped gave me a "gaunt catwalk allure."

I finally made it back out to L.A. to be with Bruno, who had by then found his true passion in life: playing poker with the guys. I hardly ever saw him. I should have thought, *Yay!* I was so depressed, though, I thought I might have a nervous breakdown. I told Bruno that it looked like our marriage was falling apart and that maybe we should just end it. He said that would be just fine with him, since he wasn't all that attracted to me in the first place. *Aaaarrrrggggghhhh!* I hated L.A., I couldn't find a job, and I missed Chicago and my friends. I spent a lot of time crying my eyes out. On top of that, I just never got picked out of the studio cattle calls. I felt like I was nothing. After ten months back in the City of Angels—from hell—I decided to go back to Chicago and start a fresh life. This should have been a "woo-hoo moment,"

but I was still a mess. Scars? It's a wonder my heart still worked. I still have nightmares about those times.

After seven years of marriage, I filed for divorce, packed two suitcases, and put Daphne in my roomy Gucci knock-off handbag. My dad was living nearby in Anaheim with his second wife—my parents having divorced when I was about twenty-seven. He drove me to the airport. Waterworks gushing, I nodded as my dad kept pointing out that this was the best thing I could have done for myself. He was right. My outlook and therefore my luck was about to change.



Oh. My. God. I smell Italian food, and it draws me right out of my memory of those moronic times with Bruno. I've wandered along, enjoying the profusion of flowers blossoming along the center divide of Rodeo Drive. The pleasant summer evening is still light at almost eight. Most of the shops have closed, so I have the place virtually to myself. The flowers perfume the streets, but my nose also detects . . . money. No kidding. The air smells like new cars and aroma therapies and salons and perfume and leather goods. *Eau de Moolah*—that's the scent along this street. I've reached the Rodeo Collection, small, yet the most expensive shopping turf on the planet. You can't really tell from the outside though. Part of it is sunken with all this ivy cascading over the brick walls and marble columns. There's an open courtyard three levels down with trees and a small waterfall. The pizza smell that is making my stomach growl is wafting up from a new upscale restaurant.

I love Italian food, but somehow I managed not to bulk up on it back in Chicago, where I worked in an Italian restaurant for the steady income. It was the first time I actually took charge of my life, and I began making a good deal of money doing TV commercials and getting small parts in films and print modeling work. I even had a couple of lines in the Mel Gibson film, *What Women Want*. Mel was very nice. I got to stand just a few feet from where he was doing his scene. I was so surprised to see what a heavy smoker he was. He would stand in front of the camera,

puffing on a cigarette, and then when it was time to do his scene, he threw the lit cigarette on the floor in front of him. After his scene, he would pick it back up and start smoking again. Cig addictions—don't even get me started.

I was happy there for five years. Chicago holds a special place in my heart—but life was about to call me back to California. I was home for Christmas at my mom's house in Federal Way when the call came that my father was in the hospital with cancer. I called the airlines, got a ticket, and jumped on the next plane to Los Angeles, crying the whole way down and as I walked into the hospital. I looked at him lying in his bed, knowing that the time had come for us to pay the ultimate price for those damn cigarettes. The hold that cigarettes get on people is like a vise around the throat. Okay, I didn't mean to go there, but knowing that he was going to suffer just about killed me.

The doctor came into the room and coldly announced that the diagnosis was terminal and that Dad had six months to live, at the most. Then he just turned around and walked out the door.

Neither of us could look at each other.

Then Dad said, "You think it's too late for me to start eating that tofu and carrot juice you're always trying to foist off on me?" We laughed and I hugged him.

Back in Chicago, it took me only five days to pack everything, close bank accounts, tell my boss I was leaving, say good-bye to dear friends like Rita—who would take care of Daphne for me—and hire a moving company. When I got back to California, Dad was no longer in the hospital. He had deteriorated so much that he was put into a nursing home. I spent days and nights at his side, crying and praying for help getting through this.

Mercifully he died a few days later. I was living at my aunt's house, waiting for my things to cross the country from Chicago on a moving truck. The second hardest thing that I've ever had to do in my life was to drive over to the cremation place and pick up my dad's ashes. I paid the four hundred dollars and was handed a cardboard box that weighed about ten pounds. I hid it in the back of the closet of the guest room that I was staying in.

That night, lying on the inflated mattress that was my bed for the next two months, I felt and heard a buzzing sound in my left ear. Then I heard the words in my dad's voice, "We did okay, didn't we? I love you."

"I love you too," I said.

I always feel Dad at my side in stressful times. Like right now.

I think he's telling me to do what makes me happy. I feel in my heart that he helped me right after I moved back to L.A., back to Hollywood.

I planned on getting an agent and a job—in any line of work except waitressing—and start auditioning again. I finally found a cute little studio apartment in Hollywood that accepted dogs, a small miracle, and Daphne and I moved in. Decorating the place helped me cope with the loss of my dad, but I still felt very lost and lonely.

I did some French translation work and was also cast in bit parts as an actress. I began doing "audience work." Yep, they actually pay people to sit in the audience at tapings of game shows and late-night talk shows. I had no idea "audience work" existed as a profession until my girlfriend, Anouchka, introduced me to it. It paid a pittance—six dollars per hour cash, sometimes more—but it was interesting. Getting on the *Judge Judy* show, for instance, paid a whole \$40 for just sitting on your butt, staying awake, and looking interested while people bickered, ranted, and endured magisterial sarcasm.

One evening, I walked to a pharmacy up on Sunset Boulevard to get some vitamins. There I met an adorable little Polish woman from New York who also lived in the neighborhood. Sabrina and I became solid friends. We went to plays and comedy clubs together—it was a lot of fun. She introduced me to one of her girlfriends who was an agent. She signed me right away. In the meantime, Sabrina was always talking about a guy who lived in her building. She told me he was dating a gal, but it wasn't serious.

I didn't really care to hear about a guy who was "in a relationship," but every time I saw Sabrina, she kept talking about this guy. She told me that he played piano at a place in Playa Del Rey.

I can't explain this, but I felt like my dad was nudging me. I was just kind of glowing with expectation the night I decided to go to the piano bar with Sabrina to secretly check him out.

Adolfo.

I liked his music, the way he played the piano, and just . . . the way he looked: Latin, handsome, with a warm smile. He came over and sat with us during his break. When he was done for the evening, we all went over to Sabrina's apartment and had a drink. We sat next to each other on her couch, and our lips, I don't know . . . they just . . . somehow . . . locked like magnets.

Affirmations

I will receive a belated tip from an old actress for \$62.37 (adjusting for inflation and interest accrual).

My happy clients shower me with appreciation.

My Dad watches over me.



three

How Dreams Change

I'm back home after my walk on Rodeo, finishing off some pasta and a green salad, catching a little CNN. Afterward, I take my laptop to my sofa, my treasured forest-green velvet loveseat, and check my Double D Dating Service email.

Hi, Marla,

This Scott sounds like yet another short, fat, bald guy. So, no way, José. Barry does look interesting, but he's just too old. And if Andy already has three kids, why does he want another one? I'm sorry but none of these men is even close. Keep trying.

Best,
Cheryl

She's holding out for George Clooney. Yeah. Right. I keep Cheryl in a different file—one I seldom use. She and a few others are sort of my secret weapons. She's a femme fatale.

Hello there, Marla,

I am liking to meet Scott who has those dimples. Also Barry looks so nice. He sure has those nice pecs for a gentleman of his so many years. I think I do not want to meet the man with already three kids. Andy. Him no. I got a new black dress to wear. You know I so much want to go on nice dates to nice places. Tell to them that please?

Sonia

Yes. I will tell to them that. I want to keep Sonia happy. I'm having a lot of luck with my Russian girls. Sonia is a stunner and is well educated, but her accent makes men think she's less intelligent. I feel better knowing I have at least one name to give out tomorrow, and I know there will be more, of course. Nothing from Gary about Nathan's demand for his money back. This issue makes my dinner churn.

I check my personal inbox and see that my publisher is asking for chapter 4 by the end of the week. I must get up and write, but . . . the loveseat is so comfy. I'll just wait for Larry King and watch a few minutes of his show first. Oh, I love this sweet little sofa. It's a remnant of my single days in Chicago and has seen more action than the Shady Lady Ranch in Nevada. Well, that's a slight exaggeration, but it always reminds me of that night Adolfo and I first kissed on Sabrina's sofa.

He likes to say that *I* kissed him, but, honestly, we kissed each other.

I didn't check the size of his pecs or ask if he could take me out on expensive dates or try to discover if he fit my list of what I want in a mate. I never felt that he was appraising my cup size—I'd lost so much weight at the time from all the chaos and emotional upheaval with my dad's death and moving that I had to take a deep breath to fill an A cup. Yet, the magic happened.

When we'd left Sabrina's, he'd walked me to my car. We exchanged phone numbers. He called me every day after that, and he took me out every night he was off. He broke things off with the girl he was casually dating, telling her he could no longer see her because he had met someone special. It wasn't too long after that this "loveseat" earned its name.

For the five years after my divorce from Bruno, I'd had no luck in the dating arena. I got my heart dragged around in the dirt a couple more times. I dated a lot. I really wanted to be in a wonderful relationship. However, for some reason, I just couldn't find or attract an available man. They never wanted to get serious or even admit that I was their "girlfriend." I thought I just really looooved one guy, but when the time seemed right, he didn't propose. We broke up and three months later, he was engaged to

somebody else. Strangely, it didn't occur to me that the guys I dated were schmucks or that we were simply not right for each other. I confess that I sorta needed watching over at the time. And wowser, does Adolfo ever love to watch over!

Anyway, the week after meeting Adolfo, my career picked up. I was booked to work for a whole week as an extra on the Jim Carrey film, *The Majestic*. I was in the courtroom scene, which was filmed in a beautiful old hotel in downtown Los Angeles. The story takes place in the fifties, so they dressed us all in fabulous clothes from that era. It was fascinating watching Jim do his scene over and over and over again until he was completely satisfied. He's so intense and definitely a perfectionist. I can see why he is a superstar.

I started collecting Daphne at my apartment and then excitedly rushing over to Adolfo's after work. I was guarding my heart, though. In Chicago, I'd made the mistake on many an occasion of being the first to bring up the subject of "Where is this going?" or "Are we exclusive?" It only backfired on me each and every time.

So, with Adolfo, I vowed to never utter a word about where the relationship was going. To my astonishment, Adolfo started to introduce me to his friends as his girlfriend after only two weeks. Was he for real? Had I slipped into a parallel universe where handsome men could experience a sense of commitment and not fear sudden loss of manhood? I was in complete shock.

One afternoon, I was in the between-jobs limbo and spending the day at his place. Adolfo decided to take me to Malibu for lunch. We were driving along Sunset Boulevard, and he looked over at me and said, "I asked God to send me someone special. He did. You are the love of my life. My heart and soul."

Naturally, I melted inside. But even if I felt the same way, my love wounds hadn't healed, and I didn't respond fully. *You know these passionate Latin lovers*, I cautioned myself. *He thinks he's in love, but next month, he'll use this line on someone else. Why else is he still single?*

Later, back at his apartment, he announced to me that he had written me a song. "It's called "Tu Eres Mi Estrella," he said.

I also speak Spanish, so I knew instantly he was telling me, "You are my star."

He took out his guitar, started strumming, and then sang to me in Spanish. In English, some of his lines translate as:

*I want to tell you now, that I feel your spirit
When I look deep in your eyes.
I want to tell you again,
Even though I'm so far, you still live inside of me*

*I'm not giving you up, I won't, and I won't give you up
Because you are my star
And I carry you inside
And you are like an earthquake
That trembles my life, my heart
You're like the silver moon that shines and shows me the
way all night*

This was by far the most romantic thing that any man had ever done for me. Any doubts I had tucked away in my damaged little heart vanished, ghostly wisps, fading with the sunlight. There we were, two blissful, joyful, love-silly souls, needing little else but the moon and the stars. He would go on to record the song, which would be played on the TV shows *One Life to Live* and *Prison Break*. He made a lot of money on it.

So my love life was going well, and my career was going well, too. I auditioned for the lead in an episode of *Unsolved Mysteries*. I was reading for the part of a woman whose husband had been murdered with an ax. The ironic thing was that when I was up in Seattle staying with my mom for a couple of weeks after my dad died, I saw a story on the news about a realtor who was showing a house and was murdered with an ax. It was the same story. They hadn't solved the case and were now doing a segment on it. In my audition, I had to pretend that I just got the news over the phone that my husband was dead and react to it. I was shaking and trying to cry and everything. I did my best, but when I walked out of the room I thought, *there is no way I am getting*

that part. I was so bad. But surprisingly, my agent called me the next day with the news. I'd gotten the job. Now, I'm the type of person who gets excited when the potted rose on my balcony gets a new bud. This was *huge* for me. My acting career was finally going somewhere.

I was also booked to do a scene with Andy Dick on his show. He is so funny and super nice. I had a blast, but the acting work proved sporadic, and my savings dwindled. I needed to get a steady job. Every day I would go sit on my front steps in the sun and try to talk myself into applying for work at some restaurants, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I'd made myself a vow.

Six months after we met, Adolfo invited me to his hometown, Mexico City, for New Year's to meet his family. One night, his parents, brothers, and sister were sitting in the living room chatting, and Adolfo stood up and pulled his wallet out of his back pocket. He extracted one of those little laminated calendars and said, "We need to pick a date for the wedding." I choked as if I'd just swallowed a whole jalapeño chili pepper, swigged my tequila, and looked at his parents. They seemed thrilled, so I jumped up and threw my arms around him.

"Honey," he said, "my family loves you as much as I do, and we want you to be part of us."

The heavens opened and showered us with golden confetti. I saw it for sure. I, Marla Renee Martenson, was engaged to my soul mate and man of my dreams. Adolfo took me to a little jewelry store next to his parents' home.

"We have to have something to show everyone that we are really engaged," he said. "Pick something out."

"But there isn't much here," I told him.

"It's okay, we just need something."

So I selected a simple silver ring with a small cubic zirconia. We walked over to the church, and I showed his parents. They kissed me and congratulated us. I could have been wearing a ring out of a crackerjack box for all I cared. I was now a part of this wonderful family. The wedding would be in ten months, right there in Mexico City.



Just before we got married, Adolfo asked me to move in with him, telling me there was no need to worry about paying rent, so I didn't need to earn much money.

Really? Honestly? Okay, then. No hay problema. I got to do what I wanted when I wanted. What an amazing concept.

Leisurely days turned into exciting nights. I got dressed up to go to fashionable piano bars around the beautiful, wonderful City of Angels—whole choirs of angels, cherubim and seraphim belting out the *Hallelujah Chorus*. I'd go alone or bring friends to hear the love of my life play his music at clubs. Suddenly, there were weekends in wine country, nights off that allowed movies and theatre instead of working late. It was glorious!

Eventually, though, as happy as I was wifeing it full time, I got tired of not having my own money, and when I found myself in credit card debt for a total of ten grand, I had a little talk with myself that went something like this: "Marla, time to get your ass in gear and make some dinero!"

So, back to job hunting. After weeks of calling, trekking around, doing interviews, schlepping résumés, and filling out reams of applications, I was getting discouraged; then Adolfo's friend took over the management of a video dating service and needed part-time help at the front desk. She told him that if I wanted the job, it was mine. I accepted and found that I thoroughly enjoyed videotaping new clients and interviewing them to learn all about what they were looking for in a partner.

What I discovered was that regardless of what men and women say they want and need from a partner it all boils down to this: a man wants someone who is beautiful, slim, and sexy; a woman wants a "good-guy" who is successful and has a sense of humor. There you have the secret of the ages as to finding successful matches, reduced to a bouillon cube that is the basis of many a stew.

I enjoyed doing the interviews for a year and a half, but when the owner sold the business, I was once again out of a job. I checked out the "Help Wanted" section in *Backstage West*, a

newspaper for actors. There was an ad that stated simply, “Talent scout, fun job, Beverly Hills,” and the phone number. I told my friend Francine, about it.

“It’s a scam! Don’t apply!” she warned.

“How bad can it be?” I said. “I’m savvy. The interview is only four miles from my apartment. What do I have to lose? I’m going to check it out!”

“You’ll be sorry,” she said, “when you’re in Bangladesh, taking orders from some fat old geezer whose real intention is to put the make on you in some sleazy backstreet hotel!”

The next day, I showed up for an interview. I loved the look of the art deco ten-story building on Roxbury. I could definitely picture myself working in this neighborhood. The place turned out to be an upscale matchmaking service that catered to wealthy men seeking goddesses, models, and ex-prom queens: none other than the Double D—which was looking for a recruiter, a hired representative to go out and scout for “talent,” meaning a fresh supply of goddesses. Given my experience in the dating industry, I was hired on the spot.

Afterward, I called Francine and gloated. “I’ll be sitting in a plush office in the center of Beverly Hills, looking out into the hustle and bustle of power brokers making mega-deals. I’ll lunch with clients who flash their little plastic cards representing unlimited credit lines in five-star restaurants. . . .” Wicked, I know. Sometimes my inner devil just kicks down the doors.

So I’d found true love with my husband and held a dream job. How could I ever find anything to whine about again?

Well, there was that little matter of my dream of acting. I had little time to audition. Was I going to have to let that dream die? Dead dreams are not the stuff of happiness. I didn’t notice so much at first because after about two months of successful recruiting, I was offered a full-time job in the office as a matchmaker, and then as head matchmaker.

I still went on weekend auditions, but they rarely led to anything. I swear I wasn’t weird about the waning possibility of an acting career. I didn’t make bitter offhand remarks or drink too much wine to drown any sorrows over my wasted talent. Somehow,

though, Adolfo sensed something. One day three years ago, I was in the living room, and Adolfo came out of the music studio in the second bedroom of the apartment.

He came up to me and said, "I have something to tell you."

"What is it, mi amor?"

"God told me to tell you to write. You need to be a writer."

I was completely shocked. Even though I'd always wanted to be a writer from a young age, I had never pursued it or even shared that dream with Adolfo. He only knew about my interest in acting.

In grade school, I used to write letters to my favorite authors, telling them how I wanted to be just like them. I sent fan letters and felt so disappointed if I didn't get a reply. I vowed to always answer my fan mail when *I* became a famous writer. *When*, not *if*.

In junior high, I was writing poetry and short stories nonstop. I got sidetracked, though, after seeing Ann Miller in a movie, and my focus shifted to tap dancing, then to acting. Yes, it was final. I would be a movie star. Yet, through all my many directions and experiments, I journaled and never lost the dream of being a writer. I just never told anyone.

"I can't believe you are saying this," I told Adolfo. "How did you know?"

"I have this vision of you being a successful writer." His face held the intent glow of sincerity. "Forget about the acting, Marlita. You need to write."

"But I still love acting. I don't want to forget about it."

"I'm telling you Marla, I got the message, and you'd better follow up on it." His voice was gentle. "I'm very perceptive. Don't waste your time and gasoline going on all these auditions that never pan out. Focus on writing. I see you as a bestseller."

Again, I marveled at his words. This wasn't just something to keep my mind off the virtual impossibility of an acting career. He truly believed in me.

I remember one day while driving to an audition, hearing Salma Hayek on a radio interview. She said, "As women, we need to make our own projects. We can't just sit around waiting for someone to give us a job." Hearing her say that with such confi-

dence and knowing what she had accomplished in her life had already planted a seed in my head. So, Adolfo's intuition or revelation was perfectly timed.

"Well . . . I have been keeping a lot of notes since I started in the matchmaking industry. I have an idea for a dating book."

His smile always won me over. "Excellent, put it together. I am so proud of you Marlita."

From that day on, he has always guided me and kept me on track, not only with my writing, but with getting out of debt, saving for retirement, prioritizing my goals, and being more creative. He likes to tease me by saying, "Don't forget, I am responsible for you being a writer."



I see I've missed Larry King. I force myself to open my book file on my laptop and work on my *book*, but first I want to jot down a few things in my journal:

Having a writing career is like working two jobs again, matchmaking by day, hitting the computer keyboard at night, early mornings, and on weekends. The matchmaking job starts to feel draining and frustrating when it sucks the energy away that I covet for my writing time. If I feel tired and frustrated from writing, though, I don't seem to mind as much because it feels like this is who I truly am. I am a writer. How could I have ever forgotten to nurture this side of myself?

Now perhaps a line for a book:

Attention! Attention! Profound truth coming at you: love really does lift us up where we belong. When you're with the right person, you can talk honestly about the future, and they won't go away. Not only that, your lover sees who you really are and encourages that true self, just as you encourage it in your loved one.

Attention all you clueless dickheads! You know who you are. You do things like rejecting twenty-three gorgeous women because their areolas aren't perfect. You are going to attract women who insist that your bank accounts are perfect, and you will never figure out how to love each other for your true selves.

Huh? Is it appropriate to say *clueless dickhead* in the book? I guess the threat of litigation has made me cranky. What about *myopic dweebs*? No? Priority-challenged simpletons? Okay, I'll work on it.

Affirmations

I keep my inner devil in her corner around irritating clients.

I am a *New York Times* bestselling author.

I am madly in love with the love of my life.