

CHAPTER ONE

*Mars and Venus,  
Sitting in a Tree*

Helena: Things base and vile, holding no  
quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity:  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the  
mind,  
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.  
Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste,  
Wings, and no eyes, figure unheedy haste.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,  
*A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, ACT I, SCENE I

We are creatures of love.

TALKING HEADS



## *What Does He See in Her?*

Our dreams of intimacy, nourished by a romantic culture, often collide with reality. As girls, we are encouraged to imagine the handsome prince scenario: He arrives on a white steed, or at least in a BMW. He is well-dressed, handsome, fit, intelligent, wealthy, powerful. Yet he writes poetry to melt the heart. He knows when to bring flowers, when to make a joke, and when to take charge. He loves only me, and he is a passionate yet considerate lover. He can change a tire as adeptly as he can fold an omelet. Also, he can waltz.

Most of the waltzing I have done is at two in the morning with a two-month-old, and I have to lead.

Seriously, does this sound familiar? By the time we have an inkling that we are looking at the man

of our dreams, hopefully we've done some adjusting. We've fine-tuned our expectations. We've figured out what matters, and what is fluff. We have matured. We've also probably been surprised by the intensity of our feelings for a man who is short or bald or nearsighted or allergic or underemployed. We feel a powerful attraction to what we would not have guessed.

We women also would be wise to keep in mind whom our prospective mate has been led to expect by the gorgeous woman scenario: She arrives at his door with cold beer. She is well-endowed, scantily clad, beautiful, fit, reasonably intelligent without being a grind, and smells really good. Yet she is a virgin. She knows when to be quiet, when to make noise, and how to seduce. She loves only him, and she is an attentive and adventurous lover. She can bring home a paycheck as adeptly as she can whip up a home-cooked meal that is heavy on the meat and light on the vegetables. Also, she understands the need for football.

My poor husband snuggles up to a wife who attempts to fill a B-cup and wears socks to bed in the winter.

Men must adjust and mature, too. They come to understand that the woman they desire for life may be flat or odorless or wordy or not blonde or may command a larger salary. And they, too, are surprised when the intensity of their feelings for her knocks them sideways.

Love is often unexplainable.

What makes a marriage work is even more unexplainable. But the quality that is ever present in a good and lasting marriage is intimacy, as well as an awareness of and reliance on the presence of God.

Jesus refers to himself as a bridegroom on several occasions in the gospels. “You cannot make wedding guests fast when the bridegroom is with them, can you?” Jesus asked the sanctimonious Pharisees, who disapproved of the merry behavior of his disciples (Lk 5:34). “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Mt 9:15).

John the Baptist tells his disciples about Jesus with these words: “He who has the bride is the

bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:27–30).

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us?" the disciples who traveled the road to Emmaus asked each other (Lk 24:32). After journeying and breaking bread with the risen Jesus, their eyes were opened by an act of tender intimacy. Their words glow with the fervor of one freshly in love, of a lover who longs to spend every moment with the beloved, of a newlywed. We, the Church, are the bride, the perfect match, the life-long mate chosen by Jesus.

If indeed our relationship with God is like a marriage, then we can see clearly that we choose each other in the same way that God chooses us. As St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, God chooses the foolish, the weak, the lowly and despised, those who count for nothing—that's us. "Not many of you were wise by human standards," he reminds us drily. "Not many of you were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26).

“What does she see in him?” we sometimes wonder about a particular couple. “What does he see in her?” What does God see in us? We may never understand what spark one sees in another, what flame draws one to another, what fire burns in one heart for another. We only know the power of what is there. In our own intimate relationships, we have lived it.



O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
    you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
    and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely. . .  
For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
    you knit me together in my mother’s womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully  
    made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
    that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

Ps 139:1–4, 13–16

Psalm 139, which is often powerfully invoked as a divine argument against abortion, also speaks to our intimacy with God. Here God knows our thoughts and words and deeds outside of time and space; God has intimately formed and knit each and every one of us, and we are indeed “fearfully and wonderfully made” in the image of God. God alone has full power over life and death.

If we believe the poetic words of Psalm 139, that we are all written in God’s book, then we understand everything about intimacy. No detail is too small to go unnoticed. There are no secrets. There is an enveloping love and acceptance, and an unbreakable connection to the one we have promised to love.

*Men Are From Mars . . .*

As much as I believe in the feminist ideals of equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunities, and Title IX for women's sports, and the perfect blending of marital roles, I have to be honest. After over two decades of marriage, I have to admit that men and women really are different.

This was brought home to me, actually brought to my very backyard, at a party for my youngest daughter. In honor of her thirteenth birthday, we invited many boys and girls of various styles and attitudes to come to our home and drink large cups of soda, eat finger foods, and listen to loud music. To please my daughter, there were no games or other party activities planned—and as little visibility of her parents as possible. (Her greatest wish was that we would either become completely invisible or leave the premises, neither of which had any chance of happening, and which is another reason why it *stinks* to be a teenager whose parents pay attention.)

When groups of girls get together, which happens often when four daughters grow up together in one family, they monopolize the phone and the

hair appliances, scream and laugh in pitches excruciating to the human ear, wear each other's clothes, and eat a lot. I am used to this pack behavior. But when boys get together, they attack each other. Literally. At my daughter's party, there were clumps of boys in the backyard, wrestling and grabbing and tripping each other. When I emerged to ask that they try not to send each other to the emergency room, they told me they were playing football.

Now, I like football. I watch football. And, Senator, this was *not* football. Although one of them did point to a football lying under a bush nearby as proof of their sport.

My husband advised me to chill out, lest I terminally mortify our daughter, and to let the boys be boys. They're fine, he said. But I wondered, how can he tell?

Eventually the boys entered the house and conversed in coherent sentences with the girls. I can tell you that boys also eat a lot, but not before dipping the wrong foods into the wrong dips and throwing some of their creations at each other. They also seem to be more concerned about their hair than they might want to admit.

The party did end without injury, and without permanent stains, and without the arrival of the police, which made it a successful event for me. Everybody had fun, and the cutest boy did show up, which made it a hit for the birthday girl as well.

But I am left to reflect on the undeniable differences between the sexes, whether innate or acquired. I am thinking these may be obvious to families where sisters and brothers coexist. And even in our lone-male household, there are those scattered moments of crossed communications. Not, of course, that any of the following examples have anything to do with *my* man. I post the large disclaimer that these observations are all hearsay, purely anecdotal, from a friend of a friend, nothing personal. Of course.

© **Men Are From Mars; Women Are From a Place Where There Is Air, and Water, as Well as Carpools and Laundry and Children and Dogs.**

By this I mean that women can multitask. We can make dinner and ponder a work project and do a load of laundry and listen to why our child's science teacher is so totally unfair and

figure out the tax versus the delivery charge for an online purchase, all at the same time. Men think they can multitask, but usually the tasks they are managing to juggle are all part of the same task. See if I'm wrong.

© **Men Are From Mars: This Is Why They Act Like Martians.**

Women come home from work and immediately get to work so that they can relax later, if they haven't already fallen asleep. Men come home from work, turn on the TV, and relax on comfortable furniture. Later they are guilt-ridden and haunted by the things they meant to accomplish after work. They also can't figure out why their women are asleep before them so often.

© **Men Are From Mars; Women Say, "Go Home, Already."**

Not really. But when a man says he has gained ten pounds, does he really want his partner to respond with exercise schedules and diet options? Because women do NOT. Women want to hear something like, "You are eternally my goddess and I desire you fantastically." Men

possibly want to hear the same thing, leaving out the goddess part. We must all face the fact that we will eventually gain ten pounds, or so. Acceptance and adulation may be what inspires us to finally lose those pounds. Just for each other.

These are egregious generalities—unjust blanket statements, of course. Individual men and women have a vast array of masculine and feminine qualities, all wrapped up in unique human packages. Sometimes men multitask admirably. Sometimes women pursue goals single-mindedly. There may actually be women who leave the toilet seat up, and men who are moved to tears by Hallmark commercials.

Just not usually the ones from earth.

### *Guess What Dinko Did: A Tale of Two Idiots*

An acquaintance of mine used to begin conversations, whenever two or more women were gathered, with the question, “Guess what Dinko did?” The first time I heard her say this so contemptuously it took me a moment to realize that she was

referring to her husband. Needless to say, theirs was not a model marriage. But over the years, the phrase has become a joke between my husband and me, a question we ask with glee whenever one of us does something stupid.

So, guess what Dinko did? I'll tell you.

My husband often travels to Sacramento for his work. He likes to take the train so that, thanks to the wonders of technology, he can work on his laptop computer while he travels. (He can also watch DVDs with it when he gets tired of working.) Traveling by train is an ideal arrangement, much less stressful than driving. He took the evening train from Bakersfield a few weeks ago, but not long after he departed, I got a slightly frantic phone call. It seems that, when he went to use the tiny hard drive containing his work files that he keeps on his key chain, he realized that he did not have his car keys. Now, one does not need car keys to travel by train. But he was pretty sure he had left his keys in plain sight on the driver's seat of his car, which was now parked for three days and nights at the train station. He had already imagined the scenario wherein a shifty-eyed thief, while strolling through

the parking lot, sees his keys, smashes the car window, and steals his car. So he was calling to ask me to skip the dance class to which I was headed, drive from Tehachapi to Bakersfield with his spare key, retrieve his keys, drive back home, and then drive the keys back down to him when his train returned in three days. I told him I considered this a *big* favor. A HUGE favor.

But, since I really do love him and promised I would forever, I did it.

My sense of superior intelligence was short-lived, however, as one weekend it was my turn to do a stupid thing. Guess what I, the Dinko, did? I'll tell you. Reluctantly.

We decided to hike a six-and-a-half-mile portion of the Pacific Crest Trail through Cameron Canyon, outside of Tehachapi. We both like to hike, and we thought it would be a good way to spend some quality time as a couple, which we had been thinking lately we don't do enough of. So we packed our water and apples and trail mix bars, put on our boots, and set out on a lovely morning. We parked my car at one end of the trail, and then drove my husband's car to the other end. The plan was to

begin our hike at his car's end, end it at mine, drive back to retrieve his car, and then go home. Not a very ecologically sound way to hike, I admit, but we were just trying to establish this new, healthy habit, the logistics of which were a little complicated.

The hike went swimmingly. We talked exhaustively, touching on things we don't get around to in the course of a normal busy day; dreams and philosophy and life's conundrums. We took pictures, admired the last of the wildflowers, and worked up an honest sweat. We ate our snacks, drank almost all our water, and were hot and grubby by the time we came over the last crest and saw my car, ready for our return home.

It was at precisely that moment that I realized that my car key was safely stowed in my purse, locked in the trunk of my husband's car. That's right: six-and-a-half-miles away. "You didn't happen to bring the extra key to my car, did you?" I ventured, my heart sinking, not relishing the role of Dinko.

He had not. He had only his car key, the key to the car he drove. He naively imagined that I would have the key to my car, the car I drove.

The thought of the return hike was daunting, to say the least. Another three hours, on very little water, on growling stomachs, on tired legs, on sunburned necks? I had really done it this time. I wondered how long it would take our children to miss us. I wondered if they would ever find our bones.

Fortunately, my husband (motto: *Be prepared with as many technological devices as possible*) had brought his cell phone, which I (motto: *Carry as little as possible, as even one key will slow you down*) had not. So we were able to call a very kind and understanding friend, who drove to where we were stranded. He picked us up and took us back to my husband's car. He and my husband had a good laugh over my keylessness.

As have pretty much all of my husband's friends, one of whom has sweetly given me a magnetic hide-a-key. Yeah, very funny.

"At least you'll never do that again," said my husband, and I hope he's right. I hate being the Dinko.

My husband and I decided we were even, trading train station fiasco for hiking disaster. We're a

good, albeit car-key-challenged, match. We may have to start carrying our car keys around our necks.

The moral of these tales of misadventure in Dinkoland, in case you were wondering, is that a workable marriage is one of give and take. Of giving each other good stories to tell at work the next day. Of taking turns being the idiot. And of never, ever, referring to each other in the presence of a third party as “Dinko.”

*reflections . . .*

*What does my partner see in me? What do I see in my partner? Really see? And really love? The unaccountable, intangible ties that bind us are also the colorful threads of our particular experience of intimacy.*

*If we are indeed from different planets, Mars or Venus or the disenfranchised Pluto, where in the heavens do we meet? Perhaps we can be more sensitive to our differences as we strive to find ways to keep our interplanetary relationship viable. May we live long and prosper!*

*Am I comfortable being the Dinko sometimes, or do I always need to be the superior being, the one who looks down on the Dinko? Are my partner and I able to be vulnerable in each other's presence? Or are we merciless? A great gift, both to give and to be given, is to be able to be wrong and still feel loved and valued.*