



# *All That Glitters is Not Gold*

**(Confessions of an Alta Cocker)**

*By Sondra Marlin*

*Dedicated to My Parents*

*Mark & Anna Marlin*

*&*

*My Brothers Bernard and Stanley Marlin*

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"The lessons of youth are not easily forgotten." The Talmud

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# *All That Glitters is Not Gold*

*Have you ever heard of an 84 year old woman who divorced her husband after 45 years of marriage? Would you like to hear it? Do you think you can handle it?  
Okay then ... here is my story...*

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## *Part One*

### *Chapter 1: Me*

**M**y chair is facing the front entrance window of this lovely house. My windows are framed by white country curtains. My favorite pillows rest on the sill. I'm ready to face the day from the inside of my cozy room at the retirement house I have been living in for the past year.

It's an amazing little house with only seven residents. My needs are met and I get a lot of individual attention. The privacy and the lovely outdoor surroundings are delightful.

Although my daughter, family and friends visit me often, I just don't feel at peace. Without warning, I am tossed into the past. I look about my room and wonder why I am not in my kitchen preparing dinner for my husband and our family. I know the answer, yet I am still compelled to question myself.

After months in hospitals, critical care units, rehab centers, and nursing homes, my daughter Heather and my brother Sam never gave up until they found a new, good and safe place for me to live. They believed I was deserving of some dignity for the rest of my life -- at least that's what my loving family hoped and strived for after the years of hell I suffered in the past.

For now, I was in the best setting I could be in, considering some of the places I had endured. Some of those places were above and beyond my worst nightmares. I've been there and now I am here. I know the difference.

## *Chapter 2: Duddy*

**D**uring the mid-August drought of 2012, the sizzling streets were melting with the smell of tar. The red hot sun was beating down on whoever was brave or stupid enough to be outside.

And here I am, feeling cool and sweating at the same time in my air conditioned room. What can I do? Where should I go? I've made so many mistakes in my life and right now I'm spending the last months of my life reliving those mistakes.

Of course there were good memories. Fabulous memories, funny memories and sexual thrills I never knew existed (although I heard about them from my married girlfriends.)

Now I know hearing an 84 year old lady talking about "sexual thrills" seems kind of uncomfortable. Just remember, I was in my early 20's when I first heard about orgasms, which I mistakenly thought meant removing pesticides from the food chain. When my girlfriends heard me say this, they doubled over with laughter and said, "You poor, naïve idiot! You actually were thinking of "organic," not orgasmic!" All I could say at that point was, "whoops" (not too swift, eh? Rather pathetic, wasn't I?)

My story really starts with a phone call I received while I was married to my first husband, Duddy. Duddy, the first of my many misjudgments was the result of being only 19 years old and going to all my friends' weddings and baby showers.

It only took ten years for me to become aware of Duddy's outrageous behavior. I guess I was one of those "slow learners." I was even slow *in learning I was slow*.

Duddy read the daily newspaper every morning. He never lifted his eyes from the paper to acknowledge "life" around him.

One morning I became quite emotional talking to him about parent's night at our daughter Heather's school. He never spoke to me or anyone else about Heather. Even though she was a remarkable girl who dedicated herself to her studies and her friends, he just could not care less. He didn't even know what grade she was in. I started to fall apart. While I spoke to him, Duddy did not miss a word of his newspaper and I became livid. I picked up the pot of hot coffee and threw it at him.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you, you fuck-faced schmuck," I screamed. His shocked expression was wonderful to see, especially when he jumped up and fell over his chair. My

anger continued with, "Be at Heather's school's main entrance at 7:00 PM -- not a minute later, TONIGHT!"

Then I ran up the stairs to start my day. My heart was pounding so fast because I didn't know I was capable of being this angry, not ever.

Duddy arrived on time. He couldn't look me in the eye. We walked into the room and Heather's teacher was sitting at her desk with two chairs diagonally facing her. The preliminary conversations were unremarkable. Introductions were made. We all sat down and Mrs. Sherman, a teacher with a delightful and lovely persona, began by telling us how she was amazed, at not only Heather's intelligence, but also her talent of inspiring classmates with humor and sincerity.

At that moment, Duddy decided to clip his finger nails. Yep! Can you believe it? He continued to clip as his nail endings flew past our eyes. I wanted to take any airline to a far away island, never to be seen again. When we were about to leave, we all stood up. Duddy went toward Mrs. Sherman's desk where he reached for a tissue. He blew his nose (yuck), shook her hand (more yuck) and said, "Good night, Mrs. Thurman."

Oye Vey. What a loser! But there's more...

One early fall morning at 3:00 AM, I received a call from Duddy. He wanted to let me know he would not be coming home until noon the next day. He said he was taking a 10 year old boy fishing. He said it made him feel like a philanthropist or a "Big Brother." He put the kid on the phone to prove it. What he didn't tell me was that the kid was the son of his secretary, and Mary (the secretary) was there too.

I knew at that point he was more of a philanderer than a philanthropist. My dreams of our vows of living happily ever after were shattered. I always thought I would get married, have beautiful, well educated children, eat in good restaurants, share romantic and wonderful Woody Allen films, go on many vacations, share more Woody Allen films and THEN die.

After useless discussions, Duddy and I were divorced. How do I keep getting caught in these webs of betrayal! If you're out there, Oscar Wilde, please give me a call.

### *Chapter 3: Peter*

*Just* a few seconds after I said that, the phone rang. Was it Oscar calling to give me advice? I could just hear him say, “My dear woman, calm down. Remember my words to you. *Experience* is simply the name we give our mistakes.”

As I tried to comfort myself with Oscar’s advice, I finally lifted the receiver to my ear (no cell phones in those days) and answered the phone.

Who would have thought this call was the call that changed my life for the next 50 years to come. Oh my God..*50 years!* Who would have thought this naïve, chubby, red-headed Jewish little girl with a loving, funny, happy family from ‘The Bronx,’ would become a lost soul?

“Hello,” an unfamiliar voice said. “My name is Peter. I met you at Harold Isaac’s Bar Mitzvah a few nights ago. We danced to Beatle’s music. I was hoping you would remember me.”

While I felt my body tense, my grip on the phone became more relaxed. I was shaky, but in control. I told him I needed a moment to think about it. He obliged, and asked if I wanted him to call me again in a few minutes. I told him I would appreciate that, and then hung up the phone.

I looked at the Betty Boop doll sitting on the corner chair and thought about those cartoons of my childhood, and how much I loved them. Whenever Betty’s grandpa had a good thought or a wise decision to make, a little light bulb would flash in his head. Suddenly, a little light bulb flashed in my head, and I remembered Peter and his outstanding looks, his charm. I enjoyed every moment we had danced together.

He called back in about 8 minutes and 42 seconds (but who’s counting?) His voice was calm, but rather authoritative, as though he were about to lecture his child for asking for the keys to his car. I was focused on what he was about to tell me, and finally he said, “I suspect that your husband is having an affair with my wife. I taped their telephone calls. I wanted to make sure you were aware of this so you have the opportunity to listen for yourself if you would like to. Are you willing to meet me in the Valley Stream parking lot?”

I said, “Yes, Peter, I sure will. How about tomorrow night at 8:00? I’ll park in front of the movie theater.” Peter said, “Good, I’ll see you then.”

I could say the day went by so fast, but every minute that I looked at the time, I wanted to push the clock ahead. I would look at my kitchen clock, then my grandfather clock, and then my wrist watch. I rushed to prepare a pot of boiling water for the night's dinner with Heather, but threw the spaghetti in too soon. Heather said, "Mom, are you okay? The spaghetti is kind of hard, but the sauce is really good."

"I'm sorry, Honey. I'm having a forgetful day. Do the best you can."

I felt comfortable about making arrangements for her to stay at grandma's and grandpa's for the night.

I arrived at the parking lot well before 8:00, and noticed he was already there. The description he gave of his car, made it easy to recognize. I walked toward the bright lights, and before I knew it, I was hopping in right next to him.

"Hi Peter," I said as I settled in. "Hi Sally." He looked relieved and not the least bit nervous. "Well, we should get started right away." Then I said awkwardly, "Yeah, let's not dilly-dally." He watched me intensely as we listened to the tape. During some really tough parts he reached for my hand, asking me if I wanted him to stop the tape. Before he finished his sentence, I said "No, Peter, I need to hear this." The voice on the tape was no doubt Duddy's voice, and the conversation was so intimate, that I could hardly stand to listen.

When I confronted Duddy the next day, I told him I've been suspicious for many months. He apologized and said over and over again how bad he felt about hurting me, yet he made it a point to declare he would not change. In spite of our own daughter's naive pleas when she was informed about what was happening to our family, the divorce was soon final.

Until this day, Duddy's transgressions hang over me. Yet, I seem to know that I was not grieving the man, but rather the failure of the marriage. I couldn't help wondering how much this impacted the start of my relationship with Peter.

Peter asked me if I wanted to have dinner with him, and see a movie afterward. How could I say no to a man whose first sexual fantasy was with Betty Boop? Yes, he actually told me that! The movie we saw that evening was Zero Mostel's, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum." It was hilarious.

I will never forget that first dinner date with Peter when we went to the local diner. I excused myself for a moment to call my Mom and Dad to thank them for being with Heather, as the evening went on much longer than anticipated. When I returned to the table, he was just sitting there. He didn't want to start eating without me. He looked vulnerable watching his food turn cold. I love vulnerable people. It's a weakness of mine.

Peter followed my car up to the steps leading to my house. He very gently kissed me and said he would call me. And he did... 20 minutes later.

I wanted to sit down and find some way to celebrate Peter's entrance into my life. I took a bag of chocolate kisses that I'd been saving. What better time than now! I opened up the bag and lined them up one at a time as though I was feasting on the succulence of the good life. After I washed my chocolate smudged face, I bent to pick up all the silver wrappings that I carelessly dropped on the floor, but found that I couldn't bring myself to throw them away. I don't know why, but I found myself stuffing them into my underwear drawer; I remember it well.

I thought about Maurice Chevalier singing, "I Remember it Well," to Herminie Ginghold in the musical, "Gigi." I started singing it out loud with tears in my eyes. I guess one would think I was a hopeless romantic. Actually I wish I would have told myself to grow up. I couldn't help it though. When my love of music takes over, I become lost in my happiness. I start dancing and singing with so much passion, I even scare myself.

My mind was drifting as I tried to sleep that night. It was too real to have been a dream. Sometimes when I just can't fall asleep, I try to think of my relatives my mother's three sisters and her seven brothers. I put them in alphabetical order and then did the same with my father's ten siblings. By the time I finished, I am usually asleep. But this time it didn't work; I was getting desperate. I pounded my pillow. But nothing seemed to be working this night.

I started searching for diversions - - any thought that would help me sleep. I thought about the time my mother told me I was a breech baby, and how Dr. Spear flipped me over like a latke. Because I was only about six years old when she tried to explain it, I had no idea what she meant. Mom hugged me whenever we talked about my feet-first entrance into the world. Thinking about this finally allowed me to sleep.

Even today, over 45 years later, I lie in bed at night and walk myself through the happiest moments of my childhood, the school years, friendships, music, books, and life-long love of sports. I think about World War II and the home front. And, I think about my loving parents and brothers and finally, my life with Peter.

I now think of this time in my life with Peter as the "ecstasy (and then) the agony." After seeing each other for about two years and writing well over 100 love letters, (which I still keep in a flowered hatbox on a shelf in my closet), we married February 8th, 1969.



## *Part Two*

### *Chapter I: The Not Too Jolly Green Giant*

**P**eter and I were living our lives like younger couples who just cannot bear to spend a minute away from each other.

We were dating all the time and enjoyed being affectionate with one another. It was a new style of life, so different since my life with Duddy. Peter and I saw Broadway plays and lots of movies. We double dated with Peter's best friend Barry, who had a preference for glamorous young women resembling strip joint show girls.

My Mom and Dad wanted me to enjoy my new life, and they were glad to take the time to be there for me when I needed them to watch Heather.

But, it wasn't long before I found myself becoming the "Jolly Green Giant of Jealousy" and it was painful and ugly.

When Barry introduced us to his entourage of "Bambies," "Lolas," and even a "Pussy-Willow," Peter would walk up very close behind them. He asked each one of them what she was wearing under her blouse. I suddenly felt like I was being kicked in the stomach. This was 50 years ago, but I remember it well.

The red flags appeared and bursted those lovely bubbles of joy hovering around the top of my head, to the bottom of my toes. My stomach, lower back and every part of my sinking body went numb and made me feel sick.

As I started to live in a constant state of denial, turning the other cheek became my new reality. I was in a state of denial. I discovered I was taking steps backwards and created a toxic environment for myself. I didn't want to lose Peter at any price, even to the point of ignoring my gut feelings which were to, "watch out - this guy is trouble." My under-the-rug mess was growing by the minute.

If that weren't enough, Peter had jealous issues of his own that now began to emerge.



I had many good career opportunities throughout my working years. I can honestly say that I never had a boss I didn't admire or respect, but I allowed Peter to negatively influence these feelings. I missed out on what could have been a lucrative future. Year after year he forcibly forbade me from seeing my closest friends. His outrageous accusations that I was having affairs with my bosses resulted in many lost jobs. It stripped me of any chance to maintain the respect I received from my coworkers, and robbed me of my own self respect.

Now, many years later, I realize that my cowardly fear of confronting Peter, is the very reason I feel like a lost soul in this little, virtually empty room of mine today.

## *Chapter 2: Merry Christmas*

*O*ne of my jobs was quite special. I worked for a management consulting firm on the 44<sup>th</sup> floor of the Newsweek building in New York City. It had a view of the Rockefeller ice skating rink, the largest Christmas tree in the country and continuous parades of important events from way up high. And, it was not unusual to share the elevators with celebrities and politicians. Even though this job was outside of my copywriting background, they took a chance with me. Everyone was classy without being snobbish.

Every year, the firm held an elegant Christmas party at a posh country club. The year that I worked there was no exception.

As Peter and I drove to the party, crossing snow covered bridges and small winding roads, I told him how excited I was. And then, *I did it*. I surprised even myself by saying to my husband: "Hey Honey, try to be a gentleman. Don't ask any woman what she's wearing underneath." Despite my remark, we had a fairly nice drive to the party. However, Peter must have been having a tough time holding it in because as soon as we were seated at the executive table, and were introduced to everyone, "Mr. Charm Boy" decided to "come on" to the wife of my boss, Gary.

I don't remember her name, but be assured it wasn't Pussy Willow. The four other company executives at our table had seen enough. They grabbed Peter, carried him into a far corner of the bar area and then presented him with a lethal combination of alcohol. I stood there trembling, and watching Peter reduced to a yellowish mountain of vomit.

They dragged him into the parking lot. Gary told the valet to drive the car to where we were standing. He told him to put "that guy" into the back seat of our white Ford station

wagon (which we playfully called “Whitey Ford”) and to open the window. Gary turned to me and asked, “Will you be able to handle the trip home? I mean the weather and all?”

As I looked around, it was starting to snow again. I ‘m afraid of driving once the first flake falls, and I have never met a bridge I could cross without getting heart palpitations. Never the less, I told Gary that it was no problem... I would be fine. I told him that I was so sorry about all this.

As Gary walked back to the party, I stuck my head into Peter’s open window. I looked at him, thinking about my scary journey. I felt like this could be the last time we see each other alive. With a controlled voice and sad eyes as though he was awake and could hear or see me, I said, “Damn it! Peter, you thoughtless despicable piece of shit! For years I’ve been the victim of your cruelty, extreme anger and abuse. You frightened me. I begged you to go for help and I would have even made the appointments. You didn’t want to talk about it. You agreed to take homeopathic pellets, and for a while you actually noticed the improvement, but it didn’t last. Look at you now! What a mess you are and what a mess you made for everyone in our families with your constant bizarre lies. You are a foolish man and I am a foolish woman for believing you.” He continued to vomit out the window, and fell back exhausted. I doubt that he even heard me.

I better get going, I thought. I walked around to the front of the car, opened the door, brushed away the falling snow on the windshield as I glanced at the rear view mirror. I wanted to see if Gary was running toward me to tell me he would drive us home, after all; of course this was wishful thinking. Why would he? The car started right up and I found the exit of the parking lot without driving around in circles, as I normally do. I was on the way! I was the one in control, not Peter. His destiny was in my hands. Peter couldn’t tell me what to do this time. He was in a coma-like sleep, interrupted only by loud gulping sounds.

The snow was easing up a bit. We finally crossed the dreaded bridge without diving into the waters below. I did it. Throughout the three hour drive, Peter’s body was motionless.

When we got to the house, I realized I didn’t have the strength to carry him. I had to swing both of his legs to one side and pull him out and up the driveway, into the garage. From there I dragged him into the bathroom. I struggled to take his vomit soaked clothes off. I had trouble catching my breath. I shook away any thoughts of calling for help. I did not want anyone to see this mess. I washed his body with the roughest wash cloth I could find and used a louffa sponge too, with all the strength I could muster. When his irritated skin started to bleed, I reached for the antibiotic lotion in the medicine cabinet. I felt mildly panicked by the sight of his blood.

Unfortunately, this was just a half bathroom without a shower. I ran into the garage for the hose. I found myself turning to the only “weapon” I was capable of using; a dribbling hose. The water was more like tear drops than the forceful pressure I expected. Peter screamed for me to “STOP,” as though he was resisting a “Tsunami.” I stepped back; the picture of him fighting off those little drops of water and yelling “STOP” was so ridiculous, I actually laughed.

As Peter seemed to return to consciousness, I saw it as a chance to confront him about all the flirtations he made me witness. I wanted him to know just how much I was hurting.

“You took a big piece of happiness, real love, fun, health, dignity and respect out of my life. I think it’s time for me to get those pieces back. I want you to remember some of our life together,” I told him. “Peter, you were a great lover, but a better liar. You are going downhill fast with this mental illness of yours which you are not even aware of.”

I saw him as a pathetic and foolish man. I know his lies, cruelty and betrayal would kill my passion for life...if I let it! At that moment, I wasn’t sure he was hearing me; nevertheless, it was great for me to hear my own words. And who knows? Maybe he heard me after all... somewhere in his psyche.

I continued to clean him and dress him in his pajamas on that night, so long ago. He held on to me as I walked him to the bedroom. I wondered why I still cared. And, after all these years, I wonder still. Almost all of my friends and some of my family cannot understand why.

“He was an adulterer, a manipulating liar. He was an abuser and he was coldly cruel to you,” they would say. “Why do you allow him to continually destroy you at this time of your life, or, for that matter, any time of your life?” They couldn’t possibly know how I loved this man, but I believed that his cruel, abusive lies and actions were the result of his mental illness. His sexual aggressiveness, I believed, was a separate issue.

I reached out for professional help over the years, but it wasn’t until recently that I finally found the right person – a clinical psychologist. I needed her help to reverse the downhill direction I was going in before my time ran out. I lived 50 of my 84 years dissolving into emptiness, internal anger, bitterness, abandonment and loss. I lacked the strength to confront this evil. I was always conflicted because there were so many lovely moments mixed in. I could no longer sweep Mt. Everest under the rug.

No physical pain or illness I've experienced could come close to the anguish of one minute of the emotional suffering I've endured. I'm aware it will take time, but now I feel there is hope, thanks to my amazing psychologist who knew how to reach my inner most emotions.

My stomach is hurting on this rainy night. I usually anticipate having nightmares about Peter when I feel like this. The dreams are bizarre and realistic at the same time. Some were about our good days, highlighting the family together at the beach, on a picnic. Could there be such a thing as "nicemares?" When I wake up in the middle of the night, I realized that he's not next to me. I reach out to take my meds, and say "goodnight" to the caregivers who watch over me.

Then I talk directly to my pills. "Hi there Tylenol. Hello sleeping pill. Thanks for your help. Good Night."

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### *Part Three*

#### *Chapter 1: The Mountain Under My Rug*

**I** learned from my psychologist that Peter was the consummate narcissist.

For those of you, women and men alike, who have had a long time marriage or relationship with a malevolent narcissist, I have a burning desire to warn you about what I failed to see during my struggle. Actually, I saw it, but I didn't do a damn thing about it except perhaps to buy a larger broom with which to sweep his damages under the rug.

With the first steps taken to see a clinical psychologist, I quickly learned that anyone who has a Peter in their life has to fight with every fiber of their being, every beat of their heart, and every cell in their brain. The toughest part is getting a narcissistic partner to physically and emotionally want to go for help. There will be something they can do, however, once they are armed with the knowledge they need. Don't sweep Mt. Everest under your rug as I did! Face your frightening, lying, cruel, masquerader disguised as an attractive, charming, charismatic person. Don't believe it when they confided in you by sharing stories about how they felt their parents trampled their self esteem.

Empathy does not exist in the life of a narcissist. For example, Peter worked for our town's Public Works. He talked about the people who worked with him. He talked to me about a particular woman. He started to send her emails and then quickly deleted them. I questioned him about this and I also asked him why he bought presents for her new baby for many years and why he thought it was necessary to hide their messages from me. I guess he didn't have a lie prepared, so he just walked away and out the door. When he returned (about five minutes later) he continued to express his feelings about this woman's husband. He didn't acknowledge how uncomfortable it was for me to hear this! He even said he would never have an affair with her because her husband was a nice guy and that he would never do that to him. Imagine that! When I delved into Peter's life, I learned that I opened the door to discover more than I ever wanted to know. This was one of those moments.

I should have responded by saying, "Oh! And what about me, your wife? Would you hurt your wife? Wasn't I nice enough?"

It was as if I did not exist. Peter's only concern was for the husband in this affair....if indeed there was one. Throughout our marriage, there were many instances of cruelty and outrageous lying to cover his guilt that was aimed right at my heart. He was a marksman at it.

One day, Peter and I were at my doctor's reception window. I will never forget the receptionist, Abby. Abby looked at Peter and asked him what time he wanted his mother's next appointment. I cut off her last word and said angrily, "His wife." No apology from Abby could have made me feel better.

## *Chapter 2: "Love Thy Neighbor As You Would Love Thyself"*

**A**in't that the truth? This narcissistic man, continually betrayed his wife with one neighbor after another. Peter was more than happy to fulfill this commandment.

The years rolled along. One of Peter's hoped-for relationships was an attractive elementary school teacher who lived across the street. Her parents shared their house with her. When he saw her car, just before she turned into her driveway, he dropped everything he was doing, grabbed a sponge, ran over and started to clean her car. They joked around with each other, laughing so loud. I heard their conversation and their laughter clearly, as I leaned against my large opened window. Neither one of them thought they were being

watched, and I felt like a stalker lurking in my self-made shadows. The way I cried as I ran away from the window could be easily defined as heart breaking. I just could not continue to live this way. Yet... I suppose I did.

Peter was very friendly with the teacher's parents. He visited them often... just to say "hello." They were a lovely old couple. Her father stopped me as I was taking a morning walk one day and he asked me, "Why don't you come to visit us when your husband drops over?" I thanked him and said I would do that. I think this man, this wise old man, picked up on some shenanigans but had the decency not to go into detail. I was sure of it when his equally decent wife implicated the same on the very next day. Unfortunately, about two weeks later, the teacher's father died and Peter and I both wanted to go to the funeral.

Peter dropped me off by the front door of the funeral home as he drove along looking for a parking space. I slowly walked to my place on the line, humbly greeted our neighbors knowing full-well they were aware that my husband and the teacher were 'involved.' When it was my turn, I extended my hand to "her" in a polite way to express my condolences.

"Your father was a wonderful man. I enjoyed knowing him." In the middle of my sentence, she interrupted my words, ignored my outstretched hand because there was Peter, right behind me. She rushed into his arms, kissed him on the lips while he muttered, "I'm so sorry." I wanted to jump into the sweet old man's coffin and close the lid tightly.

### *Chapter 3: Enter Tevye*

The hurts had become too much for me to swallow. That is why I would like to introduce Tevye at this point in my story, and explain the significance of his "*on the other hand*" outlook on life.

For those of you who don't know, Tevye is the philosophical dairyman whose story was portrayed in the musical, "Fiddler on the Roof."

In many ways, Tevye was my alter ego. When I bared my soul to him about my life with Peter, he would say, "Yes, but on the other hand." With a matter-of-fact shrug of his shoulders and eyes smiling, he explained to me that just because Peter took charge of my medications and took me to doctor appointments, that did not mean he was good or kind. There was no reason a husband should get kudos to do the things he *should* do. (There were times when the "on other hand" philosophy made one think it would be wise to have a third hand!)

When it became evident that Peter's adulterous activities were alive and well as he performed those husbandly duties, Tevye's advice made perfect sense.

Tevye and I usually had our talks early in the day. I'm sure if any of the neighbors saw me talking to an empty lawn chair, they were wondering about my sanity. The mornings were cool and the aroma of cabbage soup filled my senses. It didn't seem to matter that the aromas were imaginary, but I do solemnly swear that I actually smelled the cabbage soup. How? Why? I don't know. Have you ever thought of delightful smells from your childhood... the white paste used in kindergarten? Cafeteria food? The leather from your new shoes worn on the first day of school? Take a deep breath. It's real!

How pleased I was to actually smell the aroma as if straight from the old Ukrainian homeland where my great grandmother taught my grandmother how to cook cabbage soup on a cold winter's day. We all were allowed to slurp our grandmother's soup at the kitchen table decades later in the Bronx. We might not have had the best manners, but oh, how comforting the tastes and the sounds were. These words and glimpses of my memories not only told me who I was, but who I became. It helped me develop the emotional strength to deal with all the betrayals, abuses, indignities and manipulations.

Here I am at the age of 84. I will never be free of the cruelty of a man who I thought would never stop loving me and would stay with me until the "end." Yet, in spite of all those tainted incidents, I can still enjoy all the great songs of the 30's, 40's and 50's that penetrated my brain, my body, my spirit and saved some of my sanity. I break out in song, as it is my oxygen. I feel the arms of my young dates as we danced to Glen Miller's music, the songs of Frank Sinatra and others.

Those are the feelings I still feel today. I wonder how long it will take me to put Peter in his proper place, far behind my mother's love, my father's magic, humor and affection. And then there are my brothers, who filled my life with happiness, and the joy of my loving daughter Heather.

#### *Chapter 4: Killed By a Cupcake*

**A**s you continue to hear my story, you will come to understand how difficult it is for me to express all of my emotions. You know my history from long ago. You know my recent past. Now I will tell you about my present and what I see as my future. I can barely gather up the strength to see myself as the woman I will end up being, as the end of my life casts a shadow across my bent and withering body.

Please don't feel pity for me! I'm still determined to work through this. I remember the good stuff as well as the bad stuff. I'll never forget the misery and sadness of having had a stroke, the illness and the horrors of mental abuse, and constant betrayal. All were part of my agony, leaving the ecstasy far behind but never erased.

Let me get back to a more recent time (about three years ago) when my 90 year old neighbor died. Her house was bought by a young couple who sold it to somebody else after only living there a few months.

Now, this "somebody else" (Caryle) told the couple she became a widow the day after she and her husband signed the paperwork to buy the house. When she met us, she told us about her husband's death from cancer. She told us that it happened so quickly. No one (including his doctor of many years) knew her husband had cancer.

Although both Peter and I actually believed her at the time, in hindsight we realized that this story didn't make much sense. Think about it. Who buys a house the same day you die from stage four cancer? Really? When she spoke of her husband, she never mentioned his name. I wonder if she even had a husband.

A few days later, I answered the phone to hear our new neighbor's voice, "Hello Sally, I just made some cupcakes. I would like to give them to you and Peter. I know you'll like them. Can I bring them over? Cupcakes are my specialty."

I said, "Oh, how nice of you. Sure."

In a flash, she was at our door handing me a dish of about ten cupcakes. Then she disappeared like a kid on a "trick or treat" journey. I tasted one and found it to be too sweet. Peter said they were okay. This became a ritual. Every day I would get a call, "It's me again" and every day she would drop off her goodies, as she dashed from our driveway to her driveway, leaving me standing at the open door. I tried thanking her as she ran away.

One day her call came, but her message was a bit different.

"Hello Sally. I just baked chocolate cupcakes. They are still hot. Could Peter come over now to pick them up?" I said, "Sure. He'll be there in about ten minutes." This was happening so often. My family was teasing me about how she was probably trying to poison me so that she could run away with Peter. This made me think of that saying, "many a true word is said in jest."



For the next few weeks she would chat with me on our driveways. When she saw me she would run over to me and hug me, with an air kiss on the cheek. How thankful she was to be blessed with neighbors as wonderful as we were. She asked if we would consider adopting her. I said, "I have quite a large family, so no thank you."

A few weeks later, I had a stroke. We didn't see each other much after that, but she and Peter saw plenty of each other. The rest is history.

I was lucky that my stroke was a mild one. My left side became weaker than my right. The rehab center did a good job helping me bounce back to who I used to be. I had three rehab visits a week and Peter took me each time. While I was treated, he drove around, visited the library, and ran various errands. When I "graduated" I was in pretty darn good condition until the next day when we drove to the hospital for a follow-up exam. On the way, we were rear-ended in an auto accident and I was hurt. An ambulance was called. The resulting injuries included rib contusions from the seatbelt and pain that never seemed to go away.

While I was recovering in the house, Peter and the neighbor continued their driveway meetings. I saw them and heard their voices as clearly as if I were standing at the door watching and listening close up.

"Caryle, we can meet almost any time we want," I heard Peter say. 'She' will never figure it out. We will go places. I have lots of excuses."

I decided not to listen to any more of these secretive plans. Their voices were turning to whispers anyway. I closed the door to my house.

On the top shelf of my closet I have a flowered hatbox that I started using to keep the growing evidence I discovered about their relationship. My lovely hatbox, which had been the keeper of deep love letters between me and Peter for over 50 years, now included ticket receipts from a day cruise that Peter and Caryle took when I went back in the hospital. It included restaurant and credit card receipts. It also included a copy of an email I wrote telling Peter that I wanted him to be with me, his wife! His alibi of a response for why he couldn't possibly be with me in my time of need, was that had he had his own important doctor appointment for prostate cancer. I'll never forget when he burst into my hospital room with a document to sign myself into a nursing home. He demanded that I sign it, or I would no longer be covered by our insurance. Add to my lovely flowered hatbox, an envelope with a Christmas card signed by Peter, on which he wrote to Caryle that he's looking forward to their future life together.

And then there were the phone bills documenting all days and times they spoke to each other. There were dozens of calls made at night while I was sleeping in the other room. There were calls made from the supermarket as we walked down different aisles. And there were calls made while he was “at the gym” or returning library books. There were three minutes calls and there were three hour calls.

And then there was July 4<sup>th</sup> of 2012. Peter had been cleaning out the garage and had lots of trash to get rid of. He was planning to throw the trash bags in an empty dumpster at the end of our subdivision and would be back shortly.

I knew that kids hung out in this dumpster area and I was concerned about what they would be up to on July 4<sup>th</sup> night. So, when Peter didn’t return for several hours, I started to worry. After three hours, I called Heather and told her I didn’t know what to do. She said she would report this to the local police. Shortly after she made the call, a police car pulled up to our driveway at the same exact time Peter walked in the house.

I am sure he was next door in Caryle’s house the whole time. When Peter saw the police car drive up to our house, I’m sure he panicked and innocently came home (*“What a coincidence,”* he would say later).

I put the Police Department’s report into the “Hatbox of Evidence.” I don’t think my hat box has room for anything else.

### *Chapter 5: As the Glitter Fades*

It’s been over one year since I divorced Peter. I hear Caryle and Peter are still together.

Neighbors and friends call me to let me know when they see him. I even saw him myself recently when Heather and I drove past Caryle’s house. There he was, caught red-handed, working in her garage.

I have done much research over the past year. I learned about the many destructive twists and turns of a narcissist including how their actions affect almost everyone in their lives.

By blaming his narcissism, I honestly believed I was looking for a way to forgive Peter for his cruel, and deliberate ways. I educated myself by reading what the greatest psychiatrists of our time had to say about narcissism. Their brilliant minds helped me understand the dynamics of this mental illness (or personality disorder) and the effect it has on those who fall victim to its ugliness. There are so many abused and battered women who keep “coming back” for more humiliation.

Shortly after our divorce, Peter cancelled his part of our burial arrangements, leaving me abandoned in my future grave as well as my life. He refuses to remain friends and will not speak or write to me about the times we enjoyed together. He was definitely not the Peter I loved and married. Who was this “Stranger in the Night?”

By the way, Heather happened to see Caryle a few days ago in the store. Caryle was in one part of the store (probably looking for cupcake mix) and Peter was in the next aisle.

Heather told me she went up to Caryle and said “You probably don’t remember me. I’m Sally’s daughter.” Although Caryle appeared to be in a state of shock, Heather continued talking, smiling sweetly. “How’s Peter? Have a nice life.”

The expression of shock never left Caryle’s face.

Later, Heather asked me, “Are you mad at me?”

“Hell no,” I said. “I’m glad you had the sense and the guts to say that. I love you for it. By the way, how did she look?”

“Like shit,” Heather said with relish. We smiled and said good night to each other.

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*The End*