

Victoria
Discovering Love

P. ARTHUR STUART

Dedication:

To *Patricia Lynne* the love of a lifetime.

I'm sorry I'm not the Arthur you deserved.

I did and do love you more than you knew or know.

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BJ: A small, perhaps insignificant, comment got me started. A little bit of encouragement goes a long way and may lead to life changes; it did in my case.

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To the Reader

While the story of Victoria is fiction, I’ve put a healthy portion of real life “Food for Thought” in it. Tell the people you love, that you love them in words and action. Do it often. It’s one of the things in life you can’t over do. Equally important—communicate. One more thought: An Axiom of Life—Make the people you care about happy and you will be happy.

Prologue

The seconds seem like eternities filled with pain, unbelievable pain. I've never been this despondent. This emotional pain is greater than any physical pain I've experienced. It's like your insides are being ripped from your body.

When she is out-of-sight, I lean back, twist, turn, and squirm—figuratively and literally—as I attempt to get comfortable. Nothing works; my discomfort come from within. My anxiety and fears build and build. I feel my heart pounding and palpating. I'm sweating, shivering, and finding it hard to breathe. My world is collapsing. I have a vision that I'm standing in front of a building being imploded; the building image morphs in to me, I've become the building and it is dissolving before me. All my dreams and hopes for a future are fading quickly. I try to put these thoughts out of my mind and relax, but fail. How could I possibly expect to stop thinking and worrying about it? It's an impossibility.

Straining with great effort, I attempt to shift my thoughts and begin to think about how I can make things right again with her. If I could even figure out what I have done. We made up last night; I haven't done anything this morning, did I? Maybe her dad told her what I called him? Did she have another fight with him? I know women get pissed off at men for some really ridiculous reasons that men cannot fathom, but in this case, I didn't have a clue. I want to believe, that after a while she would just let it go, maybe after her run or possibly after we make love, if I get an opportunity to.

Alone and deeply depressed, I struggle with my thoughts and fears. I take several deep, deep breaths, hold them, and let them out slowly. It calms me a little. I decide I'll meditate, with the intended purpose to eliminate, or at least reduce my tension and depression I'm feeling, there is a mountain of it. As I start to meditate, I wonder, *Can I organize my thoughts and prepare for her anger. I'm not sure I've ever been prepared for her anger.* I take a very long and deep breath, close my eyes, and begin the process of achieving a meditative state.

Just about the time, I begin to settle into a somewhat serene state of turmoil, a swirling maelstrom, and start my meditation, I feel a presence; it draws me out of my meditative state. I look up and there's John glaring at me with his hands on his hips. I can see he's struggling with himself on some inner conflict and possibly, what to say or do. Overcoming his internal struggle, John asks me, "Why did you call me an asshole?"

His question surprises me. I nod my understanding, take a minute or two to collect my thoughts, then wait several second, before asking John, "Do you really want to know?"

John retorts angrily, "Yes! I wouldn't be here asking you, if I didn't really want to know."

"Okay," I reply, pausing for effect, wait a while, then continue, "but first you'll have to answer a few questions for me. Are you willing to do that?"

John considers my edict and then states, "Go ahead and ask."

"Tell me, do you love Elizabeth?" It's my first question.

He inhales angrily, clenches his jaw, "Yes, I would give my life for her. It should be obvious. What a stupid question," he replies antagonistically.

I ignore his attitude. "Do you love Victoria?" is the next question.

Apparently getting more annoyed and somewhat confused, "Yes, of course, I don't understand why you're asking me these ridiculous questions. It should be obvious to you," is his questioning and challenging response.

I reply, "It's not obvious to me. I'm not sure it would be obvious to anyone?" Continuing I tell John, "This is more a statement than a question. If you love someone, you want them to be happy, not a servant to do your bidding or to be your pet." Pausing a few moments, then adding, "You want the people you love to have a feeling of fulfillment, to be successful, and most of all, to be happy. To achieve ...*their*..." emphasizing, with a short pause before and after, along with finger quotes to emphasize *their* "goals and dreams; not yours." I pause to let what I said register. "Next question, *What did your father do to earn a living?*"

"My father was a carpenter. A damned good one," John states, matter-of-factly and proudly.

“Did your dad teach you anything about carpentry?”

“Yes,” and proudly boasting “I was really good at it. I probably could have made a good living at it, had I chosen too.” John states in a matter-of-fact manner.

“Did your father want you to follow in his footsteps?”

John considered my question for a moment and replied, “Yes, I think so. I think all parents would like their children to follow in their footsteps.” He nods his head in a manner that indicates to me that he thinking about what he just acknowledged.

“Do you think he’s proud of you now?”

“Yes, he told me so several times,” he states emphatically.

Continuing with this line of questioning, I ask, “What would you have done if your father had said he would disown you and not supported you if you chose something other than carpentry? Would you have become a carpenter?”

John contemplated the question for a long time, longer than I expected, and answers in a manner, indicating he’s struggling internally, “I guess I would have left and still have become a lawyer. I would have been hurt and disappointed.” It’s as if he realized something; his look turns to perplexed.

I know he is wrestling with his admission, but I say it anyway. “You might think about what you just said. Consider it carefully,” I implore him, then ask the next question, “Did your mother love you?”

“What sort of dumb question is that? Of course, she did,” retorting angrily, but not quite with the venom he had before. I’m sure he’s wondering where I’m going.

“What did she want you to do? Did she ever tell you? What did she say?” I demand.

He looks at me with a puzzle expression. I don’t know if he understood the question. As if something dawned on him, he answers slowly and softly, with a sort of reverence, “She often told me, all she wanted for me was that I’d be happy. Do what makes you happy and makes you feel good about yourself. Be a good man, a good husband, and a good father. That’s what I want for you. Take care of those you love, like your dad has for his family. If the ones you love are happy, you’ll be happy.”

“Is your father happy? Does he love you?” I push.

“Yes, I think he is happy and yes, he does love me,” he states, softly.

I explain why, “I called you an asshole because of the way you treat the people you love. You treat your wife, as far as I can see, as a servant. You treat your daughter like she’s a puppet to do your

bidding. And when she doesn't, you behave like a petulant child. I could go on and on about how you treat them but if you can't see it, everything we've just talked about will go for naught. You need to think about whether you want to make the people you love, happy or keep them miserable and increase the precipice that exists between you and your daughter. And perhaps, Elizabeth. I can see in yours and in Elizabeth's eyes the love you have for each other; it's very deep. I believe you do love your daughter, the question you need to ask yourself and answer, *Do I want to continue this estrangement or have a loving relationship with her?* You need to decide if you want to be a part of her future when she marries and has children. Don't panic. We don't have any plans. I know if I make the woman I love happy and content, it will do the same thing for me. I want the children, I hope to have some day, to be happy and successful, regardless of what they do, and to enjoy life. I will do everything in my power to support them and help them to make their dreams come true. That's what I want for the people I love." Pausing for a moment I then added, "Ask yourself, *What do I want for the people I love?*"

John just stands there like he's been hit over the head with a night stick or struck by lightning. I can see he is in deep thought and has that same glassy eyed look that his daughter had when I kissed her for the first time. He stands there for a while and I can see the tension and strain that were emanating from him before, begin to melt away. After a while he nods, just nods, at me and turns, starts walking back to the door to go into the house, in the same kind of dazed state Victoria had when I kissed her that night in Hawaii, after she slapped me. I think, *Like father, like daughter.*

"John," I call after him. When he stops and turns to look at me, "A few things you should think about. One, when your law firm gets on the Fortune 500 list of the wealthiest corporations, then and only then you can consider Victoria's wasting her time. Ask yourself how you would have answered this question. If Victoria had asked you, *Is your happiness more important than mine? Do you want me to sacrifice my future happiness, to make you happy? Do you really want me to do something the rest of my life, that will make me miserable?* Lastly, think of the relationship you had with the little girl and a skunk." He laughs begrudgingly, smiles, nods agreement, and then continues his way into the house.

Chapter 2

Shortly after John goes back into the house Elizabeth comes out and joins me. She has a ‘Cheshire Cat’s grin on her face. So, I ask, “Mom, what mouse have you just eaten?”

“What?” She replies, apparently puzzled at my comment.

“The *Cheshire Cat*’s grin you’re wearing is typically associated with mischievous behavior. What have you just done?” I ask.

She explains, “It was only a bit mischievous. When John came storming into the house, earlier, he said to me, *You know what he called me? He called me an asshole.* I surprised him and myself by saying, *He’s right and you should probably go out there and ask him why.* Before he could respond, I walked away. I guess he did go back to ask you why. The next time I saw him he was wandering around in a sort of daze, deep in thought. Strangely, I don’t think he even noticed me. I’ve never seen John like that. He appeared confused and disoriented. I thought to give him comfort but decided to let this thing just play out. It’s something he needs to discover on his own.”

I muse, “I guess you’re right, we’ll just have to wait and see.” Having Elizabeth nearby is comforting; it helps me focus on something other than my pain. We sit there for a while, silently contemplating life. I’m working on my despair and how I’m going to make things right with Victoria. The first thing I need to do is find out what is troubling her. Will she tell me?

About an hour after Victoria had left, I see her returning. I can see she is still furious and angry, perhaps even more so than when she left, and I have no idea what it’s about. Was it my forcing her to bring me here? It’s the only thing I can think of. No, it’s not the only thing. Maybe her dad confronted her again. It pains me. She looks at us and focused on me. Glaring at me. With her jaw clenched, she gives me the finger again. I think, *Holy crap, I’m really in trouble.* Just as Victoria is about to come onto the porch, John comes out and I think to confront her. Alongside me, I can see Elizabeth tenses. Victoria sees him and tenses up, preparing to do battle.

John descends the step and positions himself between Victoria and the house. She stops and faces him, defiantly and ready to do battle. She has the same angry look that she had when she slapped me; I don’t think she will strike her dad, though. Standing in front of her, he asks, in a soft warm comforting manner, “Please, please let me take your hand and walk with me.” Elizabeth and I didn’t know what to make of it. Reluctantly and puzzled, perhaps a bit skeptical, and with her guard still up, Victoria gives John her hand and they start walking together. We just sit and watch—puzzled and confused. *What is going on?* is my thought. I surmise, Elizabeth is probably thinking the same thing. To fill the time, we talk about mundane things like music, movies, and places we found interesting. We hope this mask’s our concerns and worries.

About a half hour has passed when John and Victoria reappear. I can see that Victoria is crying but nevertheless she appears to be happy and smiling. She has her arm around her father’s waist and John’s arm is on her shoulder holding her close. He has a grin that says he achieved his goal. When they get back to the house Victoria turns, hugs her father, then kisses him on the cheek, whispers in his ear, and runs into the house. I start to get up to follow Victoria inside to comfort

or let her take her frustration out on me. As John approaches, he says to me, “She asked me to tell you please don’t come in.” My heart sinks and I want to cry, I do inwardly. John continues, this time talking to Elizabeth, “Sweetheart, will you please walk with me? I have some more crow to eat and groveling to do.”

Without saying a word Elizabeth gets up, puts her arm around John, like her daughter had, and off they go. I can see Elizabeth’s eyes glowing with a happiness I hadn’t seen before. She knows intuitively that somehow this walk they’re taking is going to make their relationship better; everything is going to get better. I hope that I would find that kind of love. I wish it would be with Victoria. I have the feeling that no matter what John does, Elizabeth will love him. And I wonder, *Will it get better for me?*

Once again, I’m alone again with my despondent thoughts. I settle back in my chair to suffer my depression and anxiety. I am sitting, sipping my cold, awful coffee in silent lonely despair. An appropriate drink for someone that feels as miserable as I do—I see it as my penance. I’ve lost all hope of doing any kind of meditation. I wonder what’s gone wrong between Victoria and me. Was forcing her to come here this weekend going to end our relationship? Was doing this the biggest mistake I ever made? These thoughts and other negative ones like them, keep running through my mind.

Fortunately, it isn’t long before Victoria emerges from the house, her face seems to glow and the anger that was there before is gone. What a change in her from the time she returned from her run. My mouth drops open. I still brace myself for what I believe will be the inevitable; her telling me that it’s over. Smiling gloriously, she comes over to me, put her hand under my chin, closes my mouth, and then sits down in my lap. Wrapping her arms around me, she nuzzled my neck, and softly said, “Hold me, please. Just hold me.” My spirits lift quite quickly and the despair I am feeling, begins to slip away.

Relief floods through me. I wrap my arms around her and squeeze her tightly to me. Half-jokingly, with the intent on lightening the mood, I say, “Would you like to go to our room and make love?”

“No,” she whispered, “I want you to just hold me like this.”

We sit like this for a while, when suddenly I realized that I have an enormous feeling of contentment, where did it come from, I can’t explain it. Sitting here, holding her like this gives me a feeling of connection, to this woman, life, earth, and the universe, I cannot put into words; it’s exhilarating and euphonic. I know that this time, this very moment, is special, and hope I can recapture it, again and again. Right then and there, in that instant, I realize that I love Victoria, beyond anyone or anything I’ve loved before. I know I would do anything for her. I want to make her happy and fulfilled her every wish. Although sex is immensely, super gratifying, I wouldn’t trade this moment for any of it. It is this connection that truly makes life worth living. It makes me want to cry—to cry happy tears, like I usually do at heartwarming situations and happy endings in movies. I marvel how the human spirit can go from one extreme to the other in a instant.

We sit like this for quite a while. It's like we are the only ones in this world. I can feel the slow, steady rising and falling rhythm of her breathing. It's very comforting to me. I feel relaxed and content, although my legs feel like they are numb and about fall off, yet I didn't care.

After about twenty-five minutes or so, Elizabeth and John return. I see that Elizabeth has been crying too, but with a smile that says life is great. I think, *What's with all the crying?* It is now nine o'clock in the morning. Elizabeth says, "Let's have breakfast." Another of life's puzzles is why we always want to eat when something good happens to us.

John says, "Elizabeth, I want to make this day special, so no cooking. Let's all of us go out and have breakfast." John adds, "Is that okay with you two?"

Without asking me, not that it would've made a difference, Victoria responds, "Sure dad, we'd like that. How should we dress?" Her response to him is warm and loving, not at all like the previous day's exchanges. Elizabeth is beaming with happiness, of this I'm sure. Her family is a family again.

Victoria has on many occasions and probably would continue to answer for both of us without checking with me. Some things just never change. I really didn't mind because I know it fills a personal need for her. Actually, I kind of liked it. I have been making decisions like this all my life and find it is comforting to have somebody else decide some things for me. It's really hot and sexy. I know some men would probably feel emasculated, but it doesn't bother my ego at all. I know if I really can't live with one of her decisions, I'll change it.

"Casual. We'll go to my golf club if that's okay with everybody?" Everyone nods their acceptance.

"Mom, dad I need to take a shower. I've just come back from running several miles. We'll be ready in about forty-five minutes. Is that okay?"

"Yes. We'll be here when you're ready. Really take your time. I'll be spending quality time with your mom and it will pass quickly, I'm sure." Beaming and smiling, Elizabeth nods her concurrence.

