

OUR  
ROMANTIC  
GETAWAY

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
TO MY EVER GROWING FAMILY.  
WE ARE NOT JUST DEFINED BY BLOOD.  
IT'S MORE ABOUT WHO STOOD BESIDE  
ME, WHO STOOD UP FOR ME, AND  
WHO BELIEVED IN ME. AND TO  
MY LOVING GRANDMOTHER  
MAMMY, WHO REASSURED  
ME THAT DUCKS MIGHT  
ACTUALLY BE  
SWANS.



*Well-behaved women seldom make history.*

—Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

# INTRODUCTION

MY HUSBAND AND I WERE IN DESPERATE NEED OF A vacation. Our lives were becoming less passionate and more stagnant by the day. Our three kids were getting older, going out until all hours, and having the time of their lives. Us? Not so much. I was getting home from my advertising job at eight or nine most nights. Joe, a psychologist, worked at our local high school during the day, had a demanding private practice at night, and was getting home around ten. I would be asleep by the time Joe had dinner and came to bed. As I drifted off to the eleven o'clock news, Joe would be in the kitchen winding down.

Every weekday was the same old routine. And the weekends? We would order takeout on Friday night, so we could eat with the kids, then try to squeeze in some quality family time. Except that the kids always had their own plans, so we would end up eating by ourselves while

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straining to make small talk. BOR-ing!

Saturday night was “date night.” We would go to a restaurant, endure stilted chitchat, come home, catch a movie on Netflix, and then, if the sun, the moon, and the stars aligned, we would have sex. Most of the time, we would pass out on opposite sides of the couch. More boring. And while my relationship with Joe was close, we needed a jump-start. Badly.

Desperate times called for desperate measures. So, I insisted on a romantic getaway. Maybe it was more like persistent pleading. It had been years since the two of us had been able to get away alone. All of our recent vacations had been spent with our kids and almost always involved the two of us prowling around like stalkers, making sure they stayed out of trouble. Not even close to restful or romantic.

Anyway, Joe begrudgingly agreed with my “romantic getaway” idea, although frugal as always, he reminded me how expensive it would be. But we nonetheless booked a seven-day trip to Waves resort in Mexico, sucked up the expense, and went about our ridiculously predictable regimen.

Speaking for myself (Joe was still grumbling about the cost), I was counting down the days until we could chill

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out and spend some relaxing, romantic alone time together. In between packing and working, I made sure to buy a journal to document the excursion.

As lame as it sounds, ever since I was a kid, I've kept a diary or journal of some kind. I have them all lined up on a bookshelf, labeled by vacations, births, family reunions, and other momentous occasions. This trip would be no exception.

# DAY 1

OUR VACATION WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN! AS I STOOD AT the dresser drying my stick-straight brown hair, I discovered Joe's "to-do" list: *Up at 6. Coffee 6:15. Bathroom 6:30. Shower 6:50. Leave money for kids. Weigh suitcase. Cab pickup 7:15. Airport arrival 8:15.*

Even for OCD Joe, this list was a bit much, so I took the liberty of crumpling and throwing it away. Poor Joe. Now he wouldn't know what time to pee. I was determined to make this vacation all about forgetting our routine.

I studied myself in the mirror and was thankful that at forty-two, I could still manage to turn a few heads. At 5'6" and 125 pounds, I was in decent shape and felt good about myself and my accomplishments. But Joe was the star of our family, with his perfect pearly white teeth, thick, wavy light brown hair, and dreamy sky-blue eyes. We have a joke in our family that he is my "McDreamy."



Nothing negative to say about Joe except that he can be overly compulsive and annoyingly frugal.

As I zipped up my suitcase, Joe was running around like a lunatic. “Have you seen my list, Julie? Julie? Julie? Where the hell is my list?”

When we arrived at the airport, the check-in agent informed us that our flight was delayed for two hours. Super annoyed, we sat down at our gate for the long wait. While Joe read *The Economist*, I struck up a conversation with the couple sitting next to me. As we got to know each other better, Celine and Sam told us they were going to The Palm, a resort owned by Inclusive Clubs—the same company that owned Waves.

When the two-hour flight delay became three hours, we all decided to find a bar. After a couple of bloody marys, we were sharing stories and connecting like we had known each other for years. Celine and Sam were both equally attractive, and I was bowled over at how friendly they were. She was a stay-at-home mom, carefree, and vivacious. He was a policeman, lighthearted and hysterically funny. And even though they also had three kids, they somehow found the time and money to go to The Palm every year. I gave Joe a *How come they can go on a yearly vacation and not us?* look. He raised his shoulders in indifference.

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Once we boarded the plane, we exchanged seats with another couple so we could sit next to Celine and Sam. Even though we had just met, we wound up gabbing with them the entire flight. By the time we landed, we were like old pals. We picked up our luggage at baggage claim together, and then went over to the Inclusive Clubs check-in area. We were bound for separate resorts and, therefore, different buses, so we said our goodbyes, gave each other hugs and exchanged phone numbers and email addresses.

Joe and I strode over to the Waves desk to arrange for our bus. The lady at the counter checked our reservation on her computer. First, she furiously clicked around the keyboard while studying the screen and then asked us to wait a moment. She proceeded to the other end of the counter and whispered to a man with a nametag that said *Manager* on it.

Joe and I were exasperated. More travel trouble? The plane delay wasn't enough? I was more than ready to get this vacation started.

Mr. Manager and the counter lady huddled up for several minutes, casting nervous glances at us every so often. "This doesn't look good," Joe said as the manager made his way over to us.

"It seems that we have a problem, but it's only a minor

one. Waves is overbooked. Not to worry though, we can put you in one of our other hotels—Exotica.”

Exotica??!! Wasn't that the sex-fueled Mexican resort we had seen on a television exposé a few months back? The show featured the free-for-all atmosphere, wild parties, polygamous encounters, orgies, and nudie hot tubs! I was incensed by the manager's suggestion. I eyeballed Joe, who I assumed would be as repulsed as me.

Well, you know what they say about “ass-u-me” because beaming Joe didn't appear to be repulsed *at all*. I needed to put an end to this Exotica nonsense ASAP.

I scowled at Joe. “You're kidding me, right? And what do you think the kids and our parents are going to say about us staying at Exotica?”

“Yeah,” Joe echoed to the manager. “We would still want our family to think we're at Waves.”

*WTF?* I glared at Joe, outraged. Mr. Manager winked. “No problemo. We'll deliver your messages to your hotel room twice a day from Waves. That's a standard service we provide for many of our Exotica guests.”

*Oh, there's a problemo jerkoff,* I fumed to myself. But Joe was triumphant. “See, it's a standard service they provide,” he repeated, nodding and chuckling—until he saw my expression of incredulity and horror. Then he changed

it up and implored, “Julie, please, loosen up. Let’s give it a try.”

“Loosen up my ass,” I replied. But then in horror, I heard myself. “Well, not literally up my ass.” The manager and Joe both guffawed as I silently simmered.

The words *absolutely not*, were just about ready to spill out of my mouth, but Joe’s demeanor was so boyish and exuberant. And his annoying eagerness, with a side of begging, was wearing me down. I hadn’t seen him this fired up since his psychologist convention in Des Moines. And the only reason he was so hepped up about Iowa was their killer mac ‘n’ cheese.

Despite our tight budget, I was the one who had pushed for the vacation because we needed to break out of our uneventful and repetitive routine. The truth was, our lives had become way too monotonous and plain old stale. I hoped that a vacation together would give us the spark we needed to break out of our predictably predictable life and kick it up a notch. But this kind of kick? Not exactly what I had in mind. Des Moines was way more our speed. Or so I thought.

I gaped at Joe, and his blue puppy-dog eyes. His hands were pressed together in prayer, pleading profusely. But I couldn’t hear a word. I was in my own world, imagining

us hand in hand on a peaceful, quiet beach with beautiful waves crashing around our feet. I was envisioning the two of us swaying to romantic wafting music, moonbeams shining down on us. No floozies in barely-there bikinis, no raunchy parties, no dirty dancing into the wee hours of the morning. Just me and Joe, in our own little romantic world.

In the distance, I sort of heard Joe. “Julie? Julie? Earth to Julie.” When I tuned back in, Joe was giving me a mouthful about our choices being slim to none. The bottom line, Exotica was the only Inclusive Clubs hotel with any available rooms. “Julie, pleeeeeeasse,” Joe groveled. It was his desperation, and the spark in his McDreamy eyes—which I hadn’t seen in forever—that pushed me to change my mind. I wanted to McVomit. But against my better judgment, and notwithstanding my staunch Catholic upbringing, I drove out all thoughts of mortal sin and couldn’t believe the words that came out of my mouth. “Fine, you win.”

As he processed my answer, Joe’s expression was irritatingly cute. So, what else could I do but press on, sickening myself? “Under the circumstances, and given our limited choices, as well as your obnoxiously gung-ho desire...” I paused to give him the full effect of my displeasure before