

LAND MINES



A NOVEL BY
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PRELUDE (OR POSTLUDE, DEPENDING WHERE YOU ARE
ON THE TIME LINE OF MY LIFE)

LAND MINES. I PICTURE PRINCESS DIANA, the patron saint of women in bad marriages, head and face helmeted behind indestructible Plexiglas, walking on a field, trying to find and destroy land mines before they blow up in her face or the face of some other innocent, shattering them, maiming them, changing their lives forever.

For I was like Diana, no, am like Diana. Her spirit malnourished in a bad marriage, her husband not caring whether she knew of his infidelities, flaunted them, expected her to live with them because he was a prince, the future King.

People thought of me as a princess (truth be told, some still do), living in a gilded cage, married to a man who had first power, then money. It looked perfect on the outside. The perfect couple. People were shocked when we separated. I was a good actress. But, I digress.

I cried when Diana died because she was just pulling herself together after the very public pain of leaving her marriage and getting a divorce. She seemed happy. After years, months, of sitting home alone in her castle on Saturday nights, she had found a man to love and to love her. A younger man at that. I imagine that they had great sex and that she was all over him after years of no or bad sex, except the sex that was required to produce two heirs, like I did.

She dared to leave a prince, and she died for it. Is it better to stay with the man who bores you, repulses you, destroys you, for appearances sake, for the sake of the children, or to leave, seek and find your happiness, only to have it snatched away when you are at your happiest?



Diana knew of the destruction of land mines because she had seen them in her life. She had dodged them ever since she dated Charles, ever since her mother left her and her marriage to find her happiness with another man. Diana would go along in her life, thinking that all was well, and boom, something would blow up. Taking a bit of her spirit here, a bit of her happiness there.

Just like Diana, the land mines blow up around me when I least expect it. I need a metal detector.



CHAPTER 1
A 'NICE GIRL' IS NOT PERFECT

2/15

THE EFFORT OF MY LIFE makes me feel like I am a salmon swimming upstream. But I don't have a home to go to. I don't know where I'm going. I just know that it feels harder than anything I've ever done because I'm not swimming alone. I'm carrying two children in my arms, and my arms ache with the effort of keeping them above water. I, on the other hand, am sinking.

I've been officially separated for two weeks. I decided it's time to keep a divorce journal and record my thoughts. Have been feeling mighty down about the whole thing. My life exposed — me, Carolyn James, a “nice girl”, is not perfect. I have problems. Can't hold a man. Can't keep it all together. Can't front anymore.

Can't hide and pretend anymore. Takes too much energy and doesn't work. If I keep doing what I've been doing, I'll get what I always had. I have to open myself to more people. Be open. Be honest. Be human.

2/19

What a day! I go to work and first thing have a big meeting with the Dean about two kids in my class, one of whom's mothers is a professor at the undergraduate school and a friend of the Dean's, who I'm thinking of turning in to the honor board for collaborating on this semester's graded writing assignment, against the law school's code of conduct. A ton of bullshit later, I walk out of the room with the Dean's support and a strong desire to turn in



my resignation, except now that I'm separated, I need this job. I am down for the rest of the day, saying that they don't pay me enough for this bullshit.

Just down about a lot of shit.

I have to remind myself that this separation is a good thing. I can't stand seeing Tom, the asshole I married, the father of my two wonderful children. I don't want to be around him. So many wasted years. I wonder if they will ever get better.

2/20

Today was much calmer. I had back-to-back student conferences — all from the class that I like and call my good class. Their writing may not be the best, but at least I like all of them, unlike my other class of first year law students who determine how much respect and enthusiasm they are going to give the teacher by where she is in the law school food chain, and, as a year-to-year, nontenure-track legal writing professor, I am at the bottom.

So, since I only saw kids from my good class today, I feel better, more relaxed, not crazed by it all. Conferences are over. Next week is easy.

2/21

The Women's Law Conference was great. The inner-city law school where it was held seems like a supportive environment for women. Very intellectually stimulating — unlike the plain vanilla suburban law school where I teach a low level course with a salary to match, far off the tenure track, but with health benefits for me and the kids. But, because I have to prove that I can do it all (actually, not just prove it, but do it as there is now no one I can turn to who wants to do things for me to make my life easier), I left the conference early and spent the rest of the day running around with the kids — to a store to buy presents, to two birthday parties, which I got them to late, and to the movies.



I realize I don't want to be perfect, that I can't be perfect, and that I want to be authentic. If I was just authentic, I think I'd be more relaxed — to just be me and not worry about other people's expectations. I am going to cutback on activity to find out who I am and to reclaim the pieces of myself that I gave away throughout my marriage.

2/22

Today was a definite challenge to my determination to handle all things, to keep putting one foot in front of the other without losing my mind and my spirit.

A simple trip to the grocery store turns into a three hour wait at the hospital. Indulging my nine-year-old son, David, in his post-separation sadness, the life he knew having been ripped out from under him, I tell him that he can have a donut. He takes one out of the case and climbs back into the grocery cart, the front of which I, indulgently, told him he could stand on. His eleven-year-old sister, Angela, who ought to know better, but who was playing out her own post-separation anxiety by acting out, was already inside of the cart, taunting him. As David scrambles back into the cart, he slips and hits his head on a sharp corner at the bottom of the case that holds the donuts. His head starts bleeding all over the grocery store floor, and we're off to the hospital to get stitches. Why me? Why us? What did I do? Is this normal, or just more for me to deal with? Why do I think that this is about me, and not about my son (who was basically fine, by the way, sent home with three stitches that will dissolve in ten days)?

While I sat at the hospital with guilt that will last a lifetime, Tom came because he was supposed to take David to his soccer game that afternoon, and of course I had to call him and tell him what happened. Tom was tired, nursing a cold, and was basically dispassionate about the whole thing. No feeling there. Something is really disconnected with him. I found myself saying — no



way; I'm not going back to that relationship again, even if he asked me, which he hasn't so far, and which I don't think he will given all the venom and cruelty he spews my way. He's a barren, unhappy jerk who can't connect with anyone normally and with warmth. I need normalcy, passion, warmth — not him.

I left the kids with Tom and, injured son notwithstanding, I figured that I needed to have a life, so it was off to book club at Mary's. Some of the members knew that Tom and I had separated. They didn't say it, but I could tell. Either they heard it directly from Tom or they heard it from their husbands, who heard it from Tom. But some of them were unusually silent when it came to talking to me. Some couldn't even look me in the eye. But, I knew that some didn't know; they treated me the same as always. People only get uncomfortable when they know. Either way, it was an enjoyable time.

When I got back home, Tom had brought the kids back, and he was on the phone with one of the other doctors in his office, talking loud and disturbing me, as usual. I wonder why I felt that I had to deal with that for so long; why I didn't end the marriage when I realized that I was never going to be completely comfortable with him and his ways, when I realized that I had married the wrong man. Anyway, the rest of the evening was quiet and uneventful — thank God.

2/25

A great day, finally. I got some unexpected praise from students today when they learned that, starting with the next academic year, I was being promoted to become the director of a new academic advising program at the school. They burst into applause at a luncheon where some of my former colleagues were also extolling my virtues from the days when, a few years ago, I was a practicing attorney and a soldier struggling on the political battlefield with them. I didn't even know that the students cared about me. It felt great to know that they did.



. : *Undated notes* : .

My house (a self-help book said to write down the kind of house that you wanted; to visualize it in the mental plane until it manifests itself on the physical plane).

- Kitchen: golden brown, wooden cabinets with red and yellow accents, primary colors on the walls and accessories; very Mary Engelbreit.
- Hardwood floor; chair legs that don't need pads on the bottom of them to keep them from scratching the hardwood floors, like the ones I now have do
- Warm, golden brown, highly polished wood table
- Plenty of light streaming through the windows
- Café curtains
- An island
- Lots of counter space

House (brick? or two story informal colonial?)

- Slate walkway
- Informal flower gardens out front; lots of flowers and color all year long; a chaotic garden of color, not a perfect, highly manicured one like the one I have now
- Smaller front yard (as opposed to the acre that is now wasted and unused between the road and our front door)
- Plenty of privacy between me and my neighbors — mature trees

2/28

I am on a quest. A personal journey. I feel that I must realign my life the way that I must realign my back to be comfortable.



Maybe my back aching and feeling loose and unsupported is telling me something (a la Louise Hay in *Heal Your Life*). I feel that I need to be away from Tom's energy field and its pull to direct my own. Strange? Not according to Caroline Myss in *Why People Don't Change and How They Can*. I have to find my own lights and work with them. I feel like I no longer can be muzzled. I have to say what I have to say. Do what I have to do and not worry about the consequences. Be honest with myself and others. Why can't I tell people that I am separated? Because it doesn't come up in polite conversation? Because I don't want to talk about it? Because then they'll know that I don't have the perfect life. That it shatters my image? Who knows! I am working towards it.

Strange pains in my pelvis. Hope it's my period coming on. Have to call the doctor.

Flirted — kind of — with a guy today who didn't have a wedding ring. Felt strange, but OK. I guess I could still do it when I wanted to. Guess I still got it! But I'm not sure anymore if anyone wants it, and, if they do, how to give it away.

3/6

All of my blessings have my name on them. I can never lose what is mine by Divine right. Honesty begets what I want.

These are the affirmations I say regularly, trying to believe them. Hoping that they become a reality in my life. Grasping for anything that will make it better. It's bad, so there's something that I must be able to do to improve it. After all, for all of my life, there always has been something that I could do. If I just put forth more effort, conditions would improve. That doesn't seem to be the case now. I can put in the effort and get nothing. Or at least not get what I want, which to me might as well be nothing, because it doesn't leave me feeling satisfied. In fact, it leaves me feeling very unsettled. I hate to feel that way, but I've felt it for so long now that maybe I don't know what it's like



to feel settled. Eleven years of a bad marriage with a neurotic, angry, schizophrenic (my judgment, not a psychiatrist's) man has definitely unsettled me.

Even my traditional anchors are disappearing. Bob, the man who I would have married 15 years ago if he wasn't married already and didn't live 3,000 miles away, the man who said he'd be my friend always, the man who said he would always be there for me, isn't. I was supposed to go to New York to see him today, but he said he was sick. I said I'll come and take care of you. He said that with diarrhea and gas, he didn't want me to see him like that. I guess he's right. But maybe the universe is right, too. Maybe it was wrong to try to see him anyway. Maybe I would have been tempted to do something that I knew I shouldn't have, like sleep with him, because I didn't like it when some other woman slept with my husband. All I know is that I am disappointed, but maybe keeping today's affirmations in mind will help. If all my blessings have my name on them, I don't have to worry about losing anything, even the soul mate-like tie that I thought we had.

I want to believe that affirmation, but I'm still disappointed that my expectation of having one wonderful day with a man who thinks I'm pretty wonderful has been shot to hell. Maybe I just won't do anything but feel sorry for myself and see what happens. I'm good at doing that. Or, I can brush myself off, go with the flow (more affirmations), and put one foot in front of the other. I'm good at that, too. Or maybe I'll just go to the Boston Flower Show and revel in God's goodness, which is nature. I need to be better at that.