

From PART 1: RELATIVES

My husband was very attractive to women. He was genuinely puzzled by this, which only added to his appeal. There was something monumental about his presence. He wore an air of authority that covered him like a toga. Whatever his private insecurities, he exuded a quiet strength that acted as a gravitational pull at cocktail parties. Tall, his body was substantial but not fat, his head large, leonine, and bearded. He wore over all of this a thin veil of depression, something that, when it wasn't in its acute stages, acted as a sexual stimulant for many women. Jewish angst is powerful musk. I understand this, because although long ago I stopped finding that aspect of his character the least bit interesting, it was a large component of my initial attraction to him at twenty-one. When he walked into a roomful of people, the combination of his appearance, his wit and his reputation in the film business got him instant attention. I used to hurt a lot at the difference in our reception. I'll even admit to having experienced the fear that one of those tight-breasted, denim-clad, mascara-lidded beauties would stand out from the crowd around him and capture his interest. This did happen from time to time, but for reasons I still don't completely understand, our union managed to withstand those episodes until his death in 1995.

Unlike Ralph, I attract little attention, especially at parties. Within the first minutes of our arrival, he would be surrounded by adoring young people in contemporary dress, while I, in my Kimberly knit and sensible shoes, would find myself chatting on the fringes of the action with someone who looked as if he or she would prefer to be anywhere else. Inevitably would come a time when I'd be asked what I did. When I said "I teach," the words would drop heavily to the floor and lie there, my conversational partner not quite knowing how to pick them up. The response I most cherish was that of a young actress who first looked stricken, then smiled lamely and said, "Well, at least it gets you out of the house."

..... One evening, we were visiting at the home of friends. One of the guests was an unhappy-looking young woman, who, she told us in no time at all, had just produced her first badly received off-Broadway play, ended a love relationship, tried unsuccessfully to lose twenty pounds, and was evidently holding herself together with safety pins. As she and Ralph talked, I could see her interest increasing. It rose further when it emerged that he was in films. And by the time she discovered that he was an editor, her excitement had reached fever pitch, and a light of recognition had begun to shine in her eyes. Her adulation was so evident that I expected her to break into a scene from that Anouilh play in which a young girl says practically her only line of dialogue: "How wooooonderful you are!" over and over again to her aging lover, much to the disgust of his wife, who is looking on. What she actually said was: "Oh, my God, you're the Ralph Rosenblum who edited the PAWNBROKER and MINSKY'S and ANNIE HALL?? Would you do me a favor? Would you edit my life?"

Actually, that wasn't an altogether outlandish request. Ralph edited everything: films, books, screenplays, the refrigerator, the drawers, the closets. When the soufflé was about to fall and he was standing between me and the oven trying to decide whether to put the basil behind or next to the marjoram, I didn't ask him to get the hell out of my way and stop playing Craig's wife to my Julia Child. No, I would wait for him to finish editing the spice cabinet and then I'd save the soufflé. After all those years, I knew better than to interrupt the creative process.

Our marriage wasn't easy, but it certainly wasn't dull. Like my father, I prize talent and consider it a fair trade for the difficult temperament that often accompanies it. I figure I'll have time to marry a good-natured accountant in my next life, but during this one, I liked the excitement. Ralph's tendency toward detachment, while often hurtful, was good for me, even though I sometimes missed the attention. In one respect, it has allowed me to grow freely and in my own direction, unstunted by the kind of over-involvement I was forced to endure when I was young.

Because we were so different, it always surprised me that our odd combination worked as well

as it did. Ralph was of the arts; I, especially in my later years, was of the sciences. He attended to the design, I the details. He was a star; I generally go unnoticed. He was mercurial, often depressed; I am more stable, mostly content. He usually expects the worst, I the best. I have come to the conclusion that it isn't how different two people are as long as it adds up to 100 percent. But I think our marriage worked, especially in the years following our separation, for yet another reason. It took me a long time, but I finally came to like and respect who I am. And that is a woman of independent thought and some talent. Ralph was a man of similar attributes. We were, in short, each other's match.