

Daniela Henry

. Considering the Alternatives.

Dedicated to J.H. & W.H.

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank the people I call my own, who let me stay with them and use up all their shit and call them in the middle of the night. I would also like to thank every single person I have ever met in my entire life. Even the assholes. I mean, fuck it: Why not? I had a weirdly hard time working on this book (who even knows why – wait I got it, life is miserable in this pandemic!) and I could not have survived writing it without my brain, my son, my partner, and my family. They all gave me very good and useful ideas and notes.

I would like to thank my friends who read my stuff.

I would like to thank my north stars: mom and dad, and the rest of my family. Also, my sister. Unblock me and give me a call already. My brother, who is fucking epic and I love him to death.

I would like to thank my phone; my computer which is still working even though it is a MacBook Air refurbished from 2015; Nora Ephron for all her books; that one pizza place at Naschmarkt; Viennese coffee houses; Ben Affleck in *Gone Girl*; a proper bagel with salmon & cream cheese; toilet paper in 4-layers; all those Brené Brown books I read to become a better person when I should have gone to therapy; my

regular UPS and DHL guy, and independent bookstores (Phil Bookstore in Vienna, Austria). Seriously, I will just go on listing people until my fingers go numb so let me stop here and just text everybody else.

Finally, thanks to W.H., who was patient enough to read all the way to the end of this list just to see his name. Best for last, etc., etc. Endless thanks and love to him, my partner, friend and soulmate.

. The Missing Link.

I am a moon junkie. Every time I look at the moon, I feel less alone and less afraid. Of course, the movie *Moonstruck* with Cher and Nicolas Cage is one of my favorites. I tell my son that moonlight is a magic blanket and the stars above us are campfires set by friendly aliens. I track lunar cycles on my iPhone and sometimes I take my son outside when a moon is new or full or blue. We call this “moon hunting” and we bring tiny flashlights.

During one full moon a couple of years ago, we drove to an open field and climbed into sleeping bags and howled at the night sky. As we drove to my pre-planned spot, my son once again reminded me to stay in the moment and stop overthinking. He kept pointing at the huge moon, shouting, “Mama, it is right there. We don’t have to drive to the moon. It came to us!” We pulled over and I abandoned my previous plan. I spread out a blanket and we snuggled together. We both made wishes. I wished that my son would be kind and happy and I would wake up healthy. My son wished that everyone in the world was a robot. And more *Lego*.

Who is this little guy who follows me for almost seven years?

My son has a dark eye color that I can get lost in. He loves to run around and strongly identifies with Harry Potter these days. He recently told me, "Mama, do you want to know something funny about me? I am afraid of little things and not afraid of big things." I think he was talking about bugs and elephants, but I understood what he meant in a very deep way. He is delighted when I laugh at him, but he is no ham. He is sensitive and stubborn, and as of now, wants to become a paleontologist or a doctor. Or Iron Man. He asked me the other day, "Are you sad that you don't have a penis?" I told him that I was happy with the parts that I had. I then reminded him that girls have vaginas and everyone is different and each body is like a snowflake. He nodded in agreement and then looked up at me with a serious face and asked, "But did you once have a penis and break it?" The bond between mother and son is powerful stuff. I firmly believe that every boy needs his mom to love him and every girl her dad to pay attention to her. My son needed to figure out if I had ever owned and operated a penis. I get it. His penis is important to him. Anyway, he starts college next year. Just kidding, he is six. He recently asked if he could marry me and I said yes. I couldn't help it.

When my son was two or younger, we used to take naps together. We spent part of one summer in Germany with my parents and every afternoon we would snuggle together as the breeze blew in. I was holding

my baby and count those naps as some of the happiest times in my life. I imagined a peaceful and quiet life with my son. I pictured kissing his head as he obediently put himself to bed, as in a John Irving novel. I was so stupid. Everything is loud now. He wants to wrestle and bump and yank. He wants to play lion cub, rolling around and destroying the furniture. He jumps off couches and buzzes around with his scooter. He swings sticks and tells people “food goes into your stomach and turns into poop.” He loves dinosaurs and superheroes and thinks that I am Wonder Woman. Everything is physical and visual and some things are expressed by Patrick Swayze’s “roadhouse” kicks.

I love my son so much I fear my heart will explode. I wonder if this love will crack open my chest and split me in half. It is scary, this love. When my son arrived, he broke open everything about me. My mind flooded with oxygen. My heart became a room with wide-open windows. I laughed hard and I cried hard. I thought more about the future and read about global warming. I realized how nice it feels to care about someone else more than myself. And gradually, through this heart-heavy openness and the fresh brown eyes, I started to see the world a little more. I started to care a teeny tiny bit more about what happens to everyone in it. My son needs so much holding. Kisses and hugs and food and clothes and touch. He needs everything. Sometimes the enormity of

what he needs is intense but I give it to him unconditionally. Because I love him and I am here for him.

Single parenting is not easy but I am pretty good at it these days. Also because I was lucky to have met someone who gently gestures for me to follow him down a path that allows me to feel a little less stressed out and to see all the advantages I have in life. I am a lucky woman indeed.

When relationships or marriages end, it is hard at first to stay in a setting you used to share. No one wants to be the cat scratching at the door that won't open. Sometimes, people are very bad. Sometimes they are very good. A little love goes a long way. My partner and I are riding the same wave of awesomeness. He used to make the same mistakes that I made, which is to close the eyes and hope the storm and crashing waves will go away, miss me, or hit something or someone else. Whenever I feel I am drowning, he dives in, headfirst, to get me out. When I look at him I hide nothing.

The other day I read something that stuck with me. It went something like this: There are small promises. Look deeply at joy and sorrow, at laughing and crying, at hoping and fearing, at all that lives and dies. What truly heals is gratitude and tenderness, and love.

I realize how lucky I am and how awesome my life is. Nothing is missing. I lay in bed and thought about time and the past, and how many different people live under the same big, beautiful moon. And if we are really lucky, we are able to meet the One who adds a tiny link to unconditional happiness.

. Forget the Facts and Remember the Feelings.

“We may lose and we may win though we will never be here again.” – Eagles, Take it Easy

I am divorced and this is not a secret. I understand why people read so many articles and books on divorce because every second marriage is falling apart. Divorces are so common and nothing really special. When I was going through my divorce, I felt alone even though I had support through family and friends. Nobody felt the specific ways of pain I was in. Imagine spreading everything you care about on a blanket and then tossing the whole thing up in the air. The seemingly never-ending process of divorce is about loading up that blanket, throwing it up, watching it all spin, and worrying that stuff will break when it lands. Of course, it broke. And of course, I wanted to find answers and comfort.

I don't want to talk about too many details of my divorce because it is too sad and too personal. I also don't like people to know all my shit but only the bits and pieces I want to share. That being said, divorce really sucks. But, divorce is also good news, because no good marriage has ever ended in divorce.

Any painful experience made me see things and life differently. It also reminded me of the simple truths that I purposely forget every day or else I would never get out of bed. Things such as nothing lasts forever and relationships can end. The best that can happen is that I learned a little

more about what I am able to handle and how I can stay soft through the pain. I feel a little wiser and hopefully won't make the same mistakes again. And, maybe my experience can be of help to others. I thought about something fun. Imaginary books that may have helped me deal with my divorce a bit better. Here are some fun titles and a short summary of some divorce books I may possibly write in the future. Or not. I would rather not.

I F*ING WANT A DIVORCE!!!!!! LIKE RIGHT NOW!**

Summary: If you have a small child you will understand this book. It deals with the fact that most people who divorce with small children still need to see each other every day. Any good parent will try to put their children's needs first. This book will help teach you how to deal with a hardcore verbal fight and still attend a kid's birthday party in person and not to just send a sad gift through Amazon. How lame. Are you in your early twenties and recently broke up with someone via *WhatsApp*? This book is not for you. Have you heard that your ex is re-building a run-down hotel and you rolled your eyes at how stupid this idea is? This book is not for you. This book is for the people who choose to work together and co-parent or at least show some interest.

Possible chapters to include: Fake smiling. How important is it to have the last word? Stop buying so many toys because material things won't buy real love. Ever!

GET OVER IT! BUT NOT TOO FAST!

Summary: When you are going through the trauma and drama of divorce, you will learn who your real friends are. They guide you and take care of you and save you from your darkest days. This book is here to remind you that even though you are in pain and still in transition, everyone else has moved on and is a little tired of your situation. This book will remind you that unless the juicy fight continues or your ex-spouse actually ends up staying with his new girlfriend, most people don't want to talk about it anymore. This book will teach you how to move on, but not too fast. Be upset, but please keep it together. Don't end up in a mental institution just yet.

Possible chapters to included: She doesn't cry enough. Why is he reporting me to the Immigration Office? He seems like a psycho to me. I am sorry to interrupt, but when do you think you will get over your anger/pride/attitude, take aside what we both went through and show some interest in your child(ren)?

DIVORCE: OR TEN WAYS TO NOT CATCH IT!

Summary: Divorce is contagious! It is like cancer but worse because no one feels really that bad for you. This book will teach you how to discuss your divorce with your currently still married friends. I mean those friends who have the perfect marriage and will never ever get a divorce. This

book will help you not to strangle them when they both stand in front of you and talk about how great their relationship continues to be. This book will point to ways you can talk about your divorce without feeling like it is a real, fancy fur coat that people like to try on but then throw back at you in disgust because they would never wear something like that. They prefer only fake fur.

Possible chapters to include: [Illustrations of happy couples looking at you with pity] Divorce is not an option for me, but I am really happy for you. C'mon who hasn't cheated? I just couldn't do that to my kid(s)! We choose to stay together because of our kid(s).

HEY, LADY! THANK YOU FOR FUCKING MY HUSBAND! ARE YOU HAPPY WITH YOUR CHOICE? TELL ME IF YOU ARE STILL HAPPY WITH HIM AND HIS CRAZY IDEAS AFTER ONE YEAR! [This could possibly be a New York Times Bestseller]

Summary: Newly divorced and attending a wedding for the first time alone? This is the book for you. Inside you will find ways to deal with the strange stares and drunk accusations that come along with not having a date. You will find a lot of tips on how to gently break it to women that you don't want to f*** their husbands. You will find more tips to not get involved in other people's weird relationship shit. You will read about the experiences of other men and women who bravely attended events and came out alive. Check out the special section on what to do and say when your ex shows up at the same event. With or without his new girlfriend. Extra bonus chapter: This book will

help you navigate through all the details that people want to know, such as, how you broke up, where he is living now, what exactly happened, and who wanted it more, and what is going on with the kid(s), and how you told the kids, and if it was sad. Also, if he is mad and if you are sad, if everybody else knows, and who we can tell.

Possible chapters to include: No one is as great, wonderful and full of himself as you, Mr. Ex! It is not hard to be at a wedding without a Plus-1. I have never looked better. I am so glad he is not in my life anymore.

GUYS (AND PEOPLE) TO AVOID AND THAT YOUR MOTHER WARNED YOU ABOUT!

This book just contains a list of assholes, a picture, a short description, and why you should avoid them.

Maybe this will help you. Maybe it will make you laugh. Maybe it will help you navigate through a shitty time. Someday, happy couples won't make you feel sad anymore. Someday you may be in a relationship again. Someday you will wake up and feel happy and slowly but surely like yourself again. Forget the facts and remember the feelings.

. Can I live Without you? – Yes. Do I want to? – No.

Let's be honest. Sex is great. Everybody talks about it. Everywhere. I cannot say that I have seen it all, but there were some classic experiences in my life. I won't share details but rather have some advice instead. All of this advice is meant for older people (strictly 90+). Kidding! This advice works for anybody, straight, gay, transgender, and couples, and should be common sense. Just in case this is not clear and common sense: All sex, in this instance and every instance should be between consenting adults. Are we clear on that? Thank you in advance. Let's dive in, shall we?

Stop faking it! I know you may be tired/eager/excited/nervous to please or are unsure of how to get there. Allow yourself real pleasure and not worry about how long it takes. If it makes you feel better, talk to your partner. Let him know what you would like to do. Your partner cannot mind-read. Also, women are punished with the gift of being able to fake it.

Stop being too goal-oriented when it comes to sex. You might not make it to the finish line every time. Don't worry about it. Each part of the journey can be great.

Don't have sex with people you don't want to have sex with. Nothing needs to be added.

Don't get undressed and start pointing out your flaws of apologize for things you think are wrong with your body. Men don't notice or care. They are about to get laid! They are so happy. Men are very visual, so if you don't want them to look at your thighs just put heart stickers on your breasts to distract them.

Dirty talk. Act like a bossy lady ordering at a sandwich line at a supermarket. "I want the Proscuitto Crudo on rye and make sure you toast it. Add some arugula!" If your partner is bad at dirty talk tell him to shut up. He might even like that. If you don't like dirty talk, don't worry about it. It can be pretty hot if done well but it may not be up your alley. Avoid words like "climax," "moist," and "mom." Don't speak in a fake French accent.

Don't let your kids sleep in your bed.

Laugh a lot and try new things with someone you love.

Keep it sexy. Change things up. Surprises.

Don't watch too much porn. If you depend too heavily on the technical or visual then you may not notice the real flesh-and-blood person in your bed.

Don't be that person who talks about *Tinder* successes and that you find "Limette 69" super hot because she has huge breasts. Nobody needs to know this. Keep it to yourself. Symmetry is pleasing but not as sexy. Steven Hawking is cool but Jackson Pollock knows what I am talking about.

. Age.

My birthday is around the corner. I am approaching 39 which means the big 4-0 is just around the corner, too. This also means, that I am no spring chicken but I am not an old lady either. I can party like a twenty-year-old but it then takes me a couple of days to recover. Sometimes I am a tired mother taking my son to the park, and other times I am a petulant teenager giving the finger to Frank the FedEx guy who didn't bring me that package I ordered ten weeks ago. I idle right in the middle without knowing when middle age actually starts. According to the dictionary, middle-age is "the period of life between young adulthood and old age, now usually regarded as between about forty-five and sixty." SIXTY? Nice try, Oxford.

I personally think middle age begins once you start looking forward to eating dinner before 6.30 p.m., or when you call the cops when your next-door neighbor has a party. I know my body feels older even though I feel I am in shape and practice Yoga on a daily basis. Sometimes certain parts hurt that usually didn't. However, I would never let this social pressure of "staying young forever" get to me.

I can either exhaust myself thrashing against it or turn around and let the pressure of it massage out my kinks. Fighting aging is like the *War on Drugs*. It's expensive, does more harm than good, and has proven to never end.

Hopefully, I have another fifty years of healthy living ahead of me before I pass from this earth either in my sleep

(preferred) or during a daring rescue caught on tape the paramedics recorded. Ideally, my penultimate day would be spent attending a giant beach party thrown in my honor. Everyone would gather around me at sunset, and the golden light would make everything look awesome as I told hilarious stories and gave away my book collection to my friends. I and all my still-alive friends (which, let's face it, will mostly be women) would sing and dance late into the night. My son would be strong, grown, handsome, and happy. I would be frail but adorable. Once the party ended, everyone would fall asleep except for me, my son, and my partner. We would spend the rest of the night watching the stars under a nice blanket my granddaughter made.

As the sun began to rise, my partner would wake and put the coffee on. My son would still be asleep. My partner's last words would be something banal and beautiful. "Are you warm enough, my love? I want to tell you a story." he would ask and say while handing me another blanket. "Just right, okay, tell me a story," I would answer while feeling content.

My funeral would be incredibly intimate. I would instruct people to throw firecrackers and play Pink Floyd songs on a loop.

Did I freak you out? It wasn't until I turned thirty-two and my son was born that I started to feel like my adult life was beginning. This was around the time when I knew how to jump-start my own car battery. I had spent so much of my twenties in a state of delayed adolescence and so much of

my teenage years wishing that time would move faster. At thirty, I felt like I had about six or seven years of feeling like a real adult before my brain, and society tried starting to make me worry about being old. There is the built-in baby stuff, plus the added fascination with the new. But here is the thing. Getting older is awesome, and not because I don't care as much about what people think. It's awesome because I develop a secret superpower. My son would love to read all about it.

The superpower: Getting older makes me somewhat different or being able to adapt to things more easily. This can be exciting. Now that I am better at observing a situation, I can use my sharpened skills to scan a room and navigate it before anyone even notices that I am there. This can lead to me finding a comfortable couch at a party, or to the realization that I am at a terrible party and need to leave immediately. I can witness young people embarrassing themselves and get a thrill that it is not me. I can watch and listen to them throw around their "alwayeses" and "nevers" and "I am the kind of person who would never...." and delight in the fact that I am past that point in my life. Feeling different means I can float.

Getting older also helps me develop an x-ray vision. I am now able to see through people more. I get better at understanding what people mean and how it can be different from what they say. Finally, the phrase "actions speak louder than words" starts to make sense. I can read people's energies better, and this means I get stuck less talking to idiots. Gone are the days when I take things

personally and internalize everyone's behavior. I get better at knowing what I want and need.

Lastly, because I am a superhero, I am really good at putting together a good team. I can look around the room and notice the other superhero because they are the ones noticing me. Some friends I meet are highly emulsified and full of awesomeness. Now that I have a sense of who I am, I know better what kind of friend(s) or partner(s) I want and need. I am interested in people who swim in the deep end. I want to have conversations about real things with people who have experienced real things. I am tired of talking about movies and gossiping about friends. Life is crunchy and complicated and I am more about all the deliciousness instead.

Hey.... Can you walk and breathe? Yes!?! Then stop complaining.