

CHAPTER 1

You Fall in Love; then What?

EMILY WAS IN LOVE. She had the glow that appears in the first stage of romance. As she bounced into a worn leather chair in my office, I saw a vitality and aliveness in her small body I had not seen in the five months she had been my client in therapy, not since she first came to me following the painful breakup of a relationship.

Her brown eyes sparkling, she brought me up to date with delight.

“My world has shifted. In a lovely, scary, real-unreal, spinning way,” she said. “Here’s what happened. I went to a convention of a thousand medical technicians. The program had already started. I scanned the meeting room for someone interesting to sit next to. What I was attracted to was the back of a head of dark, wavy hair. I sat down next to him, even though I hadn’t seen his face.

“His attention was on the speaker and soon mine was, too. When the presentations were over, he turned to leave . . . and our eyes met. It was one of those magic moments. Either of us could have walked on without a second glance, but we didn’t. We jumped into animated conversation about the program. I was attracted to his warmth and enthusiasm. The words tumbled out between us. It seemed as if no one else was in the room.”

Emily gave me a look that combined puzzlement and delight. “How do these things happen? I don’t know. Was it an accident?”

Fate?” She wondered aloud if some kind of plan in the universe brings certain people together.

“We decided we had to talk some more,” she continued, “so we made a date for dinner the same night. By the end of the meal, I realized my world was different. A week later, after our second date, my heart could hardly keep from saying ‘I love you,’ though my head told me it was too soon.

“Now I catch myself smiling, forgetting where I am momentarily. I notice simple things with new awareness. Colors seem more vivid; music is sweeter. Oh, yes; his name is Ted.”

I was delighted by her good fortune, though my knowledge of her prior experiences with relationship caused me to hold some private reservations.

Three weeks later Emily called for another appointment and came to my office. Clearly, things had changed and her posture reflected it.

“Last weekend Ted and I spent the day together. It was intense, wonderful. But toward the evening, I could feel him backing away. He said he was tired.

“The next day he called to break a date and said he wasn’t comfortable with what was happening with us. He wanted to ease off. I was devastated. Even more disappointing, I realized that in spite of my originally feeling he was different, he was another ‘distancer,’ just like other men I had dated. And, in fact, like my ex-fiancé.”

She told me tearfully that she’d gone from feeling in love to feeling hopeless. Would she always be attracted to men who retreat after a first burst of enthusiasm? Was that situation caused by something she did? By the men she chose? What could she do so it wouldn’t keep happening?

It Can Happen to You

THE FIRST MONTHS of a new romance are deliciously special. Falling in love is such an exquisite experience that it is not likely to be forgotten, even if you haven’t felt those feelings in a long time.

But it can often be marked by confusion as well. Can you remember the uncertainty and the resulting pain you may have felt in the beginning of a love affair? Were you the one causing the pain to your partner because of your own uncertainty? Perhaps you, like Emily, met someone exciting and then had the same kind of disappointment she did, or you thought someone was exciting, then you backed away from the intensity of further involvement.

If those kinds of uncomfortable situations have occurred in your life, you may wonder why they happened, or other questions may arise. If you're in a committed relationship now, you may sometimes wonder *why* you chose this particular person. Perhaps you feel trapped by, or generally unsure of, a relationship you're in. Maybe you love your partner dearly, you feel settled and secure, and yet you wonder how your relationship actually works. If you have friends or grown children who want your suggestions about how to create healthy relationships, you may wish to know more so you can be helpful to them.

As you explore the issues and dilemmas of romance in this book, I hope you will find answers to many of these questions. My desire is to help you discover why you have chosen specific partners and learn how you can use this information to create a partnership that is all you want it to be.

The Unconscious and the Conscious

THERE IS A COMMONLY accepted myth that we don't actually *choose* romantic partners but rather that love "just happens" in some kind of amazing, accidental way. This is not exactly so, since whether we realize it or not, powerful, unseen forces within us are profoundly influencing everything we do, including the way we fall in love and our choices of people to fall in love with. These unseen, or unconscious, forces almost always reflect experiences we have had early in our lives along with the feelings that went with them. Even though we don't remember those experiences and feelings specifically, they remain

within us, buried in our unconscious minds. They have their unusual power *because* we are not aware of them. We don't know they exist, and so we have no authority over them. In fact, the powerful "chemistry" in romantic attraction often comes from the unconscious. When love "just happens," most of our feelings actually reflect what is going on unconsciously. The process of falling in love is far from accidental.

Nevertheless, the conscious part of each of us thinks it has knowledge about almost everything, including how and why we fall in love. But these viewpoints about why we do what we do, think what we think, or feel what we feel may not be what's really important as we seek to understand falling in love and creating a partnership.

In order for us to have a more accurate sense of our underlying motivations, we must gain access to, that is, become conscious of, as many of our powerful, unconscious messages and memories as we can so that we can use this awareness to make better decisions. Your conscious part may say, "She/he is so attractive and fun to be with I can't resist her/him," but the reasons for your being magnetized to *this* attractive and fun person rather than another one are likely to be hidden in the unconscious.

For this reason, I developed a series of simple exercises designed to give the conscious part of you more access to, and awareness of, the unconscious part to bring you more control over your romantic choices. If you are already in a relationship, gaining more knowledge about yourself and your partner can add enormously to your ability to understand conflicts that erupt between you.

First Attraction, then . . . ?

BETWEEN THE FIRST moments of strong attraction, or falling in love, and the development of a healthy intimate relationship, some

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You may choose to do the exercises now or return to them later. In either case, working with the exercises will make the material I present more meaningful and personal.

important decisions must be made. This interval is one of the most important and least understood aspects of a successful relationship. As a therapist with many years of professional experience and as a human being who's gone through the ups and downs of several important relationships, I have learned some valuable lessons about this crucial interval. These lessons may help you to be more aware and better able to make one of the most important decisions you will ever face, your choice of a life partner. The awareness I'm speaking of can also help you to better create an exciting, growth-producing relationship with your chosen partner.

If your existing relationship is not satisfying, you may discover unconscious reasons why you have chosen the partner that you have and clarify what you can do about your situation.

Can You Really Trust Love?

THE WHOLE PHENOMENON of falling in love is shrouded in mystery. What really causes "chemistry" between two people, or, as some people call it, being "love sick." Is it a necessary ingredient in creating a good relationship? How reliable is it?

A broader look at marriage and divorce could provide convincing evidence that many of us actually choose partners who are *not* the people we thought we wanted. About half of today's marriages end in divorce. The emotional pain felt by these divorcing couples, and their children, is no doubt producing long-term social problems of which we are only now dimly aware. Yet, as a society, we still trust "falling in love" as a basis for long-term relationships and marriage.

When we're young and we dream of the future, our hopes are to fall in love, marry, perhaps have children, and live a happy life. We don't dream of broken marriages, children of divorce, single parenting, perhaps remarriages and the challenges of stepfamilies. When we're young, or looking for a second marriage, we also may dream of having families that are happier or more stable or otherwise "better" than the families our parents created. If our childhood families were not

as good and loving as we might have liked, we dream of being grown up and having the power to get family life “right” as adults. We fall in love, trying to do just that, but what is there about falling in love as a basis for marriage that is not working well for many of us?

Remember a time when you felt “in love.” It may have felt like a hurricane force took over your usual routines and your sensible self or it may have felt like a gentle “goofiness” overcame you. Regardless, it probably seemed as though you were on a powerful drug. Now scientific research gives us strong evidence that this is exactly what happens! The profound euphoria of a passionate infatuation actually produces an altered state in the brain. Phenylethylamine (PEA), an amphetamine-like substance produced naturally by our bodies, floods our brains when we are excited by a new love. Along with other neurotransmitters, including dopamine, this chemical “love bath” gives lovers the ability to talk or dance all night and to feel outrageously optimistic. Like all drug-induced states, this energizing, exhilarating state eventually dissipates, but it can last from 18 to 36 months.

That, therefore, may be a dangerous time to make decisions intended to last a lifetime. I have had clients tell me, “I love her [or him], but I’m not *in love* anymore.” That kind of statement seems to reflect what happens after this induced state of being “in love” leaves and when your normal self returns and real, everyday love takes over.

I’m not ready to give up on love. It can be one of life’s most delicious experiences. I believe falling in love is a valid part of choosing a mate and apparently it’s here to stay. But *trusting romance without understanding it* is like trusting a small child to lead you through heavy traffic. Even the words we use, “*falling in love*,” suggest risk. So, as you would use your adult awareness and take that small child by the hand to lead him or her through dangerous territory, I believe you should take your own “smitten self” by the hand when you fall in love. And you can do that.

It is important for you to know more about how you fall in love and choose romantic partners, so you can do a better job of, first, choosing

a relationship and, second, using your relationship to produce growth and happiness rather than conflict and divorce. While the falling-in-love part is easy and exciting, the reality stage—the time of subsequent challenges in the relationship—is when you can learn more about yourself and your partner. This is the important time for loving.

Some form of disillusionment inevitably comes up following initial attraction, the infatuation stage, of a new relationship. That's often when a romance breaks up or fizzles out. Was Emily and Ted's relationship merely going to be something that "didn't work out"? Were their first feelings of excitement simply unreliable and misleading? Or was something else going on . . . something that, if better understood, could turn potential disappointment into happiness and the fear of pain and failure into greater personal awareness and rewarding experience?