

# THE MEDITERRANEAN LOVE PLAN

SEVEN SECRETS TO LIFELONG PASSION IN MARRIAGE

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WITH BECKY JOHNSON

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*The Mediterranean Love Plan*

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-0-310-33546-7 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-34871-9 (international trade paper edition)

ISBN 978-0-310-35033-0 (audio)

ISBN 978-0-310-33416-3 (ebook)

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Published in association with the literary agency of Wordserve Literary Group, Ltd., [www.wordsserve.com](http://www.wordsserve.com).

*Cover design: Curt Diepenhorst*

*Cover photo: © Mv\_Jamsey/iStock*

*Interior design: Denise Froehlich*

First printing February 2017 / Printed in the United States of America

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## CHAPTER I



# THE SEVEN MEDITERRANEAN SECRETS TO PASSION

*Have you never met a woman who inspires you to love?  
Until your every sense is filled with her? You inhale her.  
You taste her. You see your unborn children in her eyes  
and know that your heart has at last found a home.*

—DON JUAN DEMARCO

In the film *Don Juan DeMarco*, a middle-aged psychiatrist (played by Marlin Brando) is asked to help what appears to be a delusional young man (played by Johnny Depp) who wears a mask and claims to be *the* Don Juan, the world's greatest lover. The therapist tries to get the young man to, well, snap out of it! Be sane, be normal! Whether this Don Juan's identity is false or real becomes of less consequence as the movie progresses, the therapeutic tables are turned, and the incurable romantic is suddenly teaching the practical psychiatrist about the Spanish art of seduction and love.

Over weeks of therapy sessions, the aging psychiatrist becomes more and more influenced by the romantic philosophies of his client. He finds himself, at home, slowly awakening to his senses and becoming a more attentive and passionate lover to his oft-neglected but beautiful wife. By

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the movie's close, we see the therapist twirling and waltzing with his wife as he walks with her along the beach on the island of Eros, having blossomed into a man renewed to the passion of life itself, a passion ignited as he romanced his woman.

Men, I would love for the book you are holding to ignite your inner (monogamous) Don Juan. And women, I want you to fully embrace your womanhood with the man in your life. I want you both to start living sense-drenched, passionate lives when apart and together.

I have to admit, it takes some focused effort to learn and practice the art of living and loving at a high level. Nothing kills romance and passion quite like allowing a marriage to simply unfold naturally. If you aren't proactive about applying the secrets of passion to your marriage, every day, it won't be long before your relationship is on autopilot: both of you prioritizing your separate to-do lists rather than carving out time to linger and celebrate your love together.

You may not find yourself in a monotonous marriage overnight; it happens slowly, bit by bit. But if you leave your marriage untended, you could wake up one day and (insert loud yawn) both feel bored at best, trapped at worst.

You have to be conscious about bringing out your inner Don Juan (or Zorba the Greek or Sophia Loren or Valentino or Juliet or Helen of Troy or Pepe Le Pew). As one old Mediterranean adage declares, "Love is like good bread. It has to be made new every day." That said, what exactly do great romantics do to keep aflame their zest for life and their desire for intimacy?

I'd like to begin answering that question by sharing a landmark study on the subject of ecstasy (the emotion, not the drug).

### SEVEN SECRETS TO A MORE PASSIONATE RELATIONSHIP

In the early 1960s, writer and researcher Marghanita Laski conducted what would become a classic study on the subject of ecstasy.<sup>1</sup> She

discovered that there were certain elements surrounding experiences of passionate joy and romantic love. They occurred so often, she began calling them triggers to ecstasy.

Among the triggers to ecstatic experiences were

- being in nature
- observing art or listening to music
- discovery of new knowledge
- beauty
- spiritual and religious experiences
- rhythmic movement
- sexual love and tender touch

From my own research and observation, other common prompts to passion include

- playfulness, humor, and laughter
- intimate, soul-satisfying connection
- a meal prepared and eaten with mindfulness and love

By incorporating more of these God-given pleasures into our daily lives, we become more sensual, happy people. And when a couple both encourages and regularly shares together many of these passion triggers, or what I prefer to call intimacy inducers, romance continues to blossom.

Contrast the practices listed above to what we see, too often, in modern American marriages: faces glued to smartphones, hands on computer game consoles, husbands in man caves watching sports from their Barcaloungers, women so crazy-busy that they've lost touch with their own emotions, children who watch their parents live parallel lives rather than living intertwined and deeply connected lives through intimate romance and affectionate love. My heart aches for so many couples in trouble, who are daily weighing the question that divides and decays any relationship: "Should I stay or should I go?" It is no wonder that we have lost our passion and need a plan to find it, nurture it, and experience romantic love in all of its mysterious grandeur.

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By combining, grouping, and distilling what Laski learned about triggers to ecstasy with the practices that lead to passion in the world's most romantic countries, I have come up with the following Seven Secrets of Passion, unveiled here for you.

1. *The Secret of Attunement.* Tuning in to one another, getting in sync regularly, using all of our senses.
2. *The Secret of Playfulness.* Being fully engaged in things both spouses find that bring a sense of childlike fun and joy to the marriage.
3. *The Secret of Savoring Food.* Cooking and/or sharing a romantic meal together can intensify and enrich the experience of being together, in surprising ways.
4. *The Secret of Enjoying Beauty.* Surrounding ourselves with beauty elevates and inspires our senses and brings out the romantic in all of us.
5. *The Secret of Creativity.* Engaging in creative arts or projects or exciting adventures together turns on the neurotransmitters that support powerful romantic connections and intimate partnership.
6. *The Secret of Health and Longevity.* Staying healthy together through a naturally active and balanced lifestyle leads to more fun in the bedroom as well, lasting into old age.
7. *The Secret of Blending the Sacred and the Sexual.* Couples who naturally and successfully weave their spiritual connection to God with their human desire for closeness and oneness take their marriage to the realm of ultimate intimacy. A shared, sacred purpose also magnifies passion for living and love for each other.

### SIDE NOTE: IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO

Though one person applying these principles can become more passionate and have some influence over their partner, a great love requires two



people going all in to make their marriage the most passionate it can be. One person can certainly instigate and help get the romance dominoes falling, but because marriage is a two-party invention, one person trying alone cannot create true intimacy.

So I want to say here that if your mate is caught in one of the Four Deadly A's—abuse, addiction (be it drugs, alcohol, porn, food, shopping, gambling, or something else), abandonment, or adultery—you will need a professional counselor who's an expert in helping you navigate these potentially marriage-eroding issues. (In fact, you may want to consider beginning with a NewLife Intensive Marriage Transformation Weekend.) Deeply ingrained personality disorders (such as borderline or narcissistic personality disorder) or Asperger's syndrome or a mental illness (such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia) can also be serious challenges or even roadblocks to a passionate, intimate marriage. Past sexual abuse may also need to be handled with tender loving care and the guidance of experts who understand the unique path required for recovery.

These are complex issues that no marriage book alone can solve. As much as I'd like to say that one person's love can conquer all ills in a marriage, I cannot. Intimacy ("into-me-see") requires two people who both desire closeness and passion in their marriage. They may not be experiencing it, but they both want it. Some issues, however, so erode a marriage that intimacy cannot happen unless and until the broken foundations of safety, trust, and commitment are rebuilt with expert help and support. So get any professional help you need to repair any cracks in your relational foundation, and use this book as a resource to start adding positive, intimacy-building activities back into your marriage.

Now that I have met my professional duty and responsibility to tell you that this book is not the way to solve all problems in marriage, I want to counter that with another vital piece of reality. The ideas and dreams presented in this book could be the trigger for the complete reimagining of your marriage. An unforgettable moment, an unexpected attempt at romance, may be just the spark needed to ignite the fire of

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change and transformation. You may be surprised at how applying just one or two of these Mediterranean secrets of romance can get you out of a relational rut, just as they've worked for me and Misty.

At one point in our marriage, Misty and I fell into one of those relational spirals in which we were constantly stepping on each other's toes, and being together started to feel like work. We both ached from the pain of living together, but we were feeling isolated emotionally. So we did something radical. We packed up our resentment and bitterness, left the kids with trusted family and friends, then spent a week alone together in a beautiful spot away from work, laptops, TV, and cell phones. (There was a local phone by which our family could reach us in case of emergency, but that's it.) Once we were truly away from it all, without distractions, we were able to apply several of the secrets to romance that we share in this book, including slowing down our life to the speed of each other's heartbeat, giving our marriage the time and space for us to get in sync and attuned again. (See chapter 2 for more about attunement, a powerful ingredient of passion.)

We arrived in deep despair. Before we left the island, we were bonded back into the marriage we had experienced before we started subtly detaching, the passionate marriage we are experiencing still. There is no marriage on earth that doesn't need the occasional tune-up (or overhaul). Thankfully, before this getaway, we were familiar with the relational tools to mend and enhance our marriage. But what we needed at this point was to stop the world, slow down, and apply these secrets once again, in a concentrated week of healing, connection, and fun. It worked like a miracle.

Also, I want to say that you can certainly explore and apply the mysteries of the Mediterranean to your own life to get back in touch with the passionate joy of living, whether or not your mate participates. For those of you who are dating or looking for a mate, this book will help you become the most passionate person you can be. And it will help you spot a partner who has qualities that contribute to a long-term marriage full of playfulness, intimacy, and romance.

Finally, passion can take on many faces during times of illness or crisis, or the birth of a baby, or life with toddlers. To an exhausted mother, the ultimate intimacy inducer may be a husband who is willing to take the night shift with the newborn. When a mate is battling any kind of illness, from the flu to cancer, romance will look less erotic and more like tender loving care. When either or both of you are facing a crisis—from a dying parent to a teen on drugs—the face of passion will look more like *compassion*. Passion embraces all the senses and emotions of the human experience, of which sexuality is only one. It's an important one, no doubt, but cut each other lots of slack when one of you is going through a rough patch. Ask your ailing, hurting, or exhausted partner, "What can I do to help?" or "What do you need?" or "What would feel good right now?" and honor their requests. Allow romance and passion to take on new meanings that will deepen your love and intimacy, even when life hurts.

Throughout this book, we'll mention movies and characters, books and quotes. Some of these films or books and characters are obviously morally flawed. So we're not endorsing or condoning plot lines that glorify things like promiscuity, but we will be focusing on scenes that vividly illustrate one of the secrets to passion. Our goal is to notice and capture these elements of passion and bring them into committed marriage. So we ask for your grace and understanding: keep the pointers about passion; toss out plot lines or character flaws that are less than God's ideal for marriage.

Finally, we will be giving you more information and ideas in the following chapters than any couple can possibly employ in a short amount of time. As you read, you'll find yourselves drawn to a few ideas that spark your interest or feed your soul. Make note of these; in fact, read the book with a highlighter or pen if possible and mark the thoughts and ideas that most speak to you, perhaps sections that give you a flutter of joy or hope in your stomach, or a quote that brings a tear to your eye. Start by applying the suggestions that most tug at your heart, and don't get overwhelmed, thinking you've got to somehow do everything we

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suggest in this book, all at once. We hope this will be a book you can keep on your bookshelf and turn to, time and again, in months and years to come when you need a passion booster or two.

And now, without further ado, let's uncover the mysteries that prompt passion, create the conditions for closeness, and bring a renewed sense of romance into your marriage!

*Love withers with predictability; its very essence is surprise and amazement. To make love a prisoner of the mundane is to take its passion and lose it forever.*

—LEO BUSCAGLIA