

INTRODUCTION

The Mayor of Margaritaville

*To really lose yourself is like holding a gun to your head
and pulling the trigger-it takes courage.
Facing the truth means tying a bag over your head
until you suffocate-it takes faith.
You have to be brave to follow God's tracks into the unknown
where so many new things overwhelm and panic you.
But trust me and plunge the jeweled dagger into your heart.
This is what it takes to lose yourself.
There is no other path to God.*

—Hafiz

In the movie, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy, one of the main characters, accidentally discovers a portal to another world while hiding in a closet. It is a world of enchantment, magic, adventure and beauty—Narnia.

It takes her breath away, and for a while, she's completely lost in the wonder of the magnificent place. But soon she thinks of her friends and she feels compelled to show them what she has found because it's just too spectacular to keep to herself. So she returns to her friends and invites them to follow her through the closet, the portal, so they too can experience Narnia.

Without meaning to sound too grandiose, I feel like Lucy. For I too have found a portal to another world, only this is a world of enchanted *love*, magical *intimacy* and beautiful *communion*. I've found *Relationship Narnia*.

It's a "place" where the deepest longings of our hearts' are fulfilled. It's a place where two people experience love's divine intensity and presence. It's a place where people are seen and cherished for who they are. And I have written this book to show you what I've found and to invite you to come with me to Narnia, this magical place of relationship bliss.

Now, my guess is you're a bit suspicious after reading that. Perhaps your shelves are lined with books that have made similar claims, yet your love life is still as disappointing as ever. I know, I've got the same books on my shelves and they didn't transform my love life either. But here's why I feel so confident that this book can make a real difference in your life: My love life was an absolute, utter disaster—and now it's not.

If you read the Prologue you know I'm not exaggerating about the disaster part. And although that relationship was the most spectacularly dysfunctional of all my relationships, it was only the last of many disappointing, drama-filled and failed intimacies.

But now I have a relationship to die for. I really do. My wife and I are open and honest with our feelings; we rarely argue, criticize or blame one another; we

understand and honor our many differences; we support each other's creative path; we encourage each other to fully express our most authentic selves, and our sex life is wonderful—passionately and playfully celebrating the beauty that is our relationship.

How did that happen? Well, that's what this book is all about. I want to tell you how I transformed a love life characterized by heartache, pain and disappointment—better known as drama—and instead created deep, authentic intimacy—what I call relationship bliss.

And my premise is simple: If I can do it, you can do it. For although we may have different genders, beliefs and past experiences, when it's all said and done, you and I are the same. We're just human beings who want to love and be loved.

Love, Life and the Pursuit of Intimacy

I remember a time in my life, in fact it wasn't long after the events described in the Prologue, that I truly wondered if I'd ever have even a *decent* relationship, much less a blissful one. Frankly, I'd given up on that. Bliss seemed way out of reach, reserved for fairytales and romantic comedies. I was only hoping for a relationship that worked, as depressing as that sounds. And my guess is that you too may be on the verge of giving up on Narnia, believing that bliss is an unattainable fairytale. If the truth be told, you may only be hoping for something that doesn't regularly break your heart. And I get that. I really do. But it hasn't turned out that way for me. To my utter surprise, I found Narnia. I'm experiencing relationship bliss and I want to tell you how it happened, because it can happen for you too.

I want to have an open, honest and deeply personal conversation with you about our love lives—whether you are currently in a relationship or not. This book is not a psychological, clinical, shrink-speak treatise on relationships. Though I am a Certified Relationship Coach (that's like a therapist only I don't deal with insurance companies) who has years of experience and is considered an expert in this field, I don't want to write to you from my head. I want to write to you from my heart and from my experience. So think of this book as you and me sitting together in a quiet, intimate setting and having a heart-to-heart talk about love, life and the pursuit of intimacy.

The Core Issue

I've noticed something about relationships that seems strange to me. Maybe it will seem strange to you as well. Over the last hundred years or so, that there have been drastic improvements in almost every area of life—*except relationships*. Think about it. Medicine, civil rights, transportation, technology and communications—they've all radically evolved. Yet the divorce rate is not changing. Two reasonably sane people still can't seem to be happy with one another for any significant length of time. What's up with that?! Don't you find that strange? Everything is improving except love. *What's wrong?*

Well, after a failed marriage, a break up with my fiancée and a bunch of internet dating disasters, the last of which left me homeless in the Caribbean, I started asking myself that very question: What's wrong? And because I was confused and in pain, I asked a more personal question: What's wrong—*with me*? What was *my* problem? I never set out to figure out why the rest of the world's love life sucked. I wanted to know why mine did. What was going on with me that

led to so many disappointing and drama-filled relationships? That's what I was after—fixing my own love life.

With the help a relationship coach, I was able to discover the core issue that was responsible for *all* of my relationship pain. Although I had been in a bunch of relationships with very different women, all of the drama and heartache was coming from one, single root issue. And the issue was this: I was relying on the attention and the affection of my partner(s), to make me feel special, alive and whole. In other words, I saw a relationship as the means to alleviate my feelings of loneliness, to be the source of my happiness, to validate my masculinity and to secure my self-esteem.

Forgive me for using a corny, overdone cliché, but the truth was that I had an unconscious belief in a concept that the movie *Jerry Maguire* made famous: "You Complete Me."

Now, I loved that movie. And I cried when Jerry said "You complete me." I really did. Hell, I *still* cry whenever I see it. It moves me and touches me because I'm a hopeless romantic. Who doesn't want to hear that said to them? Who doesn't want to feel that way about their partner? I do, as does anybody who has a beating heart in their chest. We human beings (even men!) are very romantic creatures.

However, if you asked me if the "You Complete Me" mindset was technically healthy and appropriate, I would have said flatly, "NO!" My brain would have said that another person isn't responsible for my happiness. That's my job. And my brain would have also said that it's not my partner's job to alleviate my feelings of loneliness or to make me feel special or whole. But while my head might have said that, my life was saying something all together different.

In reality, though I was unaware of it at the time, I was relying on my partner(s) to meet those emotional needs. And, of course, what partner can do all that or even come close? Do you see why I experienced so much disappointment and drama? Unfortunately, that was the story of my love life.

Hooked on Love

So there it is. It took me about a year of coaching to finally see this, but the core issue that was responsible for all of my relationship pain and drama was that I was relying on a partner's attention and affection to make me feel special, alive and whole.

And let's not sugar-coat this, shall we? The word "Relying" is simply a nice, politically correct way of saying I was *hooked* on love and relationships. It was like an addiction. Am I overstating things just for dramatic effect? I don't think so. Consider the following:

- I was unable to be alone.
- I felt empty and unhappy when I wasn't in love.
- When one relationship ended, I'd jump into another one immediately.
- When I wasn't hooked up (pun intended), I joined numerous Internet dating sites, occasionally having more than one date a day.
- I'd go out with women I had previously broken up with or continue to date women I knew weren't right for me—all because it was better than being alone.

But maybe the clearest sign that I was hooked on love was the way I reacted when one particular relationship ended. I'm going to tell you much more about Julie, my ex-fiancée, as the book unfolds, but I'll briefly touch on it here because it was this relationship that gave rise to the title of this book.

When she broke off our engagement, I came completely unglued, experiencing panic attacks, sleepless nights, heart palpitations—the whole nine yards. I knew I was in bad shape, so I sought out the help of a relationship coach, a woman by the name of *Diana Chapman*. In our first few sessions, while I thought we were merely processing my grief, she saw what was really going on. I was experiencing withdrawal symptoms. I was hooked and addicted to my relationship with Julie and our break up was akin to me being cut off from my “drug,” hence the symptoms.

During one particularly memorable session, Diana was gently trying to help me see this, but I wasn't getting it. So she tried a more direct approach. She told me, bluntly, that Julie was like “a drink...with legs,” and that I was like an alcoholic, only my “drink” wasn't booze, it was babes.

That startled me. I was confused and fell silent. After a long moment, she went on. “Roy, if Julie was a drink, what kind of drink would she be?” My mind was spinning, but after a few moments I stammered, “Well, she was sweet...sexy... and, well, kinda salty.” I paused and then it hit me. I blurted, “She would be a Margarita!”

That was the moment when all my relationships and the drama I had experienced started to make sense. It all fit. My divorce made sense, my relationship with Pam made sense, the compulsive Internet dating made sense and my reaction to losing Julie made sense. It was all the result of one thing: Relying on my partners to make me feel special, alive and whole. It dawned on me that my *entire* relationship history had been one long “drinking binge” in Margarita-ville!

My core problem was that I was a relationship addict. I was hooked on love and my partners were “drinks with legs.” And throughout this book, I use the term “Margaritaville” to describe this core issue.

The Portal to Narnia

You know where I'm going with this, don't you? Yes, believe it or not, I'm about to tell you that your relationship disappointment, heartache and pain is because you too are hooked on love. Your partners have been “drinks with legs” and you too have spent your love life “wasted away again in Margaritaville.”

Now, don't get all bunched up when I say that. Give me a chance to explain. I know you bought this book to feel better about your love life and to give you some hope in this area. And being told you might, to some degree, be hooked or addicted to love might not be what you had in mind. But I promise that not only will you experience a better love life, you will experience Narnia—relationship bliss —*for recognizing that we are hooked on love is the portal to Narnia!*

That's right. The entry point to the world of enchanted love and magical intimacy is *through* your addiction. It is the *portal* to profound spiritual growth and the creation of authentic intimacy. And even if you do not think, in any way, shape or form, that you are addicted to love, and I'm guessing you don't, I'm asking you to keep an open mind, because the realization that I was hooked on love totally changed my life.

The incredible relationship I now have with my wife would not be possible if it were not for what I learned from my addiction. My spiritual awakening, my growth as a man, the purpose of my life as a writer and a relationship coach—all of it, would not have occurred apart from my relationship addiction. *With all of its pain and misery, my addiction has been my salvation. It can be yours as well.*

But I know that no one wants to think of themselves as being hooked or addicted. It conjures up images of someone living underneath a bridge, wearing tattered clothes, smelling like garbage and clinging to his bottle like a two year old clings to his favorite toy. We don't want to think of ourselves like that. But the good news is this: *I'm **not** referring to that!!!*

I am talking about something so common, so widespread and so absolutely a part of our culture's consciousness that we don't even know we're suffering from it. Yet, in my opinion, it is ruining more lives than alcoholism ever will. We are a culture absolutely and completely obsessed with, hooked on and addicted to love and relationships. It's the primary reason why love is so difficult and the divorce rate is so high. Except few see it.

So when I use the word "hooked" or "addicted" to refer to myself, you or anyone else, I don't mean that we're pathetic people who are psychologically damaged and imbalanced, unable to function and lead productive lives. Quite the contrary. I'm speaking about normal, mature, responsible, intelligent men and women, single or married, with thriving careers and lots of friends. I'm talking about high-functioning people who simply believe that life is found *in love*.

Now, of course, I could choose softer words like dependent, compulsive, needy, attached, clingy or obsessed, for they are all synonyms for what I'm talking about. But as inflammatory and polarizing as words like "hooked" and "addiction" are, I'm going to stick with them because the moment I stopped sugar-coating my issue and owned up to what was really true about me, was the minute my true healing began.

That night by the pool in the Caribbean was the night I dropped the idea that I was "dependent" or that I was a little "obsessive" concerning women and relationships. That was nonsense. I was an addict. Plain and simple. And my life began turning around the moment I dropped the euphemisms and told the unvarnished truth.

Losing Yourself

It may make sense now why I chose to start this chapter with the poem, *Lose Yourself*, by Hafiz. I would encourage you to reread it right now.

Do you see it's relevance? Your entrance to Narnia will not be easy. The journey we are about to embark on—from Margaritaville to Narnia, if you will—is often going to feel like you're putting a gun to your head or plunging a dagger into your heart. This journey will ask you to find the courage that you didn't know you had. You will be asked to really look at yourself. And let me tell you right now that much of what you will see might not be pretty. You will have to face your dark side, your crazed ego and your deeply embedded unmet emotional needs. But if you can find the courage to continue when the journey becomes difficult and scary, and I'm forewarning you it will, the result will be a relationship with yourself and with a partner that is beyond your wildest dreams.

Convince Me!

The first thing we need to do then, if you're willing to look at yourself, is to determine the degree to which you are hooked and addicted to love. I realize that you may not be fully on board with the idea yet. Even though you've had your share of pain, heartache and drama, whether or not that means you're a relationship addict is quite another matter in your mind. I get that. So I want to make a few preliminary comments about addiction in general. Then I want to define exactly what I mean by relationship addiction, because, as I said, most people grossly misunderstand it at first glance. Then the fun begins. I have a thirty question self-test to help you gage just how hooked and addicted you are. And then lastly, I tell you how this book will unfold, preparing you for the journey.

Degrees of Love Addiction

So, first of all, as I said, there are varying degrees of relationship addiction. For example, I went crazy with Internet dating, had sex with a bunch of women to try to forget the pain of my break up with Julie (which doesn't work, by the way), went to the Caribbean with a woman I didn't like and had already broken up with, and wasted a year of my life whining about women in general.

But, of course, relationship addiction can become a dangerous problem when a person repeatedly calls, harasses and stalks a former or potential lover. And remember the NASA Astronaut who drove 900 miles in a diaper to confront her former lover's partner? That would be a fairly extreme case of love addiction, wouldn't you say? Yet it can go even further than that—think: *Lorena Bobbitt* (ouch). And finally, the most extreme and pathological cases of love addiction are where someone wants to kill the other person so that no one else can have them.

So, there are degrees. And I would guess that about 90% of those reading this book are hooked only to the degree I was. I call us normal, everyday, run-of-the-mill relationship addicts. We're not weird; we're not doing anything illegal or dangerous. Yet our love lives are difficult, disappointing and painful. Even though calling that "addiction" seems a bit over the top, I have found that it gets my attention and makes my "recovery" my central priority.

Defining "Hooked"

Addictions can be broken out into two broad categories: chemical and non-chemical. We are all familiar with chemical addictions, some of the most notable being alcoholism and smoking. But we can become addicted to non-chemical things like work, exercise, shopping, fame, conflict, power, approval, security, competition, the Internet, suffering, pornography, and yes, even intimate partners. In my experience, there are many, many more non-chemically addicted people in our culture than there are chemically addicted people. In fact, the more materialistic, hedonistic, capitalist and egocentric a society becomes (ours, in a nutshell), the more prone it is to suffer from non-chemical addictions. As we try to find our value, significance and aliveness *externally* through things like money, pleasure, success or even love, it is a recipe for addiction, dependence, obsession and drama.

Sometimes at parties or gatherings, I like to spice things up a bit by asking, "So, what are you addicted to?" (I'm a really fun guy.) The question is somewhat unnerving because it *assumes everybody has an addiction*. And in my view, except for (maybe) the most enlightened among us, we are all addicted to something.

Sometimes it is to a chemical, but more often than not, it is to something non-chemical.

However, chemical and non-chemical addictions, as different as they are, share two similarities. First, both of them give a powerful “chemical hit” and an actual high. When I was involved in Internet dating, there was a palpable rush that I felt meeting a new woman. And secondly, when the non-chemical addict is cut off from his or her “drug,” there are real withdrawal symptoms like panic attacks, sleepless nights, obsessive thoughts, just to name a few. Non-chemical addictions are just as real as their chemical counterparts and even more prevalent in our society today.

Obviously, being hooked on love and relationships lies in the non-chemical category and I define it this way:

Relationship addiction is any reliance on another person to give you a sense of your self, alleviate a fear, create a feeling of aliveness, or to validate your worth.

Put another way, if you are lonely and you think a relationship would fix that, or if you believe that a partner’s love will make you feel better about yourself, or if you think you would be happier if you were in a committed relationship, those are signs of being hooked and addicted on love, as I define it here. The essence of relationship addiction is the *reliance* on a person to give you that which you cannot or will not give yourself. Drama is the guaranteed outcome of such external reliance, because when you feel that your partner’s affection or attention is inadequate, “withdrawal” sets in followed by drama.

Any time we are unaware of, or disconnected from our deepest Self, our Ground of Being, we invariably turn to *external* things to give us that which we *seem* to lack internally. That turning away from ourselves is the essence of non-chemical addiction and dependence. In other words, to look within is to find you are everything you need; to look with out, in order to fulfill a *perceived* need, is to create addiction and dependence, which, in turn, leads to drama and suffering. *Relationship addiction is your ego’s attempt to find itself in another person.*

The Moment of Truth

Below is a self-test. Answer “T” if the statement is true and “F” if it is false. Think back over the last few years and/or your last few relationships and answer with your first instinct. (Better yet, if you really want the truth, get your best friend to answer for you! I dare you.) Then, at the end, add up your “T’s” and score yourself.

1. _____ I am on two or more dating websites and I check my email for matches or responses daily.
2. _____ I have dated people after it was clear to me that they were not right for me.
3. _____ I have ignored or downplayed “red flags” in others because they were “hot” and/or the sex was great.
4. _____ I’ve gone on some dates because it felt better than spending a weekend night alone.
5. _____ My friends complain that I disappear when I begin dating a new person.

6. _____ I *think* I can be without a relationship, but it seems I never am.
7. _____ My friends have told me that I move too fast with my new partners.
8. _____ I am a magnet for partners that have an inability to bond or are commitment phobic.
9. _____ I have experienced panics attacks and/or sleepless nights when a relationship has ended or was in serious trouble.
10. _____ I've had so many rebounds in my life—I should be in the NBA!
11. _____ I have taken medication—specifically—to help me deal with a relationship issue or break up.
12. _____ When a relationship ends, I'm afraid that I'll never find "the one" or that I'll end up alone.
13. _____ I recycle with partners that I've broken up with, going back and dating them again.
14. _____ I try my best not to do or say things that would hurt somebody's feelings, especially my partners'.
15. _____ I get stressed out, overwhelmed and over committed because I don't know how to say "NO."
16. _____ I don't express anger, because I'm afraid if I did, others couldn't handle it, or worse, they might leave me.
17. _____ My therapist, coach or friends have told me that they think I have boundary issues.
18. _____ I think a lot of relationship problems are caused because couples don't know how to compromise.
19. _____ My partner has said that no matter how much attention and affection they show me, it's never enough.
20. _____ In relationships, I focus on what the other person wants.
21. _____ *If* I know what I want I usually don't speak up about it.
22. _____ The ideal relationship is where two people take care of each other and make each other happy.
23. _____ If I couldn't give my partner what's most important to them, like sex or money, I fear they would leave me.
24. _____ It's politically incorrect, but life was better in the 50's when "men were men" and "women were women."
25. _____ I have cheated on my partner, or being single, I have a friend with "benefits."
26. _____ Sex is one of the most effective ways I relieve stress or escape from all that is on my mind.
27. _____ I've told others that I am single when I am actually married.
28. _____ I view pornography weekly and/or go to strip clubs when I can.
29. _____ I "veg-out" by reading romance novels, watching soaps or relationship reality shows like "The Bachelor".
30. _____ I can stop doing any of the things I marked "T"—any time I want.

Total _____

Self Scoring

All of the questions above are expressions of being hooked, addicted or dependent on relationships to one degree or another. Later in this book, we'll take a closer look at them. For now, though, find the range that you fall into.

- 0** You are either reading this book on top of some mountain in Tibet while taking a break from meditating, or you are canoeing down a river called "De-Nile."
- 1-7** While your relational life has not been a complete disaster, you've experienced your share of drama. You are really going to enjoy this book because it will not only help you make sense out of your past and present relationships, but you will also be able to assimilate the ideas in this book quickly and experience wonderful results. Read on and enjoy!
- 8-20** If you fall in this category, take heart. In my estimation, this is where 75% of people are, *if* they are introspective and honest. You, undoubtedly, have had a lot of pain in relationships and you may be wondering if it's even possible for two human beings to be with each other and not drive each other crazy. Are you willing to do whatever is necessary to clear up the "issues" that have created the messes you've experienced? If so, read on. Real, deep, authentic and healthy intimacy awaits you.
- 21-30** You, my friend, are my comrade, my "homie!" Welcome. We are cut from the same cloth. Your road will not be easy. You, most likely, will relapse, taking three steps forward and two steps back. You will want to give up, telling yourself lies like, "People never change." I know. I've been there. But if you press on, you will transform your life. You will have to pay special attention, though, to the final section where I discuss the 12 Steps to *Narnia*. You will have to commit to them as an alcoholic would to the 12 steps of AA.

Our Path

Because Jimmy Buffet's term *Margaritaville* has had such profound meaning in my life, I've built the four parts of this book around the final chorus in the song, which perfectly describes the journey from relational "drunkenness" to "sobriety." You may have it memorized, as I do, but here are the words anyway:

***Wasted away again in Margaritaville,
Searchin' for my lost shaker of salt.
Some people claim that there's a woman to blame,
But I know it's my own damn fault.***

In part one, *Wasted away again in Margaritaville: The Devastation of Dependence*, we'll see that my story is your story and that our story is the very story of human experience. We aren't alone in *wasting* our lives in our thirst for love.

In part two, *Searchin' for my lost shaker of salt: Exploring Our Thirsty Hearts*, we begin digging into what the relationally dependent person is really *searching* for.

In part three, *Some people claim that there's a woman to blame: From the Darkness of Drama to the Dawning of Intimacy*, we not only look closely at who is to *blame* for our pain, but we also begin the healing process by discovering the deep shifts in our consciousness that must take place in order to create healthy, blissful intimacy.

In the final section, part four, *But I know it's my own damn fault: Leaving Margaritaville*, we get extremely practical by focusing our attention on specific practices and actions that are necessary to "sober up" and permanently leave Margaritaville, entering *Narnia*, the space in which authentic intimacy can occur.

A Final Word

What I have learned about relationship addiction, dependence, obsession and drama has not come from mere study, research and training, though I've engaged in each extensively. And although I coach people with this issue, my insight is not based on what I've seen *work for others*. I've practiced this in my own life. The wisdom I have to share has been dug out of the dirt of my own experience. That is why this book is filled with stories from my life. Not only is a personal story more interesting than a philosophical discussion, I am absolutely sure that what I'm sharing actually works! "I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now, I see." What I share with you is my experience. And I desire to share that with you *because I think it will work for you as well*. I invite you, not to believe what I say, but to *try* what I say, seeing if it works for you.

This book is about how the "Mayor of Margaritaville" sobered up, left town and found authentic, blissful intimacy. There is an old saying that captures the essence of this book and my role in writing it and it is this: "I'm just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." Come. Let me show you what I have found.