

Gilda Radner

**IT'S
ALWAYS
SOMETHING**

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To my dear husband, Gene Wilde

Acknowledgments

My thanks to my literary agent, Esther Newberg, for her feisty belief in me; to Susan Kamil, for opening the door into the world of publication; to Hillary Johnson, for listening to my tale over many lunches, while stirring her tea and my mind; to Rachel McCallister, for protecting me from enquiring claws; and to Bob Bender, my gentle and splendid editor.

Thanks to Bonnie Sue Smith and Anne Leffingwell, my West and East Coast typists; and finally, to Grace Ayrsman, who kept my desk and my soul in order.

We had so much fun.

Gilda and I were hired to be a part of a new show, to be called “Saturday Night Live,” and the time we spent together was dedicated to comedy. Writing jokes and creating characters. And boy, it was fun. The mid-’70s. Two kids roaming the streets of New York at a time when everyone seemed to be our age. Fellow boomers who shared our life experiences during the same cultural revolution. We’d take subways and long walks and even longer dinners where we’d bring legal pads and try our best to make each other laugh. And we did, we wrote it down. And if it made our “SNL” colleagues laugh, Lorne Michaels put it on television. The success of the show put us in the company of famous people and allowed us to enter rooms where parties were taking place. We took none of it too seriously—it was a ride we tried to enjoy without losing our sense of wonder.

Then adulthood set in. Grown-up things like marriages and mortgages and careers that no longer involved each other put our friendship to a test across a country that now separated us. She in Los Angeles and I in New York in a pre-Internet world where handwritten letters and late-night phone calls did their best to keep us connected. But inevitably we drifted apart.

When I co-created a television show in 1986 that required me to move to California, I called Gilda. In an attempt to revive a dormant relationship, I would ask her out; she’d accept, and then break the date at the last minute. Time and again this happened and I got angry. She explained that she was sick. That her mind wanted to do things that her body no longer allowed her to do. The doctors called it Epstein-Barr virus and said it would have to run its course. When it was correctly diagnosed as ovarian cancer, a heroic Gilda emerged. She used her fame to shine a light on her sickness and show the world that you can lead a quality life by dealing with it head-on. She looked it straight in the eye and dared it to get the better of her. To prove her point, she went to Lakers basketball games, appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, and made cancer jokes on *It’s Garry Shandling’s Show*.

Her illness drew us closer. My job was to make her laugh. To take her mind off what was happening to her. Yet one night, during a quiet walk along a California beach, she told me she would have preferred to be a ballerina; that comedy was about what was wrong with the world—people laughed because something was too big, or too small, or too much, or not enough. Quirks and exaggerations were the essence of parody. Irony and discomfort the grist for humor. But ballet was about harmony. Poetry in controlled motion. A finely tuned, musically carried body at peace with all that surrounds it.

Gilda’s contribution straddles both worlds. Her comedy still makes people laugh whether she’s loud as Roseanne Roseannadanna or running around like the little girl with whom she was always in touch. At the same time, her pleas for early detection, urgings to celebrate all of life’s delicious ambiguities, and legacy of Gilda’s Club help people find the ballet in their own lives. I think she would be pleased.

Alan Zweibel
New York, N.Y.
May 2009

I started out to write a book called *A Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife*. I wanted to write a collection of stories, poems, and vignettes about things like my toaster oven and my relationships with plumbers, mailmen and delivery people. But life dealt me a much more complicated story. On October 21, 1986, I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Suddenly I had to spend all my time getting well. I was fighting for my life against cancer, a more lethal foe than even the interior decorator. The book has turned out a bit differently from what I had intended. It's a book about illness, doctors and hospitals; about friends and family; about beliefs and hopes. It's about my life, especially about the last two years. And I hope it will help others who live in the world of medication and uncertainty.

These are my experiences, of course, and they may not necessarily be what happens to other cancer patients. All the medical explanations in the book are my own, as I understand them. Cancer is probably the most unfunny thing in the world, but I'm a comedienne, and even cancer couldn't stop me from seeing humor in what I went through. So I'm sharing with you what I call a seriously funny book, one that confirms my father's favorite expression about life, "It's always something."

Buddha told a parable in a sutra

A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.

Two mice, one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other.

How sweet it tasted!

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings, Compiled by Paul Reps

The Marriage

Like in the romantic fairy tales I always loved, Gene Wilder and I were married by the mayor of a small village in the south of France, September 18, 1984. We had met in August of 1981, while making the movie *Hanky Panky*, a not-too-successful romantic adventure-comedy-thriller. I had been a fan of Gene Wilder for many years, but the first time I saw him in person, my heart fluttered—I was hooked. It felt like my life went from black and white to Technicolor. Gene was funny and athletic and handsome, and he smelled good. I was bitten with love and you can tell it in the movie. The brash and feisty comedienne everyone knew from “Saturday Night Live” turned into this shy, demure ingenue with knocking knees. It wasn’t good for my movie career, but it changed my life.

Up to that point, I had been a workaholic. I’d taken one job after another for over ten years. But just looking at Gene made me want to stop . . . made me want to cook . . . made me want to start a garden . . . to have a family and settle down. To complicate things, I was married at the time and Gene had been married and divorced twice before and was in no hurry to make another commitment. I lived in a house I had just bought in Connecticut and he lived in Los Angeles. I got an amicable divorce six months later and Gene and I lived together on and off for the next two-and-a-half years. My new “career” became getting him to marry me. I turned down job offers so I could keep myself geographically available. More often than not I had on a white, frilly apron like Katharine Hepburn in *Woman of the Year* when she left her job to exclusively be Spencer Tracey’s wife. Unfortunately, my performing ego wasn’t completely content in an apron, and in every screenplay Gene was writing, or project he had under development, I finagled my way into a part.

We were married in the south of France because Gene loved France. If he could have been born French he would have been—that was his dream.

The only time I had been to France was when I was eighteen. I went with a girlfriend in the sixties when it was popular to go for less than five dollars a day—of course, your parents still gave you a credit card in case you got in trouble. We went on an Icelandic Airlines flight. The plane was so crowded, it seemed like there were twelve seats across and it tilted to whatever side the stewardess was serving on.

We landed in Luxembourg and then our next stop was Brussels. My girlfriend was of Polish descent, but had been born in Argentina—she spoke four languages fluently. After four days, she was sick of me saying “What?,” “What did they say?”—she couldn’t stand me. She just wanted to kill me. I was miserable all through the trip. I was miserable in Luxembourg. I was miserable in Brussels. We slept at the University of Brussels; you could stay there for a dollar a night in the student dormitory, where we spent the evenings watching the movie *Greener Pastures* with French subtitles. We went on to Amsterdam where we stayed in a youth hostel. I’ll never forget that there was pubic hair on the soap in the bathroom and it made me sick. Years later, I had Roseanne Roseannadanna talk about it.

There I was, eighteen years old in Europe, and all the terrible things that happen to tourists happened to me. In Amsterdam I lost my traveler’s checks and spent one whole day looking for the American Express office. I was so upset by the Anne Frank House that I got horrible diarrhea in the lobby of the Rembrandt

Museum and never saw one painting. When we went on to France, my girlfriend's boyfriend met us in Paris—romantic Paris! I found the city hectic and weird. Plus, I was on my own. My friend was with her boyfriend; I was the third person—the girl alone.

I don't know why, but everywhere I went, everywhere I looked, a man would be playing with himself. I always have been a starrer—a voyeur. I must have been staring too much at other people because I would always get in trouble. I'd be waiting to sit down in a restaurant and a man would come out of the restroom (this must have happened about four or five times), and he would suddenly start staring at me and undoing his fly and playing with himself. Yuck! This wasn't the romantic Paris I had heard of.

I was very isolated because of the language barrier. I felt lonelier than I had ever been. One night after a terrible less-than-two-dollar dinner, I actually ended up running out into the middle of the Champs Elysées trying to get hit by traffic. Yeah, I ran out onto the boulevard and lay down on the ground before the cars came whipping around the corner—you wouldn't believe how fast they come around there. My girlfriend and boyfriend ran out and dragged me back. I was lying down in the street waiting to get run over because I was so lonely and he picked me up and dragged me back. The next day I made a reservation on Air France first class to go home. I only stayed two weeks and spent a fortune flying home. I never went back until Gene took me in 1982. It was the first summer we were living together, and Gene couldn't wait to show me Paris and the French countryside and the southern provinces of the country he adored.

Gene reintroduced Europe to me; and with him I learned it could be a pleasure and I could love it. He took me to one particular château in the mountains in the south of France. We stayed two weeks and discovered that traveling can be wonderful if you stop to enjoy where you are. Our room was luxurious with a spectacular view of the Riviera. There was a tennis court and a pool and a restaurant that had one star in the Michelin guidebook. Food was served like precious gems, and I remember we watched the French Open tennis tournament on television in our splendid room, in French. Mats Wilander won.

Tennis is another joy of Gene's life, so I took lessons in California for thirty-five dollars an hour twice a week. I bought a Prince racket and some perky Chris Evert-type outfits, and learned to hit the ball. Gene was infinitely patient with me, hitting balls to me while I klutzed all over the court. I wanted to be M-A-R-R-I-E-D to Gene, but it sure wasn't my tennis game that got him.

Being interested in sports was one of the things Gene wanted in a woman. In the years I lived alone, I loved having sports on television in the background because it made me feel that there were men in the house, but I never sat down and watched it. It was a crazy thing to do, but it just felt safe. With Gene, I became a basketball fan—LA Lakers of course, when it was Kareem and Magic, Norm Nixon and Jama Wilkes. It looked like ballet to me—stunning and rhythmic. I got hooked not only on watching but on reading about it. Sportswriting is fascinating—descriptions of the opponents and the details of an event in which someone is going to win and someone is going to lose. Life is much longer and more complicated and the outcomes are less clear-cut.

• • •

Not long after our trip to France, we broke up. Gene said he was suffocating, that my needs were smothering him. I was heartsick and back in Connecticut, filled with love and with nowhere to put it. I decided to get a dog. I love dogs, but "Saturday Night Live" and New York City and my career weren't conducive to having pets. My cousins in Detroit used to raise and show Yorkshire terriers so I made a desperate call to them to help me find a dog that was female and already housebroken and small enough that I could travel with her. They found *Sparkle*. Glorious Sparkle with her coal-dark eyes and gray-blond hair and her nose like a tiny black button.

On Thanksgiving weekend 1982, Sparkle was flown into New York from Michigan, just like me. ~~A young girl who was coming back to college and was a friend of my cousins brought her to New York, right to the hotel where Gene and I were staying to see if we could work out our differences. So Gene and I met Sparkle for the first time together. Then Gene went back to his home in California and I went to my house in Connecticut with Sparkle, where I became one of those people who show you endless pictures of the dog, and all the pictures look alike. I think dogs are the most amazing creatures; they give unconditional love. For me they are the role model for being alive.~~

Sparkle is a perfect life-form, so little, only five pounds. I designed her haircut 'cause I don't like the way Yorkies look ordinarily, so I have her clipped very short on her body and her head is cut square like a little bear with Dumbo ears. I put various bows and barrettes in her hair to keep it out of her eyes, and she always seems pleased with the process.

I have taken her on television with me when I have been afraid to go alone . . . she's been on the David Letterman show where she did a Stupid Pet Trick. She took a bow on command. She did it on camera perfectly right the first time and they did an instant replay of it. Sparkle goes through things with me. She loves me no matter what I do. She has such a huge personality that if she is not in the house—like if Gene takes her to work with him and I am home—you can feel that she is not there. Her daily job is guarding me and making sure she gets her two meals a day. I once saw her chase two deer that were nibbling the tops of tulips in my backyard in Connecticut. She bounded across the lawn with her paws barely touching the ground. The deer took off into the woods, but one stopped suddenly and looked back with disdain at the tiny ferocious animal with pink barrettes in its hair.

Gene and I were split up for about five weeks and when we got back together it was under new conditions because there was Sparkle—it wasn't just me, it was me and Sparkle.

In June of 1983 we went back to the south of France and took Sparkle with us. The French people love dogs. They went crazy for ours. She opened doors; she opened their faces and their personalities. Sparkle was allowed to go everywhere with us. She ate in the restaurants sitting on her own chair. She got a real chance to go out and see other people, and she was treated like a queen. I called it the dog's holiday.

In the fall of 1983, Gene and I made our second movie together, *The Woman in Red*. It was a remake of a French film. There really wasn't a part in it for me, but I begged and whined and slept with the writer and the director and the star (all of whom were Gene), and I got a cameo part that turned out to be my first successful movie role. We shot in San Francisco and Los Angeles. At the same time I did promotion for a comedy book I wrote with Alan Zweibel—*Roseanne Roseannadanna's "Hey, Get Back to Work!" Book*. I still had plenty of time to get dinner on the table and involve Gene in endless conversations about commitment and meaningful relationships and child-rearing and meaningful relationships and commitment. He was still fighting for independence and I was all for smothering suffocation.

With the movie in the can, Gene and Sparkle and I were on our way for our holiday in France again. We were taking an early morning flight from Los Angeles to New York so we could visit Gene's sister and brother-in-law on the way. Because we had the dog, they put us in a private passenger lounge to wait for the flight. I put Sparkle down on the floor and she was running around being cute when I saw her sniffing something in a corner. When I knelt down, there were these little turquoise pellets spilling out of a box on the floor. The box clearly said, "RAT POISON." There was a woman from the travel agency with us. I gasped—I didn't know if Sparkle had eaten a pellet or not. Gene said, "She wouldn't eat that," but I was frightened. What if she had eaten one? I wanted to stick my finger down the dog's throat.

We called the poison center and gave them the number on the box and the name of the poison. "Get her to a vet immediately," said the voice on the other end. I just picked up Sparkle, said to Gene, "I am going to the vet, I will meet you in New York later," kissed him goodbye and ran out. My luggage was already on the

plane, which was scheduled to leave in twenty minutes. The woman from the travel agency went with me. ~~We flagged down a limo that was just dropping somebody off. I was panicked now—the hysterical mother—~~screaming, “Get us to the nearest vet!” I knew I had seen some on the way to the airport. We found the Airport Cities Animal Hospital in Ingle-wood, and rushed the dog in. The vet was just getting to work and was putting on his coat when I ran in yelling, “My dog ate rat poison!” I was white as a ghost and Sparkle was just wagging her tail—la-la-la. He was a wonderful vet; we gave him the information, he called the poison center and they told him what to do. He gave Sparkle an injection that caused her to throw up a turquoise pellet—she *had* eaten one. This pellet contained rat poison that kills the rat by causing its blood not to coagulate. The rat bleeds to death eventually but it gets very thirsty first. That way it won’t die in the airport where people are, but will go away to find water and die a slow, horrible death away from the building. If I hadn’t spotted that box, Sparkle would have gradually gotten ill and we wouldn’t have known why.

In the meantime, Gene’s plane went out on the runway, had mechanical difficulty and had to come back. Because I was with the travel agent, she had called the agency and told them where we were. They let Gene get off the plane to come and call me so I was able to tell him that Sparkle did eat the poison and he knew I had done the right thing. He went on to New York where his sister and brother-in-law were waiting, and stayed the whole day in the vet’s office holding Sparkle. The injection made her anxious and she trembled all day. She had to go on a program of vitamin K injections for two weeks, which kept the blood coagulating in case any pellet had dissolved and gone into her system. The vet let me be the nurse and take her home. I started to have to take her back every day for the injections, so when Gene got to New York I spoke to him and said:

“You go on to France. You need the holiday and there is nothing you can do here. I’ll take care of Sparkle now and when you get back everything will be fine.”

Gene did go, but he went thinking, *Well, she has definitely grown up, she has matured.* I wouldn’t let him go out of my sight before then, and this was me acting in a very responsible way.

When Gene came back from France, he gave me an engagement ring. Our cousin Buddy now refers to that time as the time when Sparkle tried to commit suicide because Gene wasn’t marrying Gilda. He believes that Sparkle’s “suicide attempt” was what turned Gene around and made him actually ask me to get married. So you can see why I owed a great deal to that dog.

After a successful summer release in the U.S., *The Woman in Red* opened in Europe in the fall of 1980. The movie company sent Gene and me on a publicity tour in Europe. (Of course Sparkle came too.) Arriving between the Deauville Film Festival and interviews in Rome, we stopped in the south of France and got married.

We had to climb up the cobblestoned streets of the thirteenth-century village to get to the mayor’s office. The whole ceremony was in French and I didn’t understand a word. I would wait till there was a pause and then say, “*Oui*” (I do). Then, the mayor would have to say, “*Attendez! Attendez!*” (Wait! Wait!), so I’d wait for the next pause. For a comedienne, my timing was really off. I was ahead of the whole thing. It was raining that day and someone said that meant good luck, but I have a feeling people say things like that so you won’t feel so bad wearing a raincoat over your wedding gown.

I created my own bridal outfit. I wore a straw hat with my hair piled on top of my head under it, and stuck flowers in the ribbon on the black brim. I wore culottes—long gray culottes and black tights and black ballet shoes. I wore gray because this was my second marriage, but on top I wore a white silk blouse with lace on the collar and sleeves. Gene wore a dark blue sport jacket and beige pants. He bought a new striped wedding tie in the village and carried an umbrella. Sparkle was there. I called her “the bridesdog” and she wore a small straw hat too, with pink streamers. I held her in my arms with a traditional French wedding bouquet.

Our wedding party consisted of Gene’s sister and her husband and some friends of ours who own

Danish restaurant in the south of France and a Belgian couple who are our close friends from Los Angeles. ~~The manager of the château where we were staying and her assistant were our witnesses because they were~~ permanent residents of the town. There was one photographer there. He snapped a photo that was on the cover the next day of *Nice Matin*, the local newspaper. It was Gene and I under the umbrella holding the dog in the middle of the old village with the cobblestones all around us, and behind us there was a woman peeking around the corner, breast-feeding a baby, and a big black dog watching—just so naturally—to see what all the commotion was in about. That was on the cover of all the papers with a two-page article that I could never read because it was in French.

As Americans, you can't just get married in France. There is a lot of legal rigmarole that has to be accomplished. For instance, our birth certificates and marriage documents and divorce papers all had to be translated into French and sent on to the mayor's office. We also had to have specific blood tests taken by a doctor in New York who was officially approved by the French government.

We found his office in the basement of a building in the West Fifties. There was no receptionist and the doctor greeted us in his shirtsleeves. He filled in our application on an old portable Olivetti typewriter and asked for his payment in cash. Gene paid and the doctor put the money in his pocket. Either he didn't recognize us or he wasn't a fan, because he never indicated that this was more than routine or—at best—a bit of an annoyance.

I went into the examining room to have my blood taken first, probably because I wanted to get it over with fast. The equipment seemed to be from the 1920s. Everything looked too small and a bit rusty. The doctor said he needed a urine specimen, but instead of giving me a plastic cup, he told me to pee in this porcelain dish and leave it on the bathroom floor like a dog's bowl. Without speaking, he weighed me, and took my pulse and blood pressure. I sat nervously on the examining table with my one sleeve rolled up. He unwrapped a syringe and stuck the needle into a vein in my arm to get blood. No blood came up into the needle. For a minute I thought maybe there was no blood in me, but the doctor muttered something about the needle being defective and stuck me again—no blood. He yanked the needle out and walked back over to the glass jar with the rusty metal lid to get another syringe.

I screamed for Gene to come into the room. This was a nightmare. Gene came right in and I said: "Gene, why don't you go first, there's no blood coming out of me." The doctor muttered again about a defective needle.

Gene said, "What are you scared of?"

I said, "Nothing—I'm not scared! You go ahead, you go first, I have to go for a walk."

I was going to leave. I was not going to get married because I couldn't handle this guy jabbing me with needles. I went out on the street and tried to call my psychiatrist from a phone booth, but the line was busy. I thought, *Should I go through with this? Should I let this doctor take my blood and maybe infect me with some horrible disease with his defective needle?* It had taken me three years to get Gene to marry me and now this sleazy little doctor was going to ruin it.

When I went back in, Gene and the doctor were chatting about France. With Gene, the blood had come right out. I made Gene stay in the room and hold my hand while I let the doctor stick me again. He got the blood this time. So we'd be able to get married after all. The next day, my arm turned black and blue all up and down the inside and it stayed that way for weeks.

After the mayor completed our wedding ceremony, we all rode in three cars to another small village and climbed the mountain to the restaurant of our Danish friends. They served smoked salmon hors d'oeuvre and opened bottles of champagne and everyone toasted our marriage. Later in the evening at the château dining room, we had a traditional French wedding dinner. Gene had hired two musicians to come and play for us so we could dance—a guitarist and a violinist. The violinist was actually a government official—the

assistant to the mayor of Nice—but he loved playing at private parties. They followed us everywhere with music, accompanying our moods—it reminded me of a French comedy.

It was without a doubt a brilliant way of getting married. A perfect wedding day; symbolically, the three couples who were able to come all had working marriages based on love. We invited everyone who was eating in the dining room to have some of our wedding cake and to get up and dance and celebrate with us. For something old, Gene's sister gave me a bracelet that had belonged to their mother. I borrowed even a bobby pin she had to hold my hat on that evening. I wore a dress I had bought in Paris just that week for something new, and someone sent me a lace garter from Los Angeles and Sparkle wore it around her neck—it was blue.

The French are not noted for their comediennes. It is rare that you hear of a French woman in comedy. They called me "*Charlot*" in the subsequent articles about our marriage: "Gene Wilder Marries a *Charlot*"—their word for "Charlie Chaplin." When the journalists asked Gene, "Why didn't you marry the beautiful girl in *The Woman in Red*?" he would always reply, "I did!"

We really had our honeymoon in Rome between press conferences and interviews. Like I said, it was a very romantic. I loved Rome and so did Sparkle. She went everywhere in my purse with just her head sticking out. She was so quiet and well-behaved that she slipped by the guards and saw Michelangelo's *Moses*. We spent hours traipsing through the Vatican. When we got to the Sistine Chapel, she was very busy smelling the crowds of people, but I made sure she looked up at the ceiling.

Gene flew on to London and Copenhagen to do more publicity for the movie, and I flew home to Connecticut because Sparkle couldn't go into those countries without going into quarantine. It was a nine-hour flight from Rome to New York. We ate four times and Sparkle stayed in her doggie travel carrier underneath the seat in front of me during the meal service. The rest of the flight she snuggled beside me in the seat and ate snacks. Ten days later Gene flew home to us in Connecticut, and we began our married life.

The mayor had given me a French family book along with our marriage certificate. It was funny—it was all in French, but it had our names in it: Gilda Radner from Detroit, Michigan, and Gene Wilder from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We were supposed to write in the names of our children as they came.

When I got home, I ordered stationery that said "Gilda Wilder" and "Mr. and Mrs. G. Wilder." I was uneasy for a while trying to figure out when to be Gilda Radner, the TV star, when to be Gilda Wilder, the brand-new person, when to be Mrs. Gene Wilder, the wife of the international movie star, and when to be Mrs. G. Wilder, just another blushing bride.

I decided I could be them all.

The Baby and the Movie Sta

After being Mrs. Wilder for a week, I drove into New York City from Connecticut to see a radiologist whom my gynecologist had recommended. I had to have a hysterosalpingogram. This is an X-ray technique that involves injecting a radiopaque dye in the uterus. The dye outlines the cavity of the uterus and the fallopian tubes to show whether the tubes are open or blocked.

For almost a year before my marriage I had stopped using any form of birth control. I figured my pregnancy was another surefire way to get Gene . . . but pregnancy hadn't come.

I saw the dye running through my reproductive system on a closed-circuit screen in the examining room. There I was lying on a table with my legs spread apart watching the worst show I'd ever seen on television. The show was called "My Tubes Were Closed." It was about a thirty-eight-year-old newlywed who finds out she's infertile. Those tubes have to be open for an egg to get fertilized and slide into the uterus. I remember the attending nurse looking at the screen with a long, sad face and me asking, "What's wrong?" and her saying:

"Your gynecologist will explain it to you—we really can't give you all the information."

Then her face dropped even longer. I mean, what could be lovelier than Gilda Radner and Gene Wilder having a baby? The hair alone would make people squeal with delight. But my tubes were definitely closed.

My gynecologist told me that there were a couple of routes that I could take. One was in vitro fertilization—a procedure in which an egg is removed from a ripe follicle in an ovary and fertilized by a sperm cell outside the human body, then reinserted into the uterus. The other was that I could have major surgery to open the tubes. Or we could adopt.

Gene and I talked about our options. We both wanted a family, but Gene made it clear to me that our relationship was the most important thing to him—that a baby was best off coming into the world to two people who were happy together. He said most of the decision was mine, but he was willing to help me and to do whatever we needed to do, but not to do anything that would jeopardize our marriage. I saw motherhood as the next logical step in my life; I refused to accept the infertility sentence that was handed out to me.

I found it very difficult to literally make the decision to have a baby. When it comes to you, when it just happens easily, it is still the biggest gamble in the world. It is the glorious life force . . . what's meant to be—but really to create a human being is a huge thing. It's huge and scary—it's an act of infinite optimism. Suddenly, when it's not going to be a natural event and it's put into your hands with experimental procedures and elective surgeries, the decision becomes an obsession. For me the issue became less whether I wanted a baby or not and more my inability to accept not being able to have one.

I had been pregnant in the sixties, and at nineteen years old had had an illegal abortion that probably influenced the messy state of my reproductive organs. For the next nineteen years my priority was to finish my education and pursue my career. Now I couldn't take my fate: You'll never have a baby. That was the sentence handed to me. I began to beat my fists against a door that maybe I had locked on the other side.

Gene and I flew back to California in October of 1984. He was already working on a new screenplay.

called *Haunted Honeymoon*. It took place in America in 1934 and was about a radio performer whose family tries to scare him to death. It was supposed to be a “comedy chiller.” Gene was to be the radio performer and I wanted to be (what else?) his wife. Gene worked every day at his office. Meanwhile I started screenplay with a friend. You cannot live in Los Angeles for any period of time without eventually trying to write a screenplay. It’s like a flu bug that you catch . . . even the plumber has a screenplay in his truck.

In the meantime, I found out everything about the in vitro fertilization program at UCLA. I found a doctor who would let me into the program. In simple terms, it begins with a surgical procedure called laparoscopy—that’s where the doctors look at the condition and placement of your reproductive organs by putting an instrument through an incision in your belly button. It is an outpatient procedure, but it is minor surgery that requires general anesthesia. If everything checks out, you can proceed with the program.

What happens next, in even simpler terms, is that certain hormones are injected into you daily that make your ovaries release more eggs than usual. The doctors watch your ovaries through ultrasound readings, and when you have matured enough eggs they put you under general anesthesia again to aspirate, or remove, the eggs. They are then mixed with your husband’s sperm in a dish or test tube after which the fertilized eggs are put back inside you in a procedure much like a regular gynecological exam. This is followed by more hormone injections daily to ensure that these eggs will implant onto the uterine wall. The process has to be done at a certain time in your menstrual cycle and the whole thing can stop at any time if something goes wrong—like your ovaries don’t respond properly to the hormones, or whatever.

The in vitro team at UCLA were very excited about their results. I got caught up in their enthusiasm and convinced Gene to do the same.

During the procedure, the woman can go to the hospital to get her daily hormone injections, but the doctors prefer that the husband give the shots so that he can feel more involved. Gene had been in the medical corps in the army and had given shots before, but I still made him practice on an orange and grapefruit about a hundred times. He gave me my first injection in an examining room at UCLA with a nurse and doctor in the room. He was great. From then on, Gene gave me two shots a day at home.

As we moved toward conception, foreplay for me consisted of filling myself with liquids every morning to make my bladder large enough to move it out of the way for the ultrasound picture to show my ovaries. Then I’d drive over mountains and bumpy roads to UCLA to sit on my leg in a waiting room filled with women who all had to pee so desperately that they would rip each other’s eyes out to have their ultrasound first.

On the day my ultrasound showed I had matured enough eggs, Gene’s foreplay began. That evening, he gave me an injection to induce ovulation and the next morning he drove me to the hospital for my second laparoscope. While they wheeled me into surgery to aspirate the eggs, they put Gene in a little utility room by himself. He was right next door to the laboratory where a technician would wash his sperm and join it to a test tube with my surgically removed eggs. He described the room to me later. There was a washbasin with a wooden shelf above it that held a small plastic container and a piece of paper with instructions for keeping the sperm sterile. There was no chair or window in the room, but there were a mop and a bucket and a stack of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines with a note that said, “If you require help,” Gene said the instructions were rather vague about when to wash and how to dry your hands. He said the pressure was overwhelming—him sitting on the floor with his pants around his ankles in the gray cement room. He was supposed to knock on the door when he had the sperm. He told me he thought he was going to go crazy. It wasn’t exactly romantic. He kept thinking, *My wife’s going to have surgery and what if I can’t do this?*

Miraculously, everything worked. My ovaries matured eight eggs, and Gene knocked on the door. Seven of the eggs fertilized in the dish. The happy Wilders went home and returned the next day to have four of the fertilized eggs put into my uterus. We had to sign a paper allowing them to throw three of the fertilized

eggs away. They didn't have freezing equipment at UCLA at the time, and there was too great a risk of multiple births and danger to the mother if seven or more eggs were returned to the uterus.

On the morning that was to be the moment of conception, I was lying on the examining table while Gene sat close to my head and held my hand. As I looked between my legs, I could see my three doctors—one a sandy-haired Protestant, the other a young Chinese-American, and the third a dark-skinned Sephardic Jew. The room was quiet and the lights were dim as the Protestant doctor placed the fertilized eggs into my uterus, the other two watching intently. I was reminded of the World War II memorial statue where all the different nationalities are putting the American flag in the ground at Iwo Jima.

I spent the next six hours in a dark hospital room. I wasn't allowed to read or watch TV or talk to anyone. I was to stay calm and lie with the bed tilted at a certain angle. This was to help ensure that the eggs would attach to the uterine wall. I got very anxious and very hungry, and they ended up having to give me a tranquilizer and two slices of whole-wheat toast.

For nineteen days after that, Gene had to keep giving me progesterone shots. That is the hormone you produce naturally in your body before you get your period. It made me irritable and moody. I was told to stay at home and do quiet activities, but a week later I started to bleed. The doctors told me to lie down, but I wasn't just spotting. To me it looked like someone shot a deer. I bled heavily for a few days and then continued to spot. They wouldn't let me quit taking the progesterone—I knew that I was miscarrying but they wouldn't let me quit because this was an experimental procedure and they had to follow their protocols. They made me keep taking the progesterone the whole nineteen days because they said a woman could bleed and still be pregnant. On the twentieth day, they did a blood test and it was negative—there was no pregnancy.

As horrible as it was, I would have repeated the procedure, but Gene said to me, "I will never do this again." I couldn't do it without Gene. But at this point, I'd lost interest in everything else. I was desperate not to *not* have a baby.

I cried right through Christmas and into 1985. By February I had booked myself for major surgery to have my tubes opened. This is a serious operation—it can involve six to eight hours of microsurgery, but it was determined. Gene could only say, "If that's what you want." I had the operation and I completely recuperated in a week's time.

My tubes were open and I was elated. All we had to do now was to have sex at just the right time of the month—at exactly the moment I was ovulating. Well, I'll tell you, that was the worst pressure in the world. It was as consuming as the in vitro program and I drove Gene nuts. It was the kind of obsession they show in the movies, made worse by my age. I was thirty-eight years old and my biological time clock was breaking the sound barrier.

I bought one of those new ovulation kits where you are the scientist. You have to catch your first urine of the morning in a cup, mix it with some powder, wait ten minutes, mix something else, wait ten minutes, mix it with another thing, wait a half hour, dip a stick into the mixture and match it up with a color chart to see whether it is blue or green or yellow. The kit costs about eighty dollars for one cycle. I didn't tell Gene I was doing this. He was already wondering about my sanity.

One morning I couldn't unscrew the lid with the mixing stuff in it. I was going crazy because if you don't do it in exactly ten minutes, the whole test is ruined. So I had to run into the bedroom where Gene was still asleep. I poked him and said, "Don't ask me any questions, just take the lid off this vial." He did it and never asked me about it. He was sound asleep.

I ran back to my room and started mixing. My color chart was all set up under an appropriate light. I mixed, then waited a half hour—the dipstick in the liquid turned blue. The blue matched the blue on the chart, which meant I was ovulating. I ran back into the bedroom and calmly woke Gene and told him the

we had to have sex right that second. I never let on about this expensive ovulation kit.

My ovaries became the center of my universe. Everything, even my brain, was down there all the time. I thought if I really concentrated, I would be able to tell when I was ovulating—I could feel what was happening there. I would be so relieved a few days after my period when it wasn't a time for fertility, so I could relax, but then as soon as I got to the middle of the cycle, the panic came in. I was always counting days on my calendar. Then when I got my period, it was like a death—a failure—another lost child.

Orion Pictures gave Gene the okay on *Haunted Honeymoon*. It was a “go” picture in April of 1985, to be shot in England, directed by Gene Wilder and starring Gene Wilder, Gilda Radner and Dom DeLuise. I swear Gene is the only person I have ever slept with to get a part in a movie. It is never easy to get a movie made, but *Woman in Red* was a nice enough success to make the movie company confident in sending us on again. Because the English pound was much weaker at the time than the American dollar, the exchange rate made it possible to shoot the movie in England for nine million dollars when it would have cost over thirteen million in the U.S.

The idea of working and living in London over the next year delighted Gene. I began a slow, desperate internal panic. Sparkle could not go to England. England has strict quarantine rules because it is an island. No yacht on the Thames, no helicopter drop-off, no underground smuggling ring could help. Sparkle could not go to England without spending six months in quarantine. Now you might be saying to yourself that after all, this was just a dog—but not to me. Sparkle was my baby. I felt very torn about leaving her even for the three months that I was required to be in London for the movie. Gene and I decided not to stay in London for the six months of pre-production and the casting of the movie; instead, Gene would make several trips back and forth and I would stay with Sparkle in America. For one month I'd take Sparkle to the south of France and Gene would visit us there. This was our way of making the movie and staying with Sparkle.

I continued to dwell on the fact that every time Gene traveled and we weren't together, I was missing an ovulation cycle—an opportunity to have a child. What I created was a tremendously stressful time in my life. I wanted to have everything—I wanted to be the costar of the movie; I wanted to be with Gene all the time; I wanted to have a baby; and I wanted to have the dog with me. I knew that traveling all over the place wasn't so good for my menstrual cycle. I knew that I needed to be with Gene, but the dog couldn't go, and the dog was my little baby. I had to leave the baby that already existed to pursue the baby that might be. I put myself into a terrible, stressful panic. I made it all so important that I thought my brain would pop.

In June, we flew to Connecticut where I stayed and prepared for my part in the movie while Gene went to London to cast the picture and find a place for us to live. When Gene returned three weeks later, both of us began to question the timing of our sexual activity. We thought that maybe we should abstain from having a baby now because a movie company was spending a lot of money on us. I couldn't play my part in the picture if I became pregnant. So suddenly we faced a new dilemma—do we want the movie or the baby? We decided to use birth control. It seemed weird that after in vitro fertilization and tubal surgery and eighty-dollar ovulation kits, I, the perpetrator, was choosing to put off having a baby in order to be a movie star. But my career was still very important to me, too.

Then came the day when I had to send Sparkle back to California where Gene's secretary was going to take care of her for three months. I acted it out like a major tragedy. A friend of mine was flying back to California and took Sparkle with her. I went to the airport. I held Sparkle in my arms until the flight attendant insisted that everyone board the plane. Then I broke into such a gush of tears that Sparkle's head got wet. They boarded the 747 bound for L.A.—my friend, my dog and the official airline pet traveling in a case. I stood weeping until I saw the plane safely take off. Sparkle never even looked back.

England turned out to be gorgeous in the fall. We had a house there—narrow and five flights tall. It was

in the area called Belgravia near Victoria Station—quaint and wonderful streets lined with little shops and pubs and townhouse gardens. I had to go to work immediately, fitting costumes, deciding on styles for my hair, thinking about the period of the movie—the 1930s—and how my nails would be, what hats and accessories would be appropriate. I began meeting a whole new group of people, all of whom would be helping me to be wonderful in *Haunted Honeymoon*.

I was determined to be a movie star. My mind conjured up images of Ginger Rogers and Carol Lombard—beautiful women so large on the screen, taking people out of their lives and into specially crafted fantasies. Television was earthbound, but the movies were up in the stars.

They were trying different makeups on me, giving me screen tests, elaborate costumes—everything. Hair was tilted in different directions on my head and warm lights were adjusted to make me look my best. I had been in movies before, but there was something especially glamorous about this one. I was the leading lady, so everything had to be just right.

When Gene makes a movie, the people who work on it have such a love for him that the set is always a happy place. The cast and crew were mostly English except for Dom DeLuise and me and Gene and our dear friend the actress Julann Griffin. Dom and his wife, Carol, came to London but were not there for the entire shoot because of previous commitments Dom had in the United States. Julann and I spent every day off together shopping and exploring London.

We began shooting the first day of September in 1985. On September 18, I was sitting—in my folding canvas movie-star chair wearing this luscious black-and-white evening gown—when the assistant director called me to go onto the shooting stage in the next room. At the same time, Gene was called onto the set from his trailer wearing his blue-and-white-striped pajamas. As the two of us appeared on opposite sides of the room, the cast and crew, who had gathered in a group, began singing “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow” from the top of their lungs. A huge cake sparkled in the light of one candle. It was our wedding anniversary—our first-year wedding anniversary and here we were on a movie set with the whole cast and crew around us. Just like our wedding day, it was a perfect time. We were thinking what wonderful lives we had—that we could be married in the south of France and have our first wedding anniversary in London, England. The cameramen filmed the event.

Over the next few weeks I got heavily into the adventure of moviemaking—up before the sun and asleep by nine at night. A driver took me to and from the set, and on any errands I needed to go on. Gene had his own driver because we were often on separate schedules. When the weekends came, we were exhausted. By Saturdays I did the laundry and shopped for Sunday dinner. The English shops close by one o’clock on Saturdays so supplies had to be gathered quickly. We always played tennis on Saturday afternoons on different private courts and ate a big Italian meal on Saturday nights at a restaurant called Mimmo’s around the corner from our flat. Sometimes on Saturday nights, if we weren’t too tired, we found time to make love. Sundays we played tennis or went to a movie, but I always cooked salmon steaks and baked potatoes and broccoli with delicious English whole-grain bread and fruit and shortbread cookies for dessert. Gene was always working on his next day’s shooting schedule and I did my vocal and dance exercises. Except when he was complaining about something I did or didn’t do in the movie, life fell into a pleasant pattern. The weather stayed miraculously warm and I loved being a pampered movie star and an English housewife.

The shooting of *Haunted Honeymoon* required me to wear a wedding gown almost every day for two months. I looked like a bride all the time and people seemed to treat me that way too. My makeup woman did my makeup at about six-thirty every morning. I would always joke with her about how my face was going to break out before my period and she would have her work cut out for her. But my skin was looking very good and I didn’t even think to look at my calendar until I got the first dizzy spell. My calendar showed that my period was late. I couldn’t believe it. It had been the last thing on my mind.

I sent my dresser, Jenny, out to get me one of those home pregnancy tests that show results in an hour. ~~your urine made a bull's-eye appear in this tube, you were pregnant. Bull's-eye!~~ I made Jenny run out and buy two more kits. She said they were already congratulating her at the chemist's where she bought them. Bull's-eye again! The last kit (a different kind) I took home so Gene could do the test. A stick had to turn blue. It did.

We were shocked. We walked around Belgravia, our English neighborhood. Gene had the blue stick in his pocket. The weather was warm and we held on to each other and sang quietly while our brains darted through this new phase of our life. We like to sing the song "Ohio" in harmony whenever we are happy, mainly because I've got the harmony down for the whole song except for one line near the end. I never get it right and that always makes us laugh. People say pregnancy never happens when you really want it to; it comes at the wrong time. This was absolutely the wrong time. I hadn't been thinking about it. Neither of us had. I hadn't been straining and struggling, but that is when they say it happens—when you aren't thinking about it.

I went to a doctor and had the pregnancy confirmed with a blood test. He said, "Go ahead and live your life however you would—having a baby is the most natural thing in the world." The next few days I was filled with emotion. I got a little irritable and I remember I cried on the set one day. I had a fight with someone, which I never would do, and a depression set in. I didn't worry because I'd heard many people say the first three months of their pregnancies they were really irritable because of hormonal changes. I didn't have any nausea, but I was very tired and high-strung. I felt swollen up—my breasts were getting really big and they ached.

One morning a week later, I woke up and felt relieved. It was like someone had drained the water out of me. I went to the bathroom and I was bleeding—bleeding heavily. I was having another miscarriage. It was so soon, only a week after the pregnancy had been confirmed. Gene was already at work. I phoned the doctor and he said I could go lie down, but I would have to stay that way for weeks and weeks. I knew I had to be on the set in a few hours. They were shooting a banquet scene—I would just have to sit at a table a few days. I decided to go to work and try to stay calm. The bleeding continued. I told Gene privately in his trailer—and together we made the choice for me to stay at work. We mourned quietly. We were glad we hadn't told too many people. We were creating a movie. *Haunted Honeymoon* was a third of the way "in the can." I bled for two weeks. I went to the doctor and had an ultrasound to make sure the miscarriage was complete.

I really didn't cry as much as I thought I would. It wasn't the usual great explosion of disappointment. I became very philosophical about the whole thing. I had the movie—I would now be able to do the big flying scene in the harness that I'd rehearsed. Gene was wonderful about it. What could we do? We accepted that this wasn't the right time for me to be pregnant. There would be other times. Gene was more frightened that I would have a breakdown, which I didn't seem to have. I thought it just wasn't meant to be and besides, people had said that they had had miscarriages first and then pregnancies right after. At least I knew it was possible for me to get pregnant. I was so busy making the movie every day and loving it—being the coddled baby a movie star can be—that I threw myself into my work.

I bounced back quickly from the miscarriage, but not too long afterward I caught a cold that was going around. The studio could get very damp and chilly and the cold settled in my respiratory system and wouldn't go away. I never felt one hundred percent well after that. They say that you aren't aware of your health until you lose it. It's something I'd always just taken for granted. I had always had energy—too much energy. I was the type of person who had to say, "It's three o'clock—I'd better run around the block or I won't be able to sleep tonight," or "I'd better go swim forty lengths or I'll be tossing and turning." The last couple of weeks in England I just didn't have any energy. I slipped on the stairs in our flat and hit the small of my back. That slowed me down for weeks. I'd feel good for a few days and I'd think I was fine and then I'd wake up one day and feel like I was getting the flu. I'd think I had a fever, so from my life's experience with illness I would say, "I'm getting the flu." But then I would never get the flu. I would feel okay the next day and then a week would go by and I would wake up one morning and feel like I was getting something again. I'd drink a whole lot of liquids and take vitamin C and the next day I would be okay again. I didn't have to miss work on the set, but something was definitely wrong.

We finished filming *Haunted Honeymoon* in the middle of November 1985. Then we flew back to Connecticut where I was joyously reunited with Sparkle, who was in perfect health and was plenty mad at me for the first ten days or so. She wouldn't eat or play. She would just stare at me with those "where-the-hell-did-you-go?" eyes. She definitely forgave me on Thanksgiving. I prepared the entire meal, turkey, stuffing, cranberry relish, the works! I was thrilled to be back in America and Sparkle got extra under-the-table handouts.

We were back in Los Angeles by Christmas. I had my hair permed and my eyelashes dyed black. I came back to find my screenwriting partner was married and pregnant and working on the staff of a situation comedy. Our screenplay had to be shelved for a while . . . so I busied myself reading scripts and writing little vignettes about my life as a housewife. We were redoing our living room and bathroom in Los Angeles and I was inextricably involved with painters, plumbers, tilers and interior decorators. I also started the world's most expensive course in French in reaction to our wedding ceremony. I still think every sentence I learned cost about ten dollars per word, but I enjoyed playing the lesson tapes in the car and repeating whatever Pierre and Marie said. I also liked the idea of going to school and having coffee and a cigarette in the lounge. Gene and I rang in 1986 with smoked salmon and old movies on TV.

Then on a Sunday, maybe the first Sunday of 1986, Gene and I were in the car on our way to play tennis at a friend's house. Suddenly, my eyelids got very heavy. It was as though I was hypnotized into this deep sleep. I had slept well the night before and I wasn't sick, but a feeling of uncontrollable tiredness came over me . . . like a fog rolling in over my brain that I couldn't escape. I was listless the rest of the day and slept that night and into the next day in that same relentless fog. It was a new element added to my on-and-off flu symptoms. It scared me.

I made an appointment to see my internist immediately. He gave me a total physical. I had all my blood work done and chest X-rays and an electrocardiogram—the whole deal. There was nothing wrong with me.

The internist ran a test for something called Epstein-Barr virus. The blood test showed that I had elevated antibodies for Epstein-Barr virus. Every other level of my blood was fine. The internist said he didn't really believe there was such a thing as Epstein-Barr virus, that it was the new fad illness—a catchall disease—like hypoglycemia in the sixties. If it did exist, there was no cure for it. It wasn't life-threatening—it would eventually go away. He thought my symptoms might just be from depression.

This internist had been my doctor for a few years and had listened to various complaints. He knew about my endless baby-quest. I was never a hypochondriac, but I was capable of getting very neurotic over a health disturbance. I hated to be sick and I had an imagination that could turn a stomachache into the plague. After all, endless neurotic babbling about things was often the basis of my comedy, but it all showed up in my doctor's office. I had crowned myself "the Queen of Neurosis." I worried too much. I felt guilty too often. I "what-iffed" every situation. I found my own behavior irritating and endearing at the same time. The internist patted me on the back and told me to stop worrying. "Just relax . . . it'll burn itself out."

In the next couple of weeks I ran a low-grade fever. I called up the internist and said, "I'm running a fever."

He asked, "How high?"

"Not much—very low—ninety-nine, a hundred."

He said, "It's nothing to worry about. Take aspirin or Tylenol to treat the fever—it can happen in this Epstein-Barr virus."

I hung up, but I kept thinking about how he said he didn't really think there was such a thing as Epstein-Barr virus.

So the "weird life" continued. I would be fine maybe for ten days and then seemingly around my menstrual cycle I would go into this severe fatigue and run a low-grade fever, then I would be okay again. I tried to get as much done as possible when I felt well because I knew the fatigue was going to come again. Then just when it started to develop a pattern, it would totally surprise me. For example, I wouldn't be able to get out of bed for two or three days. Gene would have to cancel social engagements or go alone.

I started to become depressed about living with the uncertainty of my health. My appetite remained good and my internist said there was nothing to worry about. He became more convinced that depression was the culprit. I wondered which came first, the illness or the depression. There were enough things to be depressed about—trying to have a baby, the miscarriages, career uncertainties, the prospect of turning forty. On the other hand, I had a wonderful husband, two beautiful homes, had just completed a movie, and was writing and enjoying life in California. The scale of good and bad didn't seem out of balance, or any more tipped than it had ever been.

In March Gene returned to Connecticut in preparation for a month's trip to London where he would do the sound mix on *Haunted Honeymoon*. My plans were to go to London with Gene. We had already booked a suite in a small hotel in our old neighborhood. We were both looking forward to it. Our friend Grace, who is the caretaker of our Connecticut home, agreed to look after Sparkle for the month. Grace, originally from the Midwest, a divorced grandmother who lives with her sister and brother-in-law about half-mile down the road, or, as she'd say, "down the pike." I consider her a member of the family, and I knew Sparkle would be fine with her.

I came to Connecticut a few days later than Gene because I was offered a screen test for a movie. I had never had to do a screen test before, but there were quite a few actresses under consideration. I liked the movie, but the deal fell apart, and the screen test never happened. When I joined Gene, I was upset and disappointed. I felt my career had slipped out of my control. I had been a big television star, but my movie career hadn't gone well enough for me to call the shots.

The day before our flight, the fog rolled in again, and I fell into a heavy fatigue. I couldn't get out of bed. ~~Maybe it was depression—the career disappointment. Gene took the flight to London alone. All I could do was kiss him goodbye and say I'd join him in a week when I felt better.~~ That week in April 1986, terrorism was on the news every night. I was scared to fly anyway, but this only made it worse. Just the same, I packed my bags and was determined to go. The night before my trip, my travel agent called and said my flight was canceled. I don't remember why but there was so much going on at the airports those days. Perhaps there weren't enough people on that flight to make the trip. Americans stopped flying to Europe. There was fear at all the airports and intense security. Gene and I spoke on the phone every day. We talked about how the whole world felt on edge. The same day my flight was canceled they found the lady in London's Heathrow Airport taking explosives onto an El Al flight. Gene suddenly said, "I don't want you to come. It's too dangerous. I'd worry too much."

My bags remained packed for the next three weeks. Every day I thought I might go. I was glued to the television set, waiting for the next thing to happen. And then it happened—*Chernobyl*. The fear of going abroad increased. There was a nuclear cloud over Europe and my husband was there. America waited to see which way the winds would blow. I stayed home.

During that month of April, I started having weird pelvic cramping. I went to see a gynecologist in Connecticut. He ran a series of blood tests that showed absolutely nothing wrong and he said what I had was *mittelschmerz*, meaning that during the time of ovulation I could sometimes get severe cramping. He said that many women have even gone to the hospital and had surgery thinking it was something serious, but it was just what he called *mittelschmerz*. So there I was with this painful reminder that I was ovulating and Gene and I were apart. Now I had Epstein-Barr virus and *mittelschmerz*: fitting diseases for the Queen of Neurosis. A girlfriend of mine from L.A. told me about a young woman in Washington, D.C., who had greatly helped another friend with health problems through vitamins and nutrition. I called the nutritionist and within a week I was taking megadoses of vitamin C and about forty other pills a day with promises of renewed health and fertility.

Gene returned, and Sparkle and I and fifteen pounds of vitamins went to the south of France for our vacation. It had become an annual trip—to go back to the place where we got married, to spend Gene's birthday there and to have this wonderful vacation life. Despite all of the scares of traveling and the American feelings around the world, I knew that I was going to make this trip. I had been away from Gene for so long that I was definitely going to make this trip to France and have a grand time. I went bravely, oddly enough when no other Americans were going to Europe. There I was, the Queen of Neurosis, jumping on a plane, next to my husband, with my dog, calm, easygoing, taking off, landing, marching through customs. Only occasionally did I wonder which passenger had a gun in his bag, or whether we would be blown out of the side of the plane.

We arrived in Paris, ate omelettes for dinner at a little bistro and spent the night. The next morning we flew to the south of France. The three weeks that we spent there were wonderful. The weather was beautiful. I felt relatively good. I knew I still had this virus but I learned to accept the terms of it. I took a tennis lesson every morning, then I read or rested quietly by the pool. By lunch-time I would feel a little dizzy and by the afternoon I would have to take a nap—maybe an hour or an hour and a half. Then I would get up, play some more tennis and have dinner. In the evening I would run a low-grade fever. I knew it wouldn't turn into anything, and we never broke any plans or missed anything. I took my vitamins faithfully every day and ate fresh and healthy food. I went on for three weeks this way and I started to be filled with hope. I remember being in the bathtub one evening before dinner and I said to Gene, "I don't ever want to leave here—it's the first time in so many months that I've felt well and happy." Of course, to stay at a hotel and not to have to make the bed or cook or shop for groceries—just to relax—certainly helps any illness. It was

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