



# Both of Us

My  
Life with  
Farrah

RYAN O'NEAL

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MY LIFE WITH

FARRAH

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with JODEE BLANCO and KENT CARROLL



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and our best hope*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Everything here is true, although occasionally events may not be described in the exact order in which they occurred.

*Play on, invisible harps, unto Love,*

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*Whose way in heaven is aglow*

*At that hour when soft lights come and go,*

*Soft sweet music in the air above*

*And in the earth below.*

—James Joyce, from “At That Hour”



BEGINNINGS



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I remember taking her hand in the car, both of us joyous and laughing, the wind tousling those famous curls as we drove from Tahoe to Reno, to the church. The night before someone had given me a Cuban cigar. I removed the gold band, slipped it onto her ring finger, and proposed. She accepted, saying, “So, you think you can make an honest woman of me, do you?”

The lake and the forest have a soothing beauty, magnificent nature in repose, almost as appealing to me as the ocean. Farrah preferred it there: the mountain air, the hikes, and, of course, the rugged horseback riding. It was one of those spontaneous moments where everything seemed aligned, as if nothing could get in the way of our future. We seemed perfect for each other. We had talked about getting married early on, but we were rebels. There weren't many people in the early eighties who lived such a public life who weren't married. We were getting pressured to do it, not by her parents, really, or by mine, but from society, so we finally decided to get hitched. Then the flat tire. I flagged down a car whose driver offered to take us on to Reno or back to Tahoe. He would have driven us to Cincinnati if I'd asked, but instead we chose the lake. We thought it was funny, even joked with each other that it had to be “a sign.”

Looking back, I can't help but wonder how my life with this rare woman might have been different if we had gone through with it that day. Why didn't I just fix the damn tire and drive us to the church? Instead of finding a way to follow through with our plans, we let it go. We laughed about it for years. It wasn't the hand of God that flattened our tire that day. It was a lousy shard of glass.

*Autumn, 1979*

She's married. Her name is Majors. I don't know her from Adam, well, Eve. Her husband is actor Lee Majors. He starred in a popular television series, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and was also known for playing in Westerns. I know him. I first met him at 20th Century Fox when I was making *Peyton Place*, five hundred episodes at \$750 per episode. That's also where I was introduced, pointed out, Frank Sinatra to my costar Mia Farrow. I never played Cupid again. Lee is in Toronto for a movie and I'm there visiting my daughter, Tatum, who's shooting a film with Richard Burton. She's fifteen. Tatum and Lee run into each other, and Tatum says, “You know, I'm Ryan's daughter.”

“Oh yeah, where is he?”

“He's at the hotel.”

Next thing, he's calling me. “Come down and have a drink with me,” he says.

So I do. And we get a little drunk together and decide to have dinner. Tatum joins us. Lee

and I are both leaving the next day. I've been there a week. And he says, "Let's go home together. We'll take the same plane." He changes his flight. Lee is a companionable big guy worth at least five and a half million. We fly home together and the limo drops us off at my house in town. It's on Tower Road, up Benedict Canyon and high in the hills, part of the old John Barrymore estate. We let the limo go and take my car. He lives farther up the hill near Mulholland on a street called Antelo Road, which has gates, and there's this beautiful girl waiting for him. She's delightful, full of childlike warmth. There is no pretense or cattiness about her whatsoever; she's vibrant and wholesome, refreshing in this town.

They kiss.

We play racquetball. They have their own court. And then she says, "Stay for dinner which I do. She whips up this delicious meal of fried chicken with mashed potatoes and thick country gravy, a Texas treat. Farrah is so sweet to us. Lee's a heavy drinker, kind of a social drunk. Their house is handsome, a tasteful blend of western-style accents and fine antiques. There are pictures everywhere, mostly personal photographs. Years later, an earthquake will destroy the place, and the cacophony of glass breaking, which frightened everyone, will turn out not to have been the windows but hundreds of photographs emerging from hundreds of frames. Lee takes me on a tour of the house. He shows me his closet. It's a room you can walk into, deep and wide. He must have seventy-five pairs of boots. *Where does Farrah keep her stuff?* I ask myself. We walk down the hall and he opens a door to a room you can barely turn around in. Farrah's clothing is piled in there. Some months later, Tatum and I will make the switch. Farrah's duds get the grand space. Lee's we move to his den.

I had gone to their home for dinner that first night, but the next night I was supposed to travel to Las Vegas for a boxing match. I have a friend, Andy "the Hawk" Price, who was fighting Sugar Ray Leonard. I'm a fight fan as well as an ex-amateur boxer. And Farrah says in this lilting, ever-so-slight Texas drawl, "Well, isn't that fight on TV?"

I say, "Yes, it is."

And she says, "Why don't you see it here? You can play racquetball and watch it with us."

"Hm," I think, "hm ... okay." I've just come back from Canada. I don't really need to go on another plane, so I return a second night. She greets me at the door with this winsome smile and says, "Aren't you glad you didn't go?" And that night there's drinking. She doesn't drink but he does. I drink a little. I'm watching them, and after dinner they start to talk about their relationship. I'm sort of encouraging them, saying things like "You're a wonderful couple." He's a man of few words, a monosyllabic cowboy type. He's not naturally funny. Farrah is more natural, open, and she doesn't have any compunction talking about the problems. She says when they were staying in Nevada, he had a boat on Lake Mead. He was a TV star at this point, not the Six Million Dollar Man, but he was in a successful Western series with Barbara Stanwyck and Linda Evans called *The Big Valley*. It ran three or four seasons. This was before Farrah's fame from *Charlie's Angels* and the poster that had made her the fantasy of every teenage boy in America. Lee would call her from a bar near the hotel and say, "Get undressed, I'm coming home."

"So I'd get undressed," she tells me. "I'd wait for him, and wait for him. He wouldn't arrive so eventually I'd get dressed again." She says this more in resignation than bitterness.

"That's the kind of man I am," he responds. "You knew that when you met me."

I can see that the marriage is not the happy mating it once was. If reality shows had existed

back then, this relationship would have been perfect fodder. The one I've agreed to do no with my prodigal daughter, Tatum, is alarmingly fraught. But that's all in the future. Back the fall of 1979, I've just met the woman who will become the love of my life and I shouldn't be put off by that kiss I just saw Lee give her at the front door. I don't say anything. I just listen and then I go to my home in town, only a few blocks away. Two days later, I'm at my house in Malibu, and Lee pops over for a visit. We walk on the beach for a bit, and then he says, "Let's go see Farrah."

"Where is she?" I ask.

"She's shooting a *Charlie's Angels*. She's at Disney Ranch."

By this time, Farrah was no longer a regular on the show. She had quit *Charlie's Angels* three years before after a bitter dispute with creator Aaron Spelling over percentages of merchandising. She wanted 10 percent, which is what she had gotten for the famous posters, and Spelling wasn't about to give in to her or the other Angels, so Farrah, in what was back then a very gutsy move, left the series. Spelling sued and it was settled out of court. As part of the settlement, Farrah agreed to appear in four more episodes, one a year for four years, one of which she was shooting that afternoon. Although she was now being paid one hundred thousand dollars for each of the episodes, compared to five thousand dollars per episode when she was a regular cast member, she didn't escape unscathed. Spelling Productions tried to have her blackballed in Hollywood. It would take some time before the studios and production companies were willing to take a chance on her again. But that was the Texan country girl in Farrah. It wasn't the money; it was the sense of fair play. She was a stickler for traditional values, which appealed to me, especially after the unconventional women of my more recent past.

Disney Ranch is a long haul on the 405 freeway. There is this huge back lot that productions can lease for location shoots. We drive out there about five in the afternoon and when we arrive, there she is on horseback. She rides beautifully, confidently, and she gallops over to us. We chat for a while and offer to drive her home. She has a scene to finish so Lee and I go into her trailer to wait. Once inside, he starts looking through her things, determined to discover some secret.

He doesn't mind that I see him doing this.

More evidence that everything isn't exactly perfect for them.

On the way back home—and this is when I get my first true sense of her—she's in the backseat, Lee and I are in the front, we're in my Mercedes, I'm driving, and I put on this tape of a musician I like named Ry Cooder. He's a wonderful guitarist and blues singer. As the music plays, she leans forward and I can feel her behind me, her clean, fresh fragrance, her aura, the warmth of her breath on my neck. I've known her for several days now, having experienced her at her most delicious, happy and smiling. I can tell that she likes me—she doesn't love me, she likes me—and she keeps moving in closer, and I get this helpless sensation. I didn't feel it with Ursula Andress or any of the other women from my past, but I do feel it with her and it's unnerving.

We drive all the way back to Malibu because Lee's car is parked at my house. I introduce Farrah and Lee to my fourteen-year-old son, Griffin, Tatum's brother. He's thrilled at the chance to meet the TV star whose poster is a favorite among his friends. It's evening now and we decide to have dinner nearby at Orsini's. Now Lee drinks and pees all the time, so he

constantly getting up and leaving the table, which gives me long moments with Farrah. I try to be funny, and then mix in some anecdotes from my years in television. I just get rolling and he's back. "Here, Lee, have another beer." He's gone a long time, must be standing there like a plow horse. While he's relieving himself, Farrah talks about throwing him a surprise going-away party at their commodious house in the hills. He's departing for Canada again in several days to start a movie with Robert Mitchum, and I, selflessly, volunteer to help.

We finish dinner and go back to my house. By now, I'm nervous. Lee drives a Porsche and he's been drinking all night. As I'm watching him and Farrah climb into this sports car and drive off, I say to myself, *I hope he's okay to drive*. Looking back now, I shudder because I didn't take his keys and insist they spend the night. Thankfully, they arrived home safely.

Farrah's party for Lee is a big success! She's a relaxed host. She puts people at ease. The vittles are surpassed only by the interesting guests. It's an intimate group: Robert Mitchum, whom I've admired and secretly envied ever since I saw *Out of the Past*, the best noir film ever, and his son Jim, with whom I'd attended University High; singer/songwriter Paul Williams and his wife; Jack Palance and his daughter. Farrah is wonderful and we tease each other and flirt. We've initiated something. It seems to me we're obvious but no one, including Lee, seems to notice. The only thing that keeps it from being a perfect evening is the absence of my daughter. Tatum is still in Canada making the film, but I've been regaling her over the phone about my dinners with Lee and Farrah. She's electrified, can't get enough. I remember that a few years back, Tatum and I were staying at the Pierre Hotel in New York, and she overheard the bellman mention to someone that Farrah was also a guest. My daughter camped out in the hotel lobby half the night waiting for a chance to meet her. They never connected. Maybe this should have been a premonition of things to come, but of course none of that occurred to me at the time. Tatum had always gravitated toward sophisticated women, cool characters whose chic exteriors did little to hide their neuroses. When I dated Bianca Jagger, she became Tatum's fashion model. Tatum even emulated her characteristic hat and walking stick when she went to the podium to accept her Oscar as Best Supporting Actress of 1974. She was ten. And Ursula Andress never minded Tatum slipping into bed between us. Ursula thought it sweet. It worried me, but I allowed it to go on. I guess I recognized that Tatum was the primo female of the house, a role she would be loath to relinquish to Farrah.

• • •

Lee's now back in Canada, phones me, implores me to call Farrah, make sure she's okay. "She's all alone up there," he says. "Why don't you take her to dinner one night?" I swear I can't believe it. "Don't worry, I've got Tatum here in Toronto," he adds, thinking he's being witty. A week goes by. I don't call Farrah. I feel uncomfortable about it. Lee's an okay guy and she seems susceptible to any emotional offer; plus I don't want to look like a predator. I hold out, hoping maybe she'll call me. She doesn't. As I'm leafing through the newspaper I notice an ad: "Santa Monica Civic Auditorium Sunday night Ry Cooder." A reason to call. That's all I need. I pick up the phone and dial. She answers.

"I thought I'd hear from you," she says, with more self-control than I can muster.

“Well, I have a reason to call you now. Your husband asked me to take you to dinner. will if you’ll see Ry Cooder with me.”

“Can I call you back?” she asks.

Not what I want to hear. Who does she have to get permission from? I’m intrigued as it usually the women who wait by the phone for me to call and not the other way around. She does phone me later in the week as promised and says she’d love to go. In the interim, Swift Lazar, the talent agent, invites me to a party he and his wife, Mary, are hosting a couple of days before the Cooder concert. He always has memorable parties, lots of famous people and very famous people. And I think, *I wonder if Farrah would like to go to that? Do I want to put it?* So I call and tell her who’ll be there: Gregory Peck, a fine gentleman and almost as suave as Cary Grant; Ann and Kirk Douglas; Burt Lancaster; and other stars of that era.

“Is it dressy,” she asks?

“No, no,” I reply. Well, of course it is but I badly want her to go, and I don’t want her saying to herself, “Oh, do I have to buy a gown?” Farrah is not a gown person. Not yet. She arrives at Lazar’s fabulous home in jeans and boots and a snakeskin jacket. She sparkles in jeans, exquisite, but everyone else is wearing bespoke suits and couture dresses. It’s an old crowd, and she’s miffed that I hadn’t made it clear to her what people would wear. To my surprise and delight, she’s the hit of the party. They’re fascinated by her. She’s famous because of *Charlie’s Angels*. And, of course, her poster. But she’s not well known to this group. They recognize her. They just don’t know her. I watch this room full of the truly illustrious gathered around her while Swifty asks her questions and Kirk Douglas tries to get her attention by broadening his smile till we can see his molars. She’s quite taken with the attention. Farrah, I should realize, is an icon of young American womanhood. I don’t fully grasp that at first. I worked with Streisand. Now she’s an icon, but of a different sort: a woman who conquered the entertainment business by sheer force of will and talent. When we were shooting *What’s Up Doc?*, Barbra had “kill approval,” meaning she had the final word on which still photos the studio could use in its publicity and marketing campaign. That’s harder to get than final cut. I remember sitting there with her, watching her review the thick stacks of photos one at a time ...

“Gee, that one looks good, Barbra.”

“Kill it.”

“But I like—”

“Kill it!”

“Barbra, it’s hard to achieve the perfect shot, and I look good in that one!”

“Nope, nope,” she’d say, flicking one discarded photo after another onto the floor.

She’s never satisfied with how she looks. But that’s not unusual in Hollywood. Some of the biggest stars carry the most burdensome insecurities. One of the few people I know who is consistently self-confident is Ron Reagan, now Governor Ronald Reagan, who’s announced his candidacy for president. He’s likable. He’s an effective governor under difficult circumstances, but I don’t think he’s president material. He has the actor’s gift of making a speech and he looks the part, but the economy is still shaky and the cold war is in a deep freeze. Washington is a hell of a lot bigger than Sacramento, and I’m not sure what’s inside that brown suit. I worked with Nancy way back, 1959, in a *General Electric Theater* production. She played my mother. He was always on the set supporting her. Today, year

later, thinking about them reminds me of what Farrah and I had.

Farrah and Barbra will meet at the house of my agent, Sue Mengers. Sue is a powerhouse who represents Barbra and many other luminaries of the time: Burt Reynolds, Cher, Joan Collins, Michael Caine, Sidney Lumet, my former director and former friend Peter Bogdanovich, Herb Ross. Sue is married to director Jean-Claude Tramont; Barbra was the maid of honor at the wedding. There's a party every weekend at Sue's house, always with a wonderful cast. Sue makes an effort to ensure that everyone's at ease. Her Bel Air home is lavish, reminiscent of Hollywood's golden era, and invitations to her soirees are coveted. In the movie business, films are packaged and Sue is a wizard at the game. She's the one who gets the producer to buy the script that's written for her actor client, who only works with a director who is another client of hers, or some such tangled maneuvering. I bring Farrah to one of these parties. Gore Vidal is there, and he and Farrah talk about the movie based on his novel *My Breckinridge*, which she was in with Raquel Welch, the only woman I can think of who Farrah ever had a problem with. (Once, at an event, Raquel complimented Farrah on her beautiful white teeth, then added demurely, "Of course all the ones in the back are yellow.") Rod Steiger, who always seems to be doing an imitation of himself, is there; so too are Tom Perkins; Neil "Doc" Simon and his wife, Marsha Mason; Jack Lemmon, who, as usual, plays the piano without being encouraged; Walter and Carol Matthau. Some years back, Walter had made the film version of *Hello, Dolly!* with Streisand. They didn't get along. Walter was famously quoted in an interview, "She has no more talent than a butterfly's fart," a comment neither chivalrous nor accurate. It's a star-bright evening. Maybe it's best that Barbra isn't there. Jack Nicholson arrives late after the Lakers game. We talk politics with Warren Beatty, Gene Hackman, Blake Edwards and his new mate, Julie Andrews. My instincts are liberal like most of the people I know, maybe because we can afford to be. But we have problems here that no one wants to be honest about. Southern California is not the paradise it was only a dozen years ago. You can't see the mountains most days for the smog, and the 405 threatens to become a parking lot rather than a freeway. A guy I know told me about the Central Valley farms and the Mexican migrants who used to be seasonal. Now they don't go home after the harvest. Who can blame them?

I remember another gathering at Sue's, which would happen later, after Farrah and I have been long together. I'm agitated that night because Mickey Rourke is monopolizing Farrah. He isn't coming on to her, just keeping her to himself. I'm actually jealous. Farrah notices, leaves Rourke, grabs my arm, and says, "Come with me." She marches me up the stairs to the bathroom and, without bothering to even lock the door, straddles me on the toilet and makes love to me. "Feel better now?" she says. I certainly did.

When Sue asks to manage Farrah, she whispers to me, "She'll be as big as Streisand." Barbra sees the future in a different way. When she meets Farrah at another of Sue's gatherings, her casual comment about our relationship is "I give it three weeks."

But now, at the beginning, the night of the Lazar party, I wonder: *What's with this Texas girl, this poster beauty with a wonderful tenderness who doesn't seem affected at all by the tumult of pop stardom?* We hesitate, then finally kiss for the first time. She is a great kisser. She has such sweet breath. I knew by the way she was kissing me that she had made up her mind.

**JOURNAL ENTRY, OCTOBER 9, 1979**

**I'm still in a state of tranquility. Could this be love? I mustn't do anything to harm it. My little family needs someone of grace and goodness. Farrah and I talked and kissed till past 3 a.m. (no real lovemaking yet). She said that since the moment Lee left for Canada she's been desperate to see me. I was stunned. This woman has kept herself in check for many years. We give each other strength and hope. Being fair to Lee is not the least of our problems. When I am sure, I'll tell him. Tate will be both puzzled and thrilled. She's never really found a girl she could turn to, confide in, be a sister.**

Reflecting, I remember the insecurity that would take hold of me while waiting for her phone calls, worrying I wouldn't be able to hold on to this extraordinary creature. She once told me, with a wink and a smile, that she was maybe the most recognizable person in the world, and I said, "What about Muhammad Ali?" She answered, "Well, okay, the most recognizable Texas girl in the world," and we both laughed because it was true. Imagine the pressure of loving someone whom millions of men fantasize about and desire? Imagine trying to be that woman and having to live up to your own poster. They would be obstacles we both struggle dearly with. But I don't know any of that now.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, OCTOBER 10, 1979**

**This is the part I hate most. The waiting. All right, she called and Lee had been on the phone with her from Canada for that long hour. She's concerned about him, trying to be decent. I admire her more and more. Now I'll dress nicely and go to see her. She's sad about her situation. And while I occasionally feel a wave of guilt, I keep telling her she is in fact a happy woman and she should act like it. No tears. I can make something out of her and she me. A kind and generous Catholic girl with morals and clear thinking. I'll disrupt that but only in part. I quite like it in her.**

Two nights later, we see Ry Cooder. I take her home and we make love for the first time. She has her period and she's shy because she thinks it might offend me. I tell her that I've never been as excited.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, OCTOBER 11, 1979**

**Tonight I'll take her to dinner, tomorrow the fights, Friday J. J. Cale and Saturday the beach, followed by a Dave Mason concert. Dave called today and asked me to come. I wonder if she's up to such a full schedule. She's an exciting lover, at once innocent and uninhibited. There is no one in my life to compare her to.**

**Went to my jeweler today and found the most beautiful garnet ring. It turns out to be her birthstone. Maybe I'm crazy for such impulsive actions but this feeling is so rare and delicate that I tend to be excessive, at least a little bit. Besides her natural allure, there's a dignity that is bewitching and disarming. She smiles with aplomb. I'm a lucky guy.**

Lee is not happy. He has a right to be sore. Farrah telephones and says he's been talking

her from Montreal and that he's clearly upset she went to a party with me. He doesn't deny telling me to call Farrah. He just didn't think I'd go out with her. Later he relents and admits that he did suggest I take her out but that he didn't think I'd actually do it. Who *wouldn't* go out with her? I feel like flying with her to the moon, to borrow a lyric patented by Sinatra. All this turmoil makes her sad and slightly hopeless. I'm ready to call him myself. She wants to wait for a decent and delicate way to confirm that the marriage is over, but I doubt that's possible. That part of her life has become disheartening. When she's with me, she's a different person, happy and full of cheer.

As the days become weeks, my relationship with Farrah deepens. I'm like a schoolboy calling her every day, telling her how desperately I love her. I'm forever bringing my darling flowers, surprising her with little presents, spending long, lazy nights making love. This earth daughter has touched me like no other woman before her. Our blissful romantic bubble will be punctured by reality soon enough, but for now, I'm luxuriating in every minute of the feeling.

I'm not the only one who's been struck with Farrah fever. My sons Griffin, fourteen, and Patrick, twelve, adore her too. Griffin is Tatum's younger brother from my first marriage, to Joanna Moore, and Patrick is from my second marriage, to Leigh Taylor-Young, both actresses. I get the boys every weekend. Patrick is serious and respectful. With Griffin, you never feel that one day he'll be a model citizen. He is already defying authority at every juncture, whether in school, on the playground, or with me. He has an angry wall around him that seems to become more impregnable every year.

I have a sauna at the beach house, and Farrah loves to take saunas. The boys start hiding under the bench in the hopes of getting a quick peek, but she's always running so late that by the time she finally gets into the sauna, they've been poached and have to be pulled out and doused with cold water. Farrah is always patient with them and kind. I'm especially pleased for Griffin, who can use all the attention and affection he can get. His and Tatum's mother, actress Joanna Moore, has battled addiction and depression all her life, and it's damaged the children.

I know it's only a matter of time before I'll have to face what I call the third-day conversation, which I've managed to avoid until now. You know what I'm talking about: the meaningful exchange every woman who's starting to fall for a man inevitably initiates, in which she wants to know more about his exes and his children. Not my favorite subject, but at least I'm ready for it when Farrah finally asks. We're curled up on the couch watching reruns of *Peyton Place*, and she shyly admits that she was a fan of the series and used to have a crush on me. I admit not so shyly that I saw a few episodes of *Charlie's Angels* and entertained a thought or two of my own about her. "Tell me," she says. I do and she actually blushes.

As we're confessing to our mutual attractions, there's a scene with Leigh Taylor-Young on *Peyton Place*. Farrah is watching in earnest, then turns to me and says, "How long did you know her before you were married?" I tell her it was only a few months. "Why so fast?" she asks. I decide to skip the details and get to the heart of the matter. "Because she was pregnant and I was still a good Irish Catholic boy under the sway of his parents' morality." Farrah looks perplexed, then says, "But isn't that the same thing that happened with Joanna Moore?"



"Pretty much," I respond. "I felt responsible and I was too young to know any better. The difference with Joanna is that I wasn't married to anybody else when we got together."

"Do you mean you were still married to Joanna when you started to see Leigh?" she says.

"Technically, but the marriage was already over." I'm trying to be honest here without incriminating myself.

"Did you love them?" she says.

"I did love Leigh and I tried to convince myself I loved Joanna."

Fortunately, Farrah's best instincts kick in.

"That must have been really hard for you," she replies. "Knowing about your marriage makes me feel better about what happened with Lee, and now I get why you've been so understanding about him." I say to myself, *That was easy*. Then, as if on cue, she says, "But what about the children? It must have been tough on them." I take a deep breath and explain. "Patrick's fine, and I think will stay that way. It's been much more difficult for Tatum and Griffin, but now that she's with me full-time and Grif is here on weekends, I know they're going to be okay. And professionally, Tatum is already on her way and Griffin may be even more talented, so both could have big careers." Farrah doesn't press me, but I sense concern and a certain knowledge that we're going to have this conversation again. But in that moment, I really did feel confident about my children's futures, especially now that Farrah had entered our lives. In all honesty, it did occur to me that there could be problems, but I swatted them away like gnats, not wanting to spoil the moment. Entire relationships are built on moments like these and I didn't want to waste this one. Farrah takes my hand and holds it to her cheek. Then she says, "I'm here to help you. I've never been a mother. You may have to guide me."

I tell myself this is a wonderful woman. Now my children and I can have both ends of the rainbow.

Though Farrah and I don't flaunt our affection for each other in public, and by now Lee, who's still in Canada, has acknowledged our union, we both know that soon the tabloids will start commenting, and we're lucky it's Liz Smith, the doyenne of New York celebrity gossip, who first reports on us in her column in New York's *Daily News*. She calls it "a very real love affair," and the item is tastefully written. I bet Sue Mengers fed it to her. That's Sue, always working an angle. She probably figures the publicity will increase our price. The papers continue to follow us but the coverage is rarely hostile; in fact, the reporters keep referring to us as "handsome together," and they repeatedly hint at a love affair, which it certainly is. The only real rough spot is a piece in *People* magazine that suggests what Farrah and I share together is tawdry and inappropriate, but we get through it. While part of me is bursting with pride that this fair-haired goddess actually loves me, another part feels bad about all the publicity because it's humiliating for Lee. Though I want nothing more than for each of us to be open about this love life of ours, and not let the world learn about it through the tabloids, it would be heartless for Farrah and me to rub it in Lee's face by declaring publicly how much we love each other.

### **JOURNAL ENTRY, NOVEMBER 1, 1979**

**Starts slowly for both of us. The sun is already warming our old souls. The beach has never been so appealing to me. We ran and threw Frisbees, and played with**

**our pups. Farrah brought her dog Satchel with her today. It makes me feel young when we're together. Christmas is beginning to draw near and so I'm trying to get it organized properly and with these new additions to the family it becomes ever more complicated. And there's the question of where Lee will be.**

Reading these journal entries today, I marvel at my determinedly frivolous judgment. And to be fair, everything really did seem okay. I was in love and very, very distracted.

By now, Tatum is on her way home from Canada and all I've been hearing on the phone from her is how delighted she is that Farrah and I have found each other. Lee has never mentioned anything to her. She even hints that we should marry if Farrah divorces Lee. So I decide to surprise my daughter and take Farrah with me to the airport to pick her up, thinking she'll be thrilled. I'm wrong. After our telephone conversation, I'm surprised that Tatum seems uncomfortable, defensive. All of a sudden, it's almost as if she's the jealous other woman. I begin not to trust Tatum with Farrah. Tatum is too talkative around her. I had known a few women. Tatum had been around them. Some she liked, some she didn't. Not that there were hundreds, but there were a few and I'm still friends with most of them. It's out of respect for them as well as for Farrah, who knew about my past, that I don't feel comfortable discussing my previous relationships. For somebody who's been the center of an avalanche of publicity for fifty years, I live an unusually private life, always have, and I'd be a traitor to one of my few guiding principles if I changed now. And so the next day I plead with Tatum, "Please, let's not remind Farrah. Let me be this virgin that she found, let me keep the illusion alive just for a little while." Tatum will have none of it. One day, several months after Tatum's return, Farrah and I are in the car, and she points to a street corner we're passing and says, "That's where your daughter told me about you."

"Oh, really, what did she say," I reply, slightly sick to my stomach.

"How hard you are on women, that you're not always a nice man, that I should be wary of you."

These were the ways that Tatum, who was living with me, tried to undermine my love affair with Farrah. She couldn't help it. She suspects mixed motives because everyone in her life has always had mixed motives.

I knew what was happening with Tatum: she was angry and confused. I just felt powerless to stop it. I was spending more time with Farrah than with her, and she saw it as a betrayal that I was abandoning her. I adored Farrah, and felt I deserved this chance at happiness. In my defense, when Farrah came on the scene, Tatum was pretty independent, had her friends and her life, and didn't need me like she did when she was a little girl. And so, to me, it didn't seem that I was spoiling the situation. I was just happy with Farrah. Alas, the happier I was with Farrah, the less Tatum appreciated it. She believed I was withholding something from her and giving it to Farrah. Tatum and I still retained our daily routine. We'd run and take long walks on the beach. If either of us was up for a part, we'd read each other's scripts. It was the evenings that were different. Tatum was no longer my regular dinner companion nor did she accompany me to parties. The evenings belonged to Farrah now. That was tricky for me, and I can't say that I handled it particularly well. I wasn't sophisticated enough to know what to do to get over this hump. I had a habit of making molehills out of mountains. I had allowed my daughter to become too close to me and now I had somebody I wanted closer.

Farrah reacted in all the right ways, which moved me deeply because I suspected, even though she never said anything, that Tatum unnerved her, that she was afraid of her. Farrah was so loving and supportive, continually reassuring me, "It's okay, we'll see more of her." She'd encourage me to bring Tatum with us to the movies, to dinner, anything to try to break through. Tatum turned sixteen on November 5, and we had her birthday party at Farrah's, the big house in the hills, and invited all her friends, including Michael Jackson, Melanie Griffith, and Andy Gibb, who was one of Tatum's great crushes. I was upset when he died, so young and so mysteriously. As best I recall, at the party the kids kept listening to Pink Floyd and the Rolling Stones. They didn't play pin the tail on the donkey or spin the bottle. But I saw the way Tatum was looking at Andy and I think they played something called "Truth or Dare," a game I didn't understand then and don't now. The Diane Keaton look from *Ann Hall* made its appearance on two or three of the girls. The only thing I remember about the boys is that they all wanted to get close to Melanie.

I give my daughter not one but two cars—a brand-new BMW and a classic MG sports car. They had them brought to the front of the house. Each had an enormous ribbon with a bow tied around it. The entire party escorts Tatum outside. I expect an ordinary teen response from her, a squeal, a little jumping up and down, a big hug for her old man. Instead there's nothing. She just looks at the cars and then at me. I can't tell whether she's confused or disappointed. "Thanks, Dad," she says as she turns and walks back into the house. By that point it's clear I'm not going to be able to console my daughter with fancy presents. The stronger Farrah believed in me, the less Tatum did. When I met Farrah, I felt that she was a goddess and that my only daughter would agree. It wasn't fair assuming my daughter could think like an adult. I had treated Tatum as if she were a grown-up since she was nine, not a healthy approach to a child. Farrah can only enhance us, I thought then, which under normal circumstances should have been the case.

I now realize "normal" had long since been an impossibility for Tatum and me. I truly believe that if Tatum and I had not made *Paper Moon*, she would be dead, because she would have been with her mother and she wouldn't have had the escape route that I gave her. She would have been a teenager in that erratic life with the worst of all adult behavior to imitate. First, I saved her, made her my whole world, and then I pushed her out.

I remember once, out of frustration, actually trying to explain to Tatum: "You're asking me to choose the girl I don't sleep with. You can't ask that of a man. You're missing one of the chief ingredients of a relationship. I love you, you're my daughter, but there are certain aspects of my life you cannot fulfill." The words came tumbling out of my mouth before I realized what I'd said. I'd inadvertently complicated our relationship. It was utterly inexcusable. I was blinded by love and in my naïveté I expected my child to sympathize with me. I kept telling myself that everything was going to be okay, that we could step blindly into that blue yonder of the faultless American family. Except there was already too much spoiled fruit on the family tree.

My mother saw what was happening and understood I would have to leave Farrah to get Tatum back. My mother didn't want to say that. She also knew I wouldn't do it. Both my parents did. My dad, Blackie O'Neal, was a well-known screenwriter and my mom, Patricia, a respected if occasional actress. They were familiar with the impermanence of Hollywood relationships. They knew my first two wives, and saw Farrah as an oasis of calm and

responsibility. They also realized that the more I fell in love with her, the more Tatum would retreat. It might have been different had I enforced healthier boundaries beginning with the filming of *Paper Moon*, where father and daughter were equal partners, but we acted like adult friends, and it would prove our undoing.

But at the start, Farrah and I are still confident things will work out with Tatum, so we're concentrating on building our life together. Also that November, trouble is brewing on another front. Lee calls from Canada with an apparent change of heart and tells me to stay away from his wife, or else. I tell him I can't do that because I love her. He repeats, "Stay away from my wife and stay out of my house!" We hang up and my adrenaline is pumping. I share this news with Farrah, who says that Lee wrote her a note about how I am only after publicity, trying to exploit her fame. He has no clue how much she means to me. He calls me back the next day, I suspect prompted by Farrah, to apologize for threatening me. I can see why Farrah was once in love with him.

Farrah and I go to New York together before Christmas. She has some personal appearances scheduled for Fabergé shampoo; she's their spokesperson, and I decide to tag along. We would make one of our lasting memories on this trip. I've booked us into the Pierre Hotel, on Fifth Avenue overlooking Central Park, my favorite hotel at the time. After we unpack, I tell Farrah, "On the top floor of this building there's a deserted ballroom, and all the plaster cherubs that must have been on the ceiling are now just lying on the floor." The Pierre was about to undergo an extensive renovation. I see her eyes light up with angelic anticipation.

"Let's have a look," I say. "We have to take the elevator as far up as it will go, and then climb a staircase. I don't think we're allowed up there, so we'll have to sneak around."

"Let's go," she whispers. We do and we find the cherubs. They must weigh twenty pounds each. And there she is, bending over, picking up these ornaments, and trying to balance them in her arms. I have the flashlight.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"That one, and that one," she says, pointing. "Oh, there's another good one behind you!"

These are not tiny keepsakes, mind you, they're big and heavy, each one like a miniature chubby Buddha. We take as many as we can carry downstairs and then have the bellhops deliver boxes that we pack with our loot. We take four home with us and they remained in our family room for years. I still have one at my beach house. Farrah and I would often reminisce about this trip—her struggling down that flight of stairs making loud banging noises as she wrestled the fat, unwieldy statues. That was my image of her forever: hunched over, sweating and laughing, moving those things in the dark. For years I would imitate her bending over, pretending to be carrying something enormous, trying to get down the stairs with too many cherubs.

Though I smile looking back on Farrah's formidable display of physical strength that day, she wouldn't always have such vibrant health. Worrisome things would crop up from time to time that would be successfully treated and go away. But back then, neither of us gave them a second thought. We were young and full of life, eager to begin our future together.

The first of these scares comes right before our first Christmas together, in 1979. Farrah

develops a group of benign cysts on her breasts, six of them, that must be surgically removed (Over the years, she'll end up having many more.) She goes home to Texas for the procedure. While I stay in LA at her request, Lee reasserts himself, racing to Houston to support his wife and then returning with her to LA to nurse her back to health. It's clear that Lee is making a final attempt to win her back and she's too weak and too tired to resist his caretaking. Though I'm deeply annoyed, Farrah keeps reassuring me that our love is safe.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, JANUARY 5, 1980**

**Lee has gone to Houston and has returned home with her. I'm hurt and confused. Farrah called and said not to worry because she loves only me. Not very consoling when I know they'll go back to the same house and with the captive eye of her mother, who's come with her.**

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, JANUARY 6, 1980**

**My girl is back but can't talk to me because Lee is in the house and watching her closely. Why is he still there? I spoke to her briefly and she sounded conflicted. I have lots of questions for this girl. Definitely not yet my idea of an independent woman, although I recognize her sense of propriety. She still feels an obligation to Lee, but is not sure how to honor it. I'll be patient with her. It seems I have no real choice short of firing her before she fires me.**

**She finally called. It was sweet, but slightly hurried as Mr. Majors was in the shower. I was abrupt and she quickly called back pleading for understanding and professing never before finding love as she has with me. I believe her and it made me feel relieved.**

It turns out Farrah's mother will not soon be my ally. Lee doesn't stay at the house long. He's doing a movie and has to go back on location, so now Lee's gone, and I'm here in Los Angeles. I meet Pauline for the first time. She's staying with Farrah until she's fully recuperated. She has a very deep southern accent. She's a quarter Choctaw Indian, high cheekbones, an older woman but striking. She's strong and stoic, not at all impressed by Hollywood fame and glamour. She's been the one sturdy constant in Farrah's life and Farrah depends on her for advice and emotional support. Farrah also has an older sister, Diane, who lives in Texas. She and Farrah, though loving sisters, share few interests and so they seldom chat. Diane sometimes helps Farrah with PR, without ever breathing the air of Southern California. Her doing Hollywood PR from the Lone Star State always amused me.

I'm up at the house with Farrah. Lee's moved out and they've filed for divorce. We're watching television in her bedroom, and the doorbell rings and it's Jay Bernstein, with his fiancée. Jay's a too slick character. He was Farrah's manager for a while until she finally gave him the boot because he treated her like a dull-witted child who also happened to be a me ticket. He managed Suzanne Somers too. Farrah told me how Jay used to think nothing of doing her newspaper and magazine interviews, telling the stunned reporters, "You don't need to talk to Farrah because I know exactly what she would say." Jay had always been close to Farrah's mother. He was smart. Flowers on her birthday, that sort of thing. And he was always working the mother because he knew Farrah listened to her. So Pauline had some

affection for him. Farrah lets him in the house with the fiancée, and I can hear them going into the kitchen, already arguing about late, unreliable financial reports. Farrah sounds furious. I'm still in the bedroom. There's this long hallway with photographs lining the walls and I hear Pauline saying to the fiancée, "And this is Farrah when she was three years old and this is her when ..." Suddenly there's a terrible crash in the kitchen. I bolt down the hall, go flying past Pauline, who keeps on pointing out pictures to this woman, "... and this is Farrah making her first communion," she continues, never even looking up, as if this sort of thing happened all the time. As I run into the kitchen, Farrah is throwing a frying pan at Jan. Now these are the kinds of frying pans you have to grip with two hands. I yell, "Stop, you're tearing your stitches." It's a lethal throw that fortunately misses. I say to the man, "I don't know how you riled her but you better go before she picks up another pot."

It's my first glimpse of Farrah's temper. I've been careful so far to keep that part of me disguised. I try to tell myself that truly passionate people are like that; it's what makes us who we are.

I want to win Pauline over, so I take Farrah and her to Chasen's, and invite my mother to join us. Farrah always loved Chasen's chili. Fred Astaire is in the entranceway when we arrive; he escorts us to our table and does a few dance steps, a dazzling start to our evening. There are lots of show business people and everyone is extremely friendly. Chasen's is the gathering spot for Hollywood's elite. Hitchcock is there that night. Though dinner goes well and both mothers are polite to each other, it's hard not to see that they have nothing in common. My mother is cultured and Pauline has a third-grade education. Don't get me wrong: Pauline isn't dumb by any stretch, but she's limited. She also has no interest in show business whatsoever, thinks Farrah should come home to Texas. I can tell Pauline doesn't like me. I think it's because she doesn't approve of Farrah's being involved with another man before she's divorced. She never does warm up to me, though Farrah's dad, Jim, and I will become the best of buddies in the coming years. We share an interest in history. On the way home from Chasen's, there's a program on the radio about Lord Mountbatten. The women are dozing, so I listen. The IRA assassinated him in Ireland, blew up his sailboat with him and his young grandson in it. I'm all for the reunification of Ireland, but can they only get there by killing?

After Pauline goes back to Texas, Farrah is still in pain. At the time, I owned a house in Berkeley. Sur. Lee is still on location with the movie. I decide to take Farrah there to heal. We take the Pacific Coast Highway, the PCH, driving along some of the most magnificent vistas anywhere in the world. Hours later, we're winding through the mountains, it's late at night, and an enormous storm hits, and we get caught in a rock slide. As I'm trying to weave through, we're trapped by a huge boulder in the middle of the road. Suddenly, fearless Farrah, with her cheeks still full of stitches, opens the door, steps out of the car into the torrential rain, and says "Help me move that thing!" I reluctantly get out and together we start pushing. I can feel the mud rising up past my ankles. Then there's another stranded motorist flapping his arms at us, screaming, "Landslide, landslide, get out of there, are you crazy?!"

"Honey, they're saying we're crazy," I shout against the pounding rain, hoping she'll retreat to the car.

"Just keep pushing," she says. "We can do this."

After a few tries, we're able to move the damn boulder enough to squeeze the car past it.

The rest of the ride, thankfully, is uneventful.

Big Sur is both soothing and exhilarating. Henry Miller used to live nearby. He would send everyone notes at Christmas, telling the recipients the presents he wanted. He once asked me to buy one of his own books for him. Later he would be ensconced near me in Pacific Palisades with his Japanese wife, who, I'm told, never stopped nagging. Henry told people she may have thought she had married a rich man. He was only famous.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, JANUARY 10, 1980**

We relax slowly and soon she's cooing and then the comedy of me fumbling around trying to enclose us from the Big Sur night. She giggles till she falls asleep and I lie next to her with great expectations in my heart, for she is beginning to endear herself to me. Next morning, I shower with my girl, a fine way to kiss and cuddle.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, JANUARY 14, 1980**

So far it's a little bit of heaven. We've had a relaxed evening by the fire with Van Morrison playing in the background. We talk at length about assorted problems like husbands and wives. Lee is packing at their home as I write this, probably for the last time.

We talked long into the night and finally slept. That we are still together amazes me. I guess it's because I'm just not used to having such a pure beauty like her and it still makes me wary. I feel a lot of powerful urges and I want to make sure that I act only on the good ones. I'm sorry we're leaving so soon tomorrow, but it's been very fulfilling in a lot of ways. Especially to me. We talk because there's no TV, no movies, a chance to get to know each other. I do want to go all the way with this.

#### **JOURNAL ENTRY, JANUARY 17, 1980**

Our last day in this magnificent seascape surrounded by ancient cliffs and trees, we shop at a bakery with irresistible smells. The drive home to LA is exhilarating. Three weather changes and all the colors the sky affords and I'm riding with my own rainbow. Straight to the heart. I felt Farrah slip out of bed early this morning, so I went to join her. I want to tell her stories, dance around the room to Stephen Stills, and then take her to lunch at the Brown Derby. A sad spot was the call from Tatum. She's fought with her mother again. I listen to her story and know it's beyond me. I turn to Farrah for help.

**F**arah's visibility is on the rise. She's shot another cover for *Vogue*, is completing the last of her *Charlie's Angels* appearances, which she'll be talking about with Barbara Walters, and she's beginning to get some interesting made-for-TV movie offers. Meanwhile, my career is in a slump. The follow-up films after *Paper Moon*, including the entertaining comedy *The Main Event*, with Ms. Barbra, did nothing to bolster the industry's respect for my acting. But the

great lost opportunity was *The Champ*. A huge success, it made Ricky Schroder a star and revitalized Jon Voight's career. That could have been Griffin and me. I was cast as the father. Griffin was promised the son's role, but the studio changed its mind about him so I walked. I was proud of how my son dealt with such a severe disappointment. He took it much better than I did.

And now I'm reading the script for *The Hand*, and Sue Mengers is convinced I'll get an offer. I've also been given the script for *The Thornbirds*. In the end, I won't get either role. Michael Caine will be cast as the lead in *The Hand*, and *The Thornbirds*, instead of being a film, will be turned into a television miniseries starring Richard Chamberlain. I want to work but the offers aren't coming. I find myself increasingly interested in Farrah's career, which is at a turning point. She wants to extend herself but doesn't know what form it should take. This is where I see an opportunity. If I can't help myself, maybe I can help Farrah by bolstering her confidence. She doesn't realize what her gifts are, thinks they're just her hair and smile.

I've come to believe that a lot of love is about admiration. Farrah has some acting licks. For one thing, she can read a scene and own it, just read it once and know the lines word perfect. All she needs now is the chance to play a role that has nothing to do with beauty. The opportunity arrives that spring of 1980 with a made-for-TV movie called *Murder in Texas*. This is a true story about a doctor with a mistress who loses interest in his wife and slowly poisons her to death—the wife, not the mistress. We pull Farrah's hair back into a ponytail. She has these tiny ears that are adorable; they're endearing. We downplay her makeup and wardrobe, and voilà, the actress emerges. She's brilliant in this part, so believable. It would mark the beginning of many similar successes. I enjoy coaching her, helping her run lines and hone her craft. I've surprised myself.

This was the love I had not known before. I had known the kind of love that children have for their parents, but that's expected; this was very different. Since my marriages, I practiced serial monogamy. I liked smart, unpredictable women, such as Anjelica Huston, but I never fell in love and I had no intention of getting married again. Farrah and I enhanced each other in ways I'd never experienced. I grew up a Catholic, but I had fallen away. I had two ex-wives when I met her. You're not supposed to get divorced in the Catholic Church and I did it twice. I didn't have a parish; I didn't have a priest whom I could speak with. Farrah wasn't lapsed. I started going to Mass again because I could accompany her. We'd get dressed in our Sunday clothes and go to Mass together every week.

It's the spring of 1980 and for me a season of endings and beginnings. Farrah's divorce from Lee enters its final stages. She has to buy him out of the house, but at least he's gone. He knew the marriage was over and eventually allowed their uncoupling to be largely amicable. And Farrah and I are free. We're launched. I've won Farrah. I've lost my daughter. It's as if Tatum has moved to a very strict boarding school that doesn't allow telephone calls or visits from parents. A letter a month at most. This girl was a chatterbox as a child. We exchange 1,000 words an hour; 950 came from her. There's this emptiness in my life now that that musical voice, that comforting background presence that helped make my house a home is gone. My old Catholic soul finds it ironic that Easter, the season of renewal, is just a week away. Tatum never blamed Farrah. She blamed me. That spring, Tatum moves out of the beach house into an apartment in Beverly Hills, across the street from her mother, who



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