

# RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

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September 2014

Dear Friends,

It's here! *Killing Lions*—the new book I wrote with my son Sam—is out! Allow me to share another glimpse with you. We are talking about marriage...

Someone once described marriage as though it were a mirror that was brought into your life, but I think it's more than that. Let's add that this mirror is following you around all the time and can talk like the teapot from *Beauty and the Beast*, and then I think you begin to get the idea. All of the good things about myself are constantly reflected back at me, which also means that all of my failures and deficiencies get their turn in the spotlight.

Before Susie, I could be out with my friends and be in a foul mood and I would be able to dismiss it to them all as just that, a mood. I could apologize for being angry or checked out or grumpy, and then go back into isolation. Everyone only saw glimpses of me, hours at a time, but that was before. Susie knows who I am when I am in public, and who I am at home. All of my issues, my inadequacies, my failures, become this siren blaring out that neither of us can ignore. It's amazing...I want to get angry with her for exposing me, and then I want to pull away and hide somehow, to disengage. I found myself thinking the other day after she raised her eyebrows in response to some rude comment I made about a friend, *Leave me alone! Let me be broken for five minutes!*

Yep. Yep. Yep. You have plunged into the glorious encounter with the Other. It is one of the greatest gifts of our existence, and by far the most radically disruptive. It's startling, really. The "otherness" of gender is especially disruptive in especially wonderful ways. I can be cruising along fine through my day and then Mom walks into the room and simply her presence is like someone turning on the stereo; sometimes it's Beethoven and sometimes Twisted Sister, but I have to *pay attention* and that is really, really good for me.

We were visiting some friends in Hawaii back in January. They took us out sailing in hopes of seeing humpback whales. As we came upon the whales our friends invited us to don snorkel gear, get in the water and swim towards them – an invitation that was at once thrilling and pretty deeply unnerving. As we cautiously kicked along we first encountered a mother and her calf, then a single adult humpback that was simply hovering in the water not far below the surface. We held our breath and dove down...and got really close. I was maybe twenty feet from a creature that weighs 50,000 pounds and runs up to forty-five feet long.

Then I saw its massive eye, about the size of a salad plate. It was looking at me.

Back on dry land it took me a good hour to recover, to try and find words to describe the experience. The best I could do was to say it must be something like when an angel steps into

the room and you see him and he sees you. Holy, beautiful, and totally disarming. This is the encounter with the Other, and marriage might be our most intimate ongoing experience of it.

As we step into a more mature loving, we realize the Other is here to call me out of myself, beyond myself. The first years of marriage can really knock you for a loop in this regard. Not only do opposites really and truly attract – in gender, in personality, in habits and lifestyle – but also *in our brokenness*. God is fiercely committed to our transformation; he simply will not allow us to carry on unchanged and so in his love he gives us...our opposite. Crazy-making though it might be, marriage is wonderfully redemptive.

Living with Susie has been the best part of my life thus far. Yes, there is confusion, and plenty of unknowns, and enough occasional flailing on my part to pass the time. But that doesn't come close to defining us. Last night, we went for a bike ride once the sun was going down and the day was cooler. It was beautiful. We rode along a bike path that follows a stream. We talked about loving our time here in Colorado, about our little apartment, about making meals together. As we rode along I noticed the sky growing dark and threatening to rain, but we were enjoying ourselves too much to cut it short, so we continued to explore the trail. I loved seeing Susie's joy at the beauty of it all. At the moment we started heading home the rain came, and it came fast.

So we took shelter in the first thing we could find, which happened to be a railway underpass. We probably stood there for forty minutes, first watching the rain, then listening to the train passing overhead, and then pointing out the arcs and veins of lightning crossing the sky. We talked about what kind of parents we want to be, what sort of home we want to create, and how happy we were to be stuck in a thunderstorm. I loved every minute of it.

Marriage has felt like so many moments stolen from time. Like that night under the bridge in the rain, it can seem like nothing else exists and that we have finally stopped the flow of time and seized the present moment. There is nothing else like it. Susie and I have often said that marriage is like having a buddy with you, someone who will adventure and suffer and explore and live by your side. Having Susie by mine has opened more doors than it ever closed, our dreams have changed into new and greater ones, and we continue to change as people – the both of us working on the other. But among all those wonders, it continues to be the small yet timeless moments that we treasure the most. It is amazing how much joy could be packed into so little a thing as that instant, standing close together in the rain.

Friends we hope you'll get this book—for yourself, and for every young man you know!

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John' with a stylized flourish.

John (and Sam)