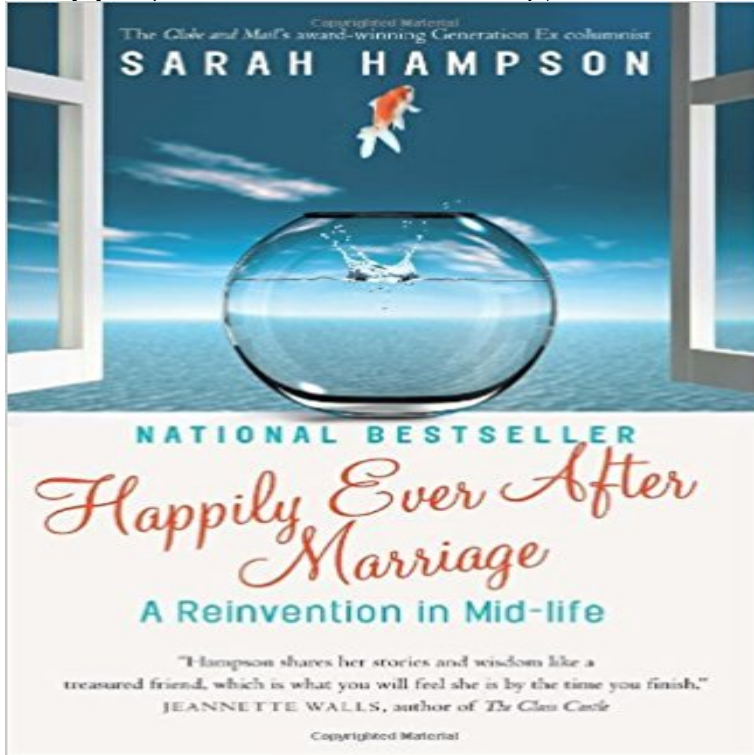


# Happily Ever After Marriage: A Reinvention in Mid-life



Earlier in my post-divorce life, I thought marriage would never happen again for me. Having exited a painful one, I had no desire to enter another. Why would anyone want to repeat a difficult experience? ... I felt that my heart would never be as trusting as it once was. I had lost my faith in marriage. I wasn't sure it was the best custodian of love. And I still feared how the wife identity could sabotage me. I was content to sit to the side and let others have their turn at giving the institution a whirl. "from *Happily Ever After Marriage: There's Nothing Like Divorce to Clear the Mind* by Sarah Hampson After eighteen years of marriage and three children, Sarah Hampson finds herself amongst the growing ranks of divorced MLWs (Mid-Life Women). "This is what happens when you are outside the marriage bubble," she writes. "Suddenly, you are in a parallel universe, across some mythic river in a place where you are the un-wife" and you and your un-husband are on the un-married side. And once there, as some kind of compensation for the hardship of the journey, you develop relationship X-ray vision. You know more than if you had never inhabited the bubble. Illusions (and delusions) drop away. Everything is clearer. (pp. xi-â-â- " xii) Hampson uses this newfound vantage point outside the "marriage bubble" to bravely explore the institution of matrimony. She applies her famously warm, perceptive and frequently hilarious perspective, not only to

her own marriage experience, but also to those of her family and friends, along with the myriad celebrities she has interviewed in more than a decade of journalism. Hampson asserts that the tradition of unveiling the bride after the vows have been made is all wrong. "A bride wears a veil after she becomes a wife," she writes. "For many, it's a question of denial, not just of what they want and their unhappiness but also of the characteristics in their mate" (p. 138). With the veil lifted from her eyes, Hampson scrutinizes the marriage assumptions she made as a child, better able to see the domestic compromises made by her mother and grandmother, as well as her own. "As a young girl growing up in a comfortably privileged household, Hampson felt secure in her expectation that she would one day be taken care of by a husband. "The message in all quarters of our upbringing was that marriage was the life glue" (p. 30), she writes. Now an Un-Married, Hampson has no end of worries to keep her awake at night. Will her children be irreparably damaged by the divorce? Will her "Ghost Dad" ex stop disappointing them, and her? How will she manage financially? Will she find the serenity she craves? "And yet, despite her worries, Hampson finds that as a mature and independent woman she has access to the sort of security and self-possession that she sorely lacked when married. She traces her divorce journey, from her hilarious "Un-marriage Ceremony" (selling her wedding ring to a junk gold broker), to a more fully realized state of being, in which life can be viewed as "a carnival of

choices, good and bad, wise and regrettable, designed not to teach us pride in ourselves for engineering whatever successes we may have, but humility in acceptance of how it happened to unfold” (p. 280). A Candid, humorous and full of fascinating stories, Happily Ever After Marriage is part modern guide, part passionate conversation with friends and part meditation on what can be seen as a new rite of passage to self-actualization in mid-life. By bravely examining her own life, Hampson brings clarity to the underlying cultural messages that inform the choices we make “ and shows how embracing change at mid-life can open oneself to new possibilities of connectedness. From the Hardcover edition.

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