

MOMENTS IN TIME

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This book is dedicated to the loving memory of my brother
and best friend Charlie and my adoring father.

“Do not fear death...only the unlived life.
You don't have to live forever, you just have to live”

Natalie Babbitt

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Namaste.

Prologue

I've been practicing yoga for years. I even became a yoga teacher. Hot yoga—really hot yoga—is my preference. I recently started practicing at a new studio closer to my children's school. Same hot yoga, same style—you know, the one with the guy who wears a Speedo and sits on this giant podium that looks like a throne in the front of the studio. I've never taken a class from him, but I heard he barks orders and hurls insults at his faithful followers and unsuspecting newbies. Anyway, the yoga is great, and this guy's managed to build a multibillion-dollar organization with yoga, the supposed antithesis of materialism and money. So kudos to the man for that alone. I really like this new studio. Not too big, cozy, and the few teachers I've taken classes with have been really good.

On this day I walk in and notice a different teacher. His back is to me. I know I haven't taken class with him yet because I've only had female teachers. As he turns and faces me, our eyes lock instantaneously. My breath is momentarily taken away, and we are staring at each other. He also seems to be taken aback a bit.

After what feels like an eternity, he composes himself and says confidently, "Hi, I'm Daniel. Don't think I've seen you here before."

I'm not quite as composed or nearly as confident as I begin to sign in. I clumsily respond, "I'm new—well not new as in new, like new to yoga, just new here." What's wrong with me?

He looks at the sign-in sheet and says, "Cassandra Peyton."

I quietly reply, "Yes."

"Nice to meet you, Cassandra. Have a great class."

As I go to place my mat down, I wonder what just happened. Did he feel that too? And if he did, what was that? Never, even in fifteen years of marriage, have I ever felt that kind of exchange with anyone, least of all someone I just met. Sure, I notice obviously attractive men. I am human, after all, married, not dead. This—this was different. This stirred something inside me. I keep trying to convince myself it was nothing, but it definitely wasn't nothing. Nothing doesn't usually have a way of making you feel something. *Let it go*, I think to myself. *It was just a momentary lapse of whatever. Focus, just focus.*

Mat down, I inspect myself in the mirror. I have long, thick, naturally curly, dark brown hair. At five foot six, I'm lean, strong, and flexible. I have olive skin and brown eyes. My best

friend, Mark, and my husband, Steve, say I have an exotic and mysterious aura about me. I pretty much keep to myself, friendly and somewhat aloof, which some read as arrogant. Truth be told, I may come off as confident, but even the drive to the yoga studio is excruciating for me. I feel anxious and insecure. I'm probably one of the few people who feel like they need Xanax on their way to yoga. Most days I have to talk myself into going.

The conversation goes something like this: *OK, just get into your yoga clothes. You don't have to go; just get dressed...Now get your gear together, water, yoga towel, mat. Great!...Get into the car, and just drive in that direction. Remember, Cass, you don't have to go...Park the car, and now go in and place your mat down. You could always leave, saying you had some family emergency. Just go in.* So it goes. Once I'm in the studio, I know even before putting my mat down I'm staying. After the first breathing exercise, it's like I'm in my own world, without any worries or concerns.

Identifying why I have this internal struggle getting to yoga is a whole other animal because I'm not exactly sure why. Yoga is like an exposé, a mirror on my life. On my mat I practice with so much control and discipline, never really letting my defenses down. Off the mat, it's pretty much the same. I'm very structured and disciplined there as well. I rarely let my guard down except maybe to my husband, my brother Andy, my best friend, Mark, my sweet dad, and my kids. I couldn't even begin to describe what reckless abandon feels like, on or off the mat.

Class begins, and Daniel steps up to the podium. He's wearing what looks like bike shorts. His shirt is off now. I would guess him to be in his early forties. He's about five foot eleven, has thick, light brown, wavy hair with visible signs of gray and hazel eyes. His hair is just past his shoulders, and he wears it pulled back into a ponytail. He's lean, tan, with well-defined muscles. *Man he looks good*, I think while my stomach does this weird flip thing. *Focus, Cassandra. Just focus*, I remind myself again. I know in yoga we're supposed to check our egos at the door, but not this day, not in this class, not with this teacher.

We start with a breathing exercise. I calm down and start to get into a zone. The zone for me is where I can tune out everything around me and be completely immersed in the moment.

“Breathe in that cosmic life force, energy, prana, all around you. Fill your lungs. Expand your lungs. Exhale, big ‘ha’ sound. Exhale it all out. Keep exhaling. Keep exhaling, getting ready for that next inhale. Inhale deep into your lungs. Breathe into the back of your throat,

elbows high, spine straight. Now exhale all the air out. Sounding strong today, everyone. Nice!” he says happily.

When we come out of our first forward bend of the series, he exclaims, “Welcome to your life everyone! Are you feeling it?”

The class chimes back, “Feeling it!”

I’m grinning. I’m not used to a teacher in this style of yoga being so interactive with the class. He’s charming and filled with so much joy for teaching. After the initial series of warm-up postures, I’ve a good sweat going. I love the way my muscles glisten through the beads of sweat pouring down every inch of my body. I never feel happier, calmer, sexier than when I’m on my mat.

I pull off an amazingly powerful class, balanced, poised, and strong. Proud of myself, I walk out and, feigning modesty, thank Daniel for class. He pauses and stares at me. There’s that look again! I can’t help but stare right back into his eyes. There’s no mistaking the attraction I feel toward him.

Finally he says, “You have a beautiful practice, Cassandra. Hope to see you again soon, and welcome.”

I smile and say, “Thanks, Daniel.” I find myself loving the sound of his voice and the way he says my name. With that I leave, get into my car, and just sit for a while in a state of joyful bliss that only this yoga can give me. Ninety minutes of heaven, ninety minutes of hell.

When I get home, I go straight to my computer and go to the studio’s website. I’ve been there before but only to get the address and to quickly check the class schedule. I open their home page, and there it is: “Directors, Daniel and Cheryl Evans,” with a picture of them both. I read Daniel’s bio and quickly realize he’s in his early fifties. *Wow, I think, yoga really is the fountain of youth!* I’m in my early forties and have been told I could easily pass for my thirties, so maybe there’s some truth to that. So he’s not just a teacher; he’s the studio owner.

I click to the class schedule, hoping to see who teaches and when. Nothing. Just the days and times. *Damn, I think, it sure would be nice to know when he teaches.* The thought of experiencing what I felt today and having my stomach do that weird flip thing, like I’m some kind of schoolgirl having her first crush, scares me. On the other hand, I’m filled with excitement and anticipation at the prospect of seeing him again. The rational part of me knows this isn’t

something I should be entertaining. The other part, apparently more powerful, can't stop thinking about him. I'm married. He's married. End of story. I look at his picture again. There's something about him I can't seem to shake.

I walk away from my computer and head to the bathroom to shower. I wonder what about him caused such a reaction within me. My husband, Steve, is wonderful—a great provider, loving father. The sex between us has always been—even after two kids—regular, though somewhat routine. Sure we've had our moments and ups and downs, but for the most part, we've an incredible life.

Steve's company is solid. He built it from the ground up. He's a private investor, like Bernie Madoff, only legal. He's a workaholic by most people's standards, mine included. When he walks through the door at the end of the day, he quickly kisses me and the kids, asks about everyone's day, and then announces that he has a "couple" of phone calls to make and has to put a "few" deals together.

"Just call me when dinner is ready, Cass. I'm really buried this week," he always says hurriedly as he makes his way upstairs to his office.

This week? I laugh to myself. *Try maybe this month, this year, this life.* Whenever I bring up to him that he's working way too much and the kids and I'd love to have more quality time with him, he responds with, "I'm doing the best I can, Cass. Do you know how big our nut is? I mean, look around you. Our kids' school alone is fifty thousand a year..." I immediately feel guilty and tell him I understand.

I get out of my wet clothes and into the shower. Now that the kids are older and in school, gone are the days of speed eating, speed showering, speed brushing and grooming. Doing all of these things plus trying to get the kids ready, the house picked up, and myself out the door successfully felt like an Olympic event instead of simple, everyday tasks. I thoroughly enjoy having the luxury of a warm, almost hot shower.

I tilt my head back to wet my already damp hair and love the feel of the warm water streaming down my body. Life seems to be moving slowly. As I shampoo my hair, the smell of lavender, one of my favorite scents, begins to permeate the air. I rinse my hair and start to wash my body. I bring the lavender soap bar close to my face, close my eyes, and take a long inhale. How I love that smell! I lather my body, starting with my neck, then my shoulders, chest, and

breasts. I pause and slowly massage each breast with each hand. I can feel my nipples become erect to my touch. I tilt my head back again as the water flows down my head and shoulders and down the small of my back. I'm moving in a trance-like state, completely engrossed in each sensation. I begin to caress my stomach and move down lower between my thighs. I'm feeling increasingly aroused.

Just then my cell phone rings. I contemplate not answering it and letting it go to voice mail. No, I have to answer. What if it's the kids' school calling to let me know one of them is sick or, worse, is on the way to the emergency room with blood gushing out of his or her head after being severely injured in PE? I rinse off quickly, grab the towel, and see it's my mom.

"Dammit!" I say out loud, frustrated. I calm down and answer. "Hi, Mom."

"Hi, dear," she replies.

"Hey, Mom, can I call you back? I just got out of the shower, and I'm standing here dripping wet," I say hurriedly.

"Oh sure, dear. I just wanted to let you know that your aunt and uncle are coming in from San Francisco two weekends from now. Let's see, that would be the twenty-third. Or is it the twenty-fifth? Let me just check the calendar here... No, it's the twenty-third. Anyway, we're planning dinner for them on that Saturday, so please don't make any plans. I've already spoken to your brothers and sister, and they plan on being here."

Annoyed now more than ever, not only at the interruption but that the "standing-here-dripping-wet part" seems to have flown right over her head, trying to contain my exasperation, I say, "Yeah, Mom, let me check with Steve and make sure we're clear for that weekend, and I'll get back to you."

She continues. "Well, you know, dear"—I hate it when she calls me dear—"we expect you to be here. You know how much we love to have the whole family together."

Calmly and with restraint, although a bit curt, I respond, "Mom, I have to dry off. I'll call you later today after I've had a chance to talk to Steve."

She says, "Oh, I'm sorry, dear." One day I'll tell her to stop calling me dear. "I don't mean to keep you. So how are the kids?"

Oh Jesus, Mary, Mother of Christ! I say in my head. Now really holding back, mustering up the very last of my patience, I say, "Fine, fine. Everyone's fine. Call you later. OK, love you." I quickly hang up, not waiting for a response.

Chapter 1

I have a very different relationship with my mother than I do with my father. As I was growing up, my mother was emotionally distant and very concerned with keeping up appearances, usually at the expense of how we kids were feeling. Our image always came first. We were taught not to make waves, and we swept so many things under the rug Mount Everest would look like a molehill in comparison. Her face never lit up when I walked into a room; if anything it was a look of annoyance and disappointment. Her way of disciplining me was by guilt and shaming me. She'd also slap and hit sometimes, usually with a slipper.

Besides Andy, I have another brother, the eldest, William, and an older sister, Allison, who is third in line. I'm the youngest. Andy's the favorite—I mean everyone's favorite—but he and I have the strongest bond of all. We have since we were kids. He always seemed to like me and loved having me around. He included me whenever he could and even taught me how to ride a bike. That's one moment I'll never forget. I kept wobbling and falling, and he kept making me get up and try again.

"I don't care if we're here all day and night; you'll ride this bike today!" he said to me enthusiastically. "You can do this, Cass. I know you can." (When I was a kid, he and my dad were the only two who called me Cass. I didn't like it when anyone else did, and if they tried, I'd politely say, "Cassandra." I still do, in fact.)

Right around sunset, after quite a few spills off that bike and plenty of scrapes and bruises, Andy was holding onto the back of the bike, and without my knowledge he let go. I went quite a ways before I heard him yelling from a distance, "You got it, Cass. You're riding a bike. You're doing it!" I looked back and began to wobble as he yelled, with both of his arms stretched straight up toward the sky, "Don't look back! Just ride, Cass. Ride!" So I did, with a huge smile, the smell of orange blossoms in the air and the warm summer wind blowing on my face. What an amazing feeling! Andy was proud of me, and that was the greatest feeling of all. We're not just brother and sister; we're best friends.

William kind of broke off from the family right after high school, never being one to deal with a false sense of propriety. I guess he rebelled in a way: put himself through college and became a very successful entrepreneur. He married young, a beautiful Asian woman he met

while in college. They have three amazing kids, two boys and a girl. They're so witty, kind, and intelligent. He did good!

Allison and I aren't very close, and I can tell she's a bit jealous of my relationship with Andy, wanting what he and I share. Allison went off, also marrying someone she met in college. She has three kids as well. I'm not as close to her and her husband as I am to William and his family. In fact, I don't care for her husband, Kyle. Steve and I just tolerate him for the sake of Allison and the kids. It's not even that we don't like him; we just don't get him. He always speaks like it's from a script, always careful to be politically correct, and tends to ask the most random questions. He and Allison are constantly at my parents' house, and they both have my mom wrapped around their fingers. They know just what to say to her. To anyone listening, it sounds patronizing and condescending, but my mom eats it up.

Andy and I never finished college, each of us for very different reasons. I became an idealistic revolutionary, determined to save the world from itself, and Andy—well, he lacked a clear vision of where he wanted to be or what he wanted to do. He ended up working for my father's insurance company. He does pretty well. Although you'd never look at Andy and think *salesman*, people like him—really like him—so they trust him. There isn't much selling involved. My father retired about ten years ago, and Andy's been running the business successfully ever since. He primarily relies on repeat business and referrals, not doing much marketing and advertising. He's never been out to make a killing; he's too down-to-earth for that. He just likes a simple, peaceful lifestyle.

Andy was married for about ten years. I never understood that relationship or the attraction. None of us liked her; we just tolerated her for Andy's sake. Andy kept putting off having kids with her. I think deep inside he knew the relationship wouldn't last and throwing children in the mix would just complicate things. I know Andy wanted kids, but he now says he is very content being a surrogate father to all his nieces and nephews. There isn't a better uncle than he is. He absolutely lives for the kids, taking them to the movies, golfing, camping, the beach. They adore him in return because they know his love is genuine and he is sincerely interested in who they are.

Andy divorced about three years ago, a really messy divorce—it's good they never had kids. Andy has since reunited with his high school sweetheart, Tracy. They're beautiful together,

and she treats him with the love and respect he needs and deserves. Love should never hurt, and Andy finally gets that.

If Andy's everyone's favorite, I'm my dad's favorite. Dad's relationship with William has always been a bit contentious. I guess Dad expected more from William because he's the oldest, and he rode him quite hard. Allison stayed out of Dad's way for the most part. My dad is strong, silent, and very authoritative. He doesn't tolerate talking back or disrespect in any way. I'm his soft spot, and he's mine. I can make him smile even when he's angry or disappointed with me. One time he was wearing these pajamas that had these ridiculous-looking Bermuda-short bottoms. I must've been around fifteen or sixteen. I did something, I can't remember what. He was yelling at me and going on and on. I was looking down, trying hard not to laugh.

He finally screamed, "Look at me when I'm talking to you!" I looked up, and he could clearly see I was smiling and holding back laughter. "What's so funny? Is something funny here?" he yelled even louder. I didn't respond and was holding back laughter. "Answer me, dammit!" Now the neighbors could hear him.

Cautiously I said, knowing this could get worse very quickly, "Dad, it's really hard to take you seriously when you're yelling at me in those Bermuda pajama bottoms." He stared at me with disbelief; I was holding my breath at this point. Finally he cracked a smile and yelled at me to go to my room.

Chapter 2

I dry off and get dressed. The usual—T-shirt and jeans. Not “mom” jeans. Stylish, low-rise jeans and a form-fitting T-shirt that accentuates my tight abs and small but firm breasts. I say firm, but I had to have them lifted. No implants, just lifted. They were like down to my knees after nursing both kids. I went from a 34C before kids to 38DD during pregnancy to who-knows-what-those-were after nursing. See, these are things people don’t tell you when you start having kids. You won’t sleep, you’ll be sucked dry, you won’t recognize your body, and there will be days when you understand why animals sometimes eat their young. Thankfully I didn’t get stretch marks. I practiced yoga during and after both pregnancies, so my abs and body bounced back quickly. I spray a little gel in my hair and let it dry naturally. My makeup is minimal—eyeliner, a little mascara, a touch of lipstick, and I’m good to go.

I go about the daily routine of my life—cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, running errands, and one of the favorite parts of my day, picking up my kids from school. I have two. My son, Lance—we call him L—is the spitting image of me. Dark, curly hair he likes to wear long, close to his shoulders, and these beautiful chocolate eyes with long eyelashes. Lance is laid-back and easygoing. His passion is quiet but unbridled. He can sit and draw or read for hours. At twelve, he’s beyond his years, an old soul of sorts. He loves music; he listens to everything from old Steely Dan to Pink Floyd, from jazz and blues to his favorite, alternative, indie, obscure-type bands. Say Justin Bieber or Miley Cyrus to him three times, and he’ll throw up on the spot. Nothing mainstream for him. He’s my little anarchist, very inside his head, a critical and analytical thinker.

My daughter, Joey, fourteen, is named after a character in one of my favorite movies, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*. Joey is stunning. She has long, thick light brown hair, hazel eyes, porcelain skin, and Angelina Jolie lips. She’s a mix of both Steve and me, taking Steve’s hair color, green eyes, straight hair, and full lips. From me she gets the thickness of my hair, my high cheekbones, and the shape of my eyes and face. Unlike her brother, she’s fiery and passionate about everything. She lives life on her terms and is very black and white in how she sees her world. She can’t stand injustice of any kind and is very vocal about it. Joey is witty, sarcastic, and has the best sense of humor, one of the few people who can bring me to tears with laughter. Of course at fourteen, she’s discovering boys, her sexuality, and the power it holds.

End of this sample book.

Enjoyed the preview?

PURCHASE NOW!

