

THE IMMORTAL

BOOK I

By

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CHAPTER ONE

Elizabeth

I have always wanted to be a writer, but never seemed to find the time to carry out my dream. Ironically, this time in my life is the most difficult of all to begin such a project as this, but it is something I must do. I have a story to tell that is difficult to believe, so I am writing it as fiction. It is too unbelievable to present as a true story. Nevertheless, I do maintain that the principles taught herein are true and that many readers will have this verified by their hearts and souls.

I'd like to start with John, but that probably wouldn't work. I must tell you about Elizabeth and something about myself before you can begin to understand.

There's not a lot to tell about me. I am average or below average in a number of ways. If there is anything out of the ordinary about me, it's probably the fact that I am quite curious in nature. I have thought quite a bit about why things are the way they are. I've always asked myself a lot of unanswerable questions, like: Who or what is God? Is there life after death? What will it be like? What is the purpose of life? Questions -- that seem to have no answers.

I met Elizabeth about ten years ago. I was 43 years old, and Elizabeth was several years younger. I was just getting my feet wet in real estate after failing in several business ventures. Both Elizabeth and I had been previously married. But since we got along great together after experiencing difficult relationships with others, we both felt like we had finally mastered the art of marriage to the extent we half-heartedly considered giving seminars on the subject.

Leaving my children with my previous wife was one of the most difficult decisions of my life, but the situation was not one of those win-win possibilities. It was lose-lose. The fact that I lost so much in my relationship with my children and they lost in their relationship with me made it all the more important to me that my relationship with Elizabeth would somehow be worth the great sacrifice.

Let's move on, here. I know a lot of you have gone through difficult marriages and wish you could have your life with your children to live over again. But there is something else I also know. I know that all of you have the desire within your hearts to meet the love of your life and to fall in love and stay in love. I know that few of you have found the quality of love you are looking for.

Well, this is one area where my life was not exactly average. I found the love of my life. I found even more than I was looking for. I found Elizabeth.

After my divorce I starting teaching several classes in the local community adult education programs. It had long been a hobby of mine to study graphology, or how character is revealed through handwriting. After years of dabbling, I became pretty good at it, so I volunteered my services.

I thank God every day that I studied handwriting analysis because without it I may not have recognized Elizabeth.

At the end of my first class, I asked everyone in the class to hand in samples of his or her handwriting. Then I proceeded to demonstrate that I was truly accurate by analyzing each of them. Now, this has nothing to do with psychic powers. Instead, it is an analytical way of discerning character.

There were about twenty in the class, and I thought that I had analyzed everyone when Elizabeth stood up.

"You haven't analyzed me yet," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Did you hand in a sample?"

"Yes, I did."

I picked up the pile of samples and handed them to her and said: "See if yours is one of these."

She looked through them. "Here it is," she said, handing it to me. "It seemed to have been stuck to another sample."

I looked at the handwriting. I did a double take. Through the years I had not only formulated an image of what I was looking for in the ideal mate, but I had also formulated what my ideal mate's handwriting would look like. After many years and thousands of handwriting samples I finally found one that looked like the image I had conjectured.

I probably embarrassed Elizabeth when I blurted out her qualities. Her handwriting showed that she was very intelligent and passionate' objective, yet caring; focused, yet curious; loving, yet with good common sense.

After telling her about a dozen positive characteristics I put the sample down and took a good look at her. The first thing I noticed was her very attractive, almost sparkling face, with darting intelligent eyes that seemed to focus with great attention from time to time. There was an honesty in her eyes that revealed her mood at the moment. I have since come to call them smiling eyes because when she is happy the sparkle in her eyes makes her feelings so obvious.

Physically, she was about 5'3", with light brown hair, a great figure and looks enough to generate an attractive pull in any male.

I somehow felt deep within myself that I would marry her. I tried to momentarily dismiss the feeling, but it stayed with me throughout the week. Then, after the next class, I accosted her and asked her to join me for coffee and the rest is history.

I could easily write a book about our relationship and how it developed, but that is not the grand purpose of this book, as you will soon see. What you need to understand at this time is that we fell as much in love as is possible for us mortals to do. Think of your favorite love story, and multiply the emotions times ten and that was us. I felt fulfilled and secure for the first time in my life. It seemed that nothing could go wrong.

Until that fateful day...

I remember the day very clearly. I was in the family room reading a book and Elizabeth was fixing us an evening cup of coffee. The moment came as she was walking down the stairs, bringing my cup to me just as she did each evening.

But this time she fell down the stairs, knocking herself into a semiconscious state.

I ran to her, holding her as she revived and lifted her up.

"I can't stand up," she said.

"Sure you can, sweetheart. You just had a bad fall. Just rest a minute."

She rested a while, but still could not stand.

I rushed her to the emergency room. The doctor told me that they needed to run some tests.

Finally, after three weeks of testing, we discovered the problem. She had multiple sclerosis. My heart sunk as I asked the doctor how serious it was and how long she had to live.

"It varies with each person," he said. "Some go quickly, other hang on for years. I must warn you, however, that it appears the disease is progressing quickly with your wife. I would guess that she has somewhere around a year or two to live. You never know, though. She could linger on for ten years or more, but you must prepare yourself for the worst.

"Right now, she can't even walk. She may get some of her strength back, but then will probably lose it again. It's like moving one step forward and two steps back. Sooner or later, the disease gets you.

"The problem now is with her legs, but later it will be other parts of her body. Near the end, she'll probably lose her sight, and even her ability to speak and feed herself. I hope you love her a lot, because she's going to be very dependent on you."

"I'll be there for her," I said with tears in my eyes. "We'll do whatever it takes. Somehow we'll beat it."

"Just be prepared to deal with it. Don't get your hopes too high. It can be frustrating for both of you. Just be thankful that you have a year or two of sharing left. Many people I deal with have their loved ones taken suddenly and wish they could just have five minutes with them to say good-bye. You have time for a long, loving good-bye. I would advise you to make the most of it."

"I appreciate the advice, doctor, but don't take our hope away. There has to be a way to beat this."

"I understand your feelings," he said patiently. "But my experience tells me that I must do what I can to prepare you for the real world."

"I see your point," I said, "but I refuse to give up hope no matter what the odds are. I've always believed that all things are possible."

"I'm here to help however I can," the doctor said quietly.

The next year was rather discouraging. The doctor was proven to be entirely correct. Elizabeth got one step better and two steps worse. She got some strength back in her legs, but later lost all strength in her legs plus some of her vision. During that year we tried every medicine, every health food, every herb that had any chance of working, but her health seemed unrelated to anything that we tried. She finally reached a point where she was confined to a wheelchair and was barely able to feed herself because of her shaking limbs. Fortunately, she still had her mental capacities, but the doctor warned me that even those could go next. At this point, he told me that she seemed to be deteriorating and could go fairly quickly. She could go in six months or possibly linger on for years.

One night, as we lay in bed together and I held her in my arms, I thought of the years we

spent together. In my mind's eye I visualized her being vibrant as she was when we first met and then visualized her as she was now. I felt very sad. Why did this have to happen to the most wonderful woman I have ever met?

As I contemplated the situation, I said a prayer from deep within my heart.

"Why, God, does something like this happen to such a wonderful person as my wife? You would think you'd have to be a serial killer to deserve such punishment, but Elizabeth has never hurt anyone. Maybe some very minor things, but nothing to deserve such pain. If this is a punishment, it seems unjust and out-of-proportion.

"Even ministers these days are saying that life is unfair. If You are truly God, then one of Your main attributes should be fairness and justice. Where is fairness and justice in this situation? I ask not for myself, but for the woman I love. Surely there is an answer, somewhere, somehow, someplace ..."

This was a sort of basic prayer I thought within my heart several times daily ever since Elizabeth became ill. But on this particular night I said it with great emotion and cried myself to sleep with my thoughts.

That night I fell into a very sound, profound yet peaceful sleep. Then in the morning something quite unusual happened. I was at that point where you are between being asleep and awake. I know there have been several times when I have been at this stage that I was not sure if I was dreaming or not. This was one of those times.

This was the first time I heard the bells: gentle, penetrating, familiar, soft, yet very real bells.

At the time I heard them I was sure I was hearing real bells, perhaps ringing somewhere outside my bedroom window, but then I roused myself and rose up in my bed and the sound disappeared. I was not sure if I really heard them or if I was dreaming. Then I settled back into sleep and I heard the bells again. I roused myself and the sound again went silent. Then this process was repeated for a third time.

One experience like this I could have shrugged off, but a three-time repetition got me thinking that there was some significance here.

Then the next morning I heard the bells again.

And again the next morning.

Finally, I felt I had to mention it to Elizabeth. I told her the story and she said: "The only thing I can suggest is that it must be some type of message or sign intended just for you. I was sleeping next to you each of these past three mornings and I heard no bells."

"But if it is some type of message intended just for me, what good is it? I've thought and thought about it and I can't see any hidden meaning in bells ringing."

"Have you heard bells in real life that sound anything like these?" she asked.

"Well, they sound something like Christmas bells and they seem very familiar. Christmas is just a few weeks away. Could it have something to do with that?"

"Who knows?" she shrugged. "Maybe you're just thinking too much about Christmas. How about taking your mind off the bells by doing some grocery shopping for me? Get a pen and I'll give you the list."

CHAPTER TWO

The Mystery of the Bells

Since Elizabeth became ill I had done most of our shopping and must admit I got pretty good at it. I clipped coupons, checked for sales, compared store brands with national brands and much more. I got to the point where I somewhat enjoyed shopping and would probably still do most of it even if Elizabeth was healed.

As I drove up to Albertsons supermarket at 16th and State Street in our fair city of Boise, Idaho, I noticed for the first time that Christmas decorations were up and Christmas trees were for sale. I wasn't sure if decorations had just been put up or if this was just the first time I had noticed. It seemed like Thanksgiving had just ended, and it was too early to even think about Christmas. I felt a little like Scrooge as I got out of my car thinking about all the presents I had to buy compared to how few I would receive. I remember thinking as I entered the building how it would be a lot better if Christmas came once every five years.

Then, as I opened the door, all thoughts left me ... I heard the bells! They were the same bells I heard in my quasi-sleep, but this time I was sure that I was awake and the bells were real. I retreated back out the door and turned around. To my surprise I saw a bell ringer for the Salvation Army!

I was amazed that I had not connected the bells I heard in my sleep with those of the bell ringers. Somehow I did not remember them sounding like the bells I heard in front of me. The sound of these bells seemed to be so pure, sweet and almost holy. Perhaps I had just never listened to them before.

The bell ringer was a good-looking older man around sixty years of age, clean shaven with dark hair and simply dressed. Some bell ringers look like they could have been taken from a homeless shelter, but this one did not give that impression. He was a far cry from looking like an executive, but he also gave the impression that he would never be down and out. If I were to guess his vocation by his looks I would guess that he was a high school teacher or maybe even a real estate salesman like myself.

After I had looked his direction for about thirty seconds, he caught my eye and said: "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," I said as I retreated back into the store in a state of bewilderment.

As I went through my wife's shopping list I tried to find meaning in it all.

I heard bells on my awakening three days in a row and now I heard the same bells here at the grocery store by a Salvation Army bell ringer. At the time I heard the bells I was thinking like Scrooge about Christmas. Maybe I was being taught some supernatural lesson like in the movie. Perhaps I was being told that I should donate to the poor.

Financially, I was feeling like one of the poor myself, for I had gone heavily into debt and had no extra money because of Elizabeth's illness. Nevertheless, perhaps I was supposed to take my mind off my own concerns and think of others who have problems.

By the time I finished shopping, I decided to give the bell ringer a donation on the way out. It wasn't much, but maybe it was what I was supposed to do.

As I passed by the pot, I dropped in a five dollar bill. The bell ringer looked me in the eye and said: "Thanks. Have a Merry Christmas."

There was something about the look in his eyes that disturbed me. He seemed to have large eyes with large pupils and the look about him reinforced the idea of a teacher in my mind. There was something about his look that made me feel that he knew things that I did not. I had never felt that way about a stranger before, but that is how I felt about this man.

I got in the car and started driving home and passed another store that appeared to have a

bell ringer. I parked again and walked toward the bells and stopped in front of the man. I was stunned. These bells sounded similar, but not exactly like the first bell ringer or those heard in my dream state.

This piqued my curiosity, so for the next couple of hours I drove all over town and visited every bell ringer I could find. Each one of them sounded similar to the second bell ringer. Only the first bell ringer created a sound like the bells that I remember hearing in my sleep. Then I began to wonder if my mind was playing tricks on me. Maybe I just thought those first bells were like those in my dream state.

Elizabeth was upset that I was gone so long shopping; she had worried about me. She quickly calmed down as I explained to her what happened. I ended with, "Maybe it was just my imagination that the first bell ringer sounded like the ones that I heard on waking."

"And maybe it wasn't," she said. "Maybe it is a sign of some kind. Perhaps you were just supposed to remember the spirit of Christmas and give what you can afford and that's all there is to it."

"Maybe," I said, not convinced she was right.

I felt unsettled about any explanation we could arrive at about the bells. The next morning, as I lay between wakefulness and sleep, I became even more unsettled as I heard the bells again. This time I heard them resonate for a few seconds after I was fully awake. I knew now that the bells were not from my imagination. I also knew that the message of the bells was not resolved.

After I shared this with Elizabeth she said: "Your guess that you are supposed to have a more giving spirit may be correct. The last time you gave five dollars. That's probably about all we have given to the poor all year. Think about it. That's not much of a donation. I know we don't have much money, but we can do better than that."

"You're right," I said. "This time I will give fifty dollars. That's about all we can afford, but we can give that much."

I took off again to Albertsons at 16th Street and approached the bell ringer again. Again I heard the beautiful sound. They were definitely the same sound that I heard on waking. As I started to appreciate their beauty, I felt my whole body and soul resonate to the vibration of the bells. Somehow they made me feel whole, peaceful, strong, connected.

It's difficult to give you the picture, but the effect was definite and strong. I put two twenties and a ten in the pot, looked at the bell ringer and said, "Merry Christmas."

"Your gift is greatly appreciated," said the bell ringer.

I started walking backward, catching the eye of the bell ringer for a few seconds before we disconnected. Again, I felt unsettled as I drove home.

After I got home, I told Elizabeth: "Giving the fifty dollars was a good thing to do, but I don't think it was the answer. Suppose that the answer has nothing to do with the bells, Christmas, the spirit of giving, but something else?"

"What else could it be?" she asked.

"Maybe it's got something to do with the man -- the bell ringer."

"You said you felt he was different?"

"Yes. He was different. Maybe he knows something."

"If you hear the bells again then maybe you should check him out," she said.