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CHAPTER I

shame, blame, and the  
failure of love

*We who have experienced it know that romantic love is a fall-in,  
crawl-out proposition.*

MARTHA BECK

Much of the horror of a breakup is the insult to our expectations of how this story was *supposed* to unfold versus how it actually *did*. Falling short of the happily-ever-after goal to which we all aspire is considered such a terrible failure, it may feel as though you'll never recover. Not from the shock of it, not from the sorrow of it, and certainly not from the shame of it.

As saddened as I was by the loss of my marriage, I must confess I was equally mortified by the loss of face I was about to endure by making it public. We have a collective story about how romantic love is supposed to work, and it's a pretty straightforward one. It goes something like this: If it lasts, then it's real. If it doesn't, then it wasn't. Either that, or someone screwed it up really badly.