



# And All The Queen's Men: A Memoir

*Dale Engelson Sessa*

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AND ALL THE QUEEN'S MEN is a frank, poignant reading experience, an ambitious memoir that explores the psychological profile of a woman throughout her life with husbands, boyfriends and acquaintances. It is a story of promiscuity and forgiveness, of the secrets she keeps and the situations in which she finds herself over the course of five decades. Sessa speaks to the hearts and lives of women of all ages in conflict with a controlling father. She puts a face to women in relationships that have become scarred by sexual domination or verbal abuse or to those smothered by a soundless partner who refuses to communicate, all of which she has experienced and chosen to share in her debut book. For this author, there has always been the muddling chasm between anticipation and reality in all of her relationships. She falls in love serially with the prospect of a man rather than with the man himself, holding on for long stretches of time waiting for these men to fulfill her expectations. However, each liaison is more complicated than the one that came before. As the author writes, "every step forward begins with a foot firmly planted in the past." She returns to her roots to investigate what went so terribly wrong. Inside, her girlhood feels so near, but when she looks around, it sometimes seems to belong to a vanished world. Today, is it even possible to conceptualize the true saga of a sixteen-year-old, bound by her autocratic father to prepare to marry the 24 year old, handsome man he has found for her because his bank account also satisfies the father's definition of "handsome?" He successfully encourages her to marry the man of his choice and the childhood years of living in the darkness with her father serve as training for living unhappily as a bamboozled, virgin, teenage bride. Thus begins a lifetime of misery and grudges against a myriad of male relationships that are not what they seem. This young woman is so influenced by her father's beliefs and world-view that it takes many years to discover her real self amid the men in her life. During this first tedious marriage, which produces two children, Sessa's anguished yet tender love affair with the family physician becomes a convenient vehicle for her true introduction to sexuality. A subsequent and dramatic marriage to a popular medical doctor dispenses another life of extravagance, complete with a spirited horseracing enterprise and jet-set travel, but there is a huge price to pay for this husband's sexual bullying. Sessa trades an enviable home life with her two children and husband for the teeming drug and sexual revolution in New York City where she is torn between love and sex and her real passion, an international television production career where she is the first woman to own such a company in the 70's. The ambivalence and complications of career and home life are provided by the story's middle, a convergent, three-year relationship with an adoring Canadian ad man, who provides the meat in a hefty, non-fiction sandwich. Following a second divorce from Sessa's physician husband, there are stolen moments and other men to come, including fascinating and urgent relationships with a Paramount Pictures' TV entertainment icon that she physically loses to lung cancer and an art curator whom she emotionally loses to a fatal car accident. Throughout the many liaisons to come, there is a constant ruffling in the air of erotic possibility. Instead of offering generalities and seeking to blur the more painful elements of a life that most authors would avoid revealing, Sessa shines a beacon of light on her own egregious behavior and shameful patterns. There are passages about the lack of important nurturing and being nurtured with a litany of men, most of whom disappoint her due to a lack of passion and intimacy. Others wring her dry before she discards them and vows never to let it happen again, although in very emotional, often disturbing exchanges, it does--repeatedly. Scandalous and seductive and yet often humorous, this insightful memoir is a true account of this author's deeply personal life. The book also presents an engrossing picture of time and place and how our eras can try, but not necessarily succeed, in defining us. While stories have been told in this vein before, AND ALL THE QUEEN'S MEN widens the road to affairs of the heart with brazen self-examination. The author's journey vividly portrays the often-raw sexual scenes from her stormy and wild romances, as she is torn trying to find balance between the woman she was bred to be and the woman she finds she is. Alone, driven

and searching for decades, Sessa ultimately emerges as an emotionally empowered woman who reaches for an enduring relationship, one that sets her free from the Pamplona-type chaos that heretofore has consumed her life. Amid all the shadows she has forged in previous relationships, this new awareness illuminates and forgives the restless ghosts of her past.

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