

After a divorce, this writer dedicated a year to seeking out new, commitment-free lovers

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Jancee Dunn • May 31



(iStock/Lily illustration)

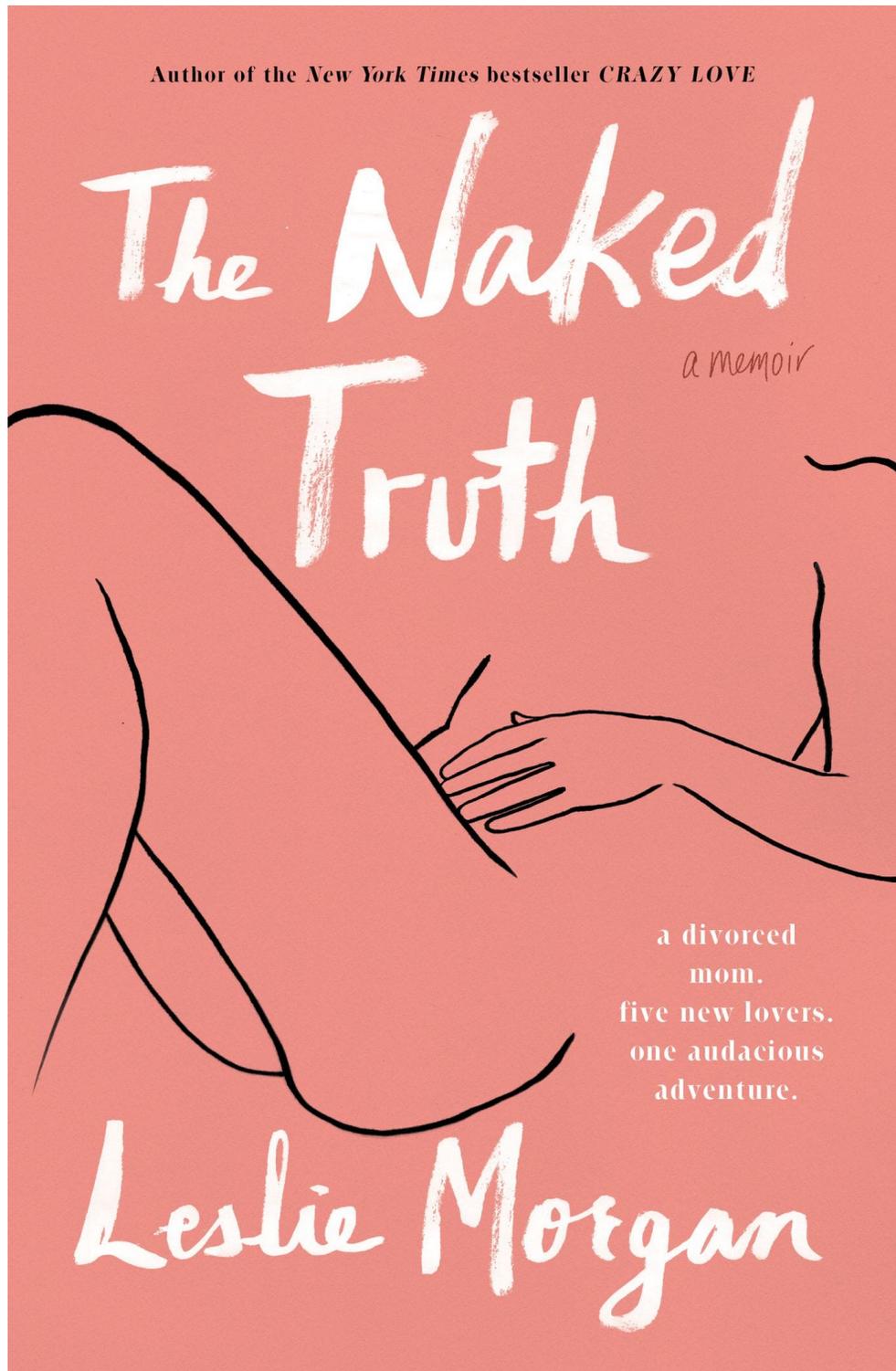
Divorced after a 20-year marriage and two children, Leslie Morgan approached her 50th birthday with a daring plan: She would devote a year to seeking out new lovers — five, to be exact. With that number, she reasoned, “I’ll have enough men in my life that I won’t get too attached to one.” After that, she’d figure out a more long-term strategy.

Yes, “The Naked Truth” screams “stunt book.” But aren’t you just a little intrigued?

It will give you some idea of my erotic life that when I heard the memoir’s premise, my first thoughts concerned logistics, like time and energy. As a fellow busy midlifer, I wondered: How does she do it? The answers: her teenage children spend weekends at her ex-husband’s and summers at sleepaway camp; her constantly-buzzing phone, meanwhile, delivering texts from crushes, kept her energy spiked.

Sex-themed books for the 50-and-up are often depressingly medical, focusing on erectile dysfunction or menopause. Morgan, a former Washington Post columnist, doesn’t go there. “The Naked Truth” is all about the giddy fun of getting back in the sack. It’s a modern-day update to the classic Helen Gurley Brown book “Sex and The Single Girl” — call it “Sex and the Soccer Mom.”

The story opens as her (second) marriage, to chilly, distant lawyer Marty, with whom she had not had sex in three years, is ending. Marty refuses to kiss her on the lips and is given to frosty pronouncements like I don't like the way you hug me. When they finally decide to split, he says calmly, "I'll start working on your severance." (He claimed that he meant "settlement.")



(Simon & Schuster)

After a mourning period, Morgan starts wearing lipstick and short skirts again, swaps her dented black minivan for a white sports car, and cooks up the scheme with a friend (and possibly a book editor) to take those five no-commitment lovers for a year. After two bad marriages, she admits, “I wanted men to desire me. I wanted to feel good about myself, attractive and valued.” What she soon finds is that love in midlife isn’t necessarily, as the song goes, “more comfortable ... with both feet on the ground.” Morgan quickly becomes enmeshed in more drama than a lovelorn high school senior.

Some newly divorced friends of mine who have not dated since the Clinton administration have emerged, blinking and bewildered, to find it’s now conducted largely via apps, some achingly specialized (Bristlr: “connecting those with beards to those who want to stroke beards”).

But Morgan is an advocate of old school in-person pickups. For her, they still work reliably: striking up conversations, asking for phone numbers, being approachable and friendly (“the sexiest quality on earth”). She has especially good luck at airports: “stocked with men like trout in a pond, mostly traveling solo, easy to approach with casual questions about destinations and delays.”

In line for a flight, she accidentally spills coffee on a handsome younger man named Dylan. He “smelled good, like wood chips mixed with clean laundry hanging in the sun to dry.” Dylan is sexy, unthreatening and separated from his wife.

They eventually rendezvous in a hotel room, and her three-year slump is broken. Morgan is overjoyed to be back in action.

“It was like being given a bite of a sandwich, and realizing I’d been starving.”

Sex is described in a cheerful, straightforward manner. Morgan only briefly explores why older women, still vital and sexual, tend to become invisible. Instead, she simply tells her story. It’s chatty and wry and funny, a Nancy Meyers movie in print, complete with an aspirational shingled beach house in Southampton.

More men follow: a tattooed guy she meets in yoga class (her pickup line a simple “good practice, right?”), a long-haired surfer who was the project manager on her house remodel, a buff Special Ops Marine from North Carolina heading for week-long training whom she meets at — yes — the airport.

Some men eventually ghost her, which prompts a shrug. “This adventure, no matter where it led, was better than the slow death of being with a man who didn’t love me, or even like me,” she writes.

The book's lively pace slows when Morgan hooks up with Jake, a leather-jacketed former high school boyfriend who's a dead ringer for Joe Strummer of The Clash. The never-married Jake, a documentary filmmaker, bristles with more red flags than a Chinese government rally — Jake is rabidly jealous, tends to vanish for long periods of time and has a model girlfriend who never quite disappears. He dumps his elderly, incontinent dog with Morgan when he travels.



The author Leslie Morgan. (Joy Asico)

But the sex is electric — and soon the jaunty, devil-may-care, men-are-everywhere Morgan (that I prefer) is constantly sobbing and checking her phone. I won't give away the ending, but if you think Jake suddenly gets introspective and realizes he's a sulky man-boy who loves the chase, you might need the date-coaching services Morgan offers on her website.

No matter. Morgan, ever optimistic, revels in her newfound sexual mojo.

“Sometimes, happily ever after doesn’t happen,” she writes.
“But happier than ever before can, and does.”

Jancee Dunn’s latest book is “How Not To Hate Your Husband After Kids.”

THE NAKED TRUTH

A Memoir

By Leslie Morgan

Simon & Schuster. 272 pp. \$26

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