



*Tell Me
the Truth
About Love*

Mary Cable





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To Harriet Wasserman with love and appreciation

Will it come like a change in the weather? Will its greeting be
courteous or rough? Will it alter my life altogether? O tell me
the truth about love.

- W. H. Auden



A headline, "Smithson Family Feud," in the Santa Fe *New Mexican* one May morning several years ago, led to the changing of my entire life. At the time I did not foresee any changes, even small ones. I had been Mrs. Osgood Decatur Smithson IV for eighteen years, and, as my mother would have put it, I was well-fixed. Whenever I felt depressed, as I often did, I tried hard to remind myself that I lived in a beautiful part of the world, surrounded by chili fields and peace and quiet, and that I really had no problems except an oppressive mother-in-law; into each life some rain must fall.

On that landmark morning, Oz left for his bank directly after breakfast, as usual. He had a routine that never varied: up at seven, push-ups, shower, dressing; bran cereal, wheat germ, skim milk, coffee, and a handful of vitamin pills; yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* propped against the fern on the breakfast table. At twenty to eight he was out the door, so that he would arrive at his bank in Santa Fe close to an hour before its doors were opened.

I usually puttered around the kitchen, still in my bathrobe, until he said, "I'm leaving, Alex." Then I said, "Bye, Oz." A kiss was not part of this procedure, and I was glad about that. I had seen other husbands and wives go through a kiss-goodbye ritual, and it didn't necessarily mean love; nor did Oz's inert "I'm leaving" mean nonlove. I believed he loved me, and I considered him a nice man.

That morning, as soon as he had driven away, I wandered down the drive to the mailbox in order to pick up the morning paper. We lived in the country outside Santa Fe, where you look at mountains in almost every direction. That day, the highest peaks still had snow on them, but here in the valley it was full spring. The early morning air was drenched with sunlight, and every little pebble in the road had an important ink-black shadow. A bull snake crossed in front of me, leaving an elegant curved track in the dust. When I first came to live in New Mexico, snakes made me scream. Now I had learned to admire their grace and their purposeful glide. They seemed to know where they were going, and that was a quality I envied.

Back at the house, I poured a second cup of coffee and returned to bed with it and the paper.