

## MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

*I really don't know how to evaluate this piece. A discussion of divorce might include sense of failure, sadness, concern for the future, etc. In this piece I read only sarcastic ridicule and exasperation. I have a difficult time siding with the narrator.*

*From what I understand, a memoir is a chronicle of someone's life. It includes all the dirty laundry in that person's life, but in the telling, it follows all the literary rules: Interesting characters, difficult situations that must be overcome, action that leads to a conclusion.*

*At this point in the story, I'm hearing a critical analysis of the marriage that sounds like a prosecutor proving a point. The marriage is in trouble and here are the reasons: the guy is a hopeless jerk who has no redeeming features.*

*I don't know if this kind of analysis, where one side is totally correct and the other side is hopelessly foolish, will make for interesting reading. There has to be some kind of balance where the reader can commiserate and understand that these two people tried and, because of conflicts beyond their control, will divorce. I wonder if the rest of the story continues in the same vein.*

*If the approach here is trying to use hyperbola to create a comic, sit-com environment, there might be a chance.*

*Good luck with this aggressive story.*

*Dave*

**Summary: This is a middle excerpt from my hybrid memoir/self-help guide on love and relationships (Wow. The masters have tried and failed to adequately define and write a guide to love and relationships. Good luck.) (Title: Love's Puzzle). Each chapter combines personal experience, relationship and neuroscience research, and anecdotes. This chapter is about the final collapse of my second rebound marriage. Dating comes next.**

Chapter Title: Forced: Mismatches and Missed Matches

He was chasing invisible opponents up mountains; I was chasing invisible demons inside my head. "Dammit, 'DaKing' just took it away from me!"

"Who's the king?"

"Some guy out of (Y)yarmouth."

"Oh, you mean a biker. He took what away from you?"

"Cyclist... Erin. King of the mountain."

"Oh." I tried to keep my rolling eyes from rolling.

*Self indulgent  
Sarcastic  
Ridicule*

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His journey took him to the edge of his capability and to the edge of my patience, racing up steeper and steeper hill climbs, trying to capture 'king of the mountain' status on the strava app on his phone. *(I was lost as to where we were and who was speaking until this point. The comment about the app focused and explained the action.)* All you had to do was start the app as you began the climb. *(Are you describing an actual climb or a video game?)* Your speed was compared to the men and women that had used the same app on the same stretch of hill before you. I imagine him whipping the phone out of his back pocket the second he got to the top. *(The top of what? You're assuming we know where we are.)* Did I do it? Am I king of the hill? Yes! A ding alerting him of his demotion often arrived during the ride home. "DaKing is now King of the Mountain". At his best, or his worst, mainly according to me, he would dash back within hours to the same spot, sometimes again and again, to reclaim his fame. *(I really don't know what happened in this section.)*

\*\*\*

Words not meant for me were seeping through the hundred year old floorboards of the dining room.

"Fuck!" *What now?* I leaned my head into the stairwell leading to the basement.

"Steve, you okay?"

"I can't get this fuckin' chain on"

"Do you need help?"

"Erin..." Exasperated, he said, "No, of course, I don't fucking need help."

*Okay, done.* I am so glad my time listening to him curse in the basement is coming to a close. I had announced my intentions for divorce just two weeks earlier. There were so many items that were affixed with only curse words in that basement.

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I agreed to his plea. I would sit down with a relationship therapist and discuss the undiscussable one more time. They were both looking at me. ~~They~~, Steve and the therapist, wanted to know my 'intentions'. They probably meant about divorcing the guy sitting next to me. However, I stuck to other more logistical topics, as long as I could.

"I get it. I know this race is really important to you, Steve. Obviously, the timing sucks. But, you have no other options and I have no other choice. So, I'll bring you down the mountain." The mountain on the divorce limbo agenda, Mount Washington, is only open to cyclists twice a year, once for a practice run and once for the real deal, a mountain hill climb race. The pre-divorce plan was to stay in Steve's sister's condo in North Conway with my three children, and for all of us non-racers to wait at the finish line on the top of the mountain to drive Steve back down. The mountain is too steep and too dangerous to descend by bike. The last part is challenging even to walk up at a 22% grade. The race is known as one of the toughest climbs in the world for cyclists. You are banned from coming down alone. *In the post-divorce announcement flurry, he couldn't find anyone else to escort him to the bottom. (That's his only concern? Or yours?)*

\*\*\*

Hours before the race was to start, I bolted up from the musty beige couch in the mountain side condo. It was 3 a.m. Anger seeped in. *What am I doing here again?* My purposely calm repose was broken. The light coming up the basement stairs had been piercing through my eyelids for hours, and I couldn't take it anymore. One might think of turning off the light. I didn't. I thought that it must have been left on intentionally by Steve. I was trying to stay out of his way and let him prepare for the big race. I was trying to be nice, just enough to

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maintain some of my tiny fortune and a bit of my dignity. He and I were to enter serious divorce negotiations directly after this trip and I didn't want to lose. *(At this point, neither seem too concerned about the break up. He was race oriented. She concerned about losing the negotiations.)*

I surmised that Steve was sleeping in the basement, mentally and physically preparing himself for the hill climb up Mount Washington. As it turns out, he wasn't in the basement at all. He was on the second floor above me. I had no way of knowing. By that point, we communicated only to avoid communicating.

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Steve rushed to pull his bags together. We were aiming for a 6 a.m. arrival. We pulled into the base parking lot just before 7 a.m. after a tense car ride, all eyes straight ahead, arms crossed and no talking. The lot was full of cars but surprisingly empty of riders. I pulled over to the side of the aisle to let him go. Steve pulled his bike off the top of the car.

"Steve... So I'll meet you at the top."

"Yeah." He turned, ready to walk away.

"Steve, how will I know where to find you?"

"Erin, just pull over to the side right below the summit. It's not a big deal. Everyone does it."

"But..".

"Erin. I don't have time for this."

"Fine." Eyes now released from the prohibition to roll, rolled away.

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He was in panic mode. He rolled his bike away from the car. Head down, absorbed in his preparation. *This is what I have to do. This is not where I want to be. Suck it up, Erin. We are almost at the end.*

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I stared at the shadows of the riders that invaded the pavement as they rode past on the narrow winding road at the top of the mountain.

“Where is he?” I muttered to myself.

I held my hand up to shade my eyes from the sun to search for him. The cyclists snaking their way up the mountain pass had slowed to a trickle. I turned my attention to my 10-year old triplets hopping from rock to rock atop a leveled area off the road where our car was jammed to one side, precariously balanced over as far as I felt I could go. *Steve said we would be okay up here. (First mention of children in the mix. Where were they the night before?)*

“Be careful guys”, I aimed at the triplets. They were unconcerned. He was not their father. He was another one of their mother’s *(My?)* dubious plans.

Each time a cyclist came into my peripheral vision, I searched their bike jerseys for the skull that should be emblazoned on their chests. The small group of lead racers had passed me first, next a larger group of unbelievably strong cyclists, then a steady stream of terribly strong cyclists continued for a while. I went back to the car to check the time again. My phone was off; it was being saved for emergencies. It had been almost an hour since the time when he estimated he would ride past me in a triumphant show of force. *(More sarcastic ridicule)*

\*\*\*

Unseen to me, everything had come screeching to a halt at the bottom of the mountain minutes after I drove away. *(Not everything. Only him. Others rolled up the road.)* His shiny new

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chain was stuck. The week before the practice run, which was the same as the week after I asked for a divorce, he searched for equipment to strengthen his bike to ensure the imagined victory in his head. His modus operandi when things went awry was to order and spend in order to fill himself up. After his first divorce, he spent thousands of dollars souping (*up?*) his low end red Saab convertible with so many bells and whistles that it was harder and pricier to fix. Shiny silver tailpipe, equally shiny rims and the piece de resistance: a computer chip to turbo-ize your ride (okay, going turbo on an open highway was actually pretty fun). Although he made it faster and potentially cooler, he ended up having to sell it for far less than the blue book value.

In his compulsion to have the best of the best for the race and in light of the second divorce looming large, he ordered a sleek bike chain. The night before the race, he forced the chain on. In his haste to get to the top of the mountain, his very first move on the bike was to slam his right foot against the clip, offsetting the chain, now stuck. With bike mechanics standing all around to assist him, he proceeded to shove and rail against the chain until it snapped. With no backup, he was finished before he began.

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This was, no doubt, a heartbreaking reminder of his failure four years earlier on the same mountain climb. He couldn't cycle to the top that time either. He wasn't strong enough. Race over, he drove, dejected, to the coffee house in town where he doused his disappointment with available women on Match.com. That was the precise moment I got caught in his web, when I accepted his invitation to meet.

"Hey Erin. I like your profile. Wine sometime?"

"Hi Steve. Your profile was hysterical. Thanks for writing! Sure, wine sounds great. When? Where?"

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“Erin, How about the Wine Bar on Wharf Street. Tuesday, 7pm. And, I promise you, I’m a good guy, not an ax murderer or anything!

Birth and death on the mountain exactly four years apart. Match.com was the online stomping ground for hookups, desperate divorcees, and willing men and women. Mainly, they were willing to say anything to get a date, anything to provide themselves with validation of their existence, and confirmation that they will be whole again given adequate time.

\* \* \*

Susan

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Which is title?

Chapter Title: Forced: Mismatches and Missed Matches

confsing - I thought it was a nickname or a funny way to say something

He Steve was chasing invisible opponents up mountains; I was chasing invisible demons inside my head. "Dammit 'DaKing' just took it away from me!" he said.

Comment [s1]: Where is this page taking place I have no idea. Are you outside with him somewhere as he's about to go up a hill?  
Comment [s2]: Your ex-husband? Start with his name here.

"Who's the king?"

"Some guy out of yarmouth Yarmouth."

"Oh, you mean a biker. He took what away from you?"

"Cyclist... Erin. King of the mountain."

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His Steve's journey took him to the edge of his capability and to the edge of my patience, racing up steeper and steeper hill climbs, trying to capture 'king of the mountain' status on the strava app on his phone. All you had to do was start the app as you began the climb. Your speed was compared to the men and women that had used the same app on the same stretch of hill before you. I imagine him whipping the phone out of his back pocket the second he got to the top. Did I do it? Am I king of the hill? Yes! A ding alerting him of his demotion often arrived during the ride home. "DaKing is now King of the Mountain". At his best, or his worst, mainly according to me, he would dash back within hours to the same spot, sometimes again and again, to reclaim his fame.

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Comment [s3]: Not sure about wording it like this. Perhaps take the "you" out. Ex: Every time he (need name of husband here) biked a hill, he activated the app, and his speed was compared to...etc etc

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Words not meant for me were seeping through the ~~hundred-hundred-year-year-old~~ floorboards of the dining room.

"Fuck!"

*What now?* I leaned my head into the stairwell leading to the basement.

"Steve, you okay?"

"I can't get this fuckin' chain on"

"Do you need help?"

"Erin..." Exasperated, he said, "No, of course, I don't fucking need help."

*Okay, done.* I am so glad my time listening to him curse in the basement is coming to a close. ~~I had announced my intentions for divorce just two weeks earlier.~~ There were so many items that were affixed with only curse words in that basement.

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I agreed to his plea. ~~I would sit down to meet~~ with a relationship therapist and discuss the undiscussable one more time. They were both looking at me. They ~~—~~, Steve and the therapist ~~—~~, wanted to know my 'intentions'. They probably meant about divorcing the guy sitting next to me. However, I stuck to other more logistical topics, as long as I could.

"I get it. I know this race is really important to you, Steve. Obviously, the timing sucks.

But, you have no other options and I have no other choice. So, I'll bring you down the mountain." The mountain on the divorce limbo agenda, Mount Washington, is only open to cyclists twice a year, once for a practice run and once for the real deal, a mountain hill climb race. The pre-divorce plan ~~was had been~~ to stay in Steve's sister's condo in North Conway with my three children, and for all of us non-racers to wait at the finish line on the top of the mountain to drive Steve back down. The mountain is too steep and too dangerous to descend by bike. The

Comment [s4]: Again, need to know where you were in the previous scene.

Comment [s5]: Just a note—the quotation mark look strange. Maybe you use a different word processor than I do and they appear differently in Microsoft Word.

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Comment [s6]: Maybe you do this elsewhere, but this sentence is a pivotal scene.

Comment [s7]: ?

Comment [s8]: Again, if the scene where you told him that you wanted to get divorced is played out, then this would flow naturally from that scene

Comment [s9]: Again, another pivotal scene. What did the psychiatrist say? What did Steve say? think you should open this into a complete scene, just as you would in fiction.

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last part is challenging even to walk up at a 22% <sup>degree</sup> grade. The race is known as one of the toughest climbs in the world for cyclists. You are banned from coming down alone. In the post-divorce announcement flurry, he couldn't find anyone else to escort him to the bottom.

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"Steve...So, I'll meet you at the top."

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Comment [s10]: Only 1 space between all sentences

Comment [s11]: Okay-it looks like you've been jumping around from scene to scene, but not in chronological order. I think you need to start from the scene where you asked for the divorce, then to the therapist scene, then onto the rest. However it played out-go in that order. It's hard to keep up when you're jumping back and forth.

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Comment [s12]: Always type small letters and then highlight, go to Font, and choose "Small caps"

Comment [s13]: Do the kids know what's going on? How old are they? Kids are a huge part of divorce.

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Formatted: Highlight

Comment [s14]: Were you standing outside watching him?

main character → → hard to feel empathy  
- doesn't seem to feel anything but anger  
- no mention of her kids or how anything affects them → hard to feel for her when they aren't playing a role

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"Yeah." He turned, ready to walk away.

"~~H~~Steve, how will I know where to find you?"

"Erin, just pull over to the side right below the summit. It's not a big deal. Everyone does it."

"But..".

"Erin. I don't have time for this."

"Fine." Eyes now released from the prohibition to roll, rolled away.

He was in panic mode. He rolled his bike away from the car. Head down, absorbed in his preparation. *This is what I have to do. This is not where I want to be. Suck it up, Erin. We are almost at the end.*

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I stared at the shadows of the riders ~~that invaded the pavement~~ as they rode past on the narrow winding road at the top of the mountain.

"Where is he?" I muttered to myself.

I held my hand up to shade my eyes from the sun ~~to search for him~~. The cyclists snaking their way up the mountain pass had slowed to a trickle. I turned my attention to my ~~10-year-year~~-old triplets, hopping from rock to rock atop a leveled area off the road where our car was jammed to one side, precariously balanced over as far as ~~I felt~~ I could go. *Steve said we would be okay up here.*

"Be careful guys," I ~~aimed said to my children at the triplets~~. They were unconcerned. He was not their father. He was another one of their mother's dubious plans.

Each time a cyclist came into my peripheral vision, I searched their bike jerseys for the skull that ~~should be emblazoned on their chests~~ was emblazoned on Steve's t-shirt. The small

Comment [s15]: How are the kids reacting to this?

Comment [s16]: Break this sentence into two too many prepositional phrases

Comment [s17]: implied

Comment [s18]: can't quite picture this

Comment [s19]: How long were you married to Steve? As a general rule, children are always in need of stability and would have some concern, even if they were just to wonder where they were going to live or if you were going to get back together with your first husband, or if they would have to change schools, etc. Everything revolves around them, in their worlds. Did they not like Steve? Etc? There's no interaction between you and your kids; they would be an integral part of the story. Were you worried about them? Were you worried about how the divorce would affect them? Where's their father?

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group of lead racers had passed me first, ~~next followed by~~ a larger group of unbelievably strong cyclists, then a steady stream of terribly strong cyclists continued for a while. I went back to the car to check the time again. My phone was off; it was being saved for emergencies. It had been almost an hour since the time when he estimated he would ride past me in a triumphant show of force.

Comment [s20]: How do you know that?

Comment [s21]: ?

\*\*\*

Unseen to me, everything had come screeching to a halt at the bottom of the mountain minutes after I drove away. His shiny new chain ~~was stuck~~ had jammed. The week before the practice run, ~~which was~~ the same as the week ~~after~~ I asked for a divorce, he ~~had~~ searched for equipment to strengthen his bike to ensure ~~the his~~ imagined victory ~~in his head~~. His modus operandi when things went awry was to order and spend ~~in order to~~ fill himself up. After his first divorce, he ~~had~~ spent thousands of dollars souping his low end red Saab convertible with so many bells and whistles that it ~~was had become~~ harder and pricier to fix. Shiny silver tailpipe, equally shiny rims and the piece de resistance: a computer chip to turbo-ize ~~your his~~ ride (~~okay~~ Admittedly, going turbo on an open highway was actually pretty fun). Although he'd made it faster and potentially cooler, he ended up having to sell it for far less than the blue book value.

Comment [s22]: Something like that

Comment [s23]: Think of a better expression c description

Comment [s24]: Did that annoy you? Did you have plenty of money or did this put you into financial strain?

In his compulsion to have the best of the best for the race, and in light of ~~the his~~ second divorce looming large, he'd ordered a sleek bike chain. The night before the race, he forced the chain on. In his haste to get to the top of the mountain, his very first move on the bike was to slam his right foot against the clip, offsetting the chain, ~~now stuck~~ which had jammed. With bike mechanics standing all around to assist him, he proceeded to ~~ignore them all and~~ shove and rail against the chain until it snapped. With no backup, he was finished before he began.

Comment [s25]: How do you know all of this, since you weren't there? Had someone told you?

\*\*\*

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This was, no doubt, a heartbreaking reminder of his failure four years earlier on the same mountain climb. He ~~couldn't~~ hadn't been able to cycle to the top that time, either. He ~~wasn't~~ hadn't been strong enough. Race over, he drove, dejected, to the coffee house in town, where he doused his disappointment with available women on Match.com. That was the precise moment I got caught in his web, when I accepted his invitation to meet.

“Hey Erin. I like your profile. Wine sometime?”

“Hi Steve. Your profile was hysterical. Thanks for writing! Sure, wine sounds great.

When? Where?”

“Erin, How about the Wine Bar on Wharf Street. Tuesday, 7pm. And, I promise you, I’m a good guy, not an ax murderer or anything!”

Birth and death on the mountain exactly four years apart. Match.com was the online stomping ground for hookups, desperate divorcees, and willing men and women. Mainly, they were willing to say anything to get a date, anything to provide themselves with validation of their existence, and confirmation that they will be whole again given adequate time.

\* \* \*

Erin,

You have an interesting story to tell. I think it would be even more compelling if you wrote it in chronological order and also addressed the points I made in the margins. Please let me know if you have any questions!

Keep writing!

Thanks,

Susan

Comment [s26]: Maybe use different font or italics here to indicate this was text on a computer/phone?

Comment [s27]: Why?

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Comment [s28]: Did he really write that?

Comment [s29]: Need to know that from the start.

Comment [s30]: Did you feel that about yourself as well?

JULIE

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WHICH IS THE TITLE?

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Where are they?

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Who is "He"?

(He) was chasing invisible opponents up mountains; I was chasing invisible demons inside my head. "Dammit, 'DaKing' just took it away from me!" attribution

"Who's the king?"

"Some guy out of Yarmouth."

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indent. ]

His journey took him to the edge of his capability and to the edge of my patience, racing up steeper and steeper hill climbs, trying to capture 'king of the mountain' status on the strava app on his phone. All you had to do was start the app as you began the climb. Your speed was compared to <sup>that of</sup> the men and women that had used the same app on the same stretch of hill before you. I imagine him whipping the phone out of his back pocket the second he got to the top. *Did I do it? Am I king of the hill? Yes!* A ding alerting him of his demotion often arrived during the ride home. "*DaKing is now King of the Mountain*". At his best, or his worst, mainly according to me, he would dash back within hours to the same spot, sometimes again and again, to reclaim his fame.

\* Comparing apples or oranges  
Compare speed to speed and people to people

\*\*\*

If she knows all this, why the ignorance in the conversation above?

JULIE

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"Fuck!" *What now?* I leaned my head into the stairwell leading to the basement.

"Steve, you okay?"

"I can't get this fuckin' chain on<sup>(K)</sup>"

"Do you need help?"

"Erin..." Exasperated, he said, "No, of course, I don't fucking need help."

*Okay, done.* I am so glad my time listening to him curse in the basement is coming to a close. I had announced my intentions for divorce just two weeks earlier. There were so many items that were affixed with only curse words in that basement.

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in the world for cyclists. You are banned from coming down alone. In the post-divorce announcement flurry, he couldn't find anyone else to escort him to the bottom.

How about his sister?

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What?

But, didn't she hear his screams from downstairs?

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Why?

"Steve... So I'll meet you at the top."

"Yeah." He turned, ready to walk away.

"Steve, how will I know where to find you?"



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Each time a cyclist came into my peripheral vision, I searched <sup>his</sup> their bike jerseys <sup>his</sup> for the skull that should be emblazoned on <sup>his</sup> their chests. The small group of lead racers had passed me first, next a larger group of unbelievably strong cyclists, then a steady stream of terribly strong cyclists continued for a while. I went back to the car to check the time again. My phone was

JULIE

MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

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Unseen to me, everything had come screeching to a halt at the bottom of the mountain minutes after I drove away. His shiny new chain was stuck. The week before the practice run, which was the same as the week after I asked for a divorce, he searched for equipment to strengthen his bike to ensure the imagined victory in his head. His modus operandi when things went awry was to order and spend in order to fill himself up. After his first divorce, he spent thousands of dollars souping his low-end red Saab convertible with so many bells and whistles that it was harder and pricier to fix. Shiny silver tailpipe, equally shiny rims and the pièce de resistance: a computer chip to turbo-ize your ride (okay, going turbo on an open highway was actually pretty fun). Although he made it faster and potentially cooler, he ended up having to sell it for far less than the blue book value.

In his compulsion to have the best of the best for the race and in light of the second divorce looming large, he ordered a sleek bike chain. The night before the race, he forced the chain on. In his haste to get to the top of the mountain, his very first move on the bike was to slam his right foot against the clip, offsetting the chain, now stuck. With bike mechanics standing all around to assist him, he proceeded to shove and rail against the chain until it snapped. With no backup, he was finished before he began.

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No replacement parts truck?

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available women on Match.com. That was the precise moment I got caught in his web, when I accepted his invitation to meet.

“Hey, Erin. I like your profile. Wine sometime?”

“Hi Steve. Your profile was hysterical. Thanks for writing! Sure, wine sounds great.

When? Where?”

“Erin, How about the Wine Bar on Wharf Street. Tuesday, 7pm. And, I promise you, I’m a good guy, not an ax murderer or anything!”

Why  
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Birth and death on the mountain exactly four years apart. Match.com was the online stomping ground for hookups, desperate divorcees, and willing men and women. Mainly, they were willing to say anything to get a date, anything to provide themselves with validation of their existence, and confirmation that they will be whole again given adequate time.

\*\*\*

FIRST, I NEED TO KNOW: IS THIS YOUR 2ND REBOUND MARRIAGE OR 2ND MARRIAGE? ARE THE TRIPLETS FROM 1ST OR 2ND? MENTION INHERITED GENETIC TRAITS.

MY HUSBAND RIDES IN THE PAN-MASS CHALLENGE, A 200-MILE BIKE RIDE TO RAISE MONEY FOR CANCER RESEARCH. THERE ARE SUPPLY TRUCKS AND BIKE MECHANICS ALL ALONG THE ROUTE. SOMEONE WOULD HAVE HAD A SPARE CHAIN, I BELIEVE.

WHY WOULDN'T HE CALL HER OR SOMEONE AT THE END OF THE RACE TO CONTACT HER?

MISSING: RELATIONSHIP AND NEUROSCIENCE RESEARCH PROMISED IN THE SUMMARY.

DO YOU BREAK THE EPISODE INTO SECTIONS: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH, AND ANECDOTES?

I'D LIKE TO SEE HOW THE PUZZLE PIECES GO TOGETHER.

*Summary: This is a middle excerpt from my hybrid memoir/self-help guide on love and relationships (Title: Love's Puzzle). Each chapter combines personal experience, relationship and neuroscience research, and anecdotes. This chapter is about the final collapse of my second rebound marriage. Dating comes next.*

**Comment [1]:** This is intriguing. Feels like it could have a real commercial hook. Obviously in six pages, you can't get to all the elements in this chapter, so I'm evaluating the memoir parts alone.

Chapter Title: Forced: Mismatches and Missed Matches

**Comment [2]:** Nice chapter title.

He was chasing invisible opponents up mountains; I was chasing invisible demons inside

my head.

"Dammit, DaKing just took it away from me!"

"Who's the king?"

"Some guy out of Yarmouth."

"Oh, you mean a biker. He took what away from you?"

"Cyclist, Erin. King of the mountain."

"Oh." I tried to keep my rolling eyes from rolling.

**Comment [3]:** It's unclear to me who is speaking. A few dialogue tags would be helpful.

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**Deleted:** yarmouth

His journey took him to the edge of his capability and to the edge of my patience, racing

up steeper and steeper hill climbs, trying to capture "king of the mountain" status on the Strava

app on his phone. All you had to do was start the app as you began the climb. Your speed was

compared to the men and women that had used the same app on the same stretch of hill before, I

imagine him whipping the phone out of his back pocket the second he got to the top. *Did I do it?*

*Am I king of the hill? Yes!* A ding alerting him of his demotion often arrived during the ride

home. "DaKing is now King of the Mountain." At his best, or his worst, mainly according to

me, he would dash back within hours to the same spot, sometimes again and again, to reclaim his

fame.

**Comment [4]:** Some of this is unclear because you probably explained it in an earlier chapter, but I'm unsure of the difference between cyclist and biker.

**Deleted:** ...

**Comment [5]:** This is a heavy loaded word. If you mean simply the biking, then journey is too much. If you mean his life journey, then maybe we need a little more.

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**Deleted:** strava

**Comment [6]:** I don't love second person here. It pulls me out. Perhaps this should all be third person (all he had to do... his speed...)

**Deleted:** you

**Comment [7]:** Why present tense here? Weren't you with him on this ride so why do you have to imagine? Actually on reread, I'm not sure you are riding with him. It would be helpful to place where you are for less confusion.

**Deleted:** .

\*\*\*

## MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

Words not meant for me were seeping through the hundred year old floorboards of the dining room.

"Fuck!"

What now? I leaned my head into the stairwell leading to the basement. "Steve, you okay?"

"I can't get this fuckin' chain on"

"Do you need help?"

"Erin..." Exasperated, he said, "No, of course, I don't fucking need help."

Okay, done. I am so glad my time listening to him curse in the basement is coming to a close. I had announced my intentions for divorce just two weeks earlier. There were so many items that were affixed with only curse words in that basement.

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I agreed to his plea. I would sit down with a relationship therapist and discuss the undiscussable one more time. They were both looking at me. They, Steve and the therapist, wanted to know my "intentions." They probably meant about divorcing the guy sitting next to me. However, I stuck to other more logistical topics, as long as I could.

"I get it. I know this race is really important to you, Steve. Obviously, the timing sucks. But you have no other options and I have no other choice. So, I'll bring you down the mountain." The mountain on the divorce limbo agenda, Mount Washington, is only open to cyclists twice a year, once for a practice run and once for the real deal, a mountain hill climb race. The pre-divorce plan was to stay in Steve's sister's condo in North Conway with my three children, and for all of us non-racers to wait at the finish line on the top of the mountain to drive Steve back down. The mountain is too steep and too dangerous to descend by bike. The last part

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**Comment [8]:** Again, dialogue tags are necessary. When you said "words not meant for me," I assumed he was speaking with someone else, so I was thrown when it was you two conversing.

**Comment [9]:** Ellipsis are generally used for trailing dialogue. These times don't feel trailing. Use them sparingly.

**Comment [10]:** Hugel Do we see this on the page? If not, this is a bombshell that brings up lots of questions. Why are you still in the same house? Was the previous conversation before or after you announced the divorce? It changes things.

**Comment [11]:** This turns out to be very important but it feels downplayed here.

**Comment [12]:** This section is fascinating to me. I love how fraught the situation is. Perhaps open the chapter with this? So we know off the bat about the divorce and the fact that he still needs you? Increases the tension substantially.

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**Comment [13]:** This feels a little like "telling." Perhaps have the original conversation where you tell him you'll still be his mountain driver?

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**Comment [14]:** Your descriptions are quite nice but the dialogue feels a little forced and awkward. Make it clear from the language who is speaking and smooth it out.

MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

is challenging even to walk up at a 22% grade. The race is known as one of the toughest climbs in the world for cyclists. You are banned from coming down alone. In the post-divorce announcement flurry, he couldn't find anyone else to escort him to the bottom.

Comment [15]: Second person still jarring

Comment [16]: This is great!

\*\*\*

Hours before the race was to start, I bolted up from the musty beige couch in the mountain side condo. It was 3 a.m. Anger seeped in. *What am I doing here again?* My purposely calm repose was broken. The light coming up the basement stairs had been piercing through my eyelids for hours, and I couldn't take it anymore. One might think of turning off the light. I didn't. I thought that it must have been left on intentionally by Steve. I was trying to stay out of his way and let him prepare for the big race. I was trying to be nice, just enough to maintain some of my tiny fortune and a bit of my dignity. He and I were to enter serious divorce negotiations directly after this trip and I didn't want to lose.

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Comment [17]: This feels in contradiction to your anger just sentences before. You're telling me how you feel but I'm not getting a sense of it through the writing.

Comment [18]: This doesn't feel right. More powerful language perhaps? Not that you don't want to lose, but that you WON'T lose.

I surmised that Steve was sleeping in the basement, mentally and physically preparing himself for the hill climb up Mount Washington. As it turns out, he wasn't in the basement at all. He was on the second floor above me. I had no way of knowing. By that point, we communicated only to avoid communicating.

Comment [19]: I like this sentence.

\*\*\*

Steve rushed to pull his bags together. We were aiming for a 6 a.m. arrival. We pulled into the base parking lot just before 7 a.m. after a tense car ride, all eyes straight ahead, arms crossed and no talking. The lot was full of cars but surprisingly empty of riders. I pulled over to the side of the aisle to let him go. Steve pulled his bike off the top of the car.

Comment [20]: Hope someone had arms uncrossed to drive. You need more detail to make this vivid.

Comment [21]: Nicely ominous but I feel like you need somewhat of an explanation. Not many folks riding? Or all had left?

"Steve, so I'll meet you at the top."

Deleted: ...

"Yeah." He turned, ready to walk away.

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MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

"Steve, how will I know where to find you?"

"Erin, just pull over to the side right below the summit. It's not a big deal. Everyone does it."

"But—"

"Erin. I don't have time for this."

"Fine." Eyes now released from the prohibition to roll, rolled away.

He was in panic mode. He rolled his bike away from the car. Head down, absorbed in his preparation. *This is what I have to do. This is not where I want to be. Suck it up, Erin. We are almost at the end.*

\*\*\*

I stared at the shadows of the riders that invaded the pavement as they rode past on the narrow winding road at the top of the mountain.

"Where is he?" I muttered to myself.

I held my hand up to shade my eyes from the sun to search for him. The cyclists snaking their way up the mountain pass had slowed to a trickle. I turned my attention to my 10-year-old triplets hopping from rock to rock atop a leveled area off the road where our car was jammed to one side, precariously balanced over as far as I felt I could go. *Steve said we would be okay up here.*

"Be careful guys," I said to the triplets. They were unconcerned. He was not their father. He was another one of their mother's dubious plans.

Each time a cyclist came into my peripheral vision, I searched their bike jerseys for the skull that should be emblazoned on their chests. The small group of lead racers had passed me first, next a larger group of unbelievably strong cyclists, then a steady stream of terribly strong

Comment [22]: Em-dash for cut off dialogue.

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Comment [23]: Why? He's still there, isn't he?

Comment [24]: I'd like to see this panic mode rather than just being told about it.

Deleted:

Comment [25]: Dialogue tags are necessary for clarity but stick with "said" or "ask" to not draw attention to them. They'll disappear into the background that way.

Deleted: ,

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Comment [26]: Nice!

## MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

cyclists continued for a while. I went back to the car to check the time again. My phone was off; it was being saved for emergencies. It had been almost an hour since the time when he estimated he would ride past me in a triumphant show of force.

\*\*\*

Unseen to me, everything had come screeching to a halt at the bottom of the mountain minutes after I drove away. His shiny new chain was stuck. The week before the practice run, which was the same as the week after I asked for a divorce, he searched for equipment to strengthen his bike to ensure the imagined victory in his head. His modus operandi when things went awry was to order and spend in order to fill himself up. After his first divorce, he spent thousands of dollars souping his low end red Saab convertible with so many bells and whistles that it was harder and pricier to fix. Shiny silver tailpipe, equally shiny rims and the piece de resistance: a computer chip to turbo-ize your ride (okay, going turbo on an open highway was actually pretty fun). Although he made it faster and potentially cooler, he ended up having to sell it for far less than the blue book value.

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\*\*\*

This was, no doubt, a heartbreaking reminder of his failure four years earlier on the same mountain climb. He couldn't cycle to the top that time either. He wasn't strong enough. Race

**Comment [27]:** Tighten so it doesn't slow the reader down: "The week after I asked for a divorce he prepared for his practice run, and he searched..."

**Comment [28]:** I love the details here about how he built up his car. Very telling.

**Comment [29]:** Unnecessary and distracting

**Comment [30]:** This is the conversation you guys had earlier, right?

**Comment [31]:** Are you saying he didn't ask the bike mechanics for help? This is unclear to me.



MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

over, he drove, dejected, to the coffee house in town where he doused his disappointment with available women on Match.com. That was the precise moment I got caught in his web, when I accepted his invitation to meet.

Comment [32]: This feels like you were tricked or manipulated. Is this what you mean?

“Hey Erin. I like your profile. Wine sometime?”

“Hi Steve. Your profile was hysterical. Thanks for writing! Sure, wine sounds great.

When? Where?”

“Erin, how about the Wine Bar on Wharf Street. Tuesday, 7 p.m. And, I promise you,

Deleted: H

I'm a good guy, not an ax murderer or anything! ☺

Comment [33]: Is this what he actually wrote? If not, make it fresher. Too cliché. Is there a reason we need the entire exchange? It doesn't add anything to the story.

Birth and death on the mountain exactly four years apart. Match.com was the online stomping ground for hookups, desperate divorcees, and willing men and women. Mainly, they were willing to say anything to get a date, anything to provide themselves with validation of their existence, and confirmation that they will be whole again given adequate time.

Comment [34]: Cliché idea

\* \* \*

Comment [35]: I'm not sure where this chapter is going, but this is nothing new and it undercuts the power of your chapter.

Hi Erin,

There is a wonderful story in here, and I'm intrigued by what's going on. Your idea for a hybrid memoir is fascinating and I think marketable.

I'd love for the chapter to be restructured so that the race is the framing device. As it is, it jumps around a bunch, and originally I thought you had introduced your second husband in a previous chapter but by the time I got to the end and your meeting of him, I was no longer sure. If you use the race as your frame, you can go back and discuss the rest of your relationship, and it will give the chapter a solid structure. Different pieces of the race can be used to explicate different aspects of your relationship. For instance, the King of the Hill piece could segue into something about how you related to each other. Was one of you King of the Hill in the relationship? Or was that there was no real leader a problem? Obviously only you know your story, but it's just one idea for how to develop this.

As silly as it sounds, brush up on your capitalization and punctuation. An editor or agent reading this will hopefully just pay attention to the story, but it's easy to be derailed if they're worried about having to clean up too much.

Great stuff in here!

Best,

Jennifer

MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

Ed

*Summary: This is a middle excerpt from my hybrid memoir/self-help guide on love and relationships (Title: Love's Puzzle). Each chapter combines personal experience, relationship and neuroscience research, and anecdotes. This chapter is about the final collapse of my second rebound marriage. Dating comes next.*

Chapter Title: Forced: Mismatches and Missed Matches

He was chasing invisible opponents up mountains; I was chasing invisible demons inside my head. "Dammit, 'DaKing' just took it away from me!" — *who says this?*

"Who's the king?" — *who says this?*

"Some guy out of ~~Y~~armouth."

"Oh, you mean a biker. He took what away from you?"

"Cyclist... Erin. King of the mountain."

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on his phone. All you had to do was start the app as you began the climb. Your speed was

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you. I imagine ~~him~~ whipping the phone out of his back pocket the second he got to the top. *Did I*

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ride home. "DaKing is now King of the Mountain". At his best, or his worst, [mainly according

to me, he would dash back within hours to the same spot, sometimes again and again, to reclaim

his fame.

\*\*\*

*When  
where  
are  
they?*

*Steve's quest?*

*other? who*

*then*

*would I*

*]*

MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

Words not meant for me were seeping through the hundred year-old floorboards of the dining room.

"Fuck!" *What now?* I leaned my head into the stairwell leading to the basement.

"Steve, you okay?"

"I can't get this fuckin' chain on"

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"Erin..." Exasperated, he said, "No, of course, I don't fucking need help."

→ Okay, done. I am so glad my time listening to him curse in the basement is coming to a close. I had announced my intentions for divorce just two weeks earlier. There were so many items that were affixed with only curse words in that basement.

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legal?

\*\*\*  
him and

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"Yeah." He turned, ready to walk away.

"Steve, how will I know where to find you?"

## MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

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## MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

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*-no idea where this\*\*\* is going*

Jenn

**MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM**

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Commented [PHS IS1]: I was confused about the setting. Wasn't sure if he was an actual cyclist ride up a real mountain, or if he was riding a stationery bike with a simulation program. Had to read it a few times to figure it out.

Commented [PHS IS2]: I don't know what you mean by this. Clarify.



## MEMOIR: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING BY ERIN OLDHAM

\*\*\*

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*What now?* I leaned my head into the stairwell leading to the basement. "Steve, you okay?"

"Steve, you okay?"

"I can't get this fuckin' chain on."

"Do you need help?"

"Erin..." ~~he said. Exasperated.~~ he said. "No, of course, I don't fucking need help."

*Okay, done.* I ~~am~~ ~~was~~ ~~so~~ glad my time listening to him curse in the basement is coming to a close. I had announced my intentions for divorce just two weeks earlier. There were so many items that were affixed with only curse words in that basement.

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I agreed to his plea ~~to~~ ~~I would sit down~~ ~~meet~~ with a relationship therapist and discuss the undiscussable one more time. ~~They were both looking at me.~~ They, Steve and the therapist, wanted to know my 'intentions'. They probably meant about divorcing the guy sitting next to me. However, I stuck to other more logistical topics, as long as I could.

"I get it. I know this race is really important to you, Steve. Obviously, the timing sucks. But, you have no other options, and I have no other choice. So, I'll bring you down the mountain." The mountain on the divorce limbo agenda, Mount Washington, is only open to cyclists twice a year, once for a practice run and once for the real deal, a mountain hill climb race. The pre-divorce plan was to stay in Steve's sister's condo in North Conway with my three

**Commented [PHS IS3]:** You are shifting between past and present tense. Be consistent.

**Commented [PHS IS4]:** Try not to name emotions. Show the emotion. My time listening to him curse in the basement would end soon. Thank God

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**Commented [PHS IS5]:** This sounds so clinical. Divorce is a serious decision, show the emotion behind it.

**Commented [PHS IS6]:** Affixed to what?

**Commented [PHS IS7]:** Why?

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children, and for all of us non-racers to wait at the finish line on the top of the mountain to drive Steve back down. The mountain is too steep and too dangerous to descend by bike. The last part is challenging even to walk up at a 22% grade. The race is known as one of the toughest climbs in the world for cyclists. You are banned from coming down alone. In the post-divorce announcement flurry, he couldn't find anyone else to escort him to the bottom.

\*\*\*

Hours before the race ~~was to start~~, I bolted up from the musty beige couch in the mountain side condo. It was 3 a.m. Anger seeped in. *What am I doing here again?* My purposely calm repose was broken. The light coming up the basement stairs had been piercing through my eyelids for hours, and I couldn't take it anymore. One might think of turning off the light. I didn't. I thought that it must have been left on intentionally by Steve. I was trying to stay out of his way and let him prepare for the big race. I was trying to be nice, just enough to maintain some of my tiny fortune and a bit of my dignity. He and I ~~would~~ were to enter serious divorce negotiations ~~directly~~ after this trip and I didn't want to lose.

I surmised that Steve was sleeping in the basement, mentally and physically preparing himself for the hill climb up Mount Washington. As it turns out, he wasn't in the basement at all. He was on the second floor above me. I had no way of knowing. By that point, we communicated only to avoid communicating.

\*\*\*

Steve rushed to pull his bags together. We were aiming for a 6 a.m. arrival. We pulled into the base parking lot just before 7 a.m. after a tense car ride, all eyes straight ahead, arms crossed, ~~no one spoke, and no talking~~. The lot was full of cars but surprisingly empty of riders. I pulled over to the side of the aisle to let him ~~outgo~~. Steve pulled his bike off the top of the car.

**Commented [PHS IS8]:** Spent less time on the details of cycling and more time on the emotions or motivations for the divorce.

**Commented [PHS IS9]:** Show the emotion, don't tell us she's angry. Show her anger.

**Commented [PHS IS10]:** Was he in the basement? If not then why didn't she just turn off the light instead of seething about the fact that it was on and keeping her awake?

**Commented [PHS IS11]:** Is he rich or is he rich?

**Commented [PHS IS12]:** Why is this relevant?

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"Steve, So I'll meet you at the top."

"Yeah." He turned, ready to walk away.

"Steve, how will I know where to find you?"

"Erin, just pull over to the side right below the summit. It's not a big deal. Everyone does it."

"But..".

"Erin. I don't have time for this."

"Fine." Eyes now released from the prohibition to roll, rolled away.

He was in panic mode ~~and~~—He rolled his bike away from the car. Head down, absorbed in his preparation.

*This is what I have to do. This is not where I want to be. Suck it up, Erin. We are almost at the end.*

\*\*\*

I stared at the shadows of the riders that invaded the pavement as they rode past on the narrow winding road at the top of the mountain.

~~"Where is he?" I muttered to myself.~~

I held my hand up to shade my eyes from the sun to search for him. The cyclists snaking their way up the mountain pass had slowed to a trickle. I turned my attention to my 10-year old triplets hopping from rock to rock atop a leveled area off the road where our car was jammed to one side, precariously balanced over as far as I felt I could go. *Steve said we would be okay up here.*

"Be careful guys." I ~~said to~~aimed at the triplets. They were unconcerned. He was not their father. He was another one of their mother's dubious plans.

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Each time a cyclist came into my peripheral vision, I searched their bike jerseys for the skull ~~that should be emblazoned on his shirt, their chests.~~ The small group of lead racers had passed me first, next a larger group of unbelievably strong cyclists, then a steady stream of terribly strong cyclists continued for a while. I went back to the car to check the time again. My phone was off; it was being saved for emergencies. It had been almost an hour since the time when he estimated he would ride past me in a triumphant show of force.

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Unseen to me, everything had come screeching to a halt at the bottom of the mountain minutes after I drove away. His shiny new chain was stuck. The week before the practice run, which was the same as the week after I asked for a divorce, he searched for equipment to strengthen his bike to ensure the imagined victory in his head. His modus operandi when things went awry was to order and spend in order to fill himself up. After his first divorce, he spent thousands of dollars souping his low end red Saab convertible with so many bells and whistles that it was harder and pricier to fix. Shiny silver tailpipe, equally shiny rims and the piece de resistance: a computer chip to turbo-ize your ride (okay, going turbo on an open highway was actually pretty fun). Although he made it faster and potentially cooler, he ended up having to sell it for far less than the blue book value.

Commented [PHS IS13]: cliché

Commented [PHS IS14]: Is this relevant to the story?

In his compulsion to have the best of the best for the race and in light of the second divorce looming large, he ordered a sleek bike chain. The night before the race, he forced the chain on. In his haste to get to the top of the mountain, his very first move on the bike was to slam his right foot against the clip, offsetting the chain, now stuck. With bike mechanics standing all around to assist him, he proceeded to shove and rail against the chain until it snapped. With no backup, he was finished before he began.

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This was, no doubt, a heartbreaking reminder of his failure four years earlier on the same mountain climb. He couldn't cycle to the top that time either. He wasn't strong enough, ~~so he~~ ~~Race over, he~~ drove, dejected, to the coffee house in town where he doused his disappointment with available women on Match.com. That was ~~when the precise moment~~ I got caught in his web, when I accepted his invitation to meet.

"Hey Erin. I like your profile. Wine sometime?"

"Hi Steve. Your profile was hysterical. Thanks for writing! Sure, wine sounds great. When? Where?"

"Erin, How about the Wine Bar on Wharf Street? Tuesday, 7pm. And, I promise you, I'm a good guy, not an ax murderer or anything!"

Birth and death on the mountain exactly four years apart. Match.com was the online stomping ground for hookups, desperate divorcees, and willing men and women. Mainly, they were willing to say anything to get a date, anything to provide themselves with validation of their existence, and confirmation that they will be whole again given adequate time.

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**Commented [PHS IS15]:** You keep doing these sidetracks that pull me out of your story. Stay with the characters so I can invest in them. They are not sympathetic at all