

# LORD OF THE DANCE



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# LORD OF THE DANCE

A True Story About Life With Sai Baba

a novel by

Ishtar

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*This book is dedicated to Bbagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

*Because You love the Burning-ground,  
I have made a Burning-ground of my heart.  
Day and night blazes the funeral pyre  
That You, Dark One, hunter of the Burning-ground,  
May Dance Your eternal Dance.*



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## CHAPTER 1

### THE DANCE OF KRISHNA

I first danced with the Krishna, the all-pervading Godhead, one autumn evening about seven years ago. I was, I confess, a little drunk at the time. But only a little. In fact, I hadn't drunk enough. I was on the verge of starting yet another pointless, vacuous relationship and I usually had to be very drunk to do that. I only mention this in case you thought that I might have been hallucinating. I wasn't. Having, in the past, taken just about every mind-bending drug known to man—or at least, The Man—I can assure you that two glasses of cheap Chardonnay were barely enough to blur the edges, which, as I said, was my dilemma.

My problem, that evening, was Jamie, a young man with the looks of an angel, who was lounging next to me on my sofa. He was starting to run his arm along the back of it, and his normally soft grey eyes were beginning to harden with calculations about how best (and how soon) he could decently get me into the bedroom.

It was all I could do not to let out a sigh.

*Here we go again, I thought. First we'll have the initial protestations of undying devotion. Then the inevitable fumbled coupling. And following immediately on will come the interminable justifications about how right we are for one another until finally, one of us, probably me, will be forced to admit, well... actually, no.... this wasn't such a good idea after all.*

So I stood up and went to poke the fire. When I sat back down, it was in the straight-backed armchair facing him.

But why so jaded? Well, I was in my mid-40s by now, with two failed marriages and countless other relationships, liaisons and one-night stands behind me. I'd always had to be in love, you

see. I was like a love junkie, continually needing the next fix from Cupid's arrow.

It wasn't my fault, though. I was just like anyone brought up in the Western world of the Fifties. Conditioned by Doris Day films and songs about love and marriage going together like a horse and carriage, I was convinced that, somewhere out there, was my Mr Right.

However, the Sixties came and went, and so did several men. I duly learned to Love the One I'm With and lose my Fear of Flying. Yet still I believed that my perfect other half, my soul mate, was probably just around the corner. So I kept searching, despite the fact that each such encounter was becoming increasingly more desperate—and each candidate, less likely.

The truth was, I couldn't survive without thinking that each man I was with was potentially my next husband. I couldn't even get out of bed in the morning without at least kidding myself that I was in love with someone and that he was in love with me. It worked well enough too, for a good long time.

Otherwise, the days would be unbearable. I would feel as if I was standing in a vast dark cave, alone and shivering with the cold. In my hand, I'd be holding an unlit candle, just waiting, until some other similarly lonely soul came along with a light. Then the deal would be struck, along with the match. And we'd both huddle over the candle together, for the warmth and the light ... until it finally spluttered out. It always did in the end.

Sometimes the candle was one of those huge church ones. It would burn passionately for days, weeks, months, and even years. At other times, it was a tiny nightlight that barely made it through until morning. But however long it took for the candle to burn out, it was always the same, whichever of us finally extinguished it. The cold and dark would accentuate the emptiness of loss, and the only way to bring back the light and warmth was to strike up another match. So I just kept going, candle after candle. The supply appeared to be endless.

It was easy, you see. I'd always been able to use my looks to get what I wanted. It wasn't even a conscious act anymore. It was written into my DNA. I couldn't remember a time when men didn't wolf whistle at me in the street, or do a double take as I walked into a bar. By the age of 13, I'd developed a full-grown bosom and my huge green eyes, fringed with thick dark lashes,

were a virtual Venus mantrap. This meant that I could get pretty well whoever I fancied, within reason. Most men (or the ones I got to meet, at least) were really not that discriminating, anyway. As long as you looked fairly okay and had all the right bits going in the right directions, you could easily get them to tell you that they loved you. Some of them probably even thought they meant it, at the time—they really did.

But I was gradually beginning to see through this lie. I was starting to see that this ‘love’ was highly dependent upon certain visual criteria. Criteria that I would one day fall well short of. Already, the writing was on the wall and in an increasingly deepening scrawl all over my face. Bits of my body that were supposed to stay up were sinking fast, while the bits that were supposed to stay down were steadily crinkling skywards. As if that wasn’t bad enough, the gentle dusting of white on my head was now migrating to my eyebrows—as well as to other parts of my body where they had no business to be at all.

On top of that, my love fixes seemed to be getting younger and younger. Again, it wasn’t my fault. I blame the magazine writers. Those who’d once taught me the “ten top ways to get him to propose” were now finding that their own advice had failed as a blueprint for marital happiness. So they were also now out again in the singles market and instructing me not to bother with,

“... the older man, because they can’t seem to leave their baggage from their previous marriage at your front door. Or even worse, he may never have been married at all, for which there’s usually a very good reason! So you’d be far better off getting yourself a younger man...”

I’d tried that. But I found that being with a young man had its drawbacks too, especially for someone who enjoys good conversation. There was the time, for instance, when I’d made a brilliant joke to my then young amour, Freddie, and the punch line alluded to the Profumo affair of the Sixties.

It was completely wasted on him. At 16 years my junior, he hadn’t even been born then. So he just stared at me blankly.

That relationship, like most of them, had held such promise in the beginning. He had looked like Tom Hanks (well, Tom Hanks in *Big*, anyway). He was gorgeous—half Italian—had tons

of energy, was great in bed and he used to make me laugh, which was all you could ask for really.

Freddie reckoned he was one of those young entrepreneurs. But as far as I could see, he just did a bit of this and bit of that, with always half an eye out for the main chance. This suited me fine because I worked from home. So he would often just turn up in the middle of the day. Love in the afternoon always seemed so much more thrilling than having to wait until bedtime.

It was exciting. With Freddie, you never knew what he was going to do next. There was that time when, after one of our afternoon sessions, he leant back against the pillows and lit a cigarette. Then he handed me the packet, asking, "What do you think of that design—I mean the colours?"

"Well, hmm ... yes, I like it," I finally decided. "You wouldn't expect blue, gold and green to go together so well."

"Good then," said Freddie. "Because those are the colours I'm going to use to do up your flat."

My flat hadn't been decorated for years. The walls and ceilings had great cracks like the cobwebs of an enormous prehistoric spider. The tiles in the bathroom were either broken, missing or chipped. The carpets were worn through in several patches and the paintwork was scuffed and marked. So I could hardly refuse.

We immediately set about clearing all the furniture from the bedroom into the living room, so that he could make a start there. Then he spent the whole of the next week working on my flat. He knocked down all the old plaster and put up new tiles in the bathroom. Then he re-plastered and painted the walls in dove blue, sea green and pale gold, and finally laid a new gold soft pile carpet. When he'd finished, it looked so fantastic that I crowned the whole look off with a new dark blue sofa.

But then the problem was that Freddie seemed to have moved in—and so had his dog, which would spread itself across the nice new sofa and drop hairs everywhere.

At first, I didn't mind too much as I was starting to get used to having him around. Freddie, I mean. I never could get used to the dog. But it only took a few weeks for my red-hot Latin lover to undergo a personality change. Now that the dynamic had altered, and we were in this husband-and-wife situation, it had brought out the other side of his Italian genes.

As a journalist, I would often be invited to parties and drinks functions where he would have felt out of place. Personally, I couldn't bear those occasions. I only went to them to network and would leave as early as I could. But I'd often arrive home to find him sitting brooding by the fire, and the first question would invariably be:

“Did you meet any men?”

I would try to lighten the atmosphere with:

“Yes, hundreds! But none so gorgeous as you!”

But it didn't really work.

Another time, I was interviewing a well-known celebrity over lunch in Soho. I'd arranged to meet Freddie in the bar of the restaurant afterwards. But Freddie turned up early. Unknown to me, he had stood glowering at us from the bar as I was blithely plying my quarry with alcohol and then employing every weapon in my flirting toolkit to try to get him to admit to an affair with his young co-star.

Freddie was disgusted:

“How can you behave like that?” he yelled at me afterwards, as he stomped down Wardour Street in the pouring rain. “That guy must have really thought you fancied him!”

“He was supposed to,” I gasped, trying to keep up with his furious step so that I could stay under his umbrella, as well as avoid bumping into the pimps and prostitutes.

“How else could I get him to open up? Look Freddie, I promise you, there's nothing to be jealous about. It's just my job.”

Then he stopped and turned on his heel, so that I could see his face. I was surprised how boyish he looked when he was hurt.

“Well, maybe I am jealous,” he said. “But how would you feel if I met a younger woman and was attracted to her? Wouldn't you be jealous and fight to keep me?”

For someone who'd never bothered to fight to keep a man because there'd always been another waiting backstage—if not actually straining his head around the wings—that question was easy. But there was more to it than that.

I put my hand on his arm.

“Look, it's only natural,” I said. “One day, you will realise that you want to have children. Obviously, I can't give them to you. So no, if a younger woman comes along, I won't stand in

your way. And I hope that I would be gracious enough to send you off with my blessings.”

I wasn't absolutely sure about that last bit. It was more about who I aspired to be than who I really was. But anyway, it turned out to be the wrong answer.

In the following days, I noticed that there was a slight, but definite, chill in the air, like there is when summer is just turning into autumn. Freddie seemed no longer interested in instigating any exciting afternoon trysts, and he would turn his back to me in bed at night. In the evenings, he would lie on the sofa stroking his dog when he was supposed to be stroking me. Then he started to complain about never being able to find a clean, ironed shirt, or dinner not being ready on time, or the wine being tasteless.

The honeymoon was definitely over.

One day, while I was washing up the dinner plates as he lay on the sofa watching football, I thought to myself, *Hey-bo, I've been here before. Now, how did that happen?*

And once I'd made that realisation, the relationship headed south quite rapidly. When the last trumpet sounded, I got to yell the immortal line:

“Just get out, and take that stinking dog with you!”

But he had just turned to me slowly and, with the traces of a cruel smile hovering around his thick Italian lips, had replied, “Why, you're just a sad, middle-aged old bag!”

I was so hurt. I didn't leave my flat for three days. Then when I finally did venture out into the town, I would stare into all the shop windows to see if he was right.

So I hope you can see why I wasn't too anxious to enter into yet another of these *danses macabre*. I just couldn't summon the energy.

But Jamie Marsden (double first from Oxford, management consultant, looking about 16) was still waiting expectantly.

“Aren't you going to join me then?” he said, smiling seductively and indicating the space next to him.

“Just give me a minute,” I replied, and got up from the armchair.

Stroking his hair as I walked past, I went out into the dove blue hallway. Then I disappeared into the sea green bathroom.

I sat down on the loo seat and put my head in my hands. Within seconds the black dog of despair was clawing at the pit of my stomach.

*How cruel is this?* I wondered to myself. *Which sadistic god is salivating over this gladiatorial sport?*

Suddenly, I couldn't remember what on earth had motivated me to get out of bed that morning, or any morning, as I ruminated on 'the human condition'.

*All we ever want is love*, my thoughts rumbled on. *Yet whenever we think we've found it, it's snatched away from us. Or even if we do manage to keep it alive for a whole lifetime, we lose each other anyway at the point of death. So what's the point of it all? We're just bonded slaves to a god of materialism. He allows us to fall in love just long enough to form an economic unit and breed more clones.*

For the first time ever, I felt the true pain of what it was to be a human being. Of course, it wasn't a new idea. It was more a culmination of thoughts that I'd been trying to keep at bay with sex, drink and drugs for most of my adult life. It had been the elephant in the room for some time. Now it was standing on its hind legs and trumpeting.

*We need eternal love*, I carried on, *the kind that doesn't splutter out on you. But we're just not designed that way. It seems to me that everything on earth is subject to decay, including us and our experiences.*

Just then, something sparked in my head. Gradually, a memory was beginning to form. It was based on something I'd read long ago in a book about Lord Krishna.

I expect you've heard of Krishna because he's quite famous really. Or maybe you've seen pictures of this beautiful, blue-skinned god in Indian shops among the joss sticks and the incense burners. He's usually wearing a peacock feather in his hair and carrying a flute. Anyway, according to this book, he was born in India over 5,000 years ago, as an incarnation of God. It's said that he had given such a wonderful experience of divine, eternal love to all his dairymaid devotees that they would dance around their milk churns in ecstasy.

*That's it*, I finally realised, letting out a long sigh. *What I need is divine love, everlasting love.*

Now I did know that those stories about Krishna were supposed to be just myths and legends, the origins of which were

lost in the mists of time. But it was then that I decided that if they weren't true, it was about time someone made them so.

So, mainly out of sheer exhaustion and desperation over the whole sorry business, I closed my eyes and started to pray. It went something like this:

“Lord Krishna, if you really are there, please help me. The stories say that you are omnipresent—not limited by time and space—and that you come to desperate people when they're suffering and need you. So why don't you come to me? Can't you see that my heart is dying? If you really are God, if you really are the incarnation of God, then please come now and give me some of that lovely divine love!”

Then I opened my eyes. But the bathroom still looked exactly the same, with Freddie's new blue tiles stuck neatly in place where the blue-skinned god should have been.

So I tried again:

“Because, I have to tell you, I really cannot stand another go-round-the-houses on this trashy piece of imitation crystal we here, on earth, call 'love'. This tainted love. It's like a mirrored ball in a dance hall. It bathes everything in magical hues and shadows just long enough to get us all hooked. Hooked into the illusion that it's divine, it's magic, it's bigger than both of us. Then when we wake up, it's the morning after the night before.

“I just can't do it again. Really I can't. And if you don't come and help me, I reckon I've had it this time. I really do.”

Still nothing ... just the sound of the dripping tap that Freddie had always meant to fix.

But you may be wondering why I should have even been reading a book about Krishna. Well, my life had always seemed like a schizophrenic smorgasbord of the sacred and the profane. Running alongside my ongoing hunt for my physical Mr Right, there had been another, more subterranean, search going on, this time for my spiritual Mr Right. Not 'right' in the sense of being 'a good fit'. But right ... well, just because he's right—because he knows the truth about God.

Ever since the Seventies, I'd practised meditation and undergone all sorts of austerities in spiritual retreats of varying religions. I'd had a *guru* (spiritual teacher) and I would rummage through loads of scriptures and accounts of quests for spiritual



enlightenment, like *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *The Life of Ramakrishna* and *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

All these writers had said there was a realisation of God that you could have. Not a belief or a faith, but an actual practical experience that felt like utter bliss, or being wrapped up in a cotton wool blanket of love, or something like that anyway. It wasn't, they said, to do with dogma or belief and you didn't have to be in any particular religion to experience it. So I'd been hunting high and low ever since for someone to teach me how to reach it.

I'd learned hatha yoga at a retreat on Paradise Island in the Caribbean. I'd spent days, weeks and months in various spiritual workshops, sometimes in England, and other times in more exotic locations, like the Greek islands. I'd sung Gregorian chant with the Benedictine nuns on the Isle of Wight. I was a Reiki Master. I'd dowsed, I'd rolfed. I'd also practised a Polynesian type of deep spiritual healing called *huna kane*. I knew about the *chakras* (the spiritual energy centres in the body) *prana* (spiritual energy) and *devas* (don't ask!).

In other words, I'd trodden the well-worn path of the spiritual seeker. Yet despite reading reams and reams on the subject, and praying and meditating every day, I'd never met a single person who could lead me to this other Mr Right. Many said they could. But you could just tell from how they acted that it was all just deluded ego. In fact, it became almost a rule of thumb that the closer they claimed to be, the further away from it they truly were.

However, and with the odds diminishing as fast as they were in my other search, I still had a deep-seated, inner compulsion to find my spiritual other half. It was like a feeling in the gut that flew in the face of experience. But at least it had been getting me out of bed in the morning—until now, that is. Because just as I was having to admit that my hunt for my worldly Mr Right seemed to be ending in failure, my search for the spiritual one was also running into the Slough of Despond.

Anyway, I tried to shake myself free of these depressing thoughts and forced myself to get up from the loo. I checked my eye make-up in the bathroom mirror. Then I set my chin to rejoin the next candidate in the living room for another spin on the not so merry-go-round.

But as I walked through the living room door, I could see that I'd been granted a reprieve. Jamie was sprawled across the sofa and fast asleep. His mouth was slightly open. A little silver filigree of saliva was rolling down to his chin. There was even a suggestion of a snore. With his blond curls all tousled now, he looked so childlike, so first soprano choirboy, that any staggering survivors from my shipwrecked libido were immediately swamped by a tsunami of maternal instinct.

I leant over him, and ruffled his curls to wake him. His eyes shot open in alarm. Then he leapt to his feet, smoothed down his hair, and muttered something apologetically about an early morning breakfast meeting the next day.

"Sure, that's fine," I smiled, and handed him his jacket.

Within seconds, he was gone—and I was breathing a huge sigh of relief.

Then I started to laugh. It was erupting up from somewhere deep inside me, great rolling waves of pure, joyous gut laughter. I didn't understand what was happening because I'd never really laughed like that before. Then suddenly, I realised that he was in the room. Krishna, that is.

I couldn't see him. But the air was thick and nectar-like with his merry, tinkling laughter and I found myself being whirled around in a giddy dance by a partner that I couldn't see or feel. It was as if I'd broken through to another dimension. Or perhaps more accurately, as if he had broken through to me. I couldn't stop laughing, and my body wouldn't stop moving in a dance I'd never known before. I was whirling like a dervish. It was ecstatic. It was bliss. It was complete joy.

I could sense the young, boyish charm in my partner, the playfulness of him. But I could also feel that he was ageless and eternal. It wasn't sexual or romantic. But neither was it completely platonic. I couldn't understand it. It didn't fit into any of my mental templates. So in the end, I stopped trying to analyse it and surrendered myself to the pure enjoyment.

Afterwards, when I tried to put words to the experience, I would say that it was as if Love had taken a body, a physical form, and dropped in to dance with me—just for the play of it, just because I had asked—and that he'd seemed vastly amused at his own joke or game.

But I can't tell you how long this dancing went on because time seemed not to exist. I suppose it could have been about half-an-hour. Then it stopped almost as abruptly as it had begun, and I'd fallen into bed, barely able to undress and, quite quickly, dropped into a very deep sleep.

Days later, I would wonder if it had just been an hallucination, or a dream. Then I'd think that I couldn't possibly have been capable of imagining such divine ecstasy. But even if I had, I would reason to myself, the feeling that it had generated was so intoxicating, and so overwhelming, that it couldn't have come from any normal earthly source.

So I was forever churning it over in my mind.

*Did Krishna really answer my cry for help? I kept asking myself. Could it really be that, in all the long decades of boyfriends, husbands, partners, dates and one-night-stands, this finally might be it? Was it divine love? Was it God? Or was it complete madness?*

In the end, though, I realised that I didn't care what they called it, so long as I could find a way to get it on tap.

As I'm sure you can guess, I had a long and extraordinary journey ahead of me.