

# May Loves December

Lucinda Franks's memoir of her marriage is a tribute to her husband.

By KATI MARTON

THE SECRET TO a long and passionate union is to marry someone almost 30 years your senior. That seems to be the message of Lucinda Franks's engaging memoir, "Timeless: Love, Morgenthau, and Me." Of course it helps if that someone is Robert M. Morgenthau, scion of a historic family, on the cusp of an extraordinarily long-running career as Manhattan's district attorney. But the real subject of this brave, highly personal account of the Morgenthaus' shared life is the mysterious alchemy that

they had ruined." She quits The Times and embraces her real calling: Robert M. Morgenthau.

When the pot-smoking, self-described "undomesticated radical" in a poncho found herself with the taciturn district attorney, she felt in the presence of greatness. "I got goose bumps the way he said . . . duty and sacrifice. . . . He was the kind of man they didn't make anymore. . . . Today he was a fine man, but someday he would be a great one." And all that history! Morgenthau's father had been Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of the Treasury, his grandfather Woodrow Wilson's envoy

his hand with firm finality, slipped in and closed the door. Somehow, he had slipped in behind me." The D.A. proves to be a great lover. "For all their revolutionary pronouncement, boys my age . . . swooped down on women like raptors. . . . But not this man." And best of all, he made pancakes the morning after.

Just when you think, please, life isn't like this, we are mercifully plunged into more bracing waters. Morgenthau is revealed as a repressed member of the Silent Generation who grabs the phone in the middle of making love when the mayor calls. "Ed, hello!" the D.A. greets Hizzoner, without skipping a beat. His insensitivity is at times jaw-dropping. He continues to wear the wedding ring from his first marriage until shortly before he weds Franks. His children rebuff her; at times they treat her like a fortune hunter.

Her adoration of him, however, knows no bounds. There were times reading her many accounts of his magnetism when I shouted T.M.I. — too much information! (The randy pair even do it in a hospital bathroom.) And though I admire her candor in revealing her deepest feelings, there are too many overwritten paens to her husband. (She even finds his undershirt "immortal." Seriously.)

But mostly, I loved her unabashed affirmation of love's irrational power. Lucky man, to have found such a smart, devoted and utterly loyal partner. Franks displays Nancy Reagan-like ferocity when Morgenthau's opponent for D.A. dares bring up his age (he is in his 80s). "I wanted to break her neck," she writes. "I wanted to cut off all her dumb blond hair and grind her preppy suits into the muck and pull out her 62-year-old pink teenybop fingernails." Whew.

Franks, despite her pot-smoking and anti-Establishment rhetoric, is in some ways a throwback to an even earlier age. She wants more than anything to adore, look after and serve her beloved. Somehow, all the while she stays true to herself. She continues to write serious, well-received books, including a poignant memoir of her mysterious father. She raises two children. And she never becomes one of those living lollipops. However, when the 89-year-old Morgenthau asks his wife, "Do you think I should retire?" and her surprised reaction is, "I almost tipped over in my chair," I felt her love had turned slightly delusional.

Perhaps inevitably, the book ends on a somewhat melancholic note. Their roles have reversed and love can no longer blind her to their near-30-year age difference. He now needs her more than she needs him. "I think you're angry at me," he says plaintively, "because I got old." The specter of mortality hangs over even the great and the powerful. By writing this affecting book, however, Lucinda Franks has made their love story permanent. □

## TIMELESS

### Love, Morgenthau, and Me

By Lucinda Franks

Illustrated. 390 pp.

Sarah Crichton Books/

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$28.

forges an unlikely couple out of two dissimilar souls. This is also a love story in a political context: the great events in New York's life in the last 40 years, observed by a sharp reporter from a privileged perch.

Among the many things that make "Timeless" an unusual May-December tale is that Franks, a former New York Times reporter, did not need a man to give her a "big life." The feisty 26-year-old was already cruising smoothly in the city's fast lane. Robert Redford calls her — three times! But she fell madly (the word here is an understatement) for an emotionally distant widower with five children who was nearly twice her age, a repressed product of Our Crowd, that world of aristocratic Jewish clans, arbiters of much of New York's cultural and social life.

Her story is the classic trajectory of a bright, ambitious young woman drawn moth-like to Manhattan in the early days of the women's movement. Following a stint as a London-based wire service reporter, and armed with a Pulitzer Prize for a U.P.I. series on a member of the Weathermen, she maneuvers an interview in 1974 with The Times's redoubtable managing editor, A.M. Rosenthal. Franks quickly decodes Rosenthal's legendary gruffness. "Why do you want to work here?" he asks her. "Because The Times is the greatest newspaper in the world," she wisely answers. "Come on," Rosenthal says, "I'll show you where you'll be sitting."

Just like that, she was inside the magic circle. But in just two years, she finds the whole business pointless and destructive. "My stories were too soon forgotten by everyone except the people whose lives



The couple early in their marriage.

to the Ottoman Empire. "Did I even have what it took to stand by him, to put myself aside and help him achieve his destiny?" The answer is, most definitely yes.

Everything changed for her on their first date in 1976, a party at the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s townhouse, which she recalls as a nightmare that might have been conjured up by Tom Wolfe. "A ghastly fairyland of flowing chiffons, feathery boas coiling around swan-thin necks. . . . Living lollipops." Jackie O. makes an appearance. "The sophisticated mouths of the society ladies fell open and smiled dumbly at her."

Taking Lucinda home after that party and dinner together, Morgenthau demonstrates he was as adept at seduction as at prosecution. She opened her apartment door "just a crack," she writes, "put my heavy shoulder bag between us, shook

KATI MARTON'S most recent book is "Paris: A Love Story." Her investigative history, "The Polk Conspiracy: Murder and Cover-up in the Case of CBS News Correspondent George Polk," will be reissued this fall.