



B R E A K U P S :

The Confident Woman's Guide to
moving on & being single

By Kali Rogers

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Introduction

Hi friend.

If you're reading this, my heart goes out to you. I know you are in a tough spot right now. Whether you're on the brink of ending a relationship or someone just absolutely wrecked your heart – there's no way you're feeling ok right about now.

The good news is, I've gone through every sort of breakup imaginable. I've reluctantly broken up with an amazing person because I wasn't into it anymore, I've been cheated on, I've broken someone's heart, I've been rejected, and I've gotten my heart broken to an exponential degree.

It's been a fun ride.

So instead of stuffing all of those wonderful memories under my metaphorical bed to collect dust, I've decided to leave them out in the open for you to learn from. While some of these memories are painful, and I will be cringing the majority of the time I write this (seriously) – I trust that you understand exactly what I went through, just as I understand what you're going through now. So let's move forward together.

Ending a Relationship

I'm not one for small talk - it's an introvert's curse - so let's just dive in, shall we?

But...before we get to the main attraction...I think it's important to touch on the fact that not all of you have actually *left* your relationship yet.

:awkward pause:

How to Know When It's Time to End a Relationship

If you are sitting there in silence, nodding your head, then pay attention! Sounds like you're probably scared shitless to walk away from something that seems decent enough - and I get that. The thought of being alone with our thoughts can feel scarier than being with someone we deem perfectly fine. So the question is, is perfectly fine good enough for you?

You're not alone. I had trouble with this question in my early 20s.

His name was Lucas. We met when I was only 13 years old. YES - you read that right - Thir-teen!Years!Old! I was a baby! But I was old enough to know that I IMMEDIATELY liked him the second I met him. I had just moved from Michigan to Texas during spring break of my eighth grade year, and was absolutely desperate to make new friends. I had approximately two months to find a group of people that would be willing to hang out with the new girl over summer - otherwise I was toast. The pressure was on.

I met Lucas on my first day of school, and knew there was something special about him. I even remember where we were - by our lockers outside of the cafeteria. (Are you feeling nostalgic yet?)

Even as an eighth grader he seemed so...old. But not in like, a creepy way. In a smart I-have-good-values-and-I-treat-people-nicely-kind-of-way. While everyone else called me “Sandy” from Grease (I am not Australian, I just had blonde hair and was the “new girl” – so clever, guys), he stuck with my first name. He looked me in the eye, but kept a respectful distance. He didn’t swoon, nor did he ignore me. I was so in.

Alas, instead of engaging in innocent flirtation and after school AOL chats, we ended up as friends. One of my first new friends at school already liked him, and his best friend (and my neighbor) had decided he wanted to pursue the new girl at school (hi). I simply couldn’t afford to rock the boat for a boy. But as the years passed and high school was in full bloom, we became best friends. He had girlfriends, I had a serious boyfriend – and I resigned myself to being Lucas’ best girl friend. It was the best I could hope for given the circumstances.

That is, until high school graduation was staring us straight in the face. Our serious relationships had both dismantled (my Mormon boyfriend graduated early to go play football at BYU and do missionary stuff – and no I am not Mormon) and we JUMPED at the opportunity to see what the two of us could actually be together. We both wanted to try it out and see exactly what we had been missing.

And man oh man, were we right to try.

He was everything I had wanted, and I knew him better than anyone in the world. We were inseparable, and having the absolute time of our lives.

That is, until I found out that I got summer acceptance into The University of Texas at Austin (because I wasn’t smart enough for fall acceptance LMAO) and was gone by the start of June. He went off to Vanderbilt to play football (wait...do I have a type?) and we did our own thing for a bit.

By the time fall came around – I was not having it with these frat boys. I kept hearing stories of sexual assault, girls passed out at frat houses, and shacking

that left me feeling rattled and unsettled about the new dating scene I was entering. Lucas was too busy with football and tutoring to even begin to think about dating...and it made sense for us to not give up on us after all.

Romantic, I know.

But it didn't matter. I felt honored to be so close with someone that special. Lucas wasn't perfect – but I knew by the time we were almost real adults, I had carved out a place in his heart that would only be reserved for me for as long as I lived. But as time passed, I just wasn't sure if I had done the same for him.

In fact, I had tried to become as intimate and vulnerable with him as much as I possibly could when we had first started dating. Maybe it's because I was scared. Or maybe it's because I was in so deep. He was too young at the time – only 18 or 19 for god's sake – but I kept feeling resentful and unfulfilled with his inability to connect to the depths I wanted him to. He didn't want to have serious conversations about life's meaning and the experiences we'd share in 5 years – he wanted to discuss football and our next trip together. But I had poured so much time and mental energy into our relationship that I found I barely had anything else going on outside of it.

And so, I made the decision to stop giving him all of myself, and to disperse it amongst others. I made closer friends in college, started branching out more, and felt happier altogether. It felt balanced, natural, organic. And while he could probably sense I was pulling away, I knew it was a much healthier choice for me.

Even though the relationship remained, once I fully came out of my shell and looked around, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was still missing out. And once I got the courage to step away from the relationship and out on my own, I realized I had been.

But the thing is, this wasn't his fault. It was MY fault for not being honest with myself. I wanted to have conversations about life's meaning and where I'd be in five years. But I suffocated that voice. I chose a fake connection over authentic friction. I had become a diluted version of myself for his pleasure. He never

asked me to do this for him, but I instinctively felt like it was the only way for us to work. I wouldn't comment on misogynist things he said (fucking football culture UGH), I pretended to be interested in the same things, and I even convinced myself I liked all of his friends, even though we had nothing in common. All of this for the sake of harmony. But none of it for the sake of my own individuality.

Right before I decided to call it off, my father could tell I was struggling internally with the relationship. So he asked me one simple question to make things easier on me:

“Does he light your haystack on fire?”

I paused. And whether I answered or not – it didn’t matter.

Very few people understood my decision to end it. His family didn’t. Our friends didn’t. He certainly didn’t. I lost a lot when I walked away. The majority of my high school and college memories remained with him. But what I gained was invaluable, and I do not ever regret my choice for one second. Because I knew the truth – all due to a simple question.

In addition to my father’s sage advice, I’ve come up with a few more strong indicators that you are emotionally ready to end a relationship. My relationship with Lucas taught me so much about commitment – and the sacrifices we sometimes make to honor it. But what’s the difference between a sacrifice, and a compromise for the sake of a relationship? This is what we are going to explore right now. My wish is that these warning signs give you the confidence to do what you know is right.

1. You don’t like yourself in the relationship.

You know how colors look differently when lined up next to each other? Your blue eyes POP when you’re wearing navy, hunter green, or purple—but they glaze over when wearing white or gray. The same happens with people.

People can complement our personalities in vastly different ways. Some can bring out your inner stand-up comedian, while others encourage your intellectual, professorial side to really blossom under pressure. It's not crazy to say that your romantic partner has the most influence over this complementary dynamic—so be honest with yourself when you ask—do you like yourself in this relationship?

Are you loving this confident, kind, ambitious, and empathetic you, or are you constantly coming face to face with your icky side?

We all have flaws. We all have demons. It's not that we want to completely erase them—but we don't want to highlight them, either. And if our partner consistently brings out the worst in us, it's going to be hard to thoroughly enjoy the relationship.

I want to make one thing exceptionally clear: this isn't necessarily your partner's fault, just like it wasn't Lucas' fault. He didn't force me to change. I did that all on my own, because I thought that's what compromise meant. I was terribly wrong.

Your partner most likely cannot help how their personality complements yours. But regardless—you deserve to be in a relationship where you feel like a better person for it. If that's not the case, then it's best to leave.

2. There isn't a perceived equity in effort.

Do you feel like you're carrying the relationship? Are you the one always reaching out? Making plans? Showing affection? Sharing stories?

Oof. You must be exhausted.

People share and receive love in different ways. Your relationship does not need to be quid pro quo down the line. But if you don't perceive the relationship as being equal—that is a massive problem.

Everyone is busy. Everyone has baggage. Everyone has obligations. But when you're in a relationship, you make time for it, period. Otherwise, you guys can just date and casually enjoy each other's company while you keep on living your life. Relationships require effort and commitment. So if you're not perceiving either—then what's the point? You deserve to be courted just as much as you should be expected to do the courting. Walking away at least gives you the opportunity to find a balanced relationship.

3. You don't feel loved.

One of the best perks of being in a relationship is having the solid belief that you are *special.* They chose YOU. You get their kisses. You get their compliments. You get their affection. You are the one who gets to be their partner, and they get to be yours.

So if you don't feel this way, again, what's the point?

Not feeling loved has got to be one of the worst feelings EVER. Yes, I am all for self-love and completely encourage women to love themselves so much that it doesn't matter what other people think. But subjecting ourselves to feeling not loved on a daily basis just sounds like agony.

That's a hard pass from me. And it should be for you, too.

The reality is, life is hard. There are going to be moments in life where you don't feel intelligent. You are going to have days when you think all of your hard work has been pointless. There will be months when you feel like absolutely nothing is going your way. I promise you, it will happen. So in those moments, the last thing you want is a partner who doesn't help build you back up. It's hard convincing ourselves of our worth—we don't need the duty of convincing our partner, too.

Let them go, and find someone who is dead sure of your worth.

4. You know you don't love them.

Do not let guilt, fear, shame, or embarrassment keep you in a relationship. Not only are you doing yourself a disservice, but you are completely screwing over your partner, too.

Breakups are hard. People get their feelings hurt. But human beings are resilient. We are wired for survival. Emotional set-backs are difficult—but we bounce back. In fact, we were designed to bounce back. And the hurt that we suffer is *completely* worth it when we are finally able to find someone who treats us the way we deserve. But guess what? You—nor them—will get that opportunity if you hold onto a loveless relationship because you're scared of short-term consequences.

I say this with love: get over it.

You are going to hurt people, and people are going to hurt you. That's life. So do what you know to be right and cut people free when you can't give them what they need. And hope to goodness that they do the same for you.
More on this later.

5. You love them, but you don't like them.

There is a *massive* difference between like and love. You love your family—but you don't always like your family. You like your next-door neighbor, but you don't love them (especially when their damn dog barks all day). (This is not a personal reference). (Ok, yes it definitely is).

So ask yourself, do you like your partner? Do you admire their accomplishments? Do you think they are a good person? Do you like their

friends? Are they nice to strangers? Do they tip their waitresses? Do you brag about them to your family?

If you are struggling to come up with concrete things that you like about your partner, that's not a good sign. You need to love AND like your partner. Life is too long to be with some-one you tolerate. They can have a good heart, and still not be the one for you. Give yourself permission to find someone who lights your haystack on fire AND is nice to your mother. They're out there. But you won't find them unless you end it.

TL;DR: Relationship Goals: Ben Wyatt and Leslie Knope. And if you don't get this reference you need to start watching Parks and Rec – but start on season 2 first. You'll thank me later.

6. You are putting your life on pause.

I'm going to continue repeating this until I am blue in the face: relationships are bonuses in life. The goal is to have an inde-pendently happy life, find someone who also has an inde-pendently happy life, and share your fabulously independent lives together. So if your life is being put on hold completely because of their choices—that ain't good.

It's ok if there is a little give and take. Your relationship responsibilities won't always be evenly distributed. But you should always be able to pursue your goals, keep moving forward, and build the life you envisioned while you are dating somebody else. The two are not even close to being mutu-ally exclusive.

I'm going to switch gears real fast and talk about my husband, Andrew, because we are a really, really good example of this if I do say so myself! About a year and a half into our relationship, Andrew decided to settle into early retirement from the law profession. I didn't blame him. Being a lawyer sucks wind.

But before that turning point, I had been planning my next career moves. I had gotten a job in private practice, been fired at said job. I had pitched an online coaching platform to a VP of a big time restaurant, been turned down for said pitch, and started building the beginnings of a company I had recently named Blush.

:)

Needless to say, I was doing a lot of the leaning. A lot. My funds were short, my stress was high, and my direction was all over the place. He was my anchor in my messy life.

Was that fair? I don't know. Maybe not. But either way, the tables were quickly turned the second he quit his job. I was now the breadwinner, the anchor, and the homemaker. It was my turn to hold down the fort while he got his life in order. We took turns. And to this day, we still do.

Not every relationship needs to have this dramatic of twists and turns—it can be way more subtle than this. But the point is, you have to have some sort of a balancing act within your relationship. There should not be a pattern of one person taking it all while the other accommodates every step of the way.

In fact, maybe there's a better way of phrasing this: your significant other is holding you back.

You can love someone with all your heart, but they just might not be on the same frequency. This might not be their fault. It might not be anyone's fault. But if you can't ignore the reality that your life isn't progressing the way it should because of this relationship—things aren't going to get any better the longer you wait. You're only going to fall further and further behind on your goals, and in the end, you will resent your partner for the lost time. Don't do that to them. Don't do that to yourself. Find someone who propels you forward instead of encouraging the status quo. End the relationship and keep pursuing life.

7. The negative outweighs the positive.

This is pretty self-explanatory. If the fighting outweighs the kissing, the crying overshadows the laughing, the knots out-weigh the butterflies—then it's time to move on.

Short and sweet!

Leaving a Relationship Without Feeling Guilty

I wish I could tell you that making the decision to finally leave is the easy part. Unfortunately, it gets worse before it gets better.

I don't say this to deter you from doing what you know is right – I'm saying it to prepare you. I don't want you to get up the courage to finally make up your mind, only to abandon it once you realize you actually have to go through with it.

If you're anything like me, the thought of hurting someone intentionally is enough to take the wind out of you. Especially when it comes to someone you either love or did love at one point.

Which is why I broke up with Lucas in an impulsive frenzy that left everyone stunned and confused. I was so petrified of hurting someone who didn't deserve it, that I actually ended up making it worse.

This fear of hurting someone else might even be strong enough to create some intense procrastination ("I'll do it after the holidays") or even be persuasive enough to abandon your decision in the first place ("I'm just not ready, we have a good thing going!") – so don't allow it to take over. Instead, read all of the reasons why you need to move forward and break someone's heart for the sake of BOTH of you. Ideally this helps you calm your nerves, think logically, and deliver your message clearly and consistently.

Do as I say, not as I do.

1. Think about what they deserve

If you actually think pretty highly of the person you are no longer in love with, why would you want to subject them to a loveless relationship?

Thinking things like, “If I could snap my fingers and fall back in love with them, I would” are not as productive as you might think. While your thoughts are sincere, it doesn’t change the fact that your significant other is in a relationship with somebody who does not and will not love them back.

Why would you want that for them?

Every day you spend in a relationship with this person, you are stripping them of their ability to find love elsewhere. They deserve more than that. Even if they have their faults, they deserve the option to be in a different relationship that is better suited for them. And the longer you spend trying to protect their feelings, the angrier they will be that they didn’t have the chance to move on sooner.

Give them that opportunity and cut them loose. Your guilt might still be profuse, but at least you’ll have the security that they can finally start looking for other options.

2. You’re being selfish

Completely.

It’s easy to think of staying in this relationship as a selfless act. You probably envision your significant others’ reaction to the breakup conversation. You imagine the crying and the begging and the look of desperation shooting from their eyes. You think to yourself, I am sparing them from pain. I am protecting their feelings and ensuring that their happiness lasts as long as possible.

But in reality, you're just being selfish.

You're actually avoiding a really terrible conversation at all costs. And you are justifying your avoidance by convincing yourself it's really for them.

Humans are resilient. And while I completely agree that being on the receiving end of a breakup is awful – I also know people get over it. They move on. They learn to live without you. In fact, most of my clients (and myself!) look back on their devastating breakups as one of the better pivotal moments of their lives. If that guy hadn't left them in that awful way, then they never would have agreed to go out on a date with that guy who really wasn't their type. And they wouldn't be getting married in a few weeks.

See what I mean?

People's stories don't end and begin with you – but that's how you are playing this. Have faith that you are not the center of their universe and give them some credit. They have the ability to move on if they are given the chance.

3. You're only making it worse by waiting

There will always be a reason to stay.

Holiday season. A birthday. A friend's wedding. The trip you planned to Colorado that's finally here. A double date you agreed to.

The list can go on and on. But the longer you wait, the more pissed off your significant other is going to be when it's finally over. People do not like having their time wasted, and if they find out you've been pretending to be in love for the past x months, it's not going to be pretty. Which, they probably will find out, because people aren't that stupid.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg for all of the issues that could arise. Trust issues could become an issue. If you pretended for so long, how can they trust future partners to be authentic? Unnecessary anger could bubble to the surface.

Do you really want this breakup to be an ugly one? There could be a chance for you two to remain friends since you have such a high positive regard for them at the moment. But lying to them for months on end is not how to get things started.

Stop making excuses and do what you need to do. There is NEVER a good time to breakup with somebody – no matter how you look at it, and the longer you wait the worse it will be.

4. You deserve to be happy, too.

You are not a monster for falling out of love with somebody.

I know this book probably hasn't been the easiest to read because I am royally calling you out, and you need that, but you also need to remember that you are still a good egg.

You cannot control how you feel – and like we went over earlier – if you could, you wouldn't be in this situation. I'm really sorry about that. Hurting somebody you respect and deeply care for feels like nothing short of a stab in the gut. Plus having the knowledge that they actually love you might as well be salt on the wound. But it is what it is. You didn't decide this. It just happened. And while you can't control your feelings, you can control your actions.

So do the right thing and let BOTH of you find happiness. You deserve to be in a relationship that doesn't make you feel like the most rotten person on the face of the earth. The amount of guilt you are carrying around with you daily cannot be good for your health, and you shouldn't keep torturing yourself. Think about the levity you are going to feel as a single person. This isn't to say you're ready to hit the dating scene ASAP – but at least you won't go to bed at night knowing you're wasting someone else's time.

Do what you need to do. Release yourself from an unfulfilling relationship and allow both of you to seek out a better environment for yourselves. After some time, you'll realize that both of you are much better off.

Getting Over a Breakup

It's time.

You've been hanging with me for long enough (or you skipped to this part of the table of contents - smart girl) and are finally ready to get to the HOW DO I GET OVER THIS MOTHERF-ING BREAKUP phase of the book.

Well, it's here. So let's dive in.

Let me start by saying, I have been dumped. Badly. Embarrassingly dumped. This is the part where I start to cringe again while writing - because I handled it so! Poorly!

But I'm going to share with you all of the icky details because I'm nice like that.

Let's pick up where I left off with Lucas. Y'all know that by the time my junior year of college came rolling around, my relationship with Lucas had turned into a massive disappointment just hanging on for dear life. It was comfortable and consistent and annoying like that scratchy old sweater you pull out every Christmas to wear for family dinner and promise yourself "*never again.*"

What I left out before, was that I actually traced back to the start of our inevitable doom to the day I called Lucas to tell him my parents were getting divorced during my sophomore year. Like a good reliable boyfriend, he promised to get on the next flight to come console me.

Instead, he called me the next morning and pretended like the conversation had never happened. And I stayed with him for a full year more because...?

See? So many "learn from my mistakes" moments coming right atcha.

Anywho, we finally broke up after I spent the majority of winter break reading terrible Y.A. novels instead of spending time together (maybe I wasn't such a stellar girlfriend, either??). He wasn't a bad guy, and I actually felt really guilty about it (see previous section). But I was ready to party. I was ready to make out. I was ready to feel like a damn debutante, being newly ushered into the world of entitled douchebags who couldn't WAIT to talk about their rich daddy's business back home.

It took me about two solid make outs before I dumped my party girl persona and went right back to being the boring, yet very loyal, plus one.

How lame. I didn't even last two weeks! Instead, I did what any obnoxious serial monogamist does and fell for the first guy who was nice to me.

He was just what the doctor ordered – a party guy who kind of looked like a vampire from Twilight. And for 2005, that's all I could really ask for. It was a dark time.

Our first date? Trulucks. Our first kiss? Don't really remember. Our first REAL sexual experience? In a LAKE.

(Ewwwww why did I think that was sanitary...?)

He introduced me as his girlfriend before we had even defined the relationship, which is basically the same thing as a college proposal. He talked about starting a life together post-college and how I was “out of his league.” We held hands in public (hello, low standards), he took me home to meet his family, we stayed up late at night singing and playing guitar and talking about how all of our dreams were going to come true together. We watched Gossip Girl together for Chrissake.

I was MADLY in love for the first time in my life. What I felt for John dwarfed my relationship with Lucas – and I was nowhere near ready for it. I also wasn't going to let anyone take it away from me.

That summer was arguably the best summer of my life. I was in a haze. Pretty sure I bombed the LSAT because I spent the majority of my time re-reading our text messages and stalking him on Facebook.

As fall approached, I noticed a slight shift but didn't seem to care too much. He wasn't hanging out with me as much, but, you know, school and stuff. I couldn't take it too seriously; after all, we were in love. Right?

Halloween was approaching and we had gone together to pick out our Halloween costumes. I was Hannah Montana—yikes—and because he refused to play along, I told him to wear jeans and a vest and go as Nick Jonas. Pop stars! SO adorbs! (Again, CRINGING writing this.) I was so excited to attend our final Halloween party of college—not only because we were seniors and could actually drink at this event legally—but also because my baby brother was a freshman in college and had been asked to attend the party as a date! YAY!!! What on earth could go wrong???

Welllllllp I forgot my ID—not once, but twice—that was a fun car ride back and forth), picked a fight with John because he wanted to smoke cigarettes with a total bratface who was always mean to me—the same girl who's response to my gushing “John told me he loved me!” was “why does he lie to people?”—and ended up walking home by myself.

Editor's note: I promise you my costumes have gotten better. In the more recent Halloweens I was pizza from McDonalds (does anyone listen to that podcast?) and the skeleton from David S. Pumpkins. I feel like this is pertinent information.

The next morning, I received the turd of all text messages. “We need to talk.”

Ah, shit. I crawled into his white Tahoe passenger seat and he proceeded to drive one city block before dumping me straight on my bum.

Kali: “But you said we were going to get married!”

John: “I know. I’m sorry.”

Kali: “How could you do this?”

John: "This just isn't going to work out."

Kali: "Pull the car over, I can't breathe."

John: "ok."

Pulls car over, waits approximately 5 seconds for me to de- board, and screeches away.

I remember calling my mom, barely able to breathe. I managed to squeak out that John had dumped me, and that I was standing in front of my sorority house (I am aware that I am a cliché), too scared and embarrassed to walk inside because hardly any of my friends had ever seen me cry.

That's right. After I ended a 3+ year long distance relationship?—no visible tears. When I totally forgot to fill in the scantron on my Chemistry test, inevitably failing?—no visible tears. My parents got a fucking DIVORCE?—no visible tears.

I'm sure I probably cried over those three instances in the privacy of the communal showers—especially the Chemistry test, how on earth did I manage that?—but I had no witnesses. JK I DEF CRIED OVER MY PARENTS DIVORCE BUT THAT'S TOO SAD FOR THIS BOOK LOLOL.

However – as far as everyone else was concerned at this moment in time, I was the Ice Queen. I had a cold-button heart and no one was going to break me.

Until my mommy made me go inside.

I cried for weeks. I lost weight and then gained it all back plus ten pounds (WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE). My friends saw me snot-nosed and puffy-eyed so many times that I think they forgot I had relatively normal pigmentation in my face. My bestie Caroline rubbed my back while I dry heaved every other night for a month. Poor thing. There is nothing I wouldn't do for that girl from here on out—I'm pretty sure half her T-shirts are drenched in Kali boogers. It took months before reality emerged from the wreckage.

But once I finally got a grip, I was faced with the reality that John wasn't the perfect boyfriend. In fact, he was a shitty boyfriend. And he got so fed up with me letting him be so shitty that he got bored with me.

Case in point:

- When we went to a friend's lake house and I got the stomach flu, he sent me home with a buddy of his who was going home early so he could stay and party another night. I threw up for two days straight.
- For my 21st birthday, also the day I took the LSAT, he came in town with a friend and sat at a different table from me and my friends. Yes, a separate table. And then he promptly went home and let me celebrate with my friends from LSAT prep class.
- He talked shit about me to his friends on G-chat. For real. Like who talks shit about their girlfriend in writing AND leaves it open on their computer? Fucking idiot. Also, I snooped! Whoopsies - do as I say and not as I do!
- He never once agreed to hang out with my friends even though I invited him on numerous occasions. And who wouldn't want to hang out with Caroline? Freak
- He would consistently go to his female friend's box seats for football games and not invite me, nor ask the host to invite me. Ever. Apparently, I was an embarrassment. Or more likely, I wasn't cool enough to hang.
- He always wanted me to smoke pot. Which I realized later meant that he wanted me to shut the hell up and chill out. But you know what John - I have a lot of my mind, so no I don't want your silencing drugs and ALSO weed makes me talk even MORE so the joke is on YOU.
- My family's finances were an intriguing topic during our relationship. He was very interested in if I had a trust fund (lol k) and sized me up next to his female friends' generational wealth. Proudly, I did not measure up.

- He continuously told me I was too good for him. Which, as a note, when someone says that, please believe them.

Good lord. How did I take this person seriously? How did I let my confidence get so low that I would allow someone to dick me around for months and then get the satisfaction of dumping me?

I don't know, but I did!!!

In the weeks and months following the breakup, I became so consumed with proving to everyone that I was better than being dumped by some asshole who called me clingy (rude), that pretty much everything I did for a solid six months was meant to manipulate others' perceptions of me.

After my days of following the trail John left around campus were gone (he essentially had a blonde shadow for three months), I decided to get my life together by applying for anything and everything I thought would impress my peers.

I applied for Teach for America without the slightest passion for teaching.

Yes, you read that right. I applied to be in TFA because I got dumped. That's how out of control I was.

Thank God the admissions team knew their shit and did not accept me. Poor kids wouldn't have stood a chance with me at the helm.

Then, I got my LSAT score back.

Turns out being a lawyer wasn't really in the cards, either. And another dodged bullet by society, might I add.

I also decided to date every douchebag on campus for approximately three days just to make sure everyone knew I "still had it." Going on a campus crusade to prove I was still kissable probably only convinced others the only thing I

actually had was HPV. (I actually don't, which is kind of a miracle, amiright?)

So yeah, my "look at me, I'm adulting!" plans for post-grad crashed like a Jenga tower at the hands of a five-year-old.

I resorted to my backup plan: counseling.

Because there is NOTHING better for the field of counseling than a shit show 22 year old looking to gather up the ashes of her former functioning life.

And that's how I got here!!!!

Ok there is way more to this story and again, I promise I am a well-adjusted married adult with two cats, but honestly I'm getting bored talking about myself so let's move onto YOU.

It's worth noting that regardless of the nature of your breakup, they hurt like a bitch. It doesn't matter if your breakup was way more dramatic than what you just read, or yours doesn't hold a candle to being utterly and hopelessly sad for six months. Breakups are equal opportunity offenders - everyone hurts. And, since unfortunately most of the relationships you will have in your lifetime aren't meant to last, you're going to have to go through at least a few of these.

If this is your first breakup, oh baby girl, I hear you. I can literally hear you crying right now as you read and you've probably been crying for the past week non-stop. Don't worry, it's normal. This severe reaction mostly stems from the lack of protection we shield ourselves with during the relationship. Had we known that this relationship was going to rip apart at the seams, we might have held back a little more. But we didn't. So everything hurts. Even our fingernails.

But please hear me when I say: I do NOT want you to learn how to restrain yourself in relationships. That leads to broken intimacy, minimal communication, insecurity, and illogical defense mechanisms. It's not good. But I do want to help you bounce back from heartache. I want you to feel like

you can go full throttle into every relationship you have, and recover just fine if it doesn't work out.

So bear in mind that the good news is we are resilient. And instead of learning how to hold back within our relationships, we just have to learn how to get better at overcoming breakups. So let's start with the basics. Repeat after me:

1. Zero Contact

I am going to elaborate on this in detail as to why in a beat – but I want to put it in here twice so you understand the severity of the situation. If not speaking to your ex is available to you (you do not work together, have children together, etc.), then please exercise that right.

If they contact you, too bad. They want to go get some coffee? So sad. This is not in your best interest. You are still pretty ripe from this breakup and seeing them for the first time isn't going to magically snap you out of feeling terrible. Usually it does the exact opposite. Which is why you best need to stay on your own for a bit in order to heal. If you need to contact them later – wait at least 30 days minimum. There is no rush.

2. Cry

A lot. Because if you don't do it now—you'll just do it later. And by then, it'll seem a little odd that you're not over it. So go ahead – let it out now. Cry in your room, cry in your car, cry to a friend, cry to your mom, cry on this book. Cry until your tear ducts have to work overtime just to supply enough tears to keep you going. Get it ALL out. You have to seriously shed all of this pent up sadness out of your body—or else it will hang around you for weeks to come.

There is absolutely no shame in crying—regardless if you saw the end coming or you were completely blindsided and left your heart completely exposed to

rejection. It hurts. Like hell. So honor the gnarly feeling that it is, get back in that shower, and cry like you mean it.

3. Spend time alone

You can rebound later. For right now, let's focus on dating yourself.

Don't worry, you're not feeling sorry for yourself if you stay in on a Friday night and binge watch Parks and Rec. (Might I suggest the "Galentines Day" episode?). Instead, you're simply getting comfortable with being alone. You really haven't had that chance in quite some time. It's fun to reconnect with yourself! You can be the most selfish brat in the world and no one is there to pitch a fit! You can watch your quirky indie comedies, eat frozen yogurt by the gallon, and experiment with creepy skin masks at your leisure. It's quite lovely.

But more than just getting to have it your way—you are overcoming the pervasive fear of being alone. Because if you are scared of being alone, how will you ever know if your next relationship is fueled by love or fear?

Let's make sure we know the answer to that one.

4. Be Vulnerable

Take a deep breath, channel the strength of my mother, Mama Karil, and tell your ass to go and call your friends.

It's time to come clean and admit that you're really hurting. Trust me, you do not want to go through a breakup all by yourself. I mean you're already not talking to your ex and spending way more time alone (riiiight?)—so let's make sure you're not suffering in total silence.

It might be totally against your nature to admit to others that you're wounded, but it's time to embrace the pain and the support together. This is the entire POINT of having frirends – to be there for each other during times of need. So

please take advantage of the gorgeous relationships you've been cultivating over the years. Whether you have a million acquaintances that have the potential to blossom into life-long friendships due to the bonding this breakup caused, or you have a few friends who you know you can call on for anything - now is the time to reach out. They won't judge you, so you shouldn't judge yourself, either.

If your social circle isn't great with the advice, that's fine. You really don't need it. What you need right now is some distraction. Anyone can cry on their own - but the mental strength it takes to get your mind off of something painful is too much to carry at the moment. So instead, let your friends show you a good time. They can be there for you while also allowing you to forget about things, even if just for a day.

5. Write a Letter

You've got a lot going on in your head right now. Questions and cuss words and hypothetical scenarios that will probably never happen keep playing over and over again. It's overwhelming. And it's time to address it. So let's write it out.

Actually, better yet, write it out to the ex.

Yes—write a letter to your ex. Write out how you feel, what you're thinking, how you've been, and any questions you may be trying to figure out. Don't worry, I'm not going to make you send it - yikes - this is just for you.

This is your time to release everything you've been carrying around and put it all down in one place. And when you're done, you can put it away. Burn it for all I care. Just don't re- read it every night or even think about hitting "send"—it's in the past now. And hopefully, some of those uncomfortable feelings you've been carrying around can stay there, too.

6. Talk and Learn

It's time to thoroughly dive into what in the hell happened that made this break up so freaking awful. And you're going to need a partner in crime to help you work it out.

If you trust one of your besties to hold your hand as you walk through the emotional train wreck that is your heartache, that's seriously amazing. Congratulations. But if you're not sure about involving a friend, you might be better off with someone who has experience with this. And sometimes, there's nothing better than a little life coaching or therapy to give you a massive emotional makeover.

The important piece is that you address the dissolution of the relationship and the aftermath because that's how patterns start to form.

You know how one of your friends always dates the same kind of people and ends up in the same situation over and over again? Yeah, you don't want that. And you definitely don't want to coast forward for a few months, trick yourself into thinking you're fine, and then have an emotional breakdown over some guy who ghosted you after two weeks that you weren't even that into.

This is the time to do the work. Talk it out. Get sad. Get angry. Reflect. Then take a break and come back.

It's crucial for you to figure out what went wrong, and how to prevent it from happening again. You do not want to continue to fall in love with people who don't feel the same for you, or who bring out the worst in you. Maybe you're anxiously attached and need to work on your own self-esteem before you jump into a new relationship. Maybe you attract people who are always in a state of transition and need to focus on themselves alone. Maybe y'all simply had different values and it caused too much friction.

I don't have the answer as to why it didn't work out. Only you do. I highly recommend working with a professional to sort everything out - there's value

in making sure you're uncovering the right answers – but above all, take the time to explore this.

7. Remember You Are Still You.

You are not defined by this break up.

You are not now and forever will be the girl “who was dumped.” You can just be you.

You were you before the break up, and you will be you after the break up. Your identity is not up for grabs, and it never will be. You don’t need pity—you need perspective. There’s no need for anyone to feel sorry for you or for you to feel sorry for yourself. I know a breakup can make you feel like you’ve lost an arm, but all of your limbs are still intact! You will get through this just like you got through everything else in your life.

It’s easy to fall into pessimistic tendencies after a breakup.

“*I’m never going to meet anyone again.*” “*My life was all about them—what now?*”
“*I can’t trust anyone.*”

Listen to me: do not let an ex take away your light.

You will meet someone again. You will get your life back. And you will trust again. Why? Because you had all of these qualities before. It’s not like this breakup went in and changed your DNA. You’re still the same you—it’s just your perspective is a bit different. Things will revert back to normal if you just trust the system. Let your body work its way through this breakup as long as it needs to. Remember that you get to control the amount of self-awareness you pour into this breakup phase. And the more energy you put into pulling yourself out, the easier it will become.

8. Limit The Permanent Proof

Please do not give them a story to tell. You don't have to be the sad little girl who continues to call, text, or whine to get back what she wants (I am definitely not speaking from my own personal experience.)

At this point, they might deserve your tears (just a few), but they certainly don't deserve your dignity. You are going to come out of this, so no need to litter proof all over his phone that you are dying a slow miserable break-up death.

It's just not a good look, and you're going to regret it later.

If you're having trouble getting all of your feelings out and want them to KNOW how terrible you feel, go back to "writing it out" and write them a letter (that you do NOT send). It at least mimics the feeling of a conversation.

The point is, you've already had it out with your ex. I know you have. You've already exchanged all of the words there are left to exchange. Nothing else is going to change the fact that the break-up happened and you are left with the pieces. So instead of marking your territory, focus on things that are productive, like getting back into a routine and reconnecting with old friends.

9. Remember It Happened For a Reason

This might sound super obvious, but it's worth tattooing on your forearm if it will help you remember: your relationship ended for a reason.

And apparently, that reason was so major that your relationship could not survive it! It was not fixable! Which means there is no point in dwelling on what could have been, when they already decided it was not worth the effort to mend what was broken.

Concentrate on that reason. Do not try to justify it, rationalize it, solve it, or wish it away. Accept it for what it is, and use it as your anchor during this grieving process.

I remember after John broke up with me, all I wanted was to get back together. I was counting down the days until when my phone rang and he would beg me for another chance. I figured he would blame his swift departure on fear or peer pressure from his newly single friends.

But I received nothing. And that's because he did not love me anymore.

I could probably think of other reasons we weren't meant to last - different friend groups, different values, different backgrounds, different lifestyles - but none of that could trump the big gun. I could not fix the fact that he was not in love with me.

My dad had another idea, however. And this one truly stuck.

After weeks had passed, my dad called me to check in on me. When I admitted that I was taking it really hard and not doing my best, he said to me:
“Well, I’m sorry it ended, but I’m not upset about it. You deserve a great man. And unfortunately, he was not a great man.”

My dad has a way of speaking to me that simplifies all of the word salad floating around in my brain. Once he said OUT LOUD that my ex-boyfriend was not a great man, I couldn’t get back together with him. No way. Because then...what would that mean? That I’m settling for someone who isn’t great? But that’s not what I deserve! I DO deserve a great man!

And there, you have it. My reason. My north star. I had to hold onto the fact that I wanted a great man in my life, and he was not it. There was only one way to proceed: forward.

Attachment Styles

To help you fully understand how you function in a relationship, I'm going to quickly go over attachment styles. Attachment styles are the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth - I did not coin these - and they are rather fascinating to study, but this is not a psych textbook... so again...I will be brief. I do believe that knowing your attachment style when it comes to relationships is a gamechanger - and it can also clarify some answers you're looking for surrounding your most recent breakup.

There are four adult attachment style categories that most people fall into during their early years of childhood. I'll explain each, and as I do, I want you to ask yourself which attachment style you realistically relate to the most, and if you can identify your ex's attachment style. Knowing these two answers will not only help you understand why your most recent relationship failed to work - but it will also allow you to make smarter choices moving forward.

There are two factors you need to be familiar with in order to understand your attachment style:

1. Anxiety
2. Avoidance

Anxiety can be defined as high nerves and fear surrounding a relationship.
Avoidance can be defined as withdrawing or hiding from a relationship.

Secure Attachment: Low Anxiety, Low Avoidance

Anxious Attachment: High Anxiety, Low Avoidance

Avoidant Attachment: Low Anxiety, High Avoidance

Anxious Ambivalent: High Anxiety, High Avoidance

Secure Attachment:

People who are securely attached feel comfortable with close, intimate relationships. They are open to being vulnerable with their partner and enjoy offering and receiving love and support. They usually conduct interdependent relationships (as opposed to independent or dependent relationships) and are at ease with separateness and overlap in their relationships. They are typically forgiving, open to differences, and reliable.

Anxious (Preoccupied) Attachment:

Anxious attachment is sometimes referred to as “emotional thirst.” People who are anxiously attached describe wanting a fairytale love and are typically drawn more to the idea of a relationship than to an actual relationship itself. They tend to be overly sensitive and insecure regarding the relationship and constantly seek reassurance and affection in order to resolve their fears. However, reassurance from their partners typically does not satisfy their self-doubt. They tend to read into things, and thus take mood shifts or other signals too personally. In addition, they are hyper self-critical and are terrified of rejection, leading to deep trust issues and emotional desperation in their relationships. This usually results in their partners feeling suffocated and scared away. It is common for people with anxious attachment styles to end up in relationships with avoidant attachment styles.

Avoidant (Dismissive) Attachment:

Relationships are often held at arm's length for people with anxious attachment styles. They identify as “loners” and typically shut down at the first sign of conflict. They are not comfortable with intimacy or dependence on anyone, and therefore lead extremely independent relationships. They avoid being open and vulnerable with their partners as they view dependence as weakness. Their communication style is often straightforward and devoid of any emotion, and

therefore they typically leave their partners wanting more affection. They often attract people with anxious attachment styles.

Fearful-Avoidant (Unresolved/Disorganized) Attachment:

People with anxious ambivalent attachment, or otherwise known as unresolved or disordered attachment, typically experience feeling insecure but distant in relationships. Emotional closeness is too much for them to handle, but they also have a tough time regulating their emotions and are prone to outbursts.

Typically they function quite well at the beginning of a relationship, before any intimacy has surfaced. However, usually as a result of childhood trauma, emotional closeness triggers repressed memories, and they begin to stray away. They do not have a strong sense of self, and therefore have difficulty fully connecting with others.

“Earned” (Developed) Secure Attachment Style

You read that right – you’re not totally fucked!

If you did NOT relate to the secure attachment style but found yourself gravitating towards anxious or avoidant, don’t panic. While it won’t be easy, you can absolutely change your attachment style through therapy or coaching. Typically this will constitute working on your self-esteem, making sense of the stories you continuously tell yourself (about your childhood or anything else), and by entering into a relationship with someone who is securely attached.

The issue is, many of us have trained ourselves to love the stomach flip-flop dating dance. If it’s too easy we say, then it must not be real.

FALSE.

The more you can rewire your brain to find reliability, confidence, security, and responsibility attractive, the much easier this process will be.

So don't lose hope!

Now that you know your attachment style, use this information to explore the dynamic of your past relationship. How do you think your attachment style contributed to the breakup? How do you think your exes style contributed? Can you think of any moments where either of your attachment styles could have triggered a fight or tension? The more you reflect on the actual daily happenings of your relationship as they relate to attachment styles – the more insight you will receive on exactly what went down between the two of you. And, ideally, you can prevent the exact same dance from happening again in the future.

What To Do When You're Cheated On

Some of you are going through double the hurt right now. Not only is your relationship over, but you were cheated on as well.

I'm so, so sorry. I know exactly how that feels.

I will admit that most of my serious relationships did not involve cheating – which is a relief to say the least. But that doesn't mean I've escaped the bitter sting that comes from knowing your relationship ended because your partner didn't have enough respect for you to keep it in his pants.

Or at least that's how it went down with Jake.

It was a completely unoriginal story. After years of my best friend trying to set me up, she finally succeeded in getting me to go out with her husband's best friend. He was my usual type – tall, athletic, charming. I was somewhat on the mend from a heavier relationship, and wanted something light. I didn't expect to like him as much as I did – but that's pretty par for the course when it comes to me.

To be completely honest, he was such an asshole. But like, the wildly fun kind. I don't think he ever met my family or friends - even though he had many, many opportunities - but I was smitten enough to go out with him and his friends weekly. His friends would say the typical "*He's never been like this with anyone before*" (I wonder how much he paid them to say that) as I sat and watched whatever movie, football game, or video game he wanted to engage with at the time. I never had a say in the matter, and for some reason, I let it slide.

After ditching me at a wedding in a different state (that's an entirely different story - and yes, it happened exactly as it sounds), I decided to give him one more chance. I figured he must really want this to work with all the begging he's doing. And I believed him.

That is, until he went to Vegas.

After two days of hearing absolutely nothing, he called to pick a fight with me for, I don't know, shits and giggles?

I remember taking his phone call and telling him I couldn't talk for long - to his disbelief - I was with a friend and didn't want to be rude. I asked him what he'd been up to, and if there was any reason in particular he hadn't called when he said he would.

That did not go over well. After a brief heated exchange, he hung up, and I went on with my night.

Upon his return, he reached out, and pretended like nothing happened. Now is where things get fuzzy - I can't remember if it was the tagged photo on Facebook, my best friend's husband, or one of his friends who told me about the girl in Vegas - but at this point, does it really matter?

My favorite part was when he tried to bend the tiff on the phone into an actual breakup to justify his behavior.

Lolololol

So, yes. I know what it's like to be cheated on. It wasn't as harrowing as I expected, because I think it was so clearly obvious this guy was a jerk and I was better off not speaking to him ever again. I can fully understand how this could be the most soul-crushing experience for someone else, however. I can't imagine if one of my other boyfriends had done this to me. And that's because cheating is the ultimate betrayal.

The person you thought would protect you, defend you, and comfort you has now put you through the worst kind of pain – and now you have to live with it. If you're looking for something that's going to help you get over being cheated on while staying in the relationship – I would put this book down. I am not going to spend the next few minutes convincing you to stay in a relationship that has caused this kind of pain. I think you deserve better.

Here are my tips on how to move on whenever you've been cheated on.

1. This Isn't About the Other Person

Before we dive into anything else – which we will – spend as much time as you need to release anger towards the other person in this debacle. No matter who he or she is – they are the wrong target for your anger. The girl in Vegas had no idea who I was, nor did she think to ask if Jake had a girlfriend. Why would she? Some hot guy is hitting on her in Vegas – it's not her job to ask. It's his job not to pursue.

I know this sucks, because Vegas girl would have been the EASIEST scapegoat. She was practically faceless. I could have conjured up an entire story in my head about how she tricked Jake into sleeping with her despite the fact that he was fully in love with me. But that's not reality. And that narrative would have only encouraged me to give Jake more second chances.

Whenever you blame the other person, what you're really doing is filling in the gaps to a story to make your significant other look better and shift blame to the innocent party. But that's not going to help you in this situation. The longer you

hold onto that anger, the longer it's going to take to realize who the real offender is. You will agonize over the wrong issues, and extend your hurt unnecessarily over time. Because at some point, you're going to realize that this person isn't your business. They aren't the reason you feel terrible right now. And their trajectory doesn't really affect your life. They can go on and have karma eat them alive later on, or they can go on living a perfectly happy life.

Neither scenario affects how you are going to move forward.

So instead, assume they are completely innocent in this situation. Assume they didn't know your significant other was betraying you. Assume they thought this was fair game (because, and this is harsh, that's usually the case). That way you can focus on what really matters in order to properly heal in a reasonable amount of time.

2. Forgive Yourself Immediately

Once we have zeroed in on the true offender in this situation, it gets real gnarly real fast.

And for a lot of us, the next immediate response is to blame ourselves. Now, I know that a lot of us are going to move through the different stages of grief out of order and for different lengths of time - but this note is so important that I want to cover it early.

You are not to blame for a significant other callously violating the terms of your relationship. It's easy to reflect back on everything you did wrong (and I'm sure there are some greatest hits!), but cheating is never the correct answer to retaliate against bad behavior. You simply do not have the power to make someone with an agenda, do something against their will. Therefore, you cannot be held responsible for their actions.

I'm sure I acted like a bitch to Jake before. I'm sure I wasn't my best self on that phone call. And I'm sure not breaking it off with him after that stranded-wedding-disaster gave him mixed signals that he could treat me like

shit and I wouldn't care. But no matter WHAT went down in the relationship, cheating does not need to be forgiven.

If your significant other was thinking about your feelings, they would have summoned the maturity to break it off with you before embarrassing you in such a demeaning way. Period. So don't blame yourself for their cowardice. You did not and will not ever deserve this.

3. Try To Be Sad Instead of Angry

This is a toughie.

While I'm all about getting angry (I am a "pro" at almost every emotion except for guilt and jealousy!) - I think sadness is going to do you a lot more favors.

Yes, you are pissed at how things went down. Yes, you are furious that a person you like/love did this to you. Of course, you are livid that the relationship can never go back to what it was, no matter how hard either of you try.

But in reality, you're sad. You're really, really, really, REALLY sad.

Getting dumped is bad enough, but you have to deal with the shame, embarrassment, and confusion of being cheated on. I know. It's not fair. And it's so easy to let yourself fall into anger because the situation is worthy of it. But instead, try to lean into the blue. Soak yourself in tears and mourn the relationship you wanted longingly to work. Processing your sadness is what will help you move forward. Anger will only keep you here for longer.

I know, because I held onto my anger for way too long.

It was too easy to stay angry. He was such a cliché and I could not BELIEVE I was a part of such a pathetic narrative. I was not only angry at him for what he did, but I was angry at myself for letting myself play a part in it. I should have known better than to be involved with someone so selfish. But here I was, the exact person I never thought I'd be.

So I stayed pissed. I barely cried. I didn't think he was worth my tears.

And you know what? My heart jumped out of my actual chest EVERY time I saw a white pickup truck fly by on the highway or park in the same lot. Any time someone mentioned anything that reminded me of him - I'd go warm in the face and wonder if anyone else noticed. I didn't want to get back together with him - but I wasn't over it. And considering how terribly he treated me and for how short of a time period we dated, there really wasn't an excuse for it. It was my anger clouding my recovery. And that's something I do not recommend.

If you think about it - anger and excitement have almost identical physical sensations. Your heart rate excels, you get a tingly feeling, sometimes your stomach flutters, and your face gets hot. It's easy for your body to actually *like* being in that state - and it's probably a lot more comfortable than feeling sad. So you'll stay there for awhile. You can function as an angry person. We see them every day! The people who scream at servers and cuss at the weather and lose their shit when their team loses. They got angry about something and just...stayed that way.

Is that what you want?

No. So instead, just be sad for a bit. It's normal to have periods of sadness. However - if you are feeling genuine signs of depression (loss of appetite, disinterest in activities you found entertaining before, weight changes, sleep changes, feelings of hopelessness, fear of the future) for a sustained period of time, talk to a psychiatrist immediately. I do not want anyone confusing sadness (situational) with depression (chemical).

But good old fashioned sadness is nothing to be ashamed of. Live in it for a bit until you're ready to release it.

4. Focus on Empowerment

At some point, you're going to get sick of feeling sorry for yourself.

The "woe is me, how could they do this, what a bastard" phase is going to get old. Your friends will fein concerned head-nods, you'll run out of new phrases to describe the heartache, and while you might still continue to fixate on what happened – it's not going to cause the same stomach-drop sensation it used to.

My strongest advice is to listen to your frustration. In fact, let it guide you to a new place of empowerment.

This is when things get fun. This is when you get to use your old friend anger and mesh her up with some feminism!

Here's what cheating empowerment sounds like:

"I am better than this."

"I deserve someone who will treat me with respect."

"I am above this drama."

"This was just an obstacle on my way to better things."

"I will find a love that will never cause me to doubt again."

"I do not need anyone to make me happy – I am in charge of my own happiness."

"I am stronger than I believe."

"This experience will help me relate to others in the future."

"I am stronger because of this."

"I am grateful they showed their true colors earlier rather than later."

"I will attract more positivity now that I know what I want and what I do not want."

"This experience taught me so many lessons I will carry with me."

"I lived through it once, and I never will have to live through it again."

"Thank you, NEXT."

And there are plenty more where that came from!

This is where you can reflect back on the hurt you endured and your decision to not let it stop you from finding a better life. You chose to look at this situation and say, "not for me."

The months after Jake cheated on me were not easy. I had to reevaluate who the hell I was and how on earth I managed to end up with somebody so wrong for me. I began to do a deep dive into the type of person I truly wanted to be with – and realized that I hadn't broken many of my bad habits. I was still going after athletes for no reason other than the fact that I found it attractive. I was looking the other way when guys were rude to me because I figured “boys will be boys.” And I easily blurred confidence with arrogance.

But it only took six months. That was it. Six months from being cheated on, to falling in love with my future husband.

Keep your head up.

5. Gratitude Will Help

I know, I know.

Don't feel pressure to get to this point right at this exact moment – but maybe clock it for later. But I want to elaborate on this point real fast so you can use it to your advantage when you're ready.

While you do not have to pull an Ariana Grande and be super thankful for your ex, you can at least be grateful that you are not going to spend the rest of your life with someone you cannot trust. You are so lucky (don't hit me) that this person showed who they were at this point in time instead of later on. And whether your significant other cheated after five months of dating or five years of marriage – you are still better off for knowing now than finding out next week, next month, or next year.

I sometimes play a quick game of “Sliding Doors” where I play out my life that could have theoretically unfolded if I hadn't left a relationship. Jake's scenario is the worst one by far. I know in my bones that the combination of his condescending nature and cheating streak would bring out the absolute worst

in me, and I would have been destined for a life of insecurity. And even though I never gave it a chance to truly happen, it still makes me sad to think about it.

Be grateful that they cheated on you during a time when you can handle it. Because you reading this article right now shows that you CAN handle it. You are brave enough to keep reading through the pain. You are courageous enough to research help during this shit time so you can move on. And you are smart enough to know that you are better off by yourself than with someone who could dare to cheat on you.

6. Reflect and Learn

Once you've moved past the anger, you're on your way out of sadness, and you've found some empowerment through this process – it's time for some lesson-learning.

Ideally you've already released yourself from any blame or guilt. If you haven't – please go back and spend some time focusing on this. In fact, it might be in your best interest to work with a life coach or therapist through these issues. Guilt and blame simply do not have a place in the healing process and will impede your ability to clearly reflect and learn from this experience.

I find that learning something through every tough life experience expands my ability to feel grateful and proud of the obstacles I faced. Once I'm able to identify exactly what I would change and what I would keep the same – I'm able to release any fear that this will happen to me again.

The goal is to figure out exactly what went wrong, and prevent it from happening again in the future. These lessons will not only help you avoid mistakes again, but they will also steer you closer to a relationship or life experience that's much healthier for you.

For example, if your significant other was jealous during the relationship – always suspicious of you and other men/women, requiring constant check-ins when you were apart, or always accusing you of being unfaithful – that's something to note. Scratch that – that's something to circle in red ink. You

know now not to even touch relationships that are mired with jealousy. But maybe it was the opposite – perhaps you felt suspicious of your ex and someone else – and you turned out to be right. Now you know to trust your gut and to listen to yourself.

The most important part (again) is to not give up hope. Being cheated on, probably even more than being dumped, can seriously make you question your worth. You’re forced to compare yourself to someone else who maybe you’ve never even met, and wonder what they have that you don’t.

But try to resist going down that path. As personal as it feels, the cheating had nothing to do with you and everything to do with them. You do not have to let the cheating become part of your identity, nor do you have to carry it with you. It’s their identity that’s tarnished. It’s their burden to carry.

A quick note: I do not condone judging anyone who stays in a relationship where cheating occurred. Every situation is different and people have their reasons. There is strength in forgiveness just as there is strength in moving forward. This is just to say that you know yourself well enough to trust that cheating doesn’t fly with you. Find power in it.

Don't Talk with Your Ex

Let's just get this out of the way now.

Talking to an ex is the single best way to hold onto your sadness. It will keep you attached to a relationship that died months ago—and you don’t have time for that. So you cannot talk to them. Cannot. Do. It.

Yes, I know. This is controversial. Experts across the board are coming out in support of being cordial with exes. Get over it, they say. Be grownups. Ditch the pettiness.

I totally agree. We need to get over it, grow up, and ditch the pettiness.

Which means we should probably call it a day.

It's almost as if refraining from speaking to an ex is considered the most immature action you could possibly take. But talking to an ex is a lot like drinking an entire bottle of wine in one sitting. It sounds *amazing* in theory, but it's absolutely destructive in action. And it also leaves you with a massive headache.

But before I dive in, I will give two exceptions to this rule. First, if you two have children together, then it's imperative to remain friendly. Co-parenting and keeping a united front for the sake of the child(ren) is highly encouraged and is most likely the best option for the family.

Second, if BOTH parties are COMPLETELY over the relationship, then being friends is totally acceptable. Why not? Platonic friendships are the best. But before you assume that this exception applies to you—make sure you can prove this theory. For instance, are both of you dating other people? How long has the relationship been over? When's the last time there was a 'moment' between you two? Be honest! If you can safely say that both of you are completely over the other, then all right. You're free to skip this part – but not going to lie – I'm a little confused as to why you're reading this in the first place. (You're probably not over it.)

Moving on.

Here's why you shouldn't be chatting it up with your ex:

1. You maintain the connection.

Continuously texting, seeing, or speaking to an ex is holding onto a ghost of the relationship. The relationship is over. It's not there anymore. So maintaining it only invests time and energy into something that didn't work out. Instead, you

need to be working on closing the connection and dumping your resources into other outlets.

Eventually when both of you have moved forward from the relationship, then you can give some energy towards the connection again. But chances are, you will have moved on by then, and it won't interest you as much as you thought it would.

2. You erase progress.

If you're recovering from a breakup, chances are you've been trying your hardest to move forward. Maybe you've given back some comfy shirts or shared books as a token of the divide. Perhaps you've tried pretty hard not to reach out, even though the temptation is killing you. And you've hopefully tried talking it out with friends or family.

So you probably already know that communication isn't a good idea. Because that's the second you lose a lot of your progress.

It's so easy. You send a text here, a snap there, and all of a sudden you are knee-deep into old patterns! You're now texting when something funny happens. You're sharing the innermost details of your day. Hell, you're even providing them with emotional support!

But unfortunately, the relationship ended and that's not its purpose anymore. Both of you have to move on, but communicating keeps you stuck.

Eventually one of both of you will realize that this pattern isn't healthy. Getting back together isn't happening, and there really isn't a point to all this chatting. So then you have to start moving on....again.

Ughhhhhh jklfdjklafjklafjl. Sorry, my forehead actually fell on the keyboard out of pure agony.

All that earlier progress. Gone. Just, GONE. Bye Felipe. Cheers to completely starting over.

Don't do this to yourself. Give yourself the space and time you need to fully move forward. Once you're in a better place, then you can rekindle any kind of platonic friendship you'd like.

3. It gives false hope.

The relationship ended for a reason. It didn't just run its course—there was a firm, legitimate reason the two of you couldn't reach the next level. Breakups don't just happen. It's not like you guys drew the short stick and had to deal with the consequences of random chance. No. There was a conversation. An agreement. A finality. And it all stemmed from one or two unsolvable problems.

So. When you two communicate like nothing ever happened, it creates a sense of falsehood. You get wrapped up into old rhythms, old memories, old feelings. Of course, those interactions are going to lead one of you on—it's almost impossible to avoid.

Just like there was a reason for the breakup—there was a reason for the relationship. You two obviously had a connection at some point, and it's pretty difficult to erase from memory. It's entirely too easy to forget why the relationship ended and remember why it started. Don't leave a trail of bread-crumbs right into the lion's den when you KNOW it is almost impossible to get out alive. Protect yourself! Let yourself regain strength and recover from the old relationship before you work on a new kind of relationship. Both of you will benefit in the long run.

4. You block other opportunities.

It's simple math: if you're doing all the talking with your ex, then you're not doing as much talking with people who are not your ex. And those other people are the people who you still have an intact relationship with...unlike a certain

someone. Instead of opening yourself up to new people or exploring existing friendships, you're sinking yourself further into a relationship that has already burnt to the ground. The emotional investment you continue to pour into an ex could be poured into other people who would gladly return the love. Don't shut yourself off from opportunities by burying yourself in an old relationship and open yourself up to new possibilities. Distraction can be a sweet treat after time spent processing, so allow yourself that break.

What to Purge After a Breakup

Now that you're well on your way to moving on - it's smart to eliminate any triggers that could trip you up during this grieving process.

After John kicked me out of his car straight into a life of mayhem, I continued to seek out places that reminded me of us like it was my mission in life. I would frequent neighborhoods, bars, restaurants, coffee shops - you name it. I'm not sure if I was actively trying to bump into him, or if I just wanted the comfort of memories surrounding me at all times. Or maybe I was just too unoriginal to find my own places.

But that's not all!

I would also continue to watch the TV shows we started together (Yes, Gossip Girl), follow certain media outlets, and stay close to his friends so I could still feel like I was in the loop.

Don't worry, you can feel bad for me. It's so sad!

And that is exactly why I want you to AVOID doing those things so you don't look like me. All I did was prolong my heartache and make myself look like a complete fool. So instead of doing things the hard way, do what I should have done and follow this advice:

1. Avoid Landmarks

I seriously wish there were breakup services that would demolish the Starbucks you two frequented down the street. I really, really do. But since we can't hire a bulldozer to destroy restaurants and coffee shops, you are going to have to do your best to pretend they don't exist.

If you take a certain route every day and you pass by a brick and mortar symbol for your relationship – take a different road. I don't want you going anywhere NEAR your date night spots, study places, work spaces, or living quarters. None of it. Erase it from your presence.

This might take a lot of extra planning and dodging, but it's worth it. You might not realize how triggering these physical representations of the establishments can be. Taking a casual stroll by y'all's favorite wine bar might seem innocent – but subconsciously, or even consciously, you are remembering the times you two shared together. Memories play back like a movie, and all of a sudden, time is rewound. You are happy and together and none of this gloom ever happened. You start to pine for those days, and confuse yourself by forgetting all of the bullshit you've endured over the past few weeks. It's so easy to get wrapped up in idolizing the relationship once it's ended. But in reality, as we discussed, the relationship had problems. It was not meant to last – otherwise it would have.

Don't let yourself go there. Skip the landmarks and save yourself the heartache.

2. Take Breaks from Certain People

In my experience, this is the hardest step. By a mile.

There is no doubt that you made some amazing friendships while you were in the relationship. You probably met their friend's girlfriends and bonded. You felt a real connection with their roommate or their coworker. And you really

became close with their mom. In your mind, the mature thing to do would be to keep the friendships. You can't imagine throwing away all of that social investment out the window just because the relationship didn't work out.

Plus, you really, really, really, really, really don't want to.

Why?

Because those relationships keep you and your ex tied together.

Secretly you are hoping these friends will serve as a link between the two of you. You don't want to be erased from their life – you want them to hurt as much as you hurt. Not in like, a terrible way, but in a pining way. In a “let's get back together I can't believe we made such a big mistake” kind of way. You want to be omnipresent in their life. And who better than their friends and family to deliver those reminders?

The problem is, these people will always have your ex's best interest at heart. They were in their life first – not yours. And while there might be a few exceptions, it rarely plays out that the recently broken up girlfriend gets to keep the solid relationship with the friend group (and definitely not the family). It should also be noted that from the instances I've witnessed where the ex-girlfriend DID keep the friend group, it took her a lot longer to move past the relationship. Like, years longer.

You keeping in contact with these people does not help you out. The more you force a relationship, the more you anchor yourself to a dead relationship.

There is another thing that might be motivating you to keep these friendships, and that's PR. Breakups can be messy, and you can't always control what messages are being passed around about the reason behind the split. So, logic would reason that remaining friends with the spectators would eliminate any bad facts circulating about the breakup.

Unfortunately, you would be wrong.

In my case, I had to deal with some pretty crappy gossip for yearsssss after my breakup. And guess what? I HAD remained friends with all of the loose connectors and I still got my ass beat.

This is a true story. My HUSBAND, (then boyfriend, BUT STILL) five years post John breakup, was actually WARNED about my “clingy” abilities (!!!).

Afterwards he even admitted that he was hoping it was somewhat true because he likes attention lolololol. I hated to let him down, but I was absolutely floored that someone had the audacity to talk poorly about the girl who got her heart broken five years later.

People can be ruthless.

Clearly I am empathetic to holding onto these relationships, because I did it myself. But take it from someone who let her ego motivate her: let it go. Controlling the message is not worth staying hooked on your ex for an extended period. Plus, like in my case, it probably won’t even work. People are going to say what they want to say even if you are a sweet pea. But if you let it go, you will let your ex go simultaneously, and then you won’t care about EITHER.

Wouldn’t that be lovely!?

3. Get Rid of Certain Items

This one seems obvious, but I have to address it just in case.

Please discard emotionally charged items involving the breakup. You probably weren’t a pack rat before, and if you were, now is the time to address those...issues.

Purge!

Shed any knick knacks, movie tickets, comfy sweaters, or anything else that reminds you of them. You might shudder at the thought, but ask yourself, “Is holding onto this item helping me move forward?”

Some of you might tell a white lie that typically goes like this, “I feel worse when I don’t have this comforting knick knack around.” It’s the same logic we use to justify keeping in contact with an ex. OF COURSE we feel better when we are connected to them! We didn’t want this relationship to end! So yeah, an ex’s presence makes us feel IMMENSELY better.

For about an hour.

And then we feel like crap again.

You are putting a bandaid on an axe wound. Don’t give yourself a hit of comfort when you know in the long run it’s just going to lengthen the recovery period. Do what’s challenging NOW so you can rest easy later.

Puuurge!

4. Let go of some Habits

Were you guys watching the same TV show together? Have a favorite movie? Reading the same book? Follow the same blogger?

Stop.

What about similar activities? Yoga? Shopping? Brunching?

Just, stop.

I know this seems wildly unfair. I know you don’t want to lose your identity during this breakup. And I really know you will miss Lost (just me? Hulu reruns? Anyone?) But it’s not Kate and Sawyer (hot take!) you are tuning in for every Sunday night – it’s for someone else.

Your relationship had certain common activities that bound it together. Most couples after a certain length of time get into a rhythm. On Saturdays, they hike. On Mondays, they cook. On Thursdays, they have happy hour. On Fridays, they date night. And on WEDNESDAYS WE WEAR PINK.

Sorry, old habit. I mean on Sundays, they watch TV.

You can't let yourself fall into the same rhythm post-breakup. It's only going to remind you that your buddy is missing. And that's sad. Womp, womp.

You don't have to quit everything, but be mindful of the habits that defined you two as a couple. Stop attending yoga every Tuesday if that was y'all's thing, and instead trade it in for spin class. You don't have to be doomed to a life of boredom, but you can add new activities and flavor into your life to distract yourself from the absence of someone else. Forcing those "couple" activities onto your single self *might* feel good in the moment because of their entrenched memories, but they have a tendency to keep you all Eeyore-like. Shake it up. Be a Tigger. Try something new. And, when you're ready, you can always come back to #TeamSawyer.

5. Stop Following On Social Media

Do. Not. Even. Try. To. Be. That. Person. Who. Is. Mature. On. Social. Media.

It's very brave of you, and I will give you a virtual high five right now because I really admire you trying to be the bigger person. I am also giving you permission to be the smaller person.

Smaller people get over their exes. It's just how it goes.

Here's how to purge on social media: UNFOLLOW.

That's it. You don't have to unfriend. You don't have to block. You don't have to post MY EX IS A FUGLY BUTTFACE WHO RUINED MY LIFE or anything of that

nature. You just subtly remove them from your newsfeed so you aren't bombarded with pictures or posts or anything else that will trigger you into your spiraling nature.

If you are really, really not over them, you should probably unfollow those friends we talked about earlier, too. This isn't for punishment or to make a statement, it's to get your mind in the habit of not being flooded with relationship memories anymore. Seeing a picture of their mom, their best friend, their best friend's girlfriend, or anyone else is going to be just as triggering as actually seeing them. If you think you can handle it, be my guest. If not, just get it over with and unfollow.

If you are really, really, REALLY not over them AND have stalkerish tendencies (it's ok, we're all friends here, you can admit it), you might need to block.

I don't say this to be dramatic, but if that's the only way that you can stop yourself from snooping through their Facebook or Insta photos, it needs to be done. You do not need to torture yourself with how happy your ex is (exes ALWAYS look happy on social media because EVERYBODY looks happy on social media). You do not need to freak out over a pic they posted with another girl who may or may not be someone he hooked up with that night but is actually his second cousin he bumped into at a wedding (You know, the one he invited you to but took it back post breakup. Ass). Don't do that to yourself. If you cannot be trusted to keep your profile to yourself, then you need to create safeguards for yourself immediately. This isn't childish, it's necessary.

Now that you know what to purge and how to do it – I want to make one thing clear:

Once you have moved on from the relationship and are feeling more confident about your direction in life, you are more than welcome to reintroduce purged items back into your rhythm. I can't promise you will want to, but it's definitely allowed.

This purge does not have to be permanent. It just needs to be implemented long enough to give you the space you deserve to heal.

Being Single

I'm going to close out this book by focusing on the next stage of your life – being single.

If you are not currently single, it better be because you haven't pulled the plug on your most recent relationship, and it better NOT be because you already leap frogged from one relationship to the next.

No. We're just not going to do that.

If you can't stomach the idea of being alone, then we have some real big-girl issues.

Experiencing the pure joy and exhilaration of being single and on your own as an adult, is like, the actual best. It's a magical time where you can do whatever you want and be whoever you want and live however you want, all without judgment and opinions from someone else. And if that sounds scary to you – then more than likely, you fall under the “anxious attachment” style and you need to focus on creating a comfortable, soothing, and empowering home base so you can go explore the world with confidence.

Anywho.

It is WILDLY important that you remain single during this transformational period. You will be forced to listen to yourself and learn what makes you tick. You'll have to entertain yourself and focus on what makes you happy. And, you won't have someone to rescue you out of those sad moods – which means you'll learn how to self soothe.

It might not sound fun, but I promise you, you will look back on this time with deep pride and pleasure.

In case you're not sure where to start, I have some ideas for you.

Get in the habit of being selfish

I said it. Get in the habit of putting yourself first now, because trust me, once a new romantic interest comes along, that is going to go flying out the window. And haven't you spent enough time already caring about what someone else wants? Enough of that. It's time to focus on you.

Now, I truly do not want you to become some troll who is only out for herself, but I do want you to really focus on asking yourself, "What do I want?" first. When you are in a serious, committed relationship with someone, you have to ask not only what YOU want, but you also have to consider their opinions, desires, and needs. That's what good relationships are built on. So when you are not in a relationship, take sweet, sweet advantage.

I want you to have a pulse on how you want your state of events to unravel. Instead of "going with the flow" or deferring action to others, take it upon yourself to cultivate some strong opinions. Get a sense of what you like and how you like it. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there.

If you are already an opinionated missy, then own the fact that you don't have to put a significant other's feelings first! This is pure FREEDOM for you. Don't restrain yourself – get used to speaking your voice and coming into your own. Because once you find somebody you truly love, you will want to soften your voice to let theirs be heard. It's the considerate and natural thing to do. But for right now, go for it Mz. Busybody.

Develop personal hobbies

Other than the dreaded question, "are you seeing anybody?" post breakup (*gulp*), I would have to say the second most anxiety-provoking question is probably "what do you like to do for fun?"

Ummm. Oh, shit. My life is SUPER boring.

What a buzz kill. It's mildly humiliating when you don't have a few go-to answers to this question at your ripe age, so now is the time to get going. Everyone needs some personal hobbies. Something to get that creative energy out. Mine happens to be writing (le duh). And writing is a rather solitary activity. It's all mine. I don't share the process with anybody, only the results. (This is mostly because editing my work is considered cruel and unusual punishment.)

So what do you like to do that's all yours? Not what you shared with your ex or what you want to share with a future ex. What do you have that's all on your own, today?

I want you to come up with a few personal hobbies that you can do all by yourself. It's ok if the hobby might intrinsically be a social endeavor. For instance, I know a lot of film buffs who proudly say going to the movies is their favorite hobby. Now that is MY kind of hobby! Sitting in a dark theatre and eating popcorn while someone entertains me. None of this hiking bullshit. My favorite kind of people tend to coin this as their favorite hobby, as you can see why.

My only issue with it is when they refuse to go alone.

Have you ever been to a movie alone? It's amazing. No one wants to sit next to you and no one whispers in your ear "Oh my gosh what do you think happens next???" while I also watch the movie unfold for the first time ever.

Instead you get pure silence and pure focus. It's a magical thing.

But robbing yourself out of that blissful retreat simply because society deems it as a "social engagement"????

No ma'am.

It is beyond me why humans believe that going to a movie should be a social engagement to begin with. Think about it! You just sit there and stare at a screen in silence. Talking to each other during the film is considered to be RUDE. You can literally get kicked out for trying to BE. SOCIAL. It makes zero sense to me. Anywayyyy.

For right now, let me just say, please do not let being single dictate your hobbies. You are giving way too much power to a society that clearly has some massive flaws.

Point is you deserve to have an individual passion that requires permission from NOBODY to execute. And you will be much better for it when the time comes for you to invite somebody into the space with you. That is, if you want to.

Work on your friendships

This is another negative side effect of relationships: they tend to put a little strain on friendships.

It's not that your friends all suddenly hate you just because you got a significant other and it's not because you will start hating your friends, either. It's because your time is cut in half. And I guarantee now that you're single, they're looking forward to getting their full time buddy back.

I'm sure it all started with the weekends. They probably brought you to a wedding, and then you introduced them to your family, and then there were date nights and cuddle nights and Netflix nights...and then, dang. When were you supposed to hang with your friends? You're still a regular at Bachelor Mondays and Wine Wednesdays, but things just didn't feel the same.

It's not like you totally lost your friends – but things shifted. And now that you have a lot of time back, don't you want to capitalize on it? Rebuild what you could have lost?

The reality is, you and your friends are going to be pulled apart in different directions even if you were ALL to stay single your entire lives. People get jobs and promotions and must move as a result. They decide to go back to their hometowns to settle down. And yes, all of you have a high chance of meeting a special someone. And yes, a lot of you will create an insanely cute yet very time consuming family. Whether those are fur babies or human babies, the time is still stretched.

This doesn't mean that the love you share with your friend group goes away, and it doesn't mean the time you have together is any less special. But as you get older your schedule will probably get more crowded, so you have to make sure you are spending an inordinate amount of time sealing these friendships for life. Take advantage of the extra hours you have and invest them in your friendships. Because before you know it, it's going to be a lot more difficult to stay in touch.

Trap those girls, you hear me? Trap 'em good.

Focus on what you'd like to change

Look at your life right now and think about what you would like to change. Do you like your job? Have you been planning on going back to school? Are you ready to take that trip you always said you'd take? Now is the time. You no longer have anyone else to consider and that gives you the freedom to do whatever the hell you want. And whether or not you believe me - you will find someone else to fall madly in love with in your future, and you won't want to rock the boat too much then, either.

Now is the time.

Face the facts: you are a superstar and you are going to end up with a fellow superstar who also has an idea of how they would like their life to turn out. Spoiler alert: those visions don't always line up. This is why compromise exists.

But my best advice to give you is to figure your goals out as early as possible while you have the flexibility to do so.

Don't wait for someone else to shape your life. Shape it yourself.

You are free right now. Free as a bird. As much as I know that might pain you, it is the best gift you could ask for at this very moment. You have the time you need to craft the life you want, and then when you meet the right person, it will feel that much better.

Ok love, this is where I leave you.

I'm proud of you for making it to the very end of this book. It couldn't have been easy. You are fighting for equilibrium in your life, and seeking out every possible way to attain it. I hope all of this advice got you closer – but know that the rest is up to you. You have the power to focus on the future and leave your past behind. You have the power to choose something or someone better for yourself. And you have the power to remain completely content by yourself until you've found it.

Blush You,

Kali