

THE ULTIMATE NO B.S. BREAKUP SURVIVAL GUIDE

HOW TO HEAL, GLOW UP, AND
GET THE CLOSURE YOU NEED



WITH ACTIONABLE ADVICE, UNFILTERED STORIES,
AND JOURNALING PROMPTS. ALSO SNACKS.

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HEY THERE,

my broken-hearted friend. How are you holding up? If it helps, I feel your pain. Right now you probably feel like nothing will help and I get that. Chances are you're here from **my blog post about my breakup**, which is precisely why I made this guide. Because when this happened to me, I searched HIGH AND LOW for shit that would make me feel even a little bit better...and I think this will. Because it's real and it's honest.

I'm not going to feed you the same bullshit platitudes that I'm sure you've read already on Instagram, I'm going to tell you exactly what I went through and exactly what I did to start feeling better. I'm also going to tell you HOW I got the closure conversation with my ex, one year later. Yes, a whole year went by but I GOT IT.

rings victory bell

PREFACE



I HAD THE WORST BREAKUP OF MY LIFE

3 years ago, which is crazy to say because I remember it so vividly. If you had consulted me about my life right after it happened, I would have told you something dramatic like “there is no tomorrow” in between hysterical tears and snot bubbles.

It was bad.

I know this sounds cliche but I’m gonna say it anyway:

I couldn’t sleep.

I couldn’t eat.

I couldn’t see past the pain, and even worse, I couldn’t really see myself. The silly, funny, “shit happens” person completely vanished.

It was like my entire body was made of baby skin - SO sensitive and raw. I hit my head on a cabinet door one morning and just fell to the floor in tears. Like an actual toddler. I was helpless.

Additionally, no one was safe from this story in my presence. It was like I temporarily had a lobotomy and forgot how to exist daily without this person in my life. Zombie-ing around bumping into shit (see aforementioned cabinet door debacle).

Don't get me wrong, I'm not diminishing the very real heartache that comes with being broken up with by someone you love, or in my case, being blindsided and flat out LEFT by someone you love, but you still have to remember who you are.

So I encourage you to stop for a minute, take a big ol deep breath and write down 3 things that make you, you. For example, I'd write this for myself:

- I have a great sense of humor and make people laugh often
- I'm compassionate, which makes me a good friend and a good daughter
- I'm silly and I can recite the alphabet backwards (true story)

Don't focus so much on the physical stuff (unless you really love your hair, in which case, by all means write that down. I don't know what it's like to have great hair and it might be a bigger deal than I realize). Try it. What makes you, you?

INTRO

WHEN I SAY I STRUGGLED

with the 5 stages of grief, I mean I BATTLED with it. I took it to a boxing ring and beat the shit out of it.

In fact, I think I made up my own additional stages, some of which included:

Fantasizing (about revenge)

Plotting (how to hurt him)

Fixating (on unhelpful thoughts)

I'm kidding on the revenge front, but I really did want him to feel the emotional pain that I was feeling. In my mind, he got what he wanted, so even if he felt bad, it was nowhere near what I felt.

I don't consider myself a vindictive person but the anger and the confusion I was feeling...fuck.

If you had given me a voodoo doll with his name on it, I would have enjoyed poking the shit out of that thing. Maybe light it on fire, who knows.

This brings me to my very first point which is...you will feel like you again. But it's going to take time and it's not going to be easy. The good news? I'm going to walk you through how I did it, share some stories, and remind you that you're not alone on this journey. 😊

Which brings me to my second point...

If there was anything I learned when this happened to me, it was that there are SO MANY women out there with the same story. It was...shocking, honestly.

And...validating as HELL.

I couldn't BELIEVE how many women popped up and shared their stories with me, which sounded exactly like mine, right down to the "robotic" mannerisms from their partner.

It was heartbreak yet comforting; it made me feel a little less insane, too, because let me tell you, the blindsided breakup is the one that fucks with you the hardest.

You search your brain for clues and things you might have missed, and when you come up with nothing, you repeat the process over and over in a vain attempt to close the loop in your mind. In my blog post, I liken this part to being in solitary confinement.

You're given nothing. NO INFORMATION. You have blank walls, a broken heart, and a Sharpie. You start writing your own story. It's sad and it's ugly. Filled with all the horrible shit you've been thinking about yourself over the years.

"Maybe I AM too much"

"Maybe I AM unlovable"

"Maybe It IS my thighs..."

You get the picture. The person who left you is not there to help you write that story, so after coming up empty over and over, you tell yourself that the answers must lie within them! So you reach out and beg for closure, but they won't give it to you.

They stonewall you.

Maybe they even block you.

And you want to rage at them. So maybe you do. You feel better for 5 minutes until you realize that snapping and letting your emotions get away from you probably just validated their decision. You kick yourself and cry some more. Lather, rinse, repeat.

It will not be at that moment, but at some point in the near future, you're going to realize that some things don't have black and white answers.

And that some people are just TERRIBLE at conflict, so they run from it. And it has NOTHING to do with you.

Trust me, that phrase infuriated me, too. I was sitting there like, "how does this NOT have to do with me?? I'm the OTHER HALF of this relationship?!"

But when I say you could be the best, most beautiful, kind, caring, and wonderful person in the world and it wouldn't make a fuck of a difference, believe me. Some people just aren't ready for you, even if they think they are.

Their behavior doesn't define you, if anything, it defines THEM.

If this speaks to you, I hope you know that you're going to be OK.

If you don't know anything else right now, just know that. You might be telling yourself the opposite, but if I could bounce back from that trauma and learn to live again (and enjoy it), you can, too.

This is not your traditional breakup guide, by the way. There's cursing, there's some tough love, but there's also empathy and funny stories.

I consider storytelling tragic things with humor kind of like my superpower? I want to make you laugh while giving you actionable advice; most of these are things you can do TODAY to start making new habits that bring you back to you.

So...fuck them and let's do this damn thing.

01

MORNING ROUTINE

AHH YES, SLEEPING

in the dreaded bed. Once a comfy little nook for you and your partner, now a place that feels empty and cold. How do you make this a safe space again where you can ACTUALLY sleep?

Well, first things first, have you tried sleeping in a giant X position?? It's kind of liberating, if you can actually fall asleep that way (I can't).

If you can't sleep like a starfish, have you tried a body pillow?? One of those long ones? Mine is named Samuel. I have no idea why, but I like to think he's British.

I'm not *completely* insane, mind you, I'm just creative. I tried a weighted blanket, which wasn't terrible, but I get hot when I sleep and that didn't exactly help matters.

PS - invest in the [Chilisleep Sleep System](#) if you also get hot when you sleep - it's a cooling mattress pad situation and it's a game changer. I used to wake up in the middle of the night just to change clothes because I would SWEAT THROUGH THEM before I discovered this. My life is literally better because of the ChiliPad and I don't know how I lived without it. But I digress.

I found the body pillow to be a lot more comforting in a post-breakup world than the weighted blanket. You can cuddle it and cry on it and it doesn't ever have to get up to go to the bathroom.

Body pillows are also great for people with back and neck issues (raises hand), so before you become concerned that I've replaced human interaction with a pillow, just know that I initially got it for other reasons. And don't knock it til you try it.

Another thing to try that REALLY helped me (and my best friend): sleep on "his" side of the bed. Seriously. It's weird but it subtly changes your view of your surroundings, which tricks your brain a little and makes it feel different/no longer as "empty."

All that said, waking up was a tough one for me. Steve* and I lived together, and I am what you call an "extreme" morning person because I wake up around 6:30/7 am pretty naturally without an alarm, whereas Steve could sleep until 10, easily.

My routine was this...

Creep out of the bedroom and close the door without making a goddamn sound. Try not to trip over Bobo (my cat who died in 2020, I miss him every day).

*Did I mention we call him Steve, by the way? We do. For privacy reasons.

Prepare coffee as quietly as humanly possible in the kitchen and make breakfast that doesn't require a stove or any elements that might sizzle/make noise (this meant cereal or overnight oats).

Proceed to eat said breakfast in the living room while listening to a podcast of my choosing with noise canceling headphones on.

Wait for BF to walk out of the bedroom and wave at you so you can begin living your life like a normal person.

So. When he left...GUESS WHAT BITCHES TIME TO MAKE SOME FUCKING NOISE AND MAKE SHIT THAT SPATTERS AND MAYBE SET OFF THE FIRE ALARM.

When I finally got sick of opening my eyes and having tears fall out of them instantly every morning, I got out of bed and turned on some music. On my TV. Not obnoxiously loud because, hello, I still have neighbors, but loud enough where I could enjoy it.

Then, I started to make myself breakfast.

Loudly.

Bang a pan for no reason!

Throw a spoon into the sink!

GO WILD BABE.

I'd slam a drawer shut if my damn kitchen drawers weren't full of "quiet-close" technology.

It's like they knew someone was gonna have an emotional breakdown in this apartment and didn't want them to take it out on the cabinets. Anyway. Let's talk about that breakfast.

One egg + one egg white, over medium. We love a runny yolk but we don't like egg semen (it's actually called albumen but it's still gross). You know what I'm talking about, when the egg white is still basically uncooked on top? Hard pass.

On the side:

English Muffin, toasted, with butter and a light shmear of chive cream cheese or jam. My journey with fruit has grown, so I now add some fresh fruit (pineapple, strawberries, etc). Also coffee with some variety of creamer. It was winter so you know ya girl was going for the pumpkin spice Christmas cookie shit. All about it.

Basic (breakup) bitch calories don't count.

After I whipped that up, I walked to the living room to eat, stopped, made an about face and marched right into my bedroom and ate it in bed. If my knee was in better shape I would have kicked the fucking door open. But then again it's my apartment, so why would I do that? Be nice to your home.

I put on Ted Lasso (we'll get to this) and watched one episode each morning with my breakfast in bed.

When that show ran out (it was only season 1 at the time) I switched to The Office or Friends, my other favorite comfort shows.

I started to enjoy this routine so much, I eventually bought a special little table made specifically for eating in bed.

You know why?

Because fuck him, that's why.

I couldn't do this when I was with him.

Listen. Was it my dying wish to eat breakfast in bed when we were together? No, but that's not the point. The point was to create a new morning routine without him. One that didn't make me cry so hard I almost pissed myself.

So...your turn! What did your routine used to look like with your ex? You don't have to write it down, just picture it (we know you're going to anyway).

Now, how can you reframe that to look like something satisfying for JUST you?

Or maybe there was something he/she hated that you felt like you couldn't do?

Welp, guess what, NOW YA CAN! You are living for just YOU. Self care is NOT selfish. Especially during a breakup. Heartache is a real ache and I want to help you fix it. Write a new reframe of your routine that you can try tomorrow:

Stuck and can't think of anything?? Here's another example:

Maybe you spoke with them every morning on the phone (if you didn't live together) or maybe you texted them when you woke up.

When one of my best friends was going through a breakup, I texted her every morning to check in because I knew her ex used to do that with her. Obviously it's not the same dopamine rush, but it's a placeholder and I know she appreciated it.

Another good trick for the phone?

DON'T FUCKING TOUCH IT. Seriously.

I don't look at my phone when I wake up. I know that's weird, but I don't check SHIT until I've worked out, made coffee, meditated, and/or pooped. At least once.

Because the second poop of the morning I'm likely scrolling through IG, let's be serious.

Nothing feels better than taking a poop while watching the stories of someone you hate-follow.

JK...ish. But seriously, just try it.

Don't rely on the tech to give you your dopamine in the morning. You CAN give it to yourself, you just have to try and maybe get creative.

And most importantly, you don't need THEM to give you your dopamine.

Trust me. You're just used to them and change is hard. Don't forget that the brain is a muscle and a breakup will make you realize just how strong that muscle memory is. But you CAN change it. You just gotta work at it.

It's like losing weight. If it were easy, everyone would do it. You gotta put in the work if you want the results.

02

TRY A CRYING
SELFIE

BEFORE YOU THROW THIS

book in the trash, hear me out. Crying after a breakup is going to happen a lot and it's normal. It sucks, but you gotta get it out.

Let me tell you a story that actually turned into a really good piece of advice that I passed on to many friends.

Right after Steve left, I got a really bad toothache and something felt really wrong with my jaw. My Dad is a dentist, so I went to see him to check it out, but he didn't see any cavities or abnormalities with the tooth.

Then, we figured we should go to my Dad's friend, the oral surgeon, to rule out anything with the jaw. I grind the shit out of my teeth when I sleep (so loudly it would wake up Steve, actually), so I've had a night guard for quite some time.

As my Dad so gently put it, "if you don't use a bite guard, you will grind your teeth right out of your skull." Excellent!

Anyway, I was convinced something was wrong with my wisdom tooth or my jaw, the pain was that bad.

The doctor said we could take a look and if it's what he thinks, we might need to do a semi-invasive procedure involving anesthesia, painkillers, the whole nine.

Stellar!

After some tests and scans, it was nothing. It was stress and tension in the jaw from extra grinding. So I cried. A lot.

I know this is going to sound twisted, but I was HOPING for dental surgery.

I was HOPING for the pain to be transferred from my heart to my face. I wanted the pain of one thing to distract myself from the pain of the other.

This is also the same mentality that those who inflict self-harm have. Confirmed by someone who used to do that (whom shall remain nameless).

When that realization came to me, I took a selfie sitting in my Dad's office, bleary eyed in tears. I opened up the calendar in my phone (if you're anything like me, you won't remember your own bday without your calendar), went to the following year on the same exact date and set an alarm with this note attached:

"Take a selfie. Compare to this date, last year."

And guess what?? Wildly different photos! Because I was in a better place, thank god.

Why did I do this??

I think my subconscious knew that the storm would eventually pass, but in the moment, I couldn't see past the pain. See below: crying in misery, then one year later, I don't really know what I'm doing but clearly THE MOOD HATH CHANGED.



Thot squat selfies give a very different energy than crying selfies.

This isn't far from your future either, I promise. You'd be surprised how quickly the time will fly by. It just doesn't seem like it now.

So, even though it might feel weird, take a selfie next time you're crying. Put a note in your calendar for 6 months - 1 year from that day and take another selfie to compare. And if you feel so inclined, let me know how it turns out. 😊

03

WHAT TO WATCH

I KNOW I BROUGHT UP

Ted Lasso briefly before, and if you haven't already watched it, remedy that immediately, specifically the first season.

I mean this from the bottom of my heart: that show got me through my breakup.

I watched it maybe 4 times all the way through, beginning to end. It's perfect for a post-breakup situation because it makes you feel all the feelings - it's funny, it's sweet, it's heartbreaking at times, it's uplifting, it's...just wonderful. Can't recommend it enough.

I actually visited Richmond, London, last year with my mom to see where they film and where "Ted's apartment" is. Easily the highlight of 2023. But I digress.

You know how I came about this show? From asking my followers on Instagram! I shit you not.

I was going through the breakup motions and I put an IG story out there asking for "feel-good shows and movies," and Ted Lasso was easily the most suggested show.

I made a whole list of them below - obviously we're going back a few years so I'm missing anything super relevant now but most of these still hold up. I am a comedy writer of sorts so I always go for laughs when I'm sad. Here you go and enjoy:

<https://www.theskinnypignyc.com/2021/01/feeling-blue-heres-some-feel-good-movies-and-shows/>

If you printed this e-book for some reason, I am sorry.

Now, here's the REAL sleeper hit for post-breakup viewing: Grey's Anatomy.

Yep. The old episodes from the first few seasons. Let me explain: that show is DARK as shit and the ER scenarios just make you happy to be walking the planet earth.

Breakups suck but you know what's worse? Having a pole go through your body and someone else's, turning you into actual shish kebab/live action foosball players. That's seriously one of the episodes. Except they don't make them play foosball, that would be cruel.

Obviously, this is fiction, but take it from me, bad things happen to good people every goddamn day.

Quick side story:

I got hit by a car when I was 17 years old and almost lost my leg from the knee down. I was also a dancer, supposed to audition for Juilliard and hopefully be on Broadway some day. Didn't make it to those auditions because I lived in a hospital for a month and couldn't walk for half my senior year.

I'm not making this about me but it is my book, right? I'm just trying to lend perspective.

And I bring it up because honestly, that broken heart and this broken heart were not too dissimilar. Both times I was grieving a very painful loss of a life I thought I had in the bag. Cue depression.

Just an example of "bad things happen to good people."

End scene.

Another thing about Grey's that makes it a great post-breakup show?? EVERYONE IS FUCKING MISERABLE.

You'll watch it and be sitting there like "AHH YESSS MY PEOPLE!!"

Every single relationship is a disaster and you're never really sure if anyone is truly happy.

And if they are happy? Chances are they're going to die or their partner is going to die.

Sorry for spoilers but the show is like 20 years old. You can't be mad at me for that. That's like getting mad at someone for giving away the ending of Home Alone.

Anyway. With Grey's, I felt like I had friends who shared my misery, ones that I could visit via a magical box in my living room.

It's not only a solid distraction, but it will make you grateful for the ability to stand upright/breathe/live without the help of a machine or 3 nurses.

Oh, and if you feel so inclined, you can read more about my car accident via my blog post here. It's a long one but it's surely another story to make you grateful for the little things like the ability to stand upright in the shower. Something I couldn't do for a long time.



Me at 17 on the left, me at 32 on the right.

04

WHAT TO EAT

I'VE BEEN A FOOD BLOGGER

for many years. I started my blog, The Skinny Pig, in 2008 (yikes) and initially wanted to be on Food Network one day with my own cooking show.

This ties back to the car accident story that you may have read from my blog/the previous chapter, but cooking (and eating) sort of became my new creative outlet once I discovered that I couldn't dance anymore, at least not professionally.

When it comes to cooking when you're depressed, I maintain that the simpler, the better. This might sound like a weird thing to say, but things that are soft are always good.

Quick side story:

When this breakup happened, I was so depressed, I just couldn't come home.

I stayed with my mom in Queens for two weeks or so because I couldn't face living in this apartment by myself - an apartment I own and have lived in for nearly 11 years by that point - it felt tainted by 9 months of living with someone else.

When you put it on paper, that sounds crazy, which is why eventually I came to my senses and decided I wasn't going to let him take that away from me. So I came back and I faced it. I can't say I handled it well at first; there were multiple moments where the term "breakdown" could have easily been used, but I pushed through.

End scene.

One of the meals my mom force-fed me while I lived with her was matzo ball soup and grilled cheese from the diner nearby. That combo kind of slaps regardless of your mood, but this was easily a great comfort food option that didn't require a lot of chewing.

On top of the fact that I was dealing with excess tension in my jaw, I think in general, soft foods are good when you're depressed because depression = low energy. Not a lot of effort needed on the mastication front.

When I started to feel a little better, I stepped it up to one bowl or one pan meals, things that would reheat easily and still taste good.

One of my go-to's was this pantry pasta that I still make pretty regularly. Lots of garlic, olive oil, salt, tomato paste, chili flakes, and parsley. Yum. If you don't have fresh parsley, fuck it. The rest will do just fine.

It's fragrant, it's comforting, and you can eat it the next day, no problem. Plus, the act of chopping all those ingredients is a good way to get out some aggression.

Recipe here for Pantry Pasta.



It's so glorious

Another good one? Overnight Oats.

I went on a serious overnight oats journey a few years ago so these recipes (below) came in handy. Again, let's hear it for soft foods. Plus, they're very good for you and they keep you full for a really long time.

I went on a serious overnight oats journey a few years ago so these recipes (below) came in handy. Again, let's hear it for soft foods. Plus, they're very good for you and they keep you full for a really long time.

My OO recipes don't have Greek yogurt because I was a little sensitive to dairy at the time (I still don't eat a ton of it, to be fair), but if you want to add that in for extra protein/thickening, go nuts. Hell, add some nuts! See what I did there? GET CRAZY.

1: Peanut-Almond Butter & Maple OO's

2: PB & J OO's

3: Chai-Almond Butter & Tea OO's

4: Chunky Monkey OO's

5: Mocha Coffee & Chocolate OO's

If you're looking for things that you don't have to cook (I get it), I think you can never go wrong with pizza (hence the cover of this book), but obviously, that's not something you can eat every day.

I have [**a list here on my blog**](#) of things that I buy regularly, including lots of packaged foods for when I'm feeling lazy.

Kodiak Cakes makes these protein waffles and pancake cups that I love; they're super easy to heat up and eat for a quick meal with a solid amount of protein. Never skimp on protein! We need it for our aging bones!! And just in general, protein keeps you fuller longer.

AND BACK TO SOUP. I FUCKING LOVE SOUP. Soup can absolutely be a meal, just ask Panera and their bread bowls. Aggressive, but you gotta respect it.

Try this lentil soup recipe I got from my mom, it's wonderful and so, so comforting. It looks like a lot but remember the thing about soup: it all goes in one pot.
win

If you follow me on IG: **@darapollak**, I'm always sharing the things I eat on my stories. I may not be as consistent with my in-feed posting because of my work within social media (i.e. burnout), but I'm consistently showing up on stories with what I'm eating/cooking and where I'm eating in NYC. You can count on that!

05

TREAT
YO
SELF

EVERYONE SAYS “PAMPER YOURSELF”

when you’re going through a breakup, and while I firmly believe in that, I think the better way to put it is...get that toxic shit out of your body. Don’t put MORE into it. I’m all for eating (or drinking) a “treat” here and there, but the REAL treat??

Get a massage.

Get several, if you can afford it.

We tend to think of massages as a luxurious experience, something you should do on vacation whilst sipping something frozen on a beach.

Don’t get me wrong, you ABSOLUTELY should do that, but we forget how much tension and stress we hold in our bodies, specifically in our muscles.

Not to get all woo woo about it, but if you’ve ever read The Body Keeps The Score, you’ll understand. PS definitely recommend reading that if you have back or neck pain, like I do.

After Steve left me, my neck started pulling every few weeks. And when I say “pulling” I mean it feels like something stabs me on either the right or left side of my spine, and it causes extreme pain, stiffness, and very limited range of motion.

If you take a look at any photo of me in a strapless or spaghetti strap situation, just look at my traps. They’re huge.

Yes, part of that comes from years of ballet and being a dancer, but the rest of it is the tension and stress that lives in those beasts. PTSD from living in a state of “hyper-vigilance” apparently, post-car accident. But anyway!

I was convinced that this was a slipped/herniated disk thing, because NOTHING could be that painful without a serious malady within the body, right?

Welp...once again, I was wrong! After multiple doctors visits, X-rays and MRI’s, the docs confirmed that much like the jaw pain, it was all in my muscles.

The muscles in my back (scap/subscap) get SO jacked up when I’m sad/stressed/angry that they press on the nerves in my spine & neck, causing intense pain.

Hundreds of dollars in medical bills to have a variety of doctors tell me to basically calm the fuck down.

Official diagnoses?

"Stretch and get regular massages."

LOL FUCK ME RIGHT?! I wish I was kidding.

So I started seeing an Osteopath, which I found to be super helpful in my healing journey. It's like intense stretching; no cracking like a chiropractor (though I do love that too, not gonna lie). Acupuncture also helped me a lot, and of course, dancing. My first love and the most cathartic release of toxic energy in the body. But I can't dance when my neck pulls.

For me, this issue is severe and something I have to manage, but it happens much less frequently now, thanks to all of these steps I now take to prevent it.

Listen to your body. If it wants to lay down for a few minutes in the middle of the day...let it. Obviously not if you're in Midtown or something, but if you work from home as many of us do these days, take advantage of the comforts of being 3 feet from your couch whilst sending emails.

You deserve that much.

I will also touch on the exercise topic, but I'm not going to go too deeply because we all know that exercise is good for the brain and the body blah blah. HOWEVER...

Forcing yourself to exercise when you're depressed is *incredibly* difficult, especially if it's the kind that requires a lot of energy (HIIT, Peloton ride, etc).

I'm a BIG believer in strength training for women (especially as we get older), and I absolutely hate cardio that isn't dancing. I think I keep that Peloton he gave me out of spite at this point. Don't remember the last time I used it. BUT I use the Peloton app for strength training workouts a few times per week and that's the extent of my exercise.

When this breakup happened, I started out doing the more slow/low impact workouts like pilates. Not yoga though. I know a lot of people love yoga but between my knees and my neck issues, it's hard for me to hold those positions for a long time without hurting myself.

Pilates really is my go-to when I'm feeling down and low-energy. And then you can build up to weights and strength training.

When I'm angry, I love lifting weights. When I'm sad, I want to move slowly. If that makes sense.

And lastly, HIGHLY recommend dancing in the kitchen to 80's/90's jams while cooking. I do this often and It INSTANTLY lifts my mood.

06

THERAPY HELPS

HEALTHCARE IN AMERICA IS A JOKE

and I know therapy is expensive. Thankfully, there are a lot of alternative options for therapy that are cheaper, like therapists in training.

When I was going through my breakup, I quite literally could not afford a traditional therapist, so I used Talkspace for quite a while. Talkspace does texts, audio messages, and/or video sessions, depending on your plan.

The thing I liked most about it was the “text or message whenever you want” aspect. Because I don’t know about you, but when I’m REALLY upset and going through a breakup, I want to talk about it.

Anyone with ears in my surrounding area is going to hear about it.

Hair stylist? Duh. Uber driver? For sure.

Guy at the supermarket who just simply asked if I needed help with something? Yep (FYI I said “MY HEART” and he laughed, it was fun for everyone).

I sounded like a crazy person.

Thankfully, my Talkspace therapist was very patient as well as responsive to me, so it really helped a lot to be able to get those thoughts out of my head and dump that energy out.

Also, if you do the audio messages, you're forced to sit there and listen to everything the therapist says without interrupting, and as someone with ADHD who interrupts like CRAZY, I found that very helpful.

In traditional therapy, they'll always ask you what brings you there/what you want out of it (present/forwards) and then they'll ask about childhood (backwards). Maybe not right away, but I assure you, your past will come up within the first few sessions.

With Talkspace, I sort of dove into the specific problem at hand and all that other stuff kind of came up naturally. I'm also no stranger to therapy so I'm very open about the things I struggle with.

I truly believe this is the reason a lot of people are anti-therapy in the first place. Because when you're a kid, you do things subconsciously to make yourself feel safe - it's like we're always in survival mode - and a lot of that behavior isn't healthy.

But we don't ever think about the things we did as children (or things that were done to us) until someone asks about it and points it out as a potential reason for how you operate now.

And who does that? Therapists, that's who! And fixing that takes WORK. Therapy is a process and more importantly, a COMMITMENT.

It can be a painful process to sit there and realize that you've been living your whole life with unhealthy coping mechanisms. Oh and PS - ghosting is actually just an unhealthy coping mechanism (google it if you don't believe me).

People who ghost are usually avoidants or dismissive avoidants (read the book Attached for more on Attachment Theory, especially after a painful breakup). They can't "handle" emotional or confrontational situations, so the only way they can feel "safe" in a relationship conflict is to retreat into themselves or physically/literally run away from it.

Believe it or not, I was actually avoidant when I was younger. I was picked on a lot and had a tense family dynamic, so I bottled up a lot of my emotions (unhealthy coping mechanism) until they had run out of places to hide.

Some people just suppress their emotions their whole lives, but when I started therapy, it was like someone pulled a ripcord on my feelings.

I got tired of running and I just snapped. I morphed into this person who was sick of being ignored, sick of being tough all the time, and sick of being expected to always land on my feet.

You should be allowed to fall sometimes. And it's nice to have people there to catch you, even if they don't know how at first.

You teach people how to treat you. Remember that.

Quick side story:

When I was 29 years old, I cried on my birthday for the first time ever (as an adult, I'm sure I cried as a child on my birthday). It's a long story but the short version is that I rented a Hummer limo to take myself and a large group of friends to Medieval Times (why? WHY NOT?), and the limo broke down somewhere in NJ on the offramp of an exit (photo below, me sitting on the roof of the limo).

Let's just say we never made it to Medieval Times.



We ordered Dominos to a gas station while we waited for a tow truck (bless), drank a handle of vodka in the limo, and headed back to NYC.

When we got back to the city, we went to a bar and my girlfriends got into a fight over a boy. Standard issue. I was so frustrated with the whole damn night and I was a little drunk, so, I just cried. This was the first time my male friends had ever seen me cry in public (save for the car accident situation), and they literally didn't know what to do.

They stood there and stared at me, then a few of them rushed over with fresh vodka sodas, not knowing what else to do for me. One of them pat me on the back a few times in the most robotic way ever.

I genuinely feel like none of them even knew I had feelings prior to that and I was almost 30. So...this is why I was in therapy for a lot of my life. I hid myself from a lot of people for far too long.

I'm not ashamed of having feelings anymore, but I was for a while. And I'm also not ashamed of my PTSD, my anxiety, and my battles with depression. It sucks and I wish I didn't "struggle" with it, but I do. You can't change the brain you have, but you CAN rewire the neural pathways in your brain if you make a cognizant effort. It's not easy but it can be done.

I encourage you to look into some form of therapy when you're going through a breakup. It can be helpful to have an objective point of view, as opposed to your friends who are just going to agree with you constantly.

Even if you're sitting there going "no my friends are honest with me!" Your friends don't have years of training in how to cope with loss, trauma, and many other things that could be living under the surface.

TALK TO A PROFESSIONAL.

07

GET A JOY JOURNAL

SAY KIND THINGS TO YOURSELF

every day while you're going through this. Even if it's something small.

I kept a "joy journal" so I could write down every little dumb shit thing that happened that made me smile.

You'd be surprised how many good things you still have in your life, you're just not giving them any attention.

The only thing you're feeding is the angry and sad beast inside your head (which is perfectly normal and I get it), but force yourself to take a break from that and focus on something that makes you happy.

For me, I have a balcony (it's small but I live in NYC so I consider that a privilege). I have good friends, I'm very close with my mom, and there's a bunch of other little things that popped up as time went on.

"Nice walk in McCarren park today. A cute bird sat next to me" was an entry in my Joy Journal.

I know that sounds like something a 6-year-old would write, but being child-like post-breakup is actually not the worst thing. Because kids appreciate little things.

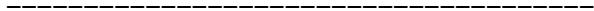
You know that scene in Knocked Up where Paul Rudd says “I wish I got excited about ANYTHING the way my kid gets excited about bubbles” ?? It really is about the little things!

Try sitting with your inner child for a bit while you’re going through this. Plus, I’m fairly certain we ALL have a little inner child healing to do and now is a great time to do that.

The quality of your friendships is more important than the quantity, and I believe that to be true of life in general.

You don’t have to be making millions or traveling all over the world to be happy, and as someone who came into a lot of money at a young age (car accident lawsuit settlement, not rich parents), I can confirm the statement “money can’t buy you happiness” is very real. It will make certain stressors in your life go away, for sure, and it’ll make you more comfortable, but it won’t bring you real joy.

Let's try a few joy journal entries!



08

CHALLENGE YOUR THOUGHTS

WHEN I HAD A NEGATIVE THOUGHT

I'd combat it with a positive one. That was one of my biggest takeaways from therapy (and Talkspace): challenge your thoughts.

Our thoughts are the driving force behind our emotions, so if you're sitting there thinking negative thoughts, your emotions are going to reflect that. Hell, your WORLD will reflect that. So when you're in a shit place, let the bad thoughts come in, but when they do, ask yourself these 2 things:

Are they true?

Are they helpful?

Some people might tell you "just don't think bad thoughts," but I prefer to live in reality.

I'm not saying you should FOCUS on bad thoughts, but ignoring them or pushing them out completely isn't helping you either. That's just straight up denial.

Another way to do this is to write down your bad thoughts and then dissect them. For example:

"I'm alone again and I'll never be happy."

Ok, maybe half of this is true. But the other half? Dramatization! And is it HELPFUL? No, if anything, it's emo as hell. If you told me this was one of my AIM away messages from 1998 I would have believed you. Rewrite it like this:

"I'm alone again and even though I'm not happy RIGHT NOW, I have a lot of friends/family to help me through this, so I'm not REALLY alone."

Now you've just made a true AND helpful thought. A bad thought doesn't have to end as a bad thought. See what I'm sayin?

Write down a few of your own below.

Now you have a bit of practice for those times when bad thoughts pop into your brain. Challenge them!!

Next step: are these thoughts actually true or are they emotionally charged? For example:

"Steve left me because he doesn't love me anymore and thinks he can do better."

The ONLY part of that thought that's true is the first part. Steve left me. That's IT. The rest is conjecture and wild speculation. Well, actually, in my case he told me to my face that he thinks there's something better out there, but that's fine. I'm fine LOL.

My point is...in most cases, we take a sliver of information and try to expound on it, just to make it make sense.

**But you can't make lemonade from one lemon wedge.
You need more pieces to get a full glass.**

So when it comes to your breakup story, write it out in a few sentences or bullet points, then cross out the parts of the sentences that are emotionally driven and/or not based on actual facts. I got this lesson from Amy Chan's Breakup Bootcamp book and I cannot recommend it enough. Give it a shot below:

My Breakup Story in a few sentences:

Lastly, and while we're on the topic of writing, let's talk about journaling and brain dumping. When I felt rage (often) or sadness (very often), I would write it out on paper. Whatever thoughts I had in my brain, I'd empty them onto the page and then throw it away. No need to re-read it or keep it (unless of course you want to).

I'm not saying you're going to write those thoughts, throw it in the trash and never think of them again, but I do believe there is catharsis in this process. It's still a release of bad energy.

I have arthritis in my hand/wrist from making #content and social media management, so sometimes I couldn't write on paper and I'd type instead.

They say writing is better to release the thoughts and the energy, but if you have physical limitations, do what you have to do to make it accessible. No judgment over here.

09

YOU DON'T
HAVE TO
“ACCEPT”
GHOSTING

LET ME MAKE A MAJOR CAVEAT HERE

because I'm speaking mostly about relationships, not someone you went on two dates with.

I don't ghost people, but I've been ghosted many times by guys I went on a couple dates with and I don't take it personally anymore. You just can't.

That person doesn't know you well enough to make any sort of call on who you are as a person to justify them ghosting you. That's on them for not knowing how to properly communicate like an adult.

It wasn't your outfit. It wasn't your tendency to hum for no reason whilst browsing the menu. It was nothing you did, and you don't need to wonder about it. Trust me.

But if you REALLY felt a connection and want to say something, do it in a calm, mature manner. I dated a guy last year who I really liked and I thought he really liked me too, but he was definitely TRYING to ghost me at one point and I did not allow it.

We had been dating for a month and a half, nothing crazy, but I wasn't a nobody to this person.

We slept together, we talked every day, we were getting closer. I felt I deserved a conversation and guess what? I got it. I haven't spoken to him since but why would I? I got my answer.

Closure isn't total bullshit like all of the dating coaches tell you it is. They tell you this to get you to move on, which is fine and fair, but closure conversations CAN help IF you're willing and able to actually receive it.

Hindsight is always 20/20, and when this initially happened, there was no way I would have truly heard Steve. I was too emotional and NOT READY to receive his answers. Doesn't mean what he did was right, but taking space was 100% helpful in the end.

As tough as I can be, I'm a pretty sensitive person and I wear my heart on my sleeve (if I actually like you). I also have a VERY strong desire to be respected in my relationships (shouldn't we all?) and to me, stonewalling someone you love (after blindsiding them with a breakup) is probably the cruelest thing you can do.

And FYI, I told Steve exactly that when we finally spoke, a year later.

Believe that.

I could have just gone on with my life and let him slink away, never having to face me again, but there was this voice inside my head that was like...no. This isn't right. I respected his boundaries and I think he should respect mine.

I asked for a calm, honest conversation in the future and he said he'd give me that. I'm gonna hold him to it.

I had mostly forgiven him (as much as one can) by that point anyway, and had given myself some closure already without even knowing it. I think that happened ONLY because I didn't like walking around with that negativity in my body (the body keeps the score!); the shitty energy of knowing there's someone out there who has that sort of power over me. I think that's when I finally got sick of it.

And THAT was the moment I decided to reach out to him one more time.

I know some of you just went "What the FUCK?! I thought you said you forgave him and got your closure??" but HANG ON let me explain.

Part of the reason I told my story on my blog (and why I wrote this book) is because I don't think it's fair that after all the progressive moves we've made (especially for women), ghosting is still, somehow, just something we're supposed to sit back and accept.

We can fight for equal pay and reproductive rights, but we can't fight for...respect and communication in a relationship? And yes, I'm aware this isn't a problem you can take to the Supreme Court, but I think it's wild that the narrative around this topic does not change.

Ever.

"You said what you needed to say. If he wants to respond, he will."

"You just have to let him go. You're not gonna get answers from him."

Literally, fuck that.

Why does NO ONE challenge this shit?

This is not your BOSS we're talking about. This is someone who loved you. Who held you while you slept, who watched you cry and held your hand when things weren't ok.

Then they let go of your hand and watch you drown.

All Rose had to do was move over a little and share the fucking door with Jack. All Steve had to do was grab my hand and not let me drown. That was all I wanted. But he couldn't bring himself to do that. Why? Well...

He blamed me for it, mostly. LOL shocking. Gaslighting at its finest. He said that I was "hostile" and "angry" so he "couldn't" talk to me.

My answer was "UMMM wouldn't you be a little fucking angry?!" JK I don't even remember my answer but I'm pretty sure I laughed and couldn't believe my ears. Was he expecting me to be like "cool well we had a good run, catch ya on the flippity flip!!" I mean, for fucks sake?

And "couldn't" is not the right word. He *could* talk to me, he just didn't *want* to.

As I mentioned before, stonewalling and ghosting are actually coping mechanisms for people like him, aka the avoidant types/dismissive avoidant types. I don't need to bring everything back to Attachment Theory, but there are times when it's pretty blatantly clear that these things are connected. PS if you haven't read Attached, you ABSOLUTELY SHOULD.

Avoidants do not like conflict and they do not like emotion. This was a HUGE conflict and I was HIGHLY emotional. I could see why he would run from something like that, knowing what I know now.

But what I still don't understand or accept, is that there is ZERO grace given for the securely attached people who get their hearts broken, too.

I consider myself mostly securely attached at this point in my life (I like to say I'm secure with anxious rising #lol astrology), but I went through literally every attachment style to get there.

I was avoidant when I was a teenager, super anxious in my 20's, then 30's hit and I learned a lot about myself and the type of person that's best for me, so I was pretty damn secure with Steve. I had my moments but they were few and far between. I THINK even he would tell you that.

Point is, just because I'm pretty well adjusted in how I handle myself in my relationships 90% of the time, means that 10% of the time when I'm devastated and upset beyond words, I can't get ANY compassion?

AND I'm supposed to sit there, be quiet, and let my boyfriend run away from me simply because HE can't handle it?? Not to be dramatic but ummm where's the fucking justice?!

I was determined to get him to talk to me at some point because I truly felt robbed of a conversation that I knew I deserved. And when I told anyone, more of these responses would follow:

"Oh, don't let him have the satisfaction of knowing you care!"

"Don't give him that power!"

"Don't chase him. If he wants to come to you, he will."

And while I typically firmly believe in NOT chasing a man, my response (after some time) was:

"I WANT him to know I care. I was in a relationship with this person for nearly 2 years and pretending otherwise would be immature and kind of insane."

"I'm in the driver's seat of my life. I don't really give a fuck if he doesn't want to talk. Because I DO."

It was always all about him. Always "well he said he doesn't want to talk anymore so..." Why does HE get to decide?? What kind of unfair patriarchal bullshit is that?

Allow me to be clear in that I didn't hound him to talk to me. Because as I mentioned before about chasing: that never works. Especially with men. The more you chase, the more they lean back or straight up run away.

You can't force someone to talk to you and I know that, so I wanted to see if time and distance would actually make a difference. Partially because I was convinced he'd miss me so much he would want to speak to me - lol jokes on me, he did not - but I also wanted more hindsight in the hopes of insight.

I wanted to see if removing the blinders would make me see all these holes in the plot of our relationship story that I didn't see before.

Spoiler alert: I really didn't have any major "aha" moments, and I still consider that relationship to be my best one, even if it didn't work out in the end.

The relationship doesn't have to be visibly flawed in order to fall apart.

There could be cracks in the foundation that you can't even see, which is what I suspect happened with us, and at the end of the day, you can't build a house on top of a shoddy foundation.

I no longer sit here and tell myself that he was the one who got away or that I'll never love anyone new again. That was a major shift change for me that I feared would never happen.

Let me also be clear in that we didn't speak A WORD to each other for nearly 6 months when I finally got the courage to reach out. And so, I emailed him, calmly (don't forget he blocked me everywhere so I basically had no choice but to go the email route).

He didn't reply. And I didn't follow up/force it.

I gave up for another 6 months, and then around Christmas I told myself one more shot, and if he didn't answer, I officially would give up and "just let it go."

I didn't want everyone to be right, and I was worrying at this point that they were.

I thought I'd try WhatsApp since we never communicated on there (but I know he had the app) and it worked. The details of the conversation (or most of them, out of respect) can be found on part 2 of the blog post.

Overarching theme here is: I wasn't letting that guy walk out of my life without giving me the conversation that I deserved a literal year prior. Fuck no, not in my house, not on my watch.

Some people will say I should have just "let it go," but again, why does he get to decide what happens? It would be one thing if we had multiple conversations about it and I just "couldn't let it go," but that isn't what happened here.

I don't think it's fair for people to judge when they haven't been in the situation, because it's one of the most emotionally painful things you can go through. It's like a sudden death.

I wouldn't wish it upon anyone. And when there were no GLARING red flags, it's even harder to understand.

We all "deserve" closure but that doesn't mean we all get it.

If after many attempts you still don't get it, you have to trust that it doesn't have to do with you.

Even when they tell you that it does, that's just gaslighting aka them making you the scapegoat for their inability to handle life.

If you tried multiple times and you're not getting anywhere, give up.

Because there comes a time when it does become an unhealthy obsession and it prevents you from moving forward. I know for a fact I was teetering on that line, but given how much I loved this person and how much I did not see it coming, I think I handled it as best as I could.

Sometimes, no answer is your answer.

Doesn't mean they don't care about you or that it was all a lie, it just means that they can't handle it and they don't want to face you. Far be it from me to take a ghosters side, but it hurts hurting someone you love.

I think he just couldn't face me again. It's selfish as shit, don't get me wrong, and I think I'll always hate him a little bit for not giving me enough credit, but if that's your situation, remind yourself that at least you're capable of being better than that.

I would never do this to someone I loved. Knowing now how truly painful it is, I could never.

On the flipside, if you think you have a shot at getting your closure, don't be aggressive or "hostile" in your approach (like me, apparently!). Give it some time and space first, then, if you still feel a conversation would help you, go for it. You're not losing anything by trying.

In fact, I'd say you're *more* brave than most people for putting yourself out there. It's not easy to be that vulnerable, but you should also be prepared to hear things that you may not want to hear. Steve told me things that I didn't expect and frankly, I could have done without some of them (lol), but I was in a good place to receive them.

Overall, I had done the work and was not nearly as emotional about it (didn't even cry after!), so the pros still outweighed the cons. I don't regret it one bit.

His peace came at the expense of my happiness; my entire world as I knew it, honestly. Someone who doesn't even think twice about that is not someone you should feel bad for.

10

LAZY
CRAZY

SOME MEN SAY WOMEN ARE “CRAZY”

Well, there's another subset of us, and we are called “lazy crazy.” What does this mean, exactly? I'm so glad you asked!

On the flipside of the last chapter, this is about as crazy as I get.

Lazy Crazy means I'm not getting up or leaving the house or even putting on pants to ruin your life. I can do that shit from my couch.

You don't wanna answer my texts?? That's fine, I'll just text you again while I got one hand in a bag of Doritos. I won't call, because that means I have to stop watching TV. It's really a matter of convenience with a sprinkle of psychological warfare.

One time many years ago, I was convinced one of my exes was cheating on me or something in the cheating family. Did I buy a wig and follow him one night? Nope. That requires action/leaving the house.

I just bought/installed a keylogger on my computer so I could get his passwords and access everything I needed. *everyone's jaw just dropped and I know it* just hear me out. I was young and painfully insecure.

You know that meme where the girl has text messages printed out to show her boyfriend that she caught him?

That was me (not literally).

I PRINTED OUT his flirtatious emails to this bitch. But I only printed them because I had a printer in my apartment at the time. Otherwise, I'm not leaving to go to Staples for that shit. I would have figured something else out, I promise you.

See? Lazy crazy. I'm not breaking into your house or slashing your tires (I like cars too much to do something like that), but I'll bitch you out from the comfort of my couch. Absolutely.

Also, let me add that if I were with someone NOW who activated my anxiety to the point of installing literal spyware on their computer, I'd run.

I was very young when I did that and women's intuition or not, that kind of behavior just means something is VERY wrong, either with you or with your partner, or both. I was a very insecure person back then, and I was with someone who made me even more insecure. And when you get triggered, you act in crazy ways.

Now, I'm more aware of the people I surround myself with and the people I date. If someone triggers me like that or activates an old wound...I can feel it in my body. And I know to walk away. Or run.

I bring up Lazy Crazy because when Steve left me, I did the thing everyone says you shouldn't do:

I sent the long email. I did.

And guess what? I DON'T REGRET IT NOT ONE BIT!

I was furious and heartbroken. We were in our mid 30's when this happened, we were not in High School. I wasn't taking that shit lying down. So, once again, LC kicked in and I said alllllll the things I wanted to say. Everyone said I'd regret it but I don't, to this day.

Did it get me my conversation? Of course not #lol.

I knew the second he saw all those words in big clusters called paragraphs he would shut down. Tbh I'm not even sure he read all of it, but it felt good to send and that's all I fucking cared about.

He RAN from me and our relationship with no warning and next to no explanation to preserve his peace. So guess what? You're allowed to be a little selfish too if it gives you peace.

The second reason I bring up Lazy Crazy is because if you've been ghosted, you may have the desire to show up at their house or at their job and beg for answers. So as someone who went through those motions, I can tell you that Lazy Crazy is more likely to get you results than standard issue crazy.

For the record, I don't think it's "crazy" to show up at someone's house or job, but it's much more dramatic and will likely put them in attack mode because they weren't prepared for it.

It's like cornering a scared animal. This person is CLEARLY a bit of a coward to begin with, so backing them up against a wall is going to bring the claws out.

And aside from the embarrassment factor (for both of you), you're making a very private matter a public one, which is not going to help. If you don't care, go for it, but I can promise you that keeping your distance for a bit is a much better plan.

Take it from someone who went all LC at first, then calmed down and went radio silent for MONTHS. That was when I finally got my closure convo.

All this is to say, going silent and giving it space aka "no contact" really is a much better approach.

11

ENJOY
THE
SILENCE

A GREAT SONG BY DEPECHE MODE,

as well as great advice.

I'll admit this didn't happen for me for a longggg time. If you read the blog post, you may recall the part about how much it hurt when Steve didn't have ONE moment of weakness with me.

No drunk texts, no random check-ins.

But the truth is, that was actually probably the kindest thing he did throughout all of this.

When you break up but still keep in touch, you're not allowing yourself the proper time to process and heal.

Not only that, you can't really find yourself again because you're still tethered to the one who broke your heart. You might think it makes the separation easier, but it doesn't. At all. It's holding you back, whether you want to admit it or not.

When it came to getting my closure talk, I don't think it would have happened if we didn't have many months of radio silence. It was painful, don't get me wrong, but there were plenty of times where I truly smiled, really laughed, and really enjoyed living for just me.

I realized that I CAN be happy without him, and that my life DIDN'T come to a screeching halt (the way it initially felt).

I touched on this before, but I had to give myself the time to actually be prepared for what he might say. If you're still on that rollercoaster of emotion, that won't be a good time to talk.

Chances are you'll be reactive instead of proactively listening, and likely just end up fighting. But I finally felt ready to reach out to him because I felt like me again. I had basically given myself the closure I needed, I just didn't realize it.

In the beginning, was he in the back of my head?
Always. But was he in the palm of my hand? Never.

I could think about him all I wanted (and I really didn't want to, I just couldn't help it at the time), but I had ZERO access to him. He wasn't a phone call or a text away.

And that makes all the difference in the world.

I will also admit something else here that I think helped me a lot: I didn't stalk his social media ever. Ok, maybe once very shortly after the breakup but I regretted it immediately.

Why? Because HE RE-FOLLOWED THAT ONE GIRL.

You know there's ALWAYS ONE that you're kinda like... "this bitch" every time you see her dumb face on his feed? Be it an ex-gf or an ex-fling or a sexy-looking coworker. I shan't reveal her but she was in one of those categories.

He had unfollowed her while we were together (his own decision, I never asked him to), and HE RE-FOLLOWED HER TWO WEEKS AFTER WE BROKE UP.

TWO WEEKS?! MY BODY WASN'T EVEN COLD YET.

He's very lucky I'm the LC type because I felt RAGE that day. But I did nothing.

I wrote it all out, bitched to my friends, and left it alone.

He wasn't my problem anymore and rationally, he was single. He could do what he wanted and I had no right to go insane on his ass, even though I wanted to.

AND HOLY HELL DID I WANT TO.

He had blocked me on Instagram, but I'm a social media manager and I run multiple accounts. He didn't block all of those! What a doofus move. I could have very easily toggled to a client's account and given his account a browse, but I rarely, if ever, did. Why? Well, see above story.

Because I knew it would hurt.

Something would piss me off or make me sad and I was in enough pain already.

Why engage in masochistic behavior when I got enough shit to deal with? I was living in my head most of the time anyway, I wanted to make it a hospitable place, ya know? Didn't need extra trash lying around.

So...DON'T stalk them on social media. Do not.

I know you think it keeps you connected to them in some way and you want to make sure they're just as miserable as you are, but you're literally never going to see something that makes you happy. You're going to see something that makes you angry or sad, or you'll see their IG story with a random raccoon meme and think it's a subconscious message to you and that you should reach out. It's not. Don't do it.

Some people just like raccoon memes.

And on the flip side, if you see them having a hard time, you'll feel compelled to reach out. But if/when that happens, remind yourself that when you were hurting, this person left you stranded on the side of the fucking road in the middle of the night with no phone and no shoes (metaphorically only, I hope).

And they never looked back.

Not once.

12

FACING TRIGGERS

THIS IS THE PART OF THE BOOK

where I tell you some mildly embarrassing stories about how I still battled with this breakup, even when I felt mostly like myself again. Because heartbreak is a bitch and it can rear its ugly head when you least expect it.

Certain places, certain smells...they can be really serious triggers.

When the breakup happened, it was about a week after New Year's Eve, so we still had our Christmas tree up. He had to go and get the rest of his stuff from the apartment, but he didn't want me to be there (because it was too sad for him, awww! *gag*), and I agreed to that, like an idiot.

Again, this is MY apartment that I OWN, yet I let him just make all these calls because I thought giving him space was the right thing to do/would get me my closure/would make him miss me and come to his senses, but LOL not so much.

So anyway, I went back to my apartment the day before to get some clothes to stay at my moms. While I was there, I stopped in front of the Christmas tree. It was a really nice one, and we decorated it together, as you do, when you're a supposedly happy couple.

My eyes glided over the rainbow lights and the gold ornaments, admiring how pretty it was. My wistful gaze was immediately squashed when I stopped on the ornament that we bought together - the one with two cute snowmen hugging that said "our first Christmas together" - and I lost it. Absolutely fucking lost it.

Hysterical tears rolled down my face and my body was filled with rage from head to toe. My face felt hot. My chest was tight. I grabbed the snowmen ornament off the tree and threw it on the ground, smashing it into about 5 pieces.* Then, I left it there and walked out the door.

Dramatic? Yes. Needed? Also yes.

I don't ALWAYS recommend breaking shit to achieve catharsis but let me tell ya...if it's of no harm to you, a pet, a family member, or your apartment. Go for it. Or go to one of those rage rooms where you pay them to let you break shit.

*I actually walked over to the kitchen to smash it, because I wanted to make sure he saw it the second he walked into the apartment. Lazy Crazy strikes again.

The saddest part? When I finally went home 2 weeks or so later, he didn't throw it away, he picked it up and placed every piece back on the counter. Not sure why, honestly. I never asked. I took it as an acknowledgment, but not a gesture, if that makes sense.

If this were a rom com maybe he would have pieced it back together and showed up to my door with it or some shit, but life isn't a movie. There aren't always poignant moments at the end of a sad story.

I love Christmas, it's easily one of my favorite times of the year, and this just put a hole in my heart. I started to associate Christmas with pain and suffering, but I remember dreading nearly every season of that year as well.

Spring was tough because that was when we met! Summer was hard because that's when we got a car and made trips to the beach! Fall was hard because we both love Fall and pumpkin spice bullshit! And then... Christmas was the final topper on this tall trifle of misery.

Remember how much I love Ted Lasso? Remember the Christmas special? I cried the whole time, I could barely watch it. Christmas songs brought tears to my eyes and not in a good way. And then...the damn Christmas lights.

We hung white Christmas lights in my living room because well, why not? I love white Christmas lights and they actually serve as a significant additional light source, so I kept them up all year (and I still do LOL).

Before you judge me for decorating my apartment like a college dorm, I have very high ceilings so I don't think it looks tacky and again, they provide a lovely ambiance!! But I digress...

One day in October, I was out on a date (see, progress!) and when I got back home, I saw them still lit up, but nothing else in the apartment was on. I forgot to unplug the lights before I left. I know this doesn't sound like a big deal, but wait for it.

I stopped in my tracks. It was like I had gotten transported back to the year prior, when we first decorated with these lights and If I went out somewhere without him, he'd be there, playing Call of Duty on the computer with all the other lights off, just the faint glow of the Christmas Lights overhead. Usually he'd smile and go "HI BABE!" and I don't know, it just made me happy, ya know?

It was the first time I remember feeling what it must feel like to come home to someone and enjoy it? And this was also the first time I saw that setting exactly the same way, but there was no computer chair, and there was no Steve.

I don't want to be dramatic (jk you know I do), but I fell to the floor. Like, slowly. Just crumpled into a cross legged position and started crying. But it wasn't the same kind of crying as the Christmas tree/ornament saga. This was...stunned crying. Gentle, even. Which also let me know I was making progress.

It was the kind where you look around and you can't even really believe your own heart, you almost don't even know why you're crying.

"I thought I was ok..."

audible sharp breath inhale

"I thought I was past this..."

another sharp breath

These were the kinds of thoughts running through my head. And I just got back from a date!! WTF?! Granted, the guy was kind of a dipshit so it wasn't going to work out and I knew that, but I was out there and I felt ready!!

The thing is, I think I WAS ready, but being ready doesn't mean you're 100% healed. I don't know that anyone is ever 100% healed from trauma?

This might be a weird comparison, but I think it's like a lifelong illness that isn't life-threatening: it's something to be managed, not cured.

So when you discover a new trigger, you either learn to adapt (as I have because I like my damn Christmas lights), or you avoid it as best as you can.

At the time, I didn't expect that sort of reaction. I was also a little tipsy, so that didn't help either. But this is where it gets fun:

I sent a video of myself explaining the situation to a few friends. WHILE CRYING. Why did I send a video?? WHY. Because I miss performing? Maybe my makeup looked good a little smudged?? LOL I REALLY HAVE NO IDEA.

I was kinda drunk and I thought "well this is easier than FaceTiming or texting them." Pro tip: do not do this. It is NOT easier than FaceTiming or texting. It's blackmail fodder, if anything. Send a voicenote, maybe?? Literally anything is better than this.

Still, they urged me to take them down, but I knew if I did that, I'd let him take away something I really loved, and he took enough away from me already. So for 2 whole weeks, I came home to Christmas lights until it no longer felt sad.

Just remember that triggers can come in all forms, but be open to them. Because heartbreak is a hell of a teacher.

For example, the first really nice NYC Spring day in 2021, I went to a cafe to get a coffee and a sandwich, and I sat outside on my balcony to eat it.

Halfway through the sandwich, my heart started racing and I felt nauseous. I've had enough panic attacks at this point to know when I feel one coming on, so I went inside and started saying the names/colors of random objects in my apartment, out loud.* Then I was able to take some slow deep breaths. The nausea dissipated shortly thereafter and I began to feel normal again.

The unfortunate realization that I would never enjoy another Spring day with him, combined with the potent cold brew hitting my veins at the same time, was too much for me.

You think you know how it's all going to go. You think you're doing great and then one small thing like a BEAUTIFUL DAY AND A SANDWICH sets you back.

Healing is a wild ride.

But I had to allow myself the time to process, so if you have to avoid certain triggers while you walk amongst the debris, consider this your permission. You're not alone and you're not pathetic for doing so.

*this is a fun little trick I taught myself to come down from a panic attack, and it originally came from a time when I was tripping a little too hard on Molly (sorry Mom) and I had to ground myself in the NOW/remind myself that I'm safe in my surroundings.

For the people who are like "but we were together for 7 years! 10 years! (insert large number here)!"

It's going to suck. That's it. It's going to suck big time.

You might have to do a little redecorating.

You might have to take the long way to the pharmacy.

You might have to order from a different Chinese place for a little bit.

But...you can also just do the things you used to do. If EVERYTHING is a trigger, then what are you going to do? Rearrange your bedroom furniture and just stay there forever??

You have to face it, but you don't have to do it all at once. You can do the supermarket one day. You can do the gym another day. Ease yourself back into the routines and make some new ones along the way.

If your old routine with them was going to the gym and coming right home, maybe stop for a latte on the way home.

Try writing down some of your routines/routes and see where you can make an adjustment with something you enjoy.

The whole point is to REWIRE those neural pathways in your brain. We're all creatures of habit, but we CAN make new ones.

They say it takes 2 weeks to form a new habit. I don't love the word habit because it has a negative connotation, but I use it to make a point. You can create a new and better life without them, but you have to believe that you can, first.

**Eventually, you will find those pieces of yourself.
Slowly but surely, you'll pick them back up, one by one, and put them back into place.**

All by yourself.

13

DONT RUSH
DATING

THIS IS A GOOD CAUTIONARY TALE FOR YOU

I was in somewhat of a manic state a few months after Steve left. Call it “trauma drive,” but it was definitely something in the back of my head that said “do not sit still.”

I am all for owning your feelings and sitting with the sadness, but I did that for a couple months by that point and I wanted OUT of that cycle.

I was sick of thinking about him, sick of missing him, and sick of feeling hopeless. So I did what any intelligent, sane woman would do and re-downloaded Hinge. In case you’re unfamiliar, that’s an online dating app. And the bane of my existence, to this day.

“Maybe I need some mild male attention and flirtation,” I said to myself, “it’ll make me feel better if only for a bit.”

Swipe left, swipe right, swipe left. Left. Left. Left. Let me tell you something. Nothing will make you miss your ex more than jumping back into dating too soon.

I swear to God every dude that “liked” me looked like a thumb. And they opened with creepy comments about my body. It didn’t make me feel better, it filled me with rage.

“Steve WANTS to go back to THIS?! This life of interviews with strangers? I was SO BAD that he would prefer entertaining THIS SHITSHOW?!”

You see my point. It was a VERY quick spiral into depressionville. Not to mention, let’s just call a spade a spade here: men have MANY more viable options than women do. It’s a numbers thing and it’s fucking science.

I’m 40 years old right now at this moment and I’m not trying to date a 25 year old. But a man can, and a man will (not all men, but I’m making a point here). Their pool is just much larger, so in the back of my head, I knew that Steve’s Hinge didn’t look like the trailer for I Am Legend. And that annoyed me.

There were a few glimmers of hope here and there, some nice conversations and mild flirtations with cute guys. But once I let them know I was a few months post-breakup, they usually dropped off the face of the earth. So again, I did what any sane woman would do and I kept it a secret until the first date! GOTCHA!

Hooked a normal-ish dude and he actually took me on not one, but two dates!

So anyway. Date 1 went well, but date 2...poor guy never saw it comin. We were at dinner at a lovely Japanese place in Brooklyn, conversation flowing nicely, feeling mildly toasted after a couple drinks when he stopped talking, cocked his head to the side and said "you're really interesting, you know that?"

Taken aback a little, I said "uhh thank you? You sound surprised?" and I laughed, awkwardly.

"Yea a little," he replied, "I just didn't think we'd have this much to talk about."

Now...some people hear this and think the guy is negging or being a dick. I forgot to mention he's not from here, so there's a slight language barrier and what he meant to say was a genuine compliment like "you're more than just a pretty face." But is that how I took it?? LOL not so much.

I remember distinctly feeling my mood shift from happy and buzzed to ANGER and suspicion. "He's lying to you Dara" my inner thoughts told me, "he's a liar just like Steve. Don't believe him. He doesn't think you're special, he's just lying."

So I took a sip of my drink, scoffed, looked away and said, "yea, you say that NOW."

He looked confused. "What?" he asked.

"I mean, you barely know me. You say that NOW but it doesn't mean shit."

I don't remember exactly what else I said (I had a few drinks), but this sort of attitude continued for the remainder of the evening, and he was still nice enough to walk my rude ass home. 5 minutes after I got into my apartment, I felt like an asshole and texted him to apologize.

"I'm so sorry about that. Just know that wasn't about you. I'm obviously not ready to date yet and I'm sorry for taking it out on you."

He replied and said he understood/had a feeling something was up, then he said he would genuinely like to stay friends. He sent me a link to an Amazon book to help me with my breakup, which I thought was really thoughtful, and we did actually stay in touch for a bit.

But like all friendships that are based on attraction by at least one party, it disappears the second the other person gets into a relationship.

There are two lessons in that story: 1 - don't force yourself into dating because you're bored and want the attention and 2 - even when you're at your worst, the right people will help you see that. And more importantly, they'll forgive you for it.

14

IN CONCLUSION

WE'VE MADE IT TO THE END AND...

let me tell you one last thing, one very important last thing:

This really will make you stronger. I know it's cliche as hell, but...this isn't something everyone goes through. Most people go through breakups, but a blindsided/ghosted breakup is not for the faint of heart.

You can choose to be angry at your shit luck for the rest of your life, or you can take pride in it and wear it like a badge of honor.

I don't love the idea that God/the universe/whatever higher power you believe in only doles out shit to those who can handle it, but...maybe it's a narrative I can get behind.

When I got hit by a car, all I could think about was "how" this could happen to me, "why" God chose me for this pain and suffering, "what" I did to deserve it, and all the thoughts surrounding that general theme of "why me?"

I was a KID. I did NOTHING to deserve it. For a long time I told myself there MUST BE some deeper explanation, so I told myself it's because I made fun of someone once and they overheard me and this was the lord's payback.

Ummm no lol.

We were all idiot kids at one point who talked shit. Hell, we still talk shit, we're just smarter about it now.

I didn't deserve months of physical pain, PTSD, 20+ surgeries, and losing my dream of being a dancer because I was rude to someone ONCE at the age of 10.

The point is this: if you can't ACCEPT what happened, your mind will run in circles trying to come up with REASONS WHY, just to give it some logic.

But there is no logic in trauma. You won't find a good enough "why" for the pain you're feeling. Trust me.

It's normal to try and "rationalize" and "close the loop" but...you have to stop at some point.

You have to let your mind be the strongest muscle you have.

You have to train it and rewire it.

Reframe “how did this happen to me” to “how can I move forward?” Not saying that’s easy to do, but it’s where you have to direct your energy if you want to get past this.

This experience changes you. No doubt about it. But it doesn’t have to change you for the worse.

There was NOTHING you could have done differently to keep this person.

Someone who does this has been thinking about it for a while and didn’t have the courtesy or the courage to clue you the fuck in.

They made this breakup about you, but it’s not about you. It’s about them and their inability to communicate.

Just because you weren’t right for them doesn’t mean they had the right to treat you this way.

You deserve someone who trusts that you can handle the truth. Someone who can hold your heart and be careful with it. And if they choose to break it, YOU have to trust that YOU will be ok.

It’s the risk you take when falling in love.

People would ask me: "but how can you trust that this won't happen again?"

And I'd say: "honestly, maybe you can't. You can only trust yourself. Trust that YOU WILL be ok again."

Being dumped by someone in this fashion is a gift. They're doing you a damn favor. I KNOW you can't see that now, but take it from me, it's very real.

If you can bounce back from a breakup like this, you can bounce back from nearly anything (at least as it pertains to matters of the heart). I really do believe that.

My anxiety is nowhere near as bad as it used to be in relationships and dating. You know why? Because there is basically nothing a guy can do to me that would make me feel worse than this did.

I was CONVINCED I was broken forever. Would never love again. Would never trust again. And while I haven't found love yet, I DO BELIEVE that I will. For whatever reason, it hasn't happened yet since him, but I don't sit around and mope and think "he took this from me" because he didn't. If anything, I'm single because I treat me better than most men do. I'm not fucking settling and neither should you.

Know your worth. Know what you deserve. And if you don't get it, have the strength to walk away.

Something that's meant for you will not pass you and you can't force something that wasn't meant to be either.

You can come out of this being scared or you can come out of it fearless. I chose fearless. I'd rather have a broken heart than be a broken person.

I don't tolerate shit that I used to, but I'm also more compassionate in other ways, and I try really hard to be understanding of what people are going through (if they actually tell me).

You learn something from every experience, so I don't regret anything or anyone. Sometimes I will go out with someone just because they seem like fun.

My therapist once told me something that changed my life and hopefully it changes yours:

"The majority of relationships don't work out."

Read that again.

At the end of the day, the relationship you have with yourself is the one you gotta work on now. Put yourself first. You know why? Because your ex sure as shit didn't.

And if that doesn't motivate you, I don't know what will.

FIN

BONUS CHAPTER!

PETTY SHIT (FOR FUN)

THERE WAS PROBABLY SOME POINT

during this book where you said to yourself, “is it time to be petty yet?!” And you’re in luck, because now is that time!

My breakup was in January, so by the time Valentine’s Day rolled around, I was really settling in nicely to the extreme anger portion of the 5 stages of grief.

Someone reached out in my DM’s about this fun thing you can do for Valentine’s Day with a local zoo: you can pay \$5 to name a roach or other insect after your ex, then they feed it to one of the animals in the zoo. They also livestream it on Facebook, so you can watch your ex, in vermin-form, be eaten by a snake or something equally upsetting.

UMM I'M SORRY BUT...ICONIC.

Now, I have a very soft spot for animals, but not bugs, so I can watch an animal eating a bug. But I can’t watch an animal eating another animal. Ya know? All that is to say that this felt like a good plan for me.

I paid the \$5, named a roach after Steve, grabbed some popcorn and set in to watch his fate. If that isn't an excellent use of \$5 I don't know what is.

Another fun and semi-petty thing my friends did for me? When his birthday rolled around a month later, they took me out for dinner/drinks and made me one of those smashable chocolate hearts that said "Fuck Him" on it. Inside the big, heart-shaped chocolate shell was a variety of mini booze bottles. Get out your aggression + chocolate + booze in one convenient package.

Saving the best for last: unearth the ugliest photo of him you can find and take a screenshot. Just hear me out.

If you're not blocked on Instagram, just go to their tagged photos. This space is usually a hotbed for this type of content. No one likes their tagged photos.

Anyway, take a screenshot of the one(s) where he looks like a cartoon character from Futurama or a garden variety drunken creep. Then, whenever you start romanticizing him or saying that you'll never find someone so amazing, just look at that photo.

Even if you know it's "just a photo" and it's "not reality," you'll make yourself laugh. These people aren't perfect and you need to humanize them. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

We tend to put our exes on a pedestal after a breakup because we think “they broke up with me, so I MUST be the problem.” But that isn’t the case. This person just doesn’t see you for you, and doesn’t accept you for you. Is that someone you want to be with? Someone who doesn’t choose you, day in and day out??

That’s probably the one bit of information that I told myself over and over that forced me to go radio silent.

I told myself, “he has the ability to apologize and make up for this or say literally anything to get me back IF he really wanted to. And he’s not. And that tells me more than anything else I’ll ever need to hear.”

Even though it was painful, it was 100% true.

Don’t let them make you feel like you aren’t worthy of being chosen.

APPENDIX/RESOURCES

If you didn't get a chance to read the original blog post that inspired this book, **here is the link to that!**

And **here is the followup blog post** regarding my conversation with Steve one year later.

Other books mentioned:

Breakup Bootcamp

Attached

The Body Keeps The Score

I hope this helped you a little bit. And if it did, please leave a review and let me know! It would mean a lot to me. :)

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Thank you for reading and happy healing!