

CHAPTER 2

*"God never gives us more than we can
handle..." unknown*

The pain is too much to bear, I thought, as I watched streaks of rain run down my fogged bedroom window. Seated in the fetal position, I sat in the dark, clearing the tears from my eyes and rocking myself back and forth. It was all an attempt to compose myself enough to keep my grief at bay so I would not cause myself immeasurable harm.

I hadn't slept, showered or eaten more than a cup of tea and peanut butter toast in about 2 and a half days. I've been numb since hanging up the telephone with him and learning that he, the man I had loved all my adult life, had just stopped loving me.

I hadn't been to work or even called in because I couldn't stop crying long enough to form a full sentence. Cognizant of my despair, my roommate of almost three years was kind enough to peek through the crack in my bedroom door to check on me. Seeing me in the same position as the day before would prompt her to pick up the phone daily to feed my employer a story about how my mystery illness that kept me from coming to work.

It really does hurt. Your heart really can break, I thought, every time my chest would heave up and down to push the tears out of my stinging, beet red eyes. By that point, I had cried so long and so hard my ribs were sore and my throat was so parched I dreaded having to utter a sound.

Beside me on the twin daybed, which had become my refuge, my pager vibrated calls from my new ex. He knew there was no real sickness that kept me from coming to our joint place of employment. He knew that it was his decision to end our nearly six year relationship that had left me a virtual drone.

It was quite ironic that he would be at work while I was not. After all, the only reason he had a job there was because of me. I had forgone my dream of going to law school to get accept a job

at the television station. When he graduated the following year, I talked my boss into giving him an internship so he could learn how to be a cameraman. Almost three and half years after starting there, a career in law was a distant memory while his future in television was secure.

Who am I without him? I thought. Who's going to love me if the person who knows me best in the world can't stand me?

It was that thought that debilitated me for two more days. I just sat wrapped in blanket, glancing intermittently over to the full size bed we used to share. I could sleep there anymore because whenever I lay down I was facing the television and dresser he'd given to me to help me feel more comfortable in his hometown. Then, there was the picture frame filled with photos of him from infancy adulthood; a Valentine's Day gift from the man who I once thought was born to love me.

I tried to close my eyes for a few minutes each day but they sprung open only moments after being shut. I was besieged with images of his infidelity with one of our co-workers; the very woman I had warned him about for months.

God, why won't you just let me die? I thought. My heart is already broken so just make it stop beating.

By the time Thursday had arrived, I had finally manage to pry myself off the bed and over to the phone. I was too ashamed to call my parent and let my father have the satisfaction of saying I told you so. He'd warned me that his drinking was too much of a problem for our relationship to have longevity. Funny, that's what he thought would do us in. No one, including me, every fathomed he would just leave me because the grass appeared greener somewhere else

Instead of trying to reach to my mother, who was also my best friend, I dialed my 89 year old grandmother. She had survived of two marriages; one ending in divorce and the other in death. If there was anyone who knew heartbreak it was her.

Her phone rang once, twice and on the third ring, she picked up the phone.

"Hello," I muttered, trying to muffle my tears. "How are you?"

"Well, grandma's getting old and my arthritis is bothering me, but I thank Jesus for everyday."

I don't remember what my grandmother said immediately after that, I just recall the soothing sound of her voice. I wanted to tell her what I was going through, how I needed her support, how I needed her encouragement. But, I simply said, "Grandma, I don't really feel like talking right now, okay?"

"Well, I'll let you go," says said, "Just remember, God willing, tomorrow is another day."

I don't know if she sensed my pain or if it was just she was rattling off another one of her favorite religious phrases. No matter the reason, those simple words sent me into a world of thought.

Lord, please give me another day only if it gives me the comfort I long for, I thought. Please don't let it mean more of the same.

Just as I finished my thought, my pager went off again. For a moment, I convinced myself that all his pages meant he had rethought his choice to leave and had once again discovered I was all

he needed. But, as quickly as the idea came to me it left. I realized that if that was the case he would've just picked up the phone and called me.

I wanted him to call me so I could hear his voice again so I could ask him how he could just dispose of our plans for the future. The last time we spoke, I was too stunned to ask any of the questions that now ran through my mind. I will never forget that Sunday afternoon. My roommate, Diane and I had just come back from shopping when our house phone rang. It wasn't odd for him to call me when he was away on a trip but he had already phoned me several times during his ski trip.

I recall asking Diane if she knew what it's like when someone is there but not really there before picking up the phone. And, for the instant I picked it, I knew there was a problem.

We had been distant since his 25 birthday a few months before. In fact, for the first time in five years, we didn't even spend that evening together. He went drinking with friends from work at the hangout spot, the Ground Round, while I stayed at home. Despite this, we still made plans and spent time together.

From the moment I heard his voice, I could tell he was avoiding telling me the true reason for his call. We exchanged the same pleasantries from hours before and then we were both were silent; each waiting for the other to speak. My hand shook as I sat on the edge of sofa holding onto the receiver. Frustrated, I mustered up the courage to urge him to tell me what's going on. The answer was actually a question, are you in "friend mode?"

"Friend mode" was something we'd invented early in our relationship. We invoked it whenever we had to say something to the other person that might make them mad or jeopardize our life as

boyfriend or girlfriend. When we were in this state, we agreed to advise one another as if we had no personal stake in the outcome. He had used this several times in the past like once when he kissed another girl; when he got into a fight with one of my ex-boyfriends; when I began hanging out with an ex behind his back; and when I caught him telling his ex-girlfriend about my miscarriage.

As I listened to him, I didn't even feel the tears begin to stream down my cheeks nor did I notice that my shaking had turned into a full blown tremor. I just stared at Diane, who stood only feet from me trying to ascertain what was being said. I tried to ignore her while she mouthed, what is he saying? What is he asking you? But, when I didn't answer it she walked up to me and began rubbing my arm. It was that simple gesture that caused me to break down, letting out all of my pent up emotions.

You didn't mean it? I shouted into the phone. It just happened? How does that just happen?
What did you, just fall in?

The question somehow struck us both as funny and provided the one moment of comic relief in the entire conversation. We chuckled for a moment, free from the sadness and shock his revelation had caused. It also freed me enough for me to apologize to him for violating the rules of "friend mode. The levity didn't last long. Soon, it was time for me to advise him as to whether he should stay with me or take a chance on someone whom he had growing feelings. All I could say was that it wasn't my right to tell him to stay. I thought if what he felt for her after a few months was enough for him to be willing to toss aside the years and history he shared with me, then leaving was the right answer.

I don't recall hanging up the phone or even changing my clothes and propping myself up on that twin. I just seemed to come to there, a day after our call, wondering why I didn't violate the rules and beg him to stay with me. But, I hadn't done that so four days later; I was still nestled in to the spot that had provided me peace for most of week overwhelmed with grief; that is until I heard the doorbell ring.

I hoped that Diane was home and would answer, so I waited for a few minutes before struggling to my feet. I paused at my partially opened bedroom door and listened for sound coming from her room. When I heard nothing, I slid my feet into my pig slippers and slowly shuffled across the carpet to the front door.

I suppose I should've thought about the fact that I was wearing pajamas and probably smelled. Instead, I just left the front door open so one of my co-workers could enter. I didn't wait to see if Richard made it inside. I just dragged myself down the hallway in our renovated factory apartment.

I didn't even look up at all until I got back to my safe haven. Richard, a 6 foot 2 inch tall black man with a shaved head, was my frequent riding buddy. His car was often on the fritz so I frequently drove him to and from work. During our drive, we would discuss everything from relationships to plans for the future. He lived a mere fifteen minutes away from my place, still I was surprised that he'd noticed my absence enough to feel compelled to stop by.

When my mother met him, she thought Richard was attracted me. If he was, it was something that I hadn't paid any attention. I always thought of him as a brother like figure, although it was

hard to miss his rock hard body and brilliant smile. Regardless of his affection for me, we were friends and it was that, he said, that made him come over.

He sat by my bedside while I stared at the mirror closet door across from me, trying to avoid making eye contact with him. I didn't need to tell him that I wasn't ill; office gossip had already alerted him. He was too kind to mention it though. It was his lack of questions that let spoke volumes.

I can't say I know how long he stayed but he was with me for a considerable amount of time. All the while, he assured me that as bad as things were at the moment, they were going to get better. But, I barely heard any of what he said. Before I knew it, I was being swept up in his muscular arms. I rested my head limply on his shoulder as I fought back tears. I inhaled deeply, taking in the manly scent I had been missing. I lifted up just enough to look into his deep brown eyes and when our sights locked, I wondered what he saw when he looked at me. I wondered who I appeared to be now that I was no longer the woman I used to see in Matthew's eyes.

He could've taken advantage of me. He could've used my vulnerability to act on whatever feelings he may have had. But, he didn't. He held me tightly, rubbed my back and then released me quickly. He placed a sweet, mild kiss on the side of my face before he stood up and walked towards my bedroom door.

I couldn't bear to watch him so I turned my head towards the ten gallon fish tank next to the bed. Ralph Two, the giant Albino frog, was frolicking in the tank unaware that his "dad" had abandoned him as well.

Friday had finally come and with a new weekend on the horizon, Diane decided I need more comfort than she could give. She placed a call to one of my dear college friends, Kevin, and told him all about my breakup.

He and I weren't close because of an intimate relationship nor were we joined through any special event. We were just two people in a group of friends that over time talked whenever one of us was in peril. He was always less forthcoming than I but whenever I needed him he was there.

I reluctantly took the phone from her when I learned who was on the other line. He didn't ask me for the details nor did he spout off any motivation phrases. He told me about his recent breakup and what it felt like for him to lose his love. After that, he just listened. I spoke at least an hour non-stop and during that time he said very few things in response. When I was done bearing it all, he said one simple thing; come home to New York where he lived and where I was from.

If ever there was a time I wanted to run from Boston and the life I had built all around Matthew, this was it. However, without a job or a place to live, home didn't seem like an option. Even though staying put, didn't seem to offer much hope of peace.

What I am supposed to do now? I thought. Where can I go? I was immediately enveloped by a feeling of hopelessness the second I hung up the phone.

I spent the remainder of the weekend, alone in my room. Although I ventured out more, occasionally eating one meal a day, I still had not showered or been able to sleep for more than a few hours.

Before leaving for work on Monday, Diane yelled out to me to see if I had finally shaken my depression enough to make it to work. She waited for my answer for a few seconds before flipping my door open. I remember telling her to give me one more day and then I watched as she pulled the door shut again.

All day I sat there, trying to psyche myself into a better frame of mind.

You're better off without, I thought. Being without him won't change anything. You have the same apartment, same car, and the same amount of money in the bank. You don't need him.

No matter how many times I repeat this mantra, it wasn't sinking in. I must've said it at least a thousand times that day before Diane returned home at 5:30.

You've got to stop this, she said, as she popped her head into my room for just a moment before retiring to her own.

I know, replied, although at that point I had no idea how to shake the negative thoughts that were debilitating me.

Less than 2 hours later, the silence of our apartment was shattered by the sound of the locks on the front door turning. Diane rushed into my room to see if I was the source of the noise, but when she realized I wasn't she hustled down the hall. Pretty soon, I heard two voices that got louder as they approached my sanctuary.

"Before I let him, are you going to be okay?" asked Diane.

Matthew stood right behind her, holding the keys to our place I had given him so he could let himself when he got off work late at night. Although he didn't live with us full-time, he would often come by to spend the night with me. He would also come in when we were at work to feed the two turtles and two frogs which we now had custody of that once belonged to him.

"I am right next door," said Diane, before letting him into my room and pulling the door behind her.

There he was, standing in front of me for the first time in more than a week. I initially thought of springing up and wrapping myself around him. Then, I looked at him and the sight caused my stomach to churn. It wasn't in the way that it does when you are about to be sick. It's hard to express but there was an emptiness that filled me in that moment, unlike any other I had ever experienced.

As he walked closer to me, I squirmed in my seat unsure of why he was here and what he wanted from me now.

"Go ahead hit me," he said. "If that will make you stop this, make you feel better than just hit."

There was a part of me that wanted to punch him, kick him, to make him feel as much pain as I did.

"You have to stop sitting here feeling sorry for yourself," he shouted. "I don't even know why you are taking it this hard. I didn't even think you would care if I left."

Was I so cold that he truly didn't believe that I his leaving would leave a hole in my life? I thought.

“You were always telling me how things weren’t working? How you wanted to leave? Now you got what you wanted,” he said.

I said those things, I thought, because I wanted you to move out of your mother’s house. It was her insensitive and at times racist comments that put a huge strain on our relationship; that made me doubt if I could marry you.

Before I could finish my thought, he puts his hand firmly on my shoulders and said, “Let it out.”

I struck blow after blow, hitting every part of his body that my arms could reach. The entire time, he didn’t whimper, complain or raise his hand to hit me back. He just took it until I broke down in tears. It was then that he hugged me and drew me close, so I could grieve on his chest.

I wanted to stay there, to have him never push me away, but he did. He waited until I was calm and then he told me he needed to go.

I can’t imagine not knowing you, he said, just before he got up and walked away.

I haven't been single in years, I thought. I don't even know how. I guess I am going to have to learn.

As few minutes later, I said a quick prayer before I finally lying myself down for my first real night’s sleep in a week.

When I arose on Tuesday, I was greeted by the warm rays of the sun. The golden light followed me as I sat up, stretched, and then placed my bare feet on the carpeted floor. I lifted myself off the crumpled sheet and walked spryly to the bathroom.

The warm water rushed down my back, relieving my tense and weary muscle. I still wasn't sure how I would fair at work with both Matthew and his new "love" there everyday, but I knew that I had to face it and stop hiding.