

Michèle Loetzner

GETTING OVER HEARTBREAK IN 99 DAYS

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INTRODUCTION



» I hear in my mind all of these voices
I hear in my mind all of these words
I hear in my mind all this music
And it breaks my heart «

Regina Spektor // *Fidelity*

Let's get one thing straight right off the bat: Heartbreak is hard. And of course, we all know that it passes. This probably isn't the first time that someone has stomped on your heart. It is possible that this latest someone took a real run-up for his fantastic heart kick though, or jumped on it from the ten-meter diving board. Heartbreak isn't contingent on age, social status, and education level. Heartbreak couldn't care less about your account balance, the number of friends you have, or your reflection. Heartbreak hurts. And what definitely doesn't help are all the old platitudes, such as "There are other fish in the sea" or "The world will keep on turning." People who say stuff like that to you when your heart is scattered across the sidewalk (or under the bar counter) in a thousand pieces are about as helpful as a bicycle helmet when you can't ride a bike.

Later, once you can gain a little distance, it will be easy to laugh about this situation. But everything just hurts when you are caught in the midst of heartbreak, which falls under the umbrella of social pain. Interestingly, this pain is processed by the same part of our brains as

physical pain. And what can counteract it? Painkillers. Yeah, Ibuprofen can help with heartbreak, no shit. And now you're thinking: WTF? That's just fine. More on this later. For the moment, it's just important that you know there are options when it comes to making your situation easier. First physically speaking, then mentally. Because this is where this book comes in.

Only once you understand what's happening can you let go.

You are someone who wants to understand – otherwise, you wouldn't have purchased this book. Or it was given to you by someone who knows all too well that you are much too smart to be satisfied platitudes. This book will accompany you, step for step, through this awful gray valley of heartbreak – 99 days in length. After all, this is the approximate length of a classic period of heartbreak. Furthermore, we agree completely with Jay Z. You will eventually concur as well: "I got 99 problems, but a bitch ain't one." You're probably gasping a little at the thought that everything is going to continue to feel like shit for the next three months, right? Your head is going to remain in turmoil and everything that happened is going to keep running through your mind. How could this have happened? Could you have done anything to prevent it? Second spoiler: You couldn't have. Third spoiler: Every day isn't going to feel awful. There will be some good days, but you'll need to clear out your head some before that happens.

One more thing: This book is principally written for heterosexual women. This isn't to say that these individuals are the only people who experience heartbreak. If only no one experienced it! But because of the distinctions between men and women, this book's focus can only be of limited assistance to members of the LGBTQ community. There are many parallels, but also differences in what various orientations

experience. Love is varied, as is heartbreak. Nonetheless, many of the concepts in this book will only be partially relevant to queer individuals. (Keep in mind though that Ibuprofen doesn't differentiate between genders or orientations. Just sayin'.)

This book is divided into three sections: remembering, compensating, and letting go – the three stages of heartbreak. On every double-sided page, you will find inspirations for the day and space for your own thoughts and notes. In general, every heartbreak feels the same (as if someone were sticking hot needles into your eyeballs), but in the details, every heartbreak is individualistic. If you miss a day, no big deal. Just pick up wherever you left off. What about plowing through the entire book over a weekend? That won't help, unfortunately. Even if the thought is horrible, heartbreak takes time to work through. View this book as a companion, a way to help you sort through your thoughts, as a notebook to document your ideas. And as an eye-opener. At regular intervals throughout the book, you will find essays about structural problems in our society located between the double-sided pages. It is worth giving some thought to this broader aspect of heartbreak: Why do men behave differently than women after a breakup? What is the link between this reality and feminism? And what is the source of the stereotype that guys drown their sorrows, while we transform ourselves into emotional disco balls?

One more critical point: This book takes you seriously. You and that feeling. That feeling as if the entire world has stopped making sense. As if you are continuously on the verge of losing your breakfast. As if you are constantly holding yourself in check to keep from simply bursting into tears. As if one final conversation, phone call, or

WhatsApp message could change something, turn things around, improve the situation. Could bring someone back to the time when everything was still rosy. When you were still in someone's arms. When that guy was your world, and together you were invincible. One sentence and everything would be good again. Or as the band Fibel once put it: "Say something nice of substance, because then I won't be so scared anymore."

This book is something nice of substance. And that guy is an idiot.

Starting now, everything will be better.



MEME BERING

DAYS 01-33

Most advice books start off with some kind of cautionary nonsense. Something like “Glad you’re here” or “You’re good just the way you are.” This isn’t how we’re going to begin because there’s one thing we need to be clear on: Today is a crappy day, although it is nice that you’re here, of course. However, you would probably prefer not to be in the middle of a crappy day right now, which has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not you’re alright with how you’re doing. After all, nothing right now is okay. You aren’t okay. The world isn’t okay. Could everyone just stop assuming that everything is going to get better again? Nothing. Is. Okay. Now.

Or maybe it is? If you just tried just a little harder? And honestly, not everything was awful with that guy. Maybe he wasn’t really the problem, but you...

Stop.

It is completely normal for you to not fully understand a breakup at first and to block out all the bad stuff. But the two of you are no longer together. And you probably didn’t willingly agree with him on this – insofar as anyone cared about your agreement. YOU, on the other hand, are probably much more interested in what he is doing at this moment and how he is handling your breakup.

Quick question: How many times have you thought about the guy today? About 35,385,000,000,000 times? That’s just fine. At first, it’s hard to believe that he really could have left a woman like you. If you’re asking yourself about what he’s doing right now – probably nothing. At least, nothing interesting.

No, you don’t need to check his Instagram account one more time. How often have you pulled it up already today? Jot down the approximate number of times here:

It’s hard on days like today to even accomplish the small stuff. Check off what all you’ve managed to do:

- ☐ Brushed your teeth
- ☐ Got dressed
- ☐ Drank a cup of coffee
- ☐ Drank a second cup of coffee
- ☐ Drank a third cup of coffee
- ☐ Drank something other than coffee
- ☐ Picked up your mail
- ☐ Left the mail unopened on your table
- ☐ That’s enough for now. We don’t want to overdo things

Just so we have written documentation of it, what was the exact date of your breakup?

When a junkie goes into withdrawal, he either stops cold turkey or starts taking a substitute substance. When we are left, the biochemical blow to our bodies resembles us being forced to give up heroin cold turkey. Thank you very much. You've been deliberately phasing out cigarettes, and trying to maintain the right balance between carbs and who knows what – and now this!

The problematic part of this condition is that we end up searching for our own kind of methadone. Our ersatz-drug is all the great memories that we share with our ex-boyfriend. This is why most people automatically start stalking their exes online. Gotcha? You aren't alone. People sometimes wonder if the sole reason behind the invention of the social media was so that broken hearts could anonymously check up on what their exes are doing. Our parents had to get on their bikes and ride past their exes' houses to see if the lights were on. They called on landlines and hung up quickly whenever someone picked up... Yep, those were the days. Today is today. Cyberstalking is a replacement fix, and that's not good. This was why Winch recommends creating lists of all the annoying and unpleasant characteristics your ex has. If you insist on a stroll down memory lane, then please do it objectively with all the warts in place. And keep at it for a while.

So, now it's your turn. On the lines in the right margin, write down all of your ex's negatives. From his lousy Netflix choices to his abrasive mother. Oh, and don't forget his shallow friends who always cracked jokes that you haven't found funny since the sixth grade. Admit that it was out of pure politeness that you laughed at them. Had he actu-

Now take a picture of the list with your phone. Every time you find yourself longing to get a memory fix, skim through the blasted list. That's why smartphones were invented. I'm sure about that one.

THE SHITLIST

Jot down all the shitty things about him. Everything.
Politeness be damned!

As you woke up this morning, what was your first thought? Don't say it! World peace? What you were going to eat for breakfast? How you were going to have the best day possible? No? Oh, come on... there's no way.

And yet... you thought about him. And about how everything hadn't really been all that bad. And how the two of you had also had some nice, good days. Yes, you did. Nobody can take those away from you. And the fact that you're presently in denial about the bad ones – no surprise there. But they were there, too. You are in the process of negotiating with yourself and your memories. This is normal, but not really helpful. You will find a good compromise when you are willing to set out what you used to like. Not in him, but in who you were when you were still with him. The way you were together.

How did he touch your heart?

Where did you kiss for the first time?

Where did you fight for the first time?

Where did he tell you for the first time that he liked you?

Where did he leave you waiting for the first time?

»» Oh, Baby, everything we were
Will fly off with the next swarm of flies
Against the window pane,
Where we'll remain. ««

Fibel // Glasscheiben

Why women suffer differently than men

At first glance, heartbreak doesn't seem to have anything to do with gender equality. After all, the one is a feeling, while the other is a social requirement. You can very easily see why this requirement is so important in the different ways men and women deal with heartbreak. Let's explore this a little by turning to a certain cliché. After a breakup, women ponder what has happened, analyze the mistakes they made in the relationship, seek a reason for its failure. Women become quiet. Men become loud. They go out drinking with their buddies, set off on a pub crawl, and pick up their next conquest under great fanfare and in front of lots of witnesses. After a breakup, men act as if none of it matters to them at all. That's what the cliché says. Science confirms this. One study done by Binghamton University in New York examined the reactions of men and women after a breakup. The researchers interviewed 5,705 participants in ninety-six countries. The results: Women suffer for a shorter time, but more intensely. Men suffer longer because early on they primarily suppress their feelings and compensate for them. They simply won't face the pain. This process leads to much worse problems in the long run, such as depression and relationship phobia. And this is certainly also a structural problem. With this, we land at the matter of gender equality.

It wasn't so very long ago that it was completely normal to call boys who cried cry babies. And even today you can sometimes overhear on the playground mothers and fathers telling their sons, "Stop crying. You're not a girl." Crying still seems to be a behavior consigned to women. It is even expected of them, while some men and boys are still mocked or criticized if they cry. The fact that children learn from what they see lived out in front of them is no earth-shattering scientific revelation. If fathers weren't taught that it was alright for them to cry, then they can't demonstrate to their sons that it is acceptable for them to do so, that it

is fine to let themselves feel anguish and despair. And even mothers can increase the emotional distance in boys by making harsh comments. How the hell a man of our decade supposed to handle a post-breakup situation than to act like a superman and do traditionally macho things (on par with going to a VW GTI Treffen at the Wörthersee)? In an interview with the liberal online magazine Splinter News, the anthropologist Craig Eric Morris, one of the three researchers involved with the above-mentioned study, gave this phase the marvelous name, the excessive Tinder stage. It is so accurately dubbed that everyone can imagine what this means.

Anyway, back to men and their toxic relationship with heartbreak. It might be true that he really doesn't care about the end of your relationship. However, the odds of that are slim. He isn't a block of wood. Even if he isn't in love with you anymore, it will mean something to him that you have been hurt. What is much more likely is that he has no idea where to take his pain except to the next bar. This isn't meant to excuse his behavior, but it is an explanation. And also an indication that feminism has nothing to do with holding doors or helping someone into a coat, but rather with this situation. Holding doors is linked to cordiality, not with feminism, as author Margarete Stokowski has accurately pointed out. And that is all. It is a totally insane – even a bitter – situation when only female role models are allowed to show mourning, anger and anguish because feelings are deemed to be an exclusively female characteristic. This is true for both women and men. And it only helps in the extreme short term when we decide to act like those guys at the bar. Of course, you could go to the next bar and pick up some man, but please don't expect this to help you feel better in the long term. It might be fine as a brief diversion, but when you wake up the next morning with a pounding headache, your heartbreak will still be there. Plus, you will run the risk that as a result of your hangover-catalyzed serotonin crash, everything will look radically worse than it actually is.



COMPEN SATING

DAYS 34-66

No one has any time. At least, no one you might like to spend time with during this phase. Let's be more specific: beside whom you would like to just veg next to. Consider the much-cited difference between being lonely and being alone. Being alone can feel very nice: slouching through your apartment in your PJs, leaving the bathroom door open, binge watching the entire run of *The Good Wife*. Or going for a walk through a new city, eating ice cream in the sunshine, spending money on new clothes that you don't really need. Silent consumption. Outstanding.

Loneliness is simply lousy. That unsettled feeling of not knowing what to do or where to go with yourself. That feeling of being driven while not making any progress. Of being stuck in the here and now while still vibrating irregularly. It's sickening. And dangerous. Recently, the psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad released a comprehensive study in which she and her colleagues at Brigham Young University in Utah proved that loneliness and social isolation count today as one of the greatest health threats in the Western world. They rank even higher than obesity. In the USA alone, more than 42 million adults suffer from chronic loneliness. They quickly grow sick and die earlier. Congratulations.

The process through which being alone transforms into loneliness is stealthy in nature. The author Anja Rützel has written an interesting (and, more importantly, a very funny) book on this topic: *Better to Be Alone than Friendless*. She makes a distinction between voluntary loneliness and involuntary loneliness. For the latter case: "If someone is involuntarily lonely, it is probably due to the fact that they have a problem meeting people. To recommend that someone simply go out and, well, meet people is just as useful as somebody sitting on a lounge on a beach and shouting to a drowning person that they should just start swimming." Yesterday, we made the assumption that you wanted to be alone. We are assuming today that you don't want to be alone.

Check the appropriate answers:

Are you lonely because no one has time for you?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Are you lonely because someone in particular (in whose company you feel supported) doesn't have time for you?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you felt lonely for more than a couple of weeks?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Have you contacted anyone today to arrange to meet them?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If you did, did that person turn you down?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Did you cancel on them?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Are you really involuntarily lonely?

☐ YES ☐ NO

NOTE

If you don't want to be alone, you know what to do (check Day 36). If you are involuntarily lonely, reach out for professional help. A first step might be a call to your local coordination center for counseling help in order to set up a trial session. It is a quick process, isn't embarrassing at all, and is completely easy to do.



LETTING GO

DAYS 67-99

The author Theresa Lachner once wrote: “If you let everything go, you will have both hands free.” If there were a reliable guide on how to let things go, you’d be out there buying it. Or at least subscribing to it via an in-app payment platform. Regardless of how much it costs. You would want to use any method that promised a quick, efficient way of letting go. However, as you well know by this point, letting go is a very individualistic process. One person simply opens their fists, lets everything fall, sets fire to their baggage, and never looks back. Another goes through day after day trying to pry their fingers apart millimeter by millimeter, grips memories tight like valuable sand, and only slowly lets them drift to the ground. Both of these people are doing the right thing. There isn’t a wrong way to go about it. Theresa Lachner hit the nail right on the head. Only when you have free hands can you reach for something new – new bodies, new hearts, new ideas. Heartbreak brings out the worst in us. In hindsight, certain experiences and behaviors are often unpleasant for us. You really could have spared yourself that one WhatsApp message. And that phone call Saturday night after five vodka sodas probably wasn’t a good idea either. But at this point, things are just the way they are. It would be utterly ridiculous for you to beat yourself up or feel ashamed at this point in time. In general, the feeling of shame is a recurring theme in heartbreak, but it is as unnecessary as a fleece jacket in the summer – much too hot, and it will make you stink. Love isn’t proud; it just wants to know what is going on. And understand what happened. And yet, what is and what was often lies in the eye of the beholder. In any breakup, there are two observers, four eyes, two heads = Pow! Many decades ago, the author Anäis Nin wrote, “We don’t see things the way they are. We see them the way we are.” And in heartbreak, we are one version (although a very contradictory one) of many iterations

of ourselves. But this is the only way we can learn about all the facets of our abysses. Or about our emotional spectrum. In the final analysis, heartbreak brings out not only the worst in us – all our hatred, fury, wrath, and fear – but also the best. Our ability to reinvent ourselves, to set new courses, to plumb new energies and creativity. Heartbreak isn’t a trifle. Only those who have survived adventures like this can set off on even greater ones. And the new adventure... It already started a while ago.

What was his name again?



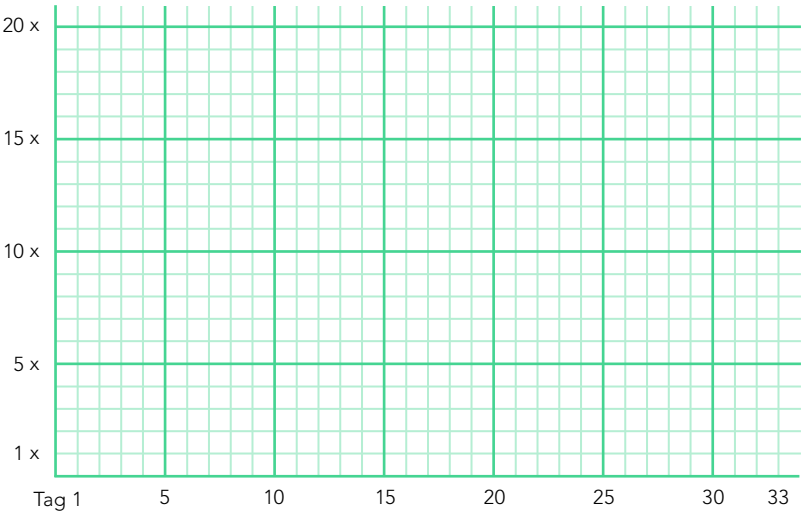
What is today's date?



DAY 99 REACHED – A SUMMARY

You’ve hopefully chilled a bottle of something bubbly for this day. There is a reason to celebrate: You. Because YOU are the one who has brought yourself to this point. Maybe everything is good now, or maybe some things are still a little wobbly. Whatever the case may be, you are no longer the person you were over three months ago. Let’s summarize everything one last time. How are things at this point?

How would you describe how much cyberstalking you did over the past 33 days? Draw it as a curve.



What have you come to understand?

What do you still not understand?

What is going better than you thought it would?

What is still going like shit?

What have you learned?

What stupid things has he done since your breakup?

What stupid things have you done since your breakup?

DAY 99 REACHED – A SUMMARY

Check the lines that apply to you and your current situation:

I want to see him again.

YES

NO

I want him to apologize for XYZ.

YES

NO

I want to tell him something badly.

YES

NO

I want to sleep with him again.

YES

NO

I want to explain something to him.

YES

NO

I want him back.

YES

NO

What are you proud of?

Which three adjectives would describe you the best today?

What is the nicest thing that’s happened since your breakup?

AFTERWORD

Love is a strange beast. Everything that has been written about it in novels, depicted in films, and sung about in songs... nothing that science has discovered about love ever coincides with what it does to us when we experience it. This is also true for the pain that we feel when love ends. There is one thing though that heartbreak isn't: It isn't a triviality that you can quickly chat away or banish with a few good intentions. It doesn't matter to heartbreak if you're 18 or 81 years old. Same heart, same pain. People going through hard times need our sympathy. And when we experience suffering, we need sympathy from others to help keep us from withering away. Together, we are less alone. This book has focused not only on the sociological, psychological and medical conclusions, but also on the social differences between men and women. It would be lovely if someday we could live in a world in which women aren't limited in the manner in which they should love and in which they should suffer. Men shouldn't have this happen to them either. Nobody should have to suffer. And whenever someone does, we should support them, regardless of their gender. After all, we are all humans. The human race is a species whose well-being depends on how we take care of each other. Without this empathy, nothing will ever change on this planet. That it is currently the way it is is a form of progress in many regards. But in some ways, we haven't seen progress. We have actually regressed on some things. There is still much to do. First and foremost, there is much that we can only accomplish if we work together. Our future depends on the decisions we make today about how we are going to treat each other. And how we handle those facing difficult times in their lives.

Spread the love.

