

I AIN'T *thinking* ABOUT YOU

The 8-Step Guide to
Finally Letting Him
Go Using The Breakup
Funeral Method



LENINA MORTIMER

DP

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For my sisters. You are inspiring. You are the sun. Every time you rise, everything around you goes into bloom.

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Chapter 1: Don't Waste Another Minute Thinking about Him

"I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow."

– Maya Angelou

Meet LaToya. She's thirty-one. She lives in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn. She works in media. She also has a side hustle. It's an online business selling household items on Amazon – it doesn't really feed her soul, but the extra money is nice (because natural hair products, rent, brunch, and Uber rides are expensive). LaToya has several college degrees, including one in Africana Studies from Howard University and an M.B.A. from Columbia University. LaToya lives alone and is single, with no children of her own yet. She wants a family one day, and in the meantime, she dotes on her sister's daughter. They share an uncanny resemblance and the pair are always together. People always confuse them for mother and daughter. LaToya loves that.

LaToya is also heartbroken. Tears fill her eyes nearly every day this week when her head hits the pillow. She's deeply sad. You likely wouldn't be able to tell if you met her on the street, because she does a great job of keeping it together. How is she faking the funk? Well, she's got great friends. She's surrounded by a loving family. She stays traveling. Her Instagram memorializes all of it. She looks fabulous all the time: hair done, nails done, everything did. She's got a trainer. His name is Derek. He's also her closest male confidant. Sometimes, she asks him for dating advice. He never gives any (sidebar, that's mildly annoying). LaToya almost doesn't mind it because he's a good listener. He listened when she told him about the new guy she was dating. He listened when she told him about the fast-talking realtor, Aaron, that she'd been seeing. He listened as she described how Aaron put up a protective arm-shield when the car in front of them stopped short in traffic. He listened when she talked about the inside jokes they shared. He listened as she described how smart, ambitious, and understanding Aaron was, and how he too comes from a close-knit family and wants one of his own someday.

Derek also listened when LaToya said she could never seem to get Aaron on the phone. He listened when she said it had been three whole weeks since he promised to call her back. Derek also listened when it dawned on her that this dude didn't forget to call because he's oh, so, *so* busy,

but rather, he just didn't care to make the time for her. Finally, he listened when she said, "Oh, shoot, this guy ghosted me!"

Now, this is where the story begins. It seems like every other thought in LaToya's head is about him, the last person in the world she'd want to be thinking about. He left without a warning. No text. No nothing. She was left feeling hurt, rejected, abandoned, and broken-hearted. Her thoughts provided no comfort.

They went something like this:

"I want a family of my own, and it seems out of my grasp right now. Despite my accomplishments – my brains, my grace, my sense of humor, and deep, spiritual connection to God – I can't seem to find a man who'll stay long enough to create one. They have no integrity. They don't do what they say they'll do. Like Aaron.

"We were friends before we became lovers. What did I do wrong that would make him disappear like that? Why can't I get over him? I thought I'd be over him by now, but all I do is think about him. I have no one to talk to about this. I talk about him so much my friends have stopped listening. They tell me it's time to move on, but I can't. I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm usually the strong one of my friends. Now, I'm embarrassed by my weakness. I can feel them roll their eyes when I say his name.

"He treated me terribly, but all I do is think about him. I miss him. I miss the jokes we shared. My pulse quickens every time I hear my phone ring. It might be him. But it's not. I just want to get off this roller coaster.

"I feel so alone. I can't talk to my friends about this because they say it's my fault I keep choosing the wrong men. They're right, and I feel like a loser because I'm too old to be pining after a man who doesn't want me. We had a relationship, but he wouldn't call me his girlfriend or introduce me to his friends and family. He met most of mine, though. I put my anxieties about the titles aside to try and make it work. I put him first even though I needed more. I'm so stupid. How could I let him lead me on like this? I'm in my thirties – I thought I left that insecure stuff behind in my twenties. I was once a woman who never let a man control my happiness, but now I feel stuck and lost. I need to let him go so that I can focus on myself and my career again."

There are some breakups you can move past with ease, and then there are the ones like LaToya's that leave you gutted and questioning every choice that landed you here... in the fifth circle of Hell. If you relate to LaToya's story in any way, then you know that breakups suck. They

make for great fodder for poems and love songs. They take an emotional toll, but they're also physically taxing. Did you know that research shows our brain processes emotional pain in the same location as physical pain? A 2010 study done at the University of Kentucky shows that the insula area of the brain, which processes physical pain is also activated when a person experiences social rejection. Breakups hurt... literally. Another study I read in the *Journal of Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences* on the emotional and physical responses to breakups reveals that women were more likely to report emotional distress and physical changes, like weight loss/gain, than men. Furthermore, the stress hormone, cortisol, that increases during times of emotional turmoil, is linked to increased belly fat, hair loss, and poor sleep. I mention all this to say that this seems unfair to me.

There's a whole chemistry and biology behind falling in love... and falling out of it. It feels like you're going through withdrawal because that's exactly what's happening. Dawn Maslar, biologist and author of *Men Chase, Women Choose*, discusses what happens to your brain when you fall in love. We know that certain neurotransmitters increase and some drop. Your cortisol level increases, causing you to feel nervous, while your oxytocin – the bonding hormone – level increases, causing you to feel amorous. A woman's testosterone goes up, causing her to be more aggressive, while a man's drops, causing him to be more passive. In both, their serotonin level drops, causing them to leave a little more obsessed. These hormone changes linger for weeks after the breakup.

Let's talk about the mental effects for a minute. The quadfecta: ruminations, loneliness, shame, and cyberstalking. Okay, the last one I threw in to see if you were paying attention. Go on, put this book down and delete and block him from everything – y'all can't be friends right now. Back to the mental impact. You know those conversations and scenarios that run a script through your head. The red flags you ignored. The tunnel vision (and laser focus on his best attributes). The loneliness, which University of Chicago Professor of Psychiatry Stephanie Cacioppo defines as a state of mind characterized by the disparity between what a person wants out of a relationship and what they are actually experiencing. In short, you'll miss him. You're probably going to want fix that disparity by calling and texting the one person you shouldn't talk to right now. You may also be thinking, "How could I have been so open? I feel so stupid to have trusted him. I let you see too much of me and now I can't undo it." This is shame. Brené Brown defines it as the

experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. All this spells depression, self-doubt, insecurity, and – the worst of all – joylessness.

Then, there are your well-meaning friends who can sometimes make you feel worse about yourself by sharing advice like, “Just get over it and stop choosing men who will break your heart.” That reads as “It’s your fault that you’re feeling this way because you picked him.” If you’ve ever uttered those words to anyone (like I have), stop. Don’t do it. It’s victim-blaming and condescending, and it has the tendency to make the person feel even worse about themselves.

Intrusive questions acquaintances ask can make breakups downright unbearable. Ever heard the following? “How long were you dating? That’s not that long,” or, “Was that really a relationship? I mean, y’all were never official. He didn’t claim you.” If you’ve ever heard those words, it’s like death by a million paper cuts. It’s reinforcing the shame and guilt you’re already feeling. If you’ve ever said those words, stop. It’s insensitive and just not true. Just because the two of you aren’t Facebook official doesn’t make the relationship any less real. Just because a relationship was short-lived does not mean it wasn’t impactful or that a genuine connection was not developed. These questions have the tendency to minimize the experience of a loss. If you experienced a connection with another person on an intimate level, you’re allowed to grieve, regardless of how long the relationship was. If we blame and condemn ourselves, healing is impossible.

You’ve wasted enough time thinking about a man who does not want a relationship with you. It’s time to get past this and I recommend you make quick work of it. Your thoughts are not your friend right now. So, how do you navigate the landmines in your mind and the physical fallout, and come out of the other side with your hairline intact, your waist snatched, and your head and heart back in the game? How do you move past this quickly so that you’re living your life and not thinking about him anymore?

I’m here to offer a simple solution. Have a Breakup Funeral. It’s a way to memorialize your past relationships. It’s not right for everyone (more on that later), but if it is a right fit for you, it is highly therapeutic. You can finally let go of Aaron, John, Peter, Paul, and any other Biblical name you can think of.

Chapter 2: How The Breakup Funeral Came About

“Shadow work is the path of the heart Warrior... let us all rise in love knowing that at first love brings up everything that is unlike itself for the purpose of healing.”

– Carl Jung

On an early spring day, eight women gathered around a table-top fire pit in the backyard of a Bed-Stuy townhouse. This is my backyard. The winter frost had barely begun to thaw when my friends and I gathered for a funeral. This was not a traditional funeral – it was not held in remembrance of a deceased loved one, but rather, in honor of past romantic relationships. We burned old letters and mementos from past lovers. We burned notes we’d written to ourselves describing which parts of our past we were letting go. The past struggles, traumas, and turmoil were reduced to ashes, and we then declared aloud what we would gain from releasing the events that haunted us: “freedom,” “confidence to start my business,” “the knowledge that I can ask for support when I’m overwhelmed.” In the weeks following the symbolic funeral, some of the women reported they experienced breakthroughs in their career, business, and relationships. Some found new jobs, one started a business, and others began new relationships. This was my first Breakup Funeral.

You may have already guessed that part of LaToya’s story is inspired by my own. I am a dating and love coach, and I was my first client. My life is the laboratory in which I test out my coaching theories and practices. I got a golden opportunity to do just that after having experienced a break-up by way of “ghosting.” Ghosting is a popular term that describes when a person you’ve been dating suddenly ceases all communication without any explanation. In the aftermath of this breakup, I dealt with feelings of rejection, abandonment, and unworthiness. It was challenging to resolve those feelings, and I know I’m not the only one to ever feel this way. I know I’m not alone because almost eighty percent of single millennials have been ghosted at least once. I read this in a survey conducted by the online dating site Plenty of Fish.

A few weeks before I was ghosted, I had this dream. In this dream, I was standing in my bedroom and it was flooded with raw sewage. When I looked down, I realized I had been wading in a pool full of raw sewage. When I noticed, I bent down and I tried scraping, scraping, and scraping it off. But the ring of scum around my ankles stayed, and it was stubborn. In hindsight, I realize now that this was my spirit communicating with me. It was a bit of foreshadowing. It was telling me that the stuff was buried deep. The stuff that had been suppressed was now bubbling up

to the surface so that it could be dealt with. It was to be cleaned up, collected, and taken out with the trash. That is what I spent a year doing, unearthing layers of deep-rooted beliefs, patterns, and behaviors that were no longer serving me.

As I was healing from this breakup, three lessons came to me almost immediately. The first lesson I learned was that I had a hidden belief that I didn't deserve to be loved consistently. I don't know that I'd ever been ghosted before, but that was the first time I cared. Up until that point, I'd date someone, and it would be loving and passionate for a few months. Then, it would end. I hadn't realized it then, but I had no consistency and continuity in my dating life.

The second lesson I learned was that, even if there is nobody around to love me, I can still love myself. The third lesson I learned was how to love myself. So, I learned about self-care and how to set boundaries.

After I got these lessons, I realized I was still thinking about the guy who ghosted me. Then, one Saturday night, feeling frustrated, I prayed, "Spirit, show me what I need to see. Tell me what I need to know so I can move past this." I went to bed. I woke up Sunday morning and I had an insight. You know Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex? The theory describes the psychosexual stages of childhood development and states that a child has feelings of desire for his or her opposite-sex parent and jealousy/anger toward his or her same-sex parent. Essentially, a boy feels that he is competing with his father for possession of his mother, while a girl feels that she is competing with her mother for her father's affections. For the purposes of this story, I boil all that down to this. You date your mom or you date your dad. When I first learned of it, I thought, "Yeah, yeah. I ain't got daddy issues. So, I don't know why my dating life is so dysfunctional." Then, on that Sunday morning, it hit me. Growing up, I had two father figures, my dad and my uncle.

When I was four years old, my uncle Lamartine was the love of my life. I had this wicked babysitter. He literally saved me from her clutches. With the babysitter out of the way, I spent most of my day with him. We cooked canned corn together. We attended church together. He was bae. Then, one morning, I woke up and he'd disappeared with no explanation. I internalized that moment and made it about me not being good enough or worthy enough for him to stay with me. I later learned as a teenager that he got sick and returned home to our native country, Haiti. Meanwhile, I spent my formative years suppressing this memory. Burying it deep, I didn't allow myself to feel his absence. I could feel the tears sting my eyes when my thoughts traveled to him.

I'd bang my little fist on my palm, stomp my foot and say, "No, I'm not going to cry." A few years later, he mailed me a letter from Haiti. My first piece of mail ever. I cherished it and I held on to it for years. Its home was the top far right drawer, in the white nine-drawer dresser my older sister and I shared. Nearly three decades later, I don't remember the exact contents of this letter, but if I had to guess, it went something like, "I love you. I miss you. I'm sorry I had to go."

On that Sunday morning, I realized that the root of my dysfunction had been hiding in plain sight this whole time. Freud may have been on to something, but I wasn't dating my dad – I was dating my uncle. On top of that, I recognized that I was recreating the relationship dynamic I had with my uncle at age four over and over again. My heart cracked open and tears flowed for what felt like an eternity (but was likely five minutes). Once the tears ceased, I got up and felt so light. It was like I could breathe again after holding my breath for so long. Then, I laughed and laughed. I laughed so hard because I didn't have daddy issues – I had uncle-daddy issues. Mind blown.

After gaining a fresh perspective on my dating life, I wanted even more. Weeks later, I found myself getting my natal chart read for the first time by an astrologer (sidebar: Scorpio sun, Taurus rising, Cancer moon over here). Our session started something like this:

"Hi, Lenina, I've examined your chart and I'm curious to know if you're coming to me because you believe that you're cursed in love."

"No," I replied. "I am tested, though."

There you have it, folks. Even the stars, moons, and planets in my chart predicted trouble. Soon after that, my dear friend Courtney Cooke read my akashic records. For those unfamiliar, the akashic records are an energetic record of your soul's past, present, and foreseeable future. Over a Facetime call, she explained that the energetic ghosts of past lovers were lingering around me. She recommended that I memorialize these relationships in some way. This is when I started taking notes.

"Perhaps, with a private ceremony in which you write their names down and put it on an altar," Courtney said. She paused, then continued, "Listen, you don't have to do any of the stuff I'm saying. This all sounds really bizarre to me."

I laughed. For one, a psychic medium – a person that deals with the realm of the unseen – found my session strange. Two, I didn't find anything bizarre about it. I said as much as I looked back at her while sitting on an over-stuffed blue sofa in my living room. "Listen, girl, my spirit

guides know me,” I said as a chuckle escaped my lips. “I’m going to throw a funeral. I’m going to invite my girls. I’ll serve pink champagne. We’ll eat some hors d’oeuvres. We’ll light up the firepit and burn some stuff in my backyard.” This is the origin story of The Breakup Funeral.

What’s the Breakup Funeral?

The Breakup Funeral is a group workshop. It’s an intervention designed to help people let go of the past and create hope for the future. The intervention borrows principles from positive psychology, transpersonal psychotherapy, and African spirituality. I will describe the intervention in greater detail later in this book, but one of the highlights of the workshop is the *cremation* ceremony. During this part of the workshop, one writes down on paper what they aim to release. Next, the paper is burned in a fire pit. The main purpose of this ceremony is to increase well-being by releasing past hurts, obtaining closure, and redirecting one's focus to future events and away from past ones.

I played host to this springtime “funeral.” I held this funeral in part for myself, to find closure after a hurtful dating experience. I invited others, who may have also been in search of closure, to join. Joe Dispenza wrote about research that shows that our thoughts, feelings, and experiences have healing and regenerative effects on our bodies. After learning this, I began to take a closer look at the effect of spiritual healing ceremonies. It raised some questions for me, like if the enactment of a funeral could really bring about therapeutic results. I got a glimpse into its effectiveness. It was highly therapeutic for me and others, so I got curious about how and why it worked. I researched it as part of my master’s thesis at Columbia University. I share part of my research in this book and I also deconstruct the Funeral so that you, too, can gather your friends and host your own Breakup Funeral.

Chapter 3: How to Use The Breakup Funeral to Finally Let Him Go

“The toughest part about letting go... is realizing that the other person already did.”

– Unknown

Imagine this: you wake up on Sunday morning. Eyes greeted by the sunrise, your new monstera plant, and the sexy L.B.D. from last night’s outing are draped on the nightstand. You make your bed and marvel at how expertly you coordinated your sheets, duvet, and throw blanket (yes, girl, that bed is Pinterest worthy). You diffuse your favorite blend of essential oils: lemongrass, lavender, and a single drop of grapefruit. You settle into your meditation nook for a fifteen-minute practice. You emerge from your nook rejuvenated, relaxed, and at peace. You check your email and then scan your Instagram feed. You pick your brunch outfit. You keep it basic with your favorite dress, a body-skimming navy-blue maxi. You fill in your eyebrows and throw on a nude lip. You admire your reflection in the full-length mirror on your way out the door. You stop short as you place your house keys in your purse and realize you haven’t thought of him once all morning. You smile. You remember a time when he was the last person on your mind at night and the first thought on your mind when your eyes fluttered open in the morning. But not this morning. In fact, you noticed that he crosses your mind less frequently these days. Soon enough, you won’t be thinking about him at all.

The good news is that you’ll have access to this reality much sooner than you may believe. I’d like to commend you for picking up this book. The journey that you’re about to embark on in this book will support you in finding your own closure. Every journey to closure is different. However, the destination, which is peace of mind, looks the same for most readers of this book. It means that you have stopped thinking about your ex. You’ve moved on, and you’re living your life.

In this chapter, you’ll find a brief overview of The Breakup Funeral process. We’ll go further in-depth about the process later in this book, but I’ll share a brief glimpse now, so you know what to expect down the line. There are eight simple steps to take to recover from a breakup quickly, and it will culminate with you holding your own Breakup Funeral. The steps to The Breakup Funeral are below, and they are accompanied by a statement of purpose. The statement of purpose is meant to add clarity to what we are meant to accomplish in each step. A word of

caution, you may be tempted to skip some steps. However, it is strongly recommended that you do each step completely before moving on to the next. Please do the steps in order, as each was designed to build upon the last.

The Breakup Funeral:

Step 1: Begin with Acceptance – give yourself permission to move on and accept that it's over.

Step 2: Envision the Results – get crystal clear about how your life will look as a result of releasing this relationship.

Step 3: Discover the Hidden Lessons – what are the lessons this relationship came to teach you?

Step 4: Identify Your Strengths – determine what your character strengths are and use them to support you through your healing.

Step 5: Create Your Own Closure through Role Play – write a letter to yourself from him with the words you most need to hear.

Step 6: Release and Replace – write down what you want to release. Make a list of anyone, anything, and anyone (including him) that no longer serves you. Burn the list and decide what will now replace the relationship you've released.

Step 7: Prioritize Self-Care – redirect all the energy you were putting into him back into you. Learn how to say no, set boundaries, prioritize self-pleasure, and practice self-compassion.

Step 8: Celebrate Yourself – celebrate your accomplishments and how far you've come.

This book promises that, once complete, you'll understand how to find the closure you desire to move on. You will also gain insight as to why the wrong men for you seem to be beating a path to your door. Sometimes, the answer is hidden in plain sight. You will also learn about a critical mistake many make that is keeping you from finally letting go. This one will likely surprise you. Finally, you'll also learn research-based techniques on how to start feeling like yourself again by identifying your character strengths.

Like cocktail parties, beachside sunsets, and jokes, the best things in life were meant to be shared. The Breakup Funeral is no exception. Each chapter includes exercises to be performed either before the ceremony or during (with the exception of Chapter 7, which includes exercises to be completed after the Funeral). The Breakup Funeral that you'll host was designed to be done

within a group. This is done intentionally because I have found that the insights and connections shared by one person can help another make their own connections and breakthroughs that may take more time for them to discover on their own. In short, healing occurs much faster in groups. So, at the end of this book, my hope is that you call over your girls and host your own Breakup Funeral. Follow the steps in order and watch as the magic unfolds.

Chapter 4: Step 1 – Begin with Acceptance

“If you don’t acknowledge it, you can’t heal it.”

– Iyanla Vanzant

“Acceptance.” It’s a word that’s commonly referenced and seldom defined. I’ll define it here for the purposes of discussion. Acceptance is the willingness to receive what has been offered – in this case, by life. It is a choice. There are several factors that get in the way of acceptance, such as self-blame and confirmation bias. I go into more detail about this later in the chapter.

This has been the hardest chapter for me to write, because I find it a bit cliché to say that the first step in the journey to moving on after a breakup begins with acceptance. I feel like this is the type of commonplace advice you’d find inside a fortune cookie. Though it may sound like sage advice, it’s not useful for most because it’s easier said than done. I don’t know that I’ve ever been taught how to do it. I mean, I get how to do it intellectually, but in practice, I fall short. Acceptance has been a challenge for me – more specifically, the acceptance of my dating mistakes. Up until this point, I have struggled with allowing myself the space (and grace) to make mistakes (God is still working on me, girl). So, when faced with clear signs that I’m heading into Mistakeville, I develop tunnel vision and plow straight ahead. Let me explain this in the context of dating.

I shared in Chapter 2 that I got ghosted, and when it came time to face that truth, I wouldn’t allow myself to see it. That’s because that would have meant admitting that I ignored the red flags, of which there were many. Here’s the thing. I’m not the only one plagued with such tunnel vision, because it’s a well-known cognitive bias called confirmation bias. You may already be familiar with this, but it’s worth sharing. It’s the tendency to search for, interpret, focus on, and remember information in a way that confirms one’s preconceptions. In other words, people tend to make up their minds and see the things that affirm them. I made up my mind that he was boyfriend material, and I clung onto anything that would affirm it. I read too much into his actions and held onto his words like they were promises, like the time he shared that he was serious and ready for a family of his own. What I heard was different: “I’m serious and ready to have a family with you, Lenina.” It was hard for me to admit that I made it all up in my head. I did not come to that realization alone. I had the support of my sisters when I reached that pivotal moment of acceptance.

I remember it like it was yesterday. Me sitting on the sofa. My younger sister, Nicky, sitting on my right side. My older sister, Clarele, on my phone screen. When I look back at it now, I realize that this was an intervention. I was one part sad, another part angry that the guy I was seeing

didn't return my phone calls or attend my birthday party. I was hurt and confused, but I was also in deep denial about what was going on between us. Namely, that there wasn't an "us."

"You know his schedule is really busy during the weekends, and he works late nights. So, yeah, I totally understand not getting back to me or showing up," I said.

The silence from my characteristically talkative sisters was deafening.

"If he wanted to call you, he would. If he wanted to come, he would have been there. He just doesn't want to," Clarele said and Nicky co-signed.

One slow tear ran down my face (dramatic, I know) when I finally saw what was going on and finally accepted the reality of the situation. I can't pinpoint what about that moment helped me see that I had been ghosted, but it was likely the way my sisters held space for me to see it for myself. They were kind and direct, but they also did not try to make me feel better about myself by lying and buying into my delusions. I might have fooled myself by doing all sort of mental gymnastics to explain his absence, but they weren't. They also did not blame me for how he disappeared. Up until that point, I was unwilling to accept that his unavailability was due to his lack of interest... and not to his schedule. I was making excuses for his absence.

In moments like this, I am reminded of the deep wisdom that can be found within the act of acceptance. It is at the core of the serenity prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." Clarifying the difference between what I could and couldn't change was where I got stuck and, ironically, where the healing journey began once I understood the difference. Brené Brown says when you find yourself stuck and lingering in feelings of shame to share your story with those who have earned the right to hear it. That's what I did, and that's my recommendation to you, too. Share your story with trusted friends or family that can offer an outside perspective that is kind and direct. This can offer great clarity that can serve as a gentle push towards acceptance.

I know first-hand that I am not the only woman to struggle with acceptance of a breakup. I once met a woman at a wellness spa who shared that she was recently ghosted. While she acknowledged the event, she hadn't yet accepted it. How could I tell? Well, she shared the following: "I find that I'm still making excuses for his behavior and absence. For example, he's a foreigner and he has a different set of customs. Also, he experienced a death in his family a few months ago. That's probably why he disappeared." If you're reading this book, you too might be at this point. I really urge you to consider that there is a price to pay if you delay accepting that the

relationship is over. For me, I was trapped in deep judgment of myself and self-blame. I blamed myself for being too “needy” for wanting to speak with him, which is a healthy and reasonable request of someone you’re dating.

In the book *Radical Forgiveness*, Colin Tipping shares the concept of forgiveness. It’s when someone no longer blames another for any wrongdoing and takes responsibility for their own life and feelings. I agree, but I think there’s a missing step – radical acceptance. Radical acceptance is the willingness to meet your life exactly where it is and the ability to stop taking the blame in relationships. If your first response to neglect and absenteeism in a relationship is to ask, “What did I do wrong? I must have done something wrong for them to have treated me this way,” then you know you’ve taken on too much responsibility and blame in the relationship. Once you recognize that dynamic and stop blaming yourself, it frees you up to see the reality of who they are and what this relationship is. I gleaned this insight after having a conversation with a dear friend, Jenn.

Radical acceptance is a necessary step in healing. Radical acceptance is crucial in order to give yourself permission to move on. I don’t know who needs to hear this message, but you should know that he isn’t checking for you. If he were, he’d be right there beside you consistently, not just when it’s convenient for him. But you’re a smart woman, and you probably already knew this. You’re likely stuck at this step. There is no amount of convincing, bargaining, and begging that can change that man’s mind. Like Iyanla Vanzant said, if you don’t acknowledge it, you can’t heal it. Acknowledgment is a start, but the true healing sets root with acceptance. If you can’t acknowledge the breakup, you can’t accept and mourn the loss of the relationship. If you can’t mourn it, you can’t heal your heart.

Exercise: Say this invocation/prayer aloud and feel free to personalize it. “I am whole. I am complete. I am fully capable of moving past this breakup. I now give myself permission to release this relationship. I give myself permission to heal and open myself to my divine truth.”

Chapter 5: Step 2 – Envision the Results

“Plan for what you want to create – not what you want to avoid.”

– Lisa Nichols

Sociologist Bill Bengston can heal cancer-riddled mice with his thoughts. Sound unbelievable? Well, it was to him too, until he met a healer who taught him how. In the 1980s, he set out to test the technique on mice that had tumors growing on their backs. Every day for a month, he would go to the lab, enter a meditative state, and cycle through twenty mental images of whatever he truly wanted that would bring him the most joy. For example, picture driving a Ferrari down the highway. The idea here is to invoke joy by using the power of imagination. Bengston explained that this method of healing requires no belief or faith, just simply the ability to focus one’s attention on mental images of what you most want in your life. After twenty-six days of holding the mental images and his hands above the mice cage for hour-long sessions, the mice would spontaneously heal. Sounds like a miracle, doesn’t it?

Bengston, along with countless scientists, has recreated this technique and research ten times with successful results by tapping into this joyful energy state. We will tap into this energy state as well in this step of The Breakup Funeral. It is done by first grounding and establishing an intention for performing The Breakup Funeral. This step is crucial because establishing an intention is a way to get clear about your “why.” Your why is your purpose and clearly answers, “Why do you want to do this?” Establishing your intention will help you get clear on the results you want to create. Getting clear on the results will help you identify when you’ve successfully achieved what you set out to do. It is also a good practice to set an intention with anything you want to achieve because it provides the universe with clear instructions on what you want manifested.

You will use The Breakup Funeral method to focus your intention, much like Bengston, who used the power of intention and the laying of hands method to heal the mice. While Bengston’s purpose was to heal the sick mice, you will establish your own. Perhaps it could be to heal your lovesick heart. Instead of the laying of the hands method, you’ll use fire to burn a written note with whatever it is you’ll let go of to activate your intention. I will share more details on that later in the book. Once you’ve grounded yourself and determined your purpose, you’ll envision what your life will look and feel like once you’ve overcome this breakup.

Before I go into any further detail about The Breakup Funeral, let us first explore the significance and the efficacy of spiritual healing ceremonies. For the purposes of this book, I am defining spiritual healing as the healing and repair of the non-physical part of a person (for example, your memories). I define a spiritual healing ceremony as an event that's steeped in ritual significance and held on special occasions. Healing ceremonies typically include a ceremonial leader and it addresses the physical and the emotional concerns of participants (such as heartbreak).

Within these pages, you will learn that spiritual healing ceremonies can be effective in improving wellbeing, and there's research that supports this assertion. Traditional healing ceremonies are of great importance in many indigenous cultures. Despite its value, very little research has been conducted on the potential health benefits of healing ceremonies. One of the first of its kind was done by Jeannette Wagemakers Schiff and Kerrie Moore, who examined the impact of the sweat lodge ceremony on well-being. There's also a growing trend for people from western cultures to participate in these ceremonies, such as the Native-American sweat lodges. This trend reflects a growing interest in integrated health care approaches, German researcher Paul Hewson in *The Journal of Alternative Complementary Medicine* writes.

While the studies on the efficacy of healing ceremonies may be limited, the results are promising. Schiff and Moore's 2006 pilot study measured the impact of the sweat lodge ceremony on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual domains of the individuals who participated. The results showed that the ceremony directly attributed to an increase in spiritual and emotional well-being of participants. Furthermore, Hewson's empirical study showed that participation in a healing ceremony increased mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual quality of life. As part of integrative health care, healing ceremonies are potentially useful for fostering participants' quality of life.

But how do healing ceremonies stack up against well-known treatments of stress reduction? An eight-week-long pilot study at Duke University Integrative Medicine Center compared the effects of a Central African healing ceremony called Ngoma with mindfulness-based stress reduction, like meditation. Ngoma is a broad ceremonial tradition involving drums and dance. It is practiced throughout Central and Southern Africa. People come together to address difficult issues, support emotional growth, and heal the body and mind. Participants in the ceremony reported feeling more energetic, calm, and relaxed than before participating. They also reported decreased anxiety, stress reduction, and feelings of social support.

Now that you've learned more about the general benefits of healing ceremonies, let's get back into exploring The Breakup Funeral and how it will help you find closure and finally get over your ex. At the end of this chapter, you'll find a journaling prompt that will help you home in on what you'll create as a result of holding a Breakup Funeral. Do this part before the ceremony to help you envision the results you'll create. At the start of the ceremony, you'll get grounded first. Grounding is when we get rooted and set the foundation for the results you'd like to create. We'll do this by setting an intention for your ceremony.

Exercise: Let's get grounded before we begin. Ask your guests to share what it is they'd like to get out of The Breakup Funeral.

Sample questions you can ask:

- Why are you here?
- What do you want to let go of?
- What will your life look like once you've moved past this breakup?

Chapter 6: Step 3 – Discover the Hidden Lessons

“All things are lessons that God would have you learn.”

– Oprah Winfrey

This part of The Breakup Funeral is about unearthing all the lessons that this relationship came to teach you. I think of what I’ve heard Oprah Winfrey say many times: “All things are lessons that God would have you learn.” The reason you can’t seem to let go of this relationship is one lesson to uncover. I like to think of hidden lessons as hidden treasures. The riches are meant for you to discover. These treasures, if you accept them, can reveal hidden beliefs that have impacted your thoughts, actions, and life for decades without your awareness.

You may be thinking, “Lenina, if the lessons are hidden, how am I to discover them? If I am to find hidden treasures, shouldn’t I be provided with a map?” The answer to that is a resounding yes. I’ll also add that you already have one. The clues are hidden in your relationships: current ones, past ones, familial ones, platonic ones, and romantic ones.

Let’s begin by noticing patterns and finding common threads. The healing is also in the noticing. This reminds me of a time in undergrad when I conducted my first self-inventory. I was the other woman and I didn’t even know it. I was a sophomore in college, and I had just broken up with my boyfriend. On the rebound, I started seeing David (not his real name). He was a senior, a popular athlete, and a frat boy. I was attracted to his perfect white smile and quiet confidence. Even though he seemed like the perfect guy, our romance was short-lived.

A few weeks after we started dating, I found out – via Facebook no less – that he had a girlfriend. What I did next will likely make you laugh. I made a declaration that I was getting rid of all the pigs in my life. I broke it off with him and stopped eating pork, bacon, and sausage. My new diet was a metaphor for the change I was making in my dating life and yet nothing changed. The pigs kept on coming. After David, I had a string of unhealthy relationships. It soon dawned on me that I was the common denominator in all of them. I took a step away from dating and took a good look at myself. I wanted to make a change, but a superficial fix would not suffice. It would require me to look under the hood.

My dating experience opened me up to self-discovery and self-interrogation. I realized that I was attracting unavailable men because I was emotionally unavailable myself. I was disconnected from who I was and what I really wanted. At the time, I was unable to be honest with myself and other people about my feelings, so that made verbalizing my wants and needs a challenge. The

ability to communicate one's wants and needs is pivotal to developing healthy relationships. It's no wonder I had a hard time in all of mine. My dating woes taught me valuable lessons about honesty and the courage to face myself – principles that are at the core of discovering the hidden lessons.

At this point, you may have an impulse to blame yourself for recreating the same dysfunctional relationships in your life. Please, for the love of God, fight that impulse. Don't blame yourself. It's not your fault. Subconsciously, people tend to be attracted and develop a preference for things merely because it feels familiar. Social psychologists call this phenomenon the mere exposure effect or the familiarity principle. I'm speaking in generalities here, so follow me if you will. Growing up, if masculinity was modeled as emotional disconnection and absence, the familiarity principle dictates that you would then develop a subconscious attraction to emotionally unavailable and absent men. This is a generality to help guide you in discovering the hidden lessons in your past relationships so you can consciously choose to make another choice. This isn't a hard and fast rule. People are complicated and our family histories are too, so one rule couldn't possibly provide a full picture of what's going on under the hood. This is not a condemnation of the people you love or the people who raised you (or the people who didn't raise you, for that matter). I share this cognitive bias to arm you with information to see your life with a new lens and to help you reframe your dating dilemmas. If it doesn't serve you, take what you need and leave the rest.

Now it's your turn to ask yourself self-probing questions. Is there anything about the men you're attracted to that feels similar? Do they remind you of anyone? Are there common themes or patterns that came up in your last three relationships? What do these patterns reveal about your beliefs around love and relationships? What new beliefs can you replace the old ones with that would serve you most? The answers may not come immediately. It may appear by way of people, conversations, seemingly random events, books, or dreams. Just pay attention and listen intently for the answers to the questions you've posed. You can even provide the universe with a deadline by saying, "Give me the answers to these questions by 4 p.m. tomorrow."

There are other ways of discovering the answers. Have you ever heard of the body pendulum? It's a way of using your body for answers, because the body never lies, doesn't forget, and often knows information before you do. Here's how it goes. Stand up nice and tall and let your hands fall to your sides. Relax your body. Next, we'll learn how to decode the language of your body by noticing what direction your body pulls when something you say is "true" or "false," or

the answer to your question is “yes” or “no.” Say something you know to be true, like, “My name is X.” Then, say something you know to be false like, “My name is Lenina.” For most people, a sway forward means “yes/true,” and a sway back means “no/false.” You can use this tool to help you identify what’s true and untrue so you can identify those subconscious beliefs that no longer serve you.

Another tool used to discover hidden lessons or beliefs is prayer. As a woman with an academic background in science, prayer was, in the past, a measure of last resort for me because I never remembered to do it. I come from a family of engineers, doctors, nurses, and educators. The realm of the spirit, the woo-woo, and the unseen – up until this point in my life – took a back seat. On the night, I sat on my bed and prayed, “Spirit, show me what I need to see. Tell me what I need to know so I can get past this,” it was out of desperation, exasperation, and sheer frustration. But it worked, and I don’t know how. I got the answer I needed. Praying opened me up to receive it. I was curious to as to how and why my prayer worked and had a conversation with a good friend, Annette, about it. “Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks,” she said, quoting the book of Matthew. She added that the point of prayer is not about getting what you ask for, but rather about how the prayer changes you so that you can receive what you ask for. She explained that the act of praying is an acknowledgment that you don’t have all the answers and you cannot rely on your own knowledge and understanding to get what you want. It took me a while to get to that point because submitting to a higher power would mean to admit that I don’t know everything and I wasn’t that humble... until my back was up against a wall. I exhausted every tool and every bit of knowledge I had. I was tired of thinking about my ex. I was tired of being angry at myself. I was tired of feeling drained because I couldn’t sleep at night. I was pissed off because he still had power over me. I was in misery and all I could do was pray. It wasn’t until I reached that point of desperation that I could bring myself to my knees. Yes, that prayer did change me. It altered the course of my life. I changed into the woman who readily asks and receives help before frustration sets in. I recommend you do the same by reaching out to a higher power, coach, counselor, or mentor.

Exercise: Beliefs impact your thoughts, thoughts impact your actions and actions impact your life. On an unbound sheet of paper (you’ll see why later), write the story of your last three relationships. What themes and patterns do you notice? Identify your dating patterns that no longer

work for you and the beliefs that support them. Can you identify where these beliefs come from?
Is it a person, place, or thing?

Chapter 7: Step 4 - Identify Your Strengths

“My worth is intrinsic, infinite and non-negotiable. There is nothing I need to do to be loved.”

— Reverend Lydia

A big aspect of The Breakup Funeral is about recognizing your inherent character strengths. There is a whole entire field dedicated to the study of these strengths called positive psychology. Put another way, it is the scientific study of the strengths that enable people like you to flourish. The study was spearheaded by Martin Seligman, who determined that there are 24-character strengths that people possess to different degrees, giving each person a unique character profile. You will get a chance to determine your character strengths later in this chapter by taking the VIA Survey, which is available online at viacharacter.org. Seligman also created a theory of well-being that says there are five needs that must be met in order to thrive: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (P.E.R.M.A.).

A focus on wellbeing and on how to flourish is especially important when overcoming a breakup. This is key information to know, because our brains are hard-wired for negative thinking. It is built to be sensitive to negative events and less so to positive ones. A negative event such as a breakup will leave a much stronger impression than, say, your birthday celebration. This is called the negativity bias. It is imperative that you fill your emotional piggy bank with positive emotions because it is crucial to survival. This is according to positive emotions researcher Barbara Fredrickson, who found that positive emotions like love, joy, and gratitude promote creative ideas and new social bonds.

Traditional psychology is focused on how to get people who are sick well. Positive psychology focuses on how to get people who are well to do even better by strengthening those strengths and relying on them to pull us through challenges, such as emotional turmoil caused by breakups. We'll do this in The Breakup Funeral by identifying your top five strengths.

In my studies of positive psychology and learning how to build my own character strengths, I was most interested in hope. Tayyab Rashid defines hope as the expectation that good things will happen in the future. Hopeful individuals are confident that their efforts toward future goals will lead to their fruition. This strength leads people to expect the best from themselves and others. But what happens when one loses hope? How can it be restored?

There is great emphasis placed on relationships in western culture, and many life goals are pursued with one's partner. Therefore, a single person is at risk for an enduring diminishment of

goal-oriented thoughts and personal worth, Clinical Psychologist Charles Snyder wrote. “Just as it can be very hurtful to lose a partner, it also is very immobilizing to be unable to make connections with other people... hope is inherently a way of thinking that occurs in social commerce. To not connect with others, in many ways, is not to hope.” Snyder also suggests that hopelessness has an isolating effect. I propose that creating connection within a community (like one created through ceremonies) may be an antidote.

Respect for nature is embedded in African spiritual culture and traditional healing practices. Traditional healer Dorene Day wrote in an article entitled *The Wisdom of Indigenous Healers* that a nature-based perspective acknowledging, honoring, and including nature is integral and beneficial to all spiritual and healing efforts. With that said, in my studies of African spirituality, I learned that of the four elements of nature (earth, air, fire, and water), fire is the only one that cannot stand alone. Fire requires something to activate it and fuel to sustain it. Hope, like fire, is the only character strength that cannot stand alone – something uncomfortable ignites it. It requires a negative event to activate it. It seems to me that hope and fire share a special connection.

In *The Breakup Funeral*, negative emotions are the fuel the fire burns. Once exhausted, what’s left is hope. If a ceremony can ignite hope, I think it is worth sharing. I am reminded of a quote from Jesuit Priest and Paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin shared at Prince Harry and Meghan Markle’s wedding. De Chardin wrote, “Someday, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.” With a little hope, forgiveness, and fire, *The Breakup Funeral* is my attempt at harnessing the energies of love. You’ll learn more about *The Breakup Funeral* ceremony in Chapter 9, where I’ll go more in-depth on how we’ll use fire to help release negative emotions thereby creating room to cultivate the energies of love.

To Be Completed before The Breakup Funeral

Exercise One: Identify your top five-character strengths by taking the VIA Character Strength Survey online at www.viacharater.org.

To Be Done during the Ceremony

Exercise Two: Wear your strengths.

Pick a scarf that most represents your top character strength and wear it throughout The Breakup Funeral ceremony. Why did you choose that scarf and how does it reflect on your top strengths?

To Be Done in the Weeks Following the Ceremony

1. Write down three good things that happened during the day every day and why they occurred.
2. Write a biography about how you want to be remembered.
3. Deliver a letter of gratitude to a person that you haven't thanked adequately in your life.
4. Every day, respond very positively and enthusiastically to good news someone shares with you.

Chapter 8: Step 5 – Create Your Own Closure through Role Play

“It broke my heart but opened my eyes.”

– Unknown

This is my favorite part of The Breakup Funeral. It is my favorite because it was inspired by the goodbye letter my uncle wrote to me. This exercise was an accidental discovery on my part. I did it with the guy who ghosted me in mind, and surprisingly, I received profound catharsis. It also elicits the strongest reactions at Breakup Funerals. Whenever I facilitate a Breakup Funeral, it inspires the most laughs and the most tears.

How Is It Done?

The letter is an expressive writing exercise in which you write a letter to yourself pretending to be the offending party. This letter is an apology, a goodbye, or whatever it is that you most want to hear from the other person. Plainly stated, this is the part of The Breakup Funeral when you get the closure you deserve from him. It will be at your own doing. This is possible because, when you’re reading his letter, your brain experiences it as though it happened. Your brain can’t distinguish between reality and your imagination. In 1995, a group of researchers in *The Journal of Neurophysiology* set out to prove this. They took brain scans of a group of volunteers as they played keys on the piano and compared them to brain scans of a group who imagined themselves playing keys on the piano. Interestingly enough, the brain scans of the area responsible for fine motor movement were activated and matched with both groups. The human brain can’t tell the difference between something you’re thinking about and the event that happened. Please keep that in mind as you dive into this step. If done correctly, you’re going to get all the closure you need from your ex. It doesn’t matter that it is not actually coming from him, because your brain can’t even tell the difference.

Outside of the fact that your brain can’t tell reality from fiction, role-playing is also especially useful in giving you, the writer, a chance to try on an alternative perspective without giving up your own. This is backed up by the research of adult learning expert Patricia Cranton. Other research by social and behavioral scientist Stephen J. Lepore on expressive writing revealed that it increases positive emotions and well-being depending on the writing prompt.

What Makes It So Effective, You Ask?

You may also be interested to learn that expressive writing can provide an experience in which people observe themselves tolerating and diminishing fear and other negative emotions. In other words, you may now be able to see yourself as someone who can handle negative emotions and move past this breakup, according to Lepore's research. His research also shows that writing can be a healing experience depending on the prompt.

In *The Funeral*, the writing prompt can offer an alternative point of view. You are ultimately in control of the message that the offender writes to you. The emotional transformation takes root when you hear (in role-play) the words that will bring closure without physically communicating with the offender. Through expressive writing, you are encouraged to explore your deepest thoughts and feelings by delving into your own feelings without having to monitor yourself, edit yourself to include the perspectives of others, or make the story easier for others to hear. This exercise may also help you see your feelings as an integral part of yourself rather than something to be pushed away.

A drawback about this part of the workshop is that it is heavy in writing and it requires the participant to be literate. Nearly fifteen percent of the world population can't read, according to a CIA report. In order to make this workshop accessible to most people, the facilitator could have participants use the empty chair technique taught to me by my mentor, Columbia University Professor and Psychologist Daniel Tomasulo. Basically, the empty chair technique is role-play using two chairs. You sit in a chair that symbolizes you, and you imagine your ex sitting in the other one. You say anything you want to say or ask them a question: "Why did you disappear on me?" Next, you become your ex by getting up and physically sitting down in the other chair and role-play. Now, you answer the question as them. "I left because I was falling in love with you and I wasn't ready for a relationship." Finally, you end the role play as yourself by moving back to your chair. You can keep the role-play conversation going as many times as you like, but you must end on your chair. You always get the final word.

To get us started, I'll share the letter I wrote after my breakup as an example.

Dear Lenina,

I'm sorry I left without saying goodbye. You are lovely. You are smart. You are kind. The qualities of a person I want to spend my life with. I am incredibly lucky to have gotten to know you and spend time with you. Thank you for sharing yourself with me.

It was with great difficulty that I left. I have work to do on myself and my life that I must do alone. I can't spend the time that you deserve on this relationship. I could not bring myself to admit it to you or myself, so I avoided you and the conversation.

I see now that I was falling in love with you. You're magnificent, beautiful, and sacred, so that was easy for me to do.

The truth is that I love you and I'm not ready for a relationship.

Love,

Ghost

(not his real name)

Now it's your turn.

Exercise: Write a letter of apology/goodbye to yourself from the person you most need to hear it from. It can be from anyone, including your younger self or a past lover. Give yourself ten minutes to complete this exercise.

Chapter 9: Step 6 – Write, Release, and Replace

“A sacrifice made by fire. A sweet aroma to the lord.”

– Leviticus

Though this may seem like the easiest step, I encourage you to take your time here. There is great value in writing down your goals and, in this case, writing down what you’re releasing. Study after study shows that people who write down their goals are more likely to accomplish them. One such study was conducted by Dominican University Psychology Professor Gail Matthews. She followed 267 participants over a four-week span. They were divided into five groups. Group one was asked to think about what they want to accomplish over the next four weeks. Group two was asked to write down their goal. Group three was asked to write down their goal and write down actions they would take to accomplish their goal. Group four wrote down their goal and actions they’d take and shared their goal with a friend. Finally, group five wrote down their goals and actions and shared weekly progress reports with a friend. The results almost seem obvious, but they’re worth sharing anyway. Those with written goals accomplished significantly more than those with unwritten goals. Those with written goals who sent weekly progress reports to a friend out-performed everybody else. Now that you understand the importance of writing your goals down, let’s get into the practice of releasing.

“Until you let go of the past, you’re not free to move into a new state,” Developmental Psychologist Robert Keegan said. Yes, that sounds true – and on behalf of those who hold on to the past with a vice grip... I get it. A new state can be scary because of the uncertainty of what’s to come. The act of releasing requires faith that something else will replace it. If you can’t be certain that the “something else” will be better, letting go can seem burdensome. Maintaining faith can be a lot to ask of a person who is on the mend after a breakup. The Breakup Funeral does not require faith to release and replace. The symbolic nature of the act itself takes care of that for you. The use of fire represents a clean slate and the intentional act of choosing what will replace that which has been released, providing an alternative to faith. Now, let’s explore the symbolism of fire further.

Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin, the editors of *The Book of Symbols: The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism*, wrote that all living things are in some way fertilized, tempered, ripened, or destroyed by forms of fire. I find that this statement can be applied to the renewing effects of fire in nature. In nature, as the fire burns through the forest, it can appear

destructive. However, the fire is also clearing out the old and creating room for new vegetation to grow.

Fire is a tool for renewal in nature, but it is also a creative force for self-reflection. Civilization has been built using fire, but so too is the stuff of the inner self, Ronnberg and Martin wrote. According to Jungian archetypal theory, the development of the inner self is “worked through by libidinal fires of urges, instincts, and desires. Their intensity brings things to the surface, releases and propagates golden seeds, calcinates, sublimates, refines... tortures, hardens, and shapes what is overly pliable and melts what is overly rigid.” Religious scholar Mircea Eliade wrote that it is through fire that nature is changed, making it the basis of most ancient magic. Perhaps this magic can be applied to healing the inner struggle of forgiveness. I believe that is the therapeutic magic behind The Breakup Funeral ceremony.

The ceremony is focused on the transformational power of fire. It symbolizes wiping the slate clean and opening oneself to forgiveness. University of Toronto Scarborough Positive Psychology Researcher Tayyab Rashid wrote that forgiveness entails accepting the shortcomings of others, giving people a second chance, and putting aside the temptation to hold a grudge or seek revenge. It allows a person to put aside anger and extend mercy towards a transgressor. Forgiveness can also be defined by what it is not. Forgiveness is not condoning, forgetting, accepting, justifying, excusing, or overlooking an event. Forgiveness is also not the reduction of unforgiveness alone. Unforgiveness is the delayed emotions, like resentment, bitterness, and hatred that develop after ruminating about transgressions. An analysis of group interventions that promote forgiveness found the most effective methods had common threads. They included developing empathy for the offender, committing to forgiveness, and overcoming unforgiveness.

For many, forgiveness involves the process of inner struggle to let go of the resentments and painful memories, Psychologist Paul Wong said. Often, it is a long and difficult process, because the old wound can remain sore for many years, Wong adds. But what if the process around forgiveness didn't have to be a long or difficult one? Forgiveness is therapeutic in nature, so it makes sense why one would seek to expedite it. Additionally, research has shown that forgiveness is powerful in emotional and relational healing. It decreases anger, anxiety, depression, and grief, while increasing hope, self-esteem, and mental and physical health, a study by Michael McCullough and Everett Worthington, Jr., in *The Journal of Psychology and Theology* found.

Now that we've explored forgiveness and how The Breakup Funeral helps us release, let us get ready to burn some stuff. First, let's take a minute to check in. Are you truly ready to let go of the person, place, or thing that you've written down? Are you truly ready to forgive? I spent some time in Chapter 4 discussing acceptance. I'd like to stress that forgiveness is not the same as acceptance. The act of forgiveness, when appropriate, offers so much by way of healing. Forgiveness is not always appropriate, and I elucidate this point later in this book. If you're not ready, don't let go of it. However, if you are on the fence about whether forgiveness is right for you, here are some thoughts to reflect upon. Can you think of a time when you offended someone and were forgiven? You now have the power to extend that gift to others.

Here are some other things to take into consideration. Please consider that you may walk into a Breakup Funeral with the expectation to release a particular person, but it could change to a place, thing, or outdated belief. This is an opportunity to get creative and thoughtful. You may have gone in thinking about burning your ex's name, but may also decide to write down and release "My tendency to doubt myself." There is no limit on people, places, and things that you can release. This isn't only relegated to the living. Breakup funerals can be done for the deceased. If you feel like you have unfinished business with someone, you can gain closure regardless of whether they are living.

Exercise 1: Make a list of anyplace, anything, and anyone (including him) that no longer serves you. You'll need some supplies first. Get an index card, parchment paper, scroll, or whatever, and write it out. Give yourself five minutes for this exercise. This is timed because I don't want you over-thinking this exercise.

Exercise 2: Before we can let anything go, we must make a conscious decision about what will replace it. The Universe loves a void. It will expand to fill any left open. Therefore, we make an intentional choice about what we want to fill the void. Be very specific and very thoughtful about what you choose.

I call this next part of the breakup ceremony The Cremation. Please have your top character strength ready. Our top character strengths are the ones we have the most access to at any given time. I recommend you use the ones that come easiest to you. That'll be your top five. Your top strengths do not change very much in your life barring life-changing events. A word of caution: the strengths at the bottom of your list are not weaknesses. You have access to them, but it just requires greater effort. It is not something that you need to fix or work on. Let it be. For the purpose

of this exercise, it'll be more useful to strengthen your top strengths by doing activities that will exercise them.

Cloaked in your scarf (top strength), you'll then burn the index card in an outdoor firepit. The scarf is a reminder that this is a strength that's ready for you to use. Next, we will affirm what it is that will be let go. Bonus points if you use Bengston's energy state/imaging technique! Before placing your index card in the fire, share one word/phrase to describe what you are letting go, which character strengths you'll use to do so, and one word/phrase to describe what you are replacing it with. For example, "I'm using my character strengths of creativity and humor to let go of overwhelm and confusion, and replacing them with vulnerability by asking for support."

Chapter 10: Step 7 – Prioritize Self-Care

“Don’t give it light.”

– Nicky Mortimer

I once heard a wise woman define what true balance is about in one elegant sentence. It’s when you’re able to balance the service of other people and service to self. When I heard that, I was impressed by how simply yet clearly they were able to describe a term that is constantly discussed but seldom defined. My goal in this chapter is to very simply and clearly define another term that is often discussed yet seldom defined. That word is self-care. Self-care is the practice of aggressive self-protection by taking an active role in improving or preserving one’s health. This chapter is dedicated to prioritizing self-care and breaking down how it is done after a breakup. There are five important steps that will be covered: redirect your energy back to you, prioritize time to self-pleasure, set healthy boundaries, practice self-compassion, and learn emotional self-defense. Let’s dive in on how it is done.

Redirect Your Energy Back into You

I can’t remember where I was (likely toiling around in my bed) or what exactly I said, but I do remember the rage that was burning its way through me when I was speaking to my sister, Nicky, about being ghosted. It likely wasn’t the first time (probably the fiftieth time) I shared the same thoughts about the situation with her. She got quiet and said four words that stopped me in my tracks: “Don’t give it light.” I understood what she meant immediately. Attention is one of the most expensive currencies around, and I was spending carelessly. Though he and I weren’t together, I was expending energy on a relationship that didn’t exist. In not so many words, my sister was reminding me that it was time to redirect all that energy back onto myself. Let this be a reminder to you to do the same. Do not waste another ounce of energy/time/mental currency/attention on a person who can’t seem to decide if they want a relationship with you. In the words of another wise woman, my sister Clarele, “Just because he won’t make a decision that doesn’t stop you from making a decision or choice about what you should do.” My sisters are smart women – I should listen to them more. It just solidified for me that I don’t want to be with anyone who is ambivalent about me.

Prioritize Time to Self-Pleasure

I was at a friend's house party when I was introduced to pleasure coach Dana Nalven. I shared that I was healing from heartbreak and she asked, "What are you doing for your self-care?"

"Nothing."

"When you're going through heartbreak, self-pleasure must be prioritized," she explained.

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"Breast massages," she said. Dana explained that a wellness YouTuber, Layla Martin, had helped popularize it. There are many health benefits and it cleanses the body. There are many lymph nodes in the breast and vigorous shaking helps release the toxins trapped in the breast. The breast region also corresponds with the heart chakra. Cleanse the breast, cleanse the chakra.

Set Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries are an important part of a self-care regimen. Part of setting healthy boundaries is understanding that you are a magnificent, sacred, and beautiful being. You have boundaries and so does everything else. I remember the day I set out to learn more about how to set healthy boundaries. Still reeling from the breakup, I was hell-bent on learning about how to take better care of myself. Several friends of mine were reading the same book called *Boundaries and Protection* by Pixie Lighthorse, so I decided to pick it up as well. I opened the book to a random page and this sentence immediately jumped out at me. "When we know our magnificence and miraculousness, we can know others to be exactly the same." What I gleaned from that is that you get to respect other people's boundaries and have yours respected as well with the understanding that you must recognize he has the right to change his mind about being in a relationship with you.

Practice Self-Compassion

Even though I got the lessons I learned through the breakup, I was stuck in a rut. I'd constantly ruminate over what went wrong. "What did I say? What did I do wrong? I can't believe I let him in so quickly. I let him see too much and now I can't undo it. I don't trust love. I'm not cut out for love. I suck at dating." It went on and on. I recognized that rumination was part of my self-beat-up. That's how I punished myself. I used negative self-talk to do so. By speaking with a trusted coach, I realized that the negative self-talk was actually loving thoughts covered in anxiety. The loving thoughts are what I need most for myself. I gained a new understanding that I don't need anyone to love me in order to love myself.

Learn Emotional Self-Defense

We're taught a lot of things in school, but self-care isn't one of them. When I was going through a breakup, I found myself ending many mundane practices in the name of self-care. The first thing I did was stop listening to sad love songs, because I found them triggering. The best singers can transport you through time, space, and emotions, like Adele. I found myself reliving my dating woes when listening to her music. Some people listen to foreign music instead so that they can't understand the words, like Spanish-language salsa. Another tool in the emotional self-defense kit is to stop asking for dating advice. Truly, you don't need any more. Everybody wants to be Dr. Phil... but sometimes your well-meaning friends don't understand that they could be doing more harm than good when it comes to giving breakup advice. Full disclosure, I was once that friend that doled out unsolicited and unhelpful dating advice. Someone dear to me once called because she felt challenged by all the dishonest men that were beating a path to her door. "I just don't get what vibes I'm putting out there that would have them try it with me," she said. My response was, "Why are you choosing them?" With that response, I made her responsible for how she was being treated and showed her no compassion for her valid feelings. That was not my finest hour. She demonstrated what to do when your friends aren't supportive – protect yourself by creating a healthy distance.

Exercise: Create a self-care menu. Break out your colored pencils and write and draw things and activities that bring you pleasure. Reference this menu the next time you're feeling burnt out, sad, depressed, or all three.

Chapter 11: Step 8 – Celebrate Yourself

“A woman who heals herself, heals her mother, heals her daughter and every woman around her.”

– Unknown

Author Regena Thomashauer wants women to brag more. In fact, she built an entire women-empowerment empire called Mama Gena’s School of Womanly Arts, which is rooted in having woman celebrating their femininity. That is the essence of the last step of The Breakup Funeral, to celebrate yourself. Admittedly, I have room for improvement when it comes to celebrating myself and my accomplishments. This step is important, so please don’t skip this, because we get to learn how to celebrate and dote on ourselves and not wait for others to do it. This step was also placed in The Breakup Funeral because when we have something in the future to look forward to, it helps to generate feelings of hope and redirects our focus to new beginnings. The Breakup Funeral provides communal and social benefits, seeing as it is a group event for people with a common interest. The ceremony provides a support system (rooted in the community of friends and family) in a time that some experience emotional turmoil. It also serves as a celebration of what’s to come.

Remember Barbara Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory on accumulating positive emotions? We play off that aspect in this last step of The Breakup Funeral. This step is about having people come together in support of each other. Tayyab Rashid highlights this in his article on how to foster more hope in one's life. One of his suggestions includes surrounding oneself with optimistic and future-minded friends, particularly when faced with a setback. Rashid adds that one must also accept their encouragement and help while letting others know that the same will be done for them when they face obstacles. This reciprocity is a crucial aspect of how The Breakup Funeral, and many other spiritual healing ceremonies, fosters a supportive environment.

I turned thirty-three years old wearing a beautiful white gown and a crown on my head surrounded by people who I love. That was my birthday bash. When I look back at it now, it was more like a quinceañera, except I was celebrating my Christic year and not my fifteenth birthday. I laugh when I think about it now because it was over-the-top and set up with a party planner, full catering, a DJ, a photographer, and – yes – I had a first dance with my father. This was my coming out party announcing to the world that I am a woman standing fully in my power... crown and all. A very different woman from the year before who was reeling from being ghosted. But that was

not me any longer. At my thirty-third bash, I created a joyful celebration, which is the final aspect of The Breakup Funeral. I threw a full-blown party, but I simplify it here to a fifteen-minute exercise.

Soon after The Cremation part of The Breakup Funeral is complete, each participant is asked to share something that they are excited to celebrate soon. They are greeted with an active-constructive response by the group and a champagne toast. The active-constructive response is a form of supportive communication. It builds positive relationships and enhances self-esteem. An example is, “I’m defending my dissertation in two weeks.” The response from the other participants is, “Oh, wow! Congratulations. Tell us more about your research.” UCLA researchers Shelly Gable, Gian Gonzaga, and Amy Strachman found that sharing personal, positive events provides prime opportunities to obtain understanding, validation, and caring from those listening. So, in short – share your good news your well-being depends on it!

Exercise: Champagne toast and share something you're excited to celebrate soon.

Host your own Breakup Funeral. Invite your friends. Light up the firepit. Pop the champagne. Keep it casual and intimate or make it a blow-out affair. Your choice.

Chapter 12: The Breakup Traps

“Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.”

– African proverb

A breakup can be a destabilizing and disorienting event. It is also a transformative event. I once attended the Matchmaking Institute’s love conference and heard a speaker say that life changes can feel like you’re a caterpillar going through a metamorphosis. Just like the caterpillar, it feels like you’re hanging upside down, backward, and alone in the dark. I’d like to stress that this feeling is normal. Take a deep breath. In this chapter, I’ll share the four factors to watch out for that’ll keep you from overcoming this breakup. I call these the breakup traps. Armed with this information, you’ll be better prepared to fight the temptation to find stability and normalcy in the arms of your ex. I would ask that you find that in yourself, not him. So, take another deep breath and release the urge to call him, text him, scroll through his social media feed, and look through old photos of the two of you. You can do it.

There are many factors that keep you from getting over your ex, but I’ll focus on the top four in this chapter: external validation, self-blame, impatience, and forgiving too soon.

External Validation

Let’s begin unpacking external validation by bringing back LaToya. Ever heard the saying, “In order to get over him, you’ve got to get under someone else?” Well, LaToya did. One week after Aaron disappeared, she already went on three dates. “I’ll show him how much I don’t care that he disappeared. I’m gonna find me a new man, and when he comes crawling back, I’ll tell him he’s missed his shot!”

Remember that saying? Well, it’s stupid. It pressured LaToya into dating much sooner than she was ready for. She felt even worse about herself because the guys she went out with were lame, which added on to her disappointment. She was in a vulnerable state. She was being confronted with wanting external validation, but it was masked as, “I’m moving on.” This was not an ideal place to be when she was dealing with heartbreak. Why? Well, she felt stupid after the breakup, and she was looking for a man that she could point to and say, “He finds me loveable and worthy,” so she could stop feeling stupid. But the thing is, she couldn’t find that man. She kept finding the ones who triggered her feelings of unworthiness. So, in order to make the feelings of, “I’m stupid,”

go away. she had to do the inner work to validate herself, create her own closure, and understand her own worth.

Self-Blame

There was a thought running a loop through LaToya's head. She heard it first thing in the morning and through much of the night because her mind wouldn't shut down long enough to allow rest. What was the thought, you ask? "What's wrong with me that he would treat me so badly?" she mused constantly. This question seems harmless at first glance – some might even say helpful. You know, self-interrogation is healthy. However, this isn't self-interrogation. This is self-beat-up. What's going on here is that LaToya was feeling insecure and was shaming herself. Feeling insecure after having experienced loss and rejection is normal. Looking for fault in ourselves for someone else's shortcomings is not, however. We talked about self-blame back in Chapter 4 when discussing acceptance. I'd like to bring it back to reiterate that it's not your fault. Self-blame is a trap because it elicits feelings of shame and guilt, which can lead to disconnection from yourself, friends, family, and work. This is not what I envision for you, dear reader. Please don't blame yourself for how he did or didn't show up for you. That's not on you, and it's not your responsibility. However, your healing is. Releasing self-blame is the first step in healing yourself, and acceptance is a close second.

Impatience

LaToya felt impatient. She did every step of the Funeral. She barely thought about her ex, but occasionally, a wave of anger would hit her when someone mentioned his name. She felt as though she was just spinning her wheels. She was going back and forth with herself because she was worried that she wasn't getting over him or making any progress.

This is just not true. Healing through a breakup is like peeling back the layers of an onion. The layers of the onion are the limiting beliefs, false thoughts, and barriers that must be removed to reveal the core – the person that LaToya is. So, while LaToya was second-guessing herself, feeling like she was not getting over him fast enough, and somehow falling behind, she was actually on the right track. This is where I would ask LaToya to practice self-compassion. Breakups are hard. Once you've reached a level of healing and understanding, another one comes soon after. This is normal – you're not standing still. In fact, you've grown.

Forgiveness

The final breakup trap discussed here is the biggest mistake you're making that's keeping you from finally letting go of your ex. You've forgiven him too soon. There are occasions when forgiveness is inappropriate and can be detrimental. Forgiveness is not a cure-all for relationship hurts. Forgiveness experts Michael E. McCullough and Everett L. Worthington Jr., describe the conditions when forgiveness is not favorable in *The Journal of Psychology and Theology*.

“Many client variables may limit the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions, including the severity of the hurt incurred, the will to forgive, presence of mental disorders, age, moral development, and religiosity. In cases involving severe hurts, such as rape, incest, or abandonment, forgiveness may be difficult or anti-therapeutic. Encouraging survivors of brutal offenses to forgive (even if having expressed a desire to do so) may exacerbate feelings of low self-worth that often follow such traumas. Clients may also perceive such encouragement as the minimization of the brutality they incurred. Only after an expression of a desire to forgive and the resolution of the more immediate event-related difficulties should forgiveness be encouraged with such clients.”

McCullough and Worthington illustrate that forgiveness may not be therapeutic in all instances. In fact, it can be triggering if done before you are ready. If done too soon, you can feel guilt and shame because you haven't been able to let go and are retriggering the trauma. Research also shows that women don't forgive easily, but battered women forgive too soon.

It almost goes without saying that The Breakup Funeral ceremony is not for everyone. It requires you to be ready, willing, and able to let go of the past having first addressed your past traumas. The act of forgiveness, when appropriate, offers so much by way of healing, and that is why I want you to move through this breakup. My wish is for you to approach dating and breakups as part of the process of living a complete human life. From this perspective, dating, relationships, and, yes, even breakups serve as a space in which you can exercise personal development, fulfillment, and spiritual growth.

Chapter 13: I Ain't Thinking About You

"Happiness is beneficial for the body, but it is grief that develops the powers of the mind."

–Marcel Proust

In the nine-week process of writing this book, I had a dream one night that was apocalyptic in nature. In my dream, I was at home. Looking out of my window, I could see a volcano erupt in the distance. Everything around my home was burning down to the ground. I was understandably panicked. That's when a woman emerged from the top of the staircase and said, "You'll make it. Don't worry, you'll be alright." Now, dream-Lenina was thinking, "How could this be? Everything around me is really messed up. But you're telling me I will emerge from this?" It seemed highly improbable to me. But I was still alive, so maybe she was right. I looked out the window again, and this time a snowy landscape appeared. But upon closer inspection, I realized that it wasn't snow covering the earth... it was a blanket of ash. The fire burned until it exhausted itself. A tranquil tableau replaced the fiery inferno. I survived. You will, too.

My wish for you, dear reader, is that by the time you've read these words, you will know how to reframe your dating dilemmas in a way that serves you most. My hope is that you will find a path to forgiveness that works for you. My hope is that you will feel lighter, hopeful, and confident that you have the tools to create your own closure and move forward. The Breakup Funeral is a metaphor for the death of your old self. It's a tool to help you to properly grieve the old you, to help you recognize that you have died. I am here to guide you through the death of your outdated sense of self, your outdated sense of unworthiness, your attachment to your significant other, and your attachment to relationships. Please know that you are brave. You are doing courageous work. You will get through this. The flames will burn out. A tranquil calm will reclaim your soul and you will emerge from the ashes phenomenally. This is a book I hope no one must ever read, but if you do, know that you're not alone. I'm in your corner. I'm cheering you on. You can do it.

Now, as we reach the end of this book, you may have some lingering questions for me. Like, what happened with the ghost? Did you two ever meet up again? To which I say, I'll share one last story. Soon after the guy I was seeing disappeared, I daydreamed about what I'd say to him if I ever saw him again. Would I make a scene? Would I turn on my heels and walk away in a huff once we made eye contact, so I know he knows I'm big, *big mad*? Or better yet, would I walk straight up to him and say, "You disappeared instead of breaking up with me. That was not

okay. But I am, and I always will be, because I am a good woman. One you will never have in your life again.”

Mic. Drop.

But no matter how many times I fantasized about it, nothing prepared me for when it happened. There I was, stepping off the A train at Utica Avenue, and who do I walk right in front of but none other than the man who had ghosted me? It was one of those surreal moments when you see someone vaguely familiar, but it takes you time to register how you know them. That’s what happened me.

I stopped and faced him. We embraced. He looked around and prattled on nervously about his job, and then I walked away unceremoniously. I was completely unfazed. The needle did not move. I didn’t feel anything. Not rage, shame, nor attraction. I reached the beautiful neutral – in a phrase, “I ain’t thinking about you.” He hadn’t been a thought on my mind in months. I bumped into him on the one-year anniversary of The Breakup Funeral. That was simply confirmation from the universe that The Breakup Funeral worked, and now is the time to share it with you.

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About the Author



Lenina Mortimer is a best-selling author and an award-winning video producer who helps women overcome breakups. She developed The Breakup Funeral™ after having been ghosted. Necessity is the mother of all invention, and Lenina found it necessary create a process for closure in order to move past her breakup. It worked, and now she is on a mission to help 20,000 women get over their exes by the year 2020.

Lenina was born and raised in the Midwood section of Brooklyn, New York to immigrant parents of Haitian descent. She speaks Haitian-creole and travels to Haiti often. Lenina is the creator of TapTap Tees Apparel, a Haitian pride t-shirt line. Proceeds for t-shirt sales helps provide Haitian children access to education.

Outside of her philanthropic endeavors, Lenina is an accomplished panel and keynote speaker and a frequent mentor to NYC teens aspiring to careers in journalism and media. As a Haitian-American woman dating in New York City with a background in psychology, neuroscience, journalism, and corporate communications, Lenina has developed the skills to coach ambitious women – helping them to understand their power in dating and in life.

Lenina is also the co-creator and executive producer of the two-time Telly Award winning YouTube series *Women of Action with Lenina*. The interview series, which features influential people in media, music, and business, is meant to touch, move, and inspire viewers into action. Lenina's work has appeared in *The Huffington Post*, *The Economist*, *The Daily Beast*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *The Legislative Gazette*.

Lenina has been training deeply in the spiritual healing arena and honing her connection with the Divine. She has a Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology and Education with a concentration in Spirituality & Mind-Body Practice and Positive Psychology from Columbia University. She has a Bachelor's of Science in Biology with a concentration in Neurobiology from Stony Brook University and a Bachelor's of Arts in Journalism from Brooklyn College. She received her coaching certification from the internationally recognized program, the Coach Training Academy.



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So, throw your hair into a satin bonnet, slide into your favorite house dress, and I'll meet you there!

Love,

Lenina