

## PART ONE: STRIPPING DOWN

### Quick Note

By now you've read *Covenant* and you loved it! But what did you take away with regard to the relationship aspect? Some will say that those women were stupid! Others may take a softer approach and say that they can understand why they made the decisions they made. Now you want to know all about independence and assertion and how to no longer be a carpet in your relationship; I mean, shit - maybe you just want to get into a relationship. Well, I've already told you all about me. Yes, Kayla from the story *Oxygen* was me-minus some of the illegal acts committed! However, things ended a little differently for me than it did for her.

When my last relationship ended I became suicidal. Over time I had to ask myself why I felt that the absence of this person in my life was worth taking my own. I learned the answer; it was co-dependency, rejection and a lack of self-love. Once he left me to play father to the baby he had produced with his co-worker while he and I were still together, it dawned on me. Did I not see this coming? Often times we do see it coming, yet we ignore all of those pesky red flags, like, for example, that year he "forgot" to get me a Valentine's Day gift and ran to CVS to purchase a quick last-minute "present". I knew it came from CVS because I ran into him there while I was picking up some personal items before heading to his house. Four years later I still hadn't received a proper gift.

Approximately eight months, three weeks and four days later he would be welcoming a new baby with the side chick who eventually became the main chick he now lives with. During that eight months, things were changing and he was changing, but not for the betterment of our relationship. However, my co-dependency kept me holding on for dear life! This is not to say that I was weak then or that I am now; nor am I claiming that I did not know better. What I am saying is that sometimes we stay in situations that have long since reached their expiration date. In my case, the obvious happened: he left me. Then came the depression and the feelings of rejection eating away at me. I felt as though, with my "better half" now missing, I was incomplete. It was not fair; he had moved on emotionally and had found love with someone else, while I remained stuck in what we had together. I thought it was going to blossom into something magical. I believed I would have a success story. Well, silly me - I was only a placeholder. Have you ever wondered how the person you loved and in whom you invested your time and your money can just walk away? Well, that was a huge conundrum for me, and then I had an epiphany: maybe I was just "something to do" until someone better came along. Now when those red flags begin to rear their ugly heads, take heed, stay sharp, and please understand that love does not change. Therefore, when you see those red flags, take a few steps back and allow your loved one to take a few steps forward. If they remain stationed in their position, then it may be time to re-evaluate the relationship. It took so much of that kind of pain for me to become the woman I am today!

I watched relationship videos, I read hundreds of articles, and I even talked my friends to death dissecting the situation looking for answers. The truth came in all different shapes and sizes, and what I eventually came to realize was that I had issues that I needed to work on and so did he. We were both two broken people trying to fix one another, with neither one of us realizing or accepting our flaws. Today, I can say with confidence that I am glad he left; that was the greatest gift of all time.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of women out there who are just like me and, therefore, just like Kara and Kayla. Love is a dangerous thing and hope is one hell of a drug. I do not want to bore you with the possible reasons you may be experiencing back-to-back failed relationships or to try to tell you what you are doing wrong. We are all adults and the only way to fix what you are doing wrong is to first accept and admit that you *are* doing something wrong and to recognize that a change needs to happen within yourself. A few months post-breakup I decided it was time to release my pain into something I knew I was good at; writing. My blogs started out as me simply venting through my words, and then I realized there are so many women, both young and old, who could benefit from my experience and learn from it, so here I am, sharing with you my diary.

The blogs I have written are a small testimony of how I arose from the ashes, dusted myself off, recognized my flaws, and then, day by day, began making a conscious effort to change. I am learning how to be the best version of myself. For the first time in my life I am single and have been for going on two and a half years. This has been the most confusing, hurtful, eye-opening time of my life, yet I wouldn't trade this time for anything. It was needed.

I hope you all enjoy my blogs and taking the journey to self-love, independence, and assertion.

## Damage Day

"The best wines are the ones we drink with friends." I wonder; is my heart still broken or am I just damaged? When we get a wound, do we treat it right away, seek medical attention or ignore it, allowing our bodies to heal themselves over time? There is no doubt that, depending on the severity of a wound, the longer it goes untreated it will become infected and can be, in some cases, fatal. Why do we as men and women not immediately treat our relationship wounds once we are battered and bruised? Do we not understand that ignoring pain, lies, and infidelity will have a long-lasting effect on our mental and physical health? Or are we just too stubborn to seek medical attention, find our way and emancipate ourselves, and thus face the world alone?

*The red pill Neo took caused him to stay in Wonderland, and find out just how deep the rabbit hole went. Upon entertaining getting into a relationship that scares the shit out of you because being alone isn't easy, we get offered the red pill – to get into the relationship and see how things progress. Then there is the blue pill - walk away, remain single and continue to date, and the right love will come along. Unfortunately, like Neo, many of us take the red pill.*

It is no secret that my past isn't pretty. But it is that ugly past and that arrogant, woman-beating, unremorseful, compulsively lying, selfish, serial cheating man who helped to shape me into the woman I am today. Have you ever heard someone say, "Why do you continue to break your own heart?" or "Are you simply a glutton for punishment?" *You know he is lying, yet you continue to believe him? Why?* The idiom "glutton for punishment" is defined as a person who continues to do things whose consequences he or she finds difficult or unpleasant.

A woman who is repeatedly wronged will spend weeks, months, and even years trying to convince herself that the things she is seeing and hearing are all just a different form of what love looks and feels like. We tell ourselves that not everyone is going to love us the same or love us unconditionally and that princess fairytales do exist, just in different forms. We also tell ourselves that as long as he is here, that must mean he cares. Since when has the determination of a relationship rested solely on the presence of a man? It baffles me greatly how so many women have fallen victim to the idea that the presence of a man is the definition of love. His presence can and may only be for self-preservation. We have reached an era in which men are agreeing to relationships – primarily for sex - and women are preserving them.

We pick at scabs and poke our wounds (at least I know I do) but when is enough, enough? When do you finally decide that you have endured enough pain and your heart and soul simply cannot withstand anymore? By this time, you are no longer heartbroken; you have entered the stage of damage. You have left a wound untreated and now it is infected, causing chronic illness. The long-term damage will now shape your future as you see your past for what it really is, a wound left untreated and ignored for many years.

It is dangerous. What is dangerous, you ask? Love and the sacrifices that come along with it. I, Lisa K. Stephenson, do not hold a doctorate in relationships; I am not a marriage counselor. What I am is a woman who once believed in fairytales. I once believed in chivalry, loyalty, trust, friendship and overall love, until that fateful time came when I had overlooked so many red flags and spent months hating myself. Afterwards, I realized that I was not alone. Many other women were experiencing the same things that I was, and then I no longer hated myself. Instead, I began to hate men. Once again I had to re-evaluate and analyze the male species, and then it dawned on me: men will only do what we women allow them to do. I will elaborate on this later, on as my outlook in this regard differs greatly from society's outlook. When is enough, enough? I asked myself this question when the man I loved walked out of my

life after fathering a child with another woman. Yet I insisted on footing the bill for an entire vacation thereafter because I did not want to lose him. I asked it again of myself after having sex with him a week after he had beaten my ass and scratched my neck and parts of my face. I did not have enough because he had not had enough. I thought that, whether good or bad, his presence meant love. I left my wound untreated and now I am damaged. I am no doctor, I am a survivor. Now let's look at some of those red flags I ignored.

### **A flesh wound and its stages:**

Stage One: The white lies, the emotional cheating and the changes in pattern and behavior. We overlook these things, believing this is simply a flesh wound and not something fatal. Why should this be the end of my relationship? The act was not physical; well, that is, not yet. The wound has only broken the skin; it is not infected, so why act now? Prevention is better than a cure, as they say. Little do we know the wounds cut deeper and deeper with time. Immediately, our red blood cells form a clot to help stop the bleeding, creating a temporary barrier that prevents more harmful bacteria from entering the infected wound. Emotional defenses are up as suspicions are formed and tensions rise; and while our body is in the beginning stages of healing, it is not enough for us to protect it, leave and walk away.

Raise your hand if you've ever gone through your man's phone and found explicit text messages being exchanged between him and another woman. Raises hand; raises both hands. Funny? No. I will tell you a story. One day after I had had ankle surgery I decided to go through my boyfriend's cellular phone while he was outside parking my vehicle. I want to pause here; many of you may be wondering why the fuck did I do this? Here is the unbiased, non-commercialized answer: Simply put; I did it because I was feeling insecure. I had just had surgery, I knew I was gaining weight, and something about his demeanor had changed. What I found when I went through his phone were many explicit, sentimental messages with multiple women. I was in such a state of emotional shock that when he came inside, I grabbed my crutches (yes, I was on crutches) and began to limp down the block. I had no clue where I was going because I didn't know where he had parked my car. I turned around and shouted at him to tell me where it was, because by now he was outside trailing behind me. A whole fool, wondering why I was so angry. I advised him after he handed me my car keys and told me where to find the car that I saw all the text messages. He grew silent and simply continued to follow me.

Once I reached my car, I sat in the driver's seat, while he stood across the street staring at me as I bawled my eyes out. I then drove off. Three days later, I was back at his house spending the night and he kept his phone next to me. Some of you may be wondering how I could have been so silly; well, it was because of the white lies: "Baby, it was nothing but text messages;" and "It will never happen again because I love you and I am sorry." Yup, that will do it to you; the empty promises and the temporary fixes (such as leaving his phone next to me as we slept). A flesh wound.

Stage Two: The secrets, tactical lies, denials, gas-lighting (manipulating someone by psychological means into questioning their own sanity), emotional abuse and apathy. That flesh wound left untreated while simply building a defense is slowly beginning to crumble as your emotions are heightened and the pain increases. Thus, arguments erupt, trust is questioned, and the household becomes complete anarchy. *We are speaking in circles*. Do you want that medical attention now? Nope, not just yet, because you haven't had enough. The open wound you didn't allow time to close and heal is now exposed and the cells in your body are left damaged,

allowing viruses, bacteria, and microbes to enter and multiply. Lies upon lies believed without question. Feeling a little queasy? It is typically during this stage that we begin to analyze our situation. While weighing the pros and cons we begin to feel lovesick, and sometimes this is enough to get us to walk away and other times it simply isn't....

Men and women in relationships of all kinds endure conflict. There is healthy conflict and, of course, you guessed it, unhealthy conflict. Now, let us dissect the two. A man does not have to physically harm you to bring you pain; after all, we women are driven by emotion. It is the emotional trauma which stings, burns and brings us nightmares. Men, on the other hand, are physical beings, meaning that their pain is derived from a physical aspect. As a quick example, if a man is having an emotional connection with another woman outside of his relationship, it is far more hurtful than if he is simply using her for temporary sexual satisfaction. With men, however, the opposite is true.

A healthy disagreement consists of the three C's: communication, compromise, and care. Public Service Announcement: **YOU SHOULD NOT BE DOING THIS ALONE!** If you find yourself speaking more and listening less, then you are not communicating, you are simply dictating, and no one likes an authoritarian. In a healthy argument, it is not about a point system; you are not fighting to win, whatever winning means to you. You are not fighting for survivorship. However, you are fighting for your relationship. But once again, you cannot fight alone, which brings me to my next C: compromise.

Compromising means finding a common ground you both can stand on without either of you feeling disrespected or, in his case, emasculated. Lastly, there is care. Without care from either party it is considered a waste of energy on both of your parts. Many times, women find themselves at the caring stage all alone, which only leads to speaking in circles. Sorry to say this, but when you are having the same fights and the outcome does not change, then your words are falling on deaf ears.

At this point you have pushed your nonchalant partner away and, even worse, you have given him or her a reason to feel justified in their pulling away. CPR anyone? Nope, because you have not yet had enough. The mere fact that you are even conquering one out of the three Cs is enough to keep you holding on, isn't it? Remember that feeling you had at stage one when you felt more empowered than you do now to simply walk away? Well, then you entered stage two and now you feel trapped - stuck. Welcome to stage three....

Stage Three: At times bacteria multiply so rapidly they crowd our host tissues - just as emotions cloud our judgment/logic and hasty decisions are made. (For example, I will stay and we will work things out; *we can move past this*). Normal function is then disrupted. Sometimes the bacteria will kill cells and tissues outright (My relationship will never be the same. I am to blame, and I wonder, what did I do wrong? Maybe I am the reason he cheated. Rest in peace, self-esteem). Sometimes the bacteria make toxins that can paralyze you (Where will I go? Who will support my child and me? I will never find someone who loved me the way that he did). The bacteria can also destroy cells' metabolic machinery (loss of appetite), and/or precipitate a massive immune reaction that is toxic (Damaged. Men are not to be trusted - Final Analysis).

Here you are doing all you know to be correct - forgiving the emotional cheating and anything else he may have done to make you question your sanity while attempting to reconcile in a healthy manner, despite all the signs. Yet you still feel like the loser. You feel like every time he lets you down you should have been strong enough to walk away. You feel like every time you turned the other cheek you were weak and docile. You also feel like because celebrities have had success stories and rectified their marriages and/or relationships, you will too. Sorry,