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THE *Last* BREAKUP

*Finding new life and true love
just when all hope seemed lost*

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Introduction

Dear friends old and new,

In 2007 when someone first suggested we write a book to tell our story, our first reaction was “Not a chance.” We shuddered at the thought of sharing our dirty laundry, and we couldn’t fathom how our story—the textbook poster child for what not to do in life and marriage—could be of any value to anyone.

But a few years later, after hearing so many people ask us to reveal the “secret” to our marriage and friendship, we came to realize we were miraculously no longer a cautionary tale of what *not* to do, but a powerful living testimony of what is possible with Grace and faith the size of a mustard seed.

One thing led to the next, and in the fall of 2017 we were moved to write the book. 22 months and 7,500 hours of writing and conferring later, by the grace of God and faith, here we are.

Some might wonder why we chose to include so many details such as: injuries and recoveries, conversations with friends, attempts to self-heal, arguments, epiphanies, etc. In other words: why not just share what we learned and skip the drama? In short, we feel called to witness, and we’ve come to believe our story, dirty laundry and all, is the most effective way to testify God’s transformative power.

So while our exact trials (such as our marriage woes, mental and emotional states, and so forth) might not be relatable to some people, we believe both the causes and outcomes of them are common (which is affirmed in 1 Corinthians 10:13), and therefore there is utility in sharing them.

We also want to encourage more people to witness for the glory of God and saving of souls. To be sure, the world is filled with countless resources that teach about God's power and tell us how to harness it; but in our view, there aren't enough personal testimonies that actually prove His power. That is, we have a surplus of teachers and preachers, and not enough actual witnesses.

So this is us, with our hearts on our sleeves, not teaching or preaching, but bearing witness to the truth and resurrection power of Jesus Christ. We hope our witness inspires people from all walks of life and belief systems to surrender and put all their Hope in our Creator, so they can come to know His love and find all the truth, belonging, worth, and sweet *peace* that we believe every soul is ultimately seeking.

We pray you suspend your preconceived notions before reading this and enter through the door with an open heart and mind. We pray our testimony is an abundant blessing of truth to you. And above all, we pray our testimony glorifies God the Father in heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Mark and Rebecca
September 23, 2019

7: Shattered

*“And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand”
-Mark 3:25 (NKJV)*

Mark: “*WATCH OUT!!*” I screamed at the top of my lungs from inside the garage. It was a couple hours before the start of our divorce moving sale, and I was hoping to save a petite elderly woman from being slammed in the back of the head by a falling steel beam. The massive beam was part of my disassembled squat rack (an exercise machine), and the woman had just tripped on it after slipping into the garage without my knowledge.

Thankfully, my primal shriek caused her to turn and look in the direction I was pointing *just* in the nick of time. By the grace of God, the beam missed her head by a hair and instead crashed to the floor—shattering an expensive crystal set with an ear-splitting “*CLANG-CRASHHH!!*”

With my heart still pounding like a jackhammer, I carefully tip-toed over the glistening crystal shards, moved the beam out of the way, and asked the trembling woman if she was alright. Nodding in the affirmative, she pulled her sock down to reveal a little red mark where the beam had grazed her foot. Fortunately, it was just a minor scratch. I was not a spiritual person, but I thanked God repeatedly.

“Ma’am I’m very sorry,” I said gently, “but this is why I told you earlier we weren’t ready to start the garage sale and asked you not to go in the garage.”

It wasn't until she forced a smile and replied in a thick accent, "S'OK, S'OK," that I realized she probably didn't understand English. *Ugh. Just my luck.*

As she shuffled down the driveway to leave, I was about to wish her well when my mother-in-law (who had arrived just in time to witness the mishap), quipped, "Don't bother suing him, he and my daughter are divorcing, and she took aaaaall his money."

Though my soon-to-be-ex, Rebecca, hadn't actually taken all the money, the comic relief was welcome, and I couldn't help but exhale a nervous laugh. I felt a little better when the woman made a kicking motion with her leg and reassured me "S'OK," one more time before getting in her jam-packed minivan and speeding off.

As if on cue, Rebecca pulled up just in time to see me waving goodbye to the woman. Upon exiting her car, she inquired, "Who was that?" When I told her what happened she huffed, "Wow! Everything we do turns into a fiasco. I'll be sooo happy when I don't have to deal with *this* anymore."

By "this" she was referring to the 14-year crazy train voyage we loosely referred to as a marriage. She had already moved out of our "dream home" and clearly wasn't happy about returning to help me sell our stuff. Having witnessed enough drama for the day, I kept my distance and treaded lightly to avoid sparking another meltdown.

A Few Months Earlier

Rebecca: A few months before the fiasco moving sale, after a decade and a half of what felt like aimless sailing on rough seas, our marriage ship ran aground and finally sank for

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good. What went wrong? Here's a brief account (with the aid of hindsight).

In a nutshell, we fell in love and took Christian wedding vows, but when the honeymoon wore off so did our desire to please each other. Consequently, our marriage gradually devolved from a "match made in heaven" to a war of stubborn wills.

Then came resentment, transgression, seeking fulfillment outside the marriage, heartbreak, distrust, hostility, scars that wouldn't heal, and ultimately irreconcilable differences that made it impossible to peacefully coexist.

It seemed to me, the only reason we stayed afloat so long was because every time we sprang another leak, Mark put on his "fix it" hat and convinced me we could patch it up. We tried counseling, going to church, self-help, new promises and more; but in the end they were only band-aids, and when they inevitably failed, we sank again... and again... and again.

Mark: If doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome is the definition of insane, then our marriage was definitely a circus of insanity.

Moreover, after *seven* breakups and makeups (yes, seven) it was an embarrassing soap opera. What we didn't realize was that every time we got back together and didn't resolve the root problem, more baggage piled on our backs, and eventually the load became too heavy to carry and crushed us.

It's not that we didn't search for root causes. We just couldn't agree on who owned them.

I blamed Rebecca. She wanted me to be her everything, and when I failed to live up to her idealistic "knight-in-shining-armor" expectations she became resentful, indifferent,

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and distant. Not only that, but she didn't support any of my aspirations, was hyper-emotional, and her flighty nature worried me non-stop. When it reached the point where she avoided being at home, I knew the end was near.

Rebecca: It's true that I avoided being home, but only because we had no "home." We had a house, a nice one in fact, but it wasn't a home because there was very little sense of family and very little to no love and belonging.

I blamed Mark. His heart was devoted to his job and many other pursuits, and marriage and family weren't high on his list. He was hyper-competitive and domineering, put all his focus and resources into his goals, and rarely spent quality time with me (unless it was something he enjoyed). Eventually I felt no more valuable than a housekeeper with benefits and finally got sick of being with someone who loved their ambitions more than me.

Mark: In my estimation at the time, I loved Rebecca and was endlessly frustrated that she couldn't see it. For me, *love* meant providing, protecting, and endurance—as in sticking it out for the sake of keeping promises. My parents had stuck it out for 40+ years, and I was determined to follow in their footsteps. Hence, I tried everything in my power to meet Rebecca's endless demands but could never make her happy—which was demoralizing, maddening, and exhausting.

Rebecca: Yes, Mark provided and looked out for us, but I believed there was much more to love and marriage than welfare. To me, "sticking it out" wasn't enough, especially if it meant being married to someone who treated marriage (and me) like it was a major burden and inconvenience that stood in the way of their dreams.

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But it's important to reiterate we're speaking in hindsight. At the time this was happening we didn't communicate our beliefs and grievances so clearly to each other. Neither of us wanted to hear the other's feelings out of fear of a meltdown, so we hid them from each other and instead walked on eggshells. The truth was not welcome in our home.

Not that I even knew what my true feelings were. All I knew was that we had totally irreconcilable differences, Mark was never going to change and be the husband I wanted, I was numb and exhausted, and my only hope for peace and happiness after 14 years of mostly war was divorce. There was no way on the world this marriage could ever be saved.

Mark: I finally threw up my hands and agreed. When we informed friends and family we were *really* calling it quits (“for *real* this time!”) they weren't shocked. With a front row seat to our rollercoaster relationship, most were actually relieved. In our recollection no one tried to persuade us to stay together. Then again, given how erratic our marriage was, who could blame them?

Rebecca: We filed a couple days after I moved out of our family home. The initial plan was for Mark to get a roommate and stay for a while so our kids could have some stability. But like everything else, that was a fiasco too, so we finally agreed to sell the house. And that brings us back to the fiasco moving sale—which started with the violent passing of my crystal set.

That's a Wrap

Mark: Once I finally cleaned up the garage after the squat rack fiasco, we kicked off the moving sale and proceeded to sell many things we acquired together. It was all quite sad, and

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my heart was heavy all day as Rebecca and I stayed on opposite ends of the driveway... and universe.

Rebecca: I felt very different. I was glad to see everything connected to our crazy train sell. When the moving sale was finally over, I celebrated as I drove away. As far as I knew, I was finally rolling down an awesome road to a whole new life. Though I was feeling a little unsettled about my future, I was elated to be free.

Mark: After the moving sale ended, I went inside, grabbed a cold beer, and plopped on the floor in an exhausted heap. Laying under the ceiling fan I remember thinking how similar the fan's circular motion was to our marriage... round and round and round. *If nothing else*, I reasoned, *it was a relief to finally leave the circus life and hopefully find some peace.*

But that didn't quell my resentment from having *wasted* 14 precious years of my life trying to revive a horse that probably died many years ago. I couldn't believe the time and money burned! The toil!

Like the shattered crystal in the garbage can outside, my life was now in pieces, and I had no idea how to rebuild it. Feeling cheated and exhausted, I flipped a beer bottle cap across the room at a stack of boxes and growled, "Thanks for nothing!"

Rebecca: I didn't feel bitter at all (initially). The only thing I was miffed about was that we lived in a state where couples are required to wait *six months* for their divorce to be official.

That meant we wouldn't be legally unhitched until the state approved our dissolution. And that meant there was plenty of time for Mark to attempt another "fix it" job to patch

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us up again. I vowed to stand firm and never allow him to change my mind or heart. *Never again!*

It would be the most unpredictable and astonishing six months of our lives.

End of excerpt