

*the cure for a broken heart*

---

# COMING APART

---

*Why relationships end  
& how to live through  
the ending of yours*

DAPHNE ROSE  
KINGMA

9 | *Finding Resolution: A  
Personal Workbook*

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF STAGES you will have to go through in order to feel resolved about the ending of your relationship. There's no getting around it. You will have to feel your way through all the stages in order to be emotionally finished with your relationship and ready to go on with whatever comes next in your life.

For example, you will have to go through the whole gamut of feelings outlined in chapter 5. You will have to go through the denial, through the explosion of tears, rage, and blame, through the bargaining, through the self-flagellation, through the moment of realization that the final thread of connection has snapped, and then finally, you will have to close the door on the relationship.

There are two other things you will have to go through in order to feel complete about the ending of your relationship. One is a change in attitude about the meaning of ending itself, a change of mind that says a relationship is allowed to end, to be gotten over. The second is the acceptance that the ending process isn't going to be easy. It isn't going to be accomplished like dumping a bag of garbage or pulling a tooth. Rather, you'll find that it's a jagged process that takes you longer than you want it to.

Ideally, it would be wonderful if you could go through the resolution of your feelings with your partner, if you could just sit down and talk with him or her about all the things that went wrong and why it's right that you end this relationship. Since this is generally impossible, I have devised a series of exercises for parting in which you can go through your own process of emotional resolution. These are exercises for you to do by yourself, and they are specifically designed to help you move through the emotional process of ending your relationship and to facilitate your emotional resolution.

They are designed in such a way as to focus you so that any part of the emotional process that hasn't been fully resolved can now be completed. In other words, if you have any unfinished emotional business, these exercises are like a net that will catch them up and give you an opportunity to go through them. Without this structured approach, you could easily get detained or even stranded at a point in the process of parting. In fact, it's very easy to get paralyzed for a long, long time. I have had many people come to me for help in resolving relationships that ended five, ten, or a dozen years ago. It's clear you can get stuck at almost any point along the way. For example, one man in his sixties came to resolve feelings about a marriage that had ended when he was twenty-seven! These exercises will push you through those feelings so that, for example, if you're stuck at the point of blaming yourself or the other person, you can move beyond that point.

In the workshops where I have done these exercises, I found that whether or not people thought they had resolved their relationships, whether they were clear that they were still in pain and confusion, or whether they believed they would never feel resolved about their relationships, they all came away feeling they had moved into a state of deeper emotional resolution. Everyone said they learned something about the relationship they had never known before and, as a result, were now able to let it go. Over and over the comment was, "Now I understand; now I feel ready to move on."

There are five exercises, each of which has several parts. They are not to be done on the day you get the news your relationship is over. Rather, they are a process to do after you have gone through your own set of feelings about the ending. In order to receive the maximum benefit from them, you should do the following things: First, take these exercises seriously. This isn't like doing a crossword puzzle or reading an article in a magazine. Get yourself a notebook for this purpose so when you are finished with the exercises, you will have them all together in a specific place where you can refer to them. They are the record of your emotional healing.

Second, allow yourself plenty of time. Provide at least half an hour, or preferably an hour, for each exercise. Settle yourself in a quiet place and choose a time when you won't be interrupted. Don't do this in the middle of the afternoon when the kids will barge in from school, or in a rush before you leave for work.

Do the first exercise and allow it to sit for a while. You may feel eager to go on to the next exercise, but since the exercises are dealing with deep emotional material, time will be required for assimilation and integration. You may want to go on to the next exercise right away, or you may want to wait several days or even a week before you begin the next one.

Read through each exercise and the examples before you begin to write. Don't hurry as you do each exercise. This isn't a speed contest. What you want is to allow enough information and enough feelings to come out so that you will be uncovering the material that can actually provide resolution. Don't be concerned with perfect sentences or perfect paragraphs or with what you wish had been true. Express your true feelings—in most cases these will be the words and feelings that jump instantly to mind after you have read the question. In other words, express whatever comes up, whether or not you feel it "makes sense," is embarrassing, or is something you wouldn't want anyone to know.

## Exercise 1: Telling the Love Story

When you get to the point of ending a relationship, you usually want to forget that you were ever in love in order to minimize the pain you feel now. But that's cheating. In order to really get over a relationship, you have to refeel your way all the way through it, starting from the beginning, when you fell in love. After all, if you hadn't fallen in love, it wouldn't be so awful to fall out of love; if something hadn't captivated you originally, it wouldn't be so hard to let go now.

So rather than avoiding the memory which is the source of pain—and also of healing—begin by telling the story of your relationship.

- A. Tell the story of how you fell in love. Include where you met, what attracted you, what there was about the other person that seemed to resonate with some deep wish or need of yours.
- B. Tell a little bit about the early stages of your relationship—your first date, your first brief interlude together. Remember—and write—the feelings you had at that time, and also include your expectations. Because of your good feelings, you developed some expectations for this relationship. They were either conscious or unconscious; some of them were appropriate and were subsequently fulfilled, and some of them were way off the mark. Don't go into what finally occurred. Go back to the original time and your first feelings and write down the expectations you had. What did you expect would eventually occur in this relationship?
- C. Write about what I call the "Clue of Failure." In every relationship, at the very beginning, there is a little clue that registers (and is subsequently disregarded). It tunes you into the fact that something will go wrong eventually, that the relationship isn't going to last forever. It may be a very odd thing.

One woman said, "I don't know why, but when I saw his tiny little bottom teeth, I knew it wouldn't work out." It turned out later that the man, who was physically immense, was, in fact, a very passive person, and it was his refusal to deal with his passivity that, in the end, caused their relationship to collapse. Somehow, at an unconscious level, her focusing on his little teeth was her awareness that he was not big, strong, and powerful, but a very passive person.

Another woman said that the man she was breaking up with swore too much the first night they went out. He was very generous, attentive, and appreciative of her, but as their relationship evolved she realized that his crude speech was an early indication of what later turned out to be an uncontrollable temper.

The point here is that there is always a clue—something that registers on a subliminal level and is subsequently disregarded, which is an indicator of what eventually occurs.

Here's an example of Exercise 1:

*I met him at a party given by mutual friends when I was traveling. I was very uncomfortable at the party and he was the only person I could really talk to. I guess that's what really attracted me to him. That, and his looks. He was tall, dark, and handsome, but the thing I really liked about him was the comfortable, intelligent conversation we had.*

*How did I feel about him after the initial encounter? Really sad. I felt like, oh, here's the kind of man I could really like a lot, the kind of man I could really talk to and be comfortable with. Just my type, but he lives 3,000 miles away. Longing. I guess that's what I felt. I hoped—but I couldn't imagine—that we would ever meet again.*

*Expectations? Well, we did meet again, on another occasion, arranged by our mutual friends. Somehow it felt like we really belonged together, and we decided we'd work out the distance.*

*I expected that because we had "recognized" each other so quickly that we'd have a perfect love. All the barriers would be taken away. I also expected, because he moved across the country to live with me, that everything else would be perfect, too. I suppose I expected that he would always sacrifice for me, just as he had by moving, that we would grow old together, that our life would consist of thousands of wonderful conversations like the one we had that first night.*

*What was the clue of failure? Well, I did notice, even that first night, in what I felt was a really wonderful conversation, that he talked an awful lot about himself. I was enjoying listening to him; I liked what he was talking about, but afterwards there was this little edge of feeling that he was a lot more interested in himself than he was in me. I discounted it, though, of course.*

Now write your love story.

## Exercise 2: Telling the Real Story

We all have a particular mythology we tell ourselves about every romance we get into. That's the "love story"—the story in which the original meeting is fated and magical, in which we "fall in love," and in which—we assume—we will go on "living happily ever after."

The "love story" embodies the illusion, romance, and hope of any romantic relationship, whether or not that relationship eventually manages to be translated into a long-term love relationship.

As we have seen, by looking more closely at what is actually going on in our relationships, we discover that there is another reality that is simultaneously occurring—the developmental process. Exercise 2 is designed to help you discover the developmental process that was operating in your relationship.

A. First, write what was going on in your life when your relationship began. What were you and your partner each trying

to accomplish when you met? Were you starting a business, wanting to have children, trying to get a graduate degree?

- B. Talk also about where you were in terms of relationship status. Were you waiting for a new relationship? Had you recently come out of a relationship? Were you in the middle of another love affair?
- C. What was your developmental task? What was your partner's developmental task? Were you trying to get the good mothering you never had? Incorporate your sexuality? Gain a sense of your power, beauty, or intelligence? Understand your father's unavailability, your mother's possessiveness?
- D. What was your gift to him or her? What did he or she give you? An example: He helped me believe that I was a lovable person and I rescued him from his mother's clutches.
- E. How did the Clue of Failure ultimately manifest itself? For example, the person who had one too many drinks on the first date turned out to be an alcoholic. The person who didn't want to get together until next week turned out to be not available for a relationship. The person who was overly generous turned out to be a spendthrift.
- F. If the story of your relationship was written up as a novel or made into a movie, what would it be called? Some examples include *Great Expectations*, *Two Ships That Should Have Passed in the Night*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *More Is Less*, *Two Many Gin and Tonics*.
- G. What was the real reason your relationship ended? This reason has to do with the completion of your developmental task. What task did you complete? What task did your partner complete? Some examples: "I outgrew my need for a mommy." "I finally got in touch with my power." "We finished raising the children." "It was all sex; that wasn't enough."

Here is an example of Exercise 2:

*When I met Hank, I was a wallflower type. I think I must have been very pretty as an adolescent, but no one had ever told me, and so I'd grown up, gotten married, and lived for years as a Plain Jane, responsible housewife. That's who I still was after my first divorce, and that's who I was when I met Hank.*

*Somehow he saw me differently. It was as if he reached back to my forgotten adolescence. He allowed me to blossom. He treated me as if I was beautiful, and so I became a beautiful woman with him. The ugly duckling turned into a swan. I finally came into possession of my beauty and my sexiness.*

*As for my gift to him, what I think I gave him was his masculine power. He'd been floundering with his business for ages. He needed a beautiful woman at his side, a mascot, someone to make all the risks and hassles of doing business worthwhile. I became that focus, and his business started taking off.*

*I believed in him and encouraged him—no one else had done that—and then he started believing in himself. He started taking the chances he needed to take in order to succeed.*

*I suppose a good title for this relationship would be Beauty and the Business Man. I got the gift of my beauty and he got the sense of himself as a competent man in the world.*

*The Clue of Failure in our relationship was the anger I felt in him the very first night we met. Along with really enjoying me, focusing on me, and telling me how beautiful I was, he expressed a lot of anger about other people and things. I found this difficult. As time went on, I also began to wonder if this wasn't one of the reasons he hadn't succeeded in business. He couldn't manage his anger. For me, that was the thing that ultimately broke our relationship. I couldn't handle being the sponge that had to absorb his anger. Even his adoration of me*

*wasn't enough to compensate. His anger was so powerful—it seemed to come out of nowhere on a moment's notice—that in the end I couldn't stand it. I was always walking on tiptoe for fear that something would set him off.*

*I can't speak for him, of course, but I'm sure there was a clue for him also. He often said he felt from the very beginning that I wasn't "available" to him. I think that's true. I'd just come out of a long-term marriage and I wasn't ready to get into another serious relationship. I wanted to play. I wanted to be a carefree adolescent. I think he finally got sick of waiting around and trying to convince me that I could get into another serious relationship. I think he hated my tenuousness, my exploratory, what-else-is-out-there state of mind.*

*Why did the relationship really end? As grown-ups, we weren't a very good match. His business really bored me. I couldn't imagine a lifetime of hearing about it or of absorbing his anger about every little thing that went wrong with it. I wasn't captivated enough by him as a person. I was captivated by his response to me, by his attention to me, but I wasn't really captivated by him.*

*The other reason is that once I had gotten a sense of my sexiness and my prettiness, I wanted to try it out. I wanted to test it out in the world. He wanted me just to hang around, to be pretty and his mascot, but since I'd solved the wallflower problem, I was ready to move on. There were a lot of other things I wanted to do with my life.*

*He wanted a conventional relationship where the man works and the wife is beautiful. I wanted to grow, to expand to my fullest dimension. In the end, we weren't really a very good match.*

Now write the real story of your relationship.

### Exercise 3: Facing the Ending

It's all well and good to do the retrospective analysis on your relationship so you can start to understand it. While all these ex-post-facto insights are terrifically beneficial and it's great to put the love of your life in a box, label it, and consign it to your personal emotional archives, there is also the problem of your pain. What about the ouch, the incredible pain of ending? What about getting through all the anguish?

Along with learning, that is, understanding what transpired, there is also the emotional process of going through the feelings that are occurring as the relationship grinds inexorably and anguishingly to its conclusion. Now it's time to deal with those feelings. This exercise, which has six separate parts, is designed to move you through these different feelings to the point of resolution. Once again, remember that each exercise takes time. It may be days or even weeks before you are able to move from one part to the next. Remember that you are not just writing, but also feeling your way through.

#### A. Something Snapped

Go back to the point at which for you "something snapped." Where was that turning point? What was the word or incident or the encounter or the betrayal that was the breaking point for you?

"It was after I'd supported her for six months in her search for herself, without any balance of support for me, that something snapped. She asked me to do the laundry one morning, and I just couldn't handle it. Something snapped. I knew we'd never make it."

"It was when he came home drunk for the four-hundredth time."

"It was when he turned down that job offer."

"It was when she forgot to call me after her meeting, for the five-thousandth time."

Now write about the moment when "something snapped" for you.

#### B. The Sour Grapes Inventory

Now make a Sour Grapes Inventory; that is, make a list of all the reasons why it wouldn't have worked out anyway.

Sometimes when a relationship has ended, we indulge in all sorts of "if only I had" or "if only she or he had." But when a relationship ends, one thing is clear: all the resources that both of you had at the time to develop or sustain your relationship weren't enough to sustain it. Instead of indulging in a lot of self-destructive nostalgia, it's much healthier to sit down and by writing the Sour Grapes Inventory, tell yourself why it wouldn't have worked out anyway. This will help you to affirm what has occurred and perhaps even tell you why your relationship should have ended long ago. Here are some examples:

##### Why It Never Would Have Worked with X:

*"He's way too dependent on me. He can't figure out what to do with his life; forty years old and he still doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up."*

*"He isn't tall enough. In the end, I really couldn't handle having a lifelong relationship with a midget. It was great to have an intimate sexual relationship with him, but in the long run, I can't have a relationship with someone I'm embarrassed to be seen with on the street."*

*"She's too young. The truth is that in time those fifteen years would make a difference. Beauty is great for passing romance, but in the long run we wouldn't work out in real life."*

*"He doesn't talk enough. I really can't handle his silence. I can't*

*stand his lack of communication. I need someone who will really talk to me."*

*"He was too arrogant. I tried to roll with it, but in the end he was incorrigible. It got too tiresome. I can't handle being with someone who always has to be right. I need life to have an easier flow."*

*"She was too hysterical. She was wonderful and exciting and I loved to look at her, but her hysteria was deadly. It took so much juice out of me. I really can't stand it, living every day wondering if I'm going to come home to my loving wife or a raving bitch. I need more evenness than that."*

*"She wanted to talk too much. She wanted more intimacy than I could handle. A relationship isn't my form of entertainment. I really prefer my work. I always felt like I wasn't giving her enough, and I couldn't stand feeling that bad about myself."*

Now think about why your relationship wouldn't have worked and write your own Sour Grapes Inventory.

### C. The Poison Pen Letter

Whether you made the decision to end your relationship or had it made for you, you are probably feeling an incredible amount of anger.

We don't like to have our footings ripped from under us; we don't like our own particular realities to change. When this happens to us, we want to blame our partner for the awful out-of-control feelings we are having. Sometimes these feelings are so intense we feel we'd like to get even.

Angry and, in particular, violent feelings are very scary. We usually want to inhibit them or disown them. They certainly don't fall into the category of any feelings our mothers ever told us were acceptable. But in order to heal from the devastating wound that ending a relationship is, it is important that we also experience these vile, rotten, intense, and unac-

ceptable emotions. In order to get beyond them, it's important to go through them, to give them full rein, to allow them expression—but in some way that is not, in fact, destructive, so that we can get beyond them.

A very good vehicle for this is what I call the "Poison Pen Letter." In this exercise, you will write a letter to your partner in which you express the full intensity of your rage, your most vile intentions about him or her, and your most self-indulgent wishes for his or her demise.

The purpose of the Poison Pen Letter is to allow you to give expression in fantasy to these intense feelings without harming yourself or anyone else.

*Dear X,*

*For starters, I hate your guts. You are a self-righteous, greedy egotist. You sit around telling other people to take risks while you, yourself, are a coward in the emotional vulnerability arena. You are a controlling, manipulative, self-centered egotist. You are selfish, self-centered, self-indulgent, and not a good enough person in your own right to recognize any of these things about yourself.*

*You may think I am broken-hearted because you've changed your mind, baby, but I'm not. I'm lucky you busted me out of my own masochistic streak. I hope you self-indulge yourself out of every relationship you ever have a chance at. You missed a beauty, sweetheart. I hope you rot in hell.*

*Dear X,*

*You are a double-crossing, two-timing arrogant jerk. I can't believe you lied to me like that. "Integrity," you always said. What you know about integrity could fit on the head of the pin. You lied and then you lied about lying. You drove me crazy with your lies and then made me feel as if it were all my fault.*

*I hate your guts for that. I hope you meet somebody and trust somebody who lies to you the way you lied to me. Then you'll know how great it feels. I hope it drives you crazy too.*

Now write your Poison Pen Letter.

#### D. Feelings of Failure

Next, write about your feelings of failure. There are two kinds of feelings of failure that can get mixed up. One bunch is the self-destructive, self-loathing feelings of failure: "I'm not good, it's all my fault, I've blown it forever." The other is a set of feelings that do have to do with your own real and very specific failures in the relationship.

First, indulge yourself in all your self-flagellation. Get it off your chest.

*"I am no good."*

*"I should have tried harder."*

*"It is all my fault: he was perfect; I'm just not any good."*

Then move on to a real accounting of your failures in the relationship. In any relationship longer than a week, we can all do things that are inappropriate, inconsiderate, mean, hateful, selfish, or just plain bad. When you come to the end of a relationship, it is important for your own healing (so you don't walk around for the rest of your life carrying a tattered knapsack of guilt) to acknowledge that you, too, weren't perfect. You did do some pretty lousy things. You weren't a god or a goddess in the relationship; you were a mere human being. You hurt and betrayed and ignored the person you loved. It is very important now to truly face your real failures. Don't get defensive about them. It really could take forever to get over your relationship if you can't acknowledge your crimes, so list them now. Write them down—as fully and as feelingly as you can.

*"I was too financially self-indulgent; I did go crazy with the credit cards and put us in a bind."*

*"I didn't take enough chances communicating with him. I let my fear overtake me. It must have been lonely, living with me."*

*"I was a pushy, aggressive jerk. I pushed her around instead of listening to her. No wonder she felt unsupported."*

*"I was a terrible slob. It must have been hard to live with my mess."*

*"I was a fantastic perfectionist. It must have driven him crazy, living with someone who had to pick up every speck of dust."*

*"I did drink too much. I am an alcoholic; I wouldn't face that. I feel terrible about the night I drove the car into the tree."*

Now list your own authentic failures in the relationship.

Don't ignore real faults, but also don't exaggerate.

#### E. The Letter of Confession

The cliché that confession is good for the soul is a cliché precisely because of the truth it contains. In order to have a clear conscience—and thus a clear consciousness—when we end a relationship, it is of critical importance not only that we acknowledge our real failures to ourselves, but also that we confess them to the person we have wounded.

So now, write a letter of apology for all your crimes to your old sweetheart, partner, husband, or wife. In this letter, be absolutely ruthlessly honest in identifying what went wrong, and be absolutely crystal clear in your apology. This is a letter for your benefit. Its purpose is to cleanse your consciousness and it need never be shown to your partner.

*Dear X,*

*I am writing to tell you how sorry I am for having an affair while I was still involved with you, and then for lying to you*



*about it. I know this made you feel crazy, and I am very sorry for messing with your perceptions in this way.*

*I know how terribly painful it is to have your sweetheart end your relationship by getting involved with somebody else. I am so sorry that I chose this indirect, underhanded way of telling you that I was no longer happy with you and that I wanted to end our relationship.*

*I hope you will forgive me for the pain I caused you and I hope that in time you will be free from it.*

*Dear X,*

*Please forgive me for being such an inconsiderate jerk, for always refusing to wash the dishes, for calling you a dumb broad. I really am very sorry that instead of supporting you and encouraging you, I chose to criticize and put you down. I didn't feel very good about myself and I tried to make myself feel better by picking on you. I was wrong. Please forgive me.*

*Dear X,*

*I'm sorry I was so unaware of who I really am. I'm sorry about all the double messages I gave you, for telling you that I really wanted to be with you, when, in fact, I only wanted a very minimal relationship.*

*I didn't know myself what I really wanted—but that's no excuse.*

*I made you suffer for my confusion, and I'm sorry. Please forgive me.*

After you've written your letter, ask yourself if it really expresses specifically and completely what you did wrong. Have you asked the other person to forgive you? Have you "eaten crow"? Have you expressed all the things about which, in your heart of hearts, you really do feel bad? Be sure you do, or you won't get the relief you need from writing

this letter. You have to express it all. What is important is that at the deepest levels of your consciousness you have acknowledged your failures, you have admitted them to the person you have offended, and when you have done this, you will be clear to move on.

Now write your Letter of Confession.

## F. Letter of Forgiveness

There's one more part to this exercise and that is writing yourself a letter of forgiveness. So you were a rotten, self-indulgent, controlling, lying, cheating, manipulative, double-crossing slimy creep. You, too, are just a human being, and you need to forgive yourself for being just that.

*Dear Me,*

*I know that I was an angry jerk over and over again in my relationship with X. I'm scared of so many things that sometimes the only way I can protect myself is by being angry. I'm sorry I did that to her; God knows, I've learned a lot from it. I'm going to stay in therapy until I learn how to temper my anger, but I forgive myself for being who I was at the time. I did the best I could.*

*Dear Me,*

*I know that I sent an awful lot of mixed messages about whether or not I was really available to be in a relationship. I was a tease. I'm sorry about that and I forgive myself for that. I really wasn't sure at the time whether or not I wanted to be in a relationship at all, and more specifically, whether I wanted to be involved with him. That was confusing I know, and I'm sorry. But that was the best I could do at the time.*

*Dear Me,*

*I know that I was a silent, uncommunicative partner. I know I punished and blamed instead of asking and telling. I'm sorry*

*about that. It was my failures in this relationship that taught me a lot about who I am as a person. Losing her was a hard way to learn my lesson, and X doesn't get the benefits, but I forgive myself for being where I was and who I was then.*

*Dear Me,*

*I know I was an out-of-control lush when I was involved with X. He complained about it and he was right. I had a lot of pain I was trying to handle very inefficiently by drinking. Now that I've quit drinking I know that, and I forgive myself for being who I was then.*

Now write your Letter of Forgiveness.

#### Exercise 4: Taking the Gifts

At the end of any relationship, there is a legacy that needs to be acknowledged. It consists of all the gifts that were given back and forth, the lessons that were learned, the changes that were accomplished. When we're going through all the pain and heartache and anguish of ending, we're not inclined to stop and take note of the benefits that we've received, but oddly enough it is at precisely this point that it is important to give thanks. You may feel that you gave everything and didn't get a thing in return, but when you really stop and think about it, you'll realize that of course you did get something for yourself—at the very least a companion for the duration of the relationship. It's really important for you to stop and take note. You have received much, for every relationship enlarges and enriches us, changes us somehow in the interior and essential fabric of ourselves. Unless we take note of that fact, we will carry a grudge—instead of an open heart—into the future.

So now write a thank you letter to your former partner or sweetheart. What are the gifts you take away from this relationship; what are the gifts that you specifically received?

*Dear X,*

*Thanks for everything. I was so unhappy before I met you. I really had no hope. The time I spent with you gave me the feeling that maybe life could be okay, even happy. Even though you're gone now, I still carry that feeling with me. That was a wonderful gift. You changed my outlook and I will always thank you for that from the bottom of my heart.*

*Dear X,*

*I guess what you gave me was a sense of my power. I never really thought that I'd amount to anything. I was a slow starter, a late bloomer. I never got any encouragement from anyone but you. Somehow, because you believed in me—and because I experienced a certain amount of success while I was related to you—I started believing in myself. I miss you terribly, but your gift remains. Now I know that I can cut it in the world.*

*Dear X,*

*Thanks for our two beautiful children. If it hadn't been for you—for us—they wouldn't exist. You and I have gone our separate ways, but those two special children we created will always be a part of us and a statement about the life we had together. Thanks for giving me some offspring to enjoy. Without them, I'm afraid I'd be lonely in my old age. Watching them grow up has brought me an unbelievable amount of pleasure.*

*Dear X,*

*Thanks for helping me through school. Not only did you give me a lot of encouragement, but you also gave me all that financial support. I would have given up if it hadn't been for you. I needed to get my degree. You stood beside me. Thank you.*

Dear X,

*Thanks for giving me my body and my health. Before you came along, I took my health for granted. Your conscientious example had an incredible impact on me. Now I exercise and take my vitamins. I love to go biking and hiking and skiing. Thanks so much for giving me this part of me. I will be grateful always.*

Now write your Letter of Appreciation.

### Exercise 5: Redefining Reality

Now that it's over and you've gone through all the tearful, sorrowful, raging, self-blaming, blaming, and forgiving feelings that comprise the emotional progression of ending a relationship, you've come a long way toward your emotional healing.

But you still have the future to consider. How are you going to manage your feelings in the future? Specifically, how will you deal with the fact that the person to whom you were related is not going to drop off the edge of the earth? You may very well run into her in the supermarket or see him at your favorite restaurant with, God forbid, *somebody else*. How are you going to handle that?

Our tendency is to talk about our former spouses and sweethearts in the negative: "That creep," "That bitch," or in historical terms, "My ex." But when we refer to our former partners in this negative way, we not only stay connected to them, but we also stay invested in bitter feelings that inhibit growth. When we refer to our former partners with the historical "My ex," we keep one foot cemented in our history. In effect, we treat our past as more important than our present—or our future. In order to move ahead and meet and inhabit our futures, we need to create a new definition of the person from whom we have separated, and with whom, in a sense, we have created a new relationship.

One of the things we're afraid of when a relationship ends is that we will totally lose the person we have loved, that he or she will utterly vanish from our world. The truth is, however, that even

though the relationship is over, the person we loved can still inhabit our emotional world. This becomes possible when we redefine the relationship by assigning a new identity to him or her. What I mean by this is that psychologically we can form a new connection with the persons we have loved by creating a different role for them in our own minds. This has nothing to do with whether we ever see them again. It simply means that we think of them differently. Instead of thinking of them as lovers, sweethearts, or spouses, we see them as having a different kind of connection to us. Assigning this new identity to your former partner is what I call the "Redefinition Ritual."

#### A. The Redefinition Ritual

Create a new identity for your partner. What was and is an essential aspect of your connection to him or her, which will always be there, even though you are not sharing an intimate romantic relationship?

Some options include father, mother, uncle, big or little sister, big or little brother, colleague, boss, employee, business associate, friend, enemy, intellectual compatriot, health consultant, financial advisor.

One woman told me: "After the dust settled, I started thinking of him as my little brother. He was always so sweet and adoring. I'd always wanted a little brother and he fits the role. Defining him this way allows me to keep the affectionate feelings I really do have for him."

*"An enemy. I'm not bitter, but he really is a bad person. I really made a mistake, getting involved with him."*

*"Daughter. I was her protector and I showed her the way. She grew up and left me. As a daughter, she's a sweetheart; as a wife, she was hopelessly immature."*

*"A consultant. I know I can still call him when I need help with my taxes. That was a very important role he played for me. He*

*helped me get my financial life squared away. I know I can always turn to him for that and that feels good."*

*"Pin-up girl. She was my Marilyn Monroe calendar. Now that I've gotten over her, I see she still is. I keep her photo in my office as a beautiful woman to inspire me. No matter who comes next, she'll still be there, like the pin-up girl a man has as a secret from his wife."*

Now create a new definition for your former partner.

#### B. Defining the New Frontier

Now that you've read this book and gone through these exercises, you should understand that underlying every relationship there is the accomplishment of one or more developmental tasks.

What is your developmental task right now, at this moment? What is your psychological growing edge? What are the most important qualities you need from the person with whom you form your next relationship?

For example, a woman who had just earned a law degree said, "I've had it with study and self-discipline. Now that I've got my career in the bag, I want to explore my feminine side. I'd like to keep a journal, read more novels, take more time for my emotional life, dress up more, and pamper myself. Any man who will fit in my life will have to be a professional who can accept that I work and appreciate the feeling side of life."

A man who had just seen his youngest child through college said, "Now it's my time for me—to stop working so hard. I need to start enjoying myself, to take better care of my body. Any woman who gets involved with me will have to share my athletic pursuits."

A woman who had been married for twenty-three years wrote, "I have to become independent, to grow up, I guess, and stand on my own two feet." No matter how unclear your developmental tasks may seem to you, it is nevertheless true that as surely as you com-

plete a relationship, you will be embarking on a new developmental task. If you have difficulty identifying it, think what your closest friends have remarked and observed about you lately, pay attention to the issues that cross and recross your own mind, or if you feel really in the dark about where you're heading, consult a psychotherapist.

Now, in order to create a new reality for yourself, write about your next developmental task and what you will need from the next person in life.

If you have been steadfast in working your way through all these exercises, you should now feel that the pain of your ended relationship has been excised. You have understood the projects and meanings of your relationship, you have forgiven yourself and your partner, you have received a plentitude of gifts. By allowing yourself to know that every relationship not only invites, but also propels you into the future, you can face what before felt like the frighteningly uncharted territory of your future with a newfound sense of direction, confidence, optimism, and excitement.