

Here is an excerpt from Chapter Eight: The Compass

As long as you think that the cause of your problem is out there—as long as you think that anyone or anything is responsible for your suffering—the situation is hopeless. It means that you are forever in the role of victim, that you’re suffering in paradise.

— Byron Katie

Heather was a well educated, successful, never-been-married gal with a string of long-term relationships, whose baby alarm clock recently had started to tick. As she neared forty, she started contemplating her shelf life. The peculiar thing was that while she seemed to have her act together—an enviable career, a tight circle of close friends and family, and was healthy and fit—she had a knack for attracting Mr. Wrong (charming, generous and utterly emotionally obtuse) over and over and over again. For Heather, it appeared the only thing *they* all had in common, aside from knowing *her*, was that they all knew each other. It was at least a place to start.

“You have to listen to this message,” Heather said as she eagerly rummaged through her voicemails to find the one she wanted me to hear. “Wait...here it is. Listen.” She pushed her BlackBerry up to my ear.

“Waaaay are ya?...Heather...I’m comin’ ta git ya,” the man on the other end of the line slurred, barely audible. She pulled the phone away from my head and saved the message. *Curious*, I thought, *a clue*.

“Can you imagine a grown man like that? He left ten messages on my phone that night, he was so drunk!”

I didn’t have to imagine; I had had my fair share of drunken encounters with men, thank you very much, and honestly didn’t miss any one of them.

“You know,” she continued, “over the weekend, my girlfriend and I were wondering, where are all the normal guys? Remember when you tried to set me up with that guy, Simon, the guy who had the fetish for wearing women’s undies?”

“Come on, that’s not fair, he seemed nice, and anyway, who knew? That’s not something I would have thought to ask him! Besides, you figured him out before he got into yours, right?”

Heather laughed. “Those could have been my undies he was wearing.” She did have a point.

It was always a bit precarious, picking the *good ones* for someone else. Pre-screening wasn't foolproof, even with a pro like me. We just happened to find out from another gal who dated him, after the fact, that he had a serious fetish for wearing women's panties, which, in my book, would have been a deal-breaker—but hey, to each her own.

The next time I saw Heather she was back *on* with a fella that she had been seeing off and on for the last year or so. I had met him once or twice, and by appearances he was nothing like the last one. That one had been big and tall; this one was short and small. They didn't seem to have anything in common, aside from liking to ski, which was at the top of Heather's non-negotiable list: He must ski. I didn't know much else about her criteria. She kept her cards pretty close to her chest, but that was about to change. I decided I would make it my business to know.

"How's it going?" she asked in that plucky way she had. I had learned, over time, that she preferred the less direct approach. A fair amount of sincere chitchat usually did the trick, and once she warmed up, she was raring to go.

"So how's...?" I asked casually.

"Ross," she said tentatively.

"Right, Ross."

"You know, things are good. ..."

What was so interesting about Heather was her noticeable contradictions. Her demeanor was like that of a surfer, yet at first blush she looked like a blueblood. Her fresh face was never made up, her ears were dolloped with standard pearl earrings, and she had product-free blonde hair with straight bangs. Yet, if you took a second look, you would notice her plummeting cashmere neckline, some fabulous piece of jewelry that made a strong architectural statement, and the tiniest pearl at the top of her left earlobe. Her style was a mix (more New York than California) of Andy Warhol meets Princess Diana.

"What did you guys do this weekend?"

"You know, at some point, you'd think people would just grow up!"

I didn't have a clue what she was talking about, but knew exactly what she meant.

"Ross and I were supposed to go out. It was my birthday last week, so he calls me two hours after we were supposed to meet, after I had been texting him for the last hour. And he didn't know why I was so upset." She was noticeably still upset. I winced a bit, hating that I had forgotten her birthday myself. "He was, like, 'You were with your girlfriends so what's the big deal? You knew my friends were in from Chicago this weekend and that I had had a really stressful day and—'" Then he goes, 'You don't have

my back, Heather.' So he keeps callin' me," (she looked down at her phone, which was beeping like crazy) "but I'm just going to ignore him."

She said that resolutely, but I could tell it was really bothering her. I had been through a few of these relationships with Heather, and she wasn't one to cry or even complain about men. She got busy instead.

"What happened?"

"He was out partying with his friends and, you know, lost track of time."

"So what had you agreed to do?"

She thought for a minute. "He was going to meet me for dinner and I called and called him and he just blew me off."

"Heather, you didn't answer my question. Tell me what you had agreed to about your birthday. What did you hear him say?"

"It's not even that. He didn't even get me a *card* on my birthday. Nothing. Not breakfast in bed...not even...sex! I mean, come on, no sex on your birthday? What is wrong with that picture? And then he blows me off when we were going to have dinner to celebrate it, A WEEK LATER! And then...says *I don't have his back.*"

I acknowledged her and then paused, making sure she was done with that thought. Then I asked another equally direct and potentially grating question. "Is this consistent with his behavior?" She looked at me, unclear. "I mean, is this his M.O.? Does he say one thing and do another...consistently?" I suspected, by the look on her face, that she was calculating the frequency. She got it.

"I know that when I expect people to be what they are really not, I get disappointed," I said. "If this is his deal and you are not okay with it, you need to tell him. But just for fun—okay, this might not be fun, but go with me here. What is he doing that you are having a hard time with? Is it that he forgot your birthday, or is it that he always chooses his friends over you? Or you think that he is too self-centered?"

"It's just that sometimes, when he starts partying, he loses track of time, and I am sick of it. It's not like I don't go out with my friends and have a good time, but it's always about him—that he's had a bad day or what he's going through—and. ..."

"Did it hurt your feelings that he didn't make a big deal out of your birthday?" She laughed out loud in her husky way. "That he didn't make *any* deal out of it is more like it. And we aren't having sex. That's just wrong."

"So is it that you're not having enough sex?"

“Any.”

“Is it that you’re not having *any* sex, then?”

“I was at a party this weekend and was totally disgusted—all these people I have known for years were sitting around doing a crazy amount of drugs, and I thought...*Grow up!* It was ridiculous. I am over it.” I was doing my best to see what was really at the core here.

“So does Ross do a lot of drugs, Heather?” I took a chance on another approach, being privileged to know her last two long-term relationships were with guys that partied pretty hard.

“He doesn’t do it every day, it’s just that when he does it...I don’t know.” She trailed off again.

“So is it that he does drugs too often that bothers you?” I asked trying, to get back to the line of inquiry.

“I think it’s that, and everything, I just want to take a break. I feel like he doesn’t get it.”

“Okay, so just to finish my thought about the little process.”

She rolled her eyes.

“Come on, this is really great stuff! If you could pick one or two things he’s ‘doing to you’ or that you can’t stand, what would they be?”

“Hmmm, I guess I would have to say that he’s really unmotivated to do anything with me. It’s always me doing it. Maybe that’s it,” she said.

“Are you sure that’s it? In this process, I would let myself get really clear on what I think the other person is doing ‘to me,’ or I would name the behavior that I am reacting to. I’d really judge it fully, so I am crystal clear. Does that feel clear, that he’s unmotivated to initiate activities with you, or is there something more specific?”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I am just saying that it makes it easier to see the truth when you are clear here. What does it mean that he is unmotivated to initiate activities? What are you really saying about him? What is the judgment?”

“Uhhmm, that he doesn’t initiate because he doesn’t care to?”

“That feels closer to me. Does that seem more accurate?”

“Yes.”

“So what would be even closer to what you perceive to be the truth?”

“That he doesn’t care enough about *me* to make the effort,” she admitted sadly.

“We can stay with this, because you have hit some feelings, which is a clue that we are closer to the truth here. Let’s look at the next part of this process. The judgment is, he doesn’t care enough about you to make the effort to...whatever.” I said trying to re-cap. “Now, Heather, where do you not care about yourself? Where don’t you make the extra effort with yourself?”

She just raised her eyebrows as if to say, *Good question*.

I continued. “The thing about this process is it helps get things in perspective, because, like I always say, *If I don’t know what I feel, I don’t know what I need*. Most often we are so busy reacting to people’s behavior and then, rather than looking inward, we blame them for not meeting our needs or not doing whatever’s right. This inquiry allows us to slow down a bit and see what’s really going on with us. Then we can take a look at being responsible for how we react or respond. That’s the next and, honestly, more difficult part.

“In real time this definitely takes some practice, but right now you can see that you weren’t really upset at what Ross was doing. You were upset about what you were making it mean. What it *may* have meant. But, we can’t change people! I asked if this was consistent with his behavior, because if it is, you have a choice about communicating that to him. That is the other part of this process—responsible communication. It is your responsibility, especially in an intimate relationship, to let people know what your expectations and needs are, rather than reacting every time he disappoints you. And now you have some language. You took care to see what the projection was, and by owning it, you gained some understanding (and hopefully, compassion) with which you ideally will be able to communicate to Ross.”

I could see this was complex and she was a bit lost. “Okay, so it’s like this:

- 1) Ross did (fill in the blank)? (Be specific as you can.)
- 2) What did you make that mean? Take responsibility for it.
- 3) Find that behavior in yourself. (Identify what you are feeling. If you don’t know what you feel, you don’t know what you need.)
- 4) Own the projection!

5) Communicate your need to your partner that this is important to you. And, like I always say, they will grow or go!

“So, one, Ross was...?” I started her off so she could really get what I deem the most liberating tool of all: taking responsibility for your reality and communicating responsibly.

“Ross was not acting like he cared about me; I mean, he wasn’t going out of his way to show me he cared about me.”

“Great, then two, what did you make that mean?”

“That he didn’t care about me.”

“Three. ...”

“And where do I do I not care about myself? Uhhh, yeah I see, sort of. And that makes me feel sad and unloved, I guess. And I should try and give that love to myself is where I get a little lost. This is hard,” she said.

“Yes,” I said with a smile, “hard, frustrating, confusing—but it beats the hell out of the alternative, which, babycakes, is having more of what you’ve got! So yes, love yourself more. Part of that will be communicating to Ross what you need.” This was the place she locked up, where most of us do.

Communicating one’s needs is the part that I notice separates the men from the boys—or in this case, the girls from the women. “It’s the other part of practicing responsible communication: telling yourself the truth and then communicating that truth to your partner, as needed.” I said.

“Okay, do I tell Ross I don’t think he cares about me?”

“If that is really what you believe. But, if you see that Ross didn’t do anything to you, take responsibility for your experience. He is mirroring your own lack of self-love. Maybe you will want to let him know what love looks like for you. For example, ‘Ross, my birthday is a really big deal for me and it hurt my feelings that you didn’t keep your commitment for dinner.’ Then watch what he does with that. If he does care about you, he will listen intently, especially if you are not in reaction. And then he’ll let you know if he can, or wants, to meet your expectation or need—which will tell you a lot about what he values.

“The relationships that are the most solid are the ones where both people are devoted to the truth, have generous hearts, and are happy to please from a genuine place. If this is really important to you, then your partner—*someone who wants what you want for yourself*—will be more than happy to make a big deal out of your birthday, while

supporting you in deepening your commitment to your own practice of self-care and self-love.”

I could see we were done. I told her the story about the lady walking down the street who fell into the hole. She loved it. Then we hugged, and she left.

This chapter goes on to give you tools for responsible communication. By now you’ve become an expert with the first tools—the Mirror, the Magnet, the Stud Finder, and the Flashlight. You’ve got a healthy, fulfilling, sustainable relationship with yourself, and you’re ready to build one with someone else!