

## **The Healing**

**By**

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She's leaving, but not for the usual reasons. He has never hit her. Infidelity is not an issue. He is obsessed with every curve of her body, the smooth brown of her skin, and the willing arch in her back. He is not rude or bizarre; not deliberately; not always. He doesn't pick at her pigeon toes or berate her about her expanding hips. The sex is fantastic ninety-eight percent of the time; the two percent is just not representative of the strength of his game. He adores her son, claiming him as his own. He goes to work everyday without encouragement or pleading or the threat of the lights being cut off. Still, she's decided to end it and go; leave with only what she brought in.

She can no longer twist her spirit into the fissures of the present arrangement. She does not know how to be in a blended family or what it means. She is unfamiliar with its shape or texture. She does not know how to be the new wife second to the EX with the long s-shaped curl hanging over her left brown-black eye. And being a stepmother when a parent is needed, a stranger the rest of the time causes her cheeks to twitch and her hands to tingle the go numb. She's tried it different ways. Shifted and dodged; stood firm and totally altered her position. She ended up in a pool of her own madness, stinking of fresh despair. But, she will not try any longer, and now she is leaving.

In truth, she has gone and come back many times over the last three years. While emotionally absent, she watched secretly from corners to catch a glimpse of the different

shades of the blended structure: purple and pink, gray and fuchsia. It looked like a nasty, muddy mess to her. Seeing it all from afar made her feel spent and lost. In a state of always losing; empty with no one available to fill her. She began to wonder, "Am I lying to myself about what is really happening here?"

When they married she had a plan to show him, to prove to him the strength of her love. She would make him see that they were her family: her new husband and THE SON with his round, slanting brown-back eyes. She would accomplish this without compromising her own smooth brown, tough skinned child or herself. And she did try. But there was one problem: the depth of a person's love should be known prior to marriage. As she would later learn, marriage is about maintaining and building on love, not proving it or convincing the other person that love exists in the partnership. To this day she feels she has to persuade him of her feelings; but painting the picture with earth tones has failed to accomplish this feat.

She spent her own money, her own time, and she gave his child a special name to call her that filled the mouth with sweetness and heavy old time care. But the EX said "mudear" sounded too much like "MOTHER DEAR" and demanded that the EX-HUSBAND/new husband change it. Even though he hadn't presented the child with the gift that felt like a secure arm wrapped around fragile shoulders, he tried to take it away and handed out a flimsy, dry substitute the boy couldn't even pronounce, "mi amour." Like EX would have co-signed on that. He made few demands on THE SON to comply with her house rules or mind her authority. She was left void. It was not the first time during their total five years together. And it would not be the last time either. She admitted to herself that the void feeling had become her definition; quietly eating her

alive. He was supposed to be the man who gave her what she needed: love, acceptance, security; a safe place to be. She was beginning to believe the desire for love and companionship was wrong.

His actions allow a flood of contempt and disrespect from his child to punch and scratch and kick at her. THE SON has rolled his brown-black eyes and poked out his pink-beige bottom lip; shoot her a slim, ecru finger on the sly. She's come close to crossing the line several times. She has almost forgotten that he is somebody's child. But she will make changes before she'll let him stomp her good sense into the ground.

So she's going and recalling times that have passed but are still closely gnawing and clinging to the roundness of her neck. He'd chose the EX and THE SON over her many times by doing what he believed he had to do without concern for her feelings or her thoughts, contributions; the fact that she'd lost sweat preparing roast beef, potatoes, and carrots that slide off the fork. He'd deal with that later or not at all. He mostly focused on how his decisions affected him alone, as if he lived in a self-contained moment.

She struggles with these occurrences. They ball her up inside. How many times was it that a call from her mother-in-law or an inquiry from a mutual friend brought enlightenment on some unspoken subject?

“Did he tell you THE SON got suspended for three days and he agreed to keep him for the rest of the week?”

“What time is he leaving for THE SON's overnight camping trip?”

When she revealed she didn't know the answers, they took pity on her and offered a long handled spoon from which to sip the details. She knows her husband because

others tell her about him. It makes her feel cheated out of that promised intimacy marriage is supposed to bring. She is learning by way of wounded guts and punctured heart that marriage—as she believes it should be—is make believe. A fantasy. And no man can achieve perfection or even adequacy in the role of husband. This is her second round of matrimony. Both times she married with the intention of getting back what she put in. Now she is wrestling with the clue.

She realizes that she's been playing with herself; sloshing around in a pool of pain and doing little but suffering through it. When the phone rings and it is EX, needing him the way she never did when he belonged to her, he removes himself from his new wife's company and seeks out a private place for their exchange. He considers not the action. It is simply instinct, like vomiting at sunrise. It is symbolic of his new wife's place in his life: When needed he wants her stuck to the bottoms of his shoes. But when her company is not required, or she is in the way, or he's not up to smelling his burning flesh under her gaze, he retreats to the one with whom he has established a bond. He calls it by THE SON's name, but she has watched as the bond throbbed and quivered with no mention of the offspring passing between them. She recognizes intimacy when it is smashed into her face and drips its ashy-muddy hue down her chin. She doesn't know if she can accept the truths that are surfacing so, she prepares to leave.

When he spoke of his enjoyment of the conversations shared with EX in their marital session, she swelled like a blowfish with fuzzy, kinky hair. For a time her life lifted from the room and she watched the therapist try to read her as she floated past him. He couldn't save her essence submerged in fire. Her tears doused the flame and she was left smoldering in her anguish. He could have just said he still loved EX and the fake

accessory blinding her left eye. Somehow she would have accepted that. His "enjoyment" sounded shifty as she thought on all of the occasions he spoke of his indifference to EX. How could there be neutrality and pleasure in a shared space? She'd missed the magic trick but was starting to understand the product it produced. They were together because they had both been in bad marriages and found relief in each other. She was wondering now if love had anything to do with his proposal and thinking maybe he'd just found a hiding place. A lying low space until EX noticed he was gone and came searching for him with her one seeing eye. Validating his worth; co-signing on his value as a man. It is easy to get dirty from tipping through their mess, but she is leaving, so she will not soil her dress.

She stands packed and collected. All loose ends of her smooth brown, tough skinned child pulled together. All of her own frayed and raggedy edges drawn in. But she can't stop perseverating. She recalls the time he said she deserved someone better, someone richer, leaner, surer. The times he championed the ways of her own indolent, negligent *ex*; each time he threw her suffocating, skin-peeling hatred of that man in her face. Then there was the conversation when she offered her feelings of incompetence as a mate, of doing a poor job as a wife and how she couldn't open her mouth without stepping on her loved one's toes. His response was a question: was it her or did she continue to choose the wrong men? He took not one breath as he awaited her response. It was curious watching his charcoal skin turn slate blue. "Yes," she offered, "I choose the wrong men. I choose men who hurt me. I choose men who are not aware that I do not have to sacrifice myself for them. I choose men who are broken and look to drain my

soul for their own healing. It is me. I raise my hand to it. But, it is also you, as it was also him. Neither of you have accepted your part.”

She is ready and the decision made; the matter now to execute. She could no longer stand frail in quicksand or deplete herself to prove love. Her love had been brazenly stripped down and spread out before him and if he could not see it, then love must not really exist in any form, for any person.

Here is how she leaves: She opens the well oiled door to her heart and steps out, sure and steady, leaving uncertainty and hopeless feelings. No doubt of her actions or discomfort from her fear comes along. She leaves the insecurity and every piece of the old pain is brushed from her clothing. She takes with her strength cultivated and attended to and ferocious love for her smooth brown child and her smooth brown self. She carries also love for her perpetually split, perpetually in need of validation new husband, a decision of tolerance towards THE SON, and acceptance that she has spent the last three years trying to beat fantasy into truth, all while competing with the weak, pitifully incompetent, fake s-shaped curl, blind in her left eye, EX.

She leaves misery and steps into the understanding that she only controls life carried in her own body, like it or not. She refuses responsibility for her husband and his truckload of stuff. She makes no expectations of change from him. If nothing else she has learned expectations lead to nothing. She will not make the decision to terminate their relationship on her own. It is not all on her and she vows to straighten the hump in her back that has led her to believe otherwise. She will not make his choices and she will not tell him his thoughts, no matter how severely she suffers as a result. She will listen and speak her mind as it comes, only with more care and gentleness of her delivery because

even though carrying the burden has damaged her, she is healing now and ugliness just slows the process.

She is freeing herself by leaving his share of their relationship in his enormous, calloused, dark, clumsy hands. Capable or not. Willing or resistant. If it has his name on it (EX has yet to run down a new victim), it belongs to him. No more totin' the whole load like a good, faithful servant. He has choices more numerous than hers. Plus he is a man and it's time he acknowledged it. So now she sits for a while in her shiny new spot with her cozy, soothing earth tones and waits. He will step up, meet the task and change, or he will continue extracting the fluid crimson from their relationship; perhaps taking things even further than she is ready to imagine: Suggesting THE SON move in? Maybe THE SON and EX? Whatever he does or does not do will inform her. Then her next step won't be as difficult. But she will wait and see. Leaving will either provide a springboard for his blinding, light-filled metamorphosis or give him enough rope to hang his own fuckin' self. If his heart doesn't lead him to her, his conscience will run him away. And really with either one she is the victor. However it goes, she is leaving and she will not part with her existence again.

### **About the author**

*Melissa Brown Levine* has published novels, contributed to magazines, and reviewed books for several years. Levine's primary writing focus is women's fiction. She explores the lives of women by creating dynamic characters who are open, vulnerable, and eager to grow.

Read more of Melissa Brown Levine's work at [www.melissabrownlevine.com](http://www.melissabrownlevine.com)

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