HOW TO SURVIVE A BREAKUP

IS THERE LIFE ~~ON MARS~~ AFTER DIVORCE?



ROMAN TRETIAKOV

How to Survive a Breakup

Is There Life After Divorce?

Roman Tretiakov

© 2026 Roman Tretiakov. All rights reserved.

Before You Begin

This book is based on the author's personal experience and views and is intended for general informational purposes. It is not individual psychological, medical, legal, financial, or other professional advice, it does not diagnose any condition, and it is not a substitute for help from a qualified professional. Imperative language in the text reflects the author's position and general experience; it should not be read as a personalized professional prescription.

The author cannot know the circumstances of every reader and is not telling any particular person to preserve or end a specific relationship. Decisions involving safety, health, children, divorce, property, or finances should be made in light of your own situation and, when appropriate, with the help of a relevant professional. If a relationship involves violence, threats, stalking, or a real danger to you or your children, safety comes first; if your emotional state becomes dangerous to you, do not stay alone with it—seek professional or emergency help.

This is not a manual for getting an ex back or preserving a relationship at any cost. It is a book about surviving a breakup without losing yourself along with it. Being ready to survive a loss does not mean wanting that loss to happen: a person who knows deep inside, "I do not want to lose you, but if it happens, I will survive it," can stay not only out of fear, but because they genuinely choose the other person.

PART I

FIRST STEPS

Chapter 1. As-Isness

They left you. Or the two of you broke up. Or everything is falling apart right now and you still do not fully understand that this may already be the end, so the same questions keep circling in your head: Why did this happen? Where did I go wrong? Is there still something I can fix? Should I text, wait, try one more conversation? What if they are just confused? What if this is not serious? What if everything changes tomorrow?

You may still go to work, talk to people, answer messages, buy groceries, and even smile at the right moments, yet a large part of you is somewhere else, because inside you there is still an endless conversation with someone who is no longer there, with a past you cannot change, and with a future you are still trying to force into the exact shape you once imagined.

This state drains you far more than it seems, because an enormous amount of energy is being spent not only on pain, but on an internal fight with a fact that has already happened whether you were ready to accept it or not.

And this is where the first step begins.

Not with falling out of love, forgiving, convincing yourself that everything happens for the best, or urgently becoming strong, but with seeing the situation exactly as it is.

I call this as-isness.

It is not a psychological term, and I am not trying to invent a sophisticated name for something obvious. I mean the first act of bringing yourself back into reality.

Accepting a situation as it is does not mean agreeing with it, admitting that the other person is right, excusing what they did, or telling yourself that you like what happened. Acceptance means stopping the fight against a fact that already exists.

If you were left, the fact is that you were left. If someone says they no longer want the relationship, the fact is that, right now, they do not want it. If you have already moved apart, the fact is that the life you shared in its previous form has ended.

You may consider what happened unfair, foolish, monstrous, or simply wrong, but as long as you refuse to acknowledge the fact itself, you are forced to spend enormous amounts of energy every day fighting reality, and that is a war you cannot win because your opponent is no longer another person—it is an event that has already occurred.

That is why acceptance and agreement are two completely different things.

When someone receives an unpleasant letter from the tax authorities, they may leave it unopened for weeks, avoid calls, and invent increasingly frightening versions of what might be inside, even though the letter itself does not disappear because they are afraid of it. In fact, while a person avoids reality, the problem inside their head can become larger than the actual problem.

The same happens with debt, conflict, and difficult conversations: the longer you avoid facing the fact, the more space it occupies inside you.

I have noticed this mechanism many times in ordinary life. When something unpleasant happens, our first impulse is often to step away, hide, not look, postpone, and pretend that somehow it might still dissolve on its own, yet this is exactly the moment when fear is given territory in which to grow.

Once I was walking with my nephew when an aggressive dog came near us and began to growl. I had no intention of finding out how dangerous it really was, but I understood one simple thing: I could not retreat and display fear because a child was beside me. I stepped between him and the dog, raised my voice, and prepared to defend us; eventually the dog moved away.

I am not telling that story as advice on how to deal with animals, because circumstances can be completely different. What matters to me is the mechanism: sometimes the thing we keep trying to retreat from becomes enormous precisely because we keep giving ground to it.

A breakup can work the same way.

As long as you keep telling yourself, “This cannot be happening,” “This is not really the end,” “He will change his mind,” “She is just angry,” “I need to wait,” you are not standing in the present; you are standing inside your own version of what the present was supposed to be.

And this is where one of the most painful parts begins: physically, you still exist in reality, but your attention has almost completely moved inward.

You replay tones of voice, analyze messages, return to the last meeting, mentally answer words that have already been spoken, and little by little the world around you starts to feel like scenery behind the one story that now occupies almost your entire mind.

I call this the inside state—when your attention has gone so far inward that you are barely present in the external world.

The first practical purpose of as-isness is therefore to begin moving outside again—back into the world, back into reality, not because everything will immediately feel good there, but because that is where your life actually is.

For a few minutes, try to stop analyzing what happened and simply look around. Do not “take a walk while thinking about everything.” Actually look at the world: houses, trees, people, cars, store windows, the sky, the road, faces, movement around you.

At first this may seem almost too simple, even primitive, but your task right now is not to solve your whole life in one

evening; it is to begin returning your attention to the place where life is actually happening.

You can watch a film that fully captures your attention for a while, go somewhere new, take a walk, meet someone you enjoy talking to—anything that pulls you out of the endless internal dialogue and back into the external world begins, little by little, to restore your presence in your own reality.

I like to think of this as reclaiming your ground, step by step.

After a severe breakup, your world can seem to shrink around a single point, and gradually you have to expand it again—first by a few feet, then a few streets, then a city, your work, your friends, your interests, and eventually your own future.

But the first action is simple: call what is happening by what it is—not by what you want it to be, not by what it may someday become, but by what it is right now.

As it is. Because only from reality can you begin building the next reality.

Chapter 2. Ego Mode: Save Yourself First

If you have just been left, or the relationship is collapsing right now, there is a good chance that most of your attention is still directed toward the other person: what they feel, where they are, why they did this, whether you can get them back, whether they are suffering too, whether they are making a mistake, what you could say to change their decision, and what else you might do to save the relationship.

For a while, I want you to turn your attention in the opposite direction—toward yourself.

This immediately creates resistance in many people because we have been taught for years that selfishness is bad, that we should think about the family, the children, the partner, the group, and only then about ourselves.

But there are periods in life when your interests really do need to come before the interests of the group, because this is not about a beautiful philosophy or about becoming a person who cares only about personal comfort; it is about preserving yourself.

I call this Ego Mode.

Not a permanent way of living, not narcissism, and not permission to hurt other people, but a temporary mode that turns on when the system has taken a serious blow and the first job is to preserve what is still capable of functioning.

Imagine an airplane that suddenly loses cabin pressure and oxygen masks drop in front of the passengers. The instruction can sound almost cruel: put your own mask on first and only then help someone else, even if a child is sitting beside you. But the logic is obvious—a person who has already passed out

cannot help anyone.

Something similar happens after a severe breakup.

You may lose your appetite, your sleep may fall apart, you may stop taking care of your appearance, cancel plans, avoid people, neglect work, stop moving, and spend hours lying still while replaying the same story, and at that point caring for yourself stops being a luxury.

It becomes a task.

Start with the simplest things, because right now they may be the hardest: eat a real meal, take a shower, get yourself dressed, go outside, walk, try to sleep, return to physical activity if your health allows it, and restore at least some part of your normal rhythm.

Not so that two months from now you can post a beautiful photo and show your ex what they lost, not out of revenge and not as a competition, but for yourself.

Your body is going through this with you, and if you systematically deprive it of sleep, food, movement, and basic care, the emotional crisis quickly gains a physical ally.

I would be especially careful with alcohol, because during a painful period it can become an easy way to switch your thoughts off for a few hours, and that ease is exactly what makes it dangerous. What looks like temporary relief at night can quickly become a second problem that has nothing to do with the breakup itself.

You do not need to build a second disaster on top of the first one. You need to preserve yourself.

That is why I would take movement seriously as well, whether it is the gym, running, a long walk, or any other form of physical activity that suits you, because the point right now is not your physique; the point is to make yourself act again and

give your body the sensation of motion instead of endless inner paralysis.

People often wait for energy to appear before they start doing anything, but in hard periods life sometimes works the other way around: energy appears during movement.

First you get up without wanting to, then you go somewhere, then you do one more thing, and only after that do you discover that there is a little more room inside you for the next action.

Mood does not always create action. Sometimes action begins to change mood.

And there is one more thing I consider extremely important: do not disappear from the world of people.

After a breakup, the urge to shut down can be enormous because conversations are tiring, questions are irritating, and sometimes you are ashamed to tell anyone what happened, but total isolation can turn your own head into the only room in which you spend all your time, and we already know where that leads.

During one difficult period of my own life, I worked as a taxi driver, and sometimes completely ordinary conversations with passengers unexpectedly made me feel lighter. It was not therapy, and I did not turn every customer into an audience for my story; the simple fact of talking to living people helped restore a sense of the external world.

Talk to someone. You do not have to tell everything, and you do not need ten people; sometimes one person with whom you can be honest is enough.

And if you are really struggling, do not turn independence into foolish pride. Seeing a psychologist, a doctor, or another qualified professional when your condition becomes too hard to manage is not defeat and is not proof of weakness.

Ego Mode means using whatever genuinely helps you preserve yourself.

Eat, sleep, move, get dressed, leave the house, talk to people, keep working as much as you reasonably can, take care of your health, do not destroy yourself with alcohol, and for a while stop making decisions solely around what would be best for the person who decided to leave.

They are already making decisions about their life. Now you need to begin making decisions about yours.

This may feel unfamiliar, especially if you have spent years living inside the word “we,” but right now your first responsibility is not to the collapsing structure of the relationship; it is to the person who needs to come out of that collapse alive—you.

And this is where what I call Survival Mode begins: not romantic theory and not philosophy for peaceful times, but four rules that can help keep you on your feet when your familiar life starts coming apart.

Because before you build a new destiny, sometimes you first have to do something much simpler.

Preserve the person who will build it.

Chapter 3. The First 72 Hours

If the breakup happened today, yesterday, or a few days ago, you do not need to understand what the rest of your life will look like, where you will be a year from now, whether you will meet someone else, or why any of this happened. There is a much simpler question right now: what do you do next?

My first answer may sound strange: if possible, do nothing. Not because nothing happened, but because after a major emotional shock people almost inevitably want to do something immediately with the pain—to text, call, drive over, demand explanations, delete everything, tell the world, get drunk, leave town, or start a brand-new life before the night is over. The first hours after a shock are rarely the best time for decisions that may be hard to undo.

I call this the first seventy-two hours not because there is a magical psychological line after which the mind automatically becomes clear on day four, but because we need a simple frame for the first few days. During that time, your job is not to build a new destiny; it is, first of all, to avoid making the pain worse through your own actions.

You do not need to switch off your emotions. You need to temporarily take away their right to make decisions for you.

First, Step Back

You may cry, rage, panic, and spend several hours not knowing what to do with yourself, but there is almost always at least a small space between an emotion and an action, and right now that space matters. You can want to call and not call, write a long message and leave it in your notes, want to drive over immediately and still stay where you are. In the first days, your victory may lie not in something remarkable you did, but in what you chose not to do.

Stepping back does not mean defeat. A person who has just been hit by a wave first needs to feel the ground under their feet again, gather themselves, and understand what reality they are standing in before deciding which direction to move.

Find One Unmoving Tree

I like the image of a storm in which everything around you is moving so violently that you lose all sense of direction. In that moment, your eyes look for one fixed point, and the image works well after a breakup: find something in your life that will still be in the same place tomorrow—your job, your children, the gym, your dog, a morning walk, a project, your parents, your church, your workshop, or any familiar responsibility that existed before this disaster and still exists now.

You do not need ten anchors; sometimes one is enough, along with one simple sentence: “Until I understand what to do with my whole life, I am holding on to this.” The familiar road to work, a child’s schedule, an ordinary shift, or a normal workout will not erase the pain, but they remind you of something important: a great deal has collapsed, but not everything has collapsed, and one of the things that still exists is you.

What Not to Do

In the first days, one of the most dangerous feelings is that you urgently need one more conversation, one more message, one more explanation. If the other person’s position is already clear, repeating the same conversation again and again rarely restores dignity or clarity, so I would not bombard them with texts or calls, show up uninvited, ask friends to act as intermediaries, or try to force the other person to regret the decision immediately.

I would be equally careful with social media, because a photo, a like, a story view, or a new follow can turn someone else’s life back into the center of your own within seconds. If necessary, remove the apps from your home screen for a few days, turn

off notifications, or simply make an agreement with yourself that your phone will not become a twenty-four-hour surveillance station.

Go Incognito, but Do Not Disappear from Life

Do not turn your breakup into a public series. There is no need to post cryptic quotes about betrayal an hour later, dramatically announce your freedom, go to a restaurant or on a date just to produce a photo for one particular person, or tell hundreds of followers details you may see very differently a month from now. If the main purpose of a post is to trigger someone else's reaction, then even your staged "new life" is still revolving around that person.

For a while, I would choose incognito: not disappearing from life, but becoming quiet in public, because there is dignity in refusing to turn pain into content, and there is also value in preserving your right to decide later what was truly private. The internet can almost always wait.

But silence online should not become isolation. In real life, do the opposite: talk to at least one person you trust—a friend, a sibling, or your parents if the relationship is good. Sometimes it is enough to say honestly, "I am hurting badly right now. I do not need the perfect answer; just stay with me." If your condition becomes so severe that you cannot function normally, barely sleep, cannot control panic, or are afraid to be alone with your own thoughts, do not turn self-reliance into heroism; professional help may be the most reasonable action you can take.

Do Not Make Big Decisions

After a shock, you may want to change everything at once: quit your job, sell the house, move, destroy belongings, cut off every mutual friend, start a war over property, or, at the opposite extreme, find someone new tomorrow. If a decision can safely wait a few days, it does not have to be born tonight; there is no

weakness in that, because a pause is also a decision.

There is one essential exception: if physical safety, the safety of children, violence, threats, stalking, or another real danger is involved, do not wait for the sake of a neat rule. In that case, the priority is a safe plan and appropriate professional support. But if there is no immediate danger and it is your emotional world that has collapsed, give yourself a few days before doing something that may be difficult to reverse.

A Plan for Tomorrow

Do not demand exceptional productivity from yourself in the first days, but try to preserve the basics: eat, drink water, shower, change clothes, try to sleep, step outside for a while, and, if your health allows, give your body some familiar movement. This is not treatment for a breakup and it is not a promise that you will quickly feel better; it is simply a way not to add a physical crisis to an emotional one.

I would be especially careful with alcohol and other ways of rapidly switching consciousness off, because pain is very good at whispering, “Just tonight,” and “just tonight” can start repeating itself. Right now you do not need a way to disappear from your own life; you need a way to remain in it.

Before bed, do not build a strategy for the next ten years. Write down three things for tomorrow: one action for your body, one action in the external world, and one task that belongs to your own life. It might be a real breakfast, a forty-minute walk, and one work task you have been putting off. Three points are enough, because in the first days, agency sometimes looks exactly like this—a small promise to yourself that you keep tomorrow.

Your Job Right Now Is Much Simpler

If you are at the very beginning of a breakup, you do not need to become a new person immediately, understand everything,

forgive, stop loving, or prove that you are strong. Your job is much simpler: do not make the first days worse than they already are, step back, gather yourself, find your fixed point, do not turn every emotion into an action, do not turn pain into a public performance, talk to someone you trust, and ask for help if you need it.

Today you do not need to build your entire new life. It is enough to preserve the person who will build it one day.

Continue with the full book

How to Survive a Breakup:
Is There Life After Divorce?

Roman Tretiakov

Available in the full edition.