

THE SILENT DRIFT



DEDE OKEKE

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

This guide is written from years of listening to women talk honestly about their marriages. It is not counselling, therapy, medical advice, or legal advice, and it cannot replace any of them. Every marriage is its own country with its own weather. Take what fits your home and leave what does not.

Nothing in these pages can promise you a particular outcome. No book can, and you should be careful of any that says otherwise. What this guide can do is help you see clearly, stop losing yourself, and act with dignity — whichever way your marriage finally turns.

If there is violence in your home, or threats of it, this guide is not the right help and I will not pretend it is. Please speak to someone you trust, your doctor, or a domestic violence support service in your country today. Your safety comes before your marriage. It always did.

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You are not imagining it.

Something has changed in your house. He still comes home. He still eats what you cook. On paper, nothing is wrong — and that is exactly what makes it unbearable.

I have sat with hundreds of women who began the same way. “*Maybe it is nothing. Maybe I am overthinking.*” Then they explain it perfectly in four minutes, and they cry.

Here is what I have learned. A marriage rarely dies from one event. It dies from a long, quiet, orderly process of two people moving apart while both of them pretend nothing is happening.

That process has stages. It follows an order. And a thing with an order can be seen coming.

Most women only learn to recognise it after it has finished. You are reading this earlier than that. Hold on to that.

Come. Let us look at it together.

— Dede Okeke

Four Things To Hold On To

Before we walk into the difficult part, I want to give you four things to keep in your pocket. When the reading gets heavy, come back to this page.

One. This is not your punishment.

Somewhere in the last few months you have quietly decided that this is happening because of something you are. Because of your body after the children. Because you talk too much, or too little. Because you are not the woman he married. Women do this immediately and almost without exception, and it is the single most damaging habit of mind in this entire situation.

A drift is not a verdict on your worth. It is a pattern that two people fell into. You will have a part in it — we will look at your part honestly, and I will not flatter you — but a part is not a cause, and it is certainly not a sentence.

Two. Slow does not mean impossible.

What took two years to build will not undo itself in a weekend. Every woman wants the one sentence, the one night, the one gesture that flips him back. I understand why. Waiting is agony when you are the only one who knows the house is on fire.

But a drift reverses the way it formed — in small, repeated, unremarkable moments. The good news buried in that is that you do not need a grand gesture. You need a series of small ones, done steadily, for longer than feels reasonable.

Three. You are allowed to want more than peace.

Many women in a cold marriage lower the bar until it is lying on the floor. “At least he does not beat me. At least he pays the fees. At least he comes home.” My sister, that is a list of things he is supposed to do. It is not love, and you did not marry a man so that you could be tolerated by him for the next thirty years.

You are permitted to want warmth. Wanting it does not make you ungrateful.

Four. The goal is clarity, not victory.

Read this slowly, because it is the spine of the whole guide.

Our aim is not to win him back at any cost. Our aim is to end the fog — to get you to a place where you know what is true, where you have shown up as your fullest self, and where the outcome, whichever it is, is one you can live with and respect yourself for.

Most women who work through these seven steps find their marriage warms. Some find it does not, and they discover instead that they have their feet under them again and can make a real decision for the first time in years. Both of those are wins. A woman with clear eyes is never the loser in the story.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read Part One straight through, in order, without skipping to the steps. You cannot fix what you have not correctly named, and the seven steps are built on the four drifts.

Then take the steps one at a time. Do not do all seven in one week. They are sequenced deliberately; each one prepares the ground for the next.

Keep a small notebook beside you. Not for him — for you. Several of the exercises need somewhere private to write, and the Drift Diary bonus is built for exactly this.

PART ONE

The Four Silent Drifts

Every cold marriage travelled a road to get there. These are the four stops on that road, in the order they come.

What A Drift Actually Is

A drift is not a fight. A fight is two people still trying. A drift is what happens when one of them quietly stops.

Think about a boat tied at the edge of a river. Nobody unties it. Nobody pushes it. But the rope was always a little loose, and the water moves all day and all night without resting, and one morning the boat is thirty metres downriver and everybody is asking how it got there.

That is your marriage. Nobody untied anything. There was no single afternoon when he decided to stop loving you. There was only the water, moving, every day, while both of you were busy.

Here is what makes the drift different from an ordinary rough patch, and you should learn this difference well, because it is the difference between a marriage that is tired and a marriage that is leaving.

In a rough patch, there is friction. You argue. You slam a door. He says something he should not have said and you do not speak for two days and then somebody breaks first and you are fine again. It is loud and it is unpleasant, but underneath all that noise is a signal you should learn to hear: *we are both still fighting for this*. People only fight about what they still want.

In a drift, there is no friction at all. That is its terrible signature. Things get smoother. Politer. He agrees with you more easily than he used to. Small disagreements that would once have taken an hour now take four seconds, because he simply says “okay, no problem” and goes back to his phone.

And here is the trap, the one that catches almost every woman: **at first, this feels like improvement.**

You think, at last, we have stopped quarrelling. You tell your friend the marriage has become peaceful. You thank God for it. Meanwhile what has actually happened is that your husband has stopped investing the energy that arguing requires. He has not become more agreeable. He has become less present. Agreement is cheap when you no longer care about the outcome.

The opposite of love was never hatred. It is the absence of effort.

The four stages, and why the order matters

Over the years I began to notice that the women who came to me were not describing hundreds of different situations. They were describing the same four situations, and the only real difference between them was how far along the road they had travelled.

I began to write down the stages. Then I began to test them — when a woman described stage two, I would ask whether stage one had happened first, and it always had. It was never out of order. Not once in all these years.

These are the four:

THE FOUR SILENT DRIFTS

One. The Withdrawal. He is still in the house, but his attention has left it. He is present in body, absent in every way that matters to you.

Two. The Substitution. The attention he took from you did not disappear. It went somewhere. Something or someone is now receiving what used to be yours.

Three. The Comparison. He begins measuring you — against another woman, against a memory of you, against a life he imagines he could have had. And you begin to lose, because you are real and the comparison is not.

Four. The Point Of No Return. You reach for him. He does not reach back. This is not the affair. This is the moment the marriage becomes a formality.

The order matters more than anything else in this book, for one reason: **each stage is easier to reverse than the one after it.**

A withdrawal caught early can be turned around in a matter of weeks by an ordinary woman doing ordinary things. The Point Of No Return can sometimes be turned around too, but it costs far more, takes far longer, and it is no longer certain.

So as you read the next four chapters, you are doing one job and one job only. You are finding your marriage on the map. Not what you fear it is. Not what your mother says it is. Where it actually is, today.

Be honest with yourself here, even where it hurts. Especially there. A woman who tells herself she is at stage one when she is at stage three will apply the wrong medicine and then conclude that medicine does not work.

The Withdrawal

He did not leave. He simply stopped arriving.

The first drift is the quietest and the most survivable, which is a cruel combination, because survivable things do not frighten us enough to act.

The Withdrawal is the stage where your husband's attention leaves the marriage while his body stays in the house. He comes home at the usual time. He eats. He asks about the children in a general sort of way. And yet you find yourself standing in your own sitting room feeling strangely alone in the presence of a man you are married to.

What it actually looks like

Let me describe it the way the women describe it to me, because generalities are useless here.

He smiles at his phone. That is often the first thing a woman notices, and it is almost always the thing she dismisses. He is scrolling, and something crosses his face — amusement, softness, interest, life. Then you speak to him and the face resets to flat. Not angry. Flat. As though you have interrupted something and he is being patient about it.

He gives you the short version of everything. “How was work?” “Fine.” Not hostile, just finished. There was a time this man would tell you about a stupid thing a colleague said at eleven in the morning. Now the whole day fits into one word.

He stops asking. This is the one women miss most. Notice not only what he says, but what he no longer wants to know. He does not ask how your day went. He does not ask what your sister decided. He does not ask what you are thinking about when you are quiet. Curiosity is the first thing to die, long before affection, and its death is silent.

The phone develops a personality of its own. It travels to the bathroom. It sleeps face

down. It is never left on the table when he goes to shower. Nothing has been said about the phone. Nothing needs to be.

He starts staying out slightly longer for entirely reasonable reasons. Traffic. A meeting that ran over. Football with the boys. Each one is true. The pattern is what is speaking, not the individual excuse.

Touch becomes functional. The hand on the back as he passes. The peck that lands somewhere near your cheek on the way out. Intimacy becomes something scheduled and efficient, or it quietly stops, and neither of you mentions that it has stopped.

He sleeps turned away. Some men move rooms entirely and call it snoring, or the heat, or an early meeting. Others simply turn their back every night for a year.

And the children notice. This is the detail that breaks women when they hear it, because a child has no filter and no diplomacy. One of them will say something like, *"Mummy, why is Daddy always sad when he is talking to us?"* and it will sit in your chest for a week, because a small child just described your marriage more accurately than you have allowed yourself to.

Why he withdraws

I want to say something here that may annoy you, and I ask you to sit with it anyway.

A withdrawing man is not usually a wicked man executing a plan. Most of the time he is a man who has stopped being able to feel useful, or admired, or at ease inside his own home — and instead of saying so, which he probably does not have the words for, he simply reduces his exposure to the discomfort.

Men in this part of the world are raised to solve, provide, and not complain. When something inside the marriage becomes uncomfortable and he cannot solve it, he does not process it. He avoids it. Avoidance is the only tool he was given.

Common causes, and you will recognise more than one:

- **Money pressure.** A man who feels he is failing financially will often go quiet at home, because home is where the evidence of the failure lives. He is not withdrawing from you. He is withdrawing from a mirror.
- **Feeling like staff.** Somewhere between the children and the bills, the conversation between you narrowed to logistics. School run. Generator. His mother's hospital bill. He began to experience himself as a functional part of a household rather than a man someone is glad to see.
- **Constant correction.** If most of what he hears from you is what he has done wrong or forgotten, he will eventually stop offering himself for inspection. I am not blaming you. You were probably carrying too much alone and correction is what exhaustion sounds like. But he heard it as a verdict.
- **An unhealed injury.** Something happened — a betrayal, a humiliation, a loss, something said in anger years ago — and it was never properly closed. It went underground and became distance.

None of this excuses him. A man who withdraws instead of speaking is doing something cowardly, and I will not dress it up. But understanding the machinery matters, because you cannot interrupt a process you have misdiagnosed as wickedness.

What you probably did in response

Almost every woman does one of two things, and both of them accelerate the drift.

Some women **pursue**. You talk more, ask more, plan more, cook better, dress better, initiate more. You are trying to close the gap with effort. What he experiences, unfortunately, is pressure — and a withdrawing man responds to pressure by withdrawing further. So you push harder. And he moves further. This is the chase, and the chase is the engine of the entire drift.

Other women **match him**. If he is going to be cold, fine. You go cold too, with dignity,

and you wait for him to notice. He does not notice, or he notices and is quietly relieved, and now there are two people withdrawing and the house becomes a very well-run hotel.

Neither works. Part Two is largely about the third option, which is neither chasing nor freezing.

AM I IN THE WITHDRAWAL?

Answer honestly, yes or no.

- Has he stopped asking me questions about my life?
- Do our conversations now consist mainly of logistics and money?
- Does his phone go everywhere with him, including the bathroom?
- Do I feel lonelier when he is in the room than when he is out?
- Has physical affection outside of sex almost disappeared?
- Am I doing most of the initiating — of talk, of touch, of plans?
- Have the children commented on his mood or distance?

Three or more yes: you are in the Withdrawal. It may not have gone further. Start at Step One and move steadily. Caught here, this is very workable.

The Substitution

Attention is not destroyed. It is transferred. The question is never whether it went somewhere — only where.

Here is a thing about human beings that is worth writing on your wall: nobody actually withdraws into nothing.

The warmth your husband stopped bringing home did not evaporate on the way. It is going somewhere. Some place, some activity, some person is now receiving the energy, the humour, the interest and the attention that used to arrive at your door. That is the second drift.

And I want to be careful here, because this is the chapter where women panic, and panic makes people do things they cannot undo.

Not every substitution is a woman

Read that again before your mind runs.

Substitution takes many forms, and most of them are not affairs:

- **Work.** The office is where he is competent, respected and thanked. Home is where he is behind on everything. Guess where he will linger.
- **The phone.** Not a person on it, just it. Endless football, politics, betting, videos, group chats. It asks nothing of him and rewards him constantly. It is the easiest place on earth to hide.
- **Alcohol.** A drink after work becomes three, becomes every night. He is not drinking to enjoy himself; he is drinking to blur the edge of coming home.
- **His friends, or his family.** Suddenly every weekend belongs to his boys, or he is at his mother's house four evenings out of seven, and there is always a good reason.

- **Church, gym, a new business, a new hobby.** Even good things become hiding places when their real function is absence.
- **And yes, sometimes, another woman.**

The reason I list the others first is that a great many women decide it is an affair, act on that decision, are wrong, and blow a repairable marriage into pieces over a receipt that turned out to be his cousin's birthday lunch.

But I am not going to insult you by pretending the last one is rare, either. If your instinct has been whispering for months, your instinct is not stupid. It has more data than anybody else's. We are going to take it seriously without letting it drive the car.

What the substitution looks like

The tell is not evidence. The tell is *energy going one way*.

He comes home from wherever he has been, and he arrives lighter than he was before he went, or heavier. Either way, something happened out there. A man whose day was merely tiring comes home neutral. A man whose day contained something significant comes home changed.

Time in the house becomes waiting. He is present, but he is between things. His actual life is happening elsewhere and this is the interval.

New patterns appear with no history. A new gym schedule at thirty-nine. Sudden interest in his appearance after eight years of the same three shirts. New music. New slang. A new way of arranging his beard. On its own this means nothing. Alongside the rest, it means somebody is being dressed for.

The phone hardens. In Drift One it was private. Now it is fortified — new password, notifications hidden, face-down as a reflex, taken to the toilet, and a small flinch when you walk behind him.

Small, unnecessary lies. This is the most reliable signal of all, and almost nobody pays

attention to it. Not big lies. Silly ones. He says he was at Chuka's and later mentions being somewhere else. He says the meeting was in Wuse when you saw the location. A man with nothing to hide has no reason to be inaccurate about small things. Lying is a habit that starts small and spreads.

Money moves quietly. Withdrawals that do not match anything. A card statement he handles alone now. A restaurant receipt in the car that was not for a client, or for you.

A contact you have never met becomes ordinary. Saved under something forgettable — “Office”, a surname, an initial. And one day a message arrives on the lock screen at an hour when work is finished: *I miss you already*.

What to do in the hour after you find something

I am putting this here rather than in Part Two because women do not find these things at a convenient time. They find them at eleven at night, and what they do in the next hour often decides the next ten years.

THE RULE OF THE FIRST HOUR

Do not confront tonight. Nothing said between eleven at night and one in the morning has ever helped a marriage. You will say the worst version of the truth, he will say the most defensive version of his, and you will both spend the following months defending sentences neither of you meant.

Do not tell his family. Do not post anything. Do not call her. Every one of these feels like action and every one of these costs you your position.

Write it down instead. Date, what you saw, exactly. Not to build a court case — to stop your mind rewriting it later when you are tempted to talk yourself out of it. This is what the Drift Diary is for.

Then go to sleep, if you can, and give yourself three days before you decide anything. Three days will not change the facts. It will change the quality of your thinking about them, completely.

One more thing, and I say it with love because it is where good women lose themselves: **do not become an investigator.**

I know the pull. Certainty feels like it would end the pain. So you start checking. The phone at 3am, the car, the receipts, the location, the laptop. And what happens is not certainty — it is a woman who has become a security officer in her own marriage, who cannot sleep, who is now hiding things too, and who has handed her entire inner life over to a man who does not even know he has it.

You already know enough to act. What you do not have is proof, and proof is not actually what you need. Step Five will show you how to find out what is true without surrendering your dignity to a search.

AM I IN THE SUBSTITUTION?

- Does he arrive home noticeably changed — lighter or heavier — from wherever he has been?
- Have I caught him in small, unnecessary inaccuracies?
- Has his phone become genuinely protected rather than merely private?
- Have new habits, tastes or grooming appeared without explanation?
- Is there a person, place or activity that now receives his best mood?
- Is money moving in ways I cannot account for?

Three or more yes: something has stepped into the space. Identify what before assuming who.

The Comparison

Once he has somewhere else to be, you stop being his wife and start being an option he is evaluating.

The third drift is where the real damage is done, and it does most of that damage inside your own head.

Comparison is what happens when a man's attention has settled somewhere new, and he begins — usually without admitting it to himself — to measure his marriage against it. And he is not comparing fairly. Nobody ever does.

Why you cannot win the comparison

He is comparing a whole life to a highlight.

You are the woman he sees at 5:40 in the morning, with a headscarf and yesterday's tiredness on your face, chasing children through a house where something is always broken. You are also the one who tells him his brother is taking advantage of him, and reminds him about the school fees, and asks why he has not called the plumber. That is not unattractive. That is *real*. Real is what a shared life produces.

Whoever or whatever he is comparing you to has no school fees attached to it. She does not need anything repaired. She has never had to tell him a hard truth, and she never will, because she is not living inside the consequences with him. She gets him for two hours, at his best, in his good shirt.

Even where there is no woman at all, the comparison still runs — against a version of you from nine years ago, or against a life he imagines he might have had. He compares the woman he lives with to a woman who does not exist, and then feels quietly cheated.

And here is the cruelty: **you can feel yourself losing a competition you were never**

told you had entered.

What it looks like from where you are standing

Criticism becomes personal instead of practical. Before, it was “the soup is too salty.” Now it is “you always do this.” The complaint has stopped being about the thing and started being about you.

He becomes disproportionately irritated by ordinary things. Your laugh. How you speak to your mother on the phone. The way you fold his clothes. It is out of all proportion, and that is the point — irritation like that is rarely about the trigger. A man who is comparing needs reasons for the distance he has already created.

He praises other women in front of you. Usually harmlessly. A colleague who is very organised. Somebody's wife who has “really kept herself.” You feel the small cut and cannot object without looking insecure.

He references the past. “You used to be fun.” “You never used to nag like this.” What he is telling you, without meaning to, is that he has been comparing you to a memory.

He stops defending you. To his mother, to his sister, to his friends. Where he once stood between you and them, now he says nothing, and the silence is loud.

And what it does to you

This is the chapter I care about most, because this is where I lose women.

Under sustained comparison, a woman starts to audit herself. You catch your reflection sideways and flinch. You start reading other women in the room as competition. You change how you dress, how you speak, how much you laugh. You become careful. Your opinions get smaller. You stop saying the thing you actually think because the last three times you did, it went badly.

And slowly, without ever deciding to, you begin to shrink.

The most dangerous thing about the Comparison is not that he stops seeing you clearly. It is that you start seeing yourself through his distracted eyes.

Here is the trap in full. The very thing that first drew him — your energy, your certainty, your laugh, the way you took up space in a room — is being extinguished by your response to losing him. You are becoming smaller in order to be chosen, and the smallness is precisely what makes the drift complete.

I have watched brilliant, funny, formidable women turn into careful ghosts in their own homes over about eighteen months. Not one of them noticed it happening. Every one of them could tell me the exact moment they realised it had happened.

So let me say this as plainly as I can, and if you take nothing else from this book take this: **you cannot win a comparison by becoming less of yourself.** The way out is not to compete. It is to stop entering.

AM I IN THE COMPARISON?

- Has his criticism moved from what I do to who I am?
- Does he react to small things with irritation far beyond the size of the thing?
- Does he refer to a past version of me as though she were a better one?
- Has he stopped defending me to other people?
- Have I started changing myself — my looks, my speech, my opinions — hoping to be chosen again?
- Do I feel I am auditioning in my own house?

Three or more yes: you are in the Comparison, and the most urgent work is not on your marriage. It is on Step Three.

The Point Of No Return

It is not the day you find out about her. It is the day you reach for him and he does not reach back.

I named this stage carefully, and I want to be honest about the name, because “no return” sounds like a locked door and I do not believe in locked doors.

What I mean is this: it is the point at which the marriage stops being a relationship two people are in, and becomes an arrangement two people are maintaining. Return after that is possible. It is simply no longer automatic. It now requires a deliberate decision by both of you, and one of you has stopped making decisions about this marriage at all.

How it actually happens

Women expect this moment to be dramatic. It almost never is. Let me tell you how it usually goes, because when I describe it, women go very quiet.

After weeks or months of coldness, you decide to try. Not to fight — to *try*. You gather yourself. You cook the thing he loves, the one that takes three hours. You send the children to your sister. You wear something. You put on music from when you were dating. You have rehearsed a sentence in your head all afternoon, something like *I feel like we have lost each other and I want us back*.

You are not asking for much. You are opening a door.

And he looks up from his phone, mildly puzzled, and says:

“We are fine. Why are you doing this?”

Then he goes back to the phone.

That is it. That is the Point Of No Return. No shouting. No confession. Nothing you

could describe to anyone afterwards without it sounding like nothing at all.

But something enormous just happened. You made yourself vulnerable, deliberately, at some cost, and he declined the invitation without even recognising that one had been made. And a woman can survive a great deal — coldness, absence, even betrayal — but there is something specific that dies when she extends her hand and it is not taken.

Notice what is *not* in this scene. There is no other woman in it. This is why women who confirm an affair and women who never do so often end up in the same place. The wound is not the affair. The wound is being reached for and not received.

The signs you have arrived here

- **You have stopped bringing things up.** Not because they are resolved, but because you already know the shape of his response and it is not worth the cost.
- **The house runs perfectly.** Meals, fees, generator, church, birthdays. Two competent adults administering a household. No warmth anywhere in it.
- **He is polite.** Coldness has matured into courtesy. He says thank you. This is somehow worse than rudeness, and you cannot explain why to anybody.
- **You perform in public.** At the wedding, at church, in front of his colleagues, you are a couple. In the car home, silence, and neither of you finds it strange any more.
- **You have started imagining a life without him** — not as a threat, not in anger, but in idle moments, the way you would daydream about a place you might one day visit.
- **You are lonely in a way that has stopped being painful.** This is the most serious sign in the whole book. Pain means you are still connected. When the loneliness goes numb, you have begun to leave too.

What I want you to understand about this stage

Two things, and they pull in opposite directions. Hold both.

The first: **this is serious**. I am not going to soften it. If you are here, the gentle version of the work will not be enough. You cannot fix the Point Of No Return with better cooking and more patience. What is required is directness — a real conversation, a real line, and a real decision. That is Steps Five, Six and Seven, and they are the hardest pages in this guide.

The second: **this is not the end**. I have seen marriages come back from here. Not by magic and not quickly. They came back because one person — nearly always the woman, because she is the one who reads books like this — stopped drifting and started deciding.

Something important happens at this stage. Because the marriage is already at its lowest, your risk is at its lowest too. There is very little left to protect. A woman at Drift One is often too frightened to speak plainly, because things are still “alright” and she does not want to disturb them. A woman at Drift Four has nothing to disturb. She is free to be completely honest, possibly for the first time in years.

That freedom is worth more than you think.

AM I AT THE POINT OF NO RETURN?

- Have I reached for him — genuinely, vulnerably — and been waved away?
- Have I stopped raising things because I already know how it will go?
- Do we perform in public and go silent in the car?
- Has the loneliness stopped hurting?
- Do I imagine a life without him in calm moments rather than angry ones?

Two or more yes: you are here. Do not despair, and do not go slowly. Go to Step One today, and do not skip Steps Five and Six when you reach them.

Where Are You Right Now?

Before you read another page, put your marriage on the map. Everything after this depends on it.

Take your notebook. Do not do this in your head — the head negotiates, the page does not.

Go back through the four checklists and write down the stage where you answered yes most often. If you sit between two stages, always take the later one. Women underestimate, consistently and by exactly one stage. I have stopped being surprised by it.

Now write three things

One. The stage. Write the sentence out fully: *My marriage is in the Substitution*. Say it aloud once. It will feel strange. It will also be the first time the thing in your chest has had a name, and you may find that you can breathe slightly better afterwards.

Two. When it started. Not the date you noticed — the date it began. Most women, when they sit still and think, can point to a season. A pregnancy. A job loss. A move. The year his father died. Write it.

Three. What you have been doing about it. Be exact and be unkind to yourself here, because this is the one place where flattery would cost you. Have you been chasing — more effort, more talking, more cooking, more initiating? Have you been freezing — matching his coldness and waiting? Have you been investigating? Have you been pretending?

Whatever you write for number three, understand that it has not been working. If it were working, you would not be on this page. That is not an accusation. Every one of those responses is a reasonable thing for a frightened woman to do. They simply do

not reverse a drift, because they are all reactions to him rather than decisions of your own.

What Part Two is going to ask of you

The seven steps are not seven things to make him do. They are seven things you do — some inside yourself, some in the room, some directly to him.

They are sequenced. Please respect the sequence. Step Five is a real conversation, and women want to run straight to it, because talking feels like doing something. But a conversation held before Steps One to Four has been done is a conversation held by an anxious woman who is trying to secure a result. He will feel that, and it will fail, and then you will believe the conversation itself does not work.

Steps One to Four take roughly three to four weeks between them. Yes, that is slow. It is faster than the two years it took to arrive here.

One last thing before we begin.

From this page on, I am going to stop asking you to think about what he is feeling. You have done nothing but that for months. You have become an expert in the inner life of a man who has not asked you a question since March.

We are turning the light around now.

PART TWO

The Seven Steps

Seven things you do, in an order that matters.

*Not seven feelings. Not seven prayers, though
pray if you pray.*

STEP ONE

The Pause

Before you can do anything new, you must stop doing the thing that is making it worse.

Every drift has an engine, and the engine is the chase.

Somewhere in the last months you became the one who carries the marriage. You initiate the conversations. You plan the outings. You reach for him in bed. You ask what is wrong. You send the message and wait to see how long the reply takes. You are, in effect, holding a rope and pulling, while the man on the other end of it quietly lets go a little more each week.

Step One is putting the rope down.

Not in anger. Not as a punishment. Not as a trick to make him miss you — if you do it as a trick, it will not work, because you will be watching him for a reaction the whole time and he will feel the watching.

You put it down because the pulling is not working, it is costing you enormously, and it is teaching him something terrible: that no matter how little he brings, the marriage will still be carried.

What the Pause actually means

For the next fourteen days:

- **Stop initiating the “what is wrong with us” conversation.** You have had it. It went nowhere. Having it again from a position of anxiety will not go anywhere either. There is a proper version of this conversation and it is Step Five, and you are not ready for it yet.
- **Stop over-explaining yourself.** Notice how much of your speech has become

justification — where you were, why you spent that, why you were on the phone. You are behaving like someone under suspicion. Stop.

- **Stop the interrogation, gentle or otherwise.** No “who was that?”, no “why are you late?”, no reading his face when he walks in. You are gathering information you cannot use.
- **Stop the extra effort aimed at earning warmth.** The elaborate meals, the constant availability, the perfect house. Keep what you do because you like it. Drop what you are doing as payment.
- **Stop checking.** The phone, the location, the receipts. Every check costs you something and buys you nothing you can act on.

And here is what you do *not* do, because women overshoot this step badly.

You do not go cold. You do not punish. You do not stop cooking or speaking or being courteous. This is not the silent treatment — that is just the drift with your hand on the wheel instead of his.

You remain warm and completely normal. You answer when spoken to, pleasantly. You simply stop supplying the extra energy that has been holding up a structure he stopped holding up months ago.

THE DIFFERENCE, IN ONE LINE

Punishing: I will withdraw so that you feel my absence and come back.

Pausing: I will stop spending energy that is not working, so that I have something left for the work that will.

He may not be able to tell the difference from the outside. You will know, and you are the one this matters for.

What will happen when you do this

Three possibilities. Each of them is information you did not have before.

He notices, quickly. Within a week or two he asks if you are alright, or he starts initiating small things. This is common and it is a good sign. It means the marriage still has a working nervous system. When it happens, do not flood him with relief and immediately resume the chase. Respond warmly, and stay paused.

He does not notice at all. Nothing changes. This is painful and it is the most likely outcome at Drift Three or Four. It is also the clearest confirmation you will ever get of how much you have been carrying. Note it. Keep going.

He is relieved. The house is more comfortable for him now that nobody is asking for anything. Rare, but it happens, and it tells you something important about how far this has gone.

Whatever happens, do the full fourteen days. The Pause is not a test with a result. It is a clearing of the ground, and you cannot build the next six steps on a field you are still ploughing.

DO THIS NOW

Write today's date in your notebook and the words *Pause begins*.

Under it, list the three specific things you do most often to close the gap. Name them exactly — “I text him around 2pm to see if he replies,” not “I try too hard.”

Those three are what you are putting down for fourteen days.

STEP TWO

The Clear Eye

You cannot act well on a story. You can only act well on the truth, and right now you are carrying both without knowing which is which.

There are two things in your head at the moment, and they are wearing the same clothes.

The first is what you have observed. Facts. Things that happened, that you saw or heard, that would survive being read aloud to a calm stranger.

The second is the story you have built to explain the facts. And your story is doing something you have not noticed: it is running constantly, in the background, all day, and it is exhausting you more than the marriage is.

The exercise

Take a fresh page. Draw a line down the middle. On the left write **What I know**. On the right write **What I have decided it means**.

Then empty your head onto the page. Everything.

An example, from a woman I sat with:

WHAT I KNOW

He came home at 9pm on Thursday. He said he was at the office.

His phone is face-down now. It did not used to be.

He has not touched me in six weeks.

He laughed at something on his phone on Sunday.

There was a receipt in the car from a restaurant on the island for two people.

WHAT I HAVE DECIDED IT MEANS

He was with her.

He is hiding her.

He finds me disgusting since the second baby.

She makes him happy in a way I cannot.

He took her to dinner while I was at home with his children.

Look at what happened there. The left column is thin, factual and survivable. The right column is a full and detailed nightmare, and it is the one she has been living inside for four months.

Notice especially the third line. “He has not touched me in six weeks” became “he finds me disgusting.” There is nothing in the left column that supports that. She built it herself, out of fear, and then she has been carrying it around as though he had said it to her face.

This is what the story does. It takes real, painful, limited facts and inflates them into something total and unbearable — and then you respond to the inflated version, which is why your reactions have started to seem excessive even to you.

The two questions

For every line in your right-hand column, ask:

Would this survive a stranger? If a sensible woman who did not love you and did not hate him read the left column only, would she arrive at this conclusion? If not, it is a story. It may still turn out to be true. It is not yet knowledge.

What else could explain the left column? Force yourself to produce two other explanations for each fact, even ones you do not believe. This is not to excuse him. It is to break the automatic path your mind now takes from any small fact to the worst conclusion.

The question you are actually asking

Underneath every right-hand column I have ever read is one question, and it is almost never about her.

Am I still wanted?

That is what you want to know. That is what the checking, the analysing, the three-in-the-morning thinking is all trying to answer. And I want you to see clearly that no amount of investigation will ever answer it, because it is not an information problem. You could read every message on his phone tonight and you would still not know, tomorrow, whether you are wanted.

That question gets answered in Step Five, by asking. Not before, and not by searching.

DO THIS NOW

Do the two-column exercise fully. It takes about forty minutes and most women cry somewhere in the middle. That is fine.

When you are done, tear out or cover the right-hand column and read only the left, slowly, twice.

That column — and only that column — is your actual situation. Everything else is weather you generated yourself. You will be surprised how much lighter the real thing is than the version you have been carrying.

STEP THREE

The Return

Before you try to bring him back, bring yourself back. This is not self-help decoration. It is the load-bearing step.

If you only do one step in this book, do this one.

I say that knowing it will disappoint you. You came here for him. You want the words that reopen him, and this chapter is about you, and you are thinking that you do not have the time or the heart for yourself right now.

But consider what has actually happened to you.

Somewhere in the drift, you began to shrink. You stopped saying the thing you thought. You dropped the friendships that took energy. You stopped the small thing you used to do on Saturdays. You became careful around your own husband, monitoring your tone, choosing your moment, reading the room before you spoke.

You did all this in order to be easier to love. It is the most natural instinct in the world and it is completely backwards, because **nobody has ever fallen back in love with a smaller version of the person they lost interest in.**

What returning actually means

Not a new hairstyle. Not the gym, unless you want the gym. I am not talking about becoming more attractive to him — that is still organising yourself around his gaze, which is the same disease with better packaging.

I mean the recovery of your own centre. Becoming, once again, a woman with a life of her own that she is inside of, rather than a woman standing at the window of a marriage waiting for the weather to change.

Three areas. Choose one thing in each.

Something that is yours. An activity, entirely unconnected to him or the children, that you do for your own sake. It does not have to be impressive. Sewing. A choir. Swimming on Saturday mornings. A course. The trade you abandoned when the second child came. One thing, and it must be regular, because the regularity is what rebuilds the self, not the activity.

Someone who is yours. One friendship, revived properly. Not to complain to about him — in fact, choose someone you do not usually discuss him with. During a drift women's friendships quietly narrow until every conversation is about the marriage, and then the friendships become part of the problem, because you are living inside the subject even when you leave the house. You need one person with whom you are simply yourself.

Something that is only for you. Small and physical and regular. Twenty minutes with the door closed. A walk without your phone. Sitting outside in the morning before the house wakes. Something that says to your own nervous system: *I am still here, and I am worth twenty minutes.*

Why this changes the marriage

Two reasons, and the second is the one that surprises people.

The first is what it does to the atmosphere. A woman with her own centre of gravity is a fundamentally different presence in a house. She is not waiting. She is not scanning. She has news of her own. She laughs at things that have nothing to do with him. A withdrawn man who has grown used to a wife who watches him will notice a wife who is occupied — not because he is being manipulated, but because the room is genuinely different, and human beings turn towards life.

The second reason matters more.

You are, at some point in the next weeks, going to have a difficult conversation with your husband, and possibly make a serious decision about your marriage. The quality of both depends entirely on whether you are speaking from need or from ground.

A woman with nothing but the marriage will beg, because she has to. She cannot afford the truth. She will accept a vague answer because a clear one might be unbearable.

A woman with a life of her own can afford to be honest. She can ask a direct question and survive the answer. She can say what she needs and mean it, because she is not negotiating for her entire existence.

You are not building a life outside your marriage in order to leave it. You are building one so that you can stand up straight inside it.

Expect resistance from yourself

Most women stall here, and the reasons are always the same, so let me answer them in advance.

"There is no time." There is. There is the time you currently spend analysing him, reconstructing conversations, checking things, and lying awake. That is several hours a week. This step is largely a transfer of existing spending.

"It feels selfish while my marriage is dying." You have tried selfless for two years. It has produced a woman with nothing left and a husband who does not notice. Try this instead.

"He will think I do not care." He currently thinks nothing is wrong at all. That is the problem we are solving.

DO THIS NOW

Write the three headings — something mine, someone mine, something only for me — and put exactly one item under each.

Then put the first one in your calendar this week. Not “soon.” A day and a time.

Do it for four weeks before you judge whether it is working. Give it the same patience you have given his silence.

STEP FOUR

The Temperature

You cannot talk a cold room warm. You have to change what he walks into.

Now we turn towards him — but carefully, and not yet with words.

Every home has a temperature, and it is set long before anybody speaks. It is in the first three seconds after he comes through the door. It is in what your face does when he walks into the kitchen. It is in what the evening feels like to be inside of.

And in a drifted marriage, that temperature has usually become one of two things: **tense** — something is coming, a question, a complaint, a mood — or **vacant** — two people processing an evening in the same building.

Both teach him the same lesson, every single night: *there is nothing here for me*. And a man who learns that lesson repeatedly will keep finding reasons to arrive later.

Please understand what I am not saying. I am not telling you to be pleasant so that he will love you. I am not telling you to swallow what you feel and perform sweetness. That is the shrinking again, and we have just spent a whole chapter undoing it.

I am saying something narrower and more practical: the drift lives in a hundred tiny daily moments, and it can only be reversed in the same currency. Not one grand conversation. A hundred small temperature corrections.

The four corrections

One. The first ninety seconds.

Whatever happens in the first minute and a half of him entering the house sets the entire evening. At the moment, that minute probably contains a problem — the generator, what his mother said, what the school sent. Or it contains nothing at all, because you have stopped bothering.

For the next month, protect those ninety seconds. Look up. Look at his face, not at his hands or his phone. Say something ordinary and human. Let the problems wait ninety seconds. They will keep.

This sounds trivially small. It is the single most effective thing in this chapter.

Two. Approach without agenda.

Count how many of your interactions with him this week carried a request, a complaint, a question about the marriage, or a piece of admin. For most women it is nearly all of them.

He has therefore learned that being available to you costs him something. So he makes himself less available. It is not personal — it is arithmetic.

Introduce contact with no attachment. A funny thing you saw. A hand on his shoulder as you pass, with no conversation following it. Sitting in the same room doing your own thing without needing him to engage. You are teaching him, slowly, that proximity to you is safe again.

Three. Restore one thing you used to have.

Every marriage had a small ritual that died without ceremony. Sunday breakfast that lasted an hour. Walking to buy something in the evening. The programme you watched together on Thursdays. Sitting outside after the children slept.

Find one. Restore it quietly, without announcing that you are restoring it and without asking him to commit to anything. Just start doing it. Be there. If he joins, good. If he does not, you are still doing something you enjoy, which is Step Three continuing.

Four. Change what you notice out loud.

In a drift, both people become expert in each other's failures. You could list what he no longer does without pausing to think.

For one month, say the good things aloud when they happen, in a small ordinary voice. Not praise for basic duties — that is patronising and he will hear it. Just noticing. *“Thank you for sorting that out.” “You handled her well.”*

A withdrawn man is usually carrying a private conviction that he is failing at home. Every time you notice something real, you loosen that conviction slightly, and it is the conviction that keeps him away.

THE WARNING ON THIS STEP

Do this for four weeks without measuring. Do not count his responses. Do not keep score. The moment this becomes a transaction — I have been warm for eight days and he has given nothing back — it stops working, because resentment is visible from across a room.

You are changing the climate. Climates do not respond to individual days.

And if after several weeks the temperature has genuinely changed and he has not moved at all, that too is an answer, and you will carry it into Steps Five and Six.

STEP FIVE

The Opening

One conversation. Not a confrontation, not a plea. The most important twenty minutes of this entire guide.

You have paused the chase. You have separated fact from story. You have begun coming back to yourself. You have warmed the room.

Now you speak.

And I want to prepare you properly for this, because you have probably attempted a version of this conversation several times already and it has gone badly, and you have concluded that talking does not work with your husband.

Talking works. The versions you attempted did not, and there are reasons.

Why the previous attempts failed

They happened at night, after an incident, when you were already full. They opened with an accusation, or a question that was an accusation wearing a dress — “do you even love me any more?” They asked him to explain himself, which put him on trial, and a man on trial defends rather than reveals. And they were driven by a need for reassurance, which meant that anything short of complete reassurance felt like failure, so the conversation always ended worse than it began.

The rules of the Opening

Choose the time deliberately. Daytime or early evening. Not after a fight, not in bed, not when either of you is tired or has been drinking. Saturday morning is often the best twenty minutes available to a married woman.

Tell him it is coming. This one surprises women, but it changes everything. Say, earlier: “There is something I would like to talk about with you on Saturday morning. It is not a

fight. I just want twenty minutes.” An ambushed man defends himself. A warned man arrives prepared, and often relieved.

Speak about yourself, not about him. Every sentence should describe what you have experienced, not what he has done. Not *“you have been ignoring me for months.”* Rather: *“I have been lonely in this house for a long time.”* The first is a charge he must answer. The second is a truth he cannot argue with, and the difference in what happens next is enormous.

Be short. Say your piece in under two minutes. Women who have waited months to speak often talk for twenty, and by minute six he has stopped hearing anything. Two minutes, then stop, and let the silence do its work. The silence is not empty. Do not fill it.

Ask one open question, then close your mouth.

Do not seek a promise. You are not here to extract a commitment today. You are here to open a door and find out whether he will walk through it. Anything he promises under emotional pressure on a Saturday morning is worth nothing by Wednesday.

A shape you can use

THE OPENING, IN FOUR PARTS

1. Name the distance without blame.

"Something has changed between us over the last year or two. I do not think either of us did it on purpose. But we have become like two people who live in the same house."

2. Say what it has been like for you.

"I have been very lonely. Not because you are cruel — you are not. Because I miss you, and you are here."

3. Say what you want, plainly and without apology.

"I do not want us to spend the next ten years like this. I want my husband back, and I am willing to do my part."

4. Ask, and then be quiet.

"What has it been like for you?"

That last question is the whole thing. Not *are you cheating*. Not *do you still love me*. Not *why have you been like this*.

What has it been like for you?

It is the first question in perhaps two years that has invited him to say something without defending himself first. Men who have gone silent very often speak when they are finally asked something that is not an accusation. Give him room. He may take a long time to begin. Let him.

What his answer tells you

There are broadly three, and each one is a signal you can act on.

He opens. Awkwardly, incompletely, perhaps with things that are hard to hear about your own part. This is the best outcome by far, and your only job is to listen without defending. Do not correct his version. Do not produce your evidence. Just listen, and

thank him, and let it be the first of several conversations rather than the last one.

He deflects but stays. “I don't know.” “It is just work.” “I have a lot on my mind.” He is not opening, but he has not walked out. This is very common and it is not failure. Say: *“Alright. I have said what I needed to say. I would like us to talk again.”* Then leave it. Many men come back to the subject days later, on their own terms, in the car or at night, when nobody is looking at them.

He refuses entirely. He is irritated. He tells you that you are imagining things, or that you are always looking for problems, or he simply gets up and leaves the room. That is your answer, and it is a serious one. He is not merely distant — he is unwilling. Take it to Step Six.

IF YOU NEED TO ASK ABOUT ANOTHER WOMAN

Sometimes you must. If so, ask directly, once, calmly, and separately from the Opening — not tangled into it.

“I need to ask you something and I want the truth, whatever it is. Is there someone else?”

Then stop. Do not present what you found. Do not build a case. You are not a lawyer and this is not a trial — you are his wife asking a question you have every right to ask.

Watch what he does with it. Then decide what you believe, knowing that you may never get proof, and that you are allowed to act on what you believe.

The Line

A boundary is not a threat and it is not an ultimatum. It is simply a description of what you will do.

Here is where women get frightened, so let me define the thing carefully before we go further.

An ultimatum is about controlling him. *If you do not change, I will leave.* It hands him the power to decide whether you follow through, and it usually ends with a woman making a threat she cannot keep, which teaches him that her words mean nothing.

A line is about you. It is a plain description of what you will and will not participate in, and it requires nobody's agreement. You do not negotiate a line. You do not announce it dramatically. You live it.

Why you need one

Because at this point, one of two things is true.

Either he responded to the Opening, in which case the marriage is now in motion and you need a line so that the change does not quietly reverse in eight weeks.

Or he did not respond, in which case you have now confirmed something significant: this is not a man who is temporarily lost. This is a man who has been told plainly that his wife is lonely and has decided to do nothing. That is a different situation, and it requires a different posture from you.

Without a line, women in the second situation do a terrible thing. They go back to waiting. Another year passes. Then another. They are still standing at the same window, only older and quieter.

How to build yours

Decide what you will not carry. Not what he must do — what you will no longer participate in. Some examples:

- “I will not keep pretending in front of people that we are fine.”
- “I will not be spoken to that way in front of the children.”
- “I will not share my bed with a man who is involved with someone else.”
- “I will not spend another year in a marriage where I am the only one trying.”

Make sure it is yours to enforce. Test each line against one question: *can I do this without his cooperation?* “He must come home by seven” fails the test — you cannot enforce it. “I will not keep dinner waiting past eight” passes — that is entirely within your hands.

Say it once, calmly, and then simply live it. Lines lose their weight through repetition. Say it once, without drama, without a raised voice, without a warning attached. Then act accordingly, every time, quietly.

Keep it small enough to actually keep. One line you hold completely is worth more than five you announce and abandon. The purpose is not to punish him. The purpose is to re-establish, in your own body, the fact that your words correspond to reality.

ON THE BIGGEST LINE

Some women's line is separation, and I will not pretend otherwise or tell you it is unthinkable.

If that is yours, do not say it until you mean it completely, have thought about the practicalities, and are prepared to act. A separation announced and not carried out does more damage to your standing than anything else in this book.

And if you are considering it seriously, speak to someone qualified — a counsellor, a lawyer, a person you trust with real judgement. Not your WhatsApp group. Not his family. Someone who can help you think.

What a line does to a marriage

Something happens when a woman stops threatening and starts simply being clear.

The marriage becomes real again. For months or years it has been running on a fiction — that everything is fine, that this is normal, that nothing needs to be decided. A line ends the fiction. It says: this is a real thing, with real terms, and I am a real person inside it.

Some men wake up at exactly this point. Not because they are threatened, but because for the first time they perceive that the marriage has an edge, and that the woman inside it is somebody with a spine rather than a fixture of the household.

And some men do not wake up. That is painful, but it is not wasted. You have learned something you needed to know, and you learned it in five months rather than five years.

The Decision

At some point you must stop waiting to see what he does, and decide what you are going to do.

This is the last step and the shortest chapter, because the work of it is not on the page.

Every woman in a drifted marriage is, whether she knows it or not, waiting for the situation to declare itself. For him to change, or to confess, or to leave, or for something to happen that makes the decision for her. Waiting feels responsible. It feels patient and faithful and wifely.

It is none of those things. It is simply a way of not choosing, and the years pass at exactly the same speed either way.

So here, some months after you began, you decide. Not forever. For a defined period.

Three honest doors

Rebuild. You have seen enough movement — he opened, he is trying, the temperature has changed — and you choose to build on it. If this is your door, name a period. Six months. In that time you invest fully and without keeping score, and you agree with yourself to review it honestly at the end.

Hold, with conditions. You do not have enough to rebuild on, but you are not ready to end it — because of the children, because of what you have built, because you are not certain. This is a legitimate door, but only if you make it deliberate. Name a period — six months, a year — and name what you will need to see. Write it down. The difference between holding and drifting is that holding has a date on it.

Release. You have done the work, you have spoken plainly, you have held your line, and he has shown you clearly who he intends to be. Choosing to end a marriage is not a failure of faith or effort. Sometimes it is the last honest act available to a woman who

has already been honest about everything else.

If this is your door, go slowly and get real help — legal, financial, practical. Do not decide it in one bad night. But do not spend three more years pretending you have not decided it either.

What I want for you

I want you to notice what all three doors have in common.

In every one of them, *you* are the one who chose. Not him, by default, through silence. Not fear. Not your mother, or the church, or what people will say.

That is the whole point of these seven steps. Not to make a man love you — nobody can put that in a book. But to take a woman who has spent two years being acted upon and return her to the position of somebody who acts.

The drift is not really about a man growing distant. It is about a woman slowly handing over the authorship of her own life. Every step in this book has been about taking the pen back.

Whatever door you walk through, walk through it standing up.

DO THIS NOW

Write the date, the door you are choosing, and the period.

Then write one sentence: *I will review this honestly on [date].*

Put it somewhere you will find it. Then go and live, rather than watch.

PART THREE

Beginning

*Seven steps is a great deal to hold at once. So
here is only the next week.*

Your First Seven Days

You will not do all seven steps this week. You will do the first two, properly, and that is more than you have done in a year.

Women close a book like this feeling motivated and then, by Thursday, the house has swallowed it. So let us make the next seven days small enough that ordinary life cannot defeat them.

Day One — Name it

Get the notebook. Write the stage your marriage is in, in a full sentence. Write when it began. Write what you have been doing about it.

Then write today's date and the words *Pause begins*, and list the three things you are putting down for fourteen days.

That is all. Twenty minutes. Do not attempt to speak to him about anything today.

Day Two — The two columns

Do the Clear Eye exercise. Left column: what I know. Right column: what I have decided it means. Empty your head onto the page.

Then read the left column alone, twice, slowly. Sit with the size of the real thing rather than the size of the story.

Day Three — Choose your return

Write your three items: something mine, someone mine, something only for me.

Then do one thing today. Not plan it — do it. Send the message to the friend. Look up the class. Walk for twenty minutes without your phone. The first act matters more than its size.

Day Four — The ninety seconds

Today, protect the first ninety seconds when he walks in. Look up. Look at his face. Say something ordinary and human. Hold every problem for ninety seconds.

Then, in the evening, write one line in your notebook about what happened. Not whether it worked — what happened.

Day Five — Contact without agenda

One interaction today that asks for nothing. A hand on his shoulder as you pass. A funny thing you saw, shared and then dropped. Sitting in the same room reading your own thing.

Notice how strange it feels. That strangeness is a measurement of how long it has been.

Day Six — Rest, and hold the pause

Nothing new today. Simply keep the pause. No chasing, no checking, no explaining yourself, no over-effort.

By now you will feel the pull to break it — to ask him what is wrong, to send the message and watch for the reply. That pull is the exact habit we are undoing. Feel it and do not obey it.

Day Seven — Look back and look forward

Read what you wrote on Day One. Then write half a page answering three questions honestly.

- What did I learn about my marriage this week?
- What did I learn about myself?
- What is the one thing I will keep doing next week?

Then plan week two: continue the pause to fourteen days, continue Step Three and Step Four, and mark on the calendar the Saturday when you intend to have the Opening.

IF THE WEEK GOES BADLY

Some weeks fall apart. A child gets sick. He says something that knocks the wind out of you. You break the pause on Tuesday and cry on Wednesday.

That is not failure and it does not mean starting again. Pick it up on the next day that is available to you. The only version of this that fails is the one you abandon entirely, and that is a decision, not an accident.

A Last Word From Dede

I want to leave you with something that has nothing to do with steps.

When women reach the end of this guide, most of them ask me a version of the same question. *Dede, will it work? Will he come back?*

I never answer it, and not because I am being clever. I do not know your husband. I do not know what he is carrying, what he has done, or what he is capable of choosing. Anybody who promises you an outcome for eight thousand naira is selling you comfort, and comfort is not what you came for.

But I can tell you what I have seen, over many years and a great many women.

I have seen marriages that everybody had written off — including the woman inside them — become warm again, slowly, unglamorously, over about a year, because one person stopped drifting and started deciding.

I have also seen marriages end, after all of this work was done properly, and I have watched those women walk out of them differently than they would have. Not bitter. Not broken. Clear. They knew they had not left anything unsaid or untried, and that knowledge carried them for years afterwards.

What I have never seen — not once — is a woman regret becoming herself again.

That is the part that is not up to him. Whatever he chooses, the woman who does this work gets herself back. Her voice. Her friendships. Her Saturday mornings. Her ability to say a true thing out loud in her own house. Nobody can take that back from you afterwards, and no marriage, however it ends, can charge you for it.

So do the work for the marriage, yes. Do it wholeheartedly, and hope.

But do it, most of all, for the woman who put down eight thousand naira at eleven

o'clock at night because she could not carry the silence one more week. She deserves better than what she has been living in. Whether the better version comes with him or without him is not yet written.

Start on Monday. Do Day One.

With all my heart,

— *Dede Okeke*

ALSO YOURS

Your Five Bonus Guides

These came with your copy. Each one goes deeper into a part of the journey this guide could only touch.

The Drift Diary

A simple daily record that helps you notice small changes in your marriage before they become big ones. Use it alongside the Pause and the Clear Eye — it is where the two-column exercise lives, and where you will track what actually happens rather than what you feared would happen.

Words That Close The Gap

Real scripts. The exact words to use in the hardest conversations — the Opening, the direct question, the line, the moment he says something that takes your breath away and you need a sentence that is not begging and not war.

Coming Back To Warmth

Small daily rituals to rebuild closeness with your husband, one ordinary day at a time. This is Step Four expanded into a month of practical, unremarkable, deeply effective habits.

If She's Already There

For the woman who fears another woman has already stepped in. What to do first, what never to do, how to ask, how to decide what you believe, and how to hold on to yourself whatever the answer turns out to be.

The Man Behind The Silence

Why men pull away, explained properly, so that you are not just guessing. What is happening inside a withdrawn man, what he is unable to say, and what actually reaches him — and what never will.

ONE LAST INSTRUCTION

Do not read all five this week. Read the main guide first and start Day One.

Then take *The Man Behind The Silence* next, because understanding lowers the temperature of everything else. Keep *Words That Close The Gap* beside you for Step Five.

The others will be there when you need them.