

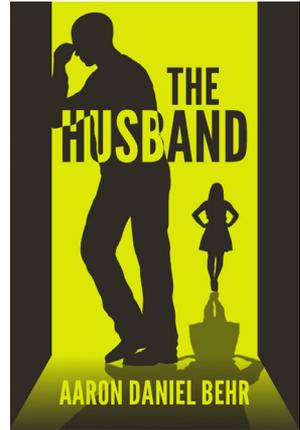
**THE
HUSBAND**

AARON DANIEL BEHR



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This book is dedicated to Dan and Coralee Behr. They believed in me when no one else would and have never stopped loving me.

My brothers Andrew, Adam, Dillon Sprague who have all, at times, carried the mantle of Superhero in my life.

To God, He'll never leave nor forsake me. He'll always love and cherish me. He's victorious yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Editor's Note

What you are about to read is based on actual events, recounted through the lens of the author's memory.

This narrative is of course biased, flawed, broken, incomplete, imperfect. The author is a human being.

We live in a world of competing perspectives. Broken, flawed, biased perspectives. In so many cases, the truth is hidden in the confluence of these voices.

In divorce, the husband's voice is most likely to be omitted. A man is 39% more likely to commit suicide after a divorce than a woman. Our support systems and cultural values are largely skewed to support women through a divorce.

If we are to address the divorce epidemic, we need to hear all of the voices. We need to challenge our stereotypes of abuse and victimization. The Husband brings a new perspective to the table, and provides invaluable insight into the plight of the forsaken man.

PART ONE
THE BREAKING POINT

April 8, 2017 – Friday

The Husband stands at a sturdy 6'2", weighs 220 pounds, squats twice his bodyweight, benches over 350 pounds, has a broad muscular physique, and a heavy brow. He's smart. Not anything prizeworthy, but averagely good enough that he can, on special occasions, seem more intellectual than he is. He is thirty-four years old. He chooses baldness over thinning hair.

At this moment in The Husband's long and trial-filled life, he flips his hoodie over his head, shoves his hands into his pockets, and marches down a sparsely lit parking lot. At the end is his tiny black sedan. It's nearly six years old, but on just the right night, still has that brand-new-car smell. He climbs inside and takes a deep breath.

Alone on a Friday, he decided to drive an hour to Columbus to watch a late showing of a depressing movie, and now it is one in the morning. His thoughts are consumed by his wife, The Wife. Worry, like bugs, slowly begins to crawl on his skin.

As The Husband sits quietly inside his chilly car, he grips the wheel and fights back ruminations. He knows The Wife is close to her coworker, The Coworker, and is with him on a work trip that began Wednesday. He knows they have been texting outside of work about subjects unrelated to the job. However, The Wife continues to reassure The Hus-

band that she and The Coworker are accompanied by their boss, The Boss. That and her relationship with The Coworker is harmless, like a brother and sister relationship.

The Husband cannot shake this uneasy feeling from his racing thoughts. He went through something akin to this with The Ex in his first marriage. It reminds him of when The Ex would go to conferences, only to meet up with the man who would later be The Ex's new husband. But The Wife would never do something like that. He loves The Wife and she loves him.

The Husband picks up his phone and unlocks it. Its low light is the only thing that illuminates the small front seat. The Wife's last message is generic. Not a "goodnight" or a "take care." It holds only a general and insincere concern, like all her messages as of late. Nerves and an intensely beating heart tell The Husband to dial her. Tonight is her last night. She will be on the road the next day and two other men will be there to drive. There is no reason why she can't talk now.

Many years ago, before she became The Wife, she would stay up talking to him as he returned from work in Columbus. It is an hour drive so there's no reason why she wouldn't now. The Husband acts on his compulsion and dials. There's no answer. He leaves a message. She calls him in the middle of the message. He tries to express himself from behind a foreboding fear.

The Wife whispers, "Hello?"

"Hey." He doesn't know what to say. There's a heavy weight on his

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chest and shoulders. It's hard to breathe and talk. He decides to start driving, fidget, and get moving so he can talk. "How are you?"

"Sleeping." Still in a whisper she continues, "Are you OK?"

"Yeah, I um..." He tries to talk with the phone to his ear as he shifts his manual car. "I went to a movie."

"That's good."

Both are silent for a moment.

He holds the phone on his shoulder then manages the standard transmission as he enters the highway. "It was good. How was your night?"

"Good...but...I need to go."

"Why?" Third gear shifts into fourth.

She whispers, "I've got to leave tomorrow."

"But you aren't driving."

"I know...but I just need to get some rest."

"Sleep in the car on the way there." The Husband tries to sound confident but his countenance won't allow him. "You can keep me awake."

She sighs. "I'm too tired."

"I know but it'll be like when we were dating." He shifts into fifth and his poor car roars as it desperately tries to travel 70 mph. "Talk me home."

Her whispers become frustrated. "I really need to go."

"Why? I need to talk. I'm struggling with some things."

"We can talk tomorrow."

Tears build in The Husband's eyes. The center yellow lines blur

with headlight beams and black asphalt. “Why are you trying to get rid of me?”

Again, she sighs. “I’m not... I’m tired.”

“You’ve barely told me anything about your week.”

The Wife’s whisper is barely audible, “Tomorrow.”

“Why are you whispering?”

“I’m tired.”

His throat is bottlenecked by a lump preventing words from leaving his mouth. “Is someone there?”

“No. I need to get some sleep.”

“I need your help.”

The Wife is clearly annoyed. “Goodbye...I need to sleep.”

“Why? Why are you trying to get rid of me?” He starts to openly sob. “I’m your husband, why are you pushing me off the phone.” His mind screams at him that there is a man with her. That she is cheating, and it is The Coworker.

He does his best to quiet those thoughts. This is The Wife. This is the beauty that he loves with his entire person, all his being. To him she is the greatest thing on the earth. She is kind and good. She is smart and caring. She knows what he went through, the pain, the trauma he suffered under The Ex. He sacrificed so much for The Wife—rebuilt a home with her, took whatever job came along to make ends meet—he will do anything for her.

This is The Wife, the “in sickness and health, till death do us part”

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wife. The Ex was a fluke. This one is for real. She loves God. She loves The Husband. This is his workout buddy, The Wife for whom he cooks nearly every meal, The Wife for whom he put his own dreams on hold, so she could find her dream. This is The Wife who just got her perfect job after years of crying on his shoulder, leaning on him for support through career move after career move until she made it.

There is no way she is having an affair...

August 2011

The failed first marriage had The Husband feeling like a loser. He ignored it and began the harrowing task of rebuilding his life. The church he started attending had a weekend leadership enrichment retreat. The first full day, The Husband noticed an adorable girl with a heart-shaped face. She was wearing the only pair of trouser jeans left in the world, a baggy long-sleeve Ohio State shirt, and her brown hair was parted down the middle.

Honestly, she wasn't The Husband's type. She was short, way too skinny, and made no efforts to look beautiful. That fact strangely attracted him to her. Despite all the thrift store clothing, the 60s hair tucked behind tiny ears, and no makeup, she was gorgeous. He couldn't stop staring at her.

There was a sunrise in her smile, one that reminded him it's a new day with new hopes. Her eyes and her entire face were filled with happiness. She had an intoxicating laugh. The harder she laughed, the more she'd snort. It shook her entire body. It was authentic.

The retreat attendees played a game inside the pole barn sanctuary. There was a line of masking tape down the center of an old brown outdoor carpet. The game was simple. Its purpose was a "getting to know you" exercise. Everyone stood on the line. The Husband found himself at the front.

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Someone called out, “Step right if you’re a dog person. Step left if you’re a cat person.”

The Husband stepped left, turned around, and caught The Girl’s sunrise smile. Her eyes boldly met his. He felt himself returning the cheesiest grin. It sent tingling warmth through his veins as if she were his boyhood crush.

They all stepped into the center. The same person called, “Right for Pepsi. Left for Coke.”

The Husband stepped left, turned around, and there was The Girl. She bore the same overwhelming smile. Back to the center, they called out something else, and both The Husband and The Girl stepped right.

Their steps moved together more than not. When lunch rolled around, he knew he had to sit at her table and he did, directly across from her.

Each person introduced themselves as they shoveled cold-cut sandwiches into their mouths. It didn’t take long before The Girl’s attention was firmly glued to The Husband, and his to her.

He asked, “So tell me what you do?”

“I work at the Naz as sort of a donor.” She did this cute contorting of her eyebrows and continued, “It’s really handing out scholarships and asking for donors. How about you?”

He looked down at his barely eaten sandwich and poked it. “I work at a department store but it’s temporary. I’m looking for something better. I’ve got a bachelor’s in English and communication from the Naz,

which means my options for work are a little limited.” He chuckled.

“What’s your degree in?”

“I have a BS in social work and my master’s in social work administration.”

“You already have your master’s? Congrats.”

“Thanks.” She blushed.

At twenty-eight, he had to figure out if she was within age range to be a viable candidate. He tried to do the math, which was one of his weaknesses. She probably went to college at eighteen, four years in undergraduate school, two for the master’s, and she spent a year working at MVNU. She had to be about twenty-five. That wasn’t bad. “I was working on my master’s in English, but I really want to be a writer.”

“Yeah?” She leaned forward. “What’ve you written?”

“Fiction, novels.” He scooted closer to the edge of his metal folding chair. “I’ve written three.”

“Wow!” Honest interest was plastered on her face.

They went on to talk their lunch away and found as many moments as possible to hover near each other during the conference. It didn’t matter that his mad genius math was skewed and she was actually only twenty-one. The Husband left on a high. It didn’t matter that he had to drive an hour for work or that his manager was an even bigger jerk that evening.

The next day they sat next to one another in church and chatted. He could barely pay attention to the service. In one moment they all had

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their hands raised, in that cheerful “God scored a touchdown” sort of way. The Husband looked over to The Girl and thought to himself, *I want to be with this girl.*

Afterward, because he was deathly afraid to ask a girl like her out, he did something casual. “So, I um...” He picked at a hole in his jeans. “Was wondering, this movie came out that I want to see. You could join me for dinner and we could keep it simple.”

Her face sunk. “I um...I’ve sort of been talking to someone else.” She started picking at the ends of her fingers. “I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s OK...”

It wasn’t. In two days of interacting and a friend request online, she never once mentioned being in a relationship. He tried to laugh it off, but it nagged at him. That thought, that word: *Loser.*

A Long Time before April 8, 2017

The Husband began as The Boy who grew up in the small town of Mount Vernon, Ohio. He was the eldest of three brothers. His father was a professor working a dream job, and his mother was a college grad working to make ends meet. They attended church every Sunday morning and night as well as Wednesday evenings.

For The Boy, school was...difficult. He was constantly bullied, which led to fist fights. Every night and morning he fought an emotional battle to convince himself to go to school. He was sad, cried often, and feared being at school as well as church.

In the early nineties, school districts were handing out Ritalin like candy. Every child who had any behavioral problems was diagnosed with ADHD. To the authorities in The Boy's life, this was the answer to all his behavioral problems.

A psychologist determined that The Boy had a generalized anxiety disorder. They quickly put him on Buspar, patted him on the bum, and sent him back into the world. It worked, for a time, but The Boy was still depressed.

The psychiatrist's answer was to put The Boy on Prozac. By the fourth grade The Boy became The Zombie. He would shuffle into school, zone out into outer space, and shuffle back home. Friendless,

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he'd spend his evenings in his room with Legos or his favorite hobby, staring at a nice corner of the bedroom ceiling.

The Boy, now The Zombie, was still being bullied, but like a good zombie he stood and drooled as this happened. The teachers eventually saw this and took sympathy on him. Instead of letting The Zombie go out to recess, they sat him in a small cabinet with a book.

High on Buspar and Prozac, The Zombie was sure of one thing—there was something wrong with him. He was not normal. He'd sit in class and think that he would always be nothing, a loser. Up to this point, that's how he was treated, and the medication made him feel like nothing, dead. He was yearning for death.



By the end of fifth grade The Zombie wanted to be a boy again; he wanted to be normal. He stopped taking the pills. As his system detoxed he was in the most paranoid and aggressive state of his life. Within the first week of being off the meds, he found himself in the bathroom with two other boys.

It was one of those boys' restrooms that always smelled like fresh hot urine. The endless lines of grout between tiny blue squares of tile had turned brown and black from years of boys missing their target. A row of sinks ran parallel to three urinals and three toilets.

White tiles with gold and silver sprinkles covered half the wall, and ugly teal filled the rest. The ceilings were high. They were covered in some material that looked like white cotton if someone had thrown dirt

at it. On the farthest wall was a noisy heater with a frosted window behind it.

The Boy finished his business, zipped up his pants, and stepped out of the toilet stall. Two boys stood waiting for him as if it were some cliché eighties film. One was shorter than the other.

The Short One taunted, “You’re in the wrong restroom. The girls’ is across the hall.”

The Tall One thumbed in that direction.

The Boy lowered his head and pushed by them. His already ringing ears felt like they were on fire. The fast beating of his heart, which kept him from sleeping the night before, only picked up speed. He turned on the water and washed his hands.

Before he could finish, they were in his space.

The Tall One said to the shorter, “He’s such a retard.”

“I’m not a retard.” Anger swelled inside of The Boy. He sharply jerked his chin up and to the left a couple of times.

“Oh no?” The Shorter One flattened his palm and wildly slammed his thumb into his chest. “Duh...you act retarded to me...duh...”

Red surrounded The Boy’s vision. Not a thought passed his mind, and before he knew it, he had balled his right hand into a fist and whirled in one powerful motion. Knuckles met the center of The Short One’s face. That stopped his chest thumping.

The Short One screamed and grabbed his nose. He backed away from The Boy and kept wailing. The Tall One wound up his fist like he

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saw all the wrestlers on television do, but The Boy was quick. Someone started yelling from a distance.

Years of soccer gave him fast reflexes and a powerful right leg. He swung his foot toward the inside ankle of The Tall One's right leg. Foot met leg before The Tall One's fist had finished winding.

The Tall One did an awkward split and fell to his back with his right leg bent in an unnatural direction. The ring of his head hitting the blue tiles had barely sounded before The Boy drove his fist toward The Tall One's face.

The Tall One moved in time to take the blow to the side of his head. His body went slack. The yelling in the distance grew louder.

The Boy readied to return to The Short One before he finally registered the yell, "Stop! Stop it now!" The stentorian voice repeated The Boy's name along with those three words repeatedly.

It finally registered with The Boy. He stepped back from the two lying at his feet. The Tall One blinked his eyes to life. The Short One sat on the floor, rocking back and forth. Blood poured between the fingers covering his face.

The Boy finally made eye contact with the distant voice. It was his teacher, one of three male teachers at the school. He was a few feet away and flushed. The edge of his lips quivered, which twitched his nose. Tall and imposing, he had his arms spread out and his fists were ready to leap.

Everything that had happened flashed in replay in The Boy's mind.

It bashed him with dizziness. He thumped his palms into the sides of his head and began to shake it. Tears ran down his face. “I’m sorry... I didn’t mean to... They called me a retard... They called me a girl.”

The teacher angrily screamed at The Boy, “It doesn’t matter!”

“I felt like...like...”

He couldn’t articulate it at the time, but it was powerlessness, over himself, over the boys, as if he had no control over his actions.

The Principal had no choice but to expel The “Unwell” Zombie. The Mom and The Dad responded by choosing to never let The Boy return. They homeschooled him. The Mom eventually quit her soul-sucking job to teach all three of her boys full time. This was a financial blow to the family.

Often The Dad would ask him, “What were you thinking?”

“I don’t know.”

Then The Boy would grab the sides of his head and shake it. He was sure of one thing, he was a loser.

April 9, 2017 – Early Saturday

The Husband arrives at home around two in the morning. Yellow house lights combine with the streetlamp to illuminate the home clear as day. It has charcoal grey siding, purple shutters, and a matching plum-colored front door, which they painted together.

He wipes away the tears that he cried while he begged The Wife to stay on the line. The empty house greets him as coldly as The Wife remains. He shoulders the phone and opens the door. “What time are you leaving tomorrow?” He closes the heavy front door behind him, latches it, and walks down the narrow passage created by the back of the dirt-brown couch to his right and an antique dresser to his left.

“Checkout is eleven.”

“Why not sooner?” He turns on the lamp on top of the dresser, and moves to the hallway where he flips a switch to break the darkness. “You’ve got nothing going on tomorrow.”

“I don’t know.” She drops back to a whisper, “Our boss is slow in the mornings.”

The Husband’s insecurities ask again, “So your boss and coworker are sharing a room?”

“Yeah...are you home yet?”

“I’m home.” The bedroom light on the nightstand is already glow-

ing. He starts stripping down to his underwear. “Please stay with me until I climb into bed.”

“I need to get some sleep!” She sounds exasperated.

He pulls himself into the queen-size bed. The bedside lamp makes it too bright to sleep, but at this moment, the vastness of the empty bed only seems safe with her beside him or illuminated. He says, “In bed.”

“OK...get some sleep.”

“I’ll try...you too... Thanks for staying on the line. I love you.”

She says, “I miss you too,” but it is quiet and insincere. The phone beeps as she ends the call.

The Husband sets the phone underneath his chin. He stares at the bright bulb on top of the table. Tears pool in his eyes. This year he has hated himself and it has affected The Wife. He is sure of this. He knows he hasn’t been good at managing his anxieties and depression. He has let the pressure to make money, to be someone, rule him.

Every failure from a lost job, every turned down application fuels memories of the bullies and his teachers. They echo insults from the past. It’s as if his mind escapes for a moment into a room with a tall bookshelf. He pulls open a book and flips through pages of pictures with decorative captions. The pictures show all the bullies in his past and the captions are the insults they hurled at him.

The light of his phone clicks back on and his heart skips. There’s no message. He reaches for the lamp, turns it off. The glow of the phone lasts a minute and then it’s black. The hall light radiates into the room

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a little. In that moment, The Husband wishes for nothing more than The Wife to be in his arms. In that moment, he formulates a plan to get everything back on track.

They'll work this out, they have in the past. He is going to do everything in his power to make sure. He begs God for help, for strength, for change, for forgiveness, for everything he can think of, and then the morning sun washes into the room. He takes a deep breath and can smell her perfume in the empty bed next to him.

Somewhere around November 2016

The Husband learned he had a toxic goiter in his right thyroid. The doctor told him he had hyperthyroidism. Surgery was the best option. The thought terrified him.

Working as a substitute teacher and unable to find a job that wouldn't suck out his soul, there was pressure building in his household for him to make money. Holiday break was around the corner, which meant days he wasn't going to get paid.

It was a Saturday. The Husband was feeling particularly low. He ambled into the living room. Several burning candles smelled like cinnamon. The Wife was sitting on the couch that, along with the antique dresser, bottlenecked the foyer. The front bay windows beside the couch filled the room with heat and sunlight.

With her elbows on her knees, she turned her head to face him. There was no glow to her that day. Her hair was pulled back by a headband. She somberly said, "We're living outside of our budget."

"What? I've been working nearly every day." It was draining. Every day he stepped into the high school or middle school was another reminder that he had accomplished nothing with his life. He stopped writing, which was a calling God had given him at a young age. The only reason he worked out was because she did. "What do you want me to do?"

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She shrugged and flopped back against the couch. “I don’t know.” She started picking at the skin at the ends of her fingers.

“I’ve been applying for jobs.”

“I’ve been applying for jobs for you.” She turned her gaze up to him.

“What? Do you want me to work at a factory, second and third shifts like I did all throughout college?”

“No...” She returned her attention to her fingers. “You just need to apply yourself a little better.”

“OK.” The Husband’s shoulders sagged. “I mean, every job I apply for barely pays minimum wage. I don’t have the education you have. There’s nothing impressive about my resume. I mean...” He rubbed his forehead. “If you expected me to be the breadwinner, I won’t ever be, not in this town.”

“I’m not asking you to be the breadwinner.” She stopped picking and leaned forward over the laptop on the coffee table. “I can move some things around. It’s just...”

“What?”

She looked up at him; there was a cold indifference in her countenance. “My parents are very traditional. They expect you to be making money. That’s not what I expect.”

“I can’t.” He slouched then flipped over his palms as if he were asking for forgiveness. “I’m the worst I’ve ever been. I need help.”

She sighed. “What kind of help?”

“I don’t know.” His hand returned to his forehead. “I need a pill or

something. I just want to shut the thinking off so I can get up and do these soul-sucking jobs. Maybe I should find a therapist.”

She shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Look...I need help. I hate my life. I don’t know what the answer is anymore. I’ve worked sixty hours a week on minimum wage. You get to work your dream. I want the same. I can’t take another pointless job just for the paycheck.”

The Wife stared at him blankly, cold again. “Do whatever you want.” She grabbed her phone and started thumbing it. “You know, when you say you hate your life, you’re saying that you hate me.”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying at all.” He changed the tone of his voice to be more comforting and said, “I’m just saying I feel horrible. It’s not about you. It’s just...I hate this town...there’re no opportunities for me.”

“It’s not all about you. You hurt my feelings when you say you hate your life.”

The Husband walked closer and she was quick to tuck her phone under her thigh. He sat next to her. “I love you. Believe me, there’s no one I ever want to be married to but you.”

“I know.” She flopped back. “I love you too.”

“I’ll um...” He rubbed his throat. The lump hurt when he was the most stressed. “I’ll find a therapist. I don’t want to have to start taking meds. And then we can text our friend and see who she suggests as a surgeon in Columbus.”

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“I’ll text her. I can help find the surgeon.”

“Thank you.”

The next day, The Husband found a therapist. When it came to the surgery, they talked about it and The Wife decided that it would be best to wait until his parents returned from the Philippines. He was unsure about this decision.

In the meantime, The Wife learned that she had precancerous spots on her cervix. The Husband’s surgery was put aside indefinitely because The Wife’s was more important and they “couldn’t afford both.” The Wife’s surgery shook The Husband to his core. Just thinking about it threw him into panic over her safety.

Fast Forward to April 8, 2017 – Saturday

The Husband climbs out of bed, showers, and cleans the house. He throws the sheets in the laundry, does a couple loads, folds them, and puts them in the proper place. Around the middle of the day he runs to the store to get her favorite meal: sirloin steak, salad, and sweet potatoes. Somewhere around one, he receives a text from The Wife that reads, “We’re stopping for lunch. It’ll be an hour.”

The Husband does the math. The hotel is about four hours away. If they waited until the last minute to leave, eleven, stopped an hour or two for lunch, a rough estimate would put them in town at five or six. He replies, “Tell me when you get close and I’ll make dinner. Are you dropping your boss off first?” She was riding in The Coworker’s car.

Her reply, “Yeah, he’s on the way home.”

Around five o’clock he asks her if she is close. Her reply is short and devoid of character, like each of her replies her entire trip. “No.”

He tries to chat with her, but she takes forever to respond. This week she claimed to be too busy, today she claims she is getting carsick.

After seven she sends him a text that she is thirty minutes away, so he throws everything together. He bakes the potatoes into fries, grills the steaks, makes the salad, sets the table, and uncorks her favorite wine. His heart has been racing all day.

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At seven-forty-five, The Coworker's SUV rolls into the driveway. The Husband watches from the front window as The Coworker helps her get her suitcase from the trunk. They linger back there for a bit. Then they round the vehicle, side by side, smiling, glowing, and share a long goodbye.

Again, The Husband must fight the feelings of betrayal. Not The Wife. She would never do that to him. She knows that would devastate him. He swings open the door and gives her a gleeful welcome. The glow she showed her coworker turns to a blank stare.

The Husband takes her bags and says, "Dinner's ready. Did you have a good drive?" He reaches for a hug.

"It's OK." She breezes past him. "We had a big lunch."

He follows. "You got your boss dropped off?"

"Mhmm." From the other room, she says, "This looks good."

The Husband is sleep deprived. His heart is beating out of his chest. All his fears seem to rest in his legs. It's like trudging through mud to walk from the living room to the dining room. He takes his seat next to her at the end of the brand new high-top table.

The dining room is small. Images of wine bottles adorn the room. A sign hangs behind her. It reads, "God, bless this house."

They try to eat but neither seems to have an appetite. She asks about his day. He tells her everything he did. She doesn't seem to care. The Husband says, "I think we need to talk. I know I've been real depressed lately and I've had an anxious week, but I feel like something's going on between us and we should work on it."

She shifts uncomfortably in her seat. “Yeah we need to talk.”

Her tone causes him to stare at his half-eaten steak. “What’s been going on?”

Simply, matter-of-factly, she says, “I want a divorce.”

The Husband wants to run. He can hardly believe his ears. That panic he felt while she was in her surgery, the dizziness he felt when surrounded by bullies, and that feeling of being powerless dumps into his head. He begins to openly cry as he asks, “Why?”

The Wife then gives him a litany of reasons. He has lost his drive, his depression and anxieties are too much and abusive, there isn’t enough money, he’s not attentive to her needs, his unhappiness has worn her down, the house isn’t clean enough, he’s not applying himself to find a job.

He openly weeps and shakes. “I’m sorry. Why all of this? Why now? We can fix it. I can be better. I’m already going to therapy. This doesn’t make any sense. There’s no need to have a divorce.”

“I’m just not happy anymore.” Her stare is trite. “I just can’t make you happy. I’ve tried, and I can’t do anything.”

He begs, “That’s my fault. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me. We can work on this.”

“No, we can’t. We aren’t good for each other. We’ve both been unhappy our entire marriage.”

Full body, gut wrenching sobs pour out of The Husband. “That’s not true. I love you more than the day I met you. There has to be something

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else going on, there has to be another man. There is, isn't there?" The Ex had given him the same speech—down to the exact “happiness” phrase—before he learned of her affair.

The Wife shakes her head. It is condescending. “No. There's no one else. We just aren't good for each other.”

He tries to argue with her, plead with her to no avail. She repeats, “It's over and there's nothing you can say or do to convince me otherwise.” He cleans the kitchen as he listens and argues with her about her list of reasons.

They get ready for bed, turn out the lights, and The Husband tries his best to muffle his crying. He prays to God, “Please don't let this be happening. Please fix this. Kill me. I can't take this pain.” Every so often he breaks down and openly wails. She half-heartedly tries to comfort him. He continues to pray and sob until the sun rises.

Fall 2011

The Girl stopped “talking” to the other guy and became The Girlfriend. She was amazing. They could talk for hours. Laughter was always a staple of the time they spent together. She was completely different than any girl he had ever been with. It was as if she was meant to be in his arms.

A huge part of him felt like she was a gift from God. He wasn't in the kind of crazy euphoric love that had landed him in the center of a courthouse with The Ex. This was dramatically different. There was a portion of wise-mindedness to his emotions that told him this was right. He prayed about it constantly.

One cold day, they both went to a Christian music festival in town. They mostly hung on each other. Somehow, this loser was able to live in the moment. He just enjoyed every minute with her.

When they climbed into the tiny black sedan they cranked up the heat and tried to get warm. Its brand-new-car smell filled the air.

“You know what I want?” asked The Husband. “Are you in the mood for tomato soup with grilled cheese sandwiches?”

“Yeah!” She beamed.

The house she was sitting for that week was all white, from the walls to tightly-woven carpet that smelled like hot plastic. The kitchen

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had a brown tint to it but was lightly colored. It was a “U” shape with a breakfast bar and stools on one side.

The Husband started the soups. She was by his side. She rested her elbows on the counter, her chin in her palms, and talked to him. He didn’t mind doing the work, he loved it.

When the meal was cooked, they sat side-by-side at the breakfast bar. She tore off a crust of bread and dipped it into the soup. The Husband was still chilly, so he plunged his spoon into the warm soup. He made a loud slurp.

“Are you slurping your soup?” She had a twinkle of ornery about her.

“Yes, ma’am.” He filled his spoon, leaned close to the soup, and slurped as loudly as he could. “It tastes better if you slurp it.”

She laughed hard enough to snort. When she caught her breath, she lifted a spoon to her lips, and looked up with determination as if he had dared her to do it.

“Trust me,” he said.

She took a long loud slurp then nearly choked with laughter. He echoed her. That moment froze in his mind. He found one of the only good scrapbooks from his mental bookshelf and dropped it in with the caption, “Slurping makes soup taste better.”

She leaned in and kissed him. To him, it was perfect. Suddenly the rest of his bookshelf full of proof that he was a loser no longer mattered. He was of value to this stunningly brilliant girl. A girl he never felt he deserved.

He opened his eyes and captured her expression. The sincerity of it made him woozy. This was their first kiss, and strangely it felt like the first of his life. Then, as quickly as it happened, she pulled back and set her soup onto the counter. She said, “I umm... I started something didn’t I?”

“I think so.” He put his soup down, wrapped his hand behind her head, and pulled her in for a kiss. It was longer, even more beautiful than the last.

He kept his hand behind her head and his forehead on hers. She looked up at him. They locked gazes, and somehow the closeness didn’t blur the image of her gorgeous brown eyes. “I’ve wanted to do that all night,” he said.

“Me too.” She lifted her mouth back to his.

April 9, 2017 – Sunday

The Husband sets to work making The Wife's day as perfect as possible. He is assertive, plans a day of shopping in Columbus and going to their favorite winery. She is agreeable but still distant.

With little to no sleep, he is running completely on adrenaline and fear. She wants to leave for Columbus later in the day, but at noon she comes to him and without looking says, "I think I'm going to go to the grocery and do some shopping before we leave."

"Cool." The Husband smiles brightly. "I can go with you."

"No..." She pauses. "I just need to clear my head." Now she looks him in the eyes and gives him a half smile. "You play some games and I'll be back in a little bit."

His heart begins to beat faster. "OK...you're sure you don't want me to go with you?"

"I'm sure." She leaves the room, shuffles around the house a bit, and then says, "Bye," as she closes the front door behind her.

He plays games in "his" room. Here he has a futon, a dresser for his clothing, a small closet, and a desk for his gaming computer. He tries not to worry about the time. It's early enough for his dad to still be online. Both The Mom and The Dad are part-time missionaries to the Philippines. They already know about The Wife's intention for a

divorce. The Dad tells the son, “Well, do whatever it takes to make it right to your wife. Work on things.”

An hour passes without a word from her. His heart is beating so hard it is building pressure in his ears, like when a plane lands. He texts The Dad, who is twelve hours ahead, “I know it’s insane, but I feel like she’s having an affair.”

The Dad replies, “That’s insane. Your wife would never do that. Make sure you remain cool and calm and respectful. Trust in God.”

Then another hour passes. He checks his phone often but there’s nothing. Finally, two and a half hours later, the front door opens, and she shuffles into the house. She yells, “I’m home.”

From the other room he yells back, “How’d it go? Do you need help unloading the car?” He climbs out of his chair to greet her.

She ghosts past him, keeps her head down, and replies, “No,” followed by a forced laugh. “I only got a few things. My head was just in space the entire time. I literally stood in the aisles staring blankly at things.”

He follows her into the kitchen. “What all did you get?”

Another feigned chuckle and she replies, “Just a few things.” One by one, she pulls out the contents of a plastic bag, six items in all.

“Two and a half hours and that’s it?” They are things they don’t even need. “Well, are you ready to head to Columbus?” He holds out his arms for a hug.

She returns his embrace with a rushed half-hearted hug. “Yeah, let me change.”

THE HUSBAND

They travel to Columbus. He plays music they listened to while dating. The conversation is light and upbeat. She tells him about the evening activities she went to on her trip—piano bars, pubs, maybe a dance place, he can hardly pay attention.

She makes jokes about The Boss's interaction with her and The Coworker. How she and The Coworker told these little inside jokes, but The Boss's hearing was poor. They knew he laughed because he saw them laughing, and not because of what they were saying.

The date begins at a winery in a Columbus shopping plaza. Inside, there are two long marble bars with a matching circular one in the middle of the room. Racks of wine line the walls. Tables displaying wine decorations, decanters and breakables fill most of the empty space. It feels claustrophobic on a slow day.

It's a crowded afternoon but they find a spot at the center counter. The Husband doesn't feel like doing this today. He's nauseous. Jitters from lack of sleep twitch his muscles. He braces himself on the side of the cold counter with both hands.

The Wife spent most of the car ride focusing on her phone and continues the habit. The Husband does his best to keep this from bothering him, but his heart continues to thump.

The waiter is a tall friendly gentleman. A couple of old ladies are flirting with him. Finally, he breaks away from their attention and turns to The Husband and Wife's table. Gleefully, he asks, "Will you be having the tasting of the month or a sweet tasting today?"

In near unison, they reply, “The month’s.”

“That’s easy enough.” He pulls tiny square napkins from underneath the counter and places one in front of each of them. Then he fishes out two glasses and sets them on the napkins. He begins with a description of the first wine, then pours them each a little.

Their conversation flutters around different subjects as they drink the first glass and move to the next. She continues to keep her phone close to her side, but the alcohol is taking the edge off The Husband’s anxieties.

By the fourth glass they are giggling. Somehow the subject of talk lands on silly songs they used to sing as kids. The Wife pulls up a song. The room is noisy and the speakers on her phone aren’t that great, but he bends low so they can put it up to their ears. They sing along to a song about a hairbrush, a cheeseburger, and pirates. They laugh together.

Something about this moment slows time for The Husband. There’s an eerie feeling to it. Whether it’s the drinks, the exhaustion, or something else, his mind returns again and again to the thought, *This is The Girl who used to slurp soup with me.*

After a while The Wife heads to the bathroom and disappears there for longer than usual. For a brief second, his knees buckle. He nearly topples to the ground but braces himself again against the coolness of the marble countertop.

The Wife returns. She’s finishing a text as she approaches the count-

THE HUSBAND

er. He tries to capture how beautiful she is. She's wearing a tight-fitting red top with his favorite jeans.

Dinner, conversation, a walk around the open mall, and then they are back in the car heading home by seven. She is texting. Her phone shifts between blue text and green as she exchanges long messages.

The Husband watches this out of the corner of his eye and suspicion grows. He sees The Wife receive a large block of text and finally he asks, "Who are you talking to?"

She replies with the name of a friend.

This answer doesn't sit well with The Husband. He asks to see the messages.

She opens her last conversation with the friend. It isn't the same conversation he was just watching. The messages coming in seconds earlier were paragraphs long, while the conversation she displays for him now contains only short sentences and GIFs. He confronts her. "That's not the text I saw a second ago. Don't lie to me. Who are you talking to?"

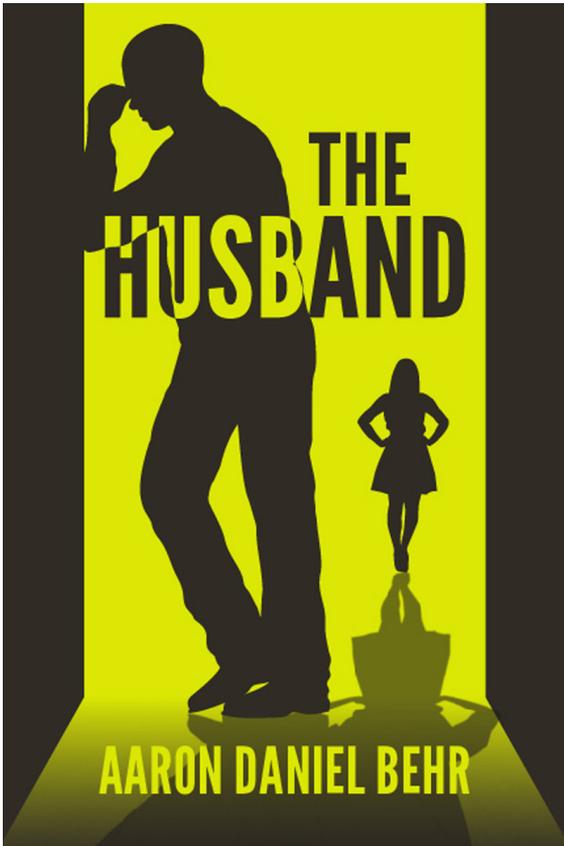
The Wife begins shifting in her seat as if she's sitting on something uncomfortable. She bobs the phone between her hands. Then she rests her head on the back of the seat, and turns to him so that he gets a strong whiff of the perfume he bought her for their honeymoon. It's a chocolatey floral scent. She whispers, "My coworker."

The Husband's heart explodes. The largest headache he's ever had hits him. His vision skips the red foggy stage of his childhood and blurs

to near blackout. His thought processing shuts off as he asks, “Are you having an affair with him?”

Again, she hesitates. “Yes.”

CONTINUE READING...



The Husband is available in hardcover, paperback, and digital editions on Amazon.com and wherever books are sold.

Purchase it on Amazon.com here:

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PRAISE FOR THE HUSBAND

“*The Husband* is addictive. Aaron Daniel Behr throws the reader into a raw world of strong emotion and even stronger faith. Only Jesus could take this story of heartbroken despair and transform it into such a deeply moving, redemptive work. I admire Behr for sharing so bravely, and I pray that God will use this book to bless many hearts for His glory.”

—**Shannon Upton**

Motivational speaker and author of *Organizing You*

“Real, raw and brutally honest, *The Husband* is an unflinching look at one man’s struggle with mental illness. Aaron Daniel Behr is one of those rare Christian authors who dares to explore the depths of depression while still clinging to hope in the end.”

—**Christopher Stollar**

Award-winning author of *The Black Lens*

“*The Husband* is a poignant, brutally honest critique of the silencing of males regarding their relationships with women. The refusal of many women to admit that men’s emotional attachments are as deep as their own has created a culture in America in which men and their feelings are often ignored or derided. The protagonist in *The Husband* meets these problems, along with a devastating physical illness, head-on with an amazing amount of restraint and self-reflection. He successfully navigates this difficult pathway with the help of family and friends and, more importantly, God.”

—**Dr. Barbara Ragan**

PhD of Literature and Literary Criticism

“*The Husband* is a masterpiece of honesty, and a triumph of vulnerability. This tremendous book is a testimony to the power of sin, and a testimony to the redemptive love of an almighty God. You will read it in one sitting.”

—**Brad Pauquette**

Author of *Sejal: The Walk for Water*

READER REVIEWS OF THE HUSBAND



“I was captivated start to finish. It has a beautiful ending with an important message for readers.”

“Well written and hard to put down.”

“Poignant, riveting, inspiring and honest. The imagery will grip your heart and keep you thinking long after you put it down.”

“*The Husband* grabs you from the start. The struggles are relatable and the ending redemptive. I can’t wait to read more from this author.”

“So real and so raw. A must read!”

“I would give it 6 out of 5 stars, if I could. Rarely does a book come along that changes you.”

“Amazing, simply amazing. Powerful, and life changing.”

“A ray of hope...”

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About the Author



Aaron Daniel Behr is a regular guy who enjoys weight lifting and his work as a nutritional counselor.

He has been broken, pieced back together, stitched up, and has lost his identity a few times. Along the way he connected with literature and writing. He is passionate about the transformative power of reading, and prays it will never lose a place in our world.

This is his first published book and it won't be his last. His short stories can be found alongside the work of other great writers in the anthologies *Triskaidekan* and *For the Road*.

Follow him on [Facebook](#) and Twitter [@aarondanielbehr](#) and visit his website: [AaronDanielBehr.com](#)

Aaron currently lives in Mount Vernon, Ohio.