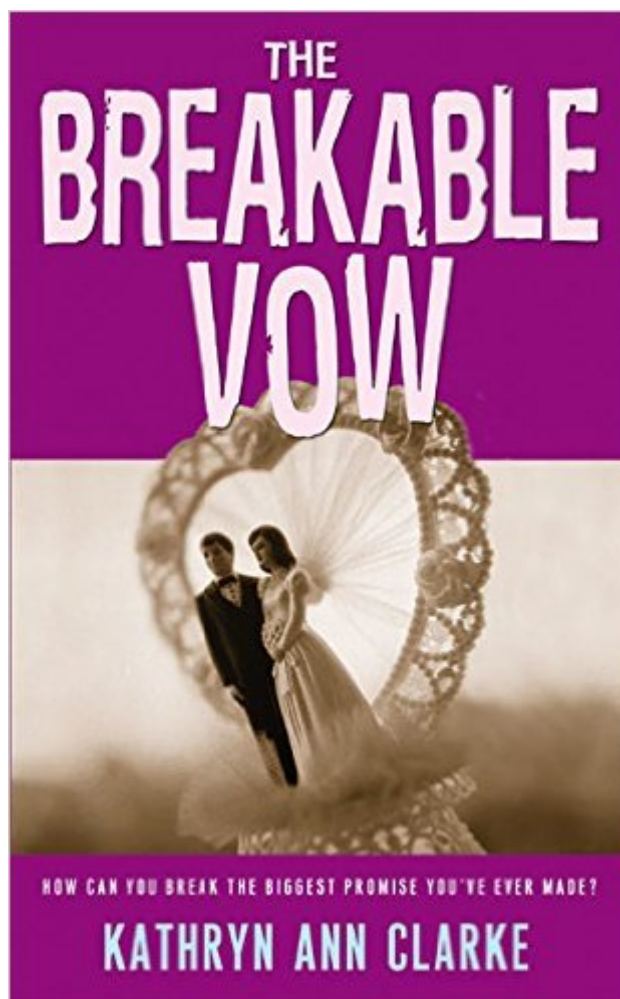


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# The Breakable Vow



## Synopsis

One night will change her life . . . Annie McGowan is eighteen years old, smart, wisecracking, fun-loving . . . a typical teenager. Yet circumstances force Annie out of the security of high school and into a world of problems all her own. Faced with an unexpected pregnancy and a turbulent, violent relationship with her boyfriend, Kevin, Annie's life begins to spiral out of control. And though her worst fears about Kevin are realized, in the heat of the moment, she finds the courage to fight back. First-time author and domestic violence expert Kathryn Ann Clarke brings clarity and compassion to an often hotly debated issue. In this inspiring debut novel, one remarkable young woman faces the most difficult odds and emerges on the other side -- whole. *The Breakable Vow* features a special educational Classroom Guide section in the back of the book that discusses: How to Recognize the Danger Signs of an Abusive Relationship, Safety Planning, Break-Up Planning, Cycle of Violence, Questions to Ask About the New Person in Your Life, and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was glued to this book for many reasons. As a well educated woman, I never expected the man of my dreams to be an abuser. In this book I found a light that illuminated the nightmare I was living. This book helped me make sense of the muddy, confusing situation of being emotionally and physically abused. *The Breakable Vow* educates the reader about the consistent dynamics presented in all abusive relationships. I wish I had read a book like this as a teenager. I am grateful Ms Clarke wrote this book. It saved my life and the lives of my five children. Whether you agree with

Annie's choices along the way , or not, you cannot deny that Ms Clarke has done a fabulous job of showing and telling what it is like to live with an abuser. Just as important, the back of the book is LOADED with good information on how to get out of the abusive relationship safely and how to help a family member or friend who is stuck.

A few years ago, I picked up my son from a Catholic high school (SW corner of Chicago, sort of rhymes with "Fairest"). The school had recently gone from all-boys to co-ed, and at the intersection outside the parking lot we pulled up alongside a red sedan carrying two kids in school uniforms--a boy and a girl. They were talking, when all of a sudden the driver--the boy--wound up and smashed the girl in the face with his fist. The girl's head flopped forward, but at that point the light changed and we lost them. My son and I were horrified, but we had a description of the car, part of the license plate number, and a good look at the kids. I knew the school had a list of students who were registered to park in their lot, and I figured that would be enough information for the school to track them down--especially if the girl had a busted lip or black eye. As soon as I got home, I called the school to report the incident. I was connected to an administrator who cut off my narrative to ask, "Did this happen on school property?" "No," I said, "It happened at the light on 115th..." "Well, then--it did not happen on our property, so it's not really our problem. Thanks and have a nice day." That reaction was almost as shocking as incident itself. Unfortunately, the admin's response is all too common. Annie, the protagonist in "The Breakable Vow," musters the courage several times to seek help. Not only is she shot down and dismissed, but when her husband finds out that she's been "disloyal" to him, he feels compelled to smack her around some more to teach her a lesson. My daughter read this book as part of her (all-girl) high school's effort to raise awareness about abusive relationships. She passed it on to me, and I can honestly say it was a riveting story. Because it's based on a true story, I knew the author (presumably the victim) survived her ordeal. It resonated with my daughter on several levels, and I think the book's message will stay with my daughter, and her friends, for a long time. The book follows Annie's relationship with a popular, handsome jock from the time they start dating in high school, to her pregnancy and their subsequent marriage, and to the Texas college town where her husband is on a football ride. Confined to student housing with a small child, Annie is lonely for her Chicago family; her husband has cut her off from having any social contacts at all unless they involve him. He fits the typical abuser profile: she "makes" him hit her, then he's effusive in his regret and concern. He methodically erodes her sense of self-worth and independence, and his attacks after each of her "transgressions" become more and more vicious. But fortunately, Annie has enough fortitude and courage to resist his total control, and she's

able to take steps to help herself. Her fears for her child's well-being force her to remain strong. The portrait of this young family is compelling. Annie's husband is not a monster 100% of the time: the reader can easily see how he was able to continue his abuse for so long, because his reasoning seems plausible to outsiders. Also realistic is Annie's home life. Her father is a widower with several children, Southside Irish Catholics who are traditional in the practice of their religion and their relationships with each other. It's a stable, wholesome home; the dad is always loving and affectionate toward his kids, and they seem balanced and secure. So how did Annie fall into this relationship? This underscores the sad fact that abuse can and does happen to anyone. Because abusers are manipulative and can turn on and off their disturbing behavior, Annie constantly overrode her instincts to ditch him and instead gave him one more chance, then another, then another...ultimately, the decision to remain this boy's partner was hers to make. And though some of her friends and relatives did encourage her to break up with the boy, others made excuses for him and implied that Annie was overreacting. In one of my reviews for another book, Gavin deBecker's "The Gift of Fear," I mention his statement that with people who are abused, "the first time you're a victim, the next time you're a volunteer." A lot of people took offense at that, and while the statement itself is an exaggeration, his point is valid. The abused person will continue to be abused until she (or he) says, "Enough! This ends now!" and then takes steps to get out of the relationship. The abuser is not going to suddenly realize that beatings are wrong, and then become the perfect, considerate partner. Nor will family or friends be able to pull the abused person out of a dangerous situation and keep her (or him) safe. It is totally up to the victim to draw the line. Annie is a perfect example. It's hard, and she has to overcome a lot of embarrassment and doubt, but there are a lot of people who are only too willing to help. She was able to benefit from that help when she decided, "Enough! This ends now!" and took the risk of planning her escape. The edition of the book we read had several typos, which I hope has been corrected in the following editions. Nothing big, just distracting. The book is part of an anti-abuse initiative, and I think every high school should have a program like this in place. You can try to model good relationships and advise your kids, but it helps to have backup. I would recommend this book to any high school student--girls and boys--as well as their parents. The message in this book could save your life--or the life of someone you love very deeply. Too bad the admin of "Fairist High School, Home of the (rhymes with) Bedhawks" didn't read it.

Kathryn Clarke has successfully conveyed exactly what it is like to be trapped as a young woman in an abusive relationship, while trying to rationalize her choices and keep herself safe. I applaud this

incredibly talented writer for boldly addressing a terrifying issue and for writing so honestly and adroitly about dating violence. In the United States, the greatest increase in partner violence is in the group of young woman 13-18 years old and Ms. Clarke's well-written and compelling story reaches this audience in a book every young woman should read. I recommend this keen and poignant novel for every teen's bookshelf-- male or female. Give it as a gift to every young woman you know as she enters high school or graduates. Give as a gift to every young man you know as a reminder that controlling behavior is hurtful and wrong. As parents, we can take the lessons from this well-told story and learn how to be more understanding and concretely helpful to the young women and men we know who may find themselves in relationships they are simply not prepared to handle.

Congratulations to Ms. Clarke for a superb story about a topic we all need to understand. I know how difficult it is to articulate the confusion and chaos of that turmoil. Ms. Clarke has done this better than any other writer I have read on the subject. What Anna Quindlen's "Black and Blue" did for the understanding of domestic violence in marriage, let this be the bible for young women and men understanding violence in dating relationships.

I have used this book and curriculum in my classroom to teach high school students about an issue that plagues them sorely: domestic and teen dating violence. Both the students and I learned a great deal about the mindset of the abused as well as of the abuser, information that is necessary to deal with this issue effectively. I recommend it to anyone and everyone who will read it, abused, abusers, and their families, as well as those who have never been touched by this awful crime of the soul and spirit. Read it, in conjunction with the tools in the back of the book, and learn how to make a difference. Kathryn, Thank you for your candor. You are saving lives.

As a young child, I was abused by my father and often saw my mom go through almost the same things Annie goes through in this story. Most people don't understand why women and sometimes men just don't pack up and leave, just like that, but it is incredible the mask that the abuser can tie tighter than a noose around the victim. The list about Batterers really helped me to understand the vicious cycle that the abusers use. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, though at times I didn't like the writing style. This book is EXTREMELY realistic, even though it seems stupid that Annie and Mary didn't just leave. It's so true to life I had to go sleep in my sister's room at the end, because I was having flashbacks of what happened to me. It is so amazing how true this book is. I recommend that every teen read this book -- they'll be glad in the future that they did.

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