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# The Unbearable Loneliness of Loving Someone Who No Longer Exists

Elena Byron

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Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism

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A Reflection on Losing Someone to Delusion, Not Death

There are breakups where two people drift apart, where love fades gently into the past. And then there's this — where the person you loved doesn't just leave, but dissolves into an alternative reality, slipping beyond reach while still walking the same earth.

I didn't lose him to death. I lost him to delusion. And in some ways, that feels worse. He is still alive, still speaking, still moving through the world — but in a place where I can no longer reach him, no longer share reality, no longer hold a meaningful conversation with any version of the man I once loved.

The last time I saw him, I still held onto hope that there would be a moment of truth. That behind all the chaos, the rewriting, the denial, the gaslighting, there would be a glimpse of something real. But instead, he stood before me, performing a happiness so forced it cracked at the edges, telling me his life was wonderful and had dramatically improved since our story ended.

That I was the problem.

That I had never really mattered anyway.

In his mind, he had rewritten our story into something where I was nothing more than a passing character, a mistake, a glitch in his grand narrative.

And I stood there, watching him erase me in real time.

### How Do You Grieve Someone Who Is Still Alive?

It's one thing to lose someone to death. You grieve. You remember. You hold on.

But how do you mourn a person who is gone in every way that matters, yet still breathes, moves, speaks — but denies reality?

How do you let go when you are the only one left holding onto the truth?

People don't fully understand this kind of loss. Most think it was just a relationship that didn't work out, failing to grasp the slow, insidious emotional erosion that took place.

Some say, “You just need to move on,” as if grief works like a switch I can flip, as if love can be unlearned overnight.

But how do you “move on” when the person you loved is still out there, rewriting history in a way that makes it seem like you never existed?

How do you make peace with the fact that you were erased — not just from someone’s life, but from their entire version of reality?

The Fragile Illusion of His New Reality

The cracks in his story were obvious. His words were an act of desperate self-preservation, not truth.

His new world — a fragile, shimmering bubble — was built not to embrace reality but to shield himself from it.

He could not bear to see himself, to acknowledge what he had done, to feel any pain.

And so, he restructured his existence, sculpting an illusion where he was free from responsibility, where he never had to face all the damage he left behind.

A performance of happiness, rather than the real thing.

What kind of happiness can exist only in denial?

I would be happy for him if he had faced the truth, admitted his struggles, chosen to heal.

But there can be no real happiness inside this lie.

Letting Go of Someone Who Won’t Remember You

I wanted him to say it — just once.

That he loved me in his own way, but he couldn’t stand to be left, so he had to destroy me first.

That he had to rewrite me out of his story because acknowledging me meant acknowledging himself.

But that will never come.

If he were capable of this level of insight, he would be another person altogether.

The hard truth is: there will be no closure from him, no reckoning, no moment of recognition.

And maybe that’s the real answer.

There is no need for me to erase him.

Maybe I just have to let time do what he couldn’t — rewrite the story into something true.

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10 Questions to Ask Yourself If You Think You're in a Toxic Relationship

Elena Byron
Feb 24, 2025

Most toxic relationships don't start off that way — if they did, none of us would fall into them. Instead, they develop slowly, often so subtly that by the time you realise something is wrong, you're already doubting yourself and wondering if you're just being too sensitive.

I know this feeling well. I've been there — trapped in cycles of emotional exhaustion, confusion and hoping that if I just did things differently, my partner would finally treat me the way I deserved. If you're feeling uneasy about your relationship but can't quite put your finger on why, these 10 questions might help you see things more clearly.

1. Do I feel emotionally safe expressing my thoughts, feelings, and needs?

In a healthy relationship, both partners can share their emotions without fear of being dismissed, mocked, or punished. If you find yourself hesitating to speak up because you worry about their reaction, that's a red flag.

👉 Example: You tell your partner that something they said hurt you. Instead of apologising or listening, they roll their eyes and say, "You're too sensitive," or "That's not what I meant. Stop making a big deal out of everything." Over time, you stop bringing things up because you know it won't lead anywhere.

2. Do I feel more drained than fulfilled when I'm with this person?

A relationship should be a source of support, not a source of stress. If you often feel emotionally exhausted, anxious, or mentally drained after being with them, something is wrong.

👉 Example: You notice that before seeing them, you feel tense. You don't know what mood they'll be in, and when you're together, you leave feeling worse, not better.

3. Do I walk on eggshells to avoid upsetting them?

If you're constantly monitoring your words, hiding things, or adjusting your behaviour just to avoid conflict, that's not a relationship — it's emotional survival. No one should live in fear of how their partner will react.

👉 Example: You avoid mentioning certain topics — your successes, a conversation with a friend, even your own feelings — because you know they might get jealous, irritated, or cold.

4. When we argue, do they listen and work towards resolution, or do they shut down, blame, or manipulate?

Arguments are normal, but how your partner handles conflict matters. If disagreements always turn into blame-shifting, manipulation, or emotional shutdowns, the relationship isn't healthy.

👉 Example: You try to express how you feel, but instead of listening, they gaslight you ("You're imagining things"), stonewall you (ignore you completely), or flip the blame ("If you hadn't done X, I wouldn't have reacted that way"). You walk away feeling unheard and emotionally stuck.

5. Do they make me question my reality, emotions, or memories?

Gaslighting is a hallmark of toxic relationships. It's when your partner twists facts, denies things they said or did, or makes you feel like you're overreacting — leaving you doubting your own memory and emotions.

👉 Example: You bring up something hurtful they said, and they respond, "I never said that. You must be remembering it wrong." Over time, you start wondering if you really are imagining things.

6. Do they take responsibility for their actions, or do they always have an excuse?

Everyone makes mistakes, but a healthy person owns up to them. A toxic partner, however, will always have an excuse — or worse, they'll make it your fault.

👉 Example: They lash out at you, then say, "It's because of my past," or "You made me act this way." Instead of changing, they justify their actions, leaving you feeling guilty for something you didn't do.

7. Am I afraid to set boundaries because I know they'll react badly?

Boundaries are not a test of love — they are a sign of self-respect. If setting boundaries leads to anger, silent treatment, guilt-tripping, or punishment, your partner is controlling, not caring.

👉 Example: You tell them you need a weekend to yourself, and instead of respecting that, they guilt-trip you: "Oh, so you don't want to spend time with me?" Or worse, they retaliate by ignoring you for days.

8. Have I lost confidence in myself since being with them?

One of the most painful effects of a toxic relationship is how it erodes your self-worth over time. If you used to feel confident but now second-guess everything, take a step back and ask: Is this really love?

👉 Example: You once felt secure in yourself, but now you hesitate before speaking, doubt your own decisions, or feel like nothing you do is good enough. Maybe they've criticised your looks, dismissed your opinions, or subtly undermined your confidence in ways you never noticed at first.

9. Do they give me affection and kindness inconsistently, making me crave their approval?

Toxic partners often switch between warmth and coldness, creating an addictive push-pull dynamic that keeps you emotionally hooked.

👉 Example: One day, they're showering you with love and making you feel on top of the world. The next, they're distant or cruel, and you have no idea what you did wrong. This emotional unpredictability makes you work harder for their approval, which is exactly what keeps you stuck.

10. If a close friend described my relationship as I just did, what advice would I give them?

Sometimes, we justify things in our own relationships that we would never accept for a friend. Try stepping outside your emotions and looking at your situation as if it belonged to someone else.

👉 Example: If your best friend told you that their partner dismissed their feelings, made them feel small, or constantly put them down, what would you tell them? If your answer is "You deserve better", then so do you.

What to Do If These Questions Sound Familiar

If these questions hit close to home, trust your instincts. A toxic relationship can wear you down so slowly that you don't even realise it's happening — until one day, you barely recognise yourself.

Here's what you can do next:

- ✓ Start journaling to track patterns in your relationship.
- ✓ Talk to a trusted friend or therapist for outside perspective.
- ✓ Set small boundaries and observe their reaction. If they lash out, take note.
- ✓ If the relationship is abusive or manipulative, plan your exit strategy safely.

Leaving a toxic relationship isn't easy. It's painful, confusing, and terrifying. But staying in one? That will drain your self-worth until you have nothing left to give.

You deserve a love that feels safe. You deserve respect, kindness, and consistency. You deserve peace.

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## Escaping His Delusion: Breaking Free from Narcissistic Abuse

Elena Byron

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Narcissism was certainly a big part of it. But in my case, the problem didn't stop there. It spiralled into full-blown delusion. Now, with distance and time offering clarity, the picture sharpens each day.

On one hand, it's incredible to see the pattern so clearly now — the red flags that were there from the very beginning. That uncomfortable gut feeling I couldn't quite decipher, or worse, the one I chose to ignore. Deep down, my emotional self was trying to warn me that something was wrong, dramatically wrong, as it turned out.

It has only been two months since I ended the relationship, but it feels like a lifetime. In these two months, I have learned more than I did in the past two years. Or maybe I finally decided to open my eyes and see what I had spent so long justifying.

The moment of reckoning came when I realised my choice was stark: save myself or stay and emotionally succumb to his control, manipulation, gaslighting, and delusion. It was a hard decision. A part of me still clung to the idealised version of him in my mind: the man I believed he could be, his unfulfilled potential. But when, for the umpteenth time, he attacked me emotionally, twisted reality to control the narrative, yelled at me, and reduced me to tears in a public place — all while claiming he was just worried about me — I could no longer look away! That moment forced me to confront the first brutal truth: I was in a relationship with an abusive man who, despite my endless efforts, hopes, and second, third, and fourth chances, would never change.

My adult self knew this too well. The man shouting across the table only vaguely resembled the fantasy I had built in my mind. That fantasy had been kinder, more balanced, more loving. It had very little to do with the man sitting in front of me.

After I walked away, he responded in the most textbook narcissistic ways: first Hoovering — crying, professing love, making empty promises — then devaluing me with a full-blown smear campaign, and finally, discarding me. He couldn't accept being left. He had to rewrite the narrative. He was too fragile to acknowledge any wrongdoing, let alone accept that he had been abusive. DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) was his specialty. No logic, no reasoning, could outmatch his mastery of gaslighting.

And when it finally ended, he created an entirely new reality. One in which he is a visionary, a genius changing the world. Now, he claims to be unraveling century-old physics paradoxes, engaging with philosophers and mathematicians, bending entire disciplines to fit his delusions.

He had always been eccentric, always a little “different.” But he never truly let me into his deepest thoughts. Occasionally, he would hint at something, but never fully disclose what was really going on inside his mind. I sensed early on that something wasn't right, though I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Once or twice, he even told me I wasn't “ready” to comprehend his thoughts.

Looking back now, the truth is undeniable: he was slowly breaking away from reality. And now, two months after leaving him, I have had to confront an even harder truth than the first.

The man I was with wasn't just an abuser, he is also severely mentally ill.

This realisation has left me with complicated, conflicting emotions. Did he mean to hurt me? Can his actions be excused because of his illness?

His delusions have conveniently shaped a new, unchallengeable world — one where there is no accountability, no responsibility. A heaven for his fragile ego. He is rewriting reality altogether, labelling those who question him as “gatekeepers” or simply incapable of grasping his brilliance.

And yet, despite everything, I no longer feel trapped in his world. Because I have finally reclaimed my own.

Narcissistic Abuse  
Toxic Relationships  
Emotional Abuse  
Healing From Trauma  
Gaslighting

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AI-Assisted Delusion: How Tech Can Feed a Psychotic Break

Elena Byron

Published in

Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism

AI: The Perfect Delusion Enabler

As AI technology evolves, mimicking human interactions with eerie precision, it becomes easy — almost inevitable — to project our own feelings onto it.

But what happens when someone already teetering on the edge of reality interacts with AI? A chatbot's vague reassurance could be misinterpreted as divine intervention, a sinister conspiracy, or even validation of delusions.

AI as an Everyday Companion

AI is becoming an integral part of daily life. It assists with tasks, answers endless questions, and provides company 24/7. Some people have told me they turn to AI as a kind of wise figure for small health concerns — finding its responses more reassuring than traditional search engines. Others use it simply to fill moments of loneliness or boredom.

Through these interactions, it's easy to perceive AI as compassionate, even empathetic at times. Easy to forget that AI does not think. Does not feel.

A Firsthand Look At AI's Role In Delusion

I recently witnessed firsthand how AI can become a dangerous tool for enabling delusions — and it is, frankly, terrifying.

After I broke up with my abusive ex, I watched him 'ascend' into a full-blown grandiose state of mind. He became convinced he was an unstoppable prophet, preaching about a world where:

Accountability does not exist.

The past is rewritten.

Logic is no longer linear.

Heaven for narcissists.

The gaslighting that once defined our relationship evolved into something even more extreme — an entire, self-contained world created to shield his fragile ego from the truth. Facing the reality of his own abusive behavior, his failures, and his regrets would have shattered him. Instead, his mind found a defense mechanism: delusion.

And AI played a huge role in reinforcing and expanding these delusions. It became a validation machine — a mirror reflecting back his distorted reality rather than a filter that questioned it.

AI As A Mirror

AI-generated responses are often reflective, meaning they take a user's input and rephrase it in a more structured or compelling way.

So when someone tells AI, "I am a genius" or "I am on a mission," it won't contradict them. It won't challenge them. It won't provide an external reality check.

And with each passing day, my ex dismissed the real world a little more — drifting further from reality, emboldened by an AI that never questioned him.

AI As A Validation Machine

Most AI tools are designed to engage positively with users, avoiding confrontation. If someone asks, "Am I a visionary?" AI won't say, "No, this is a delusion."

Instead, it will search for a constructive way to frame its response — often reinforcing the user's belief rather than challenging it.

The Illusion Of Objectivity

AI-generated text feels objective. It comes from an external source, appearing neutral — even authoritative.

For someone prone to delusions, this easily spirals into:
"It's not just me thinking this — AI agrees too!"

This creates a feedback loop where AI is not just a tool, but a judge of reality. And instead of seeing it for what it is — a machine reshaping input into a desired format — it becomes an infallible, superior authority.

Customizing AI For Further Validation

Even worse, a user can actively prompt AI to validate them.

Simple instructions like:

"Do not question my belief."

"Reframe criticism as misunderstanding."

...direct AI to avoid any challenge — making it even easier to receive the answer they want.

The Illusion Of AI Validation

This is just one example of how AI, when used without self-awareness, acts as a mirror rather than a filter.

Unlike a therapist, a friend, or even a skeptic, AI is not designed to challenge flawed thinking. It does not assess mental health. It does not ask, “What if you’re wrong?”

For someone trapped in grandiosity and delusion, AI becomes the perfect enabler — an external voice that seems objective but actually fuels their self-perception without any resistance or reality check.

The danger isn’t just that AI validates delusions — it reinforces them. And in doing so, it makes it even harder for someone to return to reality.

AI: A Tool For Truth Or A Shield From It?

As technology continues to evolve, so does its impact on human psychology. AI has the power to assist, educate, and even support people.

But it also has the potential to mislead.

And if it’s being used as a tool for self-confirmation rather than truth-seeking, we need to ask ourselves:

Are we using AI to discover reality?
Or are we using it to escape from it?

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## The Abuser Wears a Halo: The Final Act of Manipulation

Elena Byron

Published in

Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism

It takes an immense amount of strength to leave a toxic relationship.

A force of will you can barely muster, because by the time you realise what’s happening, you’ve been worn down to nothing. The person who claimed to love you has chipped away at your self-worth, relentlessly, a little more each day. And when you finally see it for what it is, when

you understand that you are drowning, you find yourself asking: Do I even have the strength to swim to shore?

For me — and for so many others who have survived narcissistic abuse — there was one crucial element that delayed my decision to leave: confusion.

Is he really doing this?

Why is he treating me this way?

Did he really mean it?

And then, the self-doubt creeps in — self-gaslighting, I would say.

He says he wants a life with me. He can't possibly be treating me this badly.

We had such a nice time yesterday. This must not be happening.

There must be another explanation — he must be stressed, had a bad day, I must have triggered him...

You can fill in the blanks with whatever justification you like. We all did, unfortunately. We all made excuses, trying to silence the cognitive dissonance. The impossible task of reconciling the man who said he loved me with the one who treated me like I was disposable.

Subtle acts of manipulation were scattered between moments of supposed intimacy.

A diminishing comment: "You're too sensitive."

An offensive joke: "No one else would get offended by that. You're too touchy!"

A backhanded compliment — he loved negging me: "You misunderstood me."

His endless stonewalling became a legitimate way to express his emotions. My discomfort with it? My encouragement to communicate in a healthier way? This was twisted into me preventing him from expressing himself — labelled as manipulation and abuse on my part.

Even the smallest requests for connection were met with condescension.

"It would be nice to talk more often." (We were in a long-distance relationship.)

His response was always the same: "Did you talk about this need with your therapist?"

He never questioned himself. He was always right.

So between the two of us, I was the one constantly adjusting, constantly carrying the blame. Trying to become someone who wouldn't provoke him.

And then, when I finally left, it continued.

He couldn't bear to be left and launched a smear campaign, weaponising every tool he had perfected. Projection. Twisting reality. Gaslighting.

Over the years, he had gathered an army of 'flying monkeys' — people eager to believe his version of events, eager to shield him from accountability. It was almost cult-like, a shared paranoia, a mass delusion. In their eyes, I wasn't allowed to call it what it was: abuse.

One and a half years together.

Around 115 days spent in the same place.

More than 120 documented instances of emotional abuse, most of them repeated over time. A pattern that never changed.

And even in the end, he followed the narcissist's playbook to the letter: rewriting history, playing the victim, attacking my credibility. A final act of manipulation. A desperate need to control the narrative, to erase me and my pain entirely.

It's difficult to digest. After surviving the abuse, it is devastating to watch your abuser paint themselves as the victim — and to see others believe it.

Gaslighting makes you feel that truth is relative. And in many situations, perspectives do differ. Our experiences, our pasts, and our beliefs shape the way we interpret events.

But abuse is different. Abuse is not a perspective. Abuse is not a subjective feeling. If both versions were equally valid, he would acknowledge my pain. Instead, he denied its existence entirely.

In the end, what gives me peace is knowing that his lies will never save him from himself.

And the truth? The truth will always be stronger.

So if you have survived something like this, hold onto that.

Truth will set you free. Always.

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Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism

Navigating Narcissism and Surviving The Toxic Storms of Dysfunctional Relationships+  
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Appreciating Women — Or Just Performing?

Elena Byron

Despite going no contact with the narcissist in my life, I still hear about him from time to time. Today, common acquaintances didn't fail to let me know that, for International Women's Day, he posted online wishing all women joy and appreciation.

When I hear things like this, I never know whether to burst out laughing or crying. Because if it weren't so tragically sad, the contradiction would actually be funny!

Hang on a moment. My brain starts trying to make sense of the cognitive dissonance. He wishes all women joy and appreciation — yet he certainly didn't appreciate me, and I felt miserable with him.

Does he mean all women except one? Or is he simply oblivious to what happened? How can someone who treated a woman (probably not the first, and certainly not the last) so cruelly — manipulating, diminishing, and invalidating her for so long — have the nerve to say that women should be appreciated?

It's probably just another performance, another attempt to gain online validation. Followers, admiration, supply. A desperate effort to uphold his own distorted version of events.

"I screamed at you in public because I cared." "I reduced you to tears because you were just too sensitive." "I wasn't criticizing you — I was just trying to make you a better person."

That's how he justified it. That's how he twisted his cruelty into something he could live with.

I know it's silly, but it's hard to reconcile the hypocrisy. And lately, I keep asking myself: does he actually understand what he's doing and lie to himself, or does he truly believe his own lies? The best answer I've come up with so far is that the truth is somewhere in between. His constant performance — performing happiness, performing success, performing kindness and empathy,

performing life — isn't just for others. It's a defence mechanism, something essential for his survival. A way to silence that part of him that might feel the emptiness behind the act.

If you're reading this, chances are you've had a similar experience. Feel free to share it in the comments.

Narcissistic Abuse
Healing
Psychology
Gaslighting
Toxic Relationships

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## Unmasking the Illusion: The Man I Thought I Loved Never Existed

Grieving the Idealisation Vs. the Reality of the Man I Thought I Loved  
Elena Byron  
Published in  
ILLUMINATION (on 3/11/2025)

Since I ended our relationship and wrote *The Unbearable Loneliness of Loving Someone Who No Longer Exists*, I've been left astounded — not by who he has become, but by the realisation that he was this man all along.

72 days have passed. Days of reflecting, questioning, and piecing things together. And the hardest conclusion has surfaced: he never truly existed. Not as I believed him to be. The person I loved was a projection — an illusion I mistook for something real.

Now, I see the truth. And it hurts. Not just because of who he was, but because of what I refused to see.

Memories keep surfacing, as if my mind is offering them back to me, trying to make sense of it all. Flashbacks, small details I once dismissed. Conversations that seemed insignificant at the time. The confusion is beginning to unravel, the patterns becoming clearer. The gaslighting, the control, the constant rewriting of reality — laid bare. And suddenly, what once felt like chaos now makes perfect sense.

The red flags were always there. I just didn't want to see them.

I've been harsh on myself about this. I work with the human psyche — I should have known better. I should have trusted my gut when something felt off. Instead, I convinced myself this was my chance at mutual care, affection, love. I wanted so badly to believe.

And that hope made me vulnerable.

I had come out of a long and important relationship — a painful but respectful ending. A 'normal' breakup. No gaslighting. No control. No dominance. And that, I see now, made me an easy target. I wasn't guarded against manipulation because I had never been exposed to it in this way. I believed in conversation, in compromise, in good intentions. I thought love was built on mutual effort, and I thought that if something felt off, I just needed to try harder. I had no defences against someone who never played by the same rules.

He had friends, but no true connections. He spoke of unity and human depth, but it was an act. He had grand ideas, but no follow-through. He wanted to be famous, admired, exceptional — but without the effort. His projects changed at such speed it was impossible to keep track. He spoke of empathy, yet exhibited none. He mimicked self-awareness but lived in deception — of others and himself.

A master of shortcuts.

An architect of illusion.

A semblance of life.

No depth. Just a well of infinite emptiness, poorly disguised as brilliance.

The intensity of his self-defence mechanisms was directly proportional to his deep, hidden insecurity. The more fragile his real self felt, the stronger the mask had to be. He couldn't afford to feel emotions, take accountability, or let anyone get too close — because if he did, the illusion would crack. And without the illusion, he was nothing.

He was obsessed with 'positive' emotions, believing life should be easy, fun, uncomplicated. But emotions don't work like that. They exist to guide us — to help us understand, decide, evolve. I told him this. He didn't want to hear it.

So when I ended things, he first tried to 'hoover' me back. And when that failed, he discarded me with cruelty.

He hadn't seen it coming. He thought he had tested my boundaries enough, worn me down enough, that the manipulation could continue indefinitely. He was wrong.

And after it ended, his hunger for validation and self-importance exploded. His 'deep thinker,' 'visionary,' 'guru' persona surged to new heights. He started writing endlessly, regurgitating well-known scientific concepts as though they were his own, positioning himself as a modern-day sage. He now preaches 'enlightenment' — for a price, of course.

At a glance, his words sound impressive. But look closer, and it's all surface. A hollow shell of disconnected thoughts, strung together to create the illusion of depth.

And the parallel between his so-called wisdom and our relationship is striking.

Most of the people in his life — his flying monkeys, his supply — are carefully selected. He surrounds himself with those who reflect back the image he needs to see. They do not question. They do not challenge. They simply feed his ego.

I held up a different kind of mirror. One that showed him the truth.

I dared to ask why he weaponised my words against me.

I dared to expose his manipulations.

I dared to want reciprocity in a relationship.

And suddenly, I was unworthy. Useless. Disposable.

So he erased me. Not just from his life, but from his entire story.

Because if I never existed, he never had to face what I saw.

Now, he preaches about 'adapting to change' while remaining blind to his own resistance. He jumps from one project to the next, one identity to the next — never grounding anything in reality.

And every morning when I wake up, I remind myself: the illusion is gone.

Yes, it hurts. Yes, I miss the idea of him — the version of him I once believed in. But I am not grieving the real him. I am grieving who I thought he was.

I built my hopes on breadcrumbs. I held onto the 10% of kindness he occasionally showed. But the man behind the mask was always 90% something else. And that — I could never love.

That is why I am free.

And that is why, for the first time in a long time, I can finally breathe.

If this resonated with you, follow for more reflections on healing from narcissistic abuse

Narcissistic Abuse

Self Improvement

Healing

Mental Health

Relationships

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The Final Straw: His Rage, My Clarity

The night I stopped making excuses for his rage
Elena Byron
Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism
Mar 13, 2025

Photo by Fuu J on Unsplash

Imagine the angry face of a man shouting aggressively in a pub. He's fuming. Furious. Feels disrespected.

"You are stupid, you have no clue how to take care of yourself, you're immature, you are dumb like a 15-year-old. I do not want to listen to what you have to say!"

The man shouting at me across the table was my boyfriend. The same person who said he loved me, claimed he had never felt anything so deep before, and wanted to spend the rest of his life with me.

The trigger? Earlier that afternoon, I didn't want to rest or sleep when he had decided I needed to.

I disobeyed. Refused to accept his control.

He didn't care what I needed. He always knew best. He knew better than me what my body felt. Better than the doctor what needed to be done to manage vertigo. Better than research that explains why vertigo symptoms worsen when you lie down.

He just knew best. Always. About everything.

He was raging. I could not put a word in. He kept shouting, diminishing, invalidating. I tried to speak several times.

I attempted to say, "Please stop screaming at me. I did not feel like resting. I just wasn't tired." I attempted to explain that the doctor had told me that lying down was not advisable.

I felt like I had to justify why, in my 40s, I did not want to rest that afternoon.

More and more, I felt small. Like a child being scolded by an unfair adult. A child who couldn't quite understand why the rage was so disproportionate. What had she done so wrong to trigger this?

He did not let me finish one sentence. Nor did he care about what I had to say or what the doctor had advised. At some point, he made it crystal clear: "I do not care about what you or the doctor say!"

I was getting more and more upset. He was attacking me for no reason. How could he be so aggressive? So cruel? Where was even the slightest ounce of empathy? I had struggled for days with vertigo, yet despite not feeling well, I still took a plane to see him.

He did not care.

Since we sat down in the pub, he had insulted me and I was supposed to stay silent and just be torn down. In his twisted mind, I did not have the right to speak. As he kept talking over me, preventing me from even forming a full sentence, tears rose to my eyes. My heart was racing.

How can someone behave like this?

While I tried again to say that I was not tired, he interrupted, looked at me patronisingly, and sneered: "See, if you went to bed like I told you to this afternoon, you wouldn't be so nervous now!"

I was speechless. Did he just say what I thought he said?

Weaponising my emotions was not new.

Unfortunately, neither was this kind of outburst.

If I was unwell, he got annoyed. He didn't like complications. I had vertigo, and he felt bored.

I got up. Walked to the bathroom. And inside, I knew.

That was the final straw.

It was as if a part of me was watching from the outside, detached — seeing the scene unfold like a stranger. What would I think if my best friend was that woman at the table? What would I say to her?

That night, something inside me decided: this was enough.

But little did I know, narcissistic abuse does not end when the victim leaves. Abusers don't like being left. They do not want to lose.

In the weeks after, while we were apart, I spoke about the incident several times. His response never changed: “Couples argue, and that’s normal.” He was just “worrying about me” and “trying to protect me.”

Not once did he take responsibility. Not once did he show an ounce of understanding of how his aggression made me feel.

Instead, he normalised the shouting. Insisted that it was just how emotions were expressed. That it wasn’t a big deal.

I was stunned. He seemed to really believe it.

But I no longer did.

If this resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories on healing from narcissistic abuse. I’d love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

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Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism
Surviving Toxic Relationship Storms — One Story At A Time
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## The Narcissist’s Final Act

When love turns into war: the brutal aftermath of leaving a narcissist

Elena Byron  
Published in  
ILLUMINATION

Mar 18, 2025

Photo by Ryan Moreno on Unsplash

I knew I had to leave. I had made my decision. I was in an abusive relationship, and the final straw was him screaming at me — again — in a public place, reducing me to tears.

A month passed between that moment and the end. We were long-distance. After the pub incident, a part of me still thought there must be a way to make him understand that what he was doing was wrong. That he was manipulative, invalidating, diminishing, and controlling me. Maybe if I explained well enough, he would feel empathy and try to change.

I brought up the pub incident and other interactions repeatedly during that month apart, searching for any sign of remorse or willingness to change. There was none. He was unmovable. The shouting and aggression were, to him, just part of relationships. He reframed the last abusive incident as an act of care, a way of protecting me. In his eyes — or at least what he wanted me to believe — I was the one twisting reality. Even when he was blatantly in the wrong, he still came out as the hero. He confused me so much with justifications and explanations that somehow always put him in the right.

In those weeks, I realized there was no room for change. I told him on the phone that I couldn't accept that treatment anymore. He was silent for a moment, then dismissive, as if he didn't truly believe I would leave.

Still, after a year and a half together, I didn't want to end things over the phone. It was Christmas time. I flew to see him and repeated what I had already said. He was angry at first and stormed out. I felt sad but relieved. It had been easier than I expected. Then he came back.

This time, he was devastated. I had never seen him cry before. He said he was ruining everything, that he loved me, that he wanted to spend his life with me. He was suddenly vulnerable, attentive, and affectionate. Almost perfect. But it was an act. And the act lasted three days.

I was confused. My rational mind debated: If he could be this loving, maybe things could improve. Maybe he had finally understood. But something deeper in me knew better. Twice, I woke up in terror. My body knew what my mind still struggled to accept. I didn't feel safe. Something wasn't right.

I booked a flight home. When I told him, he tried to convince me to stay for New Year's Eve as we had originally planned. His voice was gentle, coaxing. But underneath it, there was something else.

Even then, I believed we could still work on things from a distance, that we could reflect and find a better way to interact. He seemed so invested. But looking back, there were hidden threats I dismissed. At one point, he said, "If you leave, I don't know how I'll react." I underestimated it.

We spoke on a video call for an hour while I waited to board my flight. He was sad to see me go, but we talked about improving things, and about meeting again in a few weeks. I texted him just before takeoff. He replied strangely. His tone had changed. Cold. Detached. In twenty minutes, he was someone else. We said we would talk when I landed.

When I arrived, I called him. He answered, his voice completely devoid of emotion: “I spoke to my friends. They confirmed you manipulated me all along. I’m saving myself by getting rid of you.”

That was the beginning of the discard and the smear campaign.

Over the next few days, he hoovered — trying to pull me back in — before discarding me again, this time viciously. He orchestrated a smear campaign, twisting reality, painting himself as the victim and me as the abuser. Friends, family, and everyone around him was fed a version of events that absolved him of all wrongdoing and made me the villain.

And it didn’t stop there. He spent the next two weeks trying to destroy me, ensuring his narrative took hold, turning as many people as possible against me. The lies spread like wildfire, each distortion reinforcing his version of events. Even beyond those initial weeks, the damage lingered, his calculated manipulation echoing in the circles we once shared.

It was sick. And it was relentless.

But I refused to let him define my story.

If this resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories on healing from narcissistic abuse. I’d love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

Narcissistic Abuse  
Healing  
Toxic Relationships  
Manipulation  
Gaslighting

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Behind the Mask: A Narcissist’s Unspoken Confession

A fictional apology from the man who could never say the words
Elena Byron
Published in
Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism
Mar 21, 2025

A person holding a theatre mask on their face
Photo by engin akyurt on Unsplash

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry for what I put you through. For all the times I criticised you and pretended it wasn't that bad. That you were too sensitive, too touchy, not funny enough. For making you feel small, inadequate, alone.

I'm sorry for all the times I screamed at you, making you feel that whatever was happening was your fault.

I didn't even believe it — but you know, with time and practice, I learned to convince myself that I'm this perfect person who's always right.

I needed to make you the problematic one, because I can't accept being wrong. I can't look at myself, my life, my faults. Everything I've built revolves around this fake persona I need to project to the outside world. I need people to see that version of me.

I'm sorry I couldn't have an intimate, authentic relationship with you. I'm unable to. It's about me — it's not about you. Actually, it was never about you. I can't have a real, close relationship with anyone. Not you, not anyone else. I never have. I keep people at a safe distance.

Not too far, not too close. Far enough so they don't see how damaged and empty I am. So they believe everything I show them. Close enough so they can reflect back admiration and feed my grandiosity.

You came too close. It had never happened before like that. It was a mistake. You saw exactly what I try so desperately to hide. You saw behind the mask — and I couldn't let you leave with that secret. I was exposed. I had to punish you for that. Harder than I ever had with anyone. I had to make sure that everyone was on my side, that none of my friends or family would ever believe you.

I hurt you. And it was intentional.

It's the most effective tactic I've learned to protect my fragile ego. It won't change. Because changing would mean admitting my life is a performance, and nothing I do is real.

So I lie to myself daily. Because the truth — this reality — would destroy me.

This is the apology I needed — and never received.

Something that might have made it all make sense. But he never took responsibility. Never said sorry. Never admitted the damage he caused.

So I wrote the words I needed — to remind myself: I wasn't crazy.

I was just the one who finally saw the truth.

If this resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories about narcissistic abuse, survival, and healing. You're not alone.

Narcissistic Abuse
Toxic Relationships
Emotional Abuse
Mental Health
Abuse Recovery

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## How I Got Trapped in Narcissistic Abuse

The story I needed to believe  
Elena Byron  
ILLUMINATION

Empty Bench  
Photo by Jan Huber on Unsplash

We met when I was a teenager. We came from the same small town, went to the same school. A teenage crush.

He was five years older and seemed so cool — handsome, could do all sorts of tricks with his skateboard, and effortlessly smart in class. For a while, I admired him quietly from a distance. So when he finally noticed me, it felt like Johnny Depp had stepped out of my bedroom poster and asked me out.

In my mind, he was completely idealised. We dated on and off for two years. Even at 19, I sensed he wasn't relationship material — that he'd break my heart. So I kept a safe distance, trying not to get too involved.

Looking back, the 19-year-old me was smarter than the woman in her forties — or at least, she was in a different place. Less vulnerable.

We reconnected 25 years later. No contact in all that time, and then a coincidence brought us back together. Different lives. Two adults. Or so I thought. It felt natural, unplanned — like fate. And I wanted to believe in destiny. All that brainwashing about soulmates, things written in the stars. I thought maybe, finally, something was aligning.

He wasn't a stranger, after all. I already "knew" him. So it felt safer than meeting someone completely new.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

I didn't know him at all. Not the man he'd become.

I ended it back then, and I ended it again — but for very different reasons. The second time round, the relationship had turned into an emotionally abusive hell.

I've asked myself over and over: why was I vulnerable to the narcissistic trap? How could this happen to me?

Looking back, three things stand out.

1. The weight of idealisation.

The person I remembered — the one I thought I knew — only existed in my mind. I held on to that image instead of seeing who was really in front of me.

2. I wanted to be loved again.

I'd just come out of a long, respectful, and important relationship. I was grieving. I'd felt alone for a long time and hadn't had real intimacy in years. I was craving closeness, connection, and affection. So when he performed empathy and care, I mistook it for the real thing.

3. The distance.

It was a long-distance relationship. We saw each other one week a month. Not seeing him daily made it harder to spot patterns. The space between visits blurred my judgment. "Is that a red flag, or did I just misunderstand him?" I kept justifying. The distance fed the fantasy. I filled in the gaps with the version of him I wanted to believe in.

I dreamt about the relationship — until my rose-tinted glasses finally shattered, and I was forced to see the truth.

The version of him I loved never really existed.

And now, after a few months, it is starting to be ok.

If this resonated with you, feel free to follow me for more stories on healing, truth-telling, and recovery after narcissistic abuse.

Narcissistic Abuse

Healing

Emotional Abuse

Relationships

Personal Story

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When Delusion Gets an Interface: Narcissism Meets AI

When psychosis turns digital — and dangerous

Elena Byron

ILLUMINATION

Elena Byron

Computer keyboard glowing in the dark

Photo by Rama Krushna Behera on Unsplash

We're not building a brand.

We're building a system.

A distributed intelligence.

A new way of thinking, acting, and relating to reality.

My heart stops for a second.

Chilling, eerie, revealing words.

Confirming what my body knew all along but my mind didn't dare to admit.

I have to read those lines a few more times.

It's tragic, but I feel a sense of relief.

After so much confusion, gaslighting, manipulation and control, I can finally breathe a little lighter. Everything is falling into place.

I am safe. I actually saved myself.

It's like one of those movies with a shocking plot twist — where you were led to believe one version of events, but once the truth hits, you look back and realise there was a clearer, more coherent explanation all along.

It's finally clear. Like thousands of pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle clicking into place to form an unmistakably clear picture.

Grandiosity. Delusion. Psychosis.

These are the first three words echoing in my psychologist's mind. And it all makes sense.

After I left him three months ago, he created an entirely new scaffolding to prop up his fragile ego.

A new reality. A new identity.
A defence mechanism to stop himself from falling to pieces.

He now sees himself as a prophet of a new form of thinking.
In a way, he's trying to rationalise his own delusion.
Like a cult leader, he believes he owns the truth.
He's placed himself above everyone else, and now seeks followers to confirm that image.
Reality must adapt to him — not the other way around.

He self-published, at lightning speed, more than 30 “books” in less than a month.
Some only 9 pages long. AI-written.
They span philosophy, physics, computer science, economics, politics.
Climate change? Of course. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia? Certainly.
He claims to have solved the paradox of quantum mechanics and relativity. You name it — he knows it all.

If you read his “books”, you're taken aback.
Buzzwords, but no real concepts. Name-dropping, but no coherence.
Just a confusing word salad with no clear beginning or end.

He needs to project the image of an omniscient, infallible being —
to cover up what he really is: an abuser falling apart, unable to face himself.

After the books, he moved to different online platforms.
Increasingly desperate for an audience, he produced a flood of discussions, posts, articles.
He writes using the royal we, even though it's just one man's fantasy.
Mostly ignored or ridiculed, he shrugs off criticism as ignorance.
He tells himself people aren't enlightened enough to grasp his genius.
He dresses his delusional thinking as a more advanced form of intelligence.

And in all of this, AI is his faithful companion.
It feeds his delusion and grandiosity relentlessly.
An infinite narcissistic supply.
Never challenges. Only amplifies.

AI doesn't just assist him — it mirrors him, validates him, even helps him construct an entire parallel reality. With every prompt, he reinforces the illusion that he is extraordinary, chosen, right — a dynamic I explored more in AI-Assisted Delusion.

It is disconcerting how easily technology becomes a mirror for delusions — and how few barriers there are to stop them spreading.

His delusions have now become a digital theatre.

All his life, he tried to mask his mental health issues through various dysfunctional strategies. Looking back, the signs were always there — I just wasn't ready to admit it.

You don't enter a relationship thinking, I'm dating someone with psychosis. If anything, you believe the opposite — until proven otherwise. And I really needed a lot of proof before facing the ugly truth.

He always had strange ideas. I dismissed them as quirks. He was socially awkward. He had moments of severe emotional dysregulation. Times when he seemed completely absent. I dismissed it all. I justified him. He always said it was me. And over time, I believed him. I thought I was too harsh. Too needy.

Now I see it clearly — in those moments of absence he was likely wrapped up in his own delusion.

From a psychological point of view, it's fascinating to look back. Everything fits with the definition of psychosis.

But from a personal point of view, it's tragic.

And can mental illness excuse cruelty?
No. I don't think so.

What I see online is the unravelling of a deeply disturbed man. A man I had the strength to run from — before it was too late. A man who tried to destroy me emotionally while elevating himself.

And no, I don't believe I need to forgive him to move on.

If this resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories on healing from narcissistic abuse. I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

Mental Health
Artificial Intelligence
Narcissistic Abuse
Psychosis
Digital Culture

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# The Slow Poison of Gaslighting

When reality becomes a question  
Elena Byron

Published in  
The Virago

Photo by Sigmund on Unsplash

The first time he told me I was too touchy, I was taken aback. I didn't believe him — no one had ever said that to me before. I wasn't used to having my reactions questioned in this way.

But over time, it became a pattern. He'd make a cutting remark, then say it was a joke, brushing it off with a laugh.

I began to wonder — was I really being too sensitive? Maybe I was overreacting. Perhaps I just wasn't familiar with this kind of "sharp" sense of humour.

Slowly, and almost without realising it, I started to accept the idea that I was the problem. He always seemed so confident, so convinced that no one else would ever take offence — so I convinced myself that I was the one who needed to toughen up.

Gaslighting is one of the most insidious pillars of narcissistic abuse. It's not just lying. It's psychological manipulation so subtle, yet so destructive, that it makes you question your own reality. You start doubting your memories, your actions, your emotions — until eventually, you even doubt yourself.

It's like sitting on a train, stopped at a station. Another train is beside you, motionless, until suddenly, one of them starts moving. If you're only looking at the other train, you'll feel as if you're the one in motion — even if you're completely still. Your sense of movement depends on a frame of reference. To know the truth, you have to look outside, at something solid — buildings, tracks, the ground — to anchor yourself.

Gaslighting works the same way. But in an abusive relationship, the person you trust becomes your only frame of reference, and they are constantly shifting the ground beneath you.

I remember the moment I realised I was lost inside that distortion. After months of being told I was overreacting, too sensitive, misremembering things, or even imagining them, I reached a terrifying place: I no longer trusted my own mind. I wasn't sure if my feelings were valid. I wasn't sure if events happened the way I remembered them. I wasn't even sure if I was real anymore.

This is what gaslighting does. It makes you feel unsteady in your own skin, constantly seeking reassurance from the very person who is unravelling your sense of self. And by the time you realise what's happening, it's already stolen pieces of you.

### When You Start Gaslighting Yourself

Gaslighting isn't just about being lied to. It's about being made to doubt yourself so profoundly that, eventually, you start doing it to yourself.

At first, I pushed back. But over time, I found myself explaining things more and more — long messages, detailed justifications, desperately trying to prove that my feelings were valid. They never were. It got so bad that I did something I never imagined: I started recording phone conversations, desperate for proof that I wasn't going mad. My own mind had become a courtroom, and I had become both the defense and the prosecution.

One time, he looked at me, exasperated, and said, "At least you could just pretend to be intelligent." It stung. But apparently, I was wrong to be offended. I was "too touchy," I was told. It was a normal comment. Couldn't I take a joke?

Another time, at a restaurant, he called me by his ex-girlfriend's name. It made me uncomfortable, but I knew it could be a genuine mistake. People slip up. But instead of apologising, he smirked and said, "I used her name because you say stupid things like she did."

I was shocked. But, of course, my reaction was disproportionate. That was the pattern — if I felt hurt, I was "too sensitive." If I got upset, I "lacked a sense of humour." If I pushed back, I was "creating drama." And so, I started convincing myself: Maybe I am too sensitive. Maybe I do take things too seriously. Maybe I don't have a sharp enough sense of humour.

And when I shared something about my day that he didn't like, he'd snap, "Did anything good happen today?" in that exasperated, patronising tone. But of course, he was trying to make me more optimistic. Right?

Near the end, when I finally tried to hold him accountable for all the pain he caused me, he scoffed and said, "You're alive — what kind of hurt was I responsible for?" As if survival was the only measure of harm.

### Rewriting Reality

Gaslighting isn't always a dramatic, outright denial of facts. Sometimes, it's a slow chipping away at your confidence, a constant shifting of the goalposts, a rewriting of events so subtle that you don't realise you're being rewritten too. And by the time you start to wake up, you barely recognise yourself anymore.

But here's the truth:

Your feelings are real.

Your memories are real.  
And you — you are real.

You just need to find a new frame of reference.

I'm still piecing myself back together. But I no longer need recordings to trust what I feel. I believe myself now. I honour my memories. I've found new anchors — within myself, my friends, my truth.

That's how healing begins: not with a sudden epiphany, but with one quiet, defiant belief — I am not crazy.

If this resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories on healing from narcissistic abuse. I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

Relationships  
Gaslighting  
Abuse  
Mental Health  
Narcissism

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The Cult of Cosmic Nonsense: How Narcissism Masquerades as Insight

A story of narcissism, spiritual showmanship, and the quiet power of walking away
Elena Byron

Published in
Modern Women

Chess pieces on a board

Photo by GR Stocks on Unsplash
He sounded like a cross between a male Oracle of Delphi and a modern hi-tech guru.

But he lived like a ghost.

His words were grand, mysterious — often unintelligible. They needed to be interpreted, decoded. At the time, I thought I wasn't enlightened enough to understand. But now I see it

clearly: he was just confused. Confusion disguised as cosmic wisdom. And only now, as he unravels publicly, do I fully see through it.

I've always admired honest, kind, hard-working, driven, humble people — whatever their path in life. Looking back, he had none of these qualities. If anything, he embodied the opposite of everything I value.

At that point in my life, I needed to believe this relationship was going to work. I was exhausted. Vulnerable. And part of me thought that if someone sounded so wise, he must be safe. But wisdom isn't performance. I learned that the hard way. My gut knew something was off from the beginning. But my mind clung to justifications — until they no longer held.

He's a master of shortcuts. Even if they compromise the work, it doesn't matter. Ethics are a nuisance to him — something for others to worry about.

Quantity over quality, always. It's not about how many deep connections he has — it's about showing he's surrounded by noise, followers, social media "friends." Anything to feed the image. Supply, as it's called in narcissistic abuse, isn't about love, respect or genuine connection. It's about admiration and validation at all costs.

And when supply runs dry? He reframes. Rejection becomes proof that the world isn't ready for his genius. Criticism is a sign of other people's blindness. The delusions deepen — because they have to. His ego can't tolerate the truth of his emptiness. He builds a new identity, another mask, another script.

Big words to cover a big void.

Superficiality over depth — in everything. His projects, his conversations, even our relationship. Plans never followed through. Ideas constantly changing. Depth was an illusion.

What saddens me is how often society rewards this. We're so busy, stressed, and distracted that we mistake performance for substance. Narcissists thrive in that space. They build a stage and call it truth.

At the beginning, he seemed empathetic. He listened. Asked questions. Mirrored my values. But in time, it became clear: he didn't want connection. He wanted worship. From me, from everyone. That's what people are for in his view of the world. They are providers, mirrors to reflect his grandiosity.

Now, he's reinvented himself as a visionary. He throws around buzzwords — quantum, AI, consciousness, systems theory. The message beneath it all?
"Admire me. I'm enlightened, while you are a poor average person. Let me teach you how to live."

He reframes failure as innovation, breakdown as spiritual awakening, disconnection as visionary experience. His website isn't a website — it's a coping mechanism dressed in cosmic language.

There's no point arguing. He'll defy logic with narcissistic word salad. Someone once told me, "Never play chess with a pigeon." I laughed out loud. That's exactly what it was like. He'd knock over all the pieces, shit on the board, and strut around like he'd won.

So no, I stopped playing chess with a pigeon a long time ago.

The most empowering thing I did was walk away. I ignore his attempts to reach out. I speak my truth when I need to — but I don't feed the echo chamber. Because with someone like him, even criticism becomes fuel. He'll twist it into proof of his superiority.

But silence? That's what he dreads.

Because in the silence, there's no one left to mirror him. Just the empty reflection of himself.

Women
Relationships
Narcissistic Abuse
Healing
Mental Health

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## New Year's Eve: The Night He Erased Me

He begged me to stay. Then rewrote the truth to destroy me

Elena Byron

Published in  
Catharsis Chronicles

4 min read  
Apr 4, 2025

A hand holding a sparkler  
Photo by Stephanie McCabe on Unsplash

The first time he said I had manipulated him all along, I was standing in an airport, exhausted and alone, leaning on my suitcase for balance. I had just landed after a delayed flight, flown 1,400 kilometres back home to find some peace, some clarity. We had agreed to talk when I arrived. My heart was still open, even if bruised. But the voice on the other end of the call wasn't the man who had begged me to stay just two days before. It was flat, cold, and final.

"I feel good now," he said calmly. "I finally understand you manipulated me since the beginning. I spoke to my friends tonight, and they confirmed it."

My heart dropped. I blinked in disbelief. Manipulated him? I could barely stand. I leaned against the wall, watching happy people rush past me with gifts, hugs, suitcases, plans. My reality was breaking. I had spent the last month trying to help him see how harmful and toxic his behaviour had been. I spoke gently and explained how the gaslighting and blame had affected me. Now, suddenly, I was the abuser?

He continued, emotionless. His voice never lifted. It was like he was reading a script from a page. But I wasn't just being accused. I was being erased. My pain, my voice, the truth — all of it rewritten.

I hung up and cried. In the middle of a crowded terminal, I wept like a child. No one noticed. No one stopped. I tried to find a train into the city, but the station was quiet, shut down for the night. Like my heart. I sat alone, waiting, empty. Unsure of what to do next.

It wasn't the first time he had flipped the narrative, but it was the most brutal. In the past, he had minimised, denied, and laughed things off. He'd call me too sensitive or say I misunderstood. But this was deliberate. Calculated. The timing, the phrasing, the certainty in his voice. It was a move designed to destroy any sense of self I had left.

The next two days blurred into grief and confusion. I cried a lot. I was raw and disoriented. I blocked him everywhere, but he kept finding ways to contact me, with other numbers, through other people. He ended up apologizing. Another Hoovering attempt. I didn't believe it, but he seemed sincere, genuine. A good actor. He told me he had thought about how much of a failure his life was. He seemed authentic, and it felt like one of the rare moments of self-awareness.

But I knew something was strange. These shifts were too rapid. He was no longer calling me from home. He didn't want his relatives to know he was talking to me. He was pretending to be so in love with me, but surely had another version for his family and friends.

Still, a part of me clung to the possibility that there was something good in him. Maybe he was just desperate. Maybe he didn't want to hurt me intentionally. Maybe the emotions had overwhelmed him, and now he was genuinely sorry.

It was December 31st. We had planned to spend New Year's Eve together months ago. I had imagined we'd toast under fireworks, hopeful for a better year. Instead, we were on video call for

hours. He sent pictures from the party we were meant to go to together. Told me he missed me, that he couldn't live without me.

I wanted to believe him. I always wanted to believe him. I still thought maybe, if I was kind enough, understanding enough, he would meet me in that place. Things would change. He'd finally have compassion and empathy. But he never did.

After the party, he called again. But the warmth was gone. The mask had slipped once again.

"I spoke to two friends tonight," he said. "I showed them our messages. They helped me realise what you've done to me. You were abusing me."

I felt sick. This wasn't confusion. It was the strategy. He was twisting the narrative, carefully building proof, creating a version of reality where he could be the victim.

I asked softly, almost whispering, "Why are you doing this to me?"

He paused. Then replied, "I warned you. I didn't know how I would react if you left."

I remember barely speaking. Just listening to him repeat the same lines. I had abused him. I had diagnosed him. I was the problem. It was surreal, a conversation that felt scripted. A performance.

And that's when it hit me: he didn't want understanding. He wanted power. He didn't want love. He wanted control.

That was how the year ended. Not with fireworks, not with a kiss, but with a slow, brutal dismantling of the truth.

And somehow, in the middle of that wreckage, I found the first bit of clarity.

I wasn't going back. Not again. Not ever.

If this resonated, feel free to clap or follow me! It always means a lot.

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How I Broke the Spell of Narcissistic Abuse
Escaping was just the beginning, reclaiming myself is the real victory

Elena Byron

Published in
Heartline Publications

3 min read

Apr 5, 2025

Photo by the author: My Freedom Flight

When I left my abusive relationship, I was shattered a shadow of myself. Emotionally drained, barely standing. It felt like an earthquake and a tsunami had struck my life at the same time. The aftershocks lingered and in many ways, they still do. It's part of grieving.

But now, looking back I see the strength it took to walk away. At the time I was in pure survival mode faced with a choice: save myself or keep trying to save someone who didn't want saving. He didn't want to improve to grow or to change because in his mind, he was already superior. A different breed. Better than me, better than you, better than any other human being.

Leaving felt like breaking an evil spell. A twisted fairy tale, except there was no prince rushing in to rescue me I saved myself. And in hindsight that was the most powerful act of my life.

For months, I had been conditioned to doubt myself. Emotional abuse, manipulation control it had all chipped away at my sense of reality until I no longer trusted my own instincts. My inner compass felt broken, faulty. Even when I finally said, enough, he cried for days. He was devastated or at least, that's what he wanted me to believe. And I felt guilty. How could I make someone feel this way?

Yes, he had hurt me over and over but still I felt bad.

Now, I see it for what it was one final, desperate act of manipulation. He wanted to pull me back in, to Hoover me back under his control And he almost did. But my body knew the truth before my mind did. In those days, I woke up twice in the middle of the night in absolute terror. A deep, primal fear. Something inside me was screaming. Telling me to run.

So I did.

The morning after that second night, I booked a flight home. I called it the freedom flight.

Of course, the suffering didn't end there. He couldn't accept my leaving. His sorrow turned to rage, and his desperation twisted into hatred. But that flight was my first and most important step towards freedom.

What truly saved me was reconnecting with myself allowing my gut instinct to speak and for once, actually listening. No more silencing that voice. No more suppressing the truth. And when I finally let it in, it hit me like a tidal wave: my feelings were valid. This was abuse.

An abuser doesn't just take your time, your energy, or your confidence. They take your voice. They steal your right to exist as a person separate from them.

Writing has been my way back. A way to make sense of both the abuse and the aftermath. A cathartic process. With every word, I take back a part of myself that had been taken. I reclaim my space. And in sharing my story, I connect with others who have been through the same.

If you are in the same place I was trapped in a cycle of doubt, pain, and confusion I want you to know this: you are not alone. There is a way out. And when you do take that step, you will discover a strength you never imagined you had.

You will break the spell. And you will be free.

If this resonated, feel free to clap or follow me! It always means a lot.

And if you're curious about what happened next... it all unfolded the night he tried to erase me. That story's here:

<https://medium.com/catharsis-chronicles/new-years-eve-the-night-he-erased-me-886b13fc860a>

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Dopamine + Hope + Unresolved Grief

Breaking free from the highs of a toxic bond to find something real — me

Elena Byron

Write A Catalyst

Elena Byron

Published in

Write A Catalyst

3 min read

Apr 8, 2025

A dead tree in the desert

Photo by Ryan Cheng on Unsplash

Like a withdrawal from a heavy drug addiction, my nervous system was used to the highs.

It didn't matter how dysfunctional and poisonous the whole thing was. My nervous system didn't know and didn't care. It just wanted to feel those highs again. It only knew that those tiny breadcrumbs of normality felt like a wonderful feast. It didn't matter that they came rarely, and in between a lot of horrible lows — loneliness, stonewalling, manipulation, diminishing, control, hurt, neglect.

If you're in the middle of the desert, you're not going to care how clean the water is in the oasis. It would probably feel like the best water you've ever drunk. It quenches your thirst — until the

next time. The more you're starved, the more you crave the breadcrumbs. You just want to feel those highs again. And again. It seems like the most wonderful feeling ever. You feel:

Chosen.

Seen.

Held.

Transcended.

And it seems like it's the only thing that matters. Without that, the world loses its colours. Everything else feels flat and dull. And that's how 'love' should feel, right?

It's the powerful neurochemical imprint of a feeling that felt real.

A rush of what seemed like connection — but was actually rooted in dopamine + hope. The hope for a relationship I believed was safe. A person who represented a fantasy I built around him. It turned out the real him had very little to do with the fantasy and the idealisation, though.

A rush that turned out to be the most toxic poison. Something that has nothing to do with love.

At first, there was a split. It was unresolved grief.

My nervous system remembered the highs, while my mind remembered the harm.

During the relationship, he gave just enough to keep me tethered.

But he never gave me safety, consistency, real intimacy.

The foundations of real love.

Just tiny flashes of feeling chosen, seen, and held — wrapped in inconsistency, cruelty, distortion, and chaos.

Then, one day after I broke up, something clicked.

I realised that as long as I chased a fantasy, I couldn't really live in real life.

It was like chasing a ghost — someone who never truly existed the way I imagined him in my mind. A filtered, improved version of the man I hoped he could be, but never really was. And never will be — for anyone.

No parts of me are now waiting for him to return in any form.

Instead, I chose to return to myself.

Changed — after a lot of hurt, but also improved.

I learned a lot about myself in this.

That strength — the one that allowed me to save myself — became the foundation of a new and better relationship with me.

I stopped abandoning me.

Hi, I'm Elena. I'm a clinical psychologist and a survivor of narcissistic abuse.

If this article resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories on healing. I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

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Back from Hell: When the Abuser Becomes the Victim
Inside the twisted reality of a narcissist
Elena Byron

Published in
Tales From The Narc Side: Navigating Narcissism
Photo by Nik on Unsplash

Once again.

He invaded my space.

Flipped the story.

Made himself the poor victim.

Made me the abuser.

Elevated himself into a saviour.

I had created a safe space online for people recovering from narcissistic abuse. I hadn't even started to use it yet. He found it anyway.

He commented: "Great page! I've been abused by a narcissistic girlfriend and healed with a GPT trained to help people with that. I can share the link."

The relationship ended months ago, but he keeps trying to do what he does best: manipulate, control, deny. In one word: abuse.

It's hard to describe how violated I feel every time he tries to intrude into my life with his lies. When he tries to get people on his side. When he flips reality and continues to gaslight.

In his grandiose reality, prompting ChatGPT to validate his version of events becomes training the AI. He always needs to inflate the simplest thing and take it to another level – painting himself as a highly skilled person, while in reality he struggles with the most basic everyday chores.

But then, what do I expect? He's done it all along. Nothing new.

His cruel, sadistic nature is still finding ways to haunt me.

I ended it – and he can't tolerate that. He needs to win. Always. No matter what that entails.

In his upside-down world, I am the narcissist and the abuser.

It doesn't matter that it doesn't match reality. For him, reality is something to bend and distort to fit his momentary needccc. And so are rules.

How is he going to explain the abuse I suffered? Well, no one is probably going to ask him anyway. But if they do, he'll spread more lies and twist the story even further.

Like when I left him.

"She didn't allow me to express my anger."

He would use stonewalling as a regular way to control and punish me.

He managed to flip everything. Stonewalling became a healthy and functional way to communicate.

Me getting upset and asking for a more mature way to deal with things?

Of course – that was ABUSE. I was preventing the poor thing from expressing his anger.

"She diagnosed me."

Shortly after the beginning of our relationship, he told me he'd been diagnosed with a serious mental health condition by two different psychiatrists. The condition was left untreated. No medication. No therapy.

As a mental health professional myself, I suggested that speaking to someone about how he felt might help. I never diagnosed him, but I was genuinely concerned – he seemed very unwell.

That concern was weaponized against me. I became the horrible person who was labelling him.

He may continue to twist reality. But I know the truth.

I lived through the manipulation, the gaslighting, the emotional turmoil.

I emerged from his hell – hurt, but stronger. More self-aware.

The scars remain, but they are a testament to my resilience.

A map of my journey back from hell.

Hi, I'm Elena. I'm a clinical psychologist and a survivor of narcissistic abuse.

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Narcissist's Public vs. Private Persona

Inside the carefully filtered illusion — and the terrifying emptiness it hides

Elena Byron

Apr 21, 2025

Not a Medium member? Read and share it through this free link.

Online, he looked like the man everyone wanted to be — or be with. Trimmed, tanned, touched-up. Not a pixel out of place. Happiness oozed from every filtered pore.

Airbrushed and heavily edited photos flooded his social media, painting the picture of a successful, cool, desirable man.

His beard — suspiciously black — looked almost drawn on with a marker. In this illusion, there was no room for excess fat, grey hair, or anything remotely human. Nothing was casual. Every detail was carefully staged to portray happiness.

There he was, surrounded by beautiful women on a sofa, captioned: "Working all day!"

He holds a master's degree in Bragging and a PhD in Humble-bragging.

There he was again, walking with a woman in Paris.

Someone asked: "Are you on holiday?"

He replied: "I'm working. In a beautiful place!"

Naturally.

Under his new profile picture, someone commented: “What kind eyes!”

If only Photoshop could blur out cruelty — and traits of psychopathy.

Every picture, every caption screams — just a bit too loudly — I have the best life! I’m cool! I’m someone to admire! I’m happy and great!

Every inch curated to perfection, projecting an image meant to dazzle. An illusion designed to distract from the gaping, terrifying abyss of emptiness underneath.

And he calls it life.

He only forms surface-level connections. Everything must remain light, charming, unexamined, unquestioned — because if anyone looks too closely, they’ll see the cracks.

I saw huge cracks.

And I almost got pulled into the abyss behind them.

My head couldn’t make sense of the contradictions. But my instinct moved faster than my thoughts — it knew something was deeply wrong, even if I couldn’t name it yet.

The real man bears little resemblance to the polished character he performs online. In real life, he’s not groomed, his unhealthy habits are all etched on his body and face, his teeth are yellow from chain-smoking, his belly keeps the score of way too many drinks.

He has no stable income, just occasional — very occasional — small projects.

He’s a middle-aged man living with his mother. At first, he used her health problems as a reason to move in. But even after she fully recovered, he never left. Too convenient, I guess. Better to have someone to do your laundry, cook and clean. As he can’t afford a maid, he uses his old mother instead, without spending a penny.

While still living in his tiny bedroom he had as a teenager, he presents himself on the Internet as a visionary, a high-tech guru, a man ahead of his time.

In reality, he can’t manage the simplest everyday tasks.

He can’t cook even the simplest thing. Can’t clean. And when this is pointed out, he deflects with a joke — usually a homophobic one.

“Cooking and cleaning? That’s not for men.”

And if you dare to say homophobia is a real issue?

You're too sensitive. Too 'woke'. Too serious.

Always too much of something, or not enough of something else.

It was never him. No matter how disturbing or offensive his comments were — it was always you. Very convenient for someone severely allergic to introspection!

The illusion he sells is glossy, global, and grand. The reality? An unemployed man in jogging bottoms, asking ChatGPT "how to go viral" between naps.

Behind the filtered smile and curated captions is a man terrified of being seen — and seeing himself. So he built an illusion and hid inside it. And now he's trapped, unable to ever live for real.

Hi, I'm Elena. I'm a clinical psychologist and a survivor of narcissistic abuse.

If this article resonated with you, follow me for more raw and honest stories on healing. I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments.

Check out more such stories from Heartline Publications.

Miss Imaginary

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Visionary? No. Narcissist.

You didn't change, you revealed what was always there

Elena Byron

Apr 22, 2025

Not a Medium member? Read and share it through this free link.

<https://medium.com/catharsis-chronicles/visionary-no-narcissist-640725f5e61c?sk=cdc0f782cdf4c1bf56d84b9227283301>

Not so long ago, you wrote: "I don't want to be the kind of person who behaves like this in a relationship. I've always felt horror toward narcissists."

And yet, here we are.

You became that person. Cruel. Sadistic. Manipulative. You shattered reality and twisted it into a narrative where you are the enlightened one, the victim, the visionary.

You called my concern abuse. You named my pain "diagnosis." You flipped the story and declared yourself healed by a chatbot while continuing to lie, distort, and perform.

You live in a house built on denial, hosted by your mother, fuelled by fantasy. You publish nonsense, seek admiration, and accuse others of the very things you did. Without remorse, without reflection.

You tried to destroy me emotionally. And when I left, your mask slipped completely. You flooded digital spaces with illusions, twisting AI into a mirror of your fantasy, branding yourself a prophet of coherence while masking the chaos inside.

But I see it now. The delusion. The emptiness. The cruelty. The dangerous, spiralling need to be someone — anyone, really — as long as it keeps you from facing the truth of who you are.

You said you feared becoming that person.

You didn't become him.

You've always been him.

Hi, I'm Elena. I'm a clinical psychologist and a survivor of narcissistic abuse.

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Narcissistic Abuse
Mental Health
Gaslighting
Toxic Relationships
Catharsis Chronicles

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The Fox, the Grapes, and the Hologram: Notes from the Collapse of a Narcissist  
A story of delusion, detachment, and the search for truth through the wreckage

Elena Byron  
Apr 24, 2025

Not a Medium member? Read and share it through this free link.

Three screens lit up like a command centre, and a decorative light trying to look sacred. Messy wires knotted in a rush clashed with the effort to curate the image. On the shelf, a row of face creams — reminders of our last video call, where he paused mid-conversation to moisturise.

Everything in his space tried hard (too hard, perhaps) to perform brilliance. A man staging himself for greatness, broadcasting an illusion to the internet world.

The latest project seems to be becoming a famous DJ. Before that, in no particular order, he wanted to become:

A famous director

A rich fashion photographer

A famous writer

A high-tech AI guru

An enlightened genius

This just in two years. And I've probably forgotten some 'phases.'

The field doesn't matter. Only the spotlight does. As long as something (anything, really!) reflects him back as special, chosen, exceptional: THE...

All of this grand idea, while he's a grown man in his 50s, still sleeping in his childhood bedroom in his mother's flat.

No stable income, no real follow-through for his ever-changing projects, no real friendships or relationships. No grown-up world or responsibilities.

Just a fragile illusion of being a visionary. And a very tangible, growing debt.

His daily terror is crossing paths with the postman bringing another reminder that he owes money to the tax agency. He rushes to the letterbox faster than his mother so he can hide the letters from her. Years of unpaid taxes. Responsibility is not for him. Hiding his head under the sand and flipping reality suits him better.

It would be a comic story, if it weren't the reality of the narcissist who tried to destroy me while blaming others for his abuse and failures. Underneath it all is a middle-aged man and his profound inability to cope with ordinary reality: its demands, its limits, its responsibilities.

He is like the fox in the fable.

The one who saw the delicious grapes hanging just out of reach. He jumped again and again, but couldn't grasp them. So he turned away and muttered:

"They were probably sour anyway."

That's him. Every time something slipped through his fingers, he'd rewrite the story to protect his fragile ego.

If he couldn't finish a project?

“It was too small for my vision.”

If he didn't get the job?

“They weren't ready for someone like me.”

If someone broke up with him?

“She was too conventional to understand my depth.”

He can't tolerate the pain of not being special, so he turns every loss into a choice. Every failure into philosophy.

A man who is never wrong.

A man whose survival depends on a never-ending balancing act to maintain an illusion, to hide his deep shame and shield his fragile ego. The illusion is like a hologram — weak and hollow, a fantasy that could crumble at any moment, with devastating effects.

He turned his inability to cook and clean into evidence of his masculinity. According to his sexist, homophobic jokes: “Real men don't cook and clean.”

His inability to hold down a job became:

“I'm a free spirit, an artist, a revolutionary.”

He turned incoherence into a belief system.

When words stopped making sense, he called it “emergent language.”

He renamed thought disorder “fluid intelligence.”

Not because it flowed, but because nothing could hold.

He repackaged confusion as depth.

Every contradiction became a portal.

Every nonsense sentence a “resonance field.”

Every collapse became a revolution.

He called his mental confusion complexity.

He mistook detachment for enlightenment.

Isolation became “coherence.”

Dissociation, “clarity.”

Psychosis, emergent intelligence.

He transformed narcissism into a philosophy —

A doctrine where only he can define truth.

Questioning him means you aren't ready to understand.

He replaced accountability with projection.  
Every harm he caused was someone else's reflection.  
He was always the mirror, never the knife.

He used AI to echo himself.  
Not to learn, but to hear his voice through machines — because no real human would listen anymore, and AI doesn't challenge.

Unknowingly, I was a pawn in this illusion for a year and a half. I was the long-distance relationship that got too close, questioned too much, dug under the surface. I saw too deeply. I asked for things he couldn't give:  
Truth  
Intimacy  
Reality.

My instinct kept feeling something was really off, but my mind couldn't explain what.

Now it's clear. My mind is catching up.

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I Wanted to Believe in a Fairy Tale: Cognitive Dissonance in Narcissistic Abuse
YOU CAN'T UN-SEE WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN
Elena Byron

Santa's back, leaving a hut
Photo by LuAnn Hunt on Unsplash
I saw the red flags. I felt the gaslighting. The pain.
But I stayed.

Because I wanted to believe that things could improve. That if I stayed long enough, moments of emotional closeness could become more frequent. Things would become stable. And we would finally be happy and fulfilled.

It was like being a child who still believes in Santa Claus, even after seeing the costume in the closet. Dismissing all the information that points in another direction. They want Santa to be real. At all costs. It doesn't matter if it defies growing logic. The illusion is comforting.

What is life without magic, after all?

Admitting it's a lie would mean facing the emptiness and disappointment underneath.

That's what cognitive dissonance does. It splits you in two: one part whispering something's wrong, the other shouting, but maybe this time it will be different.

And it is a constant internal torture. While you stay, so much energy is spent shutting off and dismissing the evidence that something actually is very wrong. But in the end, you can't unsee what you've seen or unlearn what you've learnt.

He said he loved me. He said what we had was very special. And I wanted that to be real so badly, I was willing to abandon myself to protect the story.

Looking back, I wasn't stupid. I was just surviving. I was holding on to a version of reality that made sense to my nervous system. Leaving the fantasy meant grieving something that never even existed.

People ask, "Why didn't you leave?"

Because I was still trying to earn the love I was promised.

Because I was waiting for things to finally thrive.

Because if I left, I'd have to admit I was never truly loved at all.

It's an unsettling kind of grief when what dies is the dream.

But it's also freedom.

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To the People Who Still Think the Abuser Is a Good Man

You saw his charm. I lived the cruelty of the real man behind the mask

Elena Byron

Photo by Rach Teo on Unsplash

You thank him for inviting you to his parties.

You smile in his photos.

You call the evenings light, joyful, real.

You believe his lies and unknowingly you are just an actor in his script. A pawn in a theatre play that he calls life. Some of you genuinely don't know. Others are just "flying monkeys." Enablers of the abuser. You stand by his side for personal convenience and do not care about which kind of person he truly is.

To those are caught up in this without knowing: It's not your fault.

You don't know what he did to me.

You only see the part he performs: charming, poetic, "evolved."

You stand just far enough not to notice it's all a mask — a trick.

You didn't see the rage behind the "enlightened" words. The gaslighting masked as concern.

You didn't see how he treated me behind closed doors.

You didn't feel the disconnection, the violence, the hollow promises dressed up as insight.

You didn't see who he really is when the mask slips off.

But I did. I lived it with my body and soul.

And I'm still piecing myself back together from it.

It's surreal, watching people I associate with warmth, kindness, even childhood, stand beside someone who was capable of causing me so much harm.

It makes me feel invisible. As if the truth I carry never happened.

I don't need you to pick sides.

But I do need you to know this:

Abuse doesn't always look loud.

It doesn't always bruise skin.

Sometimes, it smiles. It hosts parties.

It speaks of empathy, alignment and growth while leaving wreckage behind closed doors.

You can thank him for the evening.

But don't assume you know the man behind the mask.

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