

*Narcissistic Traits: The Silent Dangers Lurking
Singles, Don't Ignore These Red Flags*

E. Marcus Legette

Disclaimer

The author is not a therapist; therefore, the contents you are about to read are not based on a diagnosis of individual references throughout this book. The author is sharing vital information related to recognizing narcissistic tendencies which are different from a narcissism diagnosis. Also, his personal experiences related to narcissistic traits.

Your head feels like it is in a fog.

Unable to sleep at night.

Anxious

No appetite at times

Confused

If you are feeling any of the above.....keep reading!

Me-You noticed whenever I have asked you to do something for me you always have an excuse not to do it.

Her-Well, if you noticed, I am always doing something, and your schedule allows you to do more.

Welcome to life with a mate displaying narcissistic traits!

Acknowledgment Part 1

To the family of the woman who tried to destroy me and my character: I managed a musician who traveled the world three times over from the time he was a teenager until the day he passed away. He never paid a dime to see the world. His talent was so immense that the people who hired him to perform covered the costs on top of his performance salary. Upon meeting him, he did not share details of his illustrious career. His accolades were not important to him. He glorified God through his gift. No matter how many adult men (including me) were left frozen in his presence due to their admiration for him, he just wanted people to be comfortable around him. This is called humility.

I have known your family for over thirty years, and to speak truth to power, much of your family member and siblings' way of thinking is derived from her upbringing which is that of arrogance and an elitist attitude. Primary examples: Upon learning that my book was self-published, a sibling remarked, "My father-in-law does that." The tone was, "Anyone can self-publish a book. No big deal." However, if a major publisher published my books, he would have graced me with personal congratulations. Allow me to respond to this comment. The reviews I have received from customers who purchased copies of my books indicate that my words have provided comfort and hope, which are measurements that are not the standard for your core family beliefs. More direct comments from members of your family articulated to my face.

"I don't know why you (your family member) make such a big deal about him." (meaning me)

“I’ll pay for it if you (me) don’t have the money to pay for it.”

Your family member, who served as the motivation to author this book, once remarked to me, “This is the reason you don’t marry someone who is not on your financial level.” This statement was in response to stating I no longer wanted to use the services of her accountant. What man would stay with a woman who makes this kind of comment? It was this one comment that validated my feelings that your family member did not respect me as a man. Her behavior and treatment of me reflected her words. It also served as the last straw. It was the comment that said, “It’s time to go!”—The above comment showed this is the environment your family member grew up in which is wrapped in the illusion that somehow people are beneath others who have achieved a certain level of success.

For the record, your family member was not abandoned. The accusation is an insult to me as a man and to the man who raised me. And I will not tolerate any insult against my father. Your family member's actions, which consisted of persistent verbal disrespect, dismissiveness, and gaslighting, were the causes for me to remove myself. Your family member refused to participate in couples counseling. Yet, the behaviors continued—abusive behaviors I learned about in therapy.

One aspect of the narcissistic trait is to defame the character of the victim once the victim decides to leave. I am confident your family member has articulated a victim explanation. Your family member was aware of the plan for my exit because it was articulated and shared to her face. The question was posed by her about my plan, and an answer was given. The answer was and I quote, “I will look for a place to live and when I find one, I am going to move in.” The next day, I drove your family member to the airport for a

business trip. On the way back to my car, I noticed your family member's SUV spare key was missing from my keychain. I walked back to the airport, saw your family member, got her attention, and informed her that her spare key was missing. Your family member searched for her pocketbook and pulled the spare key out. I informed her to keep it. On the way home, I called her and asked, "Why would you take your spare key off but keep mine?" Her response? "Because you are not telling me what you are going to do!"—Translation: "You (meaning me) will not use my SUV to move." Make sense?

Another trait of narcissism is a lack of respect for their mate. One other component of narcissism is reactionary abuse. Reactionary abuse is when the narcissists focus on the reactions of the abused. They conveniently forget the events that occurred prior to the reaction. What events? Gaslighting, dismissiveness, temper tantrums, etc. I am sure my reactions, which never included any form of violence, were shared with you. And that is okay!

I understand you will support your family member. However, I am armed with the truth. I loved your family member, but with a heart ailment and living in an environment where I was constantly dismissed and not respected would have eventually had an impact on my health due to stress. In fact, two months after removing myself, I went through two more procedures related to my heart, which increased the total to seventeen procedures/surgeries on my heart since 2013. Your family member informed me via text, after the procedures, "If I don't die before, don't ever contact her again."

Narcissistic tendencies were born within your family and became entrenched and embedded into your family member's life. There were constant reminders of the success your family has accomplished in our home even when the conversation did not

have anything to do with the topic of the discussion. Many places we went to, your family member made sure to inform people of her profession and title, even when the conversation did not require her to share that information. Or being at the hospital as I was fighting for my life and hearing about your family member informing medical doctors of her educational level. Her upbringing has played a significant role in the way your family member carries herself, which is elitist and disrespectful towards others. For the record, people are not jealous of your success.

Four males resided in the household during your family member age of maturity; it seemed evident that no one invested the time in teaching your family member about men. The way a man moves and the importance of showing a man respect. The goal instead within the home appeared to be reaching a level of success, which your family member achieved two times over. However, no one taught your family member that a man in an intimate relationship desire to be respected. Men do not want to be dismissed. No self-respecting man with pride and dignity will stay in an environment where he is constantly emasculated. Men do not want to be talked down to. Men will walk away when he is consistently not seen, heard, and dismissed.

Examples of her verbal disrespect shown towards me-

“You are useless.”

“You should know more at this stage of your life.”

“This is why they tell you not to marry a man who is not on your financial level.”

The problem I have with this family, you appear to believe your success makes you above others. On one occasion while visiting

with your family, your family member was doing her usual act which is to show the depths of her love by being overly affectionate. Another family member stated, and I quote "I don't know why you make such a big deal about him." This is the kind of comment my parents would never say to anyone. Your family? It happened to me several times, I just never responded. Why? I know who I am as a man. I did not try to prove anything to you thirty years ago and I never will.

A man is not going to voluntarily stay in an environment where he is being disrespected repeatedly. If I allow that, what kind of man would I be? Attractive physical features and the aesthetics of a lovely home will not be enough to keep a man of substance. This is your standard. It is now your responsibility to impart these lessons so your family member can also one day enjoy the company and love of a mate.

The chances are likely that, unlike within your family who have mates, your family member may never have that opportunity. I in no way wish for this to happen. However, a book such as this one will be written by more people related to this very topic because people displaying narcissistic traits are becoming very prevalent within our society. This means more people will become educated and empowered.

Your mission going forward is to provide support for your family member. The family is partially responsible for this creation. When your family member shares this book with you, she will state, "This is his narrative of events." This is gaslighting, a major contributor to the reason we are no longer together. It is a cruel and manipulative tactic designed to alter someone's reality. You all know my parents, do you think they raised a man that is unable to distinguish the difference between respect or disrespect?

Finally, in a text sent by your family member, she implied I was not supportive or even jealous of her career. For the record, when your family member book was published, a few libraries allowed her to present her book. I attended and recorded videos of her appearances and placed on social media. Success to your family members is materialistic. Success to my family is the number of people you touch and help overcome obstacles. I was accepted into a program your family member had to invest over two decades to reach that level. It took me one week!

As for me? I am still standing, and because of your family member mistreatment of me, people will become more educated and empowered. Be blessed.

Acknowledgement-Part 2

It is so egregious to realize I gave you everything other men did not want to give you and that is a commitment in a relationship. My reward? Consistent,

- Temper tantrums
- Gaslighting
- Condescending tone
- Verbal disrespect
- Dismissiveness

Even more egregious is the unwillingness to attend therapy so we could work on our issues. Leaving was not my first option.

In your world, a man speaking up for himself while enduring disrespectful behavior was described as "being picked on" or as me "complaining all of the time." Being raised in a household of "Alpha males" is a major contributor to your behavior. Removing myself from that environment was a decision I was forced to make to protect my mental and emotional sanity. Most importantly, for my health.

Remember, I am the man you performed CPR on to help save my life as I suffered a massive heart attack. Was I perfect in the relationship? Absolutely not! My parents raised me to treat others the way I wanted to be treated. Your expectations were for me to deal with and accept consistent disrespect. To become a willing recipient of those behaviors, and to remain silent. This is the mindset of an abuser.

My parents did not raise me to accept mistreatment by anyone. By the time this book is printed the million-dollar question you have yet to ask since I removed myself is, "Why did I leave?" The question was not posed by you because a person demonstrating narcissistic traits does not care to ask this question, as he or she will have to be accountable for their actions. It will force you to look at yourself. But due to your accomplishments, in your mind you are untouchable. Here are your words describing yourself early in the relationship.

- "I am all over the place."
- "I have a bad temper."
- "I can be condescending with my words."
- "I can be dismissive."
- "I am impatient."

Your honest description of yourself was my daily life for three years. Not one belongs in the confines of a healthy relationship. No one is perfect. You were cruel and condescending far more than I have ever allowed another adult to be towards me. I am ashamed I allowed it for years. My father did not raise me to tolerate blatant disrespect.

He raised me with the motto, "Respect is not an option; it is a requirement." You wanted me to make concessions to a rule that, in the past, caused me to walk into supervisors' offices and inform them, "The way you communicate with me is not working for me." I did not care about losing my job during those moments. There

are no gray areas in respect. More egregious is that you changed for a former boyfriend but were not willing to change for a husband.

The old saying goes when people show you who they really are believe. Why didn't I believe you? Because I have carried the memories of us when love was fresh, and we were inexperienced as teens and young adults. We were not exposed to the love games that adult people still play well into their fifties. It was innocent and beautiful. I came back to live the remaining years of my life with the person with whom this thing called love started. Those memories are now forever wiped from my mind.

I forgive you. I will move on with my life. Writing about my experiences is a major step forward because I am continuing on a path set over thirty years ago, which is to use my gift and pain to help others. My prayer for you is that one day you will acknowledge the traits that cause others pain. However, currently, you are unable to see it because you are blinded by your professional accomplishments. I addressed this in my first acknowledgment. Whenever we had a disagreement, you mentioned your family's success several times.

I will end with this: accomplishments, the accumulation of money, and owning real estate, will not go with us when our time on this earth is done. This is the reason arrogance should never be part of a person's character. You tried to destroy a heart that has endured seventeen procedures and surgeries over a twelve-year period. I am an overcomer, with the strength of God keeping me alive... I have not lost... I won... many others will win because of this book!

Dedication

First, I want to thank God for keeping me through such a challenging time and for showing me, late in the midnight hour, the answer to the storm I was involved in. Only you could improve the strength of my heart (from 35% after the heart attack-45%) during chaos and sorrow. What a marvelous thing you have done! To my beautiful daughters, Alexis, Gianna, and Niara. I am enormously proud of you! Keep God first and all things are possible. To my parents, your love, prayers and guidance continue to sustain me. To my older brother Michael for the laughter and to your wonderful family. To my friends who support me, share laughs with me, and encourage me. I love you all!!!

My Guardian Angel

If it were not for you, I would never have realized how deep of despair I was in. When you have an experience with someone who demonstrates or displays narcissistic traits, you forget. Forget you deserve to be heard. Forget you deserve to be respected. Forget you deserve to be seen. Forget you deserved to be shown empathy. Your genuine care and concern for me made me realize I did not deserve mistreatment at this level. You reopened my eyes to realize and remember my self-worth. My hope for you is, do not take people or life for granted. Focus on the love of God and others and that love will always help you get through trials and tribulations. I am forever grateful for having an encounter with you!!

CONTENTS

Acknowledgment Part 1	iii
Acknowledgement-Part 2.....	ix
Dedication.....	xii
My Guardian Angel.....	xiii
Introduction	1
<i>Chapter 1 --Statistics</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Chapter 2 --It's All So Simple</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Chapter 3—Narcissism and Traits</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Chapter 4---Reactionary Abuse.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Chapter 5---Am I crazy.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Chapter 6---Garbage Day-Training Begins</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Chapter 7---Rubber Band Effect.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Chapter 8---Reality Sets In.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Chapter 9--Deflection.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Chapter 10---Awakening</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Chapter 11---30 Years</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Chapter 12---The Move</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Chapter 13--- How the Monster Looks</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Chapter 14---The Comeback.....</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Chapter 15 --Time to Recover.....</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Chapter 16---Reflect.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>Chapter 17--Narcissism-Contradiction of Love</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Chapter 18---Protect Yourself.....</i>	<i>107</i>

<i>Chapter 19---Accountable</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>Chapter 20---Just in Case.....</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>Chapter 21—You are Special.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>125</i>

Introduction

Life often brings unexpected occurrences or events (like the massive heart attack I suffered in 2022) that shake us to our core. As a friend of mine once said when I asked how she was doing, she replied, “Life is lifing.”

But what do you do when the unexpected occurs at the hands of the person who professes to love you? What do you do when the immense emotional and mental pain you are suffering is caused by the very one who once swore undying love? What do you do when you try to communicate your feelings—informing the person that their behavior is damaging you emotionally and mentally—only for your words to be ignored? Instead of listening, they gaslight and deflect. Your soul feels like an inferno seeking water.

The more you try to articulate your feelings, the more they invalidate them. There were many days when my head felt clouded, as if trapped in a thick fog. My mind was like a plane struggling to navigate through the haze. There were countless nights when I laid awake, staring at the ceiling fan, while the person inflicting the pain slept like a newborn baby. I sought solace in talking to friends, hoping they could offer encouraging words. I tried walking off the stress. We lived near the water, and I would take the twenty-minute walk to sit and stare at it for as long as three hours, thinking:

Why was my ex unable to hear me? Hear my pain? Why was she so disrespectful toward me? Why did she take my love for granted, repeatedly? With each condescending word and gaslighting

experience, my heart slowly closed. Why was I not worthy of her respect?

These thoughts ran through my mind as I sat in the same spot by the water, day after day.

I knew this experience was not normal. I knew in my heart something was not right. Everybody brings a form of dysfunction into a relationship, no one is perfect. Every person comes with something their partner must adjust to or try to understand if love is to exist and be sustainable. During our brief time together, we rarely had a non-drama-filled day. Then the unthinkable happened.

I lost myself. I lost my sense of self-worth. I lost my confidence.

Each argument tore into my shield of self-esteem. Each argument made me question my own sanity and even the obvious reality before me. As I later learned while conducting research for this book, that was the plan all along making my experience even more disturbing. The strategy was to use countless words designed to confuse me every time I raised an issue related to her behavior. I heard words that tore into my manhood; despite knowing full well I had always displayed the qualities of a responsible, hardworking, and dependable man.

I raised three daughters who are now strong, independent, self-sufficient women. In fact, one day my oldest daughter said to me, “It’s your fault, Daddy... you raised us to be strong, independent women.” Yet here I was—a fully functioning adult man before this relationship—reduced to a shell of myself. I was broken emotionally. I even articulated those very words to my ex, only for the damage to continue. No let-up. No break. It went on and on.

Before long, I began responding to the disrespect. Hitting walls. Using profanity. Slamming doors so hard that pictures fell from the walls. And as this happened, she remained as calm as a peaceful body of water untouched by wind. I would later learn—through vigorous research, which you will read about in this book—that this, too, was part of the plan. The plan is to cause confusion and if you were to react the reactions will be used against you. Your reactions will be connected to reactionary abuse which I will explain in detail later in the book.

If my experiences sound familiar, then you may be involved with someone displaying narcissistic traits. This dysfunction leaves its victims feeling confused, heartbroken, and emotionally drained. These emotions, as painful as they are, may serve as the springboard for your escape.

When I first began therapy to make sense of this living hell, my therapist told me it would take years for me to fully recover. Narcissistic Abuse creates a world that makes you question your own reality. But there is hope—because if there is one thing we should never lose, it is hope.

My hope is, this book will help you to become familiar with traits connected to this horrific personality disorder called narcissism!

Chapter 1

Statistics

Sandra L. Brown, the founder of the Institute for Relational Harm Reduction and Public Pathology Education, wrote an article titled “60 Million Persons in the US Negatively Affected by Someone Else’s Pathology” that provides an estimate of the prevalence of this type of abuse.

In her article, Brown stated that about 1 in 25 people in the United States have some type of personality disorder, such as antisocial personality disorder.

At the time of her writing, Brown estimated the U.S. population to be about 304 million people. When divided into twenty-five, that works out to be over twelve million people who could have personality disorders.

Based on these numbers, Brown estimates that if each of these people had approximately 5 partners or close relationships throughout their lifetime, over 60 million people might be affected by a narcissistic relationship.(sic)---Narcissistic Abuse in the United States | Psych Central- Medically reviewed by **Kendra Kubala, PsyD, Psychology** — Written by **Brittany VanDerBill** — Updated on March 29, 2022

Chapter 2

It's All So Simple

A song on the timeless album *Miseducation of Lauren Hill*, a few lines described my experience with my ex which Ms. Hill sung so passionately.

It could all be so simple.

But you rather make it hard.

Loving you is like a battle.

I will do all I can to protect the identity of the person you will read about throughout this book while sharing my experiences dealing with narcissistic tendencies. This person represented a wonderful period in my life. I held her in high regard for a long time—for over three decades, to be exact. In fact, she was the standard by which I measured how I desired to be treated and loved by a woman.

Although we rekindled our relationship and broke up two times, it was her heart and the way she treated me with love that stayed with me over the years. You may ask, “Why didn’t you stay together?” When you are young, you assume you will always find deep emotional connections. We both eventually learned that is not the case.

Why were we so close?

First, we met as teenagers during a time when life was simple and innocent. This was the late '80s and '90s—a time when women being called a "bitch" was not endearing. A time when we had the pleasure of listening to real love songs. A time when women did not feel the need to reveal all their assets yet were just as beautiful. A time before social media. Back then, we established relationships by meeting in person or talking for hours on the telephone. Because of our age, most of our relationships developed through long phone conversations. Hours upon hours of laughing and discussing anything and everything. Our bond was not built on the physical; it was emotional and deep.

At the time, she was fourteen, and I was seventeen. Due to our age difference, dating was not an option.

For a first love, it was the best experience a young man could ever imagine. She made me feel wanted and desired. She met me at a time when I was finally beginning to accept my unique physical features. I am a light-skinned African American man with dark brown hair. The scars from years of being teased—primarily by girls my age as a boy—did not simply disappear, even as I grew to accept myself.

I was born and raised in an African American community in Brooklyn, NY. My features—very fair skin, blondish-red hair as a boy, and eyes that changed color with the season set me apart. My peers, particularly the girls my age, treated me as if I were a monster. Then, the summer after my sophomore year of high school, I grew from five foot five to five foot eleven, gained weight, and grew a little mustache. My style of dress matched the fashion of the late eighties. As I prepared for the first day of my junior year, I looked in the mirror and said, “I fully accept myself.”

From that day forward, I no longer cared what anyone had to say about my unique appearance, which had shifted to a darker complexion and dark brown hair.

She told me I was beautiful.

To this day, she is the only woman who has ever called me beautiful.

After our first breakup in my twenties, I began dating more. Most of the women I attracted occurred on the job. Then came a season where more than one married woman sought my attention. I grew up in a Christian home, and no matter the beauty of a woman, I knew nothing would happen with a married woman.

There were also times when I met women while out and about, but unlike most men, I rarely made the first move romantically. I usually responded if a woman initiated the conversation. Growing up in a strict Christian household, with both parents being born-again Christians, I was raised with strong beliefs. Sex before marriage was forbidden. I remained a virgin until I was 21 years old.

In Brooklyn, NY, where I was born and raised, most boys lost their virginity before their 13th birthday. I lost mine to the very woman who would later introduce me to a level of pain I never expected or could have ever fathomed.

Chapter 3

Narcissism and Traits

When I first heard this term, the way it was used led me to associate it with conceit and arrogance. As I learned, narcissism is connected to cycles and traits.

First, I must express arrogant people are among my least favorite people. Ironically, the woman I experienced this problem with comes from a bloodline of arrogance masked in confidence. The kind of people who share their accomplishments before being asked. The kind who proudly announces the number of properties they own and the amount of money they have in the bank. Here is the difference between the two; confidence is silent. Arrogance is loud!

In contrast, my parents raised me to never volunteer information unless asked. No matter how impressive my résumé may be according to people commenting on my resume, the only way you would ever know about it is if you asked.

According to WebMD.com, *narcissism is “extreme self-involvement to the degree that it makes a person ignore the needs of those around them.* While everyone may show occasional narcissistic behavior, ***true narcissists frequently disregard others or their feelings.*** They also do not understand the effect that their behavior has on other people.”

Based on my life experiences, the most stunning aspect of this experience was the total disregard for my feelings. It was the first time I had ever dated or been intimately involved with a woman who repeatedly showed little empathy, as you will read about later in this book. This lack of empathy was a major reason I had to remove myself from the relationship. But it was not just the absence of empathy, she was cruel and condescending far too often. I tried everything: verbally expressing my feelings, writing long texts and emails. The more I tried to express myself, the more I experienced being gaslighted, disregarded, and completely ignored.

Yet... the dysfunctional behaviors continued.

The dictionary defines *narcissism* as “*selfishness, involving a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration, as characterizing a personality type.*”

Here is an example of a lack of empathy and selfishness.

Example of selfishness

Me: *When I try to have a conversation with you, you cut me off a lot and change the subject. Then you justify it by circling back to respond later.*

Her: *Don't I have my own mind?*

It should be noted when you invite someone to share your life, it is no longer about you.

We would often walk our dogs (one passed away unfortunately) in the neighborhood, and in the middle of my sentence, she would interrupt me and say something like, *"I see our neighbor made some improvements on her house."* There would be no *excuse me* or *wait a minute*—just constant interruptions. No matter how many times I expressed that it bothered me, nothing changed. Her response would always redirect the focus back to herself.

One summer, I met up with an ex-coworker—an older colleague—and we played miniature golf. After the game, we sat at a table inside the game center just to talk and catch up. A young woman who worked there approached us and asked if we wanted something to eat. We both declined. She stayed and talked with us, and at some point, I mentioned I was an author and that my book on teen depression and anxiety was about to be published. She expressed excitement and shared that many of her college friends struggled with depression, saying my book was much needed.

Later, I shared this conversation with my ex, telling her how refreshing it was to feel heard and have a meaningful conversation.

Her response?

"Don't tell me about some young woman flirting with you."

I was stunned.

"Is this what you got out of what I just shared with you?" I asked.

Here is what you need to know when you are involved with someone displaying narcissistic traits:

It rarely—if ever—enters their mind to consider the thoughts and feelings of the people closest to them.

In later chapters, I will share the moment when my **awakening** occurred. However, while I was in the storm, I had no clue about this new experience I was dealing with. Before this experience, the women I was involved with in the past enjoyed talking to me. Some even loved the tone of my voice and described it as being very soothing.

But this experience?

It impacted my self-confidence.

Why?

Glad you asked.

I noticed that when she talked to other men, she was attentive. She never interrupted them. I listened to her engage in conversations with male family members over the phone, and I remember thinking, *she can control it*.

If your intuition is telling you something is not right, do not ignore it.

An experience with narcissistic traits and you can feel your armor of self-confidence being stripped away.

You can feel your self-worth being impacted.

That is why it is essential to become familiar with the different types of narcissism as you are dating. To arm yourself with information related to the traits and cycles of narcissism.

The very first trait you should pay attention to is the **love bombing stage**. According to webmd.com- *If you're being love-bombed, the signs might be more noticeable to others than they are to you. (sic)*

That is because, at this stage, you feel special, understood, and seen by your partner. It is a little hard to detect as it can be as confusing as being in the honeymoon stage. Within the honeymoon stage, everything seems perfect within the first three months. Including affection, compliments, sweet texts, etc. Whenever my ex and I visited my parents, the affection would be over the top. Constant touching, sitting on my lap, rubbing my hands, etc. Love bombing examples might look like this:

- Your partner seems too good to be true. They may tell you they've been waiting for you their whole life, that you're their soulmate, or that they're in love with you a short time after you first meet.
- Your partner seems to share all your interests or seems to agree with all of your opinions.
- Your partner wants to stay in constant communication with you.
- Your partner may become irrationally jealous when you want to spend time with others, including family.
- Your partner might make grand gestures or buy you inappropriately expensive gifts early in the relationship.(sic)

The stage that follows the love bombing stage is the stage you should be concerned with, which is the devaluation stage I will share in a moment. The following are other traits and cycles of narcissism.

Grandiose Behavior-People with this behavior were most likely treated as if they were superior or above others during childhood.

These expectations can follow them as they become adults. They tend to brag and be elitist.

Vulnerable Narcissism

This behavior is usually the result of childhood neglect or abuse. People exhibiting this behavior are often much more sensitive. Narcissistic behavior serves to protect them from feeling inadequate. Even though they oscillate between feeling inferior and superior to others, they become offended or anxious when others do not treat them as if they are special. (2023) (sic)

Let us first discuss grandiose narcissism. Many places we visited, she would let people know what she did for her at the doctor's office, restaurants, family gatherings, etc. In some cases, the settings or conversations did not warrant her sharing this information. Confidence was an area in which she did not struggle.

An example of the constant need for validation I experienced was having to consistently compliment her meals.

The signs of narcissism are something most people may not be familiar with, making it difficult to understand the meaning of the word. If you feel something in your gut telling you that something is not right, please pay attention to your instincts.

Narcissism is still being studied and explored, as many narcissists and individuals with narcissistic personality disorder do not seek treatment. However, there are some common traits of people displaying narcissistic traits that you may be able to spot.

Sense of Entitlement

A common sign of people with narcissism is the belief that they are superior to others and deserve special treatment. They believe that others should be obedient to their wishes and that the rules don't apply to them. (sic)

Manipulative Behavior

Another common trait of narcissism is manipulative or controlling behavior. A narcissist will at first try to please you and impress you, but eventually, their own needs will always come first. (sic)

When relating to other people, narcissists will try to keep people at a certain distance to maintain control. They may even exploit others to gain something for themselves. (sic)

Need for Admiration

One of the most common signs of being a narcissist is a constant need for praise or admiration. People with this behavior need to feel validation from others and often brag or exaggerate their accomplishments for recognition. They also like to feel appreciated to boost their ego. (sic)

Lack of Empathy

This means that the narcissist is unwilling or unable to empathize with the needs, wants, or feelings of other people. This also makes it difficult for them to take responsibility for their own behavior. (sic)

Arrogance

People with narcissistic behavior already see themselves as superior to others, so they may become rude or abusive when they don't receive the treatment, they think they deserve. While they hold themselves superior, they may speak or act rudely toward those that they deem are inferior. (sic)

Other signs include:

- A sense of self-importance, exaggerating their achievements and talents.
- A preoccupation with fantasies of success, power, or brilliance
- A belief that they're more special or unique than others and should only associate with other high-status people.
- Envy of others or the belief that others are envious of them.
- Insisting they have the best of everything.
- Feeling they deserve privileges and special treatment (sic)

Example of Sense of Entitlement

Whenever we got into an argument and I would call her out on her behavior, I let her know she came from a family that was very arrogant. Often during our arguments, she would mention the level of success her family had achieved. In other words, in her mind it is impossible to demonstrate negative and destructive characteristics if one is successful. She also shared being in the presence of certain celebrities and she would flirt with them. Often

it went unnoticed and not acknowledged. The next comment was something had to be wrong with the person.

Need for admiration example

I am unable to count the number of times, while eating the meals she prepared, she would say, “Is the food good?” I would respond with, “Yes, the food is great.” Then she would ask, “How come you never say it?” So, like a lab rat, I became programmed to ensure I gave her the proper acknowledgment during meals. I also had to be cognizant of articulating how beautiful she was or acknowledging her outfits.

Lack of empathy

This was the most astounding and shocking of all the experiences. I have been dealing with heart ailments since 2013. I have endured seventeen surgeries/procedures in twelve years as of this date, November 1, 2024. On October 22nd, 2022, I suffered a massive heart attack that almost cost me my life. She performed CPR to help save my life.

I was unconscious for four days. I was in the hospital for two weeks and had a pacemaker placed in my body. I lost twenty pounds and was out of work for six weeks. We were living in another state due to an accomplishment and opportunity she achieved related to her career that required us to relocate for a year and a half. We found a one-bedroom apartment on the third floor. We had a 100 lb. rottweiler who needed to be walked at least three times a day. In addition, counting the number of trips up and down the stairs for my own personal time. While in the hospital, my daughters approached my ex and requested that she look for an

apartment on the first floor, as I would still be recovering from a devastating heart attack. Once I was released from the hospital, I approached the subject again. I said, “We should find an apartment on the first or second floor.” Her response was posed as a question: “Did I notice we don’t hear any noise on the third floor?” Think about it—I was recovering from a death-defying heart attack, and the focus was not on my request; it was about her. I was shocked by her response, and I continued to push because I could not believe her reaction. I said, “Did you hear what I said? We should look for an apartment on the first floor.” Her response? “If I (meaning me) wanted a first-floor apartment, I should have looked for one.” I want you to think about these responses. How would you feel hearing this from someone who professed underlying love? This is a reaction from someone who demonstrates narcissistic traits behind closed doors. **They show one personality in public and their true self behind closed doors.** In fact, my mother often said, “She acts like she loves you to death.” About a year into the marriage, I shared with my mother that when I was with her, she talked down to me as if I were not smart or good enough for her. It never stopped. It continued repeatedly.

I remember seeing a TikTok video where this woman stated if you ever share with someone who says they love you, their words or behavior hurt you, and their response is other than “I am sorry,” the person does not love you. It is a very profound statement wrapped in truth. I wish I had seen that video sooner. One other example: she is an aggressive driver who often switches lanes and cuts people off at high speeds. I made a request that she do not drive like this with me in the car due to my heart ailment. It never stopped. In the initial stages of the relationship, we would be out and about, and she would speak to random men as if I were not walking next to her. I articulated my feelings to her, and she

immediately went into the reasons she was doing it. There was one day we were walking with the dogs, and at that time, we had two dogs. She held one dog, and I had the other. We were walking on a boardwalk on the beach. She was walking behind me, and there was a well-muscled man walking his dog on the other side of another boardwalk. This is the kind of man to whom she found to be attractive. The man kept looking at both of us trying to figure out if we were together. She made eye contact with him and nodded her head and smiled at him.

I am a slender man. It was the first time in my life being with a woman where I felt insecure about my physique. When we were out and about, she would make an excuse to look in the direction of a man she was attracted to, as if I were too dumb to know what she was doing. I told her if there was ever a time, we are together, and a man approached her and asks the question if we are together, it would be the last day of our relationship. One other example of my ex oblivious to the concept of respecting your partner. She mentioned she wanted to invite a co-worker who once wanted to date her over for dinner in our home along with other co-workers. I asked her if this was a respectful thing to do. She argued me down, and I let her know that if she invited him, I would not be there. In each case, no respect or empathy was shown towards me in terms of the way her behaviors and actions made me feel. I promise you, if I had known anything about narcissism during this time, I would not be authoring this book because I would have ended the relationship immediately.

Arrogance

I have been in the presence of successful people on more than one occasion. One thing I have noticed is that many are extremely

arrogant. They have allowed their accomplishments to make them feel as if they are better than others. Her arrogance was connected to her career, her accomplishments, owning property, the amount of money she had in the bank, her family's success, and their property.

Narcissism is a terrible problem and an unexpected reality for anyone to experience while trying to date and find a compatible partner. The best thing to do is to educate and empower yourself with information and act accordingly. Remember, people with narcissistic traits are also dating.... lurking!

Chapter 4

Reactionary Abuse

Of all the reading, reactionary abuse, for me, is the worst part of narcissism.

If I gave you the numbers of ten of my friends who have known me for ten years or longer, or people at my workplace, here is what they may say about my temperament:

“Eric is laid back.”

“Eric is calm.”

“If Eric yells, it means he has taken a lot, and he finally had enough.”

“If Eric uses profanity, someone said something that was extremely disrespectful, and it was done more than once.”

Imagine someone looking you in the face time after time, talking to you as if you are not intelligent or in a disrespectful manner. Imagine your mate sharing intimate details of past boyfriends in a very explicit manner.

Imagine your mate verbally disrespecting you at least twice a week. Imagine your mate always requesting that you honor their requests, and as soon as you make a request, an excuse is articulated not to do it. Imagine your mate walking into a room while you are watching television and coming inside the house talking to

someone on speakerphone. Instead of going into another room, they sit in the same room as if you are not there. Imagine sleeping in bed and your mate walk into the bedroom, turn on the lights, or make loud noises. Imagine walking with your mate and he or she makes eye contact with someone of the opposite sex and greets them. Imagine watching your mate flirt with someone of a opposite sex and gaslighting you into thinking you are seeing illusions.

Imagine your mate going from 0 to 100 because of minor mistakes. I have mentioned nine actions and behaviors, and I experienced at least three per week. After year two, I had reached my boiling point. So, as I mentioned earlier in the book, there were times I lost my temper. I slammed doors, yelled, and used profanity. I am not proud of my behavior.

She asked the question, after I removed myself as to why my actions did not receive the same attention as her actions?

The above question was posed to me by my ex in her effort to seek closure. The answer to that question is, because her behavior was more frequent and she did not want to acknowledge its impact. Those with narcissistic traits ignore their actions and will pay more attention to your reactions. However, their behavior is called reactive abuse. According to choosingtherapy.org- *Reactive abuse is a common manipulation tactic that places blame for abuse on the abused. It's commonly associated with gaslighting as this tactic aims to convince or rewrite the story, claiming the person who caused harm is actually a victim. This is also used by narcissists, as they often will play the role of the victim when they're being faced with consequences for their actions (Saxena, 2022).(sic)*

A person would have to possess the total perfect character of Christ to take all the above "imagines" and not at some point break emotionally and verbally.

My critical mistake, as I mentioned earlier, is when I saw the warning signs, I did not end the relationship. That moment came three months into the relationship, when I was mowing the lawn and she aggressively snatched the lawnmower out of my hand. The moment I left after the incident and then came back, she realized in her mind she could treat me however she wanted to. And she did.

There were moments during this horror show when I would eventually lose it. **Please understand, because she was my spouse I did not have a problem honoring her requests. The trigger was my ex-inability to be reciprocal.** If I asked a question related to her instructions, she would respond by restating the instruction, speaking very slowly in a condescending and disrespectful manner. When I would finally lose it, I remember she would become very calm and look at me as if I were mentally ill. *Reactive abuse also allows someone to refer to the victim as crazy or unstable, which can further cause psychological and emotional pain and damage to the victim (Saxena, 2022).* When I think of those moments, I allow the tears to flow because it is hard for me to believe I allowed this to happen for three years.

Here is an example of how reactive abuse works: *A boy may be bullied at school by another taller boy who is more popular. For months, the taller boy makes fun of the other boy's height and lack of popularity, sometimes pushing him and taking his lunch money. One day, the smaller boy reaches his limit and goes off on the taller boy, making fun of the taller boy's bad grades and calling him names. The taller boy plays the victim and acts like a martyr*

when he goes and tells his teacher what the smaller boy said. The smaller boy gets in trouble even though he has been the true victim for months on end. (sic)

The second part of this is; if you have an experience with narcissistic traits, if you decide to leave, be prepared for your abuser to destroy your name and character. According to choose therapy.com, *a narcissistic smear campaign is designed to damage a person's reputation and cut them off from their support system* (2024, Gillis).(sic) The wonderful thing is that my family and friends are my support system. We did not have too many mutual friends as a couple, and if we did, I would not care if their opinions of me became negative. When you are armed with the truth, you will not worry about someone trying to destroy your name. It is important that my family and friends respect me, which I believe they do. I really do not care about her trashing my name. I am a strong believer in karma, which is the reason I try my best to be careful about the way I treat people. If you know the truth, do not allow their actions to cause any further damage to you. Place your time and energy into healing. It is six months into me removing myself, and the hurt is still deep. However, this book and sharing my pain with you will be well worth it in the end.

Chapter 5

Gaslighting-Am I crazy?

My ex would say things to me that no woman should ever say to a man. The absolute worst thing, other than cheating on a man, is for a woman to give a man a visual of her having sex with another man. She did this to me several times, and the disturbing part is she would at times recount the experiences after we were intimate. Think about it—you just finished making love to the woman/man who loves you, and she/he mentions an intimate moment with a previous boyfriend/girlfriend. Just when you think this could not get any worse, when you bring up the subject denial is the next response. Gaslighting 101!

If you are a woman reading this book, always remember this: a man will never forget if you provide a visual through your words of having sex with another man; he will never forget it. I promise you, there are men in prison right now who lost their freedom because they could not control their rage for this very action I am describing. In no way am I justifying or condoning their behavior at all. Their minds, as they lie in their prison cells, tell them that if you had just walked away, you would not be spending the rest of your life in prison. The gaslighting became so bad that I began to record our conversations. When you experience gaslighting, it is like an out-of-body experience. It messes with your mind. I remember taking long walks and rethinking the arguments and her denials of a comment she made.

The definition of gaslighting according to www.psychology.com is: *Gaslighting is an insidious form of manipulation and psychological control. Victims of gaslighting are deliberately and systematically fed false information that leads them to question what they know to be true, often about themselves. They may end up doubting their memory, their perception, and even their sanity. Over time, a gas lighter's manipulations can grow more complex and potent, making it increasingly difficult for the victim to see the truth. (sic)*

Ladies, and this statement is for the ladies reading this book. There are certain comments you articulate to a man he will never forget such as,

- Mentioning a great sexual experience with another man.
- Emasculating him through your words.
- Articulating negative words about his child if he has one.
- Articulating negative words about his mother.

Those are just a few statements. She would speak fondly of one ex-boyfriend. His profession as a medical doctor, his physique, and his level of intelligence which she described as being extremely high. She described my level of intelligence as being, "As special form of intelligence." Another tactic is to articulate backhanded comments against the victim. What does a "special level of intelligence mean?" One story involved her explosive temper tantrums that she would often display in front of the ex-boyfriend. He made a comment about it and stated it was a reason he did not desire to marry her. So, she adjusted and changed her behavior, stating she would come home and go into another room to yell and scream with the door closed and come out to "take care of her man." Yet, when I mentioned this story and her changing

her behavior, it was met with deflection and more temper tantrums. When I expressed this point, she once listened to another man about her attitude; she would either say, “She didn’t remember sharing this” or “I interpreted her comment out of context.” Again, gaslighting 101. As a man, just imagine your woman sharing a story where she changed her behavior to make a former lover happy in hopes of him marrying her. She then tries to convince you she never shared that story with you. A man who, in her words, said, “When I met him, I said I’m going to make him my husband!” She denied that statement too. **The point of gaslighting is to make you think you did not hear what you heard, to alter your own sense of reality.** It is a disturbing form of manipulation with the goal of trying to control you.

It is a diabolical and cruel action to do to someone you profess love for. In relationships, gaslighting often begins gradually. The abusive person gains their partner’s trust, sometimes with an initial *“honeymoon period” in which there is no abusive behavior.* (Bowland, M. 2024)- (*Examples and Signs of Gaslighting and How to Respond*) (sic). Once your partner gains your trust this is when the diabolical action begins. In relationships, gaslighting often begins gradually.

It is a sign that someone is gaslighting you if they are:(Resnick, A. 2024)

- Constantly minimizing or invalidating your feelings
- Avoiding taking responsibility for their actions
- Lying
- Regularly recalling events differently than you
- Using words like paranoid, overreactive, dramatic, overly sensitive, or crazy
- Experiencing self-doubt(sic)

- Acting reactively or intensely where it's unwarranted (sic)

I am going to go through the signs I experienced with my ex, starting with her constantly minimizing and invalidating my feelings and concerns. My ex was the first woman I had ever dated who flirted with men right in front of me. I mentioned earlier that we would be out in public and she would speak to random men on the street. Now, someone who loves you would say, when the partner mentioned the issue, "I wasn't aware I was doing this, and I am sorry." Instead, I heard, "This is who I am and how I have always been. I speak to everyone." We had several arguments about this problem because it did not seem as if she cared how much her actions hurt me. Get some popcorn because this may be a little long.

We went to a family member's house, and we went downstairs where the fully furnished basement was in his home. There was a male neighbor already there who came to visit. He was a big man, which is the kind of physique she admires. I watched him watch her hips and thighs every time she walked past him. She was wearing tight spandex pants. My ex has hips and thighs and was proud of it because she knew men liked seeing it. In fact, thirty years ago when we reconnected for a lunch date, she said something I will never forget. As we were walking, she said, "Eric, how come you don't give me my props?" I replied, "Props about what?"

She continued, "I have the shape that men like." I still remember the sorrow that came over me at that moment because it was then I realized the world had contaminated an innocent soul.

Back to the story. Now, I am not sure if he knew we were together or not, but the big ring she had on her hand should have been a hint for his ignorant ass. Also, I truly believe my ex-cousin introduced us as husband and wife. Nevertheless, he continued to admire her. She dropped something in front of him while he was sitting at the bar. The bar was located behind where she bent over. Did she bend down with her knees? No! She did the full Players Club Ice Cube-produced movie starring a now aging Lisa Raye stripper bend right in his face. But of course, when I later brought this to her attention, she claimed she did not know he was sitting behind her.

One other example—for my birthday, she took me to a cigar bar, and the young man who worked there was incredibly handsome with a body like Thor from the Marvel movies. I already knew what was going to happen. She was smiling in his face posing question after question. I respected this young man because he continuously made eye contact with me and attempted to include me in the conversation because she was so into his face. I gave him a look like, “Have at it, brother,” and I fell back.

My oldest daughter was with us. I would have thought she would have been the one flirting with the young man because she was single. No, it was the woman who was with her dad. My daughter gave me a look like, “Daddy, she can’t be serious with this!” When I mentioned it to my ex, her response was, “I wasn’t flirting with that little boy.” See, my ex loved men who, in her words, “had a nice body.” You have seen them—the ones who wear the “smedium” shirts to show the women the results of their hours in the gym.

As I am typing this, I have tears in my eyes because I still cannot believe I went through this, and I am ashamed I did not leave

sooner. She disrespected me right in my face and functioned as if I was not seeing what I was looking at.

Regularly recalling events differently than you, which is a form of gaslighting I mentioned earlier, is a major contributor to my never wanting or desiring even a friendship with this woman. I admit my memory can be unsure at times, especially after I suffered a massive heart attack in October 2022. One thing about Eric, if someone disrespects me, I will remember the day, what the person was wearing, and the location. I believe most people will never forget certain events.

- The day a loved one passed away.
- The last words of someone who passed away.
- A child's first steps
- Becoming parents for the first time.

The list can go on and on. There was no filter with this woman. I shared some of the statements she made about past boyfriends and sexual escapades with my female friends, and they reacted in horror, saying, "Wow, Eric, I would never share this with someone I was dating." One friend said, "Eric, she must really hate you."

Acting Reactively or Intensely Where It's Unwarranted

The smallest mistakes I committed, and my ex would react like Chucky the doll when he was getting electrocuted or set on fire by his owner Andy (Google the movie Chucky). It was a full childlike tantrum. Accidentally leave the light on the microwave, tantrum. If I accidentally put a mark on her antique furniture. Tantrum. I once remembered doing something wrong and she mumbled,

“You are useless.” When I reminded her of what she said, “I never said that.” Let me ask you this, “Who would not remember someone saying to you that you are useless? Who in their right mind would get that wrong? I will take this one for the win-NOBODY!!

I had to author this book because it keeps me away from even contemplating going back to her. As painful as it is to relive these memories, I need to keep them fresh in my memory to ensure I don’t soften my stance and go back. Writing in an emotional state when the memories are fresh would provide me with the chance for you to fully grasp my experiences so you can avoid such an experience in the future. The reason you do not go back to the one who displays these narcissistic traits is due to their inability to be accountable for the behaviors that inflict so much emotional and mental pain. I will share later in the book events that contributed to me finally deciding to leave.

Before I knew of this abyss called gaslighting, I reacted. After I learned the meaning and the purpose of gaslighting, this is the way I began to handle it; (sic)

- Stayed Calm.
- Walked away.
- Went to another room.
- Simply said, “Ok.”
- Began to record our conversation.

Here are more suggestions on way to manage gaslighting according to www.healthline.com

1. First, make sure it’s gaslighting.
2. Take some space from the situation.

3. Collect evidence (Jelinik, 2024)(sic)

It is vital to not engage and take the bait when a narcissist is gaslighting you because your reactions will be used against you later to try and deem you to be an abuser.

Garbage Day-Training Begins

Part of the narcissism cycle is the love bombing stage which can easily be confused as the honeymoon stage to those not familiar with the cycles of narcissism. **During this stage, the partner is filled with love, compliments, extreme affection, and attention.** My ex- was always telling me how much she loved me, preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner—that five-star restaurants would have been jealous to see and taste. Very affectionate, hands all over me wherever we went, just like it was when we were in our twenties.

The honeymoon stage according to Brides.com is;- The honeymoon phase is a blissful, carefree period in the early stages of a couple's relationship. Both partners are just getting to know each other and seem to find little fault with their significant other. Everything that new partner does—from how they eat to the stories they tell—feels charming and endearing.(sic) This definition is THE MAIN REASON, if you are dating you need to know the second trait or cycle which follows love bombing.

The honeymoon stage is the reason you should become familiar with the traits and cycles of narcissism. Because if you do not know of the cycles and traits of narcissism, you probably will believe the problems you experience are just normal relationship issues. It's not!

After the love bombing state, I entered the **devaluation phase**. According to verywellmind.com, **the devaluation stage, also is**

known as the depreciation stage. It often starts slowly. The narcissist will start dropping subtle hints that you've done something wrong, that you've forgotten something important, or that you've hurt their feelings. You'll start to feel insecure.

Some indicators include:

- Passive-aggressiveness
- Backhanded compliments
- Excuses for poor behavior
- Subtle criticism
- Stonewalling
- Mind games that seem harmless
- Name-calling
- No win-situations
- Lack of empathy and validation
- Comparisons to others
- Ridicule and humiliation(sic) (Gupta 2024)

You will read examples of many of the above as the book continues. I pay attention to patterns. I learned how to play a few instruments simply by watching the hands of musicians who played the bass guitar, percussion, and drums. I noticed every Thursday we would have an argument. What was Thursday? Thursday was the day to put the garbage on the curb for Friday morning pickup. She would mention it around twelve o'clock in the afternoon on Thursday. It was during the summertime when both of us would be home together most of the day. You may be thinking, "Why so early and what was the urgency?" Only she can answer that question. If I did not do it when she asked me to, all hell broke loose. Also, keep in mind, when she wanted me to do it most times, I was already doing something else. Remember

narcissism is about control. If I failed to move when she wanted me to, she would stomp out of the house and drag the garbage cans to the curb herself. *She once said, “She never saw any woman from her family take out the garbage.” The experience made me feel like I was a child instead of a fifty plus year old man.*

The garbage day incident also fell according to www.psychology.com under this category:

Stage 1: Defining Event.

The “defining event” isn’t necessarily the crisis itself but rather the narcissist’s outburst. This can take the form of a fight, an argument, or even simple miscommunication. The crisis—whether real or imagined—is merely a trigger. No matter how small or insignificant the issue, the narcissist seizes on it as a reason to explode. Often, this happens when they feel they are losing control of a situation or a person, prompting them to manufacture chaos to shift attention back onto themselves. (Parkin, 2022) (sic)

Because my mind naturally notices patterns, I quickly began to adjust. I also noticed another pattern which was we would have a few good days leading up to Thursday, and then, like clockwork, she would become a completely different person once Thursday arrived. The most astonishing part was the way she would talk to me. Very rude and condescending.

Wrapped inside narcissism is an inherent lack of respect, something that makes a healthy, functional relationship impossible.

These fights were like the legendary Ali vs. Frazier battles of the 1970s—except there were no punches, only words. And after each

argument, I found myself thinking *I don't know if I can live the rest of my life like this. (sic)*

Stage 2: Regaining Control.

Even if the person high in narcissism is to blame for the crisis or problem, it may be that the victim ends up feeling apologetic. The *"Defining Event"* often shifts the power back to the narcissist and places the blame squarely on the victim. The victim may end up apologizing due to either learned helplessness or simply to keep the peace (Parkin, 2022). Learned helplessness can be a major reason behind the continuation of the cycle of narcissistic abuse. The partners of narcissists often confuse fear with love and thus may do anything to keep the peace. Fear, abuse, intimidation, and exploitation are not love and should never be confused with affection. (sic) I must reiterate this very important point; I am not labelling my ex a narcissist. I am sharing very glaring traits I experienced. (sic)

Before long, I became programmed to the point I began thinking about Thursday on Monday. By Wednesday, I was already thinking about Thursday. When Thursday came, I began putting the garbage out that morning. I even remember apologizing as if I had committed a crime if I forgot after weeks of remembering. I would often apologize just to keep the peace.

One other outburst I experienced was when I forgot to turn off the microwave light after using it. Yes, you read this right—the microwave light, meaning the time that had to be cleared after heating up my food. One day, I had an appointment; I headed to the door, activated the house alarm, and headed to the appointment. I drove one full block away from the house and thought, “Ah man, did I turn the microwave light off?” I turned the car around and

drove back home. I got out of the car, opened the door, and turned the alarm off. I ran to the kitchen and checked the microwave light to ensure it was off. Mind you, I had a specific time to be at this appointment. Did I care about being late? No. I cared more about feeling her verbal wrath if she came home and found the light on. I knew I would hear about it once I returned home. This is my home—my sanctuary. It became a place of pain, and uncertainty.

I shared with her that our home was a sanctuary—a place of peace. We should not make a big deal about every little thing. I even provided specific examples. One example I shared with her was that if one of us forgot to turn a light off, just turn the light off. I do not have to know, nor do you have to know, who turned the light off. Did she listen? Of course not.

I am going to share with you the specific moment when I found out I was in trouble. I lived with three women in my life—one full-time and the other two part-time. Let's say, for example, I accidentally left a shirt on the floor. Those two women would just pick the shirt up and put it where it was supposed to be. This one? She would make the bed every morning. The bed was a king-size bed with seven hundred pillows that had to be placed strategically in the right order. On my side of the bed, sometimes if I became hot in the middle of the night beside me, I would take my shirt off and lay it on the floor. If I forgot to pick the shirt up the next morning, I watched my ex-step over the shirt, continued to make up the bed, and step over the shirt again. She left the shirt exactly where she found it. This is the moment I knew I was in trouble.

You may think, man, you are a grown man; pick up after yourself. This is true, and normally I am a clean person and have no problem cleaning up after myself or the person I share space with. But there are days we all forget. Marriage is a partnership. If two people

share the same space, the goal is to maintain a clean house. The women who I was not married to did more in terms of the trivial things around the house. Why? Because they knew the man, they were with normally cleaned up after himself. This one? She was determined to make sure she was not going to be that woman who picked up after her man. If you are staying in the same space, to deliberately walk over trash or clothing is petty and mean-spirited.

It reached a point when I became tired of being treated as if I was a lab monkey. I began to stand up for myself because first, it was insulting to imply I was not a responsible adult just like I considered her to be a responsible adult. Second, she was not my mother, she was my spouse. So, there were days when she announced it was time to take the garbage out in the middle of the afternoon I would just respond, "I'll get to it!"

Chapter 7

Rubber Band Effect

With age comes maturity. We are a work in progress and part of progression is working on parts of our personality where we are weak. One area of improvement for me is I have learned how to bounce back from disappointments and heartaches. I learned to channel my pain into doing something productive that not only benefited me but was also designed to positively impact the lives of others. This book is an example.

One area I have never bounced back well from is being disrespected by someone. I love my father dearly. He gave me something every parent should give to their children above materialistic things: belief in their child. He believed in a little boy who he saw loved music and purchased me a bass guitar for one unforgettable Christmas. He believed in me when he observed his son had an ear for music and purchased me another instrument, which was a synthesizer keyboard. He believed in me when he purchased a drum machine for me in high school because I aspired to become a music producer, and I needed a drum machine to keep time. Without the drum machine, I had to play the same rhythm patterns on my synthesizer keyboard for minutes at a time while recording without error. Incredibly difficult to accomplish but not impossible. My dad was and still is a stickler on the way a person talks to him. He passed that down to his second oldest son, which is me.

My dad was a manager for a large supermarket chain in New York City. One summer, (I was 19) he arranged for me to work at one of the stores in Brooklyn, NY, in their deli department. I loved that job, and I became a near-professional deli meat slicer. Although one time I took my eye off the prize and nearly sliced off my finger. It is alleged that the people who owned the supermarkets were not nice people, and I will leave it at that. It was the first job I was responsible for operating a cash register. I was terrified. One day, it became busy, and I accidentally left the cash register open with a pile of money visible to the customers. The owner walked by and saw it. He called me over and asked me, "Are you trying to steal from me?" I responded, "No!" He then proceeded to threaten my life as a consequence for stealing. I was stunned because my dad at that time worked for this company for twenty years. Did he not know this? I came home and told my dad, "He said what to you?" Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Legette aka James Evans Jr. from the seventy's sitcom Good Times. My dad picked up the telephone (it was the 90s) and called the man who threatened his son. I was watching this exchange, terrified because I thought I had just cost my dad his job. He told the owner, "My son does not need to steal from anyone; I take care of him... he's working because he wants to work." The tears began to roll down my face because I honestly believed my dad was going to get fired. He finished this conversation with, "Don't ever threaten my son again!" Mind you, this was my dad's boss, the man who had the power to change a whole family's financial future. My dad was the primary breadwinner of the family at the time. Did my dad care about that at the time? No, he did not. All he cared about at that moment was someone threatened his son, and as a protector, he would not allow that to happen without it being checked. Observing that exchange had a profound effect on me. When I turned twenty-one, my dad gave me a speech. I remember it thirty

years later. He said, “You’re a man now; don’t let anyone treat you any different.”

When I entered the professional world after graduating college, I quickly learned that respect is not high on the list of those chosen to lead. One supervisor at that time fits that description. One day, I requested to speak to this supervisor. In typical Mr. Legette fashion, I went straight to the point. “The way you talk to me is not working for me” and just like my dad, I did not care about my job at that time. I share all of this to say, I do not bounce back well from being disrespected.

In the last chapter, I mentioned that on Thursdays, we would often get into nasty arguments over, drum roll please... taking out the garbage for garbage day on Fridays. During the love bombing stage, she suggested Fridays should be our date night. Most Fridays during the day, she would act in a way that by the time the evening rolled around, I had no interest in date night. The expectation was for me to move on. Typical Friday behaviors displayed prior to date night would be,

- Dismissive
- Talking down to me
- Temper tantrums
- Aggressive behavior

Right around 7:00 PM on Friday night, the expectation was to forget the prior behaviors mentioned above and move on to the romantic stuff. For most indiscretions, there was no apology to be found. Have you noticed that you have seen the descriptions of her behavior multiple times throughout the book? Narcissists and those who display the traits are often self-absorbed and lack accountability, expecting you to be a rubber band when it comes

to your emotions. "Get over it" should be their slogan. I remember hearing her say one day that she did not hold onto things. That statement exemplified the way her mind worked and the reason she could inflict pain without thinking anything of it.

Chapter 8

Reality sets in

Because she was my first love, there was a comfort level I could enjoy with her again. Despite the length of time, we were apart, I assumed our memories would be enough. I totally let my guard down for her again, despite the length of time apart, and I am sure she was aware of it.

By July of that same year (2020), just three months after reconnecting, I purchased an engagement ring and proposed to her in her home. She could not contain her excitement. She contacted every family member, friend, and church member she could think of sharing the news. She even texted screenshots of the engagement ring, which I must say was gorgeous. However, I had no idea what I was about to step into.

The narcissist's cycle begins with love bombing, as I mentioned earlier the narcissist showers their partner with intense affection and attention to create a strong bond. This also leads to idealization, where the partner is placed on a pedestal and a deep sense of connection is established. The affection was over the top. When we were out in public, her hands were all over me. As soon as we got out of the car, she already had her hand out to grab my hand. It was as if we were back in the nineties when we did not see each other for weeks at a time due to living in different states.

She prepared the best meals aside from my mother's cooking in my life, as if I were eating at a fine restaurant. She made sure the

furniture we bought from my apartment was placed in locations in the house that made me feel comfortable. One day, we went to an antique furniture store, and she purchased this expensive chester drawer to accommodate the clothes I transported from my apartment. In one of the three bedrooms, she turned it into what she deemed my “Music Room.” I placed my keyboards, drum machine, amplifier, and bass guitar in that room. She had officially captured my heart because anyone close to me would tell you I love music.

It was our first summer together, and we spent many evenings having cookouts in the backyard. We would season and prepare the food together, laughing, talking, and exchanging playful flirtations as we moved around the kitchen. She had a projector, and after dinner, we would sit outside, watching a movie while feeling the gentle summer breeze. Often, we would fall asleep mid-movie, holding hands—she in one chair and I in another. It felt perfect. I had my first love back. I often found myself gazing at her, just as I did when we were teenagers.

As I watched her, I remembered when we reconnected in our twenties, she drove to North Carolina, where I was visiting my parents. On the way back to her place in Philadelphia, my brother and his then-fiancée rode with us. Along the way, we got into a car accident in Fairfax, Virginia, and her car was totaled. My mom covered our bus tickets to Philadelphia and New York City, where my brother and his fiancée lived. The bus was crowded, and for a good part of the ride, she and I could not sit together. But even from different seats, we held hands across the aisle. Eventually, we found seats next to each other, and I remember looking at her, thinking she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I often reflected on that moment while we sat watching movies in the warm summer air.

I have always taken pride in being honest about who I am with the women I dated. Unlike some men, I never pretend to be someone I am not or claim I can do things I have no interest in doing. Early in the relationship, I made it clear: if you are looking for a "Mr. Fix-It," I am not your guy. I never felt the need to put on a front just to prove my masculinity. I shared this same truth with her, knowing she owned a home. I wanted her to understand this part of my personality, especially since some women expect men to take charge of fixing things around the house. I will, however, research ways to fix it or contribute to paying for the costs for someone else to do it.

One day during the summer her water heater broke, and she immediately began to panic. I had no knowledge of water heaters, and I was upfront about that. However, the focus quickly shifted to me. The unspoken question in her tone was clear: *Why aren't you helping me?*

Respecting someone means listening when they are honest about their vulnerabilities or limitations. From the beginning, I had been upfront about my limitations when it came to household repairs. Yet, instead of waiting for me to at least provide a solution, she turned to one of her three older brothers—her usual go-to for anything deemed a “man's responsibility.” While I understood that this was her habit as a single woman, it felt disrespectful to me, especially now that I was the man in her home.

Still, I wanted to be helpful, so I started searching Google and YouTube for viable solutions while she was on the phone with her brother. As I was researching, I said something, and I suddenly heard her brother interject, *"Stop talking to that man like that!"*

This incident occurred within the first six months of our relationship. It was only the second time in my life that I had been with a woman who spoke to me as if I were beneath her—like I was a child. And it was not just an isolated moment; it became a pattern. I found myself constantly repeating, *"Don't talk to me like that!"*

One reason this experience was so unusual, something you may never encounter in your lifetime—was the sheer speed at which things could change. One moment, she was affectionate and all over me; the next, something as trivial as a light left on could trigger a tantrum comparable to that of a child. This wasn't an occasional outburst—it happened five out of seven days a week. What should have been simple communication became a maze of confusion sprinkled with lack of accountability. For example...

Me-I think it is disrespectful to talk and speak to random men first on the street.

Her-I grew up in a neighborhood where everyone speaks to everyone.

Me-We are not talking about your old neighborhood; we are talking about random men walking down the street.

Her-I have God's love in me, and I am supposed to acknowledge everyone. I speak to everyone!

First, anytime someone informs you that your actions are disrespectful or harmful emotionally or mentally, the next response should not be about you.

Second, respect has no gray areas. This example illustrates the way someone with narcissistic traits communicates. It shows a

lack of empathy, deflection, and self-absorption. Please recognize this as a red flag if you articulate someone you are dating behavior hurts and the first response is not an apology.

Life With a Narcissist is a Maze of Confusion

The conversation should have been about hearing me, but it shifted into her actions and what she is accustomed to doing. In healthy relationships, communication flows smoothly. One person presents a concern, the other listens, validates the concern, and offers a resolution. There may be minor tensions, but both parties move forward effectively and efficiently. This clarity and efficacy in communication are essential for maintaining a strong connection. When someone loves you, he or she does not want to see you hurt or disappoint you. However, when narcissism and emotional abuse enter the picture, this ideal model shatters. According to the above definition of how a healthy form of communication should go, my experience should have sounded something like this...

Me- I think it is disrespectful to talk and speak to random men first on the street.

Her-Babe, I am so sorry I did not know I was doing this. I am so accustomed to being single, I must remember I have you now.

The concern is validated, and regarding the resolution she articulated, she will make a mental note of her actions going forward. If this form of response had occurred, I would have felt heard and respected. However, because she responded the way she did, I did not realize this would become the normal form of communication on her part. It moves to the next phase because, with someone displaying narcissistic traits, you cannot mention

anything about their behavior. The next step is to falsely accuse you of committing the same indiscretion you have an issue with.

Her-See

Me-See what?

Her-I saw you staring at that woman and I am not freaking out.

When they do this, they divert their attention off themselves and deflect. It took this woman months to understand her actions were wrong talking to random men in public while walking with me. Her behavior continued after we had the conversation. She liked men with 'nice bodies.' I am on the slender side, and I noticed these men were always thicker than me. So, let's say we were sitting on the boardwalk at the beach. If she saw a well-built man walking towards us or jogging, when he passed by, she would make an excuse to turn around so she could look in that direction. She would say something like, 'Look how big that bird is! (lol).' When I knew it was over for me and I was planning my exit, we were in Loews, and there was a muscular man who did not see us coming because he was focused on looking for his item. I said to myself, 'Watch her stop her shopping cart and act like she's looking for something near him.' I lagged behind her and sure enough, she stopped. I looked at her and said, 'I will walk ahead so you can enjoy the view.'

Chapter 9

Deflection

Narcissist deflection is a form of psychological manipulation. The tactic is generally defined as a psychological defense tool frequently used by narcissists to distract you from their misbehavior. (Kristen, 2023). (sic)

A common theme behind deflection is blaming others, or blame-shifting. *Blame-shifting refers to "passing the buck," meaning finding any reason to justify the conclusion that another person is ultimately responsible for an undesired outcome rather than oneself.* When shifting blame, an individual may be experiencing denial about their own level of personal responsibility and will deflect the unacceptable thought—that they are the reason for the failure or mistake—away by attributing the blame to someone else. This became frequent practice for her. An example of deflection is when I shared with her that I had a problem with her speaking with men on the street and she accused me of committing the same indiscretion. I do not stare at anyone because as a child, because of my light complexion and blond hair, people would stare at me like I was a unicorn.

Karma appeared live and direct at a family reunion. I attended her family reunion, and she has a cousin I met prior to the event. She is stunningly beautiful. She was family so there were no other feelings after acknowledging her appearance. I mean, I have cousins that are also beautiful. Unlike most men, I do not lose my soul over a beautiful woman. Plus, she was married but separated at the time. Two family members organized games for the family to participate in and separated the other family members into four

teams in total. And guess who was on the same team and who was not? You guessed it. The cousin was on my team, and my ex was on another team. Again, she is family, so I am not looking at this woman in any other way. Was she very friendly? Yes. Long story short, when the reunion was over, the cousin and I began to talk about her car, which was the same model as mine, but one I had not seen before. I asked her if I could look inside the car, and she said sure! Her car was in front of the picnic area, and I had to walk up a hill where the other cars were parked. As I was looking inside the car, I felt the burning gaze of my mate staring at me with death in her eyes. We rode with her parents in the back seat of their truck after leaving the family reunion. She began texting me and articulated that she did not appreciate me flirting with her cousin in front of her. My reply? That medicine does not taste good going down your throat, does it? I told her to manage it the same way I manage when she makes excuses for talking to random men in public.

The person displaying narcissistic traits trains the partner to accept their behaviors. Why do they behave like this? Narcissists love attention. I do not believe I mentioned this, but when we dated in our late teens and early twenties, she went away to college. We finally decided to be a couple. But I ended the relationship after a few months. Why? It was my first real relationship, hopelessly in love, and whenever I called her at her college, I could hear the cat calls of young men screaming her name in the background. However, at the time, I did not remember ever hearing her say once, "I am on the phone with my boyfriend." Friends older than me and with more dating experience shared at the time that her behaviors were suspect.

Narcissistic supply is a form of psychological addiction where the narcissist requires—and even demands—limitless special treatment,

admiration, importance, or validation to feed their sense of entitlement and self-centeredness. Narcissistic supply is how individuals with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) cope with the world and make it a place for them to thrive.(nd)(sic). Instead of informing the horny college boys she had a boyfriend she chose silence in a critical moment.

Attention-seeking behavior—positive or negative—is essentially narcissistic supply. Wanting attention, accolades, and validation are not inherently narcissistic. We all need to feel heard and accepted, but people with narcissistic traits crave attention constantly. They will deliberately find or create situations in which they are regularly at the center of attention, often to stave off their underlying narcissistic depression. Narcissists are never satisfied—no matter how much validation they receive, it will never be enough. (nd). I had to constantly comment about her beauty and shape. I had to constantly compliment her on the meals she prepared for me. I had to compliment her whenever we dressed to go out to an event. I would soon learn this was normal behavior connected to narcissistic traits. It should be noted there were times I would compliment her before going out, but it was not enough for her.

Chapter 10

Awakening

There were multiple conversations we engaged in when I knew I was in trouble. The first one occurred when we were engaged. We discussed the inner workings of relationships, and I expressed that the way she moved indicated she did not need a man. She looked at me with a snarl and said, “You are right; I don’t need a man.” I responded with, “That’s a problem.” I continued by informing her that every man has a desire to be needed because it is in our nature, our very DNA. My ex fits this new age where accomplished professionals who are women with money in the bank, property, and degrees seem to have this “I don’t need a man” attitude. This is not the attitude or belief of all women. She did not want to follow my lead as a man and challenged every decision I made. In fact, when I made a decision based on the evidence presented before me, she would disagree. Every time I backed down, the decision blew up on our faces. In another conversation, she shared her frustrations about not being heard as a woman in her career. There was much anger and emotion as she shared specific incidents, and it was then I realized she had issues with men. Her personality was aggressive and assertive, while mine is calm.

We had horrible arguments throughout our engagement, so much so that the handwriting was on the wall: we just were not getting along. I made the suggestion we should postpone the wedding so we could address these issues. When we first became engaged, months before, we knew we should seek pre-marital counseling. To save money, she suggested a married couple who were also

marriage counselors at the previous church she attended. Why? The services would either be free or at an incredibly low cost. Her suggestion was to not discuss our significant issues for fear of the counselors sharing via gossip within the church. This was my biggest mistake: allowing her to talk me into allowing this to happen. But again, her suggestion fell under the narcissist's umbrella, which is accountability.

Why Can't Narcissists Not Accept Blame?

According to simplypsychology.com; accepting blame and responsibility is difficult for most people, but for narcissists, it's almost impossible. Narcissists live in a fantasy world in which they are perfect and superior to others; therefore, admitting to any wrongdoing would call into question their very sense of self. I am not stating she is a narcissist, but the above is a trait. (sic)

We attended weekly sessions in the pre-marital counseling for about six weeks, and we did not address one issue. What issues was I going to mention?

Temper Tantrums

You did not know what version of her you were going to get from one day to the next. I remember one day her dog vomited in one of the bedrooms. She was downright irate, as if the dog were supposed to have the presence of mind to go to the bathroom and vomit in the toilet. I had to tell her the dog was sick. It was such a heartless display of humanity. She would go from 0 to 100 over the smallest of issues.

Condescending Tone

Do not dare ask a question because if you do, the response was as if you were a living boo-boo the fool. She was a master at talking down to people. This was the main issue I had a problem with because my thought was, “Who are you to talk down to me?” I have a master’s degree, and she has a PhD. I am one degree behind her. Honestly, degrees should not matter. Respect is respect.

Dismissive

An example of this behavior is, if I were in the living room watching television, she would walk in and just take over. Either talking on speakerphone with someone or turning her laptop on with the volume at the highest level. I am unable to express in words the feeling of someone acting as if you don’t exist. There were days I felt as if I was going to pass out due to the stress from the confusion and anger of being the victim of these behaviors repeatedly.

Verbal Disrespect

I never experienced being around someone who I was intimate with consistently talk to me like a child or down to me.

Refusal to Apologize

I was going to wait to share this until later in the book, but the memories are still fresh in my mind. The day before yesterday, she contacted me via text asking about my well-being. I wrote a long text expressing myself about this whole experience and stated that if she reads the text where I provided clear accounts of her

behavior and feels anything but sorrow, it will indicate that she still does not hear me. To be fair she did apologize on a few occasions when we were together. However, behaviors never changed. Please keep in mind the behavior were not small issues, and it required a level of accountability to change. The accountability part was not consistent.

Sure enough, her response was the same as it was when I shared space with her: no accountability, deflection, and no apology. She wrote back and simply repeated my statement. Today is the day I have decided I will never contact her again. I blocked her number and email.

Her responses were the same ones I have heard for three years, and even with me packing my things, moving out, and finding another place to live, the woman still refused to acknowledge anything.

The text, written in a tone of 'You are the problem' and 'I am taking the high road.' Another aspect of narcissism is that they want to move on after the damage is done. This is the sickness of the mental illness. The narcissists create a world that fits their imagination that removes them from all responsibility and places the blame on the abused. ***Once again, the subject is traits/cycles and not an actual diagnosis.*** You will have an exceedingly challenging time dealing with that type of mentality because it defies logic if you ever encounter someone displaying these traits. If you focus on it, it will drive you insane. The best thing.... the only thing for me was according to my therapist was to end all contact with her.

When I lived in the home, I reached a point where the mere thought of her touching me in any way turned my stomach. I was no longer

attracted to her, not because of anything related to her physically, but due to her treatment and lack of respect for me as a man.

I moved into my music room, where there was a small bed. Was it uncomfortable? I did not care. I knew I did not want to touch her or even think about being intimate with her. My mother always said, "God will always let you know" when you need to know. It was common for me to wake up multiple times throughout the night because I was trying to find a comfortable spot on the bed. I would read articles on my phone to help get me back to sleep. I came across this article related to gaslighting. As I read, it was as if a bright light turned on. The tears rolled down my face as if someone had hit me somewhere that caused me immense pain.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary:

Gaslighting is psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator. (sic) The woman who wrote the article was a victim of gaslighting in her relationship-an experience so profound that it led her to become a therapist specializing in helping others overcome this horrific problem.

After reading this article, I began to research more diving into one article after the other about gaslighting. The more I read the clearer the picture became. She gaslighted me throughout our time together. It was a deliberate attempt to control me and make me question my own sense of reality. To question the words, I heard and the things I clearly saw with my own eyes. For example, there were many times I observed the flirting or staring at other men.

According to AI Review; This "narcissistic stare" during this phase can serve several purposes:

1. **Intimidation and control:** The stare is used to exert dominance and make the partner feel uncomfortable or inferior, according to Marriage.com.
2. **Fueling insecurity:** The narcissist might stare at others of the opposite sex to invoke jealousy and doubt in their partner, further undermining their self-esteem.
3. **Seeking new sources of attention/supply:** The narcissist may be looking for potential new romantic partners, assessing their suitability as a replacement for the current partner they are devaluing.
4. **Showing disregard and contempt:** The stare can convey a dismissive attitude, making the partner feel unimportant and disregarded, further solidifying the devaluation process.(sic)

People who do this form of manipulation to others-if they never seek forgiveness or accept accountability will face a special reckoning. It was as if she had not married me for who I was but instead sought to mold me into the man she pictured in her head. The second awakening occurred again in the middle of the night. I love Tik Tok because I enjoy laughing, but that night, a video about narcissism popped up on my screen. Normally when a certain topic keeps appearing on your phone or computer on social media platforms, it is because the user has searched or viewed similar content. But I had no memory of watching anything related to narcissism before. Or even searching for the topic. After that night, one video after another began to appear on my screen. There

were videos of therapists who provided expert advice, others from ordinary people sharing their horrific experiences. The more I read and listened to the videos the more depressed I became. The angrier I became. The sicker my stomach felt. Words cannot truly express the weight of this realization.

When your own awakening comes, you will experience the same flood of emotions. My advice? Step back, and carefully consider, how you will move forward because what you learned is not a fairy tale.... it's real. *According to Mayoclinic.com, narcissists need and seek too much attention and want people to admire them. People with this disorder may lack the ability to understand or care about the feelings of others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence, they are not sure of their self-worth and are easily upset by the slightest criticism (sic) (nd).*

So what behaviors are connected to my ex?

- Love Bombing
- Gaslighting
- Lack of Empathy
- Devaluation
- Back handed compliments- "You have a special form of intelligence."

The lack of empathy was the most startling part as it pertained to me. I would watch this woman cry while watching TV and teary-eyed at the movies. She broke down crying at my parents' home when a deer got hit by a car, suffering a broken leg. As a result, a police officer came and shot the deer in the head. It was a horrific experience to watch. But for me, she showed little empathy regarding the way her behavior affected me. Going forward, I will have to work hard on not hating my ex.

I realize hatred is a strong word. However, you must understand I endured three years of abuse. The abuse continued after I moved out. Do you know how hurtful it is for someone to inflict pain on you and then expect you to apologize? The arrogance. The gall. These are the experiences of dealing with someone who displays narcissistic traits.

Once I woke up, and enlightened to the hell I was experiencing, I began to plan my exit. This was April 2024. She was scheduled to go on a business trip and then another trip to see a Broadway play in New York City in May. Unfortunately, I caught Covid. I stayed upstairs, and she stationed herself downstairs where another bathroom was located so she would not be exposed with two trips coming up on her schedule. The only time I came downstairs was for food, and every time I wore a mask. Because she was in the home, the protocol stated she too had to avoid going out. After she was no longer able to go on the business trip, her goal was to avoid becoming infected so she could at least make the trip to see the Broadway play in New York City. I made sure to wipe down everything I touched with a disinfectant wipe. There was only one time when I went downstairs to get food, and I had to use the bathroom. I made sure I wiped and sprayed disinfectant. She ended up catching the virus, and of course, she placed the blame on me. She even stated had I been wearing a mask all along, meaning in public, which hardly anyone was doing anymore, she would not have caught the virus. I became numb to the things she stated, and I continued to contemplate my exit plan.

Throughout the three years, I told her she did not respect me as a man. She used the services of the same accountant for the past fifteen years, and being that we were married, it made sense for me to allow this accountant to also do my taxes. For three years straight, with this woman doing my taxes, I owed money. I accept

responsibility for two of those three years. Nevertheless, I articulated that I would make a change going forward and I no longer wanted her accountant to do my taxes. She began sharing the accountant's accolades regarding her standing at the firm at which she was employed. I responded by informing her I did not care about her professional standing. Then it happened! She finally articulated the words I had known all along. Three years of verbal disrespect. Three years of gaslighting. Three years of watching her listen to other men and dismissing me. She looked at me and said, "This is why they say to never marry someone who's not on the same financial level as you." Her words cut through me like someone had stabbed me with alcohol on the blade in the middle of my stomach. My eyes welled with tears, and I looked her in the eyes and said, "Finally, you admit it." She said, "Admit what?" "You never respected me."

Narcissists can use words as bullets, zeroing in on anything they can to unsettle and upset you. Being on the receiving end of this behavior is horrifying and confusing (2018, Myers) (sic).

As the conversation continued, she tried to backtrack and change her words, but I simply told her, "*Please, just stop.*" After that, I withdrew, speaking to her regarding only discussions related to household responsibilities.

My heart was broken, and there was nothing she could say or do to mend the wound. I had reached a point where I completely shut down emotionally.

Chapter 11

30 Years

My couch should be outlawed. If I eat and then lie down on it, I have about an hour before I doze off. When I open my eyes, it is suddenly three o'clock in the morning. The other issue is that I am older now, and once you hit your fifties, you cannot just eat and think, *I am just going to rest here for a minute*. Now here I am, wide awake and watching TV at 3:30 a.m. So, once again, my sofa won.

The pattern is familiar. Once I wake up, I try to fall back asleep.

Some nights it works; others—like tonight—it does not. So, I started scrolling through articles on my phone and eventually ended up on Facebook.

If you have a Facebook account, you may have come across those street interview videos. In this one, a young man asked an attractive woman if she considered herself “wifey material.” She looked at him, paused, then gestured at herself and said, “*Duh, look at me!*” His response surprised me. With a level of maturity beyond his years, he replied, “*Just because you look good doesn’t mean you are wifey material.*”

After watching that video, the name of this chapter’s title came to mind as I reflected on something my ex repeated several times via text and email. Earlier in this book, I mentioned meeting her as a teenager. The way she loved me—back when I was a shy kid

struggling to accept my appearance after years of being called ugly by girls my age—had a profound impact on me.

When we reconnected, I told her that my love for her had stayed in my heart for thirty years. Back when I drove for Lyft part time, I often felt like Joe the Bartender—passengers would confide in me about their problems, sharing intimate details about their lives from the back seat of my Kia Optima. One day, a young man started talking about his relationship. I do not remember the whole story—it has been about six years—but something in our conversation gave me the chance to share my first love experience.

When I finished, he asked, “*Where is she now?*” I told him where she lived, and he said, “*Go find her.*” The opportunity presented itself, and I did.

Four years later, that decision stands as one of the most painful experiences of my life.

During the seven months after I left our home, we exchanged countless emails and texts. Looking back, it is astonishing how her words reflected a complete reversal of the truth—turning my actions, which were necessary to protect my mental and emotional well-being, into something else entirely. She became the victim!

My heart breaks daily because of the words this woman has shared with me. One statement stood out,

“You supposed to have carried all of this love for me for thirty years.”

The ability to self-reflect shows a willingness to improve areas of **weaknesses** in your life. The ability to self-reflect shows a willingness to look at yourself and say, “What did I contribute to

this problem? When you read the above statement, does the act of self-reflection come to mind? It does not! Once I removed myself from that environment and learned people who display narcissistic traits have a tough time hearing about their flaws.

A person who had the privilege of having someone come back into their life after thirty years would display empathy, compassion, and a willingness to reciprocate with love, would not make that statement. Let's break parts of this statement down,

“You supposed”

According to dictionary.com- *to believe or presume to be true; take for granted*. According to this definition, my actions and feelings were not true to my ex. Why would I come back to love a woman if it were not in my heart to do so? Love is action. What were my actions?

- After reconnecting, the first form of commitment I made was I paid for ADT to be installed in her home. As I am writing, she also mentioned a man should protect his wife. I invested in protection because prior to our union I lived three hours away.
- Within six months of the relationship, I proposed to her.
- Even though I felt disrespected on a regular basis, very rarely did she leave the house without me preparing breakfast for her before work, letting the dogs out in the morning, feeding the dogs, having a meal prepared for her when she was overwhelmed with work and continuing to do all of the responsibilities connected to being a man. Amid being disrespected, dismissed, gaslighted, etc. My reward?

“Taken for granted”

What does it mean to be taken for granted? Let's talk about it. According to psychology.com, *the very definition of taking someone for granted is assuming that the person will always stick around, regardless of whether you put enough effort into maintaining the relationship.(sic)*

The mere fact that she mentioned several times via text and emails that she thought I loved her for thirty years indicates she expected me to be around no matter what. The more she wrote that statement, the more I realized she had no problem taking me for granted. Somehow, I would accept mistreatment in the name of loving her for thirty years.

I remember sharing with her on more than one occasion I was the only man willing to give her the relationship she wanted. I was the only one who thought enough of her to make a commitment. I recall one day, during an argument, I mentioned that my level of commitment began with having an ADT system installed in her home. Her response was, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." That moment, among many other moments, as I sat alone in my apartment, made me realize this woman really did not care about me or respect me to the level of a commitment in marriage.

When you take someone for granted, it shows in actions and words. When a person assumes their mate will always be there because they know the person loves them immensely, the feeling is showing up should be enough. No effort in the relationship. The right person will behave lovingly because he or she knows that having someone decide to love you is a blessing not to be taken for granted. According to whatiscoddependency.com- *narcissistic relationships instead of deepening love, dissatisfaction and abuse increase. Naturally, this creates conflict.* (2023, Lancer, JD, LMFT).

Who wants to be dependent and dissatisfied, which is typical in codependent relationships? Narcissists are codependent, too, but they express it differently. They don't sacrifice themselves for the relationship. They sacrifice the relationship for themselves (sic). Let's talk about that last line. They sacrifice the relationship for themselves. In other words, they will risk sabotaging their own relationship to maintain their way of existence. For six months, within ninety percent of the emails and texts I responded to, I mentioned the following to explain the reasons I removed myself from the relationship:

- Dismissive behavior
- Temper Tantrums
- Gaslighting
- Condescending words (sic)

Six months later, as of this writing, she has not addressed any of my concerns. She has not said, "Eric, can you give me an example of what you mean when you say condescending words or tone?" Or how often are these temper tantrums occurring? Or give me an example of when I gaslighted you. Why did she not ask these questions? Because doing that would place on the table she is flawed, and people who display narcissistic traits will die before they make such an admittance.

"You're supposed to have all of this love for me." A rational and grateful person would express their gratitude through action—actions that displayed patience, which she did not have; actions that showed respect, which she did not have for me as a man; actions such as showing maturity, which she did not have, as evident when she exploded over the smallest mistake made or disappointment. A person who is grateful to be loved—you can feel it in the way they even look at you. I have experienced it three

times in my life when I met women who had experienced many bad relationships, and they showed their appreciation because of the man I presented to them. The narcissist's tendency is to train you like a lab rat to accept the bare minimum. For four years, I honored most of the requests asked of me until I began to take a stand because she would ask me in a tone as if I was her employee. I noticed one day that no matter how small the request was made by me; she would stand there and stare at me. The response would be a stare or simply a “no.” Let me give you a few examples:

I mentioned this earlier in the book: during a food shopping spree, she purchased a large box of cups of noodle dinners. I have experienced so many health challenges that I know my body very well. My body warns me when a cold is threatening to take over my body; my throat becomes scratchy. She asked me to put the large box in the back of her SUV so she could take it to work for her lunch. Of course, I did it. I returned to the house and said, “I feel a cold coming; do you mind if I have a soup?” She responded, “No, because if I take one soup out of the box, it will be harder for me to wheel it around and carry to my office.” I said, “Don’t worry about it.” I presented the argument if I pack the box properly the soup will not fall out. She informed me we had cans of soup in the cabinet. I looked in the cabinet and the soups we had were not the soups I ate. By the time I went to tell her, she drove off. Three days later, she left a soup on the counter. Another example: our bathroom was in the bedroom. The bed occupied half of the room and was a few steps from the bathroom. I was already lying in bed, and she was coming out of the bathroom. I asked her to pass me something out of the bathroom. She stared at me and did not move. I want to impress upon you the emotional and mental damage done when someone is not reciprocal in a relationship.

I really did not catch on to this until about a year into the relationship. This was another reason I removed myself from the relationship. Only a person displaying narcissist traits can take for granted someone who has carried loving memories for so long and forever tarnish those memories with their behavior. I escaped.

Chapter 12

The Move

By May of 2024, it became clear I needed to leave. From one day to the next, I did not know which version of her I was going to have to co-exist with. The final straw was when I asked her to help me find us a counselor. I contacted about twenty counselors, and all were booked. I mentioned to her the number of counselors I contacted, and she suggested I contact my insurance company. I did so and was provided with approximately twenty pages of referrals. I was already stressed out and depressed, so I asked her to help with the process. The response? She texted me her itinerary and ended the text by asking when did she have the time to look for counselors. Allow me to be clear: people make time for the things that are important to them. For example, in dating, one way to determine whether someone is interested in you by how quickly someone in my opinion returns a text. In the age of “ghosting,” I paid close attention to how long it took for someone to respond to a text. When I was in the dating world, if a woman returned a text four hours or more later, it was a red flag. Technology allows us to look at our phones and see exactly who contacts us. Now, missing a call is different because sometimes our phones are on silent, and we do not realize it. Back to the story.

To be fair, the end of May is always hectic for her professionally, so I did not press her. But when her work responsibilities were over, she took the time to go to Loewe's and purchased equipment to build a garden. Once she arrived home, she took the time to sit on the back porch with tools and transformed into Barbara the

Builder in the heat to assemble the equipment for her garden. She assembled it on her own. You may ask the question, "Why didn't you help her?" First, I did not know she was going to build a garden. Second, I was beyond tired of the verbal disrespect. Once she finished, I said, "The three hours you invested in assembling that equipment, you could have called numerous counselors." Her response? "Ask your dad about the best times to plant a garden." I said, "Noted." It was after that moment I began to look for apartments. Why? How many times does a person have to tell you that you are not significant? How many times do a person's actions tell you that you are not worth the time to address issues? How many times do a person's actions inform you of your lack of importance in their life?

The day before she was to leave for her business trip for two weeks, she came into the room I occupied and asked me about my plans. I clearly stated I would search for an apartment, and once I found one, I would be moving out. One thing about me: as laid back as I am, my willingness to help anyone, once you get on my nerves, I become very direct in my tone and actions. While she was away, I executed my plan. On June 4th I was contacted by the complex to inform me my application was accepted. I signed the lease on June 5th, and I began to slowly move in. It is interesting when people mistreat you; they try to act like nothing happened. The handwriting should have been on the wall because while she was away, I called her only one time. She even pointed out I was not calling her. People with narcissistic traits will not feel your pain, so in her mind, the issue was me, and she did nothing wrong. Three years of being dismissed, gaslighted, verbally disrespected, and flat-out told I was not on her financial level. Somehow, she remembered none of it. I was fortunate to find a place within walking distance to a variety of locations: clothing stores, sneaker

stores, fast food restaurants, Starbucks, etc. It is a beautiful neighborhood. I have a patio, and in the summertime, I sit outside and just exhale. I shed tears. I finally experienced something I missed for four years, which was peace in my home.

We exchanged emails and texts during this time. Her responses were much the same as when I lived in the house: dismissive, deflecting, etc. It is stunning to witness the arrogance and defiance from a person who displays narcissistic traits, clinging to their imaginary beliefs that are disconnected from reality.

When possible, maintaining no contact with someone who demonstrates all the traits I have described allows you to safely protect yourself from further gaslighting, blaming, and invalid criticisms. Discontinuing communication with them offers a chance to check your own reality against their past distortions. You may prevent additional injury to your self-esteem and regain your sense of self (2023, Grande)(sic). The gaslighting was the worst aspect of this whole ordeal. She would say the most harmful and inappropriate statements related to past boyfriends and intimate moments, only to later claim she never said those words. Furthermore, she would often accuse me of misinterpreting her words. It is one thing to deal with this while living in the same space, but there was no way in hot country hell I was going to deal with it in my own space. Throughout the back and forth, she still would not acknowledge any of her behaviors that caused me to leave, which is the reason my therapist recommended I stop all contact. The narcissistic traits demonstrated by someone are not interested in the damage they cause and their mental impact. **The goal is to confuse you in conversation, so you surrender to their world.**

I will provide context related to exchanges between her and I just days after I moved out. Due to legalities, I am unable to share text messages verbatim. However, I can paraphrase.

June 11-She questioned when would I come back to get the remaining items? She also articulated the way in which I removed myself was not mature. More communication should have been involved in terms of me leaving and informing family members.

Let's discuss this for a moment. She called my actions immature, unloving, and disrespectful. Three years of

- Dismissiveness
- Temper tantrums
- Lack of patience
- Gaslighting

Two of those behaviors fall under the emotional abuse category. So, now the abused must leave in a respectful manner. She conveniently forgot the times I tried to articulate my feelings about her behaviors and to seek a professional to help us. She conveniently forgot that the day before she left for her business trip, she asked me to share my plan. My response was that I would look for a place to live, and once I found one, I would move into it. It is interesting that when the victim is mistreated the person displaying narcissistic traits becomes the victim after they no longer have control. I was so damaged; all I wanted was peace and space.

June 13 - Me: If you are available tomorrow morning, I would like to come by and get my remaining items. It should be noted that an email was sent by her on June 9th stating I had until July 9th to

retrieve my remaining belongings. The date I requested was, I believe, June 14th or 21st.

Her: Within this correspondence, she exercised her control by stating that she did not want to meet me halfway and accommodate my request.

In an earlier e-mail, she said my belongings were already downstairs. But when I informed her that I could not make my appointment, the story changed. The new story was that she had to drag all my belongings for two hours downstairs. 'Why did the story change? One other trait connected to narcissism is being pathological liars.

***June 23** - The conversation involved me sharing with her the extent of the emotional and mental damage caused by her behavior. Her response was that I committed the same crime. She also expressed that she was tired of the accusations and suggested that I seek therapy.*

Me - Until you acknowledge the damage you have done, which I have tried to convey via email, text, and in person, you will receive the same response.

Her - She responded by shifting the emphasis of her behavior back onto me and my responses. She remained dismissive even after I was no longer in the home.

*Her-She encourages me to see a therapist and denies being dismissive towards me. Her comments continued to place the blame back on me and urged me to reflect on my actions. In other words, she asked, 'What about you?' Finally, she stated that I am the root of all our problems. **Remember, people displaying***

narcissistic traits will not hear your concerns. The belief is they are too superior to have flaws- (In other words, they are all that!)

The person demonstrating narcissistic traits will never admit their wrongdoings. When you bring their behaviors to their attention, they will not acknowledge anything you articulate. Instead, their response will be to deflect and refuse to be accountable for their actions. For three years, I tried to communicate the way her behaviors were negatively impacting me, and her response was “What about you?” Followed by, “If you are not ready to say something about yourself, please do not say anything about me.” Narcissists will deflect and ignore. She knew exactly the behaviors I had issues with, and she turned the tables around. She expressed that she is beyond tired of the accusations and comments, what is and what is not working in the relationship. When I first reconnected with this woman, she articulated the following about her behavior:

- She is hot tempered.
- She is all over the place.
- She can be dismissive.
- She lacks patience.

Although it is commendable to share our weaknesses, the next step is to work on those weaknesses so it will not negatively impact someone. If a person refuses to accept accountability when someone shares their behaviors hurt them, how can he/she blame a person for not wanting to be in their space?

My job was to walk around and just accept the mistreatment and suffer in silence. **It is one thing for someone to give you a glimpse of who they are; it's another to resist change when their repeated behaviors cause harm to others**

My ex--She blamed me for starting our issues.

Here is where the real sickness and arrogance lie. A normal thinking person would be cognizant of their own behaviors and acknowledge the fact that the person expressing their feelings is sharing them for a reason. This would, and should, cause the person to self-reflect and show empathy. Simply put, if a person articulates an issue repeatedly, it is probably because the issue is not being addressed. Her response is a term called blame shifting.

According to narcissisticabuser rehab.com, blame shifting is the redirection of responsibility for one person's actions, behavior, or mistakes onto another person, group, or thing. It is a destructive act of deception that shrinks personal responsibility and destroys trust in relationships. It is a tactic commonly used in the context of narcissistic abuse (2023, Wakefield). (sic)

Remember when I mentioned that for three years, her response whenever I shared how her behaviors affected me was, "What about you?" This is blame shifting. This is someone who did not want to acknowledge my concerns or feelings on a continuous basis. This is someone who always tried to convince me and the world that she loved me deeply, to the point I wanted to contact the Screen Actors Guild and recommend an honorary Oscar for best performance. I want you to stop for a moment and think about the level of deception and arrogance it takes to try and make someone feel they are the problem while they are abusing you. It is a reason that if I never hear from this woman again, I will have no problem with it at all. In fact, my mother recently asked me if I still loved her. I said no. Why? Where do I begin? I have no respect for people who hurt others and think nothing of it. So, how does blame shifting look? Now you know!

One more example from my ex-

She shared with me the needs of a wife which included protection, loving, etc.

One month after we began dating, I mentioned this earlier, and it is worth mentioning again. I noticed she did not have an alarm system installed in her home. I arranged for her to have it installed by a major security company and paid for it out of my pocket. Once we got married, every night before bed, I made sure to check the locks around the house and ensured the alarm was activated. These actions were done while she was sleeping. This is an example of a man being protective of his woman.

Love-I carried love for this woman in my heart for over thirty years and do you think that love weakened or grew stronger when the reality presented itself of us to be together again? This woman gave me the best first love experiences a young man could ever have. Despite the treatment I made sure I continued to do the landscaping, repair things around the house and when we went on road trips to visit family, I did most of the driving.

I mentioned earlier in this book the condescending tone. My habit is, when someone asks me to do something, I will repeat the instructions. I do it to ensure I completely understand the request correctly. Whenever she asked me to do something for her, I would repeat the instructions. Thereafter, she would begin to talk slowly as if I were not intelligent enough to understand her words or as if I was a child. After enduring this time after time, I reached a point that when it happened, my response would be, "I do not work for you. Stop talking to me like that!"

She implied I was intimidated by her success.

This is the arrogant side she inherited from her "professional and successful family." There was never a time I interfered with her career. As a matter of fact, she showed through her actions that her career was more important than her marriage. Nor was I intimidated by her illustrious career. When her book was published and libraries invited her, it was me who recorded parts of the event so she could place on social media. Does that sound like someone who is intimidated by her success?

She implied I intentionally hurt her, and my actions made her home unsafe.

I can provide you with the phone numbers of ten people who have known me for as long as thirty years, and they will attest that it is not in my character to hurt anyone intentionally. Her statement is an example of reactionary abuse, where she focused on my reactions to her abusive behaviors instead of her actions. How did she benefit from my presence?

Financially-With a second income she was able to invest more money into her 401K.

Dogs-I became the primary caretaker of her dogs. It was me who woke up most mornings with a 100lb rottweiler breathing in my face to be let out of the house to do her business. It was me who fed the dogs most of the time (one unfortunately passed away).

Housework/Cooking-Because of my work schedule, I was home more than she was, so I tried to keep our home as clean as possible. I often prepared meals even though she would not eat most of the time. I am an above average cook.

Lawn-Mowing the lawn every week and cutting hedges during the spring and summer seasons.

She implied I did not care about her health and well-being.

When she began to gain weight, she blamed me stating my constant concerns related to her behavior stressed her out. How dare I continuously inform her; her behaviors are abusive? Even while being mistreated, I still tried to encourage her to work out with me. But because of her career, which always came first, she did not put her health first. One thing I will never stand for is someone to attempt to assassinate my character.

Who is Eric Legette?

- Empathetic
- Caring
- Hardworking
- Confident
- Creative
- Loyal
- Resilient
- Ambition
- Articulate
- Determined

If I showed this list to the people who know me, I almost guarantee they would agree this is an accurate list. It is in my nature to be nurturing and to take care of those I care about. To the point, I would go without if I knew it would help someone else. I will not

receive her words because during the time I spent with her, I did all I could to take care of her, even while I was being mistreated.

Let's say, in the case of you and your mate, you mention his or her behavior is negatively impacting you. The argument escalates until suddenly the abuser says, "I wouldn't have acted that way if you weren't always nagging me," or "If you didn't always start something when I am dead tired from work, I wouldn't lose my temper." Or "If you weren't always focused on you and your needs, we wouldn't be fighting." The chances are extremely high that guilt-tripping will work because you want the relationship to thrive. Suddenly, you feel awful, and you hear yourself apologizing and making excuses for their behavior. Since your goal is to work towards establishing a healthy relationship, you will not see you have been manipulated. Aren't the above examples like the statements she made to me? If you are really paying attention, which I know you are because you are brilliant, you should have noticed that not one time within this book, in the correspondences I shared, did she mention anything about her behaviors. The guilt trip, which was true in my case, worked, and many times I apologized because she stated I was always blaming her for everything. Yet, nothing changed. Temper tantrums, dismissive behavior, lack of patience, verbal disrespect—none of the behaviors changed; they just kept continuing. I needed to send a strong message by leaving, and I did.

Below Is Text I Shared with Her

Me- Leaving you has devastated me. You gave me no choice. Your actions showed me you have little respect for me. The longer we were together, the worse it became. Part of respect is listening, and you did not want to listen. I need to heal from all of this, and I

suggest you do the same. I could not get through to you when I lived in the home with you or when I removed myself. From putting my things out on the street unnecessarily to telling people I abandoned you; you have a way of leaving out key details. Focus on your projects. We both need to heal.

This is me once again pouring my heart out and trying to articulate my feelings. Look at the response below.

Her-She called me a coward because I moved out while she was away on a business trip. My ex-continued by letting me know the proper way I should have informed her that I was moving. Now let us think about this for a moment. The person that is exhibiting abusive behaviors (condescending, gaslighting, temper tantrums), the abused must leave according to their wishes.

More from my ex—she articulated that she did not stop all contact, nor did I acknowledge the death of a college friend. I did not manage the move with maturity and class. The final part was articulating words to show she was going to be the mature one.

Yet, throughout our exchange, she once again refused to acknowledge any of the behaviors I had pointed out over the course of three years. This is a textbook example of how someone with narcissistic traits manipulates the narrative—flipping the script so that they appear reasonable while the other person is painted as the problem. In her mind, everything fell on me. She bore no responsibility. When your words or actions cause someone to feel bad it is your responsibility to acknowledge their hurt and articulate empathy. I expressed my condolences!

She expected me to tap into my humanity and express condolences for someone she had lost—the same humanity she had consistently denied for me for three years.

She also labeled *me* a narcissist. Why? Because I dared to call out the damaging behaviors that had affected my mental and emotional well-being. Because I refused to stay silent. How dare I mention issues that caused me pain? How dare I acknowledge that, as a heart patient, prolonged stress could put me in the hospital—or worse, end my life? My role, according to her responses, was to endure the abuse in silence.

Then came the controlling aspect. She instructed me not to contact her family members and even told me to unfriend them on social media. She mentioned this during a phone call, and I stopped her in her tracks. *"Those days are over,"* I told her. *"You no longer get to tell me what to do."* I made it clear—she would not dictate my actions, not in my own home, not in my life.

And then came the most disgusting part—her so-called concern for my well-being. She referenced my heart condition, pretending to worry that I would be alone and without support. The same woman who dismissed my daughters' request for us to move to a first-floor apartment so I would not have to walk three flights of stairs multiple times a day. When I mentioned their concern, her first response was not one of compassion. Instead, she asked if I noticed how quiet it was on the third floor. As if that somehow justified ignoring my health needs. The suggestion to remain living on the third floor would pose an inconvenience for her. Classic narcissistic trait!

How insensitive can someone be toward a man who suffered a massive heart attack? My condition was so severe, while I lay

unconscious and fighting for my life, my family was forced to attend meetings about the possibility of being placed on a heart transplant list when I regained consciousness.

This is the same woman who repeatedly ignored my pleas to stop driving aggressively—so recklessly that I would press my shoes into the floor out of fear. She chose when to acknowledge my heart condition, when to care, when it was convenient for *her*.

And now, as I am preparing to take this book on a national tour, I look forward to sharing my story—because no one deserves to go through this kind of emotional and psychological torment.

Chapter 13

How the Monster Looks

Within our exchanges, she once again did not acknowledge any of her behaviors I articulated over a three-year period. Her tone was very condescending. She alluded to her being the mature one. In other words, "All of this is on you... I am not the problem."

It is one thing to research and digest information. It is a whole different world when the information you discover looks you right in the face as the person displays behavior that aligns with the words written on the paper. By the fifth month after removing myself from her presence, when her texts and emails were able to get through, she requested mediation with our former marriage counselor. I shared this news with my therapist, and she quickly determined it was not mediation, but reconciliation, which I wanted no part of.

My ex and I again exchanged texts, and it was more of the same. I emailed the therapist and informed him I had no desire to meet with her. She sent ten questions via email through her therapist directed to me, which I happily answered. I became so accustomed to answering with the same responses that it was startling for her not to see I was stating the same thing repeatedly. On the next page are examples of narcissistic traits at work. Read the exchanges and keep this in mind.

She wanted to know the reasons I did not believe she respected me.

Throughout the book I shared the reasons I removed myself from her presence,

- Temper tantrums
- Condescending words
- Dismissiveness
- Lack of patience
- Gaslighting

Are the above examples of respect or disrespect? She felt she respected me in the manner she saw fit to respect me and not according to the way a man should feel or articulate being respected. It is like a parent asking a child, “What do you want for Christmas?” The child says a train set. On Christmas morning, the child opens the present with anticipation only to find a pair of tube socks. In other words, it is not about you and what you believe the person need is. **You listen to the needs of the person.** Once again, she showed I was not being heard because she would have responded this way: “Eric, I read your list related to the reasons you left. First, I am sorry I made you feel that way.” Those who display narcissistic traits are going to stick to their guns until the very end. No matter the cost. She lost a whole husband because of her unwillingness to just listen.

She instead automatically focused on herself. She detailed the things she did for me, such as cooking, cleaning, and giving of herself and resources. See that word HERSELF! If I was the one who packed his clothes and found another place to live, who should she be talking about? This is what living with someone who displays narcissistic traits looks like. Again, when you are in a relationship it is not only about your beliefs or needs. It is about the needs your partner articulates.

People who display narcissistic traits based on the reading of various research really do not listen to their partners because they are stuck in their own world. This is a reason some experts recommend leaving the relationship when you experience an encounter with narcissists.

In another conversation, she talked about the issue of talking to random men in public when she was out with me. She mentioned her various professional positions which included being personable with people, and despite her experience communicating with people, she made the adjustment to accommodate me. She was making the ultimate sacrifice of not disrespecting her spouse in his face.

Here is the truth: when I first brought this issue to her attention, here is what was said: “Eric, I grew up in a neighborhood where everyone spoke to each other.”

What was missing was first acknowledging my words, followed by an apology. So, she was not happy to make the adjustment at first, not acknowledging the behavior. She fought me tooth and nail with her responses. **When someone loves you, they will not deflect or make you feel guilty when you articulate an issue. When someone loves you, they will feel horrible knowing their actions hurt you.**

She mentioned her position as a professional and despite her position she made the adjustment regarding to not speak to men in public while walking with me. **If this was you, how would you have felt hearing this?** I will tell you how I felt. I felt as if she was doing me a favor. She showed an example of the **grandiose part of her personality** which I mentioned earlier. Her career has absolutely nothing to do with disrespecting her spouse. It was the

first time a woman made me feel as if she was doing me a favor by being with her. In fact, after I removed myself from the home, she informed me that I was 'losing a wife!'

Over thirty years ago, I was on a date with a beautiful young lady, and she said, 'You should be happy I am walking next to you.' After that date, it was the last time she saw me. This statement was made to a man who, throughout his childhood, my mother would tell me Eric means King. 'Go out and act like one!' Thirty years ago, I did not tolerate (and still do not tolerate) arrogant and disrespectful behavior from not just women but from anyone. I continue to live by this motto: ***'Respect is not an option; it is a requirement.'***

One other reason she used to validate her lack of respect was she had not been in a relationship for a long time.

Not being in a committed relationship has little to do with showing basic respect for your fellow man. The reason my heart is so cold towards this woman is that she did not acknowledge the beginnings of anything. For example, when I first brought the issue of lack of respect for me to her attention, I shared earlier that her first reaction was one that did not include empathy, compassion, or acknowledgment. So, now I am supposed to believe my concerns meant something to her? The first reaction is the most honest reaction.

Another question or comment posed by my ex was related to her reactions seeming to be judged more harshly than my reactions. What reactions is she referring to? After about a year of being talked down to, dismissed, and gaslighted, I started to react—yelling, using profanity, slamming doors, etc. First, I never stated my actions were fine. I told her, and I am telling you, the reader,

that I am ashamed of my responses. However, after four years of tolerating an elevated level of disrespect, most people will reach a boiling point. The million-dollar question she failed to mention is what happened in terms of her actions prior to my reaction? Her rebuttal was that I should have the emotional intelligence to not respond. In other words, accept the abuse and stay quiet. My reactions are linked to reactionary abuse which I mentioned in an earlier chapter.

People who have known me for ten years or more will unanimously state that if Eric yells or uses profanity, someone did something to him repeatedly, and he finally reacted. It takes me a minute to get to that level. I hope this does not sound like an excuse. I am human, and everyone has a breaking point. This was another reason I removed myself. When someone is clueless regarding mistreatment and abuse, they are inflicting on you but, it is on point if you react, that is someone you should consider staying away from. If you stay, you are at risk of becoming the victim of repeated abuse. If you stay, they will focus on your reaction. This is a choice only you can make. Her questions quickly let me know what life would be like if I went back. I will pass Alex for ten thousand dollars!

Did I ever walk away from her during an argument? Yes, plenty of times. I walked away because I realized that no matter what I said, she was not trying to hear me. I walked away because she did not want to address behaviors that were having a negative impact on me emotionally and mentally. I never grabbed or aggressively snatched anything out of her hand or steamrolled past her because it is not in my personality to be aggressive. She, however, did everything I mentioned to me multiple times.

My ex mentioned in an email that I often interrupted her while she was on the telephone, reading, etc. This action done on her part became very prevalent at the very beginning of our relationship. I dismissed this whole argument. Why? Because my parents raised me with basic manners. There were times I would be on the phone; she would interrupt, not softly, but talking to me in a normal tone of voice, and of course, the person on the other end could hear. **Again, part of the narcissistic experience is to falsely accuse you of the same behavior you had an issue with. This was no different.** She would speak to everyone on a speakerphone. For example, when she came home from work, I was already sitting in my lazy boy chair watching television. Most people would either go into another room or, if there were any upstairs, would go upstairs. This woman would sit down in the living room and just continue to talk. Did I do the same disrespectful and dismissive behaviors? No, because I have manners. **Good, respectful people will hear you for the first time when you express a concern about the way they treat you.** The first reaction shown by a good person is one of empathy and compassion if a person is told their actions have harmed another person. Again, when a person does not acknowledge the beginning within a relationship and their behaviors, it is their setup to pretend their behavior did not have a starting point. It keeps the door open for them to continue their behavior. It should be noted that one of the first things she admitted to me about her personality was having temper tantrums.

She focused heavily on my reactions and not her actions. Once again, this is the reason, if you read article after article, the advice is to leave a relationship with a narcissist because you will rarely win. **I again am not calling my ex a narcissist. However, based on the research connected with my experiences is undeniable.**

You will subject yourself to further mental, verbal, and emotional abuse.

She falsely accused me of abandoning her and implied God told her I was planning to leave which is a blatant lie.

My response- The Holy Spirit did not have to tell you anything. I told you, because you never respected me, nor did you listen or believe me, it is the reason you did not believe me. Using God is a dangerous game you are playing—invoking spirituality with a blatant lie.

Narcissists, with their captivating charm and charismatic personas, often harbor a dark secret beneath the surface—pathological lying. (sic)-(narcissisticabusenetworkcom)

I will highlight the line where she stated she caught me planning and confronted me. This is a blatant lie because I told her to her face about my plans once she asked me. This is exactly how the short conversation went the day before she went on her business trip:

Her-What are your plans?

Me-While you are away (business trip) I will look for an apartment and once I find one, I will be moving into it.

She did not have to confront me. I told her, like a man, exactly my plans. But her plan was to create this narrative so she could share with her family that I did her wrong. By doing this, she does not have to share the real story and mention anything for which she would be forced to be accountable. When I read this blatant lie, a range of emotions went through me like the speed of sound: anger, rage, sadness, and later, depression. Why depression? I could not

believe I participated in this twisted world. Sadness, because this was my first love—the woman who gave me the best first love experiences any young lady could have ever give to a shy young man trying to find his way in this thing called love. As I am typing, my eyes are filled with tears. She totally reshaped the whole truth. Abandoning someone is a cowardly act, and there is no aspect of my character that indicates I am a coward. For four years, this woman dismissed anything I shared with her. We are talking about damaging behaviors that do not belong in the realm of a healthy relationship. So, the lie fits perfectly for those who do not know the real story. This time, it was a costly mistake on her part. I once told my ex that when my frustration reached its boiling point, I would become silent and disappear. I need to share this: my past childhood trauma as it relates to women comes from being made fun of horrifically by girls from elementary school until the tenth grade in high school. As a result, I emotionally shutoff when I am hurt by women.

It is astonishing to me the swiftness with which she shifted from being this arrogant, self-absorbed woman to using a word like abandonment after I removed myself. Do you see the confusion? Narcissists are known to be arrogant people. The admission of using the word abandonment was like conceding. What was she conceding? Absolutely nothing. Her words were about a loss of control which is the cornerstone on narcissism when involved in a relationship. She knew her ex had a big heart. She knows I am an empathetic and compassionate person. She knows I am the man who has carried her around in my heart for over thirty years, so obviously, in her mind, I would never walk away no matter the amount of abuse inflicted.

July 3-Lastly, she questioned my love for her and where did the thirty-year love go.

During this conversation, she implied that my words or actions were not sincere because how could anyone love someone the way I claimed to love her and leave her in such a fashion? She thought, “This man loves me too much to ever walk away from me.” Instead, she should have worked hard not to take for granted the love a man had for her for over three decades. A person demonstrating tendencies such as the inability to understand that people will grow tired of their nonsense because they are so self-absorbed. Once again, absolutely none of my concerns were addressed, and her retribution for me leaving was to exact revenge which she did by removing my name off the AAA.

Me- My suggestion to you is to have a conversation with your dad and brothers about the way a man moves. I did not drop you like trash; you dropped yourself. I talked, talked, and talked. Right now, it is not about me; it is your ego. Because if you can think rationally for a moment, you will see I continued to try and get through to you from March until the time you left for your business trip in May. My actions now are for self-preservation purposes. Being involved in a non-reciprocal union was also an unfortunate reality I had to accept. Bring your humanity back and forget about yourself for a moment. A man was not created to follow. You are too strong and independent to hear or listen to anything a man has to say. The right kind of man, other than your brothers and father you will hear. You know the type because I observed you observing them, and I don't fit that description. You were dismissive, arrogant, and lacked any form of empathy. I decided, based on everything I mentioned, that you were an unreachable wife. Because remember, I am the one with a health condition. The stress would eventually impact my health. As for sincerity, I gave you everything other men did not want to give to you within six months of coming back into your life, and that was a committed

relationship. I want you to really think about that one statement. I truly hope for you to regain a sense of humanity that I think you have lost due to life's disappointments. This marriage was a gradual deterioration, and if you can be honest with yourself, I tried to reach you for years, and you tore me apart. Enjoy your fourth.

What does it mean to lose your sense of humanity and a fact she disagreed with? The AI definition is.

Losing your sense of humanity" means to lose the ability to empathize, care about others, and exhibit basic human qualities like compassion, kindness, and respect, essentially acting in a way that is considered cruel or detached from the shared human experience, often by treating others as less than human; it can also refer to feeling disconnected from your own humanity and experiencing a lack of self-worth.(sic)

As you read the definition, all the examples and experiences I have shared throughout this book, where do you see any evidence of empathy? Compassion? Kindness? Respect? You have, however, read examples of gaslighting, lack of empathy, lack of compassion, untruths, etc.

My response continued- I will say this and leave it alone because I have already made my decision. You lost your humanity when I looked you in the face and informed you that you broke me emotionally and mentally. Even with that information, your behavior did not stop or change; instead, they intensified up until the day of my birthday, of all days. So, sit down, be still, and admit you didn't care about me for the man I am.

Within this conversation, it was just pure gaslighting. She attempted to alter my reality of events I know to be true. She mentioned the way I should have removed myself from the marriage. Amazingly, it was wrong for me to leave an abusive relationship. I had to be the mature one and initiate a discussion related to me ending this horrible marriage. **Remember this: a person who is paying attention knows when, what, and how disrespect feels.** But the one with narcissistic traits will use the tactic of gaslighting to make you question your own feelings and reality. My ex wanted the freedom to stay in her world, the freedom to throw temper tantrums, the freedom to constantly talk down to me, and the freedom to imply I was not on her level intellectually. She wanted the freedom to gaslight me after making cruel remarks. My job? Stay silent.

Her- The implication within another conversation was that my recollection of events is not accurate, which is, once again, gaslighting. She continues the conversation by being condescending, mentioning that she was the mature one.

The pattern of communication throughout this marriage is the main reason I removed myself. In narcissistic language: “I know I am causing damage, but I really don’t care about your feelings.” “It’s not me... it’s you.” **You really need to understand that a person demonstrating narcissistic traits will never acknowledge the pain they inflict on you.**

She conveniently forgot and failed to mention the many emails and texts I sent to try to express my feelings. She conveniently forgot the many days she went from 0 to 100 in her attitude about minor mishaps in the home. *She conveniently forgot her arrogance shown to me repeatedly whenever my heart was broken. Where was her respect when she spoke to random men on the street while*

walking with me? Where was her love when I attempted several times to seek help through counseling and she refused? To be clear: I did not leave to deliberately and intentionally hurt her. I left to preserve my health, emotional, and mental well-being. She stated that nothing she had done was meant to hurt me. The damage was however done and complete. The calmness she showed through her words is akin to the calmness she exhibited when I became angry. Finally, she invoked God, which is a level of sickness that I cannot fully comprehend. God is a God of love, compassion, empathy, and understanding. All the conversations I have shared were the reason I blocked her number and email weeks ago. There is a saying: the greatest success is massive revenge. I will do all I can to reach as many people as possible to educate, empower, and inform about this horrible mental sickness called narcissism.

Chapter 14

The Comeback

So how do you reclaim your life after having a narcissistic experience? My first step was to enroll into therapy a month after I moved out, which occurred in July 2024. My therapist is a gift from God. In my very first session, she allowed me to speak uninterrupted for fifteen minutes as I shared details related to my experiences. She abruptly stopped me and said, “Eric, how much do you know about narcissism?” I shared what little I knew. She then asked me to review a list of narcissistic behaviors and to share the number of traits I experienced. I believe it was something like eight out of ten. She said, “Eric, it sounds like you were involved with a narcissist, and you are a victim of narcissistic abuse. She further stated that, on a personal level, she had recently ended a relationship with a narcissist. Through therapy, I learned how sick narcissistic people really are. My first homework assignment was to watch a two-hour video related to narcissism. It took me days to complete watching because I had to relive the memories. Therapy has provided thought-provoking questions for me to ponder and think about.

An important aspect I learned about narcissism is the sheer lack of empathy that narcissists do not possess. In August of 2024, I had two procedures related to my heart in the span of three weeks. In total, I have had a combination of seventeen procedures/surgeries in twelve years performed on my heart. Keep in mind that for all of them, anesthesia was administered. In one exchange, I shared with my ex about the procedures, and I was still recovering. I

further shared that my focus was to heal and that I did not want to deal with whatever she was bringing up. It was as if she had not heard a word I said. She continued to articulate her issues about our marriage. I informed my therapist about the exchange, and she became incredibly angry, to the point that she again recommended no contact: block emails and texts. She stated that even when I shared my health issues, my ex still was not willing to hear me.

If you ever encounter a narcissist or become victim to the traits, therapy is essential because you have experienced a form of trauma for which you were not prepared, and it is from an intimate partner. You may have felt that you were not able to express yourself to friends or family members for fear of being judged or not believed. Talking to a therapist who is empathic, warm, validating, and understanding is exactly what a victim of narcissistic abuse needs. It allows you to be honest with the therapist about your feelings. When you talk about what you have been through, you then realize the trauma you have experienced. Because narcissistic abuse is very subtle, *it's not always apparent when it is happening; however, when a client discusses it, all comes out at once, they recognize the pain and awful treatment they have experienced.* (2021, Davey) (sic)

It truly is a bonus when your therapist shows genuine care and concern beyond the job. My therapist has shown her humanity on more than one occasion because she, too, has experienced the dysfunction connected to dealing with a narcissist. My best advice for you is to try to be consistent with your therapy. I understand that depending on your insurance and co-pay, it may not be possible to schedule a session every week. I try to go every other week, and the week in between, I work on homework assignments assigned to me.

The journey is going to be painful. You will experience moments of feeling various emotions: anger, disbelief, rage, anxiety, and depression. I am not ashamed; I have shed many tears because this experience came from a woman I held in my heart for three decades. Focusing on narcissistic partners, from the moment someone meets a narcissist, especially in a romantic context, the abuse starts – this is the love bombing stage. This stage is where the narcissist grooms their victim into believing they have met their soulmate by portraying themselves as everything the victim has ever wanted, using techniques such as mirroring and future faking. (sic) (Davey, 2023)

Once the narcissist sees the victim falling for their fake charm and manipulation, they start to push the victim's boundaries to see how much they can get away with and how easy it will be to manipulate and control them. Over time, the mask slips, and the victim starts to see their identity, which is nothing like who they first met. The person the victim fell in love with was a ghost, which is a reason it's so hard to break away from a narcissist, as a trauma bond has formed. (sic). This is where the victim has become so dependent on the narcissist to give them the love and affection that they see less of as time goes by. But they can't imagine their life without them. (Davey, 2023)(sic)

When we first got together, it felt as if we were together in our twenties. She was always very affectionate. If she was not holding my hands, she was touching me in some way. Even my mother commented on her elevated level of affection, and she expressed this undying love for me repeatedly.

The reason I believe all of it was fake is based on the above reading. By June, just three months after we reconnected, she totally changed. I mentioned to you earlier in the book that I was mowing

her lawn, and she came and aggressively snatched the lawnmower out of my hands. My response was disbelief, followed by silence, and then I went inside the house. I packed my bag, got into my car, and drove back to my home in North Carolina. This was her test to see how far she could go. My response should have been to end the relationship at once. I apologize for recalling the same story already shared. Some experiences must be repeated and highlighted due to the seriousness of this topic.

Although I cannot recollect what I said to her in response to her apology at the time (I am sure I addressed it), once she called to apologize, the mere fact that I returned opened the door for the monster to come in and reside. In one reading about narcissism the moment I returned I lost her respect. The depression for me comes from knowing that this woman, based on her actions, did not really care for me despite her words. She is the poster child for 'actions speak louder than words.'

Reading old texts sent from her after I moved out, she presented a convincing argument for this undying love for me. However, this is what I know about love and respect; **you do not have to beg to be heard or seen by someone who genuinely loves you.**

I had a guardian angel as I mentioned, that reminded me I deserved to be heard, seen and respected. One day I informed my guardian angel I felt disrespected from a statement that was articulated by her. Here was the response.

- She acknowledged my words.
- Expressed regret.
- Showed empathy.
- Apologized

- A promise going forward to show me how much she respected me.

The old saying is,” Sometimes other people will treat you better than your family.”

My ex?

- Deflect
- Blame
- What about you?
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of compassion
- Dismissive

My guardian angel and I are not even in a relationship. Yet, her respect comes from observing my behavior. She observed a man who developed positive relationships with children and genuinely enjoys being around them. She observed a man who does his best to be a great co-worker. She had observed and experienced a man who showed her empathy and compassion when she needed someone to talk to and listen. My guardian angel has played a significant role in me reclaiming my life. You too can reclaim your life if you ever have an encounter with a narcissist. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Give it to God!
2. Forgive yourself.
3. Practice the art of self-talk “I am worthy of love” “I am worthy to be loved.”
4. Invest time in a hobby.
5. Set goals.
6. Pursue a dream.

7. Lean on the support of family members and friends. When you feel low, do not be ashamed to reach out and talk to them.
8. Lean on your faith.

Life is too short to dwell on someone who added nothing to your life but pain and heartache. Karma has them on their list and karma always finds those who hurt others intentionally.

Time to Recover

Part of recovery is once again seeking therapy. I am blessed to have an amazing therapist. She is incredible because the information she provided early in our journey together aligned with the behaviors of my ex each time she contacted me. You are going to need someone to talk to and provide professional assistance with your recovery. The reason therapy is needed is due to the many ways narcissism can impact your life.

Effects of Narcissistic Abuse

Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, loss of self-worth, inability to forgive yourself, physical symptoms, cognitive problems, and emotional liability (Cuncic, 2023).(sic) Early in the therapy process, my therapist informed me that this would not be an easy road and that it could take years for me to recover. At first, I did not believe her. However, as time has passed since that session in June 2024 (as of this writing, it is December 22, 2024), I believe her. I go through moments of depression, anxiety, anger, confusion, guilt, and more.

While you are recovering, you will notice that the actions of people may trigger you. You will observe behaviors or hear words that will cause you to remember your ex.

There are times when you will be alone, and the tears will flow. Just allow them to flow because tears are cleansing, even for a man. Why is recovery hard?

Everything good you've ever believed about human beings is contradicted. Every thought you've heard about loyalty, experience, and truthfulness is denied. Every trope you've heard about marriage, love, and partnership is hammered into silence. Every idea you've had about human connection is trashed by the narcissist's behavior. (nd) (2016, Huston)(sic)

Their behaviors go against the characteristics of a healthy relationship—love, honesty, reciprocal behavior, caring, kindness, respect, etc. They lash out when the victim decides to leave. "How dare you leave just because I abused you?"

First, I had to come to the reality that my experience happened. I had to force myself to ignore the pull to go back. Why? Because I loved her. She was my first love, the woman I carried in my heart for three decades. What did reality show? Three years of consistent,

- Dismissive Behavior
- Temper Tantrums
- Verbal disrespect
- Condescending words
- Gaslighting

I then remembered these words.

- "You are useless."
- "I've had plenty of good F???s" in my life from ex-boyfriends.
- "If you don't die before, don't call me ever again"- (As I recovered from two heart procedures)

- “This is why people say don’t ever marry someone not on your financial level.”

Forgiveness is a key part of a relationship; however, abuse is not. I mentioned that I gave her three opportunities to address our issues with a counselor, and she declined each time. Yet, the behavior continued. I had to come to grips with the fact that this was my reality, and I experienced it firsthand. My suggestion is to accept your reality. It is happening in real time. It is a temporary reality if you choose. Then make the necessary adjustments. Here are a few suggestions.

Friends and Family

I am relying on the support of my friends and family. They allow me the space to vent. Sometimes my venting is very harsh, and I apologize to my friends for using such unkind words at times. They have heard me at the lowest moments. One friend gives me the tough love I need when it is needed. Another friend is more empathetic.

Music

Yes, I am a 55-year-old man who loves to create house or techno music tracks. Am I striving to get a recording contract? Absolutely not. I love to create music, and I am pretty darn good at it too!!

Writing

This will be my ninth self-published book. Writing has been therapeutic for me since I was a little boy.

Helping others

I have lived a life of service for more than three decades. For twenty years I was the head of a nationally recognized fatherhood program where thousands of men obtained visitation and custody of their children. I created an initiative that led to young fathers being placed in gainful employment. There are many people who are going through worst problems. If you can help someone do so!

Exercise

I work out at least four times per week. Great stress reliever.

Chapter 16

Reflect

Once I removed myself from her presence, I was able to really sit still and think. I moved at the perfect time, which was the summer. I love my apartment. It is the right size and has a patio with a view that is gorgeous. I remember one night I turned off all the lights, with just the light from the television on. I opened the patio door with the screen door still closed. I laid down on the couch, and there was a summer breeze blowing through my toes as my leg was propped up on a stool. For the first time in an exceptionally long time, I felt a sense of total peace.

There have been days when I thought about the last four years. I thought about the arguments, the constant dismissiveness of my presence, the nights when I could not sleep, etc. I asked myself, “How did I get here?” And as painful as it was to admit, I had to accept responsibility. Think about the beginning of your relationship and the signs you may have missed when a relationship failed. This is key because by thinking about this specifically, you can avoid repeating the same mistakes. I know exactly where I went wrong. I mentioned when she snatched the lawnmower out of my hand aggressively; this was the beginning. The “I wonder if he is going to take this” moment.” I made the right decision by packing my bag and going back to my home in North Carolina. My mistake was that I should have ended it. I should have informed her that due to her obvious anger issues, I

would have to let this go. But because we had history, I gave her the benefit of the doubt. Find a quiet place and just think about the signs you might have missed. According to www.prevention.com, here are a few warning signs to watch out for in a new relationship.

- Love Bombing
- Lack of appreciation.
- Lack of communication.
- Unwillingness to compromise.
- Gaslighting
- Inconsistency-(2022, Zitz)(sic)

Based on the above, love bombing, gaslighting, and inconsistency in her behaviors were my warning flags, and I have paid a dear emotional and mental price for it. It is funny; I dated women in the past with similar behaviors, and I immediately stopped the train before it got off the tracks. So why did I stay? History. We had a beautiful history together that I carried around for three decades. Reality yelled, “She is not that person anymore!” Please understand I do not think my ex is a bad person. She just made bad choices that were wrapped in disrespect and cruelty. But I was too blinded into the fantasy of “us” being back together. Purchase a journal pad and write down the red flags and behaviors you now realize you missed. Write down as much as you can remember so you will avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

Narcissism-Contradiction of Love

I had a guardian angel whose heart listened to me and made me feel seen and heard. My guardian angel reminded me that I lost so much of Eric, I accepted the treatment of being dismissed, talked down to, and all the other horrible behaviors I have shared throughout this book.

Let's discuss what love is-if you are a religious or spiritual person there is a definition in the bible which provides a description of love which says,

1. Love is patient.
2. Love is kind.
3. It does not envy.
4. It is not self-seeking.
5. It is not easily angered.
6. It keeps no records of wrong.

Read the above and tell me which ones align with narcissism? I believe God does not desire for anyone to be subjected to emotional, physical, sexual, or mental abuse. Patience was something I displayed because this woman was my first love. She was the first young lady my heartbeat for. She was the first woman who saw past all my insecurities related to my light complexion and sandy brown hair. The insecurities came from years of being

called ugly by girls my age as a child. Only to meet her and hear her say, “He’s beautiful” to my friends when she saw me walking down the street and wondered why I always looked so sad and never smiled. It was the protective armor I used to insulate and protect myself from young ladies my age at the time. I met and dated women with the same temperament my ex demonstrated, and they did not last. I quickly ended any hope of those women thinking they could get into my space and disrespect me. Yet, I gave her chance after chance, only for all my efforts to be ignored. If you are still uncertain about whether you will continue to engage in a relationship filled with narcissistic traits after reading my story, please read this chapter repeatedly. When someone loves you, he or she will not gaslight you. **He or she will listen to your concerns related to destructive behaviors that impact you. He or she will not dismiss you.**

You will not hear words like, “You’re picking on me.” Or “You are always complaining” when you try to share your feelings about their treatment of you. **Love does not ignore the cries of those who are hurt and brokenhearted.**

Chapter 18

Protect Yourself

It is the Christmas holiday. As I was driving on the way to my parents' house, my ex texted me, and tears welled in my eyes. You have read about the ugliness of my experience. Please do not think for a moment that I sit at home and smoke cigars celebrating. I do not, because my heart is broken.

The fact that I can no longer be in contact with her is a feeling I am unable to fully express in words. I have empathy because, despite the ugliness I have experienced, I can put myself in her shoes. When I arrived at my parents' home, I found myself thinking about her. Tears again welled up in my eyes. How does she feel? I am thinking about how she must be feeling after all the damage inflicted on me. It is called humanity. Despite my pain, I still think of her.

Empathy is putting yourself in someone else's shoes. It is the holiday season, and I am sure she is thinking about this time last year when she had a husband. We were with family, laughing and enjoying each other. Although my recollection of that day is not strong, I am sure I was trying to enjoy myself. Because you see, when you are with someone who demonstrates narcissistic traits, you will rarely enjoy a perfect day. A day without a temper tantrum. A day without being dismissed. A day without gaslighting. A day without being talked down to. Yet here I was, feeling bad for not being with her, wondering about her feelings this holiday season. Her text showed she was thinking about me.

The same may happen to you once you remove yourself from a narcissistic relationship. If you return chances, are you will see things will not change. Is there a chance for change? According to [thriveworks.com](https://www.thriveworks.com) the answer is yes, those with narcissism or narcissistic traits can change. The key, *however, is a willingness to recognize the harmful patterns in their life and commit to getting help. Without consistent treatment and genuine openness to change, it can be very challenging for someone with narcissism to make meaningful progress.* (2024, Dewitt)(sic)

In my case, she has not shown me anything to prove she has changed or has the desire to change. Change starts with a willingness to be accountable and to accept the reality that your behavior is damaging to others. In her world, as she clearly stated, I had to mention my flaws first before articulating about her flaws. It has been less than a week since she sent me a video via text about men who have emotional issues and project them onto the women in their lives. I did not bother to watch the rest of the video. Once again, in her eyes, I am the problem. Nothing has changed. Part of my ex-unwillingness to change is due to pristine professional career and accomplishments. Success will tell a person, they are good. Good enough to treat people with disrespect.

A painful aspect of being a victim to narcissistic traits is that they dismiss your concerns and your pain, then switch it around and indicate that you are the problem. If you react to anything they do, it will later be used against you. You will be blamed for expressing your concerns. This is a reason this experience is so weird for me. I am witnessing in real time someone who totally shuts off when it comes to hearing that their behaviors are toxic. Once you are back in their presence, you may see little if anything has changed. And when it happens to you how will you react? What are you

going to talk about? How do you forget the fact that the person inflicting pain will not think enough of you to address it?

Run, Forest, Run. Or at least jog. Love is not deaf. Love hears. Love, cares. Love acknowledges. I didn't receive those acts of kindness from her; I received the total opposite. There were times throughout those seven months out of her environment when I would open the door slightly. Holding out hope for reconciliation. Except for one time when she apologized, her words remained the same. So, the question is: why didn't I accept the apology and move on from there? I was broken. So much damage was done that I could not bring myself to hear her. Do you know the amount of pain that must be inflicted on a person to pack their belongings and move out? It felt as if I was running from a monster. I was so broken that during the two weeks she was gone; my total focus was to escape.

Do you want to hear something ironic? The church we attended is across the street from where I now reside. I remember driving home from church one day and thinking, as I looked around, "Everything is around here." I have never lived in a neighborhood where everything you may need is within walking distance: a variety of fast-food restaurants, mid-level restaurants like Applebee's, grocery stores, department stores, Barnes and Noble, Starbucks, etc. The only feature or place missing is a view of the water. As I mentioned earlier in the book, I spent many hours sitting on those benches, looking at the water to help ease my nerves and pain at my former residence.

The stage I am in now is feeling guilty. Did I just leave a woman alone? Who is taking care of the lawn? Who is protecting her? My therapist told me in the very beginning that I would experience a range of emotions.

According to medicalnewstoday.com In the short term, emotional abuse can affect mental and physical health. People may feel:

- Anxiety
- Shame
- Fear
- Confusion
- Guilt
- Powerlessness or hopelessness(sic)

As a person deals with the emotional effects, they may also feel some physical effects of the abuse. These effects can include:

- Frequent crying
- Moodiness
- Aches and pains
- Difficulty concentrating
- Muscle tension

I feel ashamed I allowed another adult to treat me in such a disrespectful manner repeatedly. I have already mentioned guilt. I know I went around the block and down by the river sharing my story. The bottom line is that having someone in your space who has shown no evidence of change means you must protect yourself.

The recent video sent to me via text by my ex is an example of a woman who refuses to acknowledge her behaviors—a woman who is still in the "What about you?" phase. This phase served as a major contributor to our present predicament. My ex was the first woman I have been involved with whom I could not communicate with, no matter what I said or tried to do. Respect is listening. I watched my ex listen to every man not labeled her husband. **Do you know the psychological effect as I observed that reality?**

Imagine someone pinching you, and you scream it hurts. But the screams are ignored, yet the pinching continues. This was my life with my ex and the reason I cannot and will not go back. It is the reason she is no longer allowed in my space.

I had to set boundaries because whenever I responded to her, it felt like a broken record. I was repeating the same concerns as when I lived in the home with her. Protecting yourself includes setting boundaries. *Lacking empathy for how their actions affect others, people with narcissistic traits feel entitled to use other people. This makes it especially important to set firm boundaries with them.* (Neuharth, D., 2020) (sic)

As of this writing, January 7th, 2025, 9:45 PM, as I am writing on my laptop, my ex sent me a text requesting to meet with me to sign the divorce papers. My mother informed me my ex had called her two days in a row. My instincts told me the reason for the calls was to try to get my mother to provide my address to serve the papers. I also shared with my friend this was the reason.

Narcissists must find a way to reclaim their power. Her actions will provide relief for her and a narrative she can share with her high-level friends that she divorced me. My divorce happened seven months ago when I moved out. I am so glad it is happening in real time to share with you so you can see the way they move. I shared this news with a friend, and she quickly informed me I did not need to meet with her and a notary as my ex stated. I then googled whether the parties getting a divorce must meet to sign the papers in the state I reside in. The answer is no. I screenshot the information and texted it to her. She, as someone who displays narcissistic traits, would respond, stand her ground, and offer an alternative place for us to sign the papers. Even with direct

information related to state requirements, she would not budge.
She did not get her wish.

Accountable

Over ninety percent of this book has been me sharing unfortunate experiences with my ex. However, part of growth is the willingness to admit your part when something does not go well.

The label of being called a man comes with great responsibility. Men are called to be leaders in their homes. To be responsible fathers to their children by providing, guiding, instructing, and disciplining when necessary. To provide them with the tools to navigate a difficult world. We are called to display a high level of integrity and at times I have failed. I am human. I try to work on the weaknesses in my life.

Within my relationship I failed in certain areas. I should have maintained my ground when I suggested postponing the wedding. We were arguing every day. I mentioned several times throughout the book my observations of my ex-behavior.

- Frequent temper tantrums
- Dismissive
- Controlling
- Gaslighting

You may be thinking as you are reading this, “It doesn’t seem like you are pointing the finger at yourself.” I am. I am receptive to criticism and anything she wanted to present to a counselor about me, she was free to do so. It was my role and job as a man to stick

to my decision to postpone the wedding so we could gain control of this train that was falling off the track. A leader problem-solves. He sees the issues, implements a plan, and executes the plan. What should the plan have been? Take a step back. Breathe. Seek counseling. Why? To work on OUR issues so we can move forward.

You may ask, well, what about your behavior? I cannot speak on her behalf. I will wholeheartedly admit I am not perfect. Marriage is a partnership, and taking the lead at that time would have been the perfect start towards a lifelong commitment. Within a strong partnership, if one is strong in one area, he or she will help the other who is weak in that area. By refusing to continue with the wedding plans, it would have hopefully followed a plan. I was a man without a plan. As the Bible says, “*Where there is no vision, people cast off restraint.*” Our marriage perished as a result. One other failure was, being raised in a Christian home I did not place God at the center on a consistent basis.

Think back: what did you contribute to the failure of your relationship or marriage? Did you try to seek counseling for help and were talked out of it? Did you see the signs, but you continued in the name of all that is true?

In my case, it really is not about pointing fingers. It was a chance to exercise leadership. Instead, I allowed someone to take the lead who had no experience in a life decision. Think about it: a person with no experience was taking the lead, and this is part of the narcissistic trait behavior. He or she will take control of any and every situation if you allow them to, and she did. Instead of trying to be a partner in correcting OUR issues she refused. Because of my failure, two people lost four years of their lives. Because of my

failure, I became exposed to a problem that will take me years to recover from. Taking responsibility will help you in the future.

Chapter 20

Just In Case

(You meet narcissists)

This book provides a wealth of information about the narcissistic experience, with the hope that you will be able to recognize the signs *before* becoming deeply involved in a relationship that could last for years.

One day you may meet someone unexpectedly—or on a dating site. You have read this book, and now you want to stay alert and protect yourself. This chapter serves as both a review and a guide, sprinkled with new insights.

Let's begin.

Love Bombing

Your partner seems too good to be true. They might say they have waited their whole life for you or claim you are their soulmate shortly after meeting. Watch for signs such as:

- They share all your interests or agree with all your opinions.
- They want constant communication.
- They become irrationally jealous if you spend time with others, even family.

- They make grand gestures or buy overly expensive gifts early on.

Devaluation

The devaluation stage—also known as the depreciation stage—often begins subtly.

The narcissist may start dropping small hints that you have done something wrong, forgotten something important, or hurt their feelings. These tactics slowly chip away at your confidence.

Common signs include:

- Passive-aggressive behavior
- Backhanded compliments
- Excuses for poor behavior
- Subtle criticism
- Stonewalling
- Mind games that seem harmless
- Name-calling

Now that you understand the red flags, what do you do? You have decided this person is worth your time and you want to give the relationship a try. If so, it is crucial to protect your mental and emotional well-being.

Here are some essential strategies to help you stay grounded:

1. Maintain high self-esteem!
2. Advocate for yourself

3. Set and enforce clear boundaries!
4. Develop techniques to remain calm!
5. Build a strong support system!

There are additional resources to review found in the bibliography at the back of the book if you would like to explore further.

Bottom line: if you choose to stay in the relationship, you must be proactive about protecting yourself.

Finally, I would like to share with you an excerpt from an interview of a man who was diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder. I must warn you the information is disturbing.

How would you describe what a narcissist is?

Someone diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder.

There are also nine key traits:

1. Grandiose sense of self-importance.
2. Preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Need for excessive admiration.
4. Belief that he or she is special and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people or institutions.
5. Sense of entitlement.
6. Interpersonally exploitive behavior.

7. Lack of empathy
8. Demonstration of arrogant and haughty behaviors or attitudes.
9. Envy of others or belief that others are envious of him or her.

Q: How did you get diagnosed? I have understood that NPD is particularly difficult to diagnose as people usually aren't aware of their narcissism.

A: I was having a lot of other problems mentally due to PTSD, to the point where I was just sitting in my room, punching a punching bag, and crying. I am quite sure I was having some kind of psychological episode of some kind because I do not remember any of it. My roommate was like, "Okay, I'm done with your shit, you need to get checked out, or else I'm moving out," so I did, and in the process of getting that mess sorted out, I was diagnosed as a narcissist.

Q: What approach did your therapist take to inform you that you were a narcissist? How did you react to getting your diagnosis?

A: They said it very bluntly. They basically said, "From what you have told me, I think it's likely that you are suffering from narcissistic personality disorder."

4. Q: Do you know the real you? Or do you feel like you're a blank slate until you meet someone and then figure out how to portray yourself?

I do, and I don't particularly like who I am. I'm a cold, selfish, heartless person, and I don't even feel like I have "personhood" or what makes us humans special. I don't have empathy or compassion or love or anything. I'm closer mentally to a rat. I only care for what I want.

Q: Do you accept that your dating life is going to be extremely difficult, if not impossible? My last ex had NPD. I gave him the benefit of the doubt because he also had a rough childhood like mine, but even with intense therapy multiple times a week he couldn't be fixed. The constant manipulation and lying...

A: I don't care about having a long-term relationship, and I don't care about anyone other than my niece. I have had long-term relationships, but I know they aren't "real" relationships. I lie about everything in them, down to the music I like. I want to be loved, but I'm not attached to those who love me.

Q: Can someone live happily with a narcissist? Is there a cure?

A: I think it depends on the narcissist. In most cases, I'd say no. You can be friends and such with them, but I don't see having a romantic relationship ending well with 90% or more of us, definitely not me, at least. No matter what, a relationship with me is always a competition, and I will do anything in my power to win.

Q: How do we avoid dating and marrying you?

A: Don't date people who you can't see any flaws in. Everyone has flaws, and if they don't show it, they are hiding it.

Q: Have you ever been called out for your behavior? Has someone ever told you, "You're manipulating me right now," or "I can tell you have ulterior motives"?

A: I have a bunch. I just keep talking till they stop.

Q: How do you react when someone hurts or disappoints you? What does it take for you to forgive?

A: I usually escalate it and make them look shitty. If you do something to me, I will go back and do ten times worse, and I will make everyone think that you did it to yourself. I don't forgive people.

Q: Do you feel something when you know you are hurting people by your actions?

A: Not really. I kinda just feel shame that they see who I really am, but I don't care a lot.(sic)

Can you imagine living with someone who thinks like this? As I read the responses, I can pinpoint experiences, and I even felt emotions as I read this disturbing interview. Refer to this chapter often if only to read this interview so it will become imprinted in your mind.

Chapter 21

You Are Special

As I close, I feel like you need a dose of love. My mother is the best mother specifically designed for me. Why? I can call my mother right now, and if she hears my mood is down, she will ask, “Eric, what does your name mean?” I say, “It means King.” She says, “Go act like it.”

I know dating today is tough and you feel as if you will never find that person and now here, I come adding just another obstacle to your goal. I would be remiss and morally irresponsible if I did not share my horrific experience with you. Many of you are dating with the best of intentions with love in your heart and I do not want you to have an encounter with narcissistic traits and be ill-prepared. People who display these narcissistic traits tend to seek certain types of people. Who are these people?

According to USA Today.

"[Narcissists](#) need narcissistic supply, meaning attention, validation and recognition from other people to fuel their grandiose sense of self," says [Chelsey Cole](#), a psychotherapist and author of "If Only I'd Known: How

to Outsmart Narcissists, Set Guilt-Free Boundaries, and Create Unshakeable Self-Worth." "That means narcissists will naturally be drawn to people who are highly agreeable, who go with the flow, want to keep the peace, don't like conflict." (sic).

If the above fits your personality, please be careful. Some people who demonstrate narcissistic traits are surprisingly looking for love. The sad and dangerous reality is they are incapable of providing healthy love. Even though many were let go in their relationships they believe they are the prize. My ex said, "You are about to lose a wife." Think about this statement for one minute. Her mate packed his things and moved to another location. Do you think I was feeling a loss? In her moment she was saying, "Who cares how you feel, I am the prize."

You are special. You can travel across this world, and you will not find anyone like you. No one has your DNA or your heart.

I want you to do me a favor: every day, laugh. Find a sitcom or movie that will make you laugh. I have funny parts of sitcoms and movies on my phone. Every day, I try to make it a point to just laugh—laugh until the tears are rolling down your face.

Do all you can to practice self-care to counter the frustrations of dating. Love yourself constantly.

Massages, manicures, pedicures, movies, long walks, etc. If you are a spiritual person and a believer in God, do not forget to pray and ask for strength. If you are single and dating, please, please, go to Facebook, Tik Tok and Instagram and type in the word narcissism. **Watch the videos of those who have experienced having an encounter with narcissistic traits. Visit Facebook groups and read the stories of the victims**

I hope to meet you at a future book signing.

Be blessed.

Bibliography

Bachert, A. (2024, July). What is Reactive Abuse?

[What Is Reactive Abuse? | Charlie Health](#)

Better Help Editorial (2024, October). Deflection

[Deflection | BetterHelp](#)

Bowman, M. (2024, March). Examples and Signs of Gaslighting and How to Respond.

[What is gaslighting? Examples and how to respond](#)

[Chronic Lying - Narcissist Abuse Support.-](#)

narcissistabusesupport.com

Cuncic, A, MA. (2023, November). Effects of Narcissistic Abuse

[Effects of Narcissistic Abuse](#)

Davey, E. (2021. August). Healing From Narcissistic Abuse: Rebuild, Recover, and Break Free.

[Healing from Narcissistic Abuse: Rebuild, Recover, and Break...
- Counselling Directory](#)

Dewitt, H. (2024, August). Can a Narcissists Change? Effective Treatments for Narcissism

[Can a Narcissist Change? Challenges & Therapy](#)

Drevitch, G. (2020, June). Narcissists, Controllers, and the Art of Blame-Shifting.

[Narcissists, Controllers, and the Art of Blame-Shifting | Psychology Today](#)

Drevitch, G. (2020, June). 7 Ways to Set Boundaries with A Narcissists

[7 Ways to Set Boundaries With Narcissists | Psychology Today](#)

Fishman, S. (2023, August).5 Ways to Identify a Vulnerable Narcissists.

[Vulnerable Narcissist: 5 Signs](#)

Fisher, K. (2024, June). Love Bombing: Signs to Look Out For

[Love Bombing: Meaning, Signs, and Examples](#)

Medically Reviewed by [Smitha Bhandari, MD](#)

Fletcher, J. (2024, September). What Are the Effects of Emotional Abuse?

[Emotional abuse: The short- and long-term effects](#)

Gillis, K. LCWS, BACS (2024, December). Narcissistic Smear Campaign: Examples and How to Deal With It.

[What Is a Narcissistic Smear Campaign?](#)

Grande, D., PHD. (2023, August). Going No Contact With A Narcissists. Everything You Need to Know.

[Going No Contact With a Narcissist: Everything You Need to Know | ChoosingTherapy.com](#)

Gupta, S. (2024, May). How to Identify and Escape a Narcissistic Abuse Cycle. [Narcissistic Abuse Cycle: Stages, Impact, and Coping](#)

Huston, M (2016). Recovering From the Narcissist in Your Life Is So Hard

[Why Recovering from the Narcissist in Your Life Is So Hard | Psychology Today](#)

Kristenson, S. (2023). 9Toxic Deflections Tactics Used by Narcissists

Kruger, A (2025, April) What is The Honeymoon Phase? Everything to Know About this Relationship Stage, Including How Long it Lasts-[What Is the Honeymoon Phase and How Long Does It Last?](#)

[9 Toxic Deflection Tactics Used by Narcissists - Happier Human](#)

Lee, B.M.B.A(2023, December). One Key Sign That You're Being Taken for Granted

[One Key Sign That You're Being Taken for Granted | Psychology Today](#)

Life with a Narcissist Is A Maze. Marriage Recovery Cener
[Life With A Narcissist Is A Maze Of Confusion?](#) (February 2024).

Lipscomb, M. (2024, November). A Man With Narcissistic Personality Disorder Let People Ask Anything They Wanted, And His Answers Are Eye Opening. -[22 Honest Truths from a Narcissist](#)

MayoClinic (2023, April). Narcissistic Personality Disorder
[Narcissistic personality disorder - Diagnosis and treatment - Mayo Clinic](#)

McKenna, S. Dr. Things A Narcissist Will Never Do in A Relationship.

[Things a narcissist will never do in a relationship](#)

Parkin, K. L, PHD (2022, March). The Narcissistic Cycle of Abuse.

[The Narcissistic Cycle of Abuse | Psychology Today](#)

Perry, A. (2024, May). [How to Deal with a Narcissist: 10 Tools and Strategies to Help](#)

Raypole, Crystal (2024, October). Think you're Being Gaslit? Here's How to Respond.

[8 Ways to Deal with Gaslighting](#)

Psychologytoday.com-Gaslighting

[Gaslighting | Psychology Today](#)

Resnick, A. (2024, September 2024). 9 Things to Say When Someone is Gaslighting You

Trepany, C. (2023, September). Narcissists have a type. Are you a narcissist magnet? Here's how to tell.

[Narcissist magnets: Are you a narcissist's type? Know these red flags.](#)

Tudor, M. (2025, March). Web Md. Editorial Contributor
Narcissism: Signs and Symptoms

[Narcissism: 5 Signs to Help You Spot Narcissistic Behavior](#)

[9 Things to Say When Someone Is Gaslighting You](#)

Wakefield, M. (January 2023). What is Blame-Shifting and Why It Is Harmful?

[What Is Blame-Shifting and Why Is It Harmful? Learn To Spot the Signs](#)

[Narcissism: 5 Signs to Help You Spot Narcissistic Behavior](#)

Wilson, R. (2022, January). Confessions of A Narcissists Magnet

[Confessions of a Narcissist Magnet | Psychology Today](#)

Zitz, S (2022, September). 15 Common Red Flags in a Relationship That You Should Pay Attention to According to Experts.

[15 Common Red Flags in a Relationship You Should Never Ignore](#)