

# Some Dates Carry Ghosts

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## **\*\*Chapter 1: The First Glimpse\*\***

August 14<sup>th</sup>. This date held significant value in our lives – the day her father passed away and the day I blocked her, two incidents happening two years apart.

But before I tell you about the psychological warfare that would reshape my understanding of love, manipulation, and human nature, you need to know who I was before she entered my world. You need to understand the person I was before I learned that some people are emotional vampires disguised as wounded souls seeking healing.

I was twenty-one, a focused and disciplined electrical engineering student. College life was a world of lectures and exams where logic ruled and hard work yielded predictable results. I thrived in this structured environment, attending classes diligently and absorbing every lesson with the eagerness that set me apart from my peers.

My hard work paid off when I achieved the 19<sup>th</sup> rank in the state in my entrance examination – out of hundreds of thousands of students, a moment of pride that felt like I was destined for greatness. Little did I know that this determination and focus would soon be challenged by someone who would teach me the hardest lesson in human psychology I would ever receive.

It was during my early years in college when I first saw her – a girl who seemed to exist in some orbit slightly parallel to mine. She was cute, undeniably so, with eyes that held stories too complex for someone her age, and barely five feet one inch tall. Something about her presence commanded attention despite her small stature. I was too introverted to approach, too wrapped up in my own world of circuits and algorithms to risk interrupting her path.

But that wasn't the first time I noticed her. Three years earlier, I had visited this same college to meet a friend. Across the courtyard, walking with those same curious, cautious steps, I saw her. Even then, her hair caught my attention – curly and always tied back in a way that made it look soft and fluffy, like a controlled chaos that somehow perfectly framed her face. It was a trademark I could never forget. In all the times I would observe her from afar, I never once saw her braid it. It

was always this wild yet contained cascade that seemed to mirror something deeper – the chaos beneath her calm exterior that I was yet to discover.

I never dared to talk to her. My introversion was a fortress I rarely breached, and she existed just out of reach, like a shadow at the edge of my world. There was something about her that felt both fragile and untouchable, as if approaching her would somehow disturb a delicate balance she maintained around herself.

Little did I know that this brief glimpse across a college courtyard was planting the seed of a story that would completely unravel my emotional life years later. What I saw was innocence mixed with mystery, vulnerability wrapped in an aura of quiet strength. I was unaware of the storm she carried within her – the father wounds, the childhood trauma, the emotional patterns that had been carved into her psyche by years of neglect and abandonment.

What I saw was only a fraction of the chaos and control that would come to define us both. In that moment of innocent observation, I couldn't have imagined that this small girl with the fluffy curls would become my greatest teacher in the art of psychological manipulation, or that loving her would nearly destroy the very foundations of who I thought I was.

Sometimes I wonder if fate has a cruel sense of humor – placing the person who would challenge everything you believe about love right in front of you, years before you're ready to understand what they represent. She was there in my peripheral vision, a puzzle I was curious about but never brave enough to solve.

If I had known then what I know now about covert narcissism, about emotional extraction, about the difference between someone who needs love and someone who has learned to weaponize neediness – would I have still been drawn to her? Would I have still felt that inexplicable pull toward someone who seemed to carry the weight of the world in her small frame?

The truth is, probably yes. Because the person I was then – ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in the state, intellectually confident, emotionally generous, raised with love and moral values – that person believed that caring could heal anyone, that understanding could bridge any gap between two souls.

That person had no idea he was about to become someone's emotional father, provider, teacher, and therapist all rolled into one, while receiving nothing but manipulation tactics in return.

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## **\*\*Chapter 2: Cricket Friendship\*\***

The universe has its ways of orchestrating encounters, often weaving fragile threads of connection where none seem likely. Fate, or perhaps mere coincidence, placed us in the same project group during that pivotal semester. Among the group was my close friend, the one I would later confide in as I unraveled the tangled web of manipulation and emotional turmoil that this young woman would bring into my life.

We didn't talk at first. The project group was just an assignment, and I was cautious. After confirming her addition to the group by text, our team started discussing ideas. She threw out suggestions, but ultimately my friend and I, both top students in the class, guided the plan. Rather than focusing strictly on the project, our conversations drifted to the Indian Premier League cricket.

That was our first common interest, something that unexpectedly drew us onto the same page. From there, private texts started flowing – a tentative start to the connection that would soon consume much more of my time and energy.

My friend and I shared silent glances during the project meetings, feeling a subtle shift we couldn't articulate yet. Somehow, this simple cricket talk was the beginning of a complex emotional entanglement that would go far beyond college and exams.

From that point on, our conversations turned into lively texts every time a wicket fell or a significant moment unfolded in the game. There was an unspoken race to see who'd text first, each message a playful jab that slowly built our connection. Sometimes I deliberately let her win, letting her text first to give her that little victory, unaware of how deeply those small moments would root us in a strange and unexpected friendship.

Gradually, the casual exchanges and friendly competition became something more. The lines between teammates and friends blurred, and she eventually named what we had 'cricket friendship' – a bond formed not on romance, but on shared passion and playful rivalry.

We continued bonding. Slowly, the texts turned into an everyday thing. What started as match commentary evolved into check-ins every ten minutes. "How's your day going?" "What are you up to?" "Just wanted to see how you're doing." The frequency was intoxicating – here was someone who seemed genuinely interested in the mundane details of my daily existence.

She already worked in an office despite her young age, a reality born from financial necessity following her father's death two years earlier on August 14<sup>th</sup>. That date – August 14<sup>th</sup> – would come to hold profound significance in both our lives, though I couldn't have known it then. Her resilience in the face of such loss impressed me. Here was someone barely out of her teens, carrying adult responsibilities while still pursuing her education.

Eventually, our texting became constant – every moment, from the first light of dawn to the point where we'd fall asleep with our phones in hand, conversations stretching into the night. I found myself setting aside study time just to respond to her messages, prioritizing these exchanges over assignments and academic responsibilities that had once defined my entire identity.

I felt drawn to her quiet strength despite the hardships she faced. Her stories about navigating office politics as the youngest employee, her struggles to balance work and college, her determination to succeed despite the odds – it all painted a picture of someone who had grown up too fast but was fighting to build something better. What I didn't recognize was how perfectly these stories were crafted to appeal to my helper instincts, to make me want to be the person who could ease her burdens.

The conversations became my emotional anchor. During boring lectures, I'd find myself anticipating her next message. During group studies with friends, I'd sneak glances at my phone, hoping for that familiar notification tone. She had become the highlight of my day, the person whose opinion mattered most, whose attention I craved above all others.

Looking back now, I can see that these daily interactions were weaving a complicated web of emotional investment, one from which there would be no easy escape. What felt like genuine connection was actually a carefully constructed dependency. Every "good morning" text made me feel special. Every late-night conversation made me feel chosen. Every shared laugh made me feel understood in ways I'd never experienced before.

But at the time, it felt like magic. Here was someone who wanted to talk to me constantly, who seemed genuinely interested in my thoughts, my day, my dreams. For an introvert who had spent years observing social connections from the sidelines, this level of attention was intoxicating. I was being seen, heard, valued – or so I believed.

Logic and intellect – the very qualities that had earned me my 19<sup>th</sup> state rank – took a back seat to this growing emotional attachment. The engineering student who approached everything analytically was becoming entangled in a bond that defied analysis. I was becoming something I'd never been before: emotionally dependent on another person's attention and validation.

What I didn't understand was that she was studying me during every one of these exchanges. My responses, my availability, my eagerness to help, my patterns of care and concern – all of it was being carefully catalogued. While I was falling into what felt like the deepest friendship of my life, she was learning exactly how to manage and maintain my emotional investment.

The “cricket friendship” had evolved far beyond sports commentary. It had become a complex emotional system where I was learning to organize my entire day around her communication patterns, her needs, her schedule. I was learning to prioritize her happiness over my own routines, her validation over my own goals.

And so this chapter closes on the cusp of something that felt transformative but was actually dangerous – a bond born from innocent cricket discussions that had grown into a complex web of emotional entanglement. I was no longer just a focused electrical engineering student with clear goals and boundaries. I was becoming someone whose emotional well-being was increasingly tied to the attention and approval of a person I was only beginning to understand.

The boy who had been content with academic achievement and occasional chess games was disappearing, replaced by someone who lived for the ping of text notifications and the promise of constant connection. I thought I had found my deepest friendship. In reality, I had taken the first steps toward becoming someone's emotional supply source.

The stage was set for everything that would follow – the deeper manipulation, the boundary violations, the emotional extraction that would nearly destroy my sense of self. But in that moment, falling asleep with my phone next to my pillow, waiting for her goodnight message, I felt like the luckiest person in the world.

I had no idea I was being systematically prepared to give everything while receiving nothing real in return.

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## **\*\*Chapter 3: Angry Bird\*\***

For two months straight, our daily texts never missed a beat. Not a single day passed without that familiar ping of her messages lighting up my phone. It became more than a habit – it was a ritual, a constant thread connecting our lives amidst the chaos of college lectures, assignments, and her demanding office schedule.

Our conversations had evolved into something that felt uniquely ours. I discovered I enjoyed getting under her skin in small, playful ways. I'd send deliberately provocative messages about cricket teams I knew she hated, make jokes about her favorite players, or tease her about her work stories. It wasn't malicious – at least, I didn't think it was. It felt like the kind of banter that close friends share, the comfortable intimacy of being able to irritate someone because you know they care about you enough to forgive it.

When she got angry – or at least appeared to – I would quickly shift into damage control mode. "Sorry madam," I'd text, using the formal address ironically, thinking it was endearing and playful. She seemed to find it amusing, and I interpreted her responses as affectionate tolerance of my teasing. This became my go-to response whenever I sensed I'd pushed too far: immediate apology, followed by the "madam" that somehow made everything okay again.

I thought I was being charming. I thought this was how close friendships worked – you test boundaries, you apologize when you cross them, you find that sweet spot of familiarity where teasing becomes a love language. Looking back, I can see how catastrophically wrong I was, but at the time, every reconciliation felt like proof of how strong our bond was becoming.

The pattern became so predictable that my friend – the same one from our project group – started noticing it during our study sessions. "You're apologizing to her again," he'd observe when he'd see me frantically typing responses after receiving what were clearly upset messages from her. "What did you do this time?"

"Nothing serious," I'd always reply. "Just our usual back-and-forth."

It was during one of these episodes, when she'd sent a particularly fierce response to something I'd said about her favorite cricket player, that the nickname emerged. Her message was filled with angry emojis and dramatic declarations about how I was "impossible" and "annoying beyond belief." My friend, reading over my shoulder, burst out laughing.

“She’s like an angry bird,” he said, referencing the popular mobile game. “All fired up and ready to launch herself at you.”

The name stuck. “Angry Bird” became how I referred to her in my head, and eventually, how I’d introduce stories about our conversations to my friends. It seemed perfect – she was small, fierce when provoked, and had this explosive energy that was somehow both intimidating and endearing.

I even started using it as a term of endearment in our messages. “Okay, Angry Bird, I surrender,” I’d text when she got particularly worked up. “The Angry Bird is in a good mood today,” I’d note when her messages were especially cheerful. She seemed to tolerate it, even embrace it, which I took as further evidence that our dynamic was healthy and mutual.

What I failed to recognize was how this playful teasing was actually serving her purposes perfectly. Every time I irritated her and then immediately apologized, I was training myself to prioritize her emotional responses over my own comfort. I was learning to see her anger as my responsibility to fix, her moods as something I needed to manage and navigate.

More dangerously, I was establishing a pattern where she could express disproportionate anger over small provocations, and I would not only accept it but actually find it endearing. The “Angry Bird” nickname wasn’t just affectionate – it was me normalizing and even celebrating behavior that was actually teaching me to walk on eggshells around her emotional volatility.

Each “sorry madam” was a small surrender of my own emotional boundaries. Each time I rushed to soothe her irritation, I was reinforcing the idea that her feelings were more important than mine, that maintaining her happiness was my job, that peace in our relationship depended on my ability to manage her reactions to my behavior.

But I didn’t see any of this at the time. All I saw was a friendship that felt deeper and more intimate than anything I’d experienced before. Someone who cared enough about my words to get genuinely upset by them. Someone who forgave me quickly when I apologized. Someone who seemed to enjoy our dramatic little reconciliations as much as I did.

The two months flew by in a blur of constant communication, playful fights, quick apologies, and the growing sense that I’d found something special. My academic performance hadn’t suffered yet – I was still attending classes, still performing well on assignments – but I was definitely more distracted. Part of my attention was always reserved for her, for monitoring her moods, for anticipating her next message, for crafting responses that would entertain without irritating.

Looking back now, I can see how those two months were systematically rewiring my emotional responses. I was learning to be hypervigilant about someone else's emotional state. I was developing the reflexes of someone whose primary job is emotional regulation – not of their own emotions, but of someone else's. I was becoming the kind of person who apologizes automatically when someone else gets upset, regardless of whether I'd actually done anything wrong.

This is exactly how covert narcissistic relationships begin – not with obvious abuse or dramatic manipulation, but with the gradual normalization of emotional responsibility. The victim slowly learns that keeping peace means managing the narcissist's emotional volatility, that love means being constantly available for emotional labor, that friendship means accepting disproportionate reactions to minor provocations.

What I thought was playful banter was actually a sophisticated training program. She was teaching me that her emotions were volatile and unpredictable, that my words had the power to deeply upset her, and that my job in the relationship was to monitor and manage these dynamics. She was also testing my boundaries – seeing how much emotional labor I was willing to perform, how quickly I would apologize, how much responsibility I would accept for her feelings.

The "Angry Bird" phase established the fundamental imbalance that would define everything that came next. I had learned to see myself as the person responsible for her emotional well-being, while she had learned that she could express anger freely and expect immediate attention and appeasement. I had become emotionally invested in keeping her happy, while she had discovered that anger was an effective tool for gaining control over my behavior.

But in those moments, falling asleep with my phone beside me after our latest dramatic reconciliation, I felt like I was living the most interesting friendship of my life. Someone cared enough about my words to get upset by them. Someone forgave me when I made mistakes. Someone had given me a window into their emotional world and trusted me to navigate it carefully.

I had no idea I was actually being systematically prepared for a much deeper level of emotional manipulation. The playful teasing and quick apologies were just the beginning. Soon, I would learn what it really meant to be responsible for someone else's emotional stability, and the price of that responsibility would be nearly everything I thought I knew about myself.

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## **\*\*Chapter 4: The Extraction Begins\*\***

The honeymoon phase, with its playful exchanges and intoxicating constant communication, gradually gave way to something darker – though I wouldn't recognize it as such for months to come. What I experienced as a natural deepening of our friendship was actually the beginning of systematic emotional extraction, a process so subtle and gradual that it felt like genuine intimacy rather than manipulation.

It started small, almost innocuously. "Can you get me a chocolate from the canteen?" she'd text during my lunch breaks. It seemed like such a simple request – friends help each other, right? I was happy to oblige. There was something satisfying about being able to do small things that made her day better, about being the person she turned to when she wanted something sweet.

But gradually, the requests evolved into something more significant. She began asking for promises – not just casual assurances, but solemn, binding commitments that felt far heavier than our friendship had previously demanded.

"Promise me you'll never leave," she said during one of our late-night conversations. "All my old friends left me. Everyone always leaves eventually."

I should have recognized this as a massive red flag. The plea itself revealed a pattern of broken relationships, and more importantly, it positioned me as responsible for her emotional security. She was asking me to guarantee something that no healthy relationship should require – permanent, unconditional availability regardless of how the dynamic might change or deteriorate.

But I didn't see the manipulation. All I saw was vulnerability. Here was someone who had been abandoned repeatedly, someone whose father had emotionally neglected her, someone who was carrying deep wounds from childhood. Of course she would need extra reassurance. Of course she would want to feel secure in our friendship.

"I promise," I said, and meant it with every fiber of my being. "I'm not going anywhere."

What I didn't understand was that this promise would become a weapon she could use against me later. Every time I tried to establish boundaries or express discomfort with the dynamic, she could remind me of my commitment to never leave. I had voluntarily entered into an emotional contract where my needs became secondary to her sense of security.

With that promise secured, she began planning our future with an enthusiasm that was both charming and overwhelming. Her birthday was coming up on October 10<sup>th</sup>, and she had big dreams – not just for gifts, but for an entire experience that would make up for all the celebrations she'd missed during her difficult childhood.

"I want an exploding chocolate box," she told me, describing an elaborate surprise box that would pop open with chocolates cascading everywhere. "And I want the biggest party this city has ever seen. I want to feel celebrated for once in my life."

Her requests weren't just about material things – they were about creating the childhood she'd never had, filling the void left by years of emotional neglect. As someone who had grown up with love and celebration, I found her dreams both heartbreaking and inspiring. Of course I wanted to help her feel celebrated. Of course I wanted to be part of giving her the kind of birthday that would create beautiful memories instead of painful ones.

But I was also becoming her unpaid life coach and tutor. Our conversations increasingly centered around me teaching her things – chess strategies, academic concepts, life lessons from my own experience of success and stability. She would seek my guidance on everything from work problems to personal decisions, positioning me as the wise mentor who could help her navigate challenges she felt unprepared to handle alone.

"Teach me how to play chess properly," she said. "You're so good at strategic thinking. I want to learn to think like you."

I was flattered. Here was someone who genuinely admired my intellectual abilities and wanted to learn from me. I spent hours explaining chess principles, breaking down complex strategies into simple concepts she could grasp. But when I would ask her to repeat back what I'd taught her – a basic teaching technique to ensure understanding – she would often refuse.

"No, I won't," she'd say with a smile that somehow made the refusal seem playful rather than disrespectful.

I would laugh it off, tell myself she was just being cute, find ways to verify her understanding without making her uncomfortable. But looking back, I can see how she was establishing a pattern where she could benefit from my teaching without accepting any accountability for actually learning or applying what I shared.

Gradually, the gratitude that had once been effortless began to disappear. The chocolate I thoughtfully brought her from the canteen was received without a thank you. The careful explanations I provided were acknowledged with casual indifference. The emotional support I offered was accepted as if it were her due rather than a gift freely given.

Most painfully, the girl who had once anxiously checked in when I had a fever – sending concerned messages throughout the day, asking if I needed anything, expressing genuine worry about my wellbeing – was nowhere to be found. That version of her, the one who seemed to care as much about my comfort as I cared about hers, had vanished without explanation.

I found myself giving more while receiving less, but I couldn't articulate what was wrong. The relationship still felt important, still felt meaningful, but there was an emptiness growing where reciprocity used to be.

Confused and frustrated by the shift, I decided to test the waters romantically. Maybe the problem was that we had never defined what we were to each other. Maybe she was pulling away because she was uncertain about my feelings. I began flirting more deliberately, calling her cute, complimenting her in ways that made my romantic interest clear.

Her response was swift and devastating: "Any other girl would've fallen."

The implication was crystal clear. She was not "any other girl." She was special, discerning, beyond the reach of ordinary romantic gestures. I had revealed my interest and been found wanting – not rejected because she didn't feel the same way, but dismissed because my approach wasn't sophisticated or compelling enough for someone of her caliber.

What I didn't realize was how perfectly this response served her purposes. By positioning herself as immune to my romantic advances while still maintaining our friendship, she could continue benefiting from my emotional investment without having to reciprocate any deeper feelings. She could keep me in the role of devoted provider and mentor while remaining emotionally unavailable, ensuring that I would continue trying to earn what she had no intention of giving.

Looking back with the clarity I've gained through painful experience, I can see exactly what was happening during this phase. I was being systematically transformed from an equal friend into an emotional father figure. She was unconsciously seeking to recreate the parent-child dynamic she had missed in her own upbringing, with me playing the role of the loving, attentive, providing father she had never had.

This is textbook behavior for someone with her psychological profile – a person whose emotional development was stunted by childhood trauma and neglect. She had learned to survive by identifying people who could provide what she needed (emotional support, practical help, validation, guidance) while offering just enough connection to keep them invested. She had become expert at extracting care while avoiding the vulnerability and reciprocity that healthy relationships require.

The wounded child in her was desperately seeking the unconditional love and support she had been denied, but she lacked the emotional maturity to understand that healthy adult relationships

require mutual care and respect. Instead, she had learned to recreate the parent-child dynamic where love flows primarily in one direction – from the caregiver to the dependent.

My promise to never leave had essentially signed me up to be her emotional parent. My willingness to teach her chess and life lessons had established me as the wise, patient father figure. My eagerness to provide chocolates and plan birthday celebrations had confirmed my role as the provider who would ensure her needs were met.

But unlike a real parent-child relationship, where the child is expected to grow and eventually become independent, this dynamic was designed to keep me permanently in the caregiver role while she remained permanently in the position of needing care. Every gift I gave, every lesson I taught, every boundary I relaxed was training me to accept responsibility for her emotional wellbeing while expecting nothing in return.

The extraction phase had begun in earnest. What started with small requests for chocolate had evolved into a comprehensive system where my time, energy, emotional labor, and resources were being harvested to fill the void left by her childhood trauma. And because it was happening gradually, because it was wrapped in the language of friendship and vulnerability, I couldn't see that I was slowly being consumed by someone else's unhealed wounds.

The boy who had once been proud of his academic achievement and clear life goals was disappearing, replaced by someone whose primary identity was being indispensable to a person who could never be satisfied. I was learning to define my worth by my ability to meet her needs, to solve her problems, to provide what she claimed to have been denied by everyone else in her life.

And the most insidious part was that it felt meaningful. It felt like love. It felt like I was finally using my intelligence, my stability, my emotional maturity for something truly important – healing someone who had been broken by circumstances beyond her control.

I had no idea that love cannot heal someone who doesn't want to be healed, and that some people are so addicted to being wounded that they will unconsciously sabotage anyone who tries to love them back to wholeness. I was about to learn that there's a crucial difference between someone who needs healing and someone who has learned to weaponize their trauma – and that all my genuine care and dedication would never be enough to fill a void that could only be healed from within.

The extraction phase was just the beginning. Soon, I would discover what it really meant to be emotionally consumed by someone else's unresolved childhood pain, and the price would be nearly everything I thought I knew about love, friendship, and my own worth.

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## **\*\*Chapter 5: The Breaking Point\*\***

It started slow, almost imperceptibly, but soon the emotional drain was undeniable.

After full days packed with studying and household chores, I found myself forcing my exhausted evenings to become her personal therapy sessions. Her problems at the office – conflicts with coworkers, impossible deadlines, feeling undervalued despite her hard work. Her struggles at home – financial pressures, family responsibilities that felt overwhelming for someone so young. Her frustrations with other people – friends who didn't understand her, classmates who seemed to have life easier, a world that felt consistently unfair.

All of it poured out onto me as if I were the only safe harbor in her emotional storm. I tried to help her calm down, offered advice drawn from my own experience of navigating challenges, provided reassurances that things would improve, and gave her the kind of patience that parents reserve for their most distressed children. It was exhausting, mentally and emotionally, but I was in love, and love blinded me to the mounting cost.

This dynamic perfectly mirrored the caregiving roles parents take on for their children. Like a mother tirelessly soothing a toddler's tantrum at 2 AM, or a father patiently explaining the same life lesson for the hundredth time, I became the emotional buffer absorbing all her chaos without getting the chance to process my own exhaustion. It wasn't reciprocal care between equals – it was the all-consuming, one-directional nurturing that flows from parent to child.

The difference was that children are supposed to grow out of needing this level of emotional regulation. Children learn to self-soothe, develop their own coping mechanisms, gradually become capable of managing their emotions independently. But she had learned to remain perpetually in the role of the overwhelmed child, while training me to be the endlessly patient, endlessly available parent who would absorb whatever she couldn't handle.

Every evening became predictable: she would arrive emotionally dysregulated, I would drop whatever I was doing to help her process and calm down, and then I would go to bed drained while she went to sleep feeling better. I was giving my emotional energy freely, but there was never any left for my own needs, my own stresses, my own desire to be heard and supported.

One night, after a particularly intense session where she had sobbed about feeling unloved and abandoned by everyone in her life, I couldn't hold back anymore. The words came from a place of

deep, genuine caring, but also from a growing desperation to be acknowledged for everything I was giving.

“No one cares about you like I do,” I confessed with raw vulnerability.

I meant it completely. I had reorganized my entire life around her emotional needs. I had become her personal emotional support system, her go-to problem-solver, her source of validation and comfort. Surely she could see how much I cared, how much I was investing in her wellbeing, how different my attention was from the casual interest of other people in her life.

Her response was like a dagger to my heart: “There was a guy who liked me in school.”

The casual way she said it, the timing, the complete dismissal of what I had just shared – it revealed everything about how she viewed our dynamic. My confession of deep caring was met not with gratitude or reciprocal affection, but with the introduction of competition. She was letting me know that my feelings, my investment, my months of emotional labor were just one option among many. That other people had been interested in her too, and my care wasn’t as special or unique as I believed.

I pretended it didn’t hurt, swallowed the ache, maintained my composure, but inside, the pain was sharp and confusing. How could someone respond to genuine care with such casual indifference? How could months of patient listening and support be dismissed so easily?

Feeling suffocated and hurt, I made a decision that felt both necessary and terrifying – I would take a break. Three days away from the constant texting, the emotional demands, the exhausting cycle of giving without receiving. Three days to remember what it felt like to have my own thoughts without immediately wondering how she was doing or what she might need from me.

The first day, I ignored her messages completely. My phone buzzed with her usual attempts at contact, but for the first time in months, I didn’t respond immediately. I didn’t craft careful replies designed to improve her mood or solve her problems. I simply... didn’t engage. And surprisingly, after a few attempts, she stopped reaching out.

On the second day, something interesting happened. She sent an SMS instead of her usual messaging app – her fallback method when her data pack ran out. It was such a familiar pattern that I responded automatically, topping up her data without even thinking about it. Even while trying to maintain distance, I was still taking care of her practical needs.

But something else emerged in that conversation. Her anger boiled over, and she blurted out that the same “other guy” she had mentioned – the one from school who had supposedly liked her – had also spoken to her rudely recently.

This revelation hit me like a lightning bolt of jealousy and confusion. She was still in contact with this person? He was still part of her life? And now she was telling me about conflicts with him, as if I should care about her relationship drama with someone else while she was dismissing my own feelings?

I recognized this for what it was, though I couldn’t name it yet – triangulation. The psychological manipulation tactic where someone introduces a third party into a relationship to create jealousy, competition, and emotional instability. She was using this other person as a weapon to keep me off-balance, to remind me that I wasn’t her only option, to make me feel like I needed to compete for her attention and care.

But this time, something was different. Instead of rising to the bait, instead of asking more questions about this other guy or trying to prove that I cared more than he did, I felt a clarity I hadn’t experienced in months.

I decided to focus on myself.

For an entire month, I embarked on what I now think of as my training arc – a deliberate, systematic effort to break the cycle of emotional dependency that had quietly taken root in my life. I trained my mind to resist the urge to check her messages the moment they arrived. I trained my body to feel comfortable without the constant validation of her attention. I trained my emotions to exist independently of her moods and needs.

It was harder than any physical training I had ever undertaken. The psychological withdrawal was intense – I had become addicted to being needed, to being the solution to her problems, to being the most important person in her emotional universe. Learning to exist without that role felt like losing a fundamental part of my identity.

But it was also liberating in ways I hadn’t expected. For the first time in months, I had evenings that belonged to me. I could study without interruption, exercise without feeling guilty for not being immediately available, spend time with other friends without part of my attention being reserved for her potential needs.

Most importantly, I began to see how completely my life had been reorganized around someone else’s emotional volatility. I had been living in a state of constant hypervigilance, always monitoring her mood, always ready to drop everything to provide comfort or support, always walking on eggshells to avoid triggering her anger or sadness.



This month of training taught me something crucial: I had been living my life as if I were responsible for someone else's emotional wellbeing. I had accepted the role of emotional parent to a wounded child, and in doing so, I had lost touch with my own needs, my own goals, my own sense of self.

The psychological dynamics at play were becoming clearer. She had unconsciously recreated the parent-child relationship she had missed in her own upbringing, with me playing the role of the attentive, endlessly patient, unconditionally loving father figure she had never had. But unlike healthy parent-child relationships, this dynamic was designed to be permanent. There was no expectation that she would mature, become more emotionally self-sufficient, or learn to reciprocate care.

Instead, I was being trained to accept that love meant endless giving without expectation of return. That caring meant absorbing someone else's emotional chaos while having no outlet for my own needs. That friendship meant being available for crisis management while my own growth and happiness remained secondary concerns.

The triangulation with the "other guy" was a classic technique for maintaining control while avoiding genuine intimacy. By introducing competition, she could keep me emotionally invested while never having to commit to reciprocal care. By mentioning his rudeness, she could paint herself as the victim who needed protection, while simultaneously reminding me that I wasn't her only option.

This was my first real step toward psychological freedom – the recognition that I had been living in service to someone else's unhealed trauma, and that no amount of my caring could fill a void that could only be addressed through professional help and genuine self-reflection.

The training arc was just beginning, but already I could feel myself becoming stronger, more centered, less reactive to the emotional turbulence that had been defining my daily experience. I was learning that love doesn't require self-sacrifice, that care doesn't mean endless availability, and that healthy relationships are built on mutual respect rather than one-sided emotional labor.

I didn't know it yet, but this month of deliberate distance was preparing me for the much more intense psychological battles that lay ahead. The skills I was developing – emotional boundaries, self-prioritization, pattern recognition – would become essential tools for surviving what came next. Because someone who has learned to extract emotional supply from others doesn't give up easily when their primary source begins to establish independence.

My training was about to be tested in ways I couldn't yet imagine.

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## **\*\*Chapter 6: The First Reconciliation\*\***

The end of my training arc was marked not by sudden resolution, but by the rough and messy first reconciliation. We argued bitterly – a clash of unmet expectations, bruised egos, and deep-seated fears.

She gaslit me skillfully, flipping the narrative until I doubted my own memories and perceptions. Suddenly, my month of necessary self-care became “abandoning her when she needed me most.” My attempt to establish healthy boundaries became “selfishness and immaturity.” My effort to break free from emotional dependency became “hurting someone who had already been hurt enough.”

It became clear that in her world, blame was a weapon used to maintain control, not a tool for mutual understanding or growth.

Under the relentless pressure of her accusations and my own confusion, I lied. I told her I hadn’t been talking because I was dealing with my own problems, because I needed that time away to figure myself out. It felt easier than confronting the truth – that I had been suffocating under the weight of being her emotional caretaker, that our dynamic had become unsustainable, that I had needed space to remember who I was outside of her needs.

We returned to our old rhythm – the constant messaging, the academic support, the emotional availability – but it was never the same. Something fundamental had shifted, and we both felt it.

She stopped sending the good morning messages that had once brightened my days, those simple “good morning ☺” texts that made me feel chosen and special. The absence of these small gestures created a void I hadn’t expected. I found myself checking my phone first thing each morning, hoping for that familiar notification, feeling oddly deflated when it didn’t come.

I excused this as the lingering fallout from my month-long absence. “Trust takes time to rebuild,” I told myself. “She’s protecting herself from being hurt again.” I convinced myself that if I just proved my reliability and care consistently enough, those good morning messages would return, along with the warmth and intimacy we’d once shared.

But weeks passed, and the mornings remained empty of her greetings. Our conversations continued, but they felt more transactional. She still shared her work problems, still sought my

academic help, still texted throughout the day – but the underlying affection that had once colored our exchanges seemed to have evaporated.

Eventually, feeling frustrated and emotionally starved, I stopped talking again. Not for a month this time – just a few days – but enough to trigger another explosive confrontation.

This time, her gaslighting was relentless and sophisticated. She wore me down systematically, attacking my character, my motivations, my version of events. She painted herself as the victim of my “emotional manipulation” and “cruel games.” She accused me of “playing with her feelings” and “using her vulnerability against her.”

The psychological pressure was intense. Here was someone I cared about deeply, telling me that I was the source of her pain, that my actions were causing real harm to someone who had already been hurt enough in life. The cognitive dissonance was overwhelming – how could my attempts at self-preservation be acts of cruelty? How could my need for space be emotional abuse?

Under this barrage of accusations and reframing, I found myself genuinely apologizing – not the strategic apologies I’d offered before, but real, heartfelt contrition. I apologized for hurting her, for being selfish, for not considering her feelings, for making her feel abandoned. It was a breaking point that felt both humiliating and bewildering.

After that emotional demolition and reconstruction, we resumed talking, but the relationship had changed irrevocably. I was still her academic helper, still the patient listener for her endless complaints and work troubles, still the person she turned to when she needed practical or emotional support.

But now I was also chasing her attention in ways I never had before. I found myself working harder to make her laugh, being more available than ever, offering help before she even asked for it. I was trying to earn back the warmth and closeness we’d once shared, hoping to reclaim what we had lost but never fully understanding why it had slipped through my fingers in the first place.

She had successfully made me chase what I had once received freely. The good morning messages, the casual affection, the sense of being special to her – all of it was now something I had to work for rather than something freely given. I was performing emotional labor not just to meet her needs, but to earn basic recognition of my value in her life.

Looking back, I can see how perfectly this served her psychological needs. By withdrawing her affection after my attempt at independence, she had created a powerful reinforcement schedule. My previous month of distance had been met with punishment (withdrawal of affection), while my renewed availability was met with the potential reward of restored intimacy – though that reward remained tantalizingly out of reach.

This is textbook trauma bonding – the psychological phenomenon where victims become addicted to the cycle of punishment and reward that characterizes abusive relationships. The intermittent reinforcement creates a powerful psychological dependency that’s actually stronger than consistent positive treatment would be.

I was now fully hooked not just on her attention, but on the hope of regaining her full affection. I had learned that distance resulted in emotional punishment, while complete availability might – might – result in the return of the warmth I craved. I was being trained to accept less while giving more, to work harder for what had once been freely offered, to prioritize her emotional comfort above my own needs for autonomy and respect.

The month of training I had given myself had been systematically undone. Instead of emerging with stronger boundaries and clearer self-understanding, I had been manipulated into accepting full responsibility for the relationship’s problems while she accepted none. I had learned to apologize for my legitimate needs and to chase after crumbs of affection from someone who had once seemed eager to connect with me.

But I couldn’t see any of this clearly at the time. All I knew was that I loved someone who seemed to be slipping away from me, and that if I just tried harder, cared more, gave more of myself, I might be able to win back what we’d once shared.

I had no idea that what we’d “once shared” had been a carefully constructed illusion designed to create exactly this kind of emotional dependency. The love-bombing phase, the gradual extraction, the training in emotional caretaking, the punishment for independence – all of it had been leading to this moment where I would accept responsibility for her emotional wellbeing while receiving nothing reliable in return.

The wounded child had successfully secured her emotional parent. And I was so focused on trying to be good enough to earn her love that I couldn’t see I was actually being trained to accept psychological abuse disguised as friendship.

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## **\*\*Chapter 9: The Final Break\*\***

The final chapter of our story began during what would become my darkest period. Life was crashing down from multiple directions simultaneously – family pressure intensifying with each passing day, my hard-earned gym progress seeming to plateau despite relentless effort, my social connections fraying under the weight of my emotional exhaustion, and the crushing societal expectations that demanded I be stronger, better, more successful than I felt capable of being.

I was falling apart behind closed doors, piece by piece. Each night, when the world went quiet and there was nowhere left to hide, I cried alone in my room – the same room where I had once fallen asleep excited about her next message. Now those tears were different. They weren't about her anymore; they were about everything. The weight of trying to hold my life together while feeling like I was failing at every turn. It was the kind of raw, devastating pain that every man experiences but rarely admits to – the moments when the armor of stoicism cracks and reveals the vulnerable human being underneath.

Despite the chaos consuming my inner world, I maintained a façade of normalcy around her. I didn't want to burden her with my struggles – or perhaps I had learned through bitter experience that my pain was not welcome in the space between us. I kept our conversations light, focused on her needs, continuing the pattern that had defined our entire relationship.

But she brought him up again.

The triangulation tactic that I thought I had successfully established boundaries around came crashing back with devastating clarity. Another casual mention of “the other guy” – his opinions, his activities, his existence in her world where I was supposed to be the primary source of care and attention. The jealousy and confusion that I thought I had conquered came flooding back like a tidal wave, mixing with all the other pain I was carrying until I felt like I was drowning.

I left. Again. But this time, it felt different – not strategic, not boundaried, just broken.

The pull was still there, though. Despite everything I had learned about manipulation tactics and psychological warfare, despite all the months of training myself to recognize and resist her hoovering attempts, the fundamental need for connection remained. In my lowest moment, consumed by pain from every area of my life, I found myself gravitating back toward the one person who had claimed to care about me more than anyone else ever had.

I returned to her, hoping for understanding, yearning to finally share the weight of my pain with someone who might actually see and validate my struggle. I told her everything – my fears about the future, my sense of failure, my nightly breakdowns, my desperation to keep going despite feeling like I was losing the battle on every front.

Her response was swift, cold, and brutal in its finality.

“Don’t talk to me like this,” she said sharply, as if my vulnerability was an imposition she couldn’t tolerate. “Bye.”

That single word – “Bye” – hung in the digital space between us like a tombstone marking the death of everything I had believed about our connection. The person who had promised never to abandon me, who had claimed I cared about her more than her own father ever had, who had positioned herself as the one person who truly understood my emotional world, had just dismissed my deepest pain with the casual indifference of ending a text conversation.

In that moment, the last illusion shattered completely. This wasn’t someone who loved me in any meaningful sense. This wasn’t someone who had ever seen me as a complete human being deserving of care and compassion. I was useful when I could provide emotional labor, academic help, practical support, and validation for her needs. But the moment I needed something in return – just basic human empathy during my lowest point – I became a burden to be discarded.

I stood on my own after that, literally and figuratively. But I wasn’t entirely alone. My real friends – the ones I had neglected during my months of emotional captivity – rallied around me with the kind of unconditional presence I had been seeking all along. They sat with me in comfortable silence, played video games to distract my weary mind, and offered the kind of authentic companionship that requires nothing in return except mutual respect and care.

Their support became my lifeline, showing me what genuine friendship actually looked like. No emotional extraction, no manipulation tactics, no conditional availability based on my usefulness. Just people who cared about my wellbeing and were willing to share space with my pain without trying to fix it, dismiss it, or use it against me.

Deep down, I knew she would come back. She always did. The pattern was too well-established, her need for emotional supply too intense, for her to accept permanent loss of access to someone who had provided so much for so long. But this time, I was prepared to resist in ways I had never been before.

When the inevitable hoovering attempts began – sad reels implying that I was abandoning her, guilt-inducing messages about loyalty and friendship – I found myself responding not with the old emotional reactivity, but with something new: strategic clarity.

“Still stuck?” she asked in one message, attempting to bait me back into defensive explanations of my behavior.

Instead of falling into the familiar trap, I turned the question back on her. “Stuck on what?” I challenged, forcing her to articulate what she was actually referencing.

“That phase,” she replied dismissively, revealing in two words everything I needed to understand about how she viewed my pain.

My depression, my breakdown, my desperate reach for human connection during my darkest moment – all of it was just “that phase” to her. Not a legitimate experience of human suffering deserving of compassion, not a moment when someone she claimed to care about needed support, but an inconvenient phase that she expected me to get over so I could resume my role as her emotional caretaker.

The casual cruelty of that minimization was breathtaking. Someone who had spent months positioning herself as emotionally vulnerable, whose every mood swing I had treated as a crisis requiring immediate attention and careful management, had just dismissed my most genuine moment of need as “that phase.”

Undeterred by my lack of response to her guilt tactics, she sent another reel – this one claiming she had time for me, an attempt to reignite the connection and pull me back into the familiar cycle of intermittent reinforcement and emotional labor.

But I was done. Finally, completely, irrevocably done.

On August 14<sup>th</sup> – exactly two years after her father had passed away – I made the decision that would close this chapter of my life forever. I blocked her completely across all platforms, cutting off every avenue she had previously used to maintain access to my emotional resources.

The symbolism of the date was not lost on me. August 14<sup>th</sup> had been the anchor point of her trauma, the day that had shaped her abandonment fears and her desperate need to control the people who provided care and attention. Now it would become the date of our final separation – not because she was being abandoned by someone who should have loved her unconditionally, but because someone who had loved her too much had finally learned the difference between love and enabling.

The boy who had once cried alone in his room, hoping for messages from someone who seemed to understand him, had grown into a man who could recognize the difference between genuine connection and sophisticated emotional extraction. The student who had ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in the state

had applied that same analytical intelligence to human psychology and learned to identify manipulation tactics that had once seemed like expressions of deep feeling.

Most importantly, the person who had once believed that pure love could heal anyone had learned that some wounds can only be addressed by the person carrying them, and that trying to love someone into wholeness often results in being consumed by their brokenness instead.

August 14<sup>th</sup> marked the end of our story, but it was also the beginning of mine. The date that had once symbolized shared trauma and mutual woundedness became the anniversary of my psychological liberation – the day I finally chose my own wellbeing over someone else’s inability to heal.

The meme I had related to months later said it perfectly: “When I see a boy crying about a girl that hurt him and he still wants her, I can’t judge him because I see old me in him.” I had become the person who could look back at that crying boy with complete understanding and compassion, while being entirely immune to the tactics that had once devastated him.

The wounded child had lost her emotional father, but the man I had become had finally learned that love without reciprocity is not love at all – it’s just elaborate self-destruction disguised as caring.

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## **\*\*Final Analysis: Understanding the Manipulation\*\***

Looking back now, I can see her tactics followed a chillingly familiar pattern – one I now recognize as classic covert narcissistic manipulation. It always started with the guilt trip. She would bring up my past promises, not as reminders of the love we'd shared, but as chains of obligation I was expected to carry forever, regardless of how the dynamic had deteriorated.

"You promised you would never leave me," she'd say, weaponizing my own words of care against me. It wasn't about honoring commitment – it was about making me feel trapped by my own kindness, bound by promises I'd made before I understood what I was really signing up for.

That guilt was expertly designed to hook me, to keep me tethered even as every rational part of me tried to pull away. It made me question my own moral compass, wondering if my desire for boundaries made me cruel or selfish. She had turned my empathy into a weakness she could exploit at will.

When guilt alone wasn't enough to break my resolve, she escalated to more direct emotional manipulation. The reel she sent claiming she "had time for me" was a calculated psychological move. It positioned her as the gracious, forgiving party while simultaneously telling me that despite all the pain and distance, she was still the one in control – deciding when and how I would be allowed back into her emotional orbit.

The cruel genius of this message was how it completely masked the brutality she'd shown me at my lowest point. When I had reached out in genuine vulnerability during my depression, she had coldly told me not to talk to her "like this" and dismissed me with a casual "Bye." But now, through this reel, she was rewriting history – positioning herself as someone who cared and had time for me, erasing her abandonment of me when I needed support most.

This constant push-pull dynamic – dangling affection as a reward while threatening withdrawal as punishment – was a sophisticated cycle designed to harvest my emotional energy while maintaining the illusion of genuine care. It was love in appearance, but control in substance.

At its psychological core, she had learned to exploit my deepest attachment wounds with surgical precision. She used my past promises to create a false sense of binding obligation that transcended her behavior. She deployed reels and carefully crafted messages to manipulate my hope, keeping alive the possibility that things could return to how they once were. And she used



cold rejections and emotional unavailability to enforce my psychological dependency – making her attention so rare and conditional that I treasured every scrap of it.

The most insidious part was how this made me complicit in my own manipulation. I became addicted to the intermittent reinforcement she provided – occasional warmth and connection followed by withdrawal and emotional unavailability. My brain learned to crave the relief of her attention more than I valued the consistency of genuine care.

Recognizing these tactics for what they truly were was the first crucial step in reclaiming my psychological autonomy. I had to accept the hardest truth of all: this wasn't love, no matter how much it had felt like it in the beginning. It was sophisticated emotional control disguised as caring, and my liberation required learning to see the difference between genuine connection and masterful manipulation.

The boy who had once cried alone, confused by mixed signals and desperate for understanding, had grown into someone who could identify these patterns with clinical precision. That transformation – from victim to analyst, from confused participant to immune observer – represents the true victory of this entire painful education.

Breaking free meant choosing my own psychological wellbeing over someone else's expertly crafted manipulation tactics. It meant learning that love doesn't require self-sacrifice, that healthy relationships don't need promises of permanence regardless of behavior, and that sometimes the most loving thing you can do is refuse to enable someone's dysfunction – even when that refusal feels like abandonment to both of you.

The date I chose for that final block - August 14<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of her father's death – was unconsciously perfect. I was symbolically ending the father-daughter dynamic she had created and refusing to continue being the emotional parent she had never had. It wasn't abandonment. It was graduation from the most expensive psychology course I've ever taken, with a hard-earned degree in recognizing and resisting emotional manipulation.

**\*\*The End\*\***

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