

Write A Catalyst

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Dopamine + Hope + Unresolved Grief

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



Elena Byron

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

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

If you're in the middle of the desert, you're not going to care how clean the water is in the oasis. It would probably feel like the best water you've ever drunk. It quenches your thirst — until the next time. The more you're starved, the more you crave the breadcrumbs. You just want to feel those highs again. And again. It seems like the most wonderful feeling ever. You feel:

Chosen.

Seen.

Held.

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loses its colours. Everything else feels flat and dull. And that's how 'love' should feel, right?

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

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

At first, there was a split. It was unresolved grief. My nervous system remembered the highs, while my mind remembered the harm.

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

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

The foundations of real love.

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

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

I realised that as long as I chased a fantasy, I couldn't really live in real life. It was like chasing a ghost — someone who never truly existed the way I imagined him in my mind. A filtered, improved version of the man I hoped he could be, but never really was. And never will be — for anyone.

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

Instead, I chose to return to myself.

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

I learned a lot about myself in this.

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

I stopped abandoning me.

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

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

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Written by Elena Byron

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What are your thoughts?



Tina she/her
Apr 15



My nervous system didn't know and didn't care. It just wanted to feel those highs again. It only knew that those tiny breadcrumbs of normality felt like a wonderful feast.

Oof, this part hit me hard. The way you described the nervous system chasing those highs... been there to many times and yes.



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Jelly Bean

Apr 15



If you're in the middle of the desert, you're not going to care how clean the water is in the oasis

Very well put! How heartbreaking it is to see beyond the idealization to the real person too - the grief that comes with losing a fantasy.



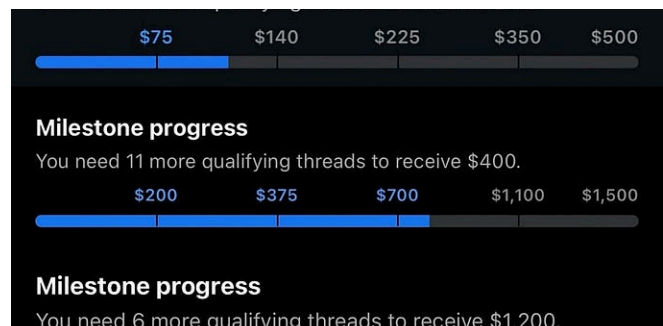
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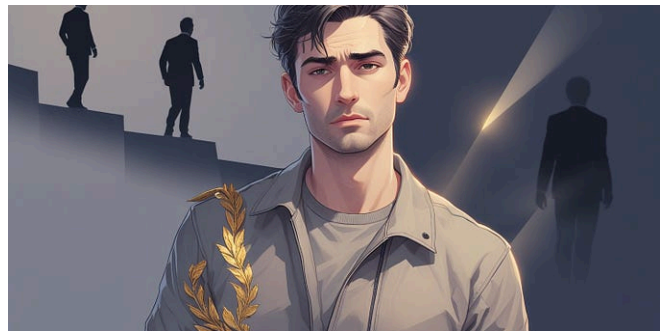
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