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I Wanted to Believe in a Fairy Tale: Cognitive Dissonance in Narcissistic Abuse

You can't un-see what you have seen



Elena Byron

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I saw the red flags. I felt the gaslighting. The pain.
But I stayed.

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

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

What is life without magic, after all?

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

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

And it is a constant internal torture. While you stay, so much energy is spent shutting off and dismissing the evidence that something actually *is* very

wrong. But in the end, you can't unseen what you've seen or unlearn what you've learnt.

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

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

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

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

Because I was waiting for things to finally thrive.

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

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

But it's also freedom.

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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Psychologist & Trauma Therapist | Survivor Exploring the aftermath of narcissistic abuse, the resilience of the human mind and the path to self-reclamation.

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What are your thoughts?



atinder kaur she/her

May 1

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It was like being a child who still believes in Santa Claus, even after seeing the costume in the closet.

Even you grow up, there is still a part of the heart that wants to believe in the Santa Claus - made just for that thrill.



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Chrysa Stergiou

May 1

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It's an unsettling kind of grief when what dies is the dream.
But it's also freedom.

I believe we should leave as soon as we have the first signs. Such people can become so manipulative that they could kill you (literally) Thank you so much for supporting Catharsis Chronicles, my dearest Elena.



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A.H. Mehr she/her



May 4

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

That's the hardest part - waiting for things to thrive, trying to earn that love - yet it doesn't happen in these cases, Elena. Good title and subtitle too.

Thanks for sharing.



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