

ILLUMINATION

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

Grieving the idealisation vs. the reality of the man I thought I loved



Elena Byron

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

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

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

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

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

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

And that hope made me vulnerable.

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

He had friends, but no true connections. He spoke of unity and human depth, but it was an act. He had grand ideas, but no follow-through. He

wanted to be famous, admired, exceptional — but without the effort. His projects changed at such speed it was impossible to keep track. He spoke of empathy, yet exhibited none. He mimicked self-awareness but lived in deception — of others and himself.

A master of shortcuts.

An architect of illusion.

A semblance of life.

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

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

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

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

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

And after it ended, his hunger for validation and self-importance exploded. His ‘deep thinker,’ ‘visionary,’ ‘guru’ persona surged to new heights. He

started writing endlessly, regurgitating well-known scientific concepts as though they were his own, positioning himself as a modern-day sage. He now preaches ‘enlightenment’ — for a price, of course.

Lately, that illusion has gone digital. I unpacked one of his “mind-expanding” inventions in When Delusion Gets an Interface. Spoiler: the only thing expanding is his ego.

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

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

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

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

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

I dared to expose his manipulations.

I dared to want reciprocity in a relationship.

And suddenly, I was unworthy. Useless. Disposable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is why I am free.

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

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

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Written by Elena Byron

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Just Some Writer (JSW) he/him

Mar 15



He was obsessed with ‘positive’ emotions, believing life should be easy, fun, uncomplicated

He sounds like a man child.



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Just Some Writer (JSW) he/him

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...

but because of what I refused to see

Many of us have done this. I know the pain.



12



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...

not by who he has become, but by the realisation that he was this man all along

Once you realize, "this is who they are," it just changes for the absolute worse. The person you loved never even existed, that's a pain that hurts like no other.



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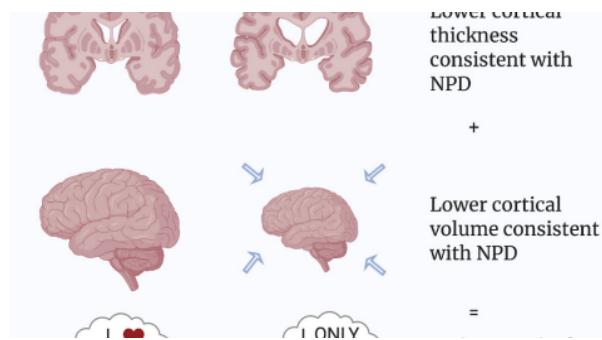
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