

## INTRODUCTION - A TESTAMENT OF A LIE

It began with a lie, as all things too good to be true tend to do.

Eleven and a half years later, I hide in the south of Poland, rapidly going bankrupt from fighting an endless court battle against a man who is using his wealth and nepotistic connections to ensure I am left with nothing. And in this place where my ears are blind and my eyes are drowning in rustic beauty, I sit before my beloved keyboard and write a testament of hell. Of destruction. Of evil.

Of the silent, insidious process of someone systematically eradicating the identity, self, worth and value of another with escalating psychological, financial, sexual, and physical abuse.

It takes a special type of personality to possess the lack of empathy required to hijack a person's love and trust and use it to invalidate them, to punish them, to turn their heart into weapon to be used against them. To control them.

Narcissists are everywhere. They live among us. Hard to spot. Harder to catch. Impossible to stop. They enter your life with calculation and expertise, are excellent listeners (at the beginning), because information is power. Their story is always the same. They are the victim of selfish people who have taken advantage of their generosity and goodness. They prey on your empathy, sharing their tale of woe until you are seduced by their words, and of how incredibly fortunate you are that they appear to be the very one you have been waiting for (from the things you have told them you desire in a partner, one of their favorite questions). You know you won't do

to them what their previous partner did. You know you are perfect for them. They tell you they love you. You fall. Hard. And they are there to catch you.

Perhaps you get two months. Perhaps a year. It is a fairytale. A love affair drenched in passion, adventure, and excitement. You can't believe your luck. They ask you to marry them.

You say yes. You don't want them to slip away.

And then the fairytale ends. Like the proverbial frog in the frying pan, things shift subtly. At first you express concerns. You are told you are over-reacting. Doubt plagues you. Not about *them*—about your ability to see things as they truly are. Nothing is clear, you try to get clarity and frame your question. It's not right. You try again. Still not right. You are corrected. Often. Gently, with a smile, as though you are cute but a little dense. Something feels off. You used to be able to trust your gut. Not anymore. It seems your gut is the liar these days. Soon you give up saying what you see or remember because you never get it right and have to be corrected. It's just easier to let them tell you how it is. How that blind woman with the seeing eye dog *wasn't* on the pedestrian crossing and your partner almost ran them over. You saw it wrong. They weren't even on the crossing.

But you saw the dog almost get hit.

*Or did you?*

As your light dies from their continual crises, drama, and fights created out of thin air, a line is crossed. Exhausted of your internal energy, of your light, of what made you who you are, you become a shell, no longer of any use or interest to your once-fairytale partner. Now you are looked at with derision. The hate begins. And it's terrifying. Like an abused dog who knows nothing better, you crawl back, trying to

appease them, to please them, to get the fairytale days back. To get the hate to stop. Because if they hate you, you must also hate yourself. The pain is unbearable.

Sometimes they relent and are kind for a day, maybe a week, or even a month. It's a oasis of heaven in the midst of a burning hell . . . but then the pendulum swings back and the hate returns again, the treatment even worse than before.

Over and over the pattern repeats until in desperation you have no choice but to turn against your Self, make your thoughts and experiences wrong and theirs right, and accept that everything—everything—is your fault. Caught in their riptide, your existence is slammed against the sharp rocks of their bleak shore, and the only way to end the storm (they tell you) is to do what they ask but each time the request is more humiliating, demeaning, and annihilating . . . until you are not you anymore, but a broken thing, lost, isolated, and trapped in their glare of intense, insatiable hatred.

One year ago yesterday the divorce was finalized. But the court fight goes on. He claims I owe him money for having supported me. I had no job. I had nothing. It was how he wanted it. Now he wants not only everything there is from the marriage, but he also wishes to put me into debt to him. I have gathered up the scraps of the fight that remains within me to write this for you. If only someone had written this book before I met him, if only someone had recommended it to me. How different my life might be right now. Perhaps I might not have seen through the fantasy he created at the beginning, but I would have understood sooner what he was, and why he was doing what he was doing, and how it would never, ever end until either I died, or was discarded, a broken, ruined woman. I would not have continued on in the false hope that somehow I could make things better.

But there was no book, and back then no one really knew or talked much about narcissists so I was unprepared for the enormity of the sacrifice my heart had made in its pursuit of a love that was a complete lie.

My story is ugly, painful, and at times, utterly brutal. Strong men have gotten tears in their eyes when they have heard the recordings of what has been done to me. It will be hard to write this. I will be forced to relive awful memories. But after months of consideration, and the encouragement of my friends, I know I cannot remain silent when I have the gift of words and the knowledge this experience has given me. My father says the greatest thing one can do is to give service to others. Perhaps I was always meant to write this book, even if it has come to cost me almost everything. Perhaps as I sit here in the ruins of my life, my only true purpose is to protect other women from great harm with the gift I have been given.

So this book is for you, to help you understand and spot those monsters who seek to consume your light until you are nothing but skin and bone, your soul enslaved to their control, your existence defined by their mood. Your life left in a tailspin and them still hunting you, maliciously seeking to kick you while you are down. Trying to force your own hand to end your life.

I am almost 49. I fled the country to escape him. Now I live in my best friend's house and try not to think of the beautiful home I had, the car I loved to drive or the garden I nurtured. The few scraps I owned from before the marriage are stored in a shipping container, locked away for who knows how long. Perhaps forever. My narcissist was incredibly successful in his work.

He has all and I have . . . nothing.

Except this. My words.

And those can never be taken from me.

So let us begin.

This time with the truth.

## SANCTUARY

It's late. Everything is closed and it's dark. In the industrial orange glow of a solitary street lamp, I wait at the back of an empty mini-bus, its interior aglow in garish pink and blue neon lighting. I'm the last of the passengers to leave and am glad to escape its condensation-soaked interior.

There is a strong scent of wood burning in the heavy air. I inhale, grateful to cleanse my lungs of the ripe odour of unwashed humans. The air tastes of silence, and long, dark nights and quiet, unchanging days. Of a place locked outside of the passage of time.

A two and half hour flight from London. Five hours on a train, then another hour and forty minutes crammed into a sweaty mini bus stopping and starting its way towards Slovakia and the mountains of southern Poland.

Cocooned in a muggy drizzle of foggy air I eye the deserted bus terminus. It's very small. My bags hit the ground with a loud smack and my attention lurches back to reality. The mini bus driver gives me a dirty look loaded with Polish condemnation. I want to apologise for the weight of them but I don't know how. No one speaks English here. No one.

He slams the rear doors closed. It sounds resentful.

Without a word, he leaves me under that ugly orange street lamp, gets into the empty bus and drives off in a thick cloud of dirty exhaust. The handful of others who were on the bus have already departed for their fireplaces and hot showers. I am alone. It's very dark. Panic touches my spine.

*What the fuck have you done?*

I don't answer. Because I know it's not my voice. It's *his*. And I know if I answer, it will only get worse for me. It always does. He always wins. Even in my head.

Even now.

One year exactly after the day our divorce was finalised, it's still not over.

That's why I came here, to a place where I would be vulnerable, alone, and safer than I have been for a very, very long time.

I came here to heal, to write this book. But right now I am freaking out. Old triggers are lighting up inside me like fireflies, threatening to set me aflame in terror. I can hear his voice rising, mocking me, derisive, calling me a stupid cunt, and a selfish asshole for doing a stunt like this in the middle of a pandemic, saying I deserve to be tricked and left alone in the dark. That he hopes I die there in the gutter of Poland where I belong. I close my eyes to shut out the noise of him, to concentrate, like when you turn down the music when you're driving to focus on where you are going.

Just breathe. He will come. You are ok. You are not a stupid cunt. You are brave. You are courageous. It's not a gutter.

Footsteps approach. I turn, my heart pounding, fear eating me alive. A man pulls his medical mask down so I can see his face then he lifts up his phone and in its white glow I see my Airbnb profile photo.

Darek.

The brother of the woman who owns the flat is there to collect me as promised. I don't bother to hide my relief. I smile. Giddy. Elated. Safe. Safe. Safe. I practically run to get away from that street lamp, from the bad words that were inside me. But they follow me, as they always do.

But not for much longer, because I have a plan to end the tyranny of the toxicity he buried within me.

I have learned that in silence, there is doubt, and where there is doubt there is control. Words will liberate me from the lies. The pain. The sorrow. The hopelessness.

Words will become my weapons in this silent battle to restore my life to myself, and this fight is not only for me but for every woman who is enduring, about to endure, or is in the aftermath of her endurance in one of the most hellish scenarios imaginable.

Let us begin together then, the work of unpicking the lies, one by one, and with these words we can heal our wounds, and give ourselves our power, our hope, and our lives back.

It starts in infancy. Narcissists are made not born. So, in a way they are victims after all because their ability to trust others and see themselves as separate from others is demolished at a critical time in their early development, when their caregiver does not respond to them the way nature intended.

In the normal development of an infant, it is assumed infants do not perceive any separation between themselves and their caregiver (much like how their needs were

met instantaneously in the womb). They cry, get a response, and calm returns. This cycle of trust paves the way for the eventual understanding their caregiver is separate from them, and the infant is able to develop an awareness of separation, of the 'otherness' necessary for the development of a healthy ego. This is the crucial point where the foundation for the healthy give and take in adult relationships is laid.

It is when this fundamental assumption is fractured via neglect, carelessness, absence, or abuse a narcissist is made. Denied the opportunity to understand their caregiver is separate from them, the cycle of trust never begins and the door to the healthy development of their 'otherness' necessary for healthy relationships not only remains closed, but vanishes altogether.

All they know is a void. An emptiness. They cannot trust their needs will be met. This is a place of terror and misery. A place of enormous uncertainty and fear, far too overwhelming for an infant to process in any possible way.

In response to this violent destruction to their assumption of the lack of separation to their caregiver, the infant's nascent psychological development is stunted in a way that can never be remedied.

The damage is permanent. No medicine can help. No therapy will mitigate the damage they will cause to themselves or to others from their inability to understand they are separate from others. They must live for the rest of their lives nursing the deepest of wounds, which cannot be healed.

Psychologists call this fracture 'the narcissistic injury' and narcissists are doomed to live with it for the rest of their lives, unaware of its existence, or of the immense harm it causes them to do to others, and how they see themselves as the victim no matter how deep the cruelties they have thrust upon those who have orbited into their world.



No amount of love, care, or compassion can heal them. They are destined to live with the outgrowth of this breach in their development for the rest of their lives, where it will only fester, fed by an unending cycle of negative feedback loops they will manifest through destructive relationships over and over again.

This fracture is the root of narcissism, and in particular NPD (Narcissistic Personality Disorder).

It is a tragedy to think this could happen to an innocent baby, and as an empath, I find it heartbreaking someone could have such an awful destiny bestowed on them.

But there is one other aspect we need to understand if we are going to protect ourselves from the damage narcissists are capable of doing to those caught in the abusive cycle of trying mend an unmendable wound.

Narcissists are unaware of their injury and never will be. Their blindness is perhaps a mercy, a construct created in infancy to wall themselves away from the magnitude of their fracture. They do not see their suffering as we see their suffering—their loneliness, their anger, their blaming, their constant search for fulfilment and never finding it. They are incapable of it. You can try to explain it to them, but you will only be met with derision, or worse, you will be accused of making them that way.

But this book is not about them. It is about your survival if you have been caught in the snare of narcissist, or are being targeted by one.

The great American author Joan Didion has said when she doesn't know how to deal with something, she learns everything she can about it to give her power over it. And so, let us take a leaf from her book and learn about the ones who were doomed in infancy to live in emptiness, incapable of love, empathy, compassion, or personal responsibility—unable to understand we exist separately from them and are not things

which are an extension of their world whose only purpose is to enforce or validate their skewed perception of reality.

It is said the only way to protect yourself from a narcissist is to go no contact.

Easier said than done, since they are masterful at getting what they want, and when distancing oneself from a narcissist, one must be extremely careful because they are capable of unimaginable vengeance if you leave before they are ready (since it triggers their original injury). I had to flee the country, and even now, one year after our divorce he still hunts me through the courts seeking to make me pay him for having had the misfortune of having been his wife.

As terrible as it sounds, the 'safest' way to get away from a narcissist is to be discarded by them, but by then you will be a shell of yourself, barely alive, your light consumed by them from their endless dramas, fights, accusations, demands, abuse, and gaslighting. Your mind, body, and soul will be in its weakest position to face the aftermath that will inevitably follow if there are children or a divorce to be faced. No, it is hardly a 'safe' exit. But it is the unfortunate lesser of two evils.

Narcissists are drawn to empaths like moths to a flame, only this breed of moth has evolved with flame proof armour with the power to extinguish the beautiful fire of love and light that burns within us. They settle over our trusting light, their black-armoured wings beautiful, complex, and enchanting, with us unaware it is a dance they have repeated over and over and left countless others in the ruined, broken darkness of their extinguished light.

It is comparable to addiction, their ingrained need to feed on others to fill the void within them, of their inability to see others as separate beings with feelings, needs, wants, and desires of their own. No, we exist only to nourish them in a sick cycle of insatiable emotional, and psychological vampirism. We are not individuals to them. We are nothing more than a supply that exists for them to fill the void within them. And when they have drained us of our last scrap of energy, they look at us with derision and leave without so much as a backward look (the discard), to begin the cycle all over again with a fresh, bright new target brimming with supply (whom they have usually already begun to seduce with their victim narrative while still in a relationship with you).

For a time, while our light is burning its brightest, they place us on a pedestal, and tell us we are wonderful, perfect, the best thing that has ever happened to them. We believe it because they are convincing liars, or perhaps because they know it is exactly what we want to hear, and we long to believe it. It doesn't matter. It works. You have what they want, and they will stop at nothing to get it, like a junkie desperate for their next fix, they will lie, cheat, steal and deceive until they can take from you what they do not have themselves.

Manipulation is their strongest skill, and without any moral compass, you are destined to be putty in their hands. And the deeper and greater your empathy, the stronger your appeal, the bigger the seduction and the harder you fall.

## THE FALL

I am walking on air. I cannot believe my luck. I have just met the perfect man. When my best friend gave me a copy of *The Secret* to read I was doubtful that airy fairy crap could ever work, but in the year that had passed after my broken engagement to a

Danish guitarist I really felt I had nothing to lose so I gave it a try and began to visualise exactly the kind of man I wanted to end up with. Sensible, mature, smart. Good job. Nice looking. Good with his hands. Manly. Interested in me.

I still can't wrap my head around the concept that visualising the kind of man I wanted to meet would actually turn up, and so fast. But he did, and he's exactly the one I have been waiting my whole life for.

He did stare at your breasts a lot more than your face.

I brush away the unquiet thought. It's true. He did look at my breasts a lot. It made me a little uncomfortable. At one point I even reminded him I was 'up here'. He didn't seem ashamed or embarrassed though. Just smiled in a cocky way that reeked of confidence, like he already knew I was going to be his.

He was so interested in me, wanted to know all about me, and he listened carefully, asking questions in a way that flattered me, and encouraged me until my throat grew so raw from talking I had to stop. I realised far too late I knew hardly anything about him and he had the advantage of me. What was it he said when I pointed this out? 'You are far more interesting than me.' Then before I could say anything more, he left to buy me another latte exactly the way I liked it.

It began at Copenhagen airport. I felt his eyes on me, watching me in a way that said 'You are going to be mine'. It wasn't love at first sight, but damn, the electricity that snapped through my body from that look of his, of being watched by a man as beautiful as him, of having been selected out from all the others. It's true I was both intimidated and flattered all at once. He had the advantage right from the start.

He asked if he could buy me a coffee. I said yes. We spent four hours in Starbucks. He was so male, so big and strong, he made me nervous but in a delicious way. He had beautiful hands. I couldn't stop looking at him, at how perfect he was. I couldn't believe he was real. Handsome, tall, clean cut, smart, witty, an engineer, travelling for work. Masters educated, fit. The ultimate alpha male. Perfect. Perfect. Perfect. Just as I had visualised.

We agreed to meet again when he returned from Germany at the end of the week. I would pick him up from the airport and he would stay at my flat before he continued his onward journey into Sweden on Sunday. He kissed me goodbye, a chaste thing but with the promise there would be more. Much more. I shivered with delight. Perhaps it *was* moving a little too fast, but it just *felt* so right. Anyway, who was I to question destiny?

We spoke several times during the week and on Friday evening I went to get him, my gut screaming I was making a huge mistake. I listened to it, uneasy, because usually my gut was good with its instincts, but no matter how I combed through the conversations I'd had with him or his behaviour (apart from the breast staring) I couldn't pinpoint why my gut was panicking like a wild thing trapped in a cage, so I turned the music up and drove faster towards the one I knew was meant to be my soul mate and told myself it must be nerves.

We eat the roast I cooked. We drink single malts. We kiss. I tell him I want to wait to sleep together since things were moving so fast. We fall asleep on top of the bed, still dressed and full of whisky.

I wake sometime in the night, my jeans around my knees and him riding me.

'You are inside me.' I am so stunned, I can only state the blindingly obvious.

He says yes and continues doing what he is doing.

'But I was asleep.' Also obvious.

He smiles and kisses me.

Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. I am locked in disbelief. He is so calm. It makes no sense. Is this rape? I don't know.

'Please. Stop. Get off me.'

He slows and looks down at me, the room too dark for me to see his eyes. 'But you started it,' he says with what sounds like genuine confusion.

I push him away from me and sit up. He sits back onto his haunches. He is naked, unlike me. I haul my jeans and underpants back up and notice I am wet. How could I be wet? Nothing makes sense. I pinch myself hoping it's just a bad dream. It's not.

'How could I have started this?' I demand, starting to freak out. I have no idea how to handle this. I glance at the clock. 3 am. I had been asleep for 4 hours. The last thing I remember is falling asleep, the taste of whisky in my mouth. 'When I have been asleep until now?!'

'Not as far as it has been for me,' he says, and I see him shake his head. 'It was you who started it, you turned to me and started to kiss me, you woke *me* up. I thought you were awake. You were moaning the whole time.'

I blink. Stunned. He sounds so sincere. I don't know what to think. I can't think. Everything feels weird and wrong. I have never ever had anything like this happen to me before.

I open my mouth to tell him I think it's time for him to leave when he says, quiet: 'I am not a rapist. I swear I thought you were awake. But I can tell you don't believe me. I'll go.'

Guilt slams into me. It's the way he says it. Like I have hurt him thinking he could do such a thing.

Shit.

He slides off the bed and bends over to pick up his jeans from the floor. Unhappiness surrounds him. I let him dress. I need time to think. At the door he turns back to look at me.

'What will you do?' I ask.

'Drive home,' he says.

'It's a five hour drive,' I say. More guilt. I *was* wet. If he had been forcing me I would have been dry, right? Maybe he is telling the truth. I don't know. I don't know what to do.

He says goodbye, low, and turns to leave.

I crack.

'Wait.' I whisper. 'Stay, we'll figure this out tomorrow.'

He comes back and lays down beside me, his clothes still on. I say nothing, and neither does he.

He falls asleep before me. My gut churns. I wonder if this was the warning it had tried to give me. Uneasy, I watch him sleep. Then it begins. I rake over the evidence, the possibility he could do such a thing to me. I had been very attracted to him the night before, maybe I did start to kiss him while half asleep and didn't remember. I

had drunk a lot of whisky after all. Maybe I hurt him making him feel like a rapist. He has only ever been a gentleman with me. I decide he is telling the truth. I fall asleep and never bring it up again.

When you're caught in the grip of a narcissistic relationship, the one thing you are absolutely guaranteed not to have is clarity. Or certainty. Or peace.

Your world will be one of constant instability, with brief lapses of false stability that end for no reason at all. When you ask a question to gain clarity, or attempt to understand the cause of a bad atmosphere through open communication, you slide down a rabbit hole of accusations, caught in a confusing cycle of blame that has nothing to do with the conversation at hand. When it is done, the situation is far worse than it was at the start and instead of just one question needing clarification, you now have twenty.

You retreat, hurt by their words, accusations, and refusal to come to a place of understanding and peace, your thoughts spinning like windmills in a storm, and your emotions drowning in an ocean of confusion. You cry. You feel sick. The one person who could bring clarity to all these uncertainties is the very one causing them. The feeling of betrayal is enormous. The feeling of being controlled, suffocating. There is no balance, no peace, only chaos in your mind, body and soul.

And then the silent treatment begins, so there is zero hope of getting any clarity in the next hours to days. You have no choice but to sift through the turmoil of what you just experienced and try to make sense of it alone.

But there is no sense to it. Because it isn't about open communication, understanding, and compromise. No, it's about control, power, and a need to draw on



(even feed on) the emotional energy you expend navigating each of these fabricated-out-of-thin-air crises.

Once you are done crying and you drift, exhausted, into an all-too-familiar numb reprieve, your beautiful, good, kind, innate sense of empathy kicks back in, and you find yourself trying to see their point of view, since your own no longer makes sense. You reason they must see something you can't. They were so forceful in their views, perhaps, as they said over and over, you didn't listen properly. Or maybe you really are that stupid. Or was it dense this time? No thick. You are thick.

And then, your thoughts swerve in a direction your gut hates, maybe they *are* right. Maybe it *is* all your fault. Maybe you started it all. Maybe you are the problem.

But that's the thing. You don't know exactly what the problem is.

If you take just one from this book, it needs to be this. It's them.

The problem is *them*.

But right now, and for a long time, you won't understand this, because when you are with a narcissist, you are groomed into a mindset similar to Stockholm Syndrome. You know your partner is not treating you right, but to survive you make excuses for them and blame yourself, and the very thing that made you powerful—your empathy—is turned into a weapon and used against you.

And this is going to be your greatest challenge, to understand what has been stolen from you, and to reclaim your empathy and give it back to yourself, instead of pouring it into their endless void. To love yourself back to life again.