



Wired Differently

A psychological profile written by its subject

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Notes From the Author.

If you bought this book in hopes of reading about murder mysteries, you're in the wrong place. This isn't about body count. This is purely from a psychology perspective and a way to put my unfiltered thought process in writing without having to worry about the mask. Hence the anonymity. That said, I've done things most people would call "bad."

I have been diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder and most of my traits are associated with high functioning psychopathy. I wasn't planning on writing this book because I had never felt the need to show the world how my mind works.

Recently, while working on a university paper about psychopathy (ironic, I know), I realized how little raw information actually exists. There's no shortage of articles or textbooks, but there is almost nothing from the primary source itself. It lacks authenticity. They're always written about people like me, never by people like me.

I can tell you a lot about someone if I observe them long enough, but it'll never be as accurate as reading their thoughts directly. That's what I'm trying to do. I'll be as raw as I can. No lying to fit in, no manipulation to get what I want. Just pure thought.

This isn't a continuous story.

It's not meant to be read like a straight line.

It's more like a diary, fragments of thought, memory, and observation.

A record of how I see the world, and how I think it really works.

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People have looked at me my entire life. Teachers, neighbors, girlfriends, strangers passing on the street. They all saw something. A son. A friend. A boyfriend. A polite nod. A quiet smile. A presence they could name, label, place neatly in the world. They saw enough to feel certain. Certain they knew who I was. Certain their eyes didn't lie.

But they did.

Truth is, no one has ever seen me. Not really. And to be honest, that's mostly on me.

I've always known how to give just enough away to keep people from asking for more. And they were satisfied with that. Everyone was. No one asked what lived underneath the gestures, because the gestures were easier to accept. People don't really want the whole truth. They want the part that doesn't disturb their picture of the world.

So I let them have it. I kept the rest to myself.

Not family. Not friends. Not girlfriends. None of them could tell you who I am even if they read this.

But you will.

You won't just see me. You'll invent me. I'll feed you shards of myself, and your mind will stitch those fragments into a face. Each

reader will carry a different version. Our version. What you create will be part my truth, part your interpretation, representing us both.

Before we start, imagine a face. It won't be mine yet. It will change the more you read. Maybe you made me older. Maybe younger. Maybe softer. Maybe I look like someone you loved, or someone who hurt you, or someone you'd share a cigarette with at 2 a.m.

That's our starting point. Every so often, after each chapter, keep me in your mind. Keep track of the pieces you've built. Watch how I shift.

Blueprints.

Ever since I can remember, I've navigated through life using my brain more than my heart. Not as a choice. Not as some cold philosophy lifted from a book. More like the only option available to me. People like to believe everyone defaults to kindness, or empathy, or some effortless warmth. I didn't. Actually, I couldn't. Those things require authenticity, and the best I could manage was to play the part.

To most, that sounds inhuman. Maybe even dangerous. But for me, it was a dead end. Either I showed up as I really was and unsettled people, or I performed the version they wanted and lived as a fake. So I went with the second option. The smile. The jokes. The gestures that passed for sincerity. The mask.

If the goal is to be understood, the mask can't stay on forever. Bluntness is the only option. Honesty, even when it cuts against common values, even when it doesn't line up with what most people would call "right."

The best place to begin is where it all looked harmless. Childhood. The supposed beginning of everything.

I wasn't the kind of kid anyone would single out as strange. Not many looked at me and thought, *something's wrong there*. What I hated most was the quiet superiority in people's eyes, the assumption that their way of seeing the world was the default, the standard, and everything else was distortion. Early on, it became second nature to tuck away the pieces of myself that made people uneasy. But hiding

them didn't erase them. They waited, pressed flat under the surface, shaping everything in silence. And if that meant stepping into the role people expected, so be it.

I've killed. A lot. Not people, not in the way you might be picturing. I've ended lives, but the lives were tiny and the deaths anonymous. Ants, mostly. They moved in neat lines across my yard, on the sidewalk, through the cracks by the trash bins. I would crouch down until the world was ant-sized and watch. I'd break their rhythm, drag a finger through a trail, push Hot Wheels into their highway and study the collapse that followed. Sometimes I'd press one beneath a thumbnail until it stopped moving. Then another. Then another.

It wasn't anger. It wasn't cruelty. It was mostly curiosity. I wanted to know what would happen. Would they scatter, reroute, rebuild, or simply dissolve? They weren't insects to me so much as reactions, subjects in a miniature lab, playmates in an experiment. In my mind, we really were playing. It was purely a stimulus and response. Cause and effect.

Experts who compile warning signs draw a straight line from crushed bugs to later violence. They call it a red flag. Maybe they're right. Maybe that pattern meant something ominous was budding. All I can tell you is this, I never felt rage when I did it, never felt a twisted pleasure. I was watching. Testing. Learning.

It always circled back to the same question. Did that make me dangerous? The answer depended less on fact than on definition. Was "danger" a matter of intent, or of outcome?

Everyone lives by their own rules. Some are taught, spelled out in words and warnings. Others are learned quietly, discovered in the spaces between instructions, in what is ignored or overlooked. I ignored both long before I even knew they existed.

For younger me, going to the supermarket with my grandma felt like stepping into a space where the rules didn't really apply. Not for her. Not for me. Everyone seemed to know her. The cashier smiled before we even reached the register. The staff greeted her like she was family. And me? I was the quiet shadow trailing her cart, watching, absorbing, learning.

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She'd tell me to pick out a candy. I'd grab whatever I wanted. No one said a word. They didn't scan it separately. Didn't point it out. Didn't even look twice. It was simply added to the bill. Silently. Like it was understood. At the time, I didn't realize I was being given a pass. I thought that's just how it worked. You see what you want, you take it.

So I kept taking it. From every store I walked into. With her. Without her. One day, my dad caught me.

"Why are you stealing candy?" he snapped.

He was angry, really angry. He yelled, paced, threw his hands up like I'd just robbed a bank. I just stood there, watching him burn through all that energy over a piece of chocolate. I remember thinking how ridiculous it looked, his voice rising, his face red. All of it over something that didn't matter. Not to me, at least.

Shouting didn't scare me. It only made me lose respect for the person doing it. It felt weak. Emotional. I wasn't trying to be defiant. I just didn't feel what he felt. His anger made no sense. It was like watching someone cry over spilled water.

To me, it wasn't stealing. Hell, I didn't even know what that word meant yet. It felt normal. That day didn't stop me from taking things. What it taught me was something more important. Adults yell when they feel powerless.

And understanding that, the gap between emotion and logic, between reaction and observation, that was lesson one. These little things kept shaping me.

Volume doesn't equal power. If anything, it exposes the opposite. The louder someone gets, the less control they usually have. Yelling shows uncontrolled emotion, powerlessness, instability. A clear mind always has the edge. And a clear mind doesn't yell.

Adults thought they were reading me. They'd search my face for guilt, hesitation, fear... anything they could use. But I wasn't showing them what they wanted to see. Instead, I was watching them. How they shifted when they lied. How they swallowed before saying something they weren't sure about. How their eyes moved when they were about to tell me "no." Every reaction was a page in their book.

I wasn't doing this consciously. Not back then. Maybe I make it sound that way because this is how I think now. It wasn't strategy. It

was just... survival. That's how my brain had to work. Not out of choice, but out of necessity.

I didn't feel emotions the way other kids seemed to. Or maybe I did, but they were faint. Vague. Too weak to shape my decisions or stop me from doing something. Other kids seemed to have an emotional compass. Mine was more like a loose needle, spinning until it pointed toward whatever made the most sense in the moment.

And that's the thing about morals. People act like they're a compass too, like they point in one clear direction for everyone. But they don't. I've been told my whole life that morals are what separate good people from bad people, that you should follow them, live by them. But even as a kid, I didn't really get it. "Good" and "bad" never felt like solid concepts to me. They were flexible. They bent depending on who was talking, what mood they were in, and what they wanted.

If you told the truth about your friend cheating on a test, the school would call it good. Honest. The "right" thing to do. But to your friend, it would be the worst thing you could've done. Betrayal. Backstabbing. Exactly what a "bad" person would do. Same choice. Two completely opposite labels.

I didn't sit there plotting ways to challenge morality. I just noticed the pattern. The same adult who told me lying was wrong would turn around and tell me to say they weren't home when someone called. The same parent who told me to be polite would talk to a felon like they were dirt.

Were morals something fixed? Or did they only matter when the other person followed the same moral compass they did? If that's the case, then they weren't morals at all. They were preferences dressed up as principles. I found that both unfair and ironic.

And yeah, I know I'm not exactly a saint myself. I've lied. I've bent rules. I've broken them just to see if they would break. But hypocrites... they get under my skin. Not because they lie. But because they believe they don't. They rewrite their own history so the story always casts them as the hero. They step on the same lines they draw for others and then pretend the line was never there. I used to watch people like that the way a scientist watches a rat in a maze. With interest. Maybe with a bit of disgust too.

Most people's morals aren't about right or wrong. They're about convenience. They bend when it's uncomfortable to keep, disappear entirely when it's easier to protect themselves. They'll swear they believe in fairness, until fairness costs them something. They'll preach loyalty, until loyalty becomes inconvenient. They'll demand honesty, until the truth makes them look bad. Once you see that, you stop listening to what people say they believe. You watch what they protect. What they break their own rules for. That's the real compass they follow.

And if you can read that compass better than they can, you can predict them. Even steer them. I realized that in most situations, the right thing to do wasn't the "moral" thing. It was the thing that got you the result you wanted without getting punished. That was my moral code. If you could call it that.

It wasn't written down anywhere, and it didn't come with applause or approval. It was an internal architecture, quietly guiding choices in a world that didn't make sense the way it made sense to others. But morals were just one piece of the puzzle. The other piece was... me. Or rather, the version of me I was supposed to be.

I didn't just have one fixed personality. I had a whole wardrobe of them. Each hanging on an invisible rack in my head, ready to be tried on at a moment's notice.

With some people, I was the quiet one. Eyes lowered, small smile, nodding just enough to seem attentive. With others, I was bold. Leaning forward, keeping eye contact until they were the ones to glance away. Sometimes I played the listener, letting people pour themselves into me like I was an empty glass. Sometimes I was the talker, filling the space before they could.

I used to think that's just what everyone did, adjusting to the room, reading the vibe, shifting slightly to fit in. But with me, it wasn't a slight adjustment. It was complete shape-shifting. I didn't walk into a room and "adapt." I walked in and took stock. How they stood. How they spoke. How they laughed. What words they chose, and which ones they avoided.

Once I saw the outline of who they were, I filled it in with a version of me they'd respond to best. If I could figure out who they

wanted me to be, I could figure out what I could get from them. Attention. Respect. Time. Sometimes just a way to be left alone.

I mirrored people until they saw themselves in me. And once they did, they trusted me. Liked me. Mirroring worked on almost everyone. The lonely ones thought I understood them. The arrogant ones thought I admired them. The suspicious ones thought I feared them.

I was good with people. Not in the way most people mean when they say that. I wasn't "friendly" or "charming" in some generic, Hallmark-card way. I was good with people because I knew how to make them feel like they were the only one in the room.

The trick was simple. I focused on them. Not halfway, not with one ear listening while my mind wandered. No. All in. Most people aren't used to that. They live in a world where everyone is too distracted, too self-involved, too eager to talk about themselves. So when someone actually gives them undivided attention, they drink it in like water.

It wasn't completely about control. It was mostly about connection. My way of connecting.

The more versions of myself I created, the harder it became to remember which one was the "real" one. When you change your voice, your body language, even your sense of humor to fit the person in front of you, you start to lose track of where the mask ends and your face begins.

It wasn't like I stood in front of a mirror, rehearsing who I'd be that day. It just happened, automatically, like slipping into a jacket that already fits.

Everyone does it, but most people don't do it consciously. They drift into it, steered by emotions they don't even recognize. A flash of pride here, a stab of insecurity there, and suddenly they're acting without realizing why. Maybe that's what makes them human. You can't control every move you make, not when so much of it is running on thoughts you never see.

But if you are aware of what you're doing, if you can see the wires, then you have the best chance of playing your cards right. Of getting what you want without giving away more than you should. Is

that awareness a gift? Or is it a slow poison? That depends on the person.

The best thing about being human is that you are you. There's no one exactly like you. Sure, there might be people who are similar, but never an exact match. You can be anything you want, in theory. In practice, what stops most people from becoming whatever they want isn't lack of ambition. It's the parts of themselves they can't control. And at the top of that list? Emotions.

That's why I could be whoever I wanted to be. I became so good at it that somewhere along the way, I forgot who I actually was.

But maybe that's the real question. Do you ever know what you are? If you're constantly adapting, switching gears, shifting tones, rewriting yourself for the room you're in, do you even have a personality?

Is there still a "real" you underneath it all? Or are you just a collection of versions, stitched together by habit and convenience?

Maybe the search for yourself isn't about digging deep until you find the core. Maybe you dig forever and discover there's no core to find. And if there's nothing there, is that a problem? Or is that freedom?

Most people want to believe they're solid. One person, unchanging, permanent. But the truth is, they shift too. They mold themselves to fit into jobs, friendships, relationships. They just don't notice the shape-shifting because they call it "compromise" or "growth."

I never called it anything. I just knew it was happening. The difference between me and them is that I was watching. I could see the moment I adjusted a laugh, or the way I stood, or the choice of words, to match whoever was in front of me. And it worked. It always worked.

But that's the thing about playing every role. Eventually you lose track of which one is actually yours. What's my real voice? My real face? Do I even have one? Or are they all just masks I've worn for so long that they've fused into skin?

I used to think I'd figure it out someday. That one morning I'd wake up and the fog would clear. I'd know exactly who I was and who I wasn't. But the older I got, the more I realized, maybe that moment

never comes. Maybe some people never meet themselves. Or maybe meeting yourself is the one thing you can't do while you're still busy being everyone else.

And if being everyone else gets you further, gets you safer, gets you what you want... why would you stop?

Childhood ended quietly for me. No big moment. No rite of passage. Just a point where I stopped asking the question I'd been chasing for as long as I could remember. Who am I?

I stopped caring whether the person in the mirror was the "real" me or just another mask I'd forgotten to take off. The search was exhausting, and all it ever gave me were more versions, more questions, more fragments to sort through.

It's strange, the calm that comes when you drop the need for an answer. You start noticing things you missed before, how people cling to their labels, how they fight to defend their "true self" even when that self is just a collection of habits they never chose.

You start seeing how much of life is just people protecting their idea of themselves. And while they're busy guarding that fragile image, you can move however you want.

You can be whatever the moment demands. You can choose without having to check whether it fits some personal definition. You stop worrying about what's underneath and start using what's in front of you.

Most people would call that freedom. Some would call it denial. I just call it living.

Inside the Wires.

There's a point where you stop asking "Who am I?" and you start asking "Why am I like this?" That shift is important. Because "who" is a costume question and changes with the scene. But "why" is wiring. It's under the skin.

That change usually arrives in adolescence. Childhood runs on imitation, you copy, you follow, you absorb. But adolescence interrupts that rhythm. Hormones hit, the body reshapes, and suddenly the world feels louder and heavier. As you start questioning deeper, the questions grow bigger too. Every look, every word, every silence becomes a test of acceptance.

Why was it that even when I looked and acted like everyone else, I still felt like I didn't belong? Why could the things that interested me derail a conversation if I mentioned them? Why did small irritations, meaningless to me, seem to upset them so easily?

I used to think the way I saw the world was just a matter of perspective, like a camera angle I'd chosen. Then I learned it's more like the lens itself was built differently.

The only way I could understand myself was to strip it down to mechanics. Feelings weren't reliable, they never were. The only option was to study the machinery of my own mind and predict the impulses before they even surfaced. I read study after study on psychopathy, on how the brain triggers behavior, how fear, guilt, shame, or the absence

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of them, shapes every move. Slowly, the chaos of instinct became a pattern I could follow. Each observation, each data point, each neural quirk I cataloged, made me knowable and predictable. And knowing myself, that's the only kind of control that ever worked for me.

All that research eventually pointed me toward one place. The root of the short-circuit.

The amygdala, a small, almond-shaped piece of the brain and the part that often misfires in those with ASPD, acts like an internal alarm system. When something feels dangerous, it goes off. Heart rate spikes. Stomach drops. Muscles tighten. Breathing shortens. Adrenaline floods in. Fight or flight. Most people don't think about it. It just happens. For me, that "alarm" is more like a dim light that flickers instead of blaring.

Researchers have found the amygdala in psychopaths processes fear less intensely, and in some cases, less often. That's not an excuse for anything I've done, it's just the hardware. The operating system. Mine still pumps adrenaline, but the signal feels different. No panic. No freeze. No tunnel vision. Just a quiet hum, like the engine of a car idling.

It doesn't mean I don't recognize danger. It means fear doesn't grab the wheel. And when fear doesn't control you, you can walk into places most people would never go. Sometimes that's a strength. Sometimes that's a flaw. But it's always a difference.

And that difference changes everything. My decisions, my risks, my life.

My lowered sensitivity to fear shows up everywhere, from the small, almost trivial moments to the times that could've turned into headlines. It can be as simple as sitting through a horror movie. Everyone else jumps, gasps, clutches their armrest. I don't. Not because I'm trying to look tough, but because the reaction just doesn't fire. The scare lands a few seconds too late, and by then it feels awkward to even pretend. If there's a lead-up, I can prepare a reaction, but even then, I still get the timing wrong sometimes. That same gap carries into real danger.

The city I grew up in isn't exactly the safest. Robberies are common, and in my adolescence I had more than a few people try to

take my phone or the cash I carried. I've been held at knife point more than once. And every time, the feeling that rose was more irritation than fear. Losing ten bucks for lunch or the phone in my pocket seemed like a bigger violation than the knife itself. Fight or flight never really kicked in. Compliance never crossed my mind. To me, the bigger threat was being submissive to someone who hadn't earned it.

I couldn't wrap my head around why anyone would think stabbing me over an iPhone was worth the risk of being on the run. If they truly believed that was a smart tradeoff, I classified them as idiots. And I've never been the type to hand over anything to an idiot. Especially my ten bucks.

The same wiring applies to guilt and shame. If I feel them at all, it's more of an echo, something faint and delayed, like hearing a sound from a block away. That's the prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain's frontal lobe, at work, or in my case, working differently. It's the part of the brain that connects emotions to consequences, telling you not just what happened, but how to feel about it.

When I hurt someone's feelings, their reaction is immediate. Tears well up, their face hardens, their voice changes. For them, the emotion hits like a reflex. I see the reaction, I register what it means, but my brain doesn't send that sharp signal that says, *you should feel bad right now*. There's a delay, a gap between action and response. In the moment, it feels almost clinical, like I'm standing outside the situation, noting the change but not being moved by it.

Later, when I replay the event in my head, the logic catches up. I'll recognize that what I did or said is something other people would immediately tie to guilt. The pieces line up in hindsight: *this caused pain, pain usually means you feel remorse, remorse should guide behavior*. But by then, the connection is theoretical, not visceral.

If those lines are crossed or underpowered, you can still understand the rules, you just don't feel them as deeply.

I've also never felt the constant anxiety that seems to anchor so many people. The endless worry about what could happen, what someone might think, what mistake they might make. That weight just isn't there for me.

It's why I could slide into any version of myself without hesitation, no voice in my head asking, *What if they hate you? What if you fail? What if this is wrong?* I didn't have to fight that battle, because it never started.

People with ASPD often carry traits of narcissism too. It doesn't mean strutting in front of a mirror or thinking you're a god among men, that's the Hollywood version. In psychology, narcissism splits into two main categories: grandiose and vulnerable.

Grandiose narcissism is what most people imagine. Confidence, dominance, a strong belief in your own worth. Vulnerable narcissism looks different. It's insecurity covered with defensiveness, a need for approval, a fragile ego that cracks under pressure. Both overlap in how they affect self-image, confidence, and control. I fall on the grandiose side and that ties directly into psychopathy.

Research shows that people high in both psychopathy and grandiose narcissism are more likely to take risks, seek admiration, and move through social situations with an ease most people don't feel. Again, this isn't bragging. It's not about thinking I'm better than everyone else. It's about not being weighed down by the same doubts most people drag behind them.

That lack of doubt looks like confidence. And confidence, whether real or manufactured, changes everything. Even something as simple as approaching girls works differently for me. I know narcissistic tendencies feed into it, but objectively, I'm not bad looking. The thing is, even if I was, I still wouldn't care. Because caring about rejection, about judgment, about what they might think, is what kills people before they even move.

Confidence isn't a mood. It's the absence of hesitation. And when you don't have the fear of rejection, hesitation doesn't exist. I've learned to listen before I act, and that makes me charismatic in ways looks alone never could.

I've seen the best-looking guys freeze up, trapped by their own self-doubt, while some of the most questionable-looking dudes end up with a different girl every week. They win because they move. They don't wait for the perfect moment. Most people are so obsessed with

their appearance that they forget how to seduce. They're too busy rehearsing lines in their head instead of actually playing the game.

A few days ago, I was on holiday with my friends, and something happened that reminded me of this. We were at a beach party. I wasn't there for girls, but when I saw my friends frozen at the thought of approaching one, something sparked in me. Their hesitation didn't put me off, it fueled me. It became less about the girls and more about the moment. A chance to prove a point. To show them how it's done. Just the idea of stepping in and making it look easy was enough to flip the switch.

I told them to pick someone. Preferably without even seeing her first. Random. No safety net. Because if you only move when the odds are in your favor, you're not really playing, you're waiting. They pointed her out. I didn't hesitate. I walked straight over, because it's never about the approach. It's about how you carry yourself into it.

She looked up. Curious. Maybe a little surprised. I smiled. Not forced, not nervous, just like I'd been there before a hundred times. We ended up talking for fifty minutes. She was interesting, pleasant, easy to be around. And the truth is, if I'd carried the same fear my friends had, if I'd stayed frozen like them, I never would've had that moment. I never would've had that memory.

The conversation itself wasn't magic. It never is. I didn't drop some rehearsed line or try too hard to be clever. I just asked her something simple, something that gave her space to talk. And then I listened. That's where the real charisma is, not in the talking, but in making the other person feel like what they're saying actually matters.

In psychology, there's something called a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's when your expectation of something, good or bad, pushes you to act in ways that make it come true. If you walk up to someone already convinced they'll reject you, your body betrays you. Your voice shakes. Your smile strains. Your timing is off. You create the rejection you feared.

The less you need the outcome, the more likely you are to get it. The more you need something, the more you think about it. And not in a good way. You start running every possible outcome in your head. *What if she rejects me? What if I say the wrong thing? What if*

everyone sees me fail? And right there, before you've even taken a step, you've already failed. Not because she said no. But because you already did.

That's overthinking in the way most people know it, anxiety dressed up as analysis. People throw the word around like it's always a curse, and for most, it is. Overthinking usually means they're stuck in a loop, spiraling, imagining every possible failure until they're paralyzed into doing nothing. That's anxiety talking. That's attachment to the outcome.

The trick is to detach from the outcome. When the result doesn't carry weight, options appear where there were only obstacles. Most people can't achieve this because their emotions are tied too tightly to the result. Instead of running through every possible failure, the mind can consider what happens if it goes right, what happens if it doesn't, what happens if it simply walks away. Three paths instead of one dead end. Overthinking doesn't kill. It's the way it's done that does.

Loops and frames matter, but they're still self-contained. The real difference starts when you stop staring at your own reflection and start paying attention to the room around you.

Awareness. It's what separates someone who reacts from someone who sees. Awareness isn't just noticing. It's not glancing at the surface and saying, "Yeah, I get it."

Ordinary minds live in a haze of reactions. Something happens, they feel something, and they react. That's it. No pause, no calculation, just input to output. Awareness adds a layer in between. A filter, a check, a choice.

Here's what I mean. When someone is a certain type of person, in certain situations, they tend to respond with specific mannerisms, little tells, little habits. Each of those is part of an equation. Take someone who doesn't trust their own judgment. You can see it in how they hesitate before answering, how they look for validation in your face, how they second-guess themselves out loud. If you notice that, and I mean really notice it, you already know something about them. When the time comes to make a hard decision, they'll look outside themselves for the answer. And if you're the one standing there, calm,

confident, and clear, they'll follow your lead. That's awareness. Not necessarily manipulating or forcing, just seeing the path before they even know they're walking it.

Being aware doesn't mean thinking through every possible scenario while it's happening. That's impossible. The moment will pass before you finish the thought. Being aware means you've trained yourself to recognize the patterns before they show up. It's practice. You run the equation in your head enough times, and eventually it stops being an equation. It becomes instinct, habit, a reflex that feels effortless.

Awareness works like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets, but it doesn't stay in your head forever. After enough practice, awareness sinks into habit. That's where the basal ganglia comes in, the part of the brain that turns repeated choices into automatic behaviors. At first, you have to think through everything. You notice the hesitation in someone's voice. You decide what it means. You choose how to respond, step by step. But the brain hates wasting energy. The more often you walk that path, the smoother it gets. Eventually, the thinking part, the conscious part, hands it off to the automatic system. What used to be deliberate becomes reflex. That's why habits are so hard to break. The wiring gets built into the brain itself.

Habits often form around emotion, fear, shame, guilt, anxiety. They create loops that push behavior in predictable directions, avoiding discomfort and seeking relief until it feels automatic. With ASPD, emotional brakes aren't as strong. Without being dragged by feelings, I could study the mechanics. Not "this feels wrong," but "this leads here." Not "I'll regret this," but "this outcome doesn't serve me."

It's funny that the same lack of emotional weight that makes people call it a disorder can also free you.

That freedom gives you space to notice without being swept up. But awareness on its own only takes you so far. Knowing how the world moves is not the same as feeling it move. If you do not understand people, all the observation in the world is just noise. To move beyond noticing, you need a way to interpret what you see, to

translate patterns into understanding, and that's where empathy becomes essential.

Empathy is what allows people to connect, to measure closeness, to decide who is safe and who is not. It is not a single thing. It splits into two main types. Emotional empathy is what most people think of. You feel what the other person feels. Their joy lifts you, their pain drags you down. It is contagious. That is the default setting for most people.

But there's another side to empathy, one that doesn't rely on feeling at all. Cognitive empathy. It is not about taking on someone else's emotions. It is about understanding them. It is recognizing the signals, piecing together the equation, and seeing what is written on their face even if you do not feel it in your chest. It is like reading music without ever hearing the melody. You might not feel the swell of emotion in the notes, but you can still see the pattern and play it back. That is how it worked for me. Where most people relied on their gut, I relied on data.

Cognitive empathy is still empathy. I do not drown in someone else's emotions, but I can see them. If someone is sad, I may not feel the sadness bleeding into me as most people would, but I can recognize the signs, the shift in their voice, the drop in posture, the shortening of words and respond in a way that helps them. Not because my body forces me, but because my brain reads it.

Some people call that fake. I do not. Because in the end, whether the comfort comes from instinct or intention, the person still feels comforted. And that is the point.

However, that kind of thinking only keeps opening other questions.

What matters more? The outcome or the intention behind it? If you help someone because you feel for them, does that mean more than helping them because you decided to? If your instinct is kindness but it makes the situation worse, does that still count as "good"? If your intention is calculated, detached, maybe even selfish, but it helps them anyway, does that still count as "bad"?

When your instincts are quiet and your emotions don't pull the strings, intention becomes the engine. Sometimes that scares people

because they think, “If you didn’t feel it, then it’s fake.” But is it? If someone holds the door for you because they were raised to and someone else holds it because they calculated it would make your day slightly better, which one is “real”? Instinct feels warm. Intention feels cold. But both can still get the door open.

Most don’t think about that difference because, for them, instinct and intention are fused. Their feelings are their choices. For me, they’re separate. There’s the impulse, and then there’s the plan. Instincts can be wrong. They can tell you to fight when you should walk away, to stay quiet when you should speak up, or to trust someone who doesn’t deserve it. Instinct is fast, yes, but it isn’t flawless. Intention is slower, more deliberate, but it gives you the chance to step outside the heat of the moment and actually choose.

Would you rather trust someone who feels for you but might act recklessly, or someone who doesn’t feel it but will still act for you because they decided to? Which one do you value more? The warmth of instinct or the weight of intention? Because the truth is, maybe it’s not a clean choice. Maybe the answer isn’t instinct or intention. Maybe it’s about what you value in the moment. When you’re drowning, you don’t care if the hand that pulls you out belongs to someone acting on impulse or someone who calculated every move. You just care that you’re breathing again.

That’s why I don’t see my way as lesser. Different, yes, but not broken. Intention isn’t the absence of care, it’s control applied to it. Society tends to believe that goodness has to come from the heart, that without emotion, it doesn’t count. But maybe it just has to reach someone.

I’ll let you sit with that. Because for me, that’s not theory. That’s survival. That’s how I move through life.

If both instinct and intention can move us to act, then what separates me from everyone else? What emotions still reach me? Where do our worlds overlap? Where does my wiring still match yours?

Not everything about me is different. I don’t live in some alien state, cut off from the entire spectrum of human feeling. There are

emotions I feel almost exactly like you do, joy, amusement, anger, desire, the highs and lows that come with being alive.

The difference is in their weight. Some emotions hit me with the same strength as anyone else. Others come through like static, faint and distant, and a few barely register at all.

Take anger, for example. I feel it, sharp, clean, alive. It isn't muted. If anything, it's clearer because it isn't tangled with guilt or fear. When I'm angry, I'm not second-guessing it. I just am.

The same goes for excitement. The rush of chasing something, winning, laughing with friends, those things land. They feel real, solid. If you watched me in those moments, you wouldn't see a difference.

Sadness, guilt, and regret are different. That's where the gap widens. I understand those feelings, I see them in others, but in me, they're thinner, lighter, almost optional. My "full blast" isn't the same as yours.

Some emotions sit at the center of your world, while others stay at the edges, barely touching you. Psychologists sometimes call it "emotional blunting." It doesn't mean emptiness, it means the volume is turned down. Certain emotions come through loud and clear, while others barely make a sound.

That gap creates what I think of as emotional asymmetry.

That difference doesn't erase humanity; it reshapes it. I still laugh, still get angry, still feel the adrenaline rush of chasing something I want. Those parts of me are just as real as they are in you. The only change is the hierarchy.

It creates a strange kind of overlap: enough similarity to pass, enough difference to stay apart.

Once you understand how you're wired, the next question is obvious. What do you do with it? What does wiring like mine actually chase?

Everyone is driven by something. Some people want safety. Others want love. Others chase meaning, purpose, or legacy.

Me? I've never cared much about "meaning." I don't wake up searching for some grand cosmic reason. What I seek is simpler and sharper. Stimulation. Excitement. Challenge.

Psychology would call it sensation seeking, a trait tied to psychopathy and to how the dopamine system works in the brain. The less fear holds you back, the more you're pulled toward intensity. Risks that paralyze others feel like opportunities to me, not because I don't understand the danger, but because the danger makes it interesting.

I love climbing tall buildings. Not for the view, though that's part of it, it's the climb itself. The rush of being somewhere I shouldn't be. The wind cutting across my face. The ground stretching out hundreds of feet below. Up there, I feel calm, focused. Every move is deliberate, every grip exact.

It's not just about the height, it's about the edge, the thin line between control and chaos. That's where I feel most alive. The same pull is why I love urban exploring. The adrenaline, the uncertainty, the sense that you never really know what's waiting around the next corner.

One night, I was with my friends when we stumbled across a broken fence near a construction site. Curiosity pulled us in. Behind it was an old, long-abandoned building, dust, broken glass, silence. The kind of place that feels frozen in time.

We kept moving, hall after hall, stairwell after stairwell, until the place opened up into what looked like an abandoned air base, empty hangars and wide concrete yards. At least, that's what we thought.

The walk across the site took close to ten minutes. By the time we were approaching the base, the first drone appeared. Then another. Circling above us, buzzing low, like they were scanning. That's when we turned back toward where we'd come from, trying to play it off, trying not to run.

Two minutes later, headlights flared, two security cars, speeding straight at us. That's when we ran. Not down the open street where they could follow, but into the fields. The ground was rough under our feet, tall grass cutting against our legs, the night swallowing us whole. The cars couldn't follow us there, but the drones stayed overhead. For ten minutes they buzzed and circled, searching. Eventually, under the cover of a roof, we split up. The lights drifted off, and the chase was over.

Most people would've taken that as a warning. Stay away. Never come back. I didn't. My brain lit up. The rush I felt in that moment was worth the risk, worth chasing again.

There was only one question in my mind: how do we do it again, this time smarter?

A few days later, I convinced my friends to go back. Same place, same risks. But this time we came prepared. Flashlights, a plan for the drones, watch points.

What looked like recklessness from the outside was, in my head, strategy. "Fear" didn't end the game; it just made me more invested in finding a way to play it better.

We took the same route back in, this time with our eyes up, watching for drones. When they circled to the far side of the base, we moved, from one spot to another, keeping under cover. Step by step, we reached the point where they had stopped us the first time. This time, we knew we could push through.

I was filming, documenting the time we had, when lights appeared again, opposite side from last time. Seconds later, my friends bolted. That was enough of a sign. Even if security hadn't seen us yet, they had now. Adrenaline surged, sharp and clean. I ran too, more alive than ever.

The difference was clear this time. They were closer. Too close. And no one outruns a car on foot. I knew that. So I dropped low and hid in the first bush I saw. My friends dove into another just a few feet away.

For two minutes, patrol cars circled, engines humming, flashlights cutting across the field. The only thing keeping us safe was the darkness. Then the doors slammed, and beams of light swept the grass. They were searching.

That's when my friends broke. They stood up, hands raised, like we were in a movie. I can't describe how disappointed I felt. I stayed hidden for a breath, long enough to know it was over. If they were caught, I was caught too. So I stood.

One guard stormed toward us, red-faced, barking like we were criminals. He was too far gone. No point trying with him. So I didn't. I

saved my words for the other one, and I was right. The second guard was calmer. Rational. Human. I knew if I talked to him, I could turn it.

My friend still had his GoPro strapped to his chest, so I spun a story. Told him we'd found the place days ago and curiosity got the better of us. That we were filming a scene for my university. (I study psychology. No cameras, no film degree.)

I spoke with confidence, not pleading, not nervous, just certain. Within minutes, he softened. He even laughed when I pointed out how ridiculous it was that we'd tried running. "What else could we do?" I said. "We were just anxious teens, clueless."

The anger drained out of him. He told the other guard to delete the photos of our IDs. By the time he walked us to the exit, we weren't criminals anymore, we were just kids who'd made a mistake.

We talked about his daughter on the way out, how she was interested in videography. I recommended the "university I was supposedly studying at." He nodded, grateful.

And just like that, a night that could've ended in police reports ended in laughter, handshakes, and advice about college.

That night sums me up better than any test or diagnosis could. There's a kind of clarity that comes with pressure, a stillness in the middle of chaos that makes sense in a way calm never does.

People like to think thrill-seeking is about danger, but it's not. It's about stimulation. When fear doesn't register the same way, the world starts to feel muted. Ordinary life lacks the signal strength to keep the brain engaged. So you seek things that push harder, sharper moments, closer calls, anything that makes the noise louder. That's what danger does. It raises the volume until you can finally hear something.

Novelty plays into it too. The brain lights up at newness, at the unknown. Every unfamiliar space, every unsolved problem, gives a quick burst of reward. The chase itself becomes the reward, not the outcome. That's why the second time back wasn't about stupidity, it was about optimization. The brain remembers the rush and rewires to get it again, but smarter.

Then there's control. Chaos is only satisfying when you can navigate it. It's not the risk that matters, it's mastering it. That feeling

of being in control when everything around you isn't, that's what keeps the system running. It's proof that you can move through disorder without being consumed by it.

Status and influence also follow naturally. When you stay calm under pressure, when you can talk your way through situations that should explode, people notice. They respond differently. You earn a kind of quiet authority, a sense that you can steer things even when they're spinning.

And always, it comes back to immediacy. Most people with wiring like mine crave instant rewards. They live for the spike, the quick hit of satisfaction that comes right after the risk pays off. But that's where I differ. I like spontaneity, but not waste. I won't throw myself into something unless it gives me something back that lasts longer than the rush.

I can act in the moment, sure. Impulse isn't foreign to me. But it's filtered through purpose. If I can't picture the outcome turning into something useful, either leverage, experience or opportunity, then the motivation fades before I even start. The adrenaline feels good, but the result has to feel right too. Otherwise, it's noise.

Law of attraction.

Every book about someone's life seems to need a love story.

This is mine, though calling it that isn't quite right. It's less about romance and more about behavior, about how my mind shapes the way I connect and how my ego rarely steps aside long enough for the fairytale version to exist.

Most of the time, being with a girl isn't about her. It's about me, proving I can get her, seeing the look in her eyes when she wants me. That reaction excites me more than the act itself. Sometimes I don't even follow through, because the game is already over the moment she shows desire.

Some of you might have guessed already, but I've always found girls with boyfriends more attractive. Not because they're different, but because of what it means to win them. It creates an extra layer, a challenge.

It's not even about sex most of the time. It's about the imbalance it creates. Her boyfriend becomes a shadow in the room without even knowing it. Every message she answers, every glance she sneaks, every risk she takes, it all says the same thing: she's breaking her "rules" for me. That's what makes it addicting, because it's not just desire, it's betrayal in my favor. And betrayal means power. Not power over her, but power over the frame she's supposed to live inside,

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the story she tells herself about being loyal, or safe, or committed. I get to step in and rewrite it.

I don't feel pity for their boyfriends, in the same way I wouldn't feel sad if it happened to me. If a girl I was with cheated, I don't think it would break me. It wouldn't feel like loss so much as imbalance. Because that's what cheating usually is. A shift in the scales, a sign that one person misread the situation, that one side of the equation wanted more than the other.

At the start, every relationship begins balanced. Two people liking each other enough to step in. But balance is fragile. It doesn't hold itself. Both people have to keep it steady. And when one person starts to drift, the other usually knows. The signs are there. Pulling away, less interest, shifting attention.

The problem is, the weaker one pretends not to see it. They rewrite their boundaries, retreat to keep the other person happy, fold instead of holding ground. And that's the exact moment they lose. Because when you start stepping down, the other person starts stepping over, even if they don't realize it. Even if they couldn't explain it, they feel it. The ease. The lack of challenge. The unspoken shift that says: *you want me more than I want you*.

Once that imbalance is there, desire begins to die. Not instantly or dramatically, but slowly, like erosion, until the attraction is gone and all that's left is the search for something sharper.

Being better than the weaker side isn't much of an accomplishment. Anyone can step over someone who's already bent. That's not victory, it's inevitability.

What I really enjoy is different. It's seeing if someone who's deeply in love, tied to someone else, invested, committed, would still risk breaking that bond for me. That's not just validation, that's pure attraction. Wanting me enough to ignore the consequences, to gamble security for a rush, to choose the risk knowing what it costs.

That tension is stronger than any relationship could ever give. It's sharper and hotter, but it burns too fast. Like an explosion, the arousal isn't just in the act but in the possibility. The "what if" is enough to spark it, sometimes more than the follow-through.

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And let's be honest, everyone likes to feel risky sometimes. Everyone gets tempted by the thrill of crossing a line. The difference is, most people's moral code is stronger than their hunger. Remorse cuts the high short. Guilt outweighs the rush.

It's gotten to the point where I know I'm usually detached from genuine intimacy. Because if a girl is single and likes me, there's no real win, no competition, no conquest, no psychological high. I get bored when it's easy. The attraction fades as soon as I realize the outcome is guaranteed.

What I normally crave isn't affection. It's resistance, the pushback, the barrier I'm not supposed to cross.

The forbidden feels more real to me than the available ever does. A single girl who chooses me, that's a choice. But someone willing to risk everything else for me? That feels like gravity. I love the tension of almost, the danger of maybe, the moment where the decision could collapse everything and they still take the step.

As much as I love this, I'm aware that that kind of connection doesn't last. It burns too fast to build anything from.

Building a family has always been one of my biggest goals. Not just to be a father, but to be the best one.

I know being a father isn't just about me. It's about the child, and a child doesn't just need a father, they need a mother too. That means I need to figure out relationships, because one can't exist without the other.

The problem is, relationships are supposed to be 50-50, but the best I've managed is 95-5. A heavy 95, though. The kind that, under the right circumstances, can still hold its weight.

I've seen what being on the other side looks like. Two of my closest friends, the second they got into their first relationships, disappeared inside them. They didn't just date their girlfriends, they became them. Their identities dissolved. Their egos vanished. It was like watching them deteriorate in real time.

That used to infuriate me, because that's not me. I'm not like the girls they gave themselves up for either. And if that's how it's supposed to be for a relationship to work, then my not-yet-born child should start figuring out how to live without a mother figure.

When I step into a relationship, it isn't about losing myself. I don't want someone fragile I can step over. I want someone strong-willed enough to call me out, someone who makes me sharper instead of softer. That's how I work. I push people to be better, and I want them to expose the cracks in me so I can fix them, whatever they may be.

I've tried masking, faking, lying to make things work, but it never lasts. They get lost in the illusion of the "perfect man" I build for them. But that's the flaw. It's not perfection. It's just their version of perfect, and I'm only playing the role. That can get you laid, but it can't get you love, not the kind that builds something real, not long term.

So I stopped. Or at least, I tried to. Because I know I'm not the most emotional person. I can't give the connection most people are looking for. But what I can do is try, and sometimes, trying feels worth it.

If I want a family one day, I need to figure out the game plan. If I can't hold a relationship, what am I really giving my future child? Half a home. Half a life. How are they supposed to grow up whole if I hand them something broken? How can I expect to make something perfect if I can't even build the foundation myself?

That's not the story I want to write. Relationships, as I see them, shouldn't be about vanishing, about losing yourself in the other person until you don't even know who you are anymore. That kind of love is a slow erosion, a self-inflicted decay. I've watched too many people around me let it hollow them out.

If I can't build something different, then I'm no better. I'd just be a contradiction. Despising in others what I failed to escape in myself. And there's nothing weaker than hypocrisy.

Weakness spreads quietly, like rot, passed down from one generation to the next unless someone decides to cut it out. I plan on being that someone, because I know I can.

So what if I don't connect like others? So what if emotion doesn't come easy? That doesn't mean I can't build something real. It just means I'll have to build it differently. On clarity instead of fantasy. On strength instead of surrender.

If that's the only way I know how, then so be it. Because my child won't inherit weakness from me.

Still, saying that and living it are two different things. I've learned that control sounds solid in theory, but life doesn't always follow blueprints. For all my talk about strength and composure, there were moments where the script didn't hold. Moments where I didn't feel like I was running the game, but like something bigger than me was pulling me in.

It's strange for me to write this because I've never felt love the way people describe it. Unconditional, absolute, eternal. I "love" my family, sure, but my definition feels different. I don't want to lose them, but I don't drown in the word the way others do.

And yet, three girls, at different times in my life, made me break my own rules. Made me feel things I wasn't supposed to. Stepped on my carved beliefs without even trying. What I've read says it was probably limerence. Infatuation and obsession. But honestly, I didn't care what it was called. Because for the first time, I wasn't detached. For the first time, I started to feel the weight of losing someone.

Most girls fade from memory the second the game is over. These three didn't. Even years later, I'd find myself replaying pieces of them like a song I couldn't get out of my head. When I found another girl who lit that same fire, the nostalgia for the last one vanished instantly. As if my mind could only hold one at a time. Not because they weren't real, but because they were too rare to coexist. Every one of them gave me something new.

The first one, I was 15 when we met. We had mutual friends and ended up at the same house party. She caught me off guard, not because of how she looked, but because of how quickly she moved.

I had just arrived, literally not even a full minute in the door, and she was already in front of me, introducing herself. Me, being who I was, didn't care. Not about her name, not about her words. The only thing running through my head was finding my friends and doing something dumb. So I brushed her off. Walked away without even really looking at her.

Ten minutes later, there she was again. Same confidence, same persistence. This time, I looked. And I saw it, the frustration in her eyes. She told me I hadn't even given her my name, then casually dropped my full government name. She had asked my friends about me. And then, instead of letting the moment go, she introduced herself again. Her name was Alma. "Alma," soul in Spanish. It stuck with me immediately. Not because of the word, but because of how she carried it. That's what actually pulled me in. Not her face, not her body, the things you'd expect a 15-year-old to notice first, but the way she refused to be ignored. The guts it took not only to walk up to me once, but to come back after I blew her off. That wasn't normal confidence. That was another level of defiance.

So I apologized. Told her my name, even though she clearly already knew it. And somehow, we ended up talking for three hours straight. I really don't like talking for long. Not then, not now. After a while, I get bored of the mechanics of it, keeping my face animated, matching tones, feeding back little reactions just to make the other person feel heard. I don't mind it, but it drains me. But with her, it was different. She'd already proven she could handle me ignoring her once, so that gave me permission to drop the act. I tried talking to her the way I talk to myself. No filter. No remembering to raise my eyebrows at the "right" moments. No energy wasted on pretending. And she didn't pull back. She didn't look put off. She leaned in. She wanted more. She wasn't charmed by some version of me I built for her. She was engaged with the unmasked version. And that made me stay engaged too.

She gave me something that hadn't even crossed my mind before. She allowed authenticity. She allowed me. And I really enjoyed that part of myself. It charged me in a way nothing else had. After the party, she asked for my Instagram. We started talking. Then hanging out. Then dating. And before her, I didn't even know I wanted those things. But the time with her felt cathartic. Like a weight I didn't know I was carrying had been lifted.

For two months, that was enough. But then, slowly, I felt it fade. Like I'd already taken everything I could from the experience. There wasn't a fight, there wasn't betrayal, just silence stretching

longer and longer until there was nothing left. Now I understand why. She was a lot like me. She had her own shadows, her own edges, her own “problems,” if you want to call them that. And maybe that’s why I could be so unfiltered with her. She didn’t just tolerate it, she wanted it.

But being too similar, as much as it sparks in the beginning, can burn out fast. Familiarity doesn’t feed fire forever. She gave me exactly what I needed at the time. The space to be myself, and the mirror to finally see what that self even looked like. For that, I thank her. Maybe that’s why she stood out. Why, even after it ended, it took years before I felt anything even close to what she gave me.

She gave me what her name meant, Soul.

But Alma was the first. And four years later, there was another.

We’ll call her Girl #2.

I was nineteen when I saw her at a local sushi bar, sitting across from her boyfriend, chopsticks in hand. She looked rare, not just pretty, not just attractive, but the kind of girl who could’ve stepped straight out of a movie, framed by the kind of beauty designed to hold a gaze. And she caught mine instantly.

We weren’t complete strangers. We followed each other on social media, had never spoken. But in that moment, it felt like we were in on something together.

She kept stealing looks, subtle, careful, never letting her boyfriend notice. That half-hour of glances was enough to light me up more than most nights ever did. As much as I wanted to walk up to her then and there, I knew that would be reckless. Offside. So I played it differently.

When I got home, I messaged her. A casual opener, “Was that you?”, though I already knew the answer. She confirmed, and the conversation took off. At first, I thought this would be another casual game. Another conquest where the high came from knowing I could pull her away. But something was different. She was a ten, the kind of ten people back in time would start a war for. Her boyfriend? Good-looking too. That didn’t scare me. If anything, it made it better. Higher standards meant higher difficulty. And difficulty is where I thrive.

That night, we said everything we couldn't say at the table. Every hidden thought behind those glances. And to me, that was the green light. A girl doesn't talk like that to another man unless a door has already cracked open.

A week later, I picked her up. She was new to the city, and I knew the terrain. That was the advantage of having a car at nineteen, freedom. I showed her the basics, the landmarks, the streets she'd need to know, and then I took her to a spot with a view near my place. The night had all the makings of what I thought I already knew would happen. And then it didn't.

When I leaned in, she stopped me. Dead in my tracks. She looked me straight in the eyes and told me that I was "kind" and "funny," but she couldn't do this to her boyfriend. She talked about trust and boundaries and loyalty. And for the first time in as long as I could remember, I had misread the situation. The pride I carried, always knowing what people wanted, always reading between their words and gestures, cracked. I felt it. I had been wrong.

At that moment, I had never been more fixated on winning a girl in my life. Any normal guy would've stopped there. Taken the no, respected the line, and let it go. But to me, the impossibility made it irresistible. I didn't show it. I couldn't. Desperation kills attraction, and what I felt wasn't desperation anyway. It was something sharper. Something closer to obsession.

So I played the part. I told her I understood. That I was wrong for trying. That I'd gotten lost in the moment. She liked that answer. Liked the honesty. Liked the "kindness." And I know it wasn't real, but I liked that she liked it. So I offered to take her home, as friends. Platonic. She agreed.

After that night, we started going out almost every week. It was strange for me. Normally, once I get confirmation that I can win a girl, I lose interest. The game is done, the box is checked, and I move on. But with her, I couldn't. Her commitment to her boundaries was stronger than her attraction to me, and my mind couldn't let that go. It was like a wall I couldn't climb, and the harder it held, the more I wanted to break it.

Obsession is one of the most destructive feelings, but it's also the one that allows you to achieve what nothing else could ever push you toward. I felt out of control, and worse than that, I was losing. Her loyalty was winning. I didn't care if it took weeks, months, years. I had to make it happen.

And then, two months in, it happened. She called me at four in the morning. She had never done that before. Her voice was bright, almost shaking with excitement. She told me she was so happy, and she had to see me. I don't think I've ever gotten ready faster in my life. I picked her up, and the whole ride I could feel her staring at me. Not the way she did across the sushi bar, sneaking glances, but openly now. Like the decision had already been made. We drove back to the same spot from our first night. I asked what the big deal was. She didn't answer with words. She kissed me. Hard. I still remember it like it was yesterday. The taste of watermelon gum. Her breath, quick and desperate. The way she kept pulling me back in like she couldn't get close enough. Ten minutes felt like a lifetime.

Before things went further, I pulled back and asked the question that had been haunting me since the start. "What changed?" What made her finally put me first, over her boundaries? Her answer should have been my victory. She said everything I wanted to hear. That she couldn't stop thinking about our connection. That her boyfriend couldn't fill the hole I did. That being with me mattered more.

And then she said it. Breaking up with him was the best thing she ever did.

And just like that, I lost all interest. I had gone from a hundred to zero in a single sentence. That wasn't a win. That was my biggest loss yet. The game had ended and I was the loser. She hadn't bent for me. She hadn't broken her rules because of me. She just moved the line herself. She played the game, but with her rules, not mine. And with that, her choosing me wasn't enough. In fact, it was the opposite. I felt cheated on, in a way I can't explain. Not by her boyfriend, but by her. She had robbed me of the one thing I was chasing.

She noticed my shift immediately. She asked what was wrong. Everything was wrong. But what could I say? That her being single for

me wasn't good enough? That her doing exactly what most people would call "the right thing" ruined it for me? She wouldn't have understood, and I couldn't blame her. So I gave her some half-baked excuse and ended the night early. A few days later, I told her I couldn't be with her.

She gave me something I didn't know I needed. Grounding.

For the first time, I felt the weight of someone else's loyalty pressing against my chaos. She wasn't easy. She wasn't quick to fold. And that resistance forced me to sit with myself in a way I never had before. She showed me that desire without boundaries is hollow, that the thrill of winning means nothing if there's nothing solid beneath it.

And even though I walked away, she left me with that lesson. Authenticity was Alma's gift. Grounding was hers.

Psychologist Robert Sternberg said that love rests on three pillars: intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Intimacy and passion? Those I had. Commitment? That's where you lose me. The best I'd managed was two months, and that's not commitment, that's barely a warm-up.

They say love finds you when you stop searching, but I was searching. Detective-level searching. Scanning every girl for the checklist in my head, testing and discarding. The more I searched, the more I found myself in dead ends. Single girls were too easy to lose interest in. Taken girls, I could never take seriously afterward, not if they'd betrayed someone else just to be with me.

So I split my time. "Me time," chasing, playing, winning. "Us time," trying, half-heartedly, to see if someone could actually stick. Both had their place, but lately, "me time" was eating the hours. After months of disappointment, I started giving up on the idea of anything real.

Then came one of those nights where boredom demanded chaos. I hit up an old fling, told her to bring a friend, and my buddy and I would come pick them up to roll up and drink. She was just like I remembered her, always ready. A few hours later, we were pulling up to find them and get the night going.

That's when I saw her. My old fling stood there exactly as expected, but next to her was her friend. She caught my eye, not in the

way I was used to. She wasn't "hot" in the movie-poster sense, or built for attention like Girl #2. She was pretty in a softer, disarming way. A warm smile that didn't feel staged. Genuine, like she hadn't spent her life rehearsing it in the mirror.

I looked at my boy, he looked at me, and no words were needed, we swapped targets instantly. Opposites attract, and that's exactly what I felt when she smiled at me. A pull. Not the adrenaline-soaked rush of conquest, but something quieter. A kind of gravity.

When we got to my place, it didn't feel like the usual routine. We'd talked in the car, but once we were inside, it was different. It wasn't small talk or filler; we were actually talking and listening. I've seen enough movies to know what people usually ask when they're trying to build something real, so I knew what to say. She asked those questions too, but not just the basic ones. She went further, digging deeper, listening sharper.

That's when I knew that if anyone was going to break my cycle, it would be her.

We talked that night, then the night after, and the next twenty nights. Every day, without fail, until the word "official" almost didn't need to be said. But I made sure it was. I waited just long enough, twenty days or so, so it wouldn't look rushed. Timing matters, even with feelings. And then we were it. Boyfriend and girlfriend.

She had someone to talk to, and I had someone to listen to. Of course, I talked too, but she was too pure for me to unload everything unfiltered. With her, I held some things back. But even then, it worked.

I was faithful, not because I had to be, but because I wanted to be. I didn't feel the usual need to test the edges or see what I could get away with. I wanted to prove something different this time; that I could actually do it, be a boyfriend, the right kind.

Two months passed, then three, then four. By the fifth month, summer had come, and with it, a first for me. She invited me to her family's summer house near the beach, where her grandparents stayed. A place she'd gone since she was a kid, a piece of her history.

The idea felt like an opportunity in more ways than one. Vacation, free housing, a chance to cohabit for the first time in my life.

I knew it would test me. I've always valued my personal space, my time. But this was different. This was a challenge worth stepping into.

I drove five hours down the coast, through a scenic route that almost felt like a prelude. I wasn't just going to her summer house, I was stepping into something bigger. A trial run. A chance to see if I could actually live inside the thing I'd been saying I wanted.

We never agreed on how long I was going to stay. That's what I liked about her, she went with the flow and let me take the lead. I valued that more than I admitted. A strong but submissive woman, someone who had her own spine but was willing to let me set the pace.

The first days were almost cinematic.

Day one, I met her grandparents. I cooked lunch to break the ice. Garidomakaronada, pasta with shrimp.

Day two, she woke up in my arms, one of them numb. The kind of small inconvenience people laugh about, but in the moment, it felt grounding.

Day three, the rhythm settled in. Mornings at the beach, cocktails, movie nights. That evening, she asked to take the wheel herself, so I let her. Watching her, the least reckless person I knew, suddenly speed up just to impress me, it sparked something. A pulse of adrenaline where I least expected it. A moment of what people would call "bond."

By day four, she brought me into her world, introducing me to her local friends and showing me the village, their spots.

By day five, those friends wanted more of her time, but she insisted on staying with me. I liked the loyalty, but I knew better. Friends can coexist, and I really wanted some alone time. I told her to go, but she brought me along anyway. One girl stepped on a sea urchin, and I ended up playing doctor, laughing, improvising.

By day six, I started feeling the fatigue. A relationship is one thing; living inside it 24/7 is another. It's work, constant. Like remembering to be human at every second, rehearsing your lines for an endless play. She had the same energy she did on day one. That part was admirable. She didn't fade, didn't drift. It made me want to match her, so I stayed, even when I felt the cracks forming.

Seven days. That was my limit. I wouldn't say I lost my mind, but I started slipping back into myself, the baseline version. Not hateful, not resentful, just stripped down. My reactions weren't polished anymore; they were basic, default. She noticed. I knew this would happen. After girl #1, I'd learned the importance of being myself in a relationship, but not too much of myself. While I'm good with me, other people rarely are. If they saw the unfiltered version, they'd think I didn't care about them. And they wouldn't be entirely wrong. I do care, but on my terms. Conditional. Egoistic. The kind of love that says, "I'll give you everything, but it's because I want to, not because I'm built to." Most people can't live with that, especially the pure ones who want reciprocation as deep as the one they give.

By day eight, it came to a head. She brought it up while we were out, sitting me down to talk because she could feel the distance. She said I never listened to her. Our first fight.

The thing is, when she said that, I actually wasn't listening. That was the finishing strike; her words barely landed before she broke down crying. I freeze when people cry. I don't know what to do with tears. They want emotion, comfort, that soft surrender. But that's not me. I default to logic, to reason, to fixing. When I tried that with her, it backfired. My answers came out wrong, flat, hollow. Instead of pulling her closer, they set her off even more.

We started around 11 p.m. Although calling it a fight isn't fair. It was one-sided. She was upset but she had the problem with me. And the strange part? I was enjoying it. Not in a sadistic way, not because she was hurting, but because in that moment, I finally saw her.

My sweet girl, the one who always smiled and softened, was shouting. Demanding. Showing raw frustration. It felt like she was taking her own mask off. The thing is, I know she wasn't. That's how normal people are. When they're happy, they look happy. When they're sad, they look sad. When they're angry, they show it. I admire that. I can look happy when I'm furious. I can play calm when I'm boiling. Even joy feels filtered through performance sometimes. So watching her unravel so openly was fascinating at first.

From 11 to midnight to 1 a.m., she kept circling the same lament. After a while, it wasn't fascinating anymore. It was repetitive.

Okay, you got me to feel for you. You got me to listen. Now what?

I decided to break it off. I wanted to move, to shake it up, to feel like me again. I told her we were going for a drive. I knew exactly what I wanted. Something reckless, something real. Ten minutes later, we stumbled across a crowd gathered outside a church. Curious, I parked the car and asked a guy walking out what was going on. He told me it was a wedding after-party. Perfect.

I turned to her and said: "Follow my lead". I could see the anxiety flash across her face just at the thought. This was the test. Could she step into my world? Could she bend enough to meet me where I lived?

She hesitated, but after ten minutes of convincing, she followed. We walked in and I went straight to the bride, introducing myself as a friend of the groom. Then straight to the groom, introducing myself as a friend of the bride.

Quick, clean lies, delivered with a smile. She was nervous, but I saw it. Under the nerves, she was enjoying it. Enjoying me.

We drank some of their alcohol, blending in with the crowd like we belonged. And then I saw it. A 150-euro bottle of champagne, sitting untouched in the gift pile. An idea sparked instantly. I pulled her aside and dragged her to the nearest corner shop. We bought the cheapest bottle of wine we could find, maybe two euros at most. I pocketed some gum too.

Then we went back.

While no one was watching, I swapped the champagne with our bottle, leaving the original note in place. Just imagining that couple, on their wedding night, opening gifts only to find a handwritten note next to the cheapest wine in the store, cracked us both up. She laughed until she cried.

And I realized in that moment, I liked seeing her like that. Not in her world, but in mine. Not making me softer, but stepping into the chaos with me.

We got back into the car with the stolen champagne and two glasses we swiped from the wedding party, searching for our next adventure. We passed a school and, without thinking twice, decided to jump the fence. No goal, no reason, just because we could.

Inside the hall, chairs were scattered everywhere. She started arranging them, stood up front, and pretended she was giving a speech. It made me laugh. Then came the rooftop. Her idea, not mine. But the second she suggested it, I loved it. No hesitation, no fear, just climbing. She moved with an energy I had never seen in a girl before. Maybe it was the alcohol, maybe the adrenaline, but she was climbing like she belonged up there.

When we finally sat on the roof, looking out at the quiet night, I thought, this is it. This is the version of her I want.

But it never lasted. Because then came the feelings again. While I was content sitting in silence, she wanted to dig. To talk. To get me to open up in ways I didn't want to. And when I ignored her long enough, she just kept pressing. Eventually, I gave in, but not in the way she wanted. We left the rooftop, started walking, and ran into a drunk guy swaying in the street. Perfect distraction. I mirrored him, stood face-to-face acting just as drunk, holding eye contact for almost a minute while she laughed so hard she could barely stand.

But fun was never enough for her. When we drove to a spot near her house, I knew what was coming. She wanted to talk. To peel back the night until it was raw again. Complaints. Why I didn't listen. Why I felt distant. Why I wasn't what she needed me to be. And I couldn't do it. Not after champagne, rooftops, stolen moments, and laughter.

So I shut it down. Drove her home in her car, grabbed mine, and went for a drive. Because with her, the highs were some of the best I've ever felt, but the lows dragged me back into a place that drained me.

I knew this part mattered. Every real relationship has these moments, the crying, the late-night talks, the ugly honesty. I knew it then too. I knew this was the part you're supposed to push through if you want something that lasts. So after half an hour, I went back. 6am.

There she was, laying in bed, crying.

As much as I hate the conversation that comes with tears, I can't lie, she looked beautiful. Desireful, even. I slipped back into the boyfriend role. I laid next to her, kissed her forehead, played with her hair until her breathing slowed. She liked it. I liked it too, for a while.

Then came the words. She told me I was a douche for not remembering something she wanted to talk about. Truth is, I really didn't remember. And she wouldn't tell me what it was either. For half an hour I chased her around the subject until she finally cracked, it wasn't some big revelation. It was that I don't listen like I used to. That I was an ass for not noticing. Bad timing. I'll give her that. Then she went deeper.

Said she was sad that I could lie so well, talking about the night. That it scared her. That she didn't know if I was ever telling the truth. And the thing is, she wasn't wrong. She didn't know me. Not really. But I never gave her a reason to suspect me either. Except that night. Our "fight" dragged on until 11 a.m., when she finally said she was too tired to keep talking. She went upstairs to sleep near her grandparents and told me she'd write me a letter, that she could explain her feelings better on paper.

And maybe that was the moment it all clicked for me. Because as much as I cared for her, I couldn't go back to her world after living mine that night. I couldn't go back to routine, to complaints, to filtering myself. That night on the roof, at the wedding party, stealing champagne, that was the perfect version of us. And I wanted to leave it like that. So I slept for an hour, packed my things, and when I found her note, I didn't even read it. I told myself I'd read it later. I wrote her one back, something cringe, fake-heartfelt, even sprayed water on it to look like I cried. Left her headband tucked inside as a goodbye gift. And I left. No goodbye to her, no goodbye to her grandparents. No point in waking them up.

Halfway home, it hit me. I'd left her letter behind. The only thing that might have told me who she really was, or how she really felt. And maybe I wanted to know. Maybe I didn't. But either way, I never turned back. I asked her once for the photos we took that summer, then cut contact.

She gave me a glimpse of what commitment might look like if I ever chose to hold on. With her, I tested myself, tested whether I could step out of my own head, out of the game, and into something steady. And for a while, I did. I was faithful. I was present. I was a boyfriend in every sense of the word. That alone was a victory. But she also

showed me my limits. That no matter how much chemistry, no matter how much intimacy or passion, once the mask slips and reality sets in, commitment is where I crack.

Real relationships survive in the slow hours, the repetition, the listening. The parts I've never been good at. And maybe that's why I left her behind the way I did.

Because in my mind, I owed her at least that much, to remember her at her best. To keep her frozen in that perfect night, instead of watching her fade into something less.

Layers of belief

It's been three chapters now.

You've seen where I come from, what I've done, who I've hurt, and how I love. If you've been keeping up, my face has probably changed since you started reading. Back then, you imagined me out of nothing, just a sketch built from your own mind. But now there's color. Texture. Weight. The sketch is turning into a portrait.

Each part added something new, sharpening one feature, softening another. When you start to understand someone, they stop being a concept and start becoming a person.

But you still don't have the full picture. For that, you will need to know what I believe. You can't really see someone until you see the rules they live by and the stories they tell themselves to make sense of the world.

The beliefs I kept, the ones I abandoned, and the ones I still don't know if I believe at all are what make me, me. After this, my face will probably look different again. Maybe clearer, maybe harder to look at, but definitely closer to real.

Maybe the perfect place to start is where the clearest difference shows, the part people swear they understand and feel, but in my eyes, they rarely do.

Good and bad. Two of the oldest words we learn.

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I talked about them before, how they shift depending on who's holding the compass. As a kid, that realization felt like uncovering a trick in the system. Now, it feels bigger than that. "Good" and "bad" are less about reality and more about belief. They're not written in stone; they're written in people, in parents, in teachers, in laws, in religions. Most people don't question it. They inherit a script and live by it. If their group says it's bad, it's bad. If their group says it's good, it's good. No further thought needed. But belief doesn't just guide behavior, it shapes perception. It tells people what to cheer for, what to hate, what to punish, and what to forgive. And if you believe hard enough, it doesn't even feel like a choice anymore. It feels like truth. That's what makes belief powerful, and dangerous.

When you take away the group, the rules, the fear of punishment, what's left? Does "bad" still exist? Or is it just another story, one people tell to keep order?

When you strip away the labels, you're left with raw actions. The act itself is neutral until someone stamps it with meaning. We're so busy worrying about whether something is "good" or "bad" that we never stop to ask: according to who?

Ask a child if stealing is wrong and they'll say yes, because someone told them it is. Ask them again if it's still wrong when their family is starving, and watch the hesitation crack through the certainty. Lies are "bad," unless they protect someone you love, unless they keep the peace, unless they make life smoother. Violence is "bad," unless it's war, unless it's punishment, unless it's for protection. Same action, different context, different label.

When you say something is "wrong," do you mean it, or do you mean it until it serves you? Would you lie to save your career? Would you steal to save your child? Would you hurt someone to protect yourself? And if you did, would you rewrite the story in your head until it felt "justified"? Or would you still call your actions "bad" with the difference being that since you were forced, it wasn't your fault? Would you just have to learn to live thinking you do bad things? Or would you bend the frame until your reflection feels cleaner?

You either challenge your beliefs, strip them down, question them, risk rebuilding from scratch, or you adjust the story in your head

until you feel okay doing “bad” things. And once you do that, you’re left with another label. Not just “bad action,” but “bad person.” The weight of morality is not in the act itself but in the name it forces you to wear afterward. Labels don’t just shape how others see you; they infect how you see yourself. A liar, a thief, a sinner, a coward. Not acts but identities. Masks glued to your skin until you can’t tell where the act ends and where you begin.

It’s easy to point at others and label their actions as evil, selfish, or cruel. It’s harder to admit that under the right pressure, you’d do the same thing. So, do you believe in good and bad, or do you believe in convenience dressed up as morality? Because if your “morals” vanish the moment they cost you something, were they ever really morals at all?

I think these questions are the reason religion always fascinated me. It promised answers to the same questions morality left open. It takes the same moral scaffolding, good and bad, right and wrong, and builds an entire world on top of it. The difference is, this time, the story isn’t told by people. It’s told by something higher.

I know that this is the part where I’ll probably lose some of you. You might want to skip ahead if you’re religious and have started sympathizing with me, because this is where you’ll feel attacked, where it’ll feel personal. And once you feel attacked, it’ll be easy to stop trying to understand me, easy to tell yourself: he’s wrong, he’s dangerous, he’s heartless.

You already managed to move past the part about me killing insects, so I know you can forgive me for this as well. If you can’t, then this is where you’ll drop the book. And I get it, because what comes next cuts deeper. Religion isn’t like insects. It’s not something distant, crawling outside your house. It’s inside you. It shapes how you see yourself, how you judge others, how you anchor your choices. So when I press on it, it won’t feel like I’m criticizing an idea; it’ll feel like I’m criticizing you. Belief fuses with identity until you can’t separate one from the other. And the moment someone touches it, you don’t defend the idea but yourself.

Anyways, here’s my truth. I never understood the need for a higher power to act decent, to follow rules, to be told what’s “good”

and “bad.” Religion, to me, has always felt like an outsourced conscience. Instead of asking yourself, “Is this right? Is this wrong?” you look up and wait for an answer that was written centuries ago. That might feel comforting, but it also means you’ve traded your ability to decide for yourself. It’s a safety net for most people, a script to follow when the world feels too big, too random and too cruel. And I get it, life without certainty terrifies people. But to me, certainty handed down from above feels hollow. It’s borrowed meaning, not your own.

The irony is, religion has done incredible things, built communities, ended wars, saved lives. And at the same time, it has started wars, divided communities, and justified cruelty. The same books that preach love can be used to defend hate. People use religion like a shield and a sword, to protect themselves when they’re afraid, and to strike others when they need an excuse. And when you believe it comes from something higher, you don’t question it.

But it doesn’t just offer answers; it demands certainty. It takes the most complicated questions, why are we here, what happens after we die, what is right and wrong and hands you a script with no edits allowed. That certainty is addictive, because life is chaos, because control is an illusion. And if someone tells you they have the truth, the map, the way, most people will cling to it like oxygen.

What I can’t ignore isn’t the faith itself, but the arrogance that grows from certainty, the refusal to admit doubt. Because the moment you stop questioning, you stop thinking. And once you stop thinking, you’ll do anything, anything, if you’re told it serves the higher cause. People who believe are always so certain that what they believe is the truth. Any religion. But put a Christian and a Muslim in the same room, both convinced they’re right, both absolutely sure eternity is on their side. They *can’t* both be right. At least one of them is wrong. Maybe both. Certainty doesn’t survive contradiction. When two absolutes collide, one has to break, or you have to admit the possibility that they’re both built on sand.

It’s not just Christianity and Islam. Every religion claims the exclusive key. The Hindu sees rebirth. The Buddhist seeks release from rebirth. The Christian sees one life, one judgment. The Muslim

sees paradise or punishment. Each version is absolute. Each one makes the others impossible. And yet billions of people live and die with their entire lives anchored in one of these absolutes. That doesn't mean faith is useless. It just means it isn't proof. It's conviction, not evidence. And conviction can be beautiful or dangerous, depending on where it's pointed.

So let me be clear. I don't hate religion. I respect what it gives people; comfort, order, hope. I see the way it softens grief, the way it stitches together broken hearts, the way it makes people feel less alone in a world that often doesn't make sense. But I can't respect the weakness of needing it to act decently, of outsourcing your conscience to something written down before you were born, of trading the responsibility of choice for the illusion of safety.

To me, strength is standing in the chaos of the world without needing a rulebook written for you. No commandments. No promises of reward. No threats of punishment. Just you, your mind, your awareness, your decision. That's freedom, not the freedom to do whatever you want without consequence, but the freedom of ownership. The freedom of knowing that if you're kind, it's because you chose it. If you're just, it's because you decided it mattered. Not because you were told. Not because you were watched. Religion can make you obedient. But obedience isn't morality. And it's not strength. Real strength is walking into the storm without a map and still knowing you'll find your way.

When belief turns into law, morality becomes punishment. Every religion, every system, eventually builds its own version of justice, ways to reward the obedient and punish the defiant. But once you give someone the right to punish in the name of "good," everything starts to blur.

Justice is supposed to mean fairness, balance. Wrong punished, right rewarded. But in reality, justice looks less like a scale and more like a stage play, a performance built on who holds the power and who writes the rules. People like to believe that punishment is about morality, that laws exist to protect what's good and punish what's bad. But step back and it becomes clear. Punishment doesn't always line up

with “bad,” and reward doesn’t always line up with “good.” A murderer can get twenty years. A fraudster can ruin thousands of lives and walk away with ten. A soldier can kill and be honored. A civilian can kill and be condemned. It’s not about the act itself; it’s about the frame around it. Who did it, who judged it, who benefits from calling it justice.

It’s a system that pretends to be blind but always sees status, money, influence. People call it fairness, but most of the time it’s negotiation. Punishment becomes a bargain between what society needs to believe is right and what those in charge are willing to excuse.

Justice isn’t built for truth, it’s built for order, for keeping the majority calm, for protecting the image of balance even when the scale is tilted. That’s why two people can commit the same act and walk away with completely different outcomes. One punished, one forgiven. Not because the act was different, but because their place in the story was. Justice is about consequences, not “right or wrong,” but “what happens if you cross the line.” Justice, then, isn’t a cure, it’s a show of control, a reinforcement of the idea that someone, somewhere, is holding the reins. But that control is selective. It cracks harder on the powerless than the powerful. Because punishing the weak keeps order, while punishing the strong threatens the system itself. That’s why fraudsters buy their way out while thieves rot for years, why a man in a uniform can pull the trigger and be saluted, while another, without a badge, is caged for life.

Punishment isn’t just about the person who breaks the rule; it’s about the audience watching. That’s why trials are public, why verdicts are announced, why sentences are broadcast. It’s not just one person paying for a crime, it’s a warning to everyone else. That’s the stage play. Punishment is less about balance, more about performance, a way of telling society: “See? The rules work. The order is intact. You’re safe. But if you don’t listen, you’re not.” Even when the reality behind the curtain is chaos.

Punishment doesn’t always stop the act it condemns. It doesn’t erase the desire, the opportunity, or the calculation. It just changes who’s willing to risk it. The desperate still steal. The powerful still exploit. The violent still kill. The difference is in who gets away with

it, and who doesn't. Of course, that doesn't mean justice and punishment aren't needed. People need to see that actions carry consequences. Without that, the game collapses. If nothing is enforced, if every choice is free of weight, then chaos doesn't just hurt the powerful, it crushes the weak. This is already a society where the weak get the shorter end of the stick, where their mistakes cost more and their voices carry less. But take away justice entirely, and it isn't just "unfair." It's predatory. Because chaos doesn't fall evenly. It tilts toward those bold or ruthless enough to exploit it. The irony is that the very system that punishes the weak unfairly is also the only thing standing between them and complete destruction. Justice, flawed as it is, keeps chaos in check. Without it, the upper hand belongs to whoever is willing to grab hardest, hit first, or cross lines others wouldn't dare. Chaos applies to everyone, but only a few thrive in it, and they're not usually the ones who need protecting.

Justice may keep chaos in check, but it can't touch what lives underneath it. Laws can control behavior, not intention. Punishment can stop an action, but it can't reach the reason behind it. Even in the most orderly society, people don't always do what's right because of rules, they do it because of how it makes them feel. When the threat of punishment fades, when no one's watching, when justice has no say, what still pushes people to do what's "right"?

Ego is the engine behind more choices than people admit, not survival, not morality, but the need to feel something about yourself, to feel important, respected, validated. Religion uses it, morality feeds it, even punishment bends around it. It's what keeps people moving. The very need that makes us prove ourselves, show ourselves, build ourselves, that's ego. It's what turns effort into meaning. Without it, ambition would wither. Without it, victories would feel empty. Without it, no one would bother to climb, to compete, to create. No reason to push past comfort, or fear, or failure. Ego is the voice that says you can be more than invisible. It's the tension that makes the strings vibrate, the reason people strive instead of settle. It is the spark behind every invention, every empire, every story that outlives the person who wrote it. Ego is the undertow beneath it all. It doesn't just

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push people to leave something behind, it also pushes them to hold the door open, to donate, to comfort. Ego is the reason we act at all.

Can pure altruism exist? Some believe in pure selflessness, the saint who sacrifices everything for others, but scratch the surface and there's always something underneath. Relief, pride, gratitude. The ego handing you a small reward for your effort. Is that wrong? Not necessarily. It's just human. Psychology calls this egoistic motivation, the idea that even prosocial behavior, helping, giving, sacrificing, circles back to the self. Philosophers like Nietzsche said it plainly. Morality is often just self-interest in disguise. Freud would add that the ego's job is to balance impulses with reality, but it still feeds itself first.

And neuroscience is brutal. Brain scans show dopamine firing when we help someone. The "feel-good" chemical. Your brain literally rewards you for being "selfless." So is that selflessness, or just another form of hunger? Even the extreme cases don't escape it. A soldier throws himself on a grenade to save his squad. Noble, absolutely, but psychologists argue there's still a self-serving element hidden there; the fear of living with survivor's guilt, the pull of being remembered as a hero, the unconscious calculation that a quick death beats a lifetime of shame.

People spend their lives trying to prove they're selfless, when the truth is, the very need to prove it comes from ego too. Because if others see you as noble, you get the reward twice. The inner glow of pride, and the outer praise of recognition. If helping others always circles back to making us feel good though, is that selfish, or is it the perfect design? The ego gets fed, someone else gets saved, and society gets to keep believing in "good."

Maybe selflessness isn't real at all. Maybe it's just self-interest, wrapped in prettier language. We cling to the illusion so hard because if selflessness falls apart, so does one of the most comforting lies society sells; that goodness is some universal current running beneath the chaos. But look closer, and what you'll see isn't a river of goodness; it's a thousand egos swimming in the same water, each chasing its own reflection.

That's not cynicism, it's design. The current still moves forward, progress still happens, but it isn't born from purity. Ego doesn't erase kindness or generosity, it fuels them in its own way. And that's why the line between selfless and selfish blurs until it almost disappears. The question isn't whether ego drives you. It does. The real question is, do you control it, or does it control you?

That's something you'll have to answer yourself. But what I can say is that beliefs don't define truth, they define people. The ones we keep say less about the world and more about what we need from it. These were mine.

From here on, what you see depends on what you believe too.

I was. (Epilogue)

I guess this is the part where I step out of the story.

It's strange, reaching the end of something that was never really about an ending.

Every word you've read, every thought you've agreed or disagreed with, every judgment you've made about me, that's more your reflection than mine. You haven't just been watching me come to life. You've also been building yourself in the process. The way you reacted, what made you flinch, what made you nod, that's your blueprint, drawn between my lines. You didn't just create me, you created the version of you that exists in relation to me. A rare and rather unexpected bond.

That's what makes this whole thing work. I can only exist through the eyes reading me, through your understanding, your bias, your empathy, your resistance. Every person who reaches this point will walk away with a different face for me. And in turn, a slightly different face of their own.

So here we are, the end of the sketch. You have enough now to name me. I've given you everything I could. All that's left is a name, and I'll give you that too.

It's been here all along, hidden between the titles of the four chapters. Line them up, trace the first letters, and you'll find me there.

That's my name, the one you built, the one that only exists because you were here to see it.

Sidenote: If you can sketch, try drawing the face you've built in your mind and share it with me on instagram, @subject064. I'm curious to see how close you got.