



Love Bombing

The Trauma Bond Trap

Anita Lane

An Intensive for Reclaiming Your Heart

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INTRODUCTION: IF IT FELT LIKE MAGIC... AND THEN LIKE A MUGGING

If you've ever fallen for someone who made you feel chosen, cherished, adored—and then, slowly or suddenly, tore you down... congratulations: your nervous system was playing tag with a trauma bond.

This isn't because you're weak. Or naïve. Or "too emotional."

It's because your beautiful, loyal, attachment-wired brain was biologically doing what it's supposed to do during unpredictable, high-intensity relationships: bonding to survive.

Here's the thing nobody tells you when you're sobbing into your steering wheel wondering why you can't just *leave* already: trauma bonds aren't character flaws. They're neurological adaptations. Your brain developed in environments where reading emotional cues and attaching to caregivers meant survival. Fast forward to adulthood, and that same wiring can get hijacked by someone who learned—consciously or not—how to exploit it.

Trauma bonds form through intermittent reinforcement, the same mechanism that makes slot machines addictive and cult leaders successful. When someone cycles between love, validation, criticism, guilt, and control, the bond intensifies instead of dissolving. Psychologists Dutton and Painter identified this pattern back in 1993, noting that the power imbalance combined with intermittent good-bad treatment creates surprisingly strong emotional attachments—attachments that can feel stronger than relationships built on actual consistency and care.

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Anthropologist Helen Fisher's research on the neuroscience of love helps explain why. Romantic attachment activates the same brain regions involved in addiction, including the ventral tegmental area and the nucleus accumbens. When that attachment becomes unpredictable, your brain doesn't let go—it doubles down, desperately seeking the next "hit" of connection.

And that's where this Intensive begins: not with blame, but with biology, clarity, and the freedom that comes from understanding the cycle.

Because once you see the pattern, you can't unsee it. And once you understand that your brain was doing exactly what brains do under these conditions, you can stop beating yourself up and start the actual work of rewiring.

CHAPTER 1: LOVE BOMBING – The Spark That Isn't Actually a Spark

What Love Bombing Actually Is

Love bombing is not love; it's strategy.

I know that's a hard sentence to read, especially if you're still holding onto memories of those early days when everything felt electric. When they texted you good morning before you'd even opened your eyes. When they remembered your coffee order after one date. When they said things like "I've never felt this way before" and "Where have you been all my life?" within the first two weeks.

It felt real. It felt like finally. It felt like the universe was apologizing for every bad date, every heartbreak, every lonely night.

But love bombing operates on a simple principle: overwhelm the target's defenses with positive attention before they have time to assess the situation accurately.

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The term itself comes from cult research. Groups like the Moonies would surround new recruits with intense affection, attention, and belonging—not because they genuinely cared, but because they understood that humans are neurologically incapable of maintaining skepticism when flooded with oxytocin and dopamine.

Anita's Take: *"Love bombing is basically emotional clickbait. It promises the whole fairytale, but only delivers pop-up ads and malware."*

The Neurochemistry of Being Swept Off Your Feet

Your brain on love bombing is essentially your brain on drugs. Researchers Burkett and Young published a fascinating paper in 2012 examining the neurobiological parallels between social attachment and drug addiction. They found that the same reward circuits activated by cocaine and opioids are activated by romantic attachment—particularly the dopamine and opioid systems.

Here's what happens when someone love bombs you:

Dopamine floods your reward system. Dopamine isn't actually the "pleasure chemical" as it's often described—it's the *anticipation* chemical. It fires when you expect something good is coming. Love bombing creates constant anticipation: the next text, the next compliment, the next grand gesture. Your brain becomes a dopamine factory.

Oxytocin creates rapid bonding. Physical touch, eye contact, emotional disclosure, and feeling "chosen" all trigger oxytocin release. This hormone promotes trust, attachment, and the sense that this person is safe. The problem? Oxytocin doesn't fact-check. It bonds you to whoever triggers it, regardless of whether they deserve that bond.

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Norepinephrine heightens everything. This stress hormone creates the "butterflies," the racing heart, the inability to eat or sleep because you're so consumed by this person. We interpret these arousal symptoms as passion, but they're actually your nervous system in a heightened state.

Serotonin drops. Research on people in the early stages of romantic love shows serotonin levels similar to those seen in OCD. This explains the intrusive thoughts, the obsessive checking of your phone, the inability to focus on anything else.

The trick your brain is playing on you: it bonds with the feel-good chemicals, not the person. This is why letting go later feels like withdrawal—because it literally is.

The Love Bombing Playbook

Love bombers tend to follow predictable patterns, though the specific tactics vary based on what they've learned works:

Hyper-attunement. They study you like you're the final exam. They notice everything—your favorite song, your childhood wound, your dream vacation, the way your face lights up when you talk about your grandmother. This attention feels like being truly *seen* for the first time. But it's data collection, not intimacy.

Future faking. They paint elaborate pictures of your shared future before you've established a shared present. Within weeks, they're talking about moving in together, meeting each other's families, where you'll vacation next summer, what you'll name your kids. This creates premature investment. You start planning around someone you barely know.

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Idealization. You're not just great—you're perfect. You're their soulmate. They've never met anyone like you. No one has ever understood them the way you do. This idealization feels incredible at first, but it's building a pedestal you'll inevitably fall from. No human can sustain being someone's perfect fantasy.

Isolation disguised as intensity. "I just want you all to myself." "Your friends don't really understand what we have." "Why do you need to go to that thing when we could spend time together?" Early isolation often masquerades as passionate devotion.

Moving fast. Healthy relationships develop gradually as trust is established through consistent behavior over time. Love bombing accelerates the timeline, creating a sense of urgency that bypasses your normal evaluation process. Why? Because if you had time to think clearly, you might notice the red flags.

Why Your Gut Instinct Might Have Tried to Warn You

Here's something interesting: many survivors of narcissistic abuse report that they had early warning signals they ignored. A moment of unease. A comment that didn't quite sit right. A feeling that this was "too good to be true" that they dismissed as self-sabotage or fear of intimacy.

Your gut instinct—what scientists call neuroception, your nervous system's below-conscious threat detection—was doing its job. But love bombing is specifically designed to override it.

When your nervous system detects danger, it sends you signals: unease, anxiety, a desire to slow down or pull back. But when those signals are immediately followed by intense positive reinforcement, your brain learns to ignore them. That thing you do is so cute. You're overthinking. No one will ever love you like I do. You deserve this happiness—stop self-sabotaging.

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Over time, you learn to distrust your own perceptions. And that's exactly where they want you.

Anita's Take: *"Your gut tried to send a memo. But it got cc'd to your vagus nerve, your abandonment wound, and your dopamine receptors, who all voted to override it with a unanimous 'BUT LOOK HOW PRETTY THE RED FLAGS ARE WHEN THEY'RE WAVING.'"*

Love Bombing vs. Genuine Enthusiasm

Not everyone who's excited about you is love bombing you. So how do you tell the difference?

Genuine enthusiasm respects your pace. Someone who's genuinely into you is excited, yes—but they're also capable of patience. They don't push to escalate before you're ready because they want you to feel comfortable, not overwhelmed.

Genuine enthusiasm is reciprocal. Love bombers often talk at you, not with you. They're so busy performing devotion that they don't actually create space for mutual exchange. Real connection involves two people sharing and listening in roughly equal measure.

Genuine enthusiasm doesn't isolate. Someone who actually cares about you wants you to have a full life. They're interested in meeting your friends, supportive of your other relationships, and secure enough to give you space.

Genuine enthusiasm handles disappointment well. Try saying no to something early on. A healthy person will be disappointed but understanding. A love bomber will often push harder, guilt-trip, or suddenly become cold—revealing that the "devotion" was conditional all along.

Genuine enthusiasm grows from reality. They're interested in the actual you, not a fantasy projection. They're curious about your flaws and complexities, not just your highlight reel.

The Setup for What Comes Next

Love bombing isn't a standalone phenomenon. It's Stage 1 of a cycle, and understanding it as such is crucial.

The intensity of the love bombing phase directly predicts the intensity of the devaluation to come. The higher they put you, the farther you fall. And because you've been chemically bonded to the love bombing version of this person, you'll spend the rest of the relationship trying to get back there.

That person who made you feel like the center of the universe? They weren't showing you who they are. They were showing you who they needed you to believe they were long enough for you to be hooked.

The real person emerges in Stage 2.

CHAPTER 2: THE DESCENT – Isolation, Criticism & Control

Stage 2: Isolation – Shrinking Your World

The transition from love bombing to isolation is so gradual that most people don't recognize it until they look up one day and realize they're alone.

It starts small. They're a little jealous of your best friend. They seem hurt when you make plans without them. They have opinions about your family that create subtle distance. They make comments about your coworkers that plant seeds of distrust.

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You don't notice because each individual incident seems reasonable. Maybe your best friend *is* a little negative. Maybe you *have* been neglecting the relationship. Maybe your mom *is* too involved in your life.

But here's the pattern: every opinion, every concern, every hurt feeling moves you closer to them and farther from everyone else.

Social psychologist Robert Cialdini identified isolation as a key influence technique because it removes reality checks. When you're isolated, your partner becomes your primary source of information about yourself, your relationship, and your world. They become the lens through which you interpret everything.

The tactics of isolation include:

Monopolizing your time. They have urgent needs whenever you have plans. They create crises that require your attention. They're sick, struggling, or stressed at suspiciously convenient moments.

Creating conflict with your people. They pick fights with your friends or family, then frame it as your loved ones being the problem. Now you're in the middle, and it's easier to just avoid the conflict by avoiding the people.

Being "hurt" by your independence. They don't explicitly forbid you from doing things—that would be too obvious. Instead, they make you feel guilty for wanting a life outside the relationship. Their sad eyes and wounded silence when you leave speak louder than words.

Manufacturing urgency. The relationship always needs *work*. There's always a crisis to manage, a conversation to have, an issue to resolve. You don't have energy left for anyone else because you're spending it all on them.

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Undermining your support system. "I don't think Sarah really has your best interests at heart." "Your brother has always been threatened by your success." "Your therapist doesn't understand our relationship." One by one, the people who might help you see clearly are discredited.

Anita's Take: *"They don't build a prison around you. They convince you to brick yourself in, one 'I just want what's best for us' at a time."*

Stage 3: Devaluation – Welcome to the Fun House

If love bombing put you on a pedestal, devaluation kicks it out from under you.

The same person who couldn't believe their luck at finding you now can't believe your flaws. The things they once adored become sources of criticism. Your independence becomes selfishness. Your sensitivity becomes weakness. Your accomplishments become threats.

Devaluation serves multiple purposes in the abuse cycle. First, it creates confusion that keeps you off-balance. Second, it makes you work harder to regain their approval—approval that was freely given during love bombing but is now parceled out sparingly. Third, it erodes your self-worth so thoroughly that you become dependent on them for validation.

The forms devaluation takes:

Comparison. You're compared unfavorably to exes, coworkers, friends, strangers, fictional ideals. Someone is always doing it better than you.

Moving goalposts. You can never quite meet the standard because the standard keeps changing. You clean the house the way they like, but now they're upset about something else. You modify your behavior to avoid criticism, but the criticism simply finds new targets.

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Subtle digs disguised as humor. They mock you in front of others and claim you "can't take a joke." They point out your insecurities while maintaining plausible deniability. "I'm just teasing!"

Withholding. Affection, attention, sex, conversation—things that flowed freely during love bombing are now rationed based on your behavior. You learn to perform for crumbs.

Contempt. Eye rolls, sighs, dismissive body language. Research by relationship psychologist John Gottman identifies contempt as the single greatest predictor of relationship failure. It communicates: you're beneath me.

Rewriting history. Events you clearly remember are reinterpreted. Your experience is wrong. Your memory is faulty. That's not what happened. You're too sensitive. You're making things up.

Here's what makes devaluation so insidious: you've already bonded. You've already isolated. You've already invested. So instead of recognizing the abuse and leaving, you do what feels logical—you try harder.

You think: if I could just be better, we could get back to how things were at the beginning. You don't realize yet that the beginning was a performance. You're chasing a person who never existed.

Stage 4: Manipulation & Control – The Invisible Cage

By Stage 4, the control often becomes explicit. But even then, it rarely looks like the obvious control we're taught to watch for. It's sophisticated. It's deniable. It's crazy-making.

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Gaslighting is perhaps the most damaging manipulation tactic because it attacks your grip on reality itself. The term comes from the 1944 film in which a husband manipulates his wife into believing she's going insane. In practice, gaslighting includes denying things that happened, accusing you of things you didn't do, questioning your sanity, and telling you that everyone else sees you the way they do.

Research on gaslighting suggests it causes cognitive dissonance so severe that victims often develop anxiety, depression, and symptoms that look like mental illness—which the abuser then uses as further evidence that the victim is the problem.

Monitoring escalates during this stage. They check your phone, track your location, demand access to your accounts, and want to know where you are at all times. This is often framed as the result of their "trust issues" (which are somehow your responsibility to fix) or as what you "owe" them given how much they've been hurt.

Financial control may emerge—running up debt in your name, controlling access to money, sabotaging your work, or creating situations where you're economically dependent on them.

Guilt-tripping becomes a primary tool. Everything is reframed as something you've done to them. Their behavior is always a response to your behavior. You "made" them act that way. If you were different, they could be different.

Weaponized "hurt feelings" are particularly effective because they exploit your empathy. You end up apologizing for their abuse because they've convinced you that calling it abuse is what's really hurtful. Your valid complaints become attacks. Your boundaries become abandonment. Your attempts at accountability become cruelty.

Anita's Take: *"A narcissist will stab you, hand you the knife, and then cry because you made them bleed."*

CHAPTER 3: INTERMITTENT REINFORCEMENT – Why You Stay Even When You Know Better

Stage 5: The Slot Machine of Suffering

If the trauma bond had a keystone, this would be it. Intermittent reinforcement is the glue that holds the whole dysfunctional structure together.

Here's the psychological principle: when rewards are unpredictable, the brain becomes *more* motivated to seek them, not less. This counterintuitive truth was discovered by B.F. Skinner in his work on operant conditioning. Pigeons who received food pellets on a random schedule pressed the lever more obsessively than pigeons who received food every time. The randomness created compulsion.

In a trauma bond, your partner alternates cruelty with crumbs of kindness. After days or weeks of coldness, criticism, and control, suddenly there's a glimpse of the person you fell in love with. They're sweet. They apologize. They make promises. You have amazing sex. They remind you of the early days.

Your brain lights up. Dopamine surges. *This is it. They've changed. We're going to be okay.*

But they haven't changed. This is the cycle. And your brain is now addicted to the unpredictability itself.

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Neuroscience research has shown that variable reinforcement schedules create stronger neural pathways than predictable ones. A study published in *Neuropsychopharmacology* by Zhang and colleagues found that uncertainty increased activity in brain regions associated with reward anticipation. When you don't know when the "good" is coming, you stay in a constant state of hope and vigilance.

This is not love. This is biochemistry wrapped in chaos.

Why "Good Days" Make It Worse

You might think the good days would be healing. They're not. They're the trap.

The good days do several devastating things:

They provide just enough evidence to maintain hope. "See? When it's good, it's *so* good. Maybe this is the real them and the other stuff is just stress/their trauma/something I triggered."

They reset your tolerance. After experiencing the relief of the good phase, the bad phase feels survivable again. You've been reminded of what you're holding on for. You can endure a little more.

They create cognitive dissonance. The same person who terrorizes you also cuddles you tenderly. These two experiences can't both be true, so your brain works overtime trying to reconcile them—usually by minimizing the bad or blaming yourself.

They make leaving feel impossible. If they were awful all the time, leaving would be easier. But they're not. And you love the person in the good moments. Walking away feels like abandoning that person.

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Anita's Take: *"You're not addicted to them. You're addicted to the relief you feel when the storm passes. That's not love—that's Stockholm Syndrome in a relationship."*

The Addiction Model of Trauma Bonding

Patrick Carnes, a pioneer in understanding trauma bonds, proposed that these relationships function like addictions because they *are* addictions. The neurological processes are nearly identical.

Just like substance addiction, trauma bonding involves:

Tolerance. You need more intensity to feel the same highs. The early love bombing that swept you off your feet wouldn't impress you now—you've been conditioned to higher stakes.

Withdrawal. When you try to leave or when they pull away, you experience genuine physiological distress. Racing heart, anxiety, obsessive thoughts, physical pain. Your brain is screaming for the drug.

Continued use despite negative consequences. You know this is destroying you. You stay anyway. Not because you're stupid, but because addiction doesn't respond to logic.

Preoccupation. They consume your mental space. You can't focus on work, friends, hobbies—everything is filtered through the lens of the relationship.

Loss of control. You swear you'll maintain boundaries this time. You swear you won't call. You swear you won't apologize. Then you do, because the craving is stronger than your resolve.

Understanding trauma bonding as addiction isn't meant to shame you. It's meant to liberate you. You're not weak-willed. You're not pathetic. Your brain has been systematically conditioned to depend on this person, and breaking that conditioning requires the same compassion and support we'd offer any addict.

CHAPTER 4: OBSESSION, PREOCCUPATION & EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

Stage 6: Living in the Tornado

By this stage, your nervous system has been reorganized around the relationship. You're no longer living your life with a relationship in it—you're orbiting their moods like a satellite.

The hallmark signs of Stage 6:

Hypervigilance. You've become an expert in their micro-expressions, their tone of voice, the cadence of their texts. You can detect a shift in their mood before they're consciously aware of it. This isn't intuition—it's survival adaptation. Abuse victims develop hypervigilance because accurately predicting their abuser's behavior provides the illusion of control and may reduce harm.

Obsessive overthinking. You replay conversations trying to figure out what went wrong. You analyze their Instagram activity. You rehearse future conversations. You construct elaborate theories about their psychology that might explain the inexplicable.

Walking on eggshells. Your behavior has become entirely reactive. You don't make decisions based on what you want—you make them based on what will keep the peace. You've stopped being a person and started being a hostage negotiator.

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The exhausting pursuit of "fixing it." If you could just find the right words, the right approach, the right version of yourself, you could break through. You read books, listen to podcasts, try new strategies—all focused on changing *them* through changing yourself.

Minimization. To tolerate the intolerable, you shrink it. "It's not that bad." "Other people have it worse." "At least they don't hit me." "They had a hard childhood." The abuse becomes normalized because your system can't sustain continuous alarm.

Secrecy and shame. You stop telling people what's happening because you're embarrassed, because you know what they'll say, or because you're protecting your partner's image. The isolation deepens—now it's self-imposed.

Complete exhaustion. Chronic stress depletes cortisol reserves, dysregulates your HPA axis, and causes genuine physiological damage. You're not just tired—you're running on fumes in a body that's been in crisis mode for months or years.

Anita's Take: *"If you need an Excel spreadsheet and three therapists to decode whether someone loves you—they don't."*

The Cognitive Load of Abuse

One thing that's rarely discussed is how much *mental energy* abuse requires.

You're not just dealing with bad treatment. You're also:

Running constant threat assessment. Monitoring their mood. Planning for contingencies.

Managing their image to others. Hiding evidence of problems. Rehearsing responses. Processing confusing interactions. Seeking explanations. Blaming yourself. Forgiving them. Hoping.

Despairing. Hoping again.

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This cognitive load leaves nothing for you. Your work suffers. Your other relationships suffer. Your health suffers. Your sense of self—who you are outside this relationship—begins to dissolve.

And here's the cruel irony: the more depleted you become, the harder it is to leave. Leaving requires resources—emotional, cognitive, often financial and logistical. Abuse systematically drains exactly those resources.

CHAPTER 5: WHY LEAVING IS SO DAMN HARD

Stage 7: The Revolving Door

Stage 7 tells the truth: leaving hurts. Staying hurts. The cycle restarts.

Statistics on intimate partner violence show that victims leave an average of seven times before leaving for good. Seven times. This isn't because they lack willpower or intelligence. It's because leaving requires overcoming every survival mechanism the trauma bond has installed.

When you try to leave:

Your brain experiences withdrawal. The same neurological processes that make quitting heroin agonizing make quitting a trauma bond agonizing. You're not just missing a person—you're missing a chemical state.

Your attachment system panics. Human attachment is wired for proximity-seeking during distress. You're distressed, so your brain tells you to get closer to your attachment figure—even when they're the source of your distress. This is called the "abuser as refuge" paradox.

Cognitive dissonance demands resolution. You've invested so much—time, love, energy, identity. The human mind hates writing that off. It keeps searching for ways to justify the investment, which keeps you invested.

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Practical barriers compound emotional ones. Finances, housing, children, pets, social networks—untangling a life is complicated, and complication creates delay.

Leaving activates the honeymoon phase. Abusers often escalate positive attention when they sense they're losing control. They become the perfect partner, proving that they *can* change, that leaving would be a mistake. The cycle resets.

The Chains Are Internal

Here's what makes trauma bonds different from being physically trapped: the chains are internal.

Your brain has paired familiarity with safety. Even a painful familiar feels safer than an unknown future. The devil you know.

Your brain has paired inconsistency with hope. Each cycle of abuse followed by sweetness teaches you that if you just wait long enough, the good will return. Hope becomes a trap.

Your brain has paired your self-worth with their approval. Their opinion of you has become your opinion of you. Without their validation, you don't know who you are.

This is not weakness. This is conditioning. And like all conditioning, it can be undone.

Anita's Take: *"Leaving isn't a door—it's an escape room designed by someone who studied your entire psychology. Give yourself credit for every time you even looked for the exit."*

The Neuroscience of Hope: Why This Is Reversible

Here's the good news, and it's not just a platitude: neuroplasticity is real.

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Your brain's wiring isn't permanent. Neuroscientist Richard Davidson's research demonstrates that our brains remain capable of significant reorganization throughout life. The patterns created by trauma bonding were learned, which means they can be unlearned.

The research of Bruce McEwen on stress and the brain shows that while chronic stress causes measurable brain changes—including hippocampal shrinkage and amygdala enlargement—these changes are often reversible with stress reduction and targeted intervention.

Your brain can rewire. Your patterns can change. Your identity can be reclaimed and rebuilt. But it doesn't happen through willpower alone. It happens through understanding the cycle, regulating your nervous system, and deliberately installing new patterns.

This Intensive is the rewiring.

CHAPTER 6: HOW TO BREAK THE TRAUMA BOND (Without Breaking Yourself)

You don't break a trauma bond by white-knuckling it. You don't shame yourself into healing. You don't think your way out of something that lives in your body.

You break it by addressing each component of the bond: the cognitive distortions, the nervous system dysregulation, the identity erosion, the addiction patterns, and the isolation.

Reality Anchoring

Your grip on reality has been systematically loosened. Gaslighting has made you doubt your perceptions. Intermittent reinforcement has kept you perpetually off-balance. Rebuilding means creating external evidence that you can return to when your brain tries to rewrite history.

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Daily proof-texts to yourself. When something happens—a cruel comment, a broken promise, a moment of clarity—document it. Not to build a case against them, but to build a case for your own sanity. Your memory will try to soften things. Your written record won't.

Create a "truth file." Collect screenshots, notes, voice memos—anything that captures reality. When you're tempted to minimize, go back to the file. Let past-you remind present-you what actually happened.

Talk to witnesses. The people who love you saw things. Ask them to tell you what they observed. Their perspective anchors you when your own has been destabilized.

Write the story as if it happened to someone else. It's remarkable how differently we evaluate situations when we're not emotionally invested. If your best friend described your relationship to you, what would you tell her?

Nervous System Regulation

Trauma lives in the body. Polyvagal theory, developed by Stephen Porges, explains that our autonomic nervous system can become "stuck" in survival states—chronic fight, flight, or freeze. Breaking a trauma bond requires getting your nervous system out of constant crisis mode.

Breathwork. Extended exhales activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Try box breathing: inhale 4 counts, hold 4 counts, exhale 4 counts, hold 4 counts. Or simply make your exhale twice as long as your inhale.

Grounding techniques. The 5-4-3-2-1 technique engages your senses and brings you into the present moment: 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste.

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Somatic release. Shaking, dancing, screaming into a pillow, punching a mattress—your body needs to discharge the stress hormones it's been accumulating. Let it be messy.

Cold exposure. Cold water on your face, cold showers, or ice on your chest activates the dive reflex and can interrupt panic states. It's also a surprisingly effective way to prove to yourself that you can tolerate discomfort.

Vocal toning. Humming, singing, or simply making low "voo" sounds stimulates the vagus nerve and promotes calm. There's a reason people hum to self-soothe.

Safe touch. If you have access to safe physical contact—a hug from a friend, a massage, even self-holding like placing a hand on your heart—use it. Touch regulates the nervous system in ways nothing else can.

Rebuilding Self-Trust

The deepest wound of abuse isn't what they did—it's how it made you abandon yourself. You overrode your instincts. You ignored red flags. You betrayed your own boundaries repeatedly. Healing requires rebuilding the relationship with yourself.

Tiny promises, kept. Start impossibly small. Tell yourself you'll drink a glass of water, then do it. Tell yourself you'll go to bed by 11, then do it. Each kept promise repairs self-trust incrementally.

Notice and honor your no. Practice saying no to small things and sitting with the discomfort. Your no muscle has atrophied. It needs gentle training.

Self-compassion practice. Treat yourself with the kindness you'd offer a friend in your situation. Research by Kristin Neff shows that self-compassion is more psychologically beneficial than self-esteem, particularly for trauma recovery.

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Validate your own experience. You don't need anyone else to confirm that what happened was bad enough. You get to name your experience. You get to grieve it.

No-Contact / Low-Contact Strategy

Breaking the addiction requires breaking the supply. For most people, that means ending contact. For those who share children or other unavoidable connections, it means radically restructuring contact.

No-contact essentials: Block on all platforms. Yes, all of them. Yes, their number too. Yes, even LinkedIn. Ask mutual friends not to update you. Remove digital traces from your environment. Delete photos from your camera roll (or archive them somewhere you can't easily access).

Low-contact strategies: Parallel parenting instead of co-parenting. Communication only through apps that document everything. Grey rock technique—be boring, brief, and emotionally unresponsive. Treat interactions like business transactions.

Scripts for weak moments. Write down exactly what you'll do when you want to reach out. "When I want to call, I'll call my sister instead. When I want to look at their social media, I'll do 20 jumping jacks first." Make the alternative automatic.

Anticipate the extinction burst. When you cut off supply, they may escalate. Love bombing might return in full force, or the opposite—rage and punishment. Knowing this is coming helps you withstand it.

Anita's Take: *"No contact isn't punishment for them. It's peace and quiet for your nervous system. Your amygdala has been on a decade-long conference call—it's time to mute and leave the meeting."*

Community and Witnessing

Healing happens in relationship. The isolation must be reversed.

Find your people. Support groups, online communities, friends who get it, a therapist who specializes in trauma—surround yourself with people who can hold your story without minimizing or dramatizing it.

Let yourself be witnessed. There is something profoundly healing about telling your story to someone who believes you. Trauma expert Judith Herman calls this the testimony method—speaking what happened and having it received.

Be around regulated nervous systems. Nervous systems regulate each other. Being around calm, safe people helps your own system learn what safety feels like again.

CHAPTER 7: REPATTERNING LOVE — What Healthy Love Actually Looks Like

Once you've been in a trauma bond, healthy love can feel... wrong. Boring. Suspicious. Not intense enough.

That's because your nervous system has been recalibrated to interpret chaos as passion and anxiety as attraction. Healthy love doesn't trigger those pathways—and at first, that absence can feel like absence of love altogether.

Part of recovery is retraining your system to recognize real love, even when it doesn't set off fireworks.

What Healthy Love Includes

Consistency. They show up, day after day, in predictable ways. Their words match their actions. You don't have to decode their behavior because it's straightforward.

Safety. Your nervous system is calm in their presence. Not euphoric, not anxious—calm. You can think clearly. You can be yourself without performance or hypervigilance.

Repair. Conflicts happen, but they get resolved. Someone apologizes—genuinely, not performatively. Change actually occurs. You don't have the same fight endlessly with no resolution.

Accountability. They own their behavior. They don't deflect, minimize, or blame you for their choices. When they hurt you, they acknowledge it without you having to fight for that acknowledgment.

Mutuality. The relationship is balanced. You're not doing all the work. Your needs matter as much as theirs. Compromise goes both ways.

Support for your full life. They celebrate your friendships, your family, your interests, your growth. They're not threatened by your expansion. They want you to thrive, even in ways that don't directly benefit them.

Transparency. You know where you stand. There are no games, no tests, no mysterious silences to interpret. They tell you what they're thinking and feeling.

Boredom that's actually peace. The absence of drama isn't the absence of love. It's the presence of safety. What feels boring at first will eventually feel like home.

Love Bombing & The Trauma Bond Trap

Anita's Take: *"Healthy love is a nervous system that doesn't need a helmet. It's having hard conversations that don't end in WWII. It's waking up next to someone and not immediately checking the emotional weather forecast."*

Grief for What You Thought You Had

Here's a hard truth: you have to grieve.

Not just the relationship—the fantasy. The person you thought they were. The future you imagined. The version of yourself that believed you'd found your person.

That grief is real, even if the love wasn't what you thought it was. Something existed—the hope, the investment, the longing. You're allowed to mourn it even as you recognize it was built on false foundations.

Grief isn't linear. You might feel relief one day and crushing sorrow the next. You might find yourself missing someone you simultaneously know was terrible for you. Both can be true.

Signs You're Healing

Progress isn't always obvious in the moment, but these markers suggest you're on the path:

You think about them less. Not never—just less.

The good memories stop erasing the bad ones. You can hold both.

You trust your perceptions again. When something feels off, you believe yourself.

You're not waiting for them to change. You've accepted who they showed you they were.

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Your window of tolerance has expanded. Things that used to dysregulate you are manageable now.

You feel bored and you don't panic. Boredom isn't a sign of failure.

You're reconnecting with who you were before. Or discovering who you want to become.

CHAPTER 8: A FEBRUARY LOVE REBELLION

This month is not about roses or chocolates. It's not about finding someone new to fill the void. It's not about performing happiness for Instagram.

This month is about reclamation.

You are reclaiming your mind from the cognitive distortions. Your body from the chronic hypervigilance. Your identity from the person they told you you were. Your future from the patterns that were installed without your consent.

You're reparenting the parts of you that didn't get what they needed—the parts that make sense of why you were vulnerable to this in the first place. This isn't about blame; it's about completion.

You're repatterning how you love and what you tolerate. You're teaching your nervous system a new definition of safety. You're building the capacity for something better than you've known.

And you're doing all of this not because love in February demands it, but because you deserve ease.

You deserve people who don't turn you into versions of yourself you don't recognize.

You deserve relationships that don't require constant emotional triage.

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You deserve a nervous system that knows peace.

You don't need Cupid. You need Clarity, Calm, and Courage.

Good news—you've got all three.

Anita's Final Take: *"The best love story isn't finding someone who 'completes' you. It's becoming someone who doesn't need completing. Then, if partnership shows up, it's a bonus—not a rescue mission. You've been your own hero this whole time. Now act like it."*

APPENDIX: REFERENCES

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"Love Bombing & The Trauma Bond Trap" delves into the psychological manipulation of love bombers who exploit our emotional wiring, creating powerful trauma bonds through intermittent reinforcement. The book reveals how these relationships can mimic addiction, making it nearly impossible to break free as our brains become conditioned to seek validation from the very individuals who cause harm. Through research and personal insights, readers learn to recognize the signs of love bombing, reclaim their self-trust, and ultimately find a path to healing.