

## INTRODUCTION *Entering the Gap*

If you have picked up this book, something is probably already wrong, and you are probably already not sure if it counts as wrong. That uncertainty is the first symptom. The thing being done to you is happening slowly enough that you cannot point to it. There is no single moment you could put on a page. There is a feeling instead. A growing sense that you are smaller around this person than you used to be around anyone. A sense that you are always managing something. A sense that the version of yourself you bring into the room is calculated, not chosen. A sense that you have begun to apologize for things you did not do, and that the apologies are starting to feel automatic. You are not sure if any of this is a problem, because every single instance of it, taken on its own, looks like nothing. It is only when you stack them next to each other that the shape becomes visible. And by the time you can see the shape, you are already inside it.

I wrote this book because I was you, and I could not find it anywhere when I needed it. I was inside a relationship with a woman who was destroying me, slowly, with patterns I could feel but could not name. I knew something was wrong. I could not explain it to anyone, including myself. The few people I tried to explain it to looked at me strangely, because the surface of the relationship looked normal, and the surface of her looked normal,

and the things I was describing sounded, when I said them out loud, like I was the one with the problem. So I stopped saying them out loud. I stayed for three years. The staying cost me more than I knew at the time.

What I needed, during those three years, was a book that did one thing. I needed a book that named the patterns clearly enough that I could finally trust my own eyes. I did not need theory. I did not need a degree-level explanation of personality disorders. I did not need a clinician's tone. I needed someone who had been on the receiving end to tell me, in plain language, what was being done to me. That book did not exist. So I wrote it.

This is a book about manipulation, but it is not a manipulation manual. It will not teach you to do anything to anyone. It will teach you to recognize what is being done to you, and to recognize when it is time to leave. Those are the two skills that get a man out of a situation like the one I was in. The first one takes longer to develop than you think. The second one is harder to act on than you imagine. Both are buildable, in private, with the right help, in the right amount of time. This book is here to help with both.

I am going to tell you my story, but the story is not the point. The story is the proof that the patterns are real. You will recognize some of them. You may recognize most of them. Where you recognize them, the recognition is the gift. It means the thing you have been unable to name has a name. It means you are not crazy. It means the smallness you have been feeling around this person has a cause that exists outside of you. It means there is a way out.

I am also going to tell you the truth about what knowing does. Knowing does not free you. Knowing is the first step in a much longer staircase. There are men in your life right now, or men in