

## *Hello, From The Storyteller (Again)*

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Welcome to Part Two of this workbook series. If you have not read Part One, where we learned about our emotional vulnerabilities, this workbook will only be of partial help to you. However, it will still make sense. I created these workbooks because of my own lived experience in **cycles** of abuse, manipulation and emotional exploitation. I saw through these experiences how there were parts of myself that made me more susceptible to emotional coercion – specifically to certain types of coercive stories. After studying this within myself, I began to recognize these same susceptibilities in people around me, too. Specifically, three parts, that I call our “unique fingerprint of vulnerability”. These are:

- Ignorance about oneself, others or aspects of a situation.
- Any unrealistic, harmful or dysfunctional belief that someone holds about themselves, relationships or the world **which** weakens their sense of self, their perception of their reality, or their belief in their sense of reality.
- Fantasy-based thinking and/or addiction to fantasy, where someone is addicted to fantasy like a drug, someone expects a fantasy to come true because it feels realistic, or someone is emotionally reliant on a fantasy to be able to cope and exist, because they do not have an ability to tolerate their own reality.

Everyone’s fingerprint of vulnerability is made up of different parts. Their complexity is why predators and con-artists case and observe potential targets, and it is why we have to learn what our unique vulnerabilities are. We did this in Part One. We have to understand our own tendencies and beliefs that work against us, to fully appreciate the coercive, unrealistic stories that can manipulate us, personally.

Now that we have finished learning about the vulnerable person (ourselves and the people we care about), Part Two will be addressing the stereotypes and misunderstandings surrounding grooming. Specifically, the tactics of grooming and how the emotional vulnerabilities we learned about ourselves in Part One act in a symbiotic relationship with these tactics.

In Part One, I told you seven stories. Here, in Part Two, I have seven more stories to tell.

To fully understand grooming and protect ourselves better, we need to learn how to think like the personalities being discussed. However, we are not trying to understand exclusively predatory or highly exploitative personalities. The tactics we will examine in this workbook can be used by anyone who chooses to pick them up as a tool. They are available to any of us, and any of us can become emotionally manipulative when pushed into specific corners. They are not tools exclusively owned by the more extreme or abnormal personalities within our world – though these personality types often get focused on the most heavily. However, many people have picked these tools up if the tool is effective enough to help them reach their goal. The temptation can be great. Therefore, the personalities we will be discussing can fall into many different categories, with many different intentions. That is why no one – once again – will be labeled with any specific psychology-based terminology to avoid distraction and from seeing where more unexpected similarities can be found.

The greatest tool to manipulate and groom is words. Everyone is a storyteller, in some capacity, trying to tell a story that they believe and/or that they want others to believe. **But we have choices in which stories we choose to accept and there is power in learning how to analyze stories and words better.** So, words are what we will be intensely studying here in Part Two.

Welcome aboard.

I'm glad you came back. Now we can move on to the fun part (and I do hope that you have fun again).

Part One was for learning ourselves. Part Two is for practicing self-defense. I step here. Where do you step next? **Just as our vulnerabilities are unique to each of us, so are our emotional responses.** I tell you a story... and how do you respond to it? More specifically, how does your mind respond and what stories does it especially like?

We will begin to explore and find out together.

Self-defense can't be about perfectionism. If it is about perfection, we remain frozen and unwilling to practice and fail. Self-defense, like in boxing or fencing, is about **failing so that we can improve and grow.**

Also remember that we do not begin with dragons when we practice defending ourselves better against stories that may harm us. We begin with the simpler and the smaller – which is what this workbook is for.

#### Introduction:

*So those were the first Great Adventures of Someone and her forest friends (and her new friend, Aperson, of course). There will be more time later to hear other stories from these first-new-friend days. For now, we must move on to the other Great Adventures that Someone had alone, in a part of the forest that came to be known as the Thoughtful Place.*

*Someone discovered this Thoughtful Place after she met Aperson and he filled her with Curiosity from the questions that she had been asking and answering and thinking because of him. On the many, many pages that you just read before.*

*Curiosity, as we know, leads to many things. And one of the things that Curiosity led Someone to, was a new part of the forest she had not considered exploring before. It was not so far away from the gait that Aperson was trying to find, but Someone did not know this and Aperson did not know it either. So the gait continued to remain unfound.*

*In this new part of the woods came new personalities for Someone to meet. Perhaps it was because of this strange new part of the forest. Perhaps it was because of her being alone, and this aloneness caused the personalities to find her. Either way, we must continue on now to the next lessons Someone came to learn...*

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Someone had many trees that she loved to visit, but her most favorite tree was her Wondering Tree. She had been both wondering and wandering when she had found it one day, and so that is what it came to be called. On days when she had run out of things to jump over, or climb over, or friends to visit ... over, Someone would go to a new part of the forest she had discovered for just herself alone and sit beneath the Wondering Tree to find new things to wonder about, instead.

She wondered about what was to be done if something was lost and never ended up being found again. Did that mean that it did not want to be? And if so, what had she done to hurt the lost thing's feelings? She lost a great many things. She wondered about if the word 'fly' meant something different if you flew as a leaf versus as a bird. A person would certainly know. She wondered about if grasshoppers were ticklish. Mainly because she had tickled one the other day and she thought that they had had a very good time. She wondered about what would happen if she ate 15 quail eggs in a row. Mainly because she had never done it.

It was as she was sitting and thinking about these sorts of things one day that a whistle came on the wind. A whistle which Someone had never heard before.

At first, she wondered if a new wind had come to visit them. For Someone, it did not matter very much if a new wind visited the woods. Any sort of wind was welcome in the forest in her mind, especially if it was a playful one. Yet, as soon as the whistle came, it was gone.

Nevertheless, now that her wonderings had been interrupted, Someone decided she had wondered everything that she could for that day, and she would rather explore instead. In this new place, there were so many new things to find.

So on her way she went, exploring things to both the right and to the left, and also forwards and behind her, too. However, every time she turned around to go behind her, she found her forwards there, which made things very confusing for exploring each them for quite some time.

Along the way she saw trees and stones, and a lake that was similar to the one that A person had found, but it was much smaller in size and it looked more green than blue in its color. Someone also saw trees whose barks were different colors and textures than the ones in her parts of the woods.

The one thing that Someone kept looking for, however, were new animals to make her friends. Someone loved to ask new questions to new friends. Sometimes the animals had just as many questions back, and sometimes they said things like "oh my, my stomach isn't feeling well, I really must go."

It was while Someone was looking for new animal friends that she stumbled upon the small, spherical shaped objects sprinkled throughout the grass underneath a shag bark tree. They were blue, and shone brightly in the sunlight, which made them easy to spot. At first, Someone's immediate curiosity was if they were Wonderments. But upon picking one up and examining it, it did not appear to do specifically special or life-changing like a Wondement would do. Their bright blue exterior was surprisingly soft and malleable, despite appearing hard.

Someone was in the middle of collecting all of them to take back to her part of the woods when the long whistle came again. Someone was sitting cross legged on the ground, with a large pile of spheres gathered into her shirt and at the sound of the whistle, she stopped and looked up.

There was nothing other than the forest that she could see, though. The whistle floated on the air and gently wafted through the trees before fading away and vanishing once more. She was preparing to stand up and move elsewhere when she suddenly saw a large tail poking out from behind a tree, some distance away. She noted that it was most fabulously green and furry.

Someone froze, unsure of what to do. Since she was not familiar with any of the animals in this part of the woods, she could not definitively call any of them friends. But did not being called friend right now mean that you were not able to be called a friend later? She made a note to wonder about that later under her tree.

However, she didn't know whether to call out or to sneak away to the animal when she did not know its personality. Before she could decide for herself, though, a smiling green face of a fox peeked out from behind the tree and looked directly at her. Its black eyes were small and bright, like a bird's, and the fox did not appear surprised to see her at all while she was very surprised to see it.

It looked at her with a familiarity that made her uncomfortable and Someone wondered if it had been following her the whole time.

Almost impulsively, it seemed, the fox emitted the same, long whistle from its mouth while staring at her and then moved to step out from behind the tree. With his whole body now in view, Someone saw that he wore a bowtie made of out of birds' feathers around his neck, whose purple and blue colors stood out in bright contrast to his almost lime-green colored fur. He was quite tall and stood upright on his hind legs like a person would, but much taller and much larger.



"Why hello there, tiny thing," the fox declared.

He did not move, other than to comfortably prop his tall body against the tree where he had been hiding. His voice was friendly enough, but she noticed his tiny eyes glance down immediately to the blue spheres clutched within her hands. A large smile stayed stretched across his face, but his tiny eyes stared at the spheres intensely.

"Hello," Someone said. The hesitation that she felt shone through in her voice.

"Not to fret, not to fret," he said comfortingly, putting his paws together in what was meant to be a reassuring pose, but which came across as devious looking instead. "My name is Thistle, to introduce myself and make your acquaintance."

"I'm Someone," she said, still studying him as equally as he studied her.

"Are you from these parts, Someone?" he asked, stroking the bird feathers in his bowtie as he looked around them. "Do you have friends close by?"

"Yes," she said, not understanding why he was asking about her friends. Perhaps he was looking for friends like she was. "I have many friends, and they are very close by. Do you have family close by?" she asked back, trying to follow his way of making conversation.

“So, you are quite familiar with this area, then,” the fox said cheerfully, not seeming to hear her question. She noticed that his cheerfulness did not seem to have joy like her other friends’ cheerfulness did.

“Yes,” Someone said. And then: “Well, not *this* area,” she corrected herself. “This area is very new to me.”

“Ahhhh, I see, I see,” the fox said, moving closer and his eyes resting on the blue spheres once again. “Are you good at running, and climbing trees?” he asked.

“Um... I think so,” Someone said, pulling her shirt tighter to protect the bundle of spheres from his gaze. She wasn’t sure why she felt the need to do this, or why she felt the need to move backwards a bit upon the ground.

“I only ask because I saw you running earlier for fun! I am very good at running, too,” he said, yet something in his tone made her think that they ran for different reasons. “And I suppose you like exploring, too? Since you are not from these parts, as you said.”

“Yes,” she answered simply. “That’s how I found these balls.”

“Ah yes,” The fox said, a bit too quickly at the mention of the blue spheres and his bright eyes widened. “I could not help but notice the beautiful things you had collected. So you are not very familiar with what you’ve found, then?” he asked, leaning very far forward. His eyes remained unblinking as he waited intensely for her response.

“Um, no, I don’t think they look familiar to me,” Someone said hesitantly, peeking into her shirt to be extra sure.

“So you might be willing to *trade for them*, then,” he said, and he stared at her hard as he reached up to stroke the birds’ feathers again.

“Well...” Someone answered slowly. “Trade for what?” she then asked in an unexcited sort of way.

She didn’t know anything about the balls, it was true, but the fox’s intense interest made them seem quite important and like maybe she should not give them away at all.

“Perhaps one of the objects that I have collected for myself in my fox den. A collection for a collection, you might say,” he responded, showing his teeth with his wide smile this time. “If you come with me, I can show you now. It’s in a special, secret place where I keep to myself in these woods.”

“I... suppose that is fine,” Someone said, not seeing any particular reason why she shouldn’t go. The spheres were important to him for reasons that mattered to foxes and should not matter to her. Balancing herself carefully and standing up, she began to walk beside him as he placed a paw on her back to guide her away from the area that she was so familiar with. It was into a new part of the woods that they began to travel, the fox and the girl.

“Why is your name Thistle?” she asked as they walked. “Is that the type of fox that you are?”

“It means ‘to prick,’” he said, looking down at her. And he had to look quite far down, with how tall he was and how tall she wasn’t.

“What do you prick?” she asked, in response, still juggling the spheres awkwardly in her shirt as they walked.

“Only things that ask to be,” he answered.

“Your friends ask to be pricked? Is it a game?” she asked.

“I don’t have friends, I have acquaintances and contacts,” he said calmly. “And sometimes we ask for things but tell ourselves that we didn’t. Everyone loves a bit of trouble now and then, anyway.”

Someone, however, had never wanted ‘trouble’ and the idea of being pricked by a Thistle-fox sounded very scary and not loveable as an idea, indeed. She was not sure why others would want or love this at all.

They had not been walking very long at all. Someone was about to ask another question about pricking, yet suddenly through the brush and along the ground came very fast rustling that grew closer and closer. The fox peered back, a look of concern flashing briefly over his face.

“Let’s go this way to my den instead,” he said, and was pushing her gently in a new direction through the trees when out of nowhere, a very small animal that Someone had not come across before came jumping out in front of them. It stood in their path (albeit they could have easily stepped over it and continued on their way) and put its tiny paws out in front of it, clearly signaling for them to halt. So tiny was it and so curious was she, that Someone paused.

“Someone!” the tiny animal said, addressing her by name and this taking her by surprise.

“You know my name?” she asked. “Do I know you?”

“No, you don’t. Your friend sent me! You can’t go with this fox, he is d-dangerous!”

Feeling confused, but also very nervous now, Someone took a step backwards.

“My friends sent you? Who was it? Bearly or Orange, perhaps?”

“Bearly,” the small animal nodded fervently and fast. It wrung its tiny hands while looking up at the fox in fear, whose lips had curled back very unpleasantly while he remained strangely smiling as he always did.

“Why did she send you? Did she know I was here?” Someone asked, looking from the fox to the tiny animal and thinking that perhaps she should simply go on her own way again by herself. She could make new friends another day.

“To watch over you in this new part of the woods! This fox is dangerous, please listen. Bearly has had me watching you for protection since she knew that you were exploring over here all by yourself. I am from here and familiar with this area.” The tiny animal continued to speak so quickly in his nervous energy that it was almost hard to understand him.

“I have done nothing dangerous,” the fox argued back, clearly offended at the words that the tink animal spoke. Holding his paws out of front of him to protest his innocence to the audience in front of him, he continued, “I am merely taking her to my den to show her some things in an honest trade. I’ve never seen or met this chipmunk,” he added to Someone directly.

“What is a chipmunk?” Someone asked.

“Why that is what I am,” the tiny animal said in his anxious, fast-talking manner. “But this fox, h-he is luring you to a dangerous place. Fox dens are not safe, animals here know that. Please, please follow me back to safety!”

“There is nothing dangerous I wish to do at all,” the fox said. However, his tiny black eyes had grown increasingly more intense as the chipmunk spoke, and Someone saw him once again eyeing the spheres that were tucked away within the fabric of her shirt. He rubbed his own paws together now, too, but she was not sure why.

Someone looked back and forth between the two of them as they both waited, poised, to hear her choice.

Finally, she said, “I will go with you.” And it was to the chipmunk that she spoke.

“Let us make haste!” the chipmunk exclaimed quickly, hopping past them in almost a flash. He apparently moved as fast as he spoke. He once again darted a nervous glance at the fox who was now staring at him almost hungrily. No inkling of a smile was found on his face anymore.

At first, Someone thought that maybe the fox would do something to stop them, but he did not. As she began to follow the chipmunk away, he only called after them one last time, “You’re both wrong!” and then he disappeared into the woods.

“P-Please do not fret,” the chipmunk called out as he scampered along in front of her, stopping every few feet to wait for her to catch up. “We will get you back to the safer part of the woods very quickly. I am very glad that I followed you, otherwise Bearly would have been very, very angry with me, most surely, for any harm coming to you. Oh my, oh my, yes indeed.”

“Yes, thank you for protecting me,” Someone said, still trying to carefully hold the spheres within her shirt so that none of them fell, while also trying to walk faster and keep up with the chipmunk’s speedful running. While she somewhat understood that danger had been close at hand, she mainly felt grateful that she could now go home and show her friends the interesting things that she had found. They would definitely be most impressed.

“M-May I take a look at what you’re carrying, that the fox was so interested in?” The chipmunk asked, after they had gone quite a ways and Someone continued to struggle with holding the spheres as they tried to escape.

“Yes, look at my amazing find!” Someone said proudly.

Finding a spot beneath a large tree, she gently dumped the small, soft spheres onto the ground and beamed. They shone brightly in the light, reflecting the sun back at both of them and causing Someone to squint. The chipmunk hopped over to join her at her side.

“Ah, briar balls,” the chipmunk said, taking one and holding it up in his paw. “Definitely a more rare find in these parts of the woods. However, these appear to be rotten, I’m sorry to say. The fox must not have gotten a good to look at them to have known. He surely wouldn’t have wanted them if he had. You should just throw them away.”

“That’s okay, rottenness doesn’t bother me,” Someone said, looking down at the remaining pile of tiny spheres on the ground most proudly. Blue would be so happy to see that they were blue like him. Perhaps a few would be good decorations in his nest, since he still hadn’t lucked out on a new female yet. “I would like to show my friends what I found! Maybe there’s another use for them that we can all find. Rotten things can be useful, too and we are all very good eating almost anything. The other day, I found the most disgusting—”

“I assure you that there is nothing useful with something like that,” the chipmunk said matter-of-factly, interrupting her on accident it seemed while he still studied the spheres. “No one I know would want to keep

rotted briar balls. They're most likely moldy inside. Yeck," he said, making a face in disgust and holding it away from him at the thought. "I can't stand moldy things."

"Then you're the one who should not have these," Someone said, laughing. She stood up and held out her hand for the one that the chipmunk held. He handed it back to her with a tiny, gracious bow.

"You are probably right," he said, smiling back, and they continued on their way through the woods.

"What is your name, by the way?" Someone asked as they walked.

"Chester," he replied.

"It's very nice to meet you, Chester," Someone answered politely and stopped walking for a moment so that she could carefully lean over to extend a hand and shake his tiny paw the way that A person had shown her how to do.

"Likewise," he responded, watching as she curiously shook his paw up and down for no specific reason that he saw. "I've lived in this area for quite some time, as I said. There are many dangerous animals but I'm glad that a kind someone such as yourself is here. I'm always grateful when I can meet new, kind friends who are trustworthy in these parts. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only trustworthy animal around. It can make living here very scary."

He anxiously looked around as he spoke, as if reminding himself that he should be watching their surroundings more closely.

"In my part of the woods, I have many trustworthy and kind friends!" Someone replied cheerfully.

"Well you are very lucky, indeed, then," he said. "May I ask which area you found those briar balls in, by the way?"

"I believe it was over there," Someone said, pointing to the left.

"Oh my," the chipmunk said. "To the left? Are you sure? Are you quite sure?" He repeated with his speech faster than ever now. He halted in his tracks and wrung his hands together in the terrified way that he did before.

"Yes, I believe so. Why?" she asked.

"That's where my friend Peel lives. He is a chipmunk just like myself. He collects briar balls and is very proud of his collection. Oh my, oh my, I think you might have taken them from him by accident!"

"Will he be upset?" Someone asked. She looked down at the balls most sadly, hoping that he would say no. "I was so excited to show these to my friends."

"I understand," the chipmunk said, nodding rapidly but still sympathetically. "I also once took several piles of nuts by mistake from another forest animal who had moved into the area. Unbeknownst to me, of course. A very embarrassing day, indeed. I apologized more times that I can count when it happened and she found me. *Quite* the passionate lady, I tell you," he said, almost wincing slightly at the memory. "However, since they were not yours to take, it would be most kind if you returned them to where you found them. He would indeed be most upset! Especially if I did not help return them after finding them with you."

"I understand," Someone said. "Let's go back and I will put them back."

However, a moment later as they came to a large bush with purple flowers, Someone recognized it and realized that she and the fox had come from the *right* side of the woods and not the left.

“Oh look!” she cried out excitedly, pointing to the bush. “I know that bush, I know where we are now! I did not come from the left side after all!”

“Are you sure?” the chipmunk asked nervously.

“Quite sure!” Someone replied, very happy once again.

“Oh excellent,” the chipmunk said, sounding quite relieved and tabbed at his brow with his paw. “I was so concerned that Peel would be upset with both of us and my friendship would be affected.”

“Well now you can feel happy and joyous once again!” Someone said cheerfully, to encourage him. “And now that I know where I am, I know where I’m going and how to get back to my friends so that I can show them the briar balls that I found! They will be so very interested to experiment with me.”

“Very good,” the chipmunk said, bowing politely to her once more. “If it’s not of an inconvenience, I might walk with you until I know for sure you’re back where you need to be in your own woods. I’m only concerned that other animals might come across your path before you’re back home safely. I would not want Bearly to be upset with me if anything happened to you again before you certainly got back home.”

“It’s no bother to me, you can follow if you’d like. That’s very kind of you.” Someone replied. More company was never a bother to her on her journeys.

Yet she had not even moved several steps away before she heard a tiny squeal behind her and she looked back to see Chester laying on his side on the ground.

“Chester!” she said, coming back to him. “What’s wrong??”

“I stepped on a thorn,” he cried, showing her his tiny foot where some kind of sharp object was sticking out between his toes. “I don’t know what to do!”

“Should I—?” Someone began to say, starting to look around, but the chipmunk interrupted her.

“Wait! I just remembered! Briar balls actually help with removing thorns!”

“They do? That’s great!” Someone exclaimed. “Oh, but mine are rotten.” She remembered a moment later, her face falling again.

“No, even the rotten ones work!” he cried, lifting a tiny paw towards her as he laid on the ground. “Please, I’m in so much pain!”

“Okay, I can give you one to use—” Someone started to say, but the chipmunk interrupted her once again.

“I’m so sorry but I will most likely need to use all of them. They are so tiny and this thorn is so large.”

“All of them?” Someone asked sadly, looking down at the chipmunk’s paw. “I could probably try to pull the thorn out first, though.”

Someone moved to reach down towards the chipmunk's paw but he moved away from her, faster than she expected. "I-I'm sorry," he stammered. "I just know that it's in very deep and I don't want it to hurt if you do it wrong. The briar balls would take away all of the pain and make the thorn fall out easily! Please, don't you want to help me??"

"I do," Someone said. "It's just that I don't want to use all of the briar balls if we don't have to. Couldn't I please try to pull the thorn out myself first, to see if I could? I will be very careful," she promised. She made a movement to reach down again but once again the chipmunk was too fast, and scurried away, although somewhat awkwardly, on three of his paws.

"N-no!" he cried out nervously. "Why don't you want to help me when I've been so helpful to you? I've helped you out, getting you to safety and away from that dangerous fox. You're not a kind & trustworthy someone after all, at all. You're selfish like all of the others! I'm hurting and you just want to keep your briar balls to yourself, when they're rotten, they're not even good!"

"But I—" Someone tried to cut in, but he continued, interrupting her again.

"Bearly would *not* approve of how you're acting right now. You're not acting like a good friend and you know it," he said, beginning to cry softly into his tiny paws.

"I'm sorry!" Someone said, sitting down upon the ground and releasing the tiny blue spheres from her shirt so that they could roll softly into a pile beside the chipmunk. "Here, you're right. I'm sorry for being selfish, please stop crying." She rubbed his tiny back with one of her hands.

The chipmunk immediately raised his tear-stained face to look gratefully at the briar balls now sitting beside him. "Thank you, Someone. Thank you, truly. I appreciate this act of kindness so much. Especially in return for the kind things that I have done for you. And I will tell Bearly of this act of kindness, too, when I next see him." The chipmunk continued to ramble in his fast-paced way as he gathered the tiny blue spheres closer to him.

However, Someone paused at his words. "Him?" Someone said slowly.

"What?" the chipmunk asked absentmindedly.

"The next time you see him?" she asked, repeating the words with a bit more emphasis.

"Yes, the next time I see him, I will tell him of your great kindness," the chipmunk repeated himself without faltering in any of his words.

"What does Bearly look like?" Someone asked, putting her hand on the chipmunk's paws and stopping him from what he was doing with the collection of briar balls.

He paused and looked up at her slowly, the expression on his face completely different now and changed.

"It doesn't matter now, does it?" he asked, his voice sounded different now, as well. "The briar balls are mine." And before Someone could stop him, he had gathered all of the tiny blue balls into the large pouch-like structures of his cheeks and was scampering away through the forest.

Someone sat there, unsure of what to do or think. She sat there, just staring. Slowly, she got up and decided to make her way back to her Wondering Tree so that she could wonder some more over the things that had just occurred. When she arrived and had been sitting there beneath her tree for some minutes, however, she heard another long whistle from behind another, nearby tree.

“I don’t have the briar balls anymore,” she called out in frustration. Thistle’s fox face, smiling wide once again, emerged from behind the tree like it had before.

“I know. I followed and watched how the chipmunk tricked you. They love briar balls even more than foxes.” He said, teeth showing in his smile. “I would have traded you honestly for them, but you believed him instead.

They weren’t rotten, by the way,” he added, letting out another impulsive, long whistle while staring down at her.

“Well how was I to know any of that?” Someone asked, huffing. “Everything he said made sense to me.”

The fox stroked the bowtie of birds’ feathers as he looked up towards the sky amusingly in response to her words. “Didn’t anyone ever tell you to never trust a chipmunk?”

SAMPLE

*[Sample from continuation from next section]*

“...The same exact tactics that a sexual predator used to pressure me, manipulate me, control me and exploit me for sex –while conflating it with the idea of love– are now extreme versions of the contemporary, common dating process used in all areas of relationships, for both men and women.

Love bombing is the new normal within dating, and people want the love bombing experience. “Real” attraction is sold as instantaneous, caused by someone’s near-psychopathic charisma or charm. Limerent-level obsession is the new version of having a crush. Pacing should be fast, and enmeshment and addiction are the new ways to feel in love. It can be flattering early on in a relationship when the other person showers you with affection, constant attention and gifts. There’s a line, however, when the continuous compliments, unending texts and grand romantic gestures are given with the goal of emotionally influencing you or gaining control over you.

It’s an odd contradiction, considering the world has never been more anti-psychopath and anti-narcissist while also being incredibly pro-mental health. People denounce narcissism, psychopathy and many dysfunctional personality disorders, but then, without realizing it, crave seduction and relationship dynamics that match these predatory personality styles. They want their dating experiences to include a predator’s most common manipulative tactics. This is a direct result of becoming normalized to predatory dating and sexually exploitative dynamics.

Storytelling that teaches us how stability, independence and measured-ness can exist within passionate love is being forgotten and erased. As a result, the gap is quickly narrowing between those with trauma-based ways of connecting and those with more stable and more self-reliant “attachment styles”, while going completely unnoticed. What is culturally normal and common is not questioned, but does an idea being normal mean that it is safe and right?

The problem is that grooming doesn’t happen in obvious, extreme ways. Manipulation happens over time, for any type of person, within the very subtle, incredibly common, and very, very tiny moments. Tiny new habits, tiny new thoughts and beliefs which are introduced to us, here and there. Moments that are so brief, common, or minute that people often gloss over them, consider them insignificant and unimportant, and judge them unworthy of discussion or deeper examination. They look almost like breadcrumbs to me, but breadcrumbs which are evidence of something larger, creating a trail towards something insidious. We don’t look up to see where these breadcrumb moments are leading us. We just continue eating one crumb at a time without consideration of their significance, and I understand why. I was such a person, myself, for a decade and a half of my life.

These breadcrumb moments can be highly innocuous. A brand-new co-worker offering you a secret to keep about someone else, followed by them complimenting you on how trustworthy you seem and turning to you for comfort. Either or both of these events can be harmless. However, these small, breadcrumb moments could also result in someone slowly pigeon-holing you into required loyalty and triangulation against others over time. Your “trustworthy character” becomes weaponized against you via encouraged secret-keeping and charismatically solicited trust. Other moments can look like the smallest act of accepting a benign gift or favor from a new friend, only to have it held over your head later for continual, obligatory requests for favors that never seem to end. Perhaps it is being asked to cater to/for someone’s insecurities by simply not attending a social outing that night. Or not texting your friends as often one day so that the other person can feel more emotionally attended to. It may happen only once or twice, at first, and these can be harmless on their own as acts of kindness. Eventually, however, they could result in your slow isolation from everyone and everything important to you.

Crime and abuse are made up of incredible subtleties – a micro-framework that most people struggle to see, let alone understand. The trick to understanding is found in examining the tiny details of this framework

within ourselves and our lives. We must look at the things that felt common and normal, not necessarily what felt abnormal. Only then, when these tiny breadcrumbs are pieced together to form the larger picture does it become obvious.

Most of us have seen how our own secret beliefs and/or addictions can work against us when coupled with convincing trickery and unrecognizable deceit, tangling us in a complex web that's very difficult to unweave. I want to help you recognize how these small, breadcrumbs can be the key pieces for predatory personalities to be able to indoctrinate and exploit, and how you can use that recognition to stay safe.

The tiniest of all breadcrumbs that we will be examining will be words, and the ideas behind them. Part One focused on the emotionally vulnerable beliefs we hold, which are born from the words that we hear and we believe are truth. Words that we hear consistently, or words we have heard in passing. Part One focused on the beliefs born from those words (how we have come to think about our valuable "oranges" that we possibly give away).

Now, Part Two will focus on the words, themselves. Words we should pay closer attention to in our day-to-day reality. The stories we are told and the verbal tactics used **to get** a valuable orange from us.

Words are the things that shape our reality and give us all our ideas and beliefs. They are how we connect, express, inspire, teach and ultimately, convince. They are the most powerful tool that we have, and they are the building blocks of life. With them, we can create or destroy many things inside of ourselves...."

*[End sample]*