



*Kristen Milstead*  
WRITER - RESEARCHER - ACTIVIST

## Why Can't I Just Leave:

*A Guide to Waking Up and Walking Out of a Pathological Love Relationship*

FOREWORD BY SANDRA L. BROWN,  
AUTHOR OF **WOMEN WHO LOVE  
PSYCHOPATHS**

More than 60 million people have been in a pathological love relationship with someone who has an impaired conscience.

Survivors may try to break off the relationship yet feel powerless to stop their partners from walking in and out of their lives.

Pathological partners may lie so much that sometimes survivors aren't sure they know what's real or who their partners really are.

Survivors may alternate between believing that their partners are the love of their lives and questioning their sanity or even feeling their lives may be in danger.

Survivors may continue to feel fiercely loyal toward their partners, although their partners put them through unspeakable acts of cruelty and betrayal.

The impact can be devastating, and the most extreme effects on survivors of these relationships may sound as if they only happen in movies.

Using the stories of survivors and social psychological research on compliance, cognitive dissonance, and thought control, *Why Can't I Just Leave* explains how relationships with pathological partners can create impossible dilemmas that trap their partners in a distorted dream-state and hijack their thoughts and emotions.



### ABOUT KRISTEN

Kristen Milstead is a writer, researcher, and activist who has a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Oklahoma. She is currently an academic member of the Association for NPD/ Psychopathy Survivor Treatment, Research & Education.

After her experience in a pathological love relationship, she started a website for narcissistic abuse survivors, *Fairy Tale Shadows*, which has reached millions of people from over 180 countries. Her work has been featured on *PsychCentral*, *HealthyPlace*, *Your Tango*, and *Thought Catalog*.

She lives in Washington, D.C with her partner, Charles, and her Arabian Mau rescue cats from Kuwait, Bo and Chewbacca.

**NO ONE EVER REALLY LEAVES A  
RELATIONSHIP WITH A PATHOLOGICAL  
PARTNER. THEY ESCAPE ONE.**

**-KRISTEN MILSTEAD**

## PRAISE

This is probably one of the best narcissist books you can get your hands on if you find it hard to leave your narcissistic partner/spouse. This book will... motivate you to choose yourself and your happiness, and finally let go of them, so that you can build a happy and peaceful life for yourself.

**–Alexander Hall, *The Minds Journal***

Kristen Milstead has done an excellent, and more importantly, accurate job of explaining these relationships of “inevitable harm”. . . Kristen’s book is a one stop shop for understanding the pathology behind your partner, your relationship dynamics, why you were targeted, the symptoms of your trauma, and steps you can take toward leaving you partner.

**–Sandra L. Brown, M.A., author of *Women Who Love Psychopaths***

Kristen Milstead provides a social psychological analysis of narcissistic abuse using the empathetic voice of a survivor. Survivors who read this book will be able to trust the “lightbulb” moments this rare perspective offers.

**–Bree Bonchay, LCSW, author of *I Am Free: Healing Stories About Surviving Toxic Relationships with Narcissists and Sociopaths* and founder of World Narcissistic Abuse Awareness Day (WNAAD)**

Kristen has a straightforward way of explaining the complex topic of narcissistic abuse. Her book shares both insights from her personal experiences and a clear and compassionate framework for understanding the complex ways that ostensibly loving relationships can morph into something utterly corrosive and dangerous.

**–Dan Partland, Emmy-award winning director of *#UNFIT: The Psychology of Donald Trump***

In *Why Can't I Just Leave?* author Kristen Milstead provides you with the answers you need to understand why you're stuck in a relationship with a narcissist, sociopath, or other exploiter so you can finally make your escape.

**–Donna Andersen, author of *Lovefraud.com* and *Red Flags of Love Fraud: 10 Signs You're Dating a Sociopath***

The truth is often hard to face. Getting free from an emotionally abusive relationship and facing that truth will be the hardest thing you will ever do. This book is packed with been-in-the-trenches wisdom and the key to your freedom.

**–Tracy A. Malone, founder of *Narcissist Abuse Support*, Author, and Coach**

With the courageous use of her own intimate relationship, Kristen Milstead provides both an exploration and explanation of every aspect of “pathological love relationships.” ...Every aspect is covered in both practical and theoretical detail, as well as by example.

**–David M. Reiss, M.D., Psychiatrist (Private Practice–San Diego, Boston, NYC) and Co-Author, *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump***

*Why Can't I Just Leave* has been named in the...

- TOP 10 OF **CHOOSINGTHERAPY.COM'S 21 BEST BOOKS ON NARCISSISM AND NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER**
- **9 BEST BOOKS ON NARCISSISM YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO MISS BY THE MINDS JOURNAL**
- **TOP 15 RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR RECOVERY FROM RELATIONSHIPS WITH NARCISSISTS BY THE WEBSITE MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE**

### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Release Date:**

October 19, 2021

**Audiobook Release Date:**

August 24, 2022

Read by Sheri Saginor

**Publisher:**

Author Academy Elite

**Price:**

\$9.99 (ebook)

\$22.95 (paperback)

\$29.95 (hardback)

\$24.95 (audiobook)

**Available:**

Amazon and wherever books are sold



FAIRYTALE SHADOWS

*Fairy Tale Shadows was founded by Kristen Milstead, Ph.D. to support and validate survivors of narcissistic abuse. The website seeks to elevate the voices of survivors through personal narrative, as well as to advance research on pathological love relationships and to develop new resources for survivors based on this research.*

*By working with other educators, mental health professionals, and researchers, Kristen's goal is to use the website to increase societal support for survivors among mental health professionals, the legal system, and society at-large, and to help survivors find the resources they need to successfully exit and recover from these relationships.*

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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**SOCIAL MEDIA:** [HTTPS://FACEBOOK.COM/FAIRYTALESHADOWS](https://FACEBOOK.COM/FAIRYTALESHADOWS)

**Excerpt @ 2021 by Kristen Milstead.**

We stood in a crowded bar, but that didn't stop Amir from waving to the bartender impatiently for a fresh rum and Coke. I watched him flirt with the young woman on the other side of him, a woman he'd met at the hotel pool earlier. He had invited her to meet us after dinner, as if we hadn't spent the past eighteen months in a passionate relationship together with him whispering to me daily I was the love of his life.

Unsure of what to do, I looked around the spacious lobby of the resort, which was tucked garishly among several others along the powdery sand of the Jamaican shoreline. The bar was centered between tall white marble columns. Plush blue couches and a black grand piano hovered at the perimeters of the room, where beautiful, tanned people draped themselves over the furniture, talking to one another about their beautiful lives. I sat in shock, unable to fathom the stake that had been driven through mine.

Amir had finished at least twice as many drinks at the bar as I'd had on top of several rum and Cokes at dinner, and when he stood up, he fell. The crowd in the room gasped and went silent as he ambled to his feet, the knees of his suit pants dusty. Two staff members rushed over, but Amir waved them away and held his arms out to show everyone he was okay. He turned to me, glaring as if I'd had something to do with his fall. After saying something to the woman next to him, he growled in my ear that he was going back to our room.

"Are you coming?" he said.

I froze, contemplating the trap before me. If I followed Amir back to the room, his drunken contempt for me would take over. We would be alone with nothing to stop him from unleashing it on me. Yet if I stayed without him at the bar too long, he'd accuse me of going back to another man's room.

Maybe he would pass out.

I looked down and shook my head, and I could see him staring out of the corner of his eye before he tore off into the night. Then, it was as if I had willed it to happen.

A man appeared beside me. He was in his early thirties with dark blonde hair, dressed in a brown, checked sport coat and a button-down shirt.

"I can't talk to you," I said before he had said a word.

"What?" His eyebrows creased in confusion.

"I mean, I have a boyfriend."

"Oh," he said, relaxing. "Well, he's a very lucky man."

"Uh—thanks," I said, my eyes darting around the room. The lobby had several entrances, and my eyes flicked back and forth between all of them. Each time my eyes fell upon the one Amir had walked through, his shape materialized for an instant, then disintegrated. I felt faint.

"Did he come here with you?"

"Yes, he did. And if he sees me talking to you, he's going to be really upset." I blurted it before I could even stop myself. My heart hammered in my chest now.

The man's eyes creased again with concern. As soon as I saw it, I lost my composure, and I started to cry. "I'm sorry. I have to go."

"Wait. Wait, are you okay?" He touched the underside of my arm, where I had a bruise in the shape of a thumbprint.

No. I'm not okay. The enormity of it all crushed me, pushing me away from myself. It was a dream, yet it wasn't. I wasn't sure exactly how I had ended up there. Yet every excruciating detail had been its own slicing blade, and dozens of tiny cuts were draining me out.

About a week before Amir and I had left for Jamaica, his secrets had been eating me alive, and I finally decided I had to know the truth.

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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- How does narcissistic abuse differ from other types of abuse?
- What happens in the initial meeting with a narcissist that disarms survivors and makes them blind them to red flags?
- Once in the relationship, what happens that fools survivors into thinking there's no deception?
- Explain cognitive dissonance as it relates to narcissistic abuse.
- How does cognitive dissonance affect survivors who went through a narcissist discard?
- What effect does this kind of relationship have on a person's psyche?
- Why is it so challenging for victims to get out?
- How do these relationships typically end?
- What are the most important things to consider that help ensure that going no-contact will be successful?
- What do you consider the most important aspect of healing -- is it getting therapy, coaching, joining support groups, or something else?