



The Rose Phenomena: The Seductive Allure Reels You In; The Insidious Thorns Tear You Apart by Arlen Keith Leight, Ph.D.

It's a whirlwind romance. You meet the man of your dreams. He sweeps you off your feet with his charm, his charisma, his allure. He shows you effusive affection and makes you feel as though you are the most wonderful man he has ever met. He romances you and talks, however obtusely, about potential and the possibilities for an amazing life together. He lets you in on all his secrets. You hear about his past loves (and there are many), but somehow this one with you is different. He appears to open his heart and soul to you, and you begin to do the same. The connection is so strong you are convinced quickly and completely that this is your soul mate. This is the one for sure. You can hardly believe this can be real, and, unfortunately, you learn in time it truly is not.

Then it happens. You are in love and he knows it. He starts to withdraw. He becomes distant and you wonder what you did wrong. You may find yourself withdrawing a bit yourself only to see that he comes around-a bit. As soon as you begin to make yourself available again, he seems distant again. You approach him about this change in the "connection" and he seems to blame it on you. You've become needy or you're too clingy. Just a few weeks (or days) ago he couldn't get enough of you; now he wants space. You are now available and he simply is not.

But he's not ready to let go of you-not quite yet. He's ready to test your love. He sets up new boundaries to suit his needs and keep you at a distance. You get clues that he is dating someone else-he leaves a guy's phone number somewhere so you're bound to see it. He's not available when you know he otherwise would be. He talks about how you're not quite up to snuff. He subtly puts you down. He goes away for several days without calling you. He may tell you he wants to continue to see you while he dates others. You may even find him bed with another man the day after you had the most romantic evening in your life with him.

And what do you think he is doing and saying with these other men? They are now being swept off their feet. His charm and charisma are now being used to allure another man (or men) into his world. And once he knows they love him he will have achieved his goal and be ready to move on.

This is the life of a narcissist, and you happened to get caught up in it. The narcissist is seemingly the most wonderful of men. No one has ever been this nice to you. You simply cannot imagine that the love of your life could have some sort of personality disorder, and it is this very fact that makes him so dangerous. He'd do anything for you. He's generous and caring and open and loving and full of life. Well, sorry to say, he is all of these things because more than anything else he needs to have others love him.

There is a huge void in the personality structure of the narcissist that results from early childhood wounds. Parents who were more concerned about their own needs than their child's needs create a world in which the child has to figure out a way to get love and attention and have their needs met. Furthermore, the child learns that the love object is never truly available and so they have no role model for learning intimacy. A

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false self is developed and conveyed to the world to manipulate others to love them. The authentic, true self is subverted or never developed because the child learns that being oneself is insufficient to attract love and attention.

The adult narcissist has had a lifetime to consciously AND unconsciously figure out how to lure others to give him the love he never received from his parents. As well, once he receives love in return it feels frightening because true intimacy is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. The only love the adult narcissist understands is the one that is unavailable. Take a look at the men that have been in your love's life for any significant amount of time. Did they live in a different city or travel extensively? Were they addicted to drugs or alcohol? Were they unable to fully communicate for one reason or another? Were they committed to someone else? Were they themselves narcissists or had some other personality or mental disorder?

The biggest fear for the narcissist is abandonment. If the narcissist has fallen in love with the unavailable man of his dreams, and this man leaves him, the rage and/or depression will be unbearable. However, the narcissist cannot go very long without having his need to be loved filled. Even after the most devastating of rejections, he is quickly back to his charismatic self. And if your whirlwind romance ends, don't be surprised to find him with his arms around another man within days if not hours. In fact, overlapping romances are not uncommon for the narcissist. You may have been replaced even before you were out of the picture.

The sad truth is that men who fall in love with narcissists do so because they have some of these narcissistic tendencies themselves. Remember, narcissism is on a continuum. Some men are toxic narcissists, some are very mild. The narcissist makes us feel so wonderful about ourselves. They draw us up into their narcissistic world. This feeds our own self-absorption-we must be wonderful if we can be loved by such a wonderful man. And, let's face it, because the narcissist is unavailable, aren't we simply finding ourselves loving the unavailable-a person with whom we cannot share true intimacy? If this is your pattern, if you keep falling in love with unavailable men, it may be something you want to look at with a trained professional.

So what do you do with this love of your life? Remember this: the narcissist will not change. It is a pattern that will persist throughout his life. If the narcissism is mild, attention to it and professional help may create some behavioral shift. If you have just met your narcissistic lover you are probably experiencing constant anxiety and uncertainty. This should be warning enough that you need to end it now. If you are already committed and suffering remember to take care of yourself. Don't ignore your own needs. Seek professional help to aid you in creating boundaries and structuring your life so it works for you.

Breaking up with a narcissist is very, very painful. This man who treated you like a king is now treating someone else the very same way. You feel rejected, lost, confused, jealous and alone. Know that this is not a man who can have the type of intimate relationship you want for yourself. He will always be looking for more love from another source. You deserve better. Time will heal the wounds and provide perspective. Right now it's hard to imagine this man as having a problem. He may have convinced you that you were the problem. Don't believe it. Don't try to figure out what went wrong. Just focus on caring for you and moving on. Talk with friends and surround yourself with the people that truly love you. And, of course, talking with a therapist can be very helpful. Just know you have done nothing wrong and there are better days ahead.

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