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When Friendship Is One-Sided: Letting Go of Someone Who Was Never Really There

COOKIES

By [Jennifer Tomlin](#)



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“Finally, I realized that I was never asking too much. I was just asking the wrong person.” ~Unknown

Friendship should nourish the soul. And in my life, for the most part, it has. I have a small, longstanding circle of friends steeped in a long-shared history. We’re basically a real-life, thirty-five-year-long John Hughes film.

However, every now and then, a hornet in disguise has buzzed into my life and stung.

He was one of them. A bad sting.

Love Bombing

Right off the bat, knowing him felt amazing.

I was still reeling from the aftereffects of living with an [abusive man](#) who died a few months after I finally got away. Emotionally raw, my nervous system felt like it was covered in third-degree burns being scrubbed with a Brillo pad.

But this new friend? He felt safe. Quiet. Peaceful.

He wanted to see me multiple times a week. He introduced me to his child. We spent time watching TV, going out for drinks and dinner, living in what felt like a comforting routine. His good



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morning texts became a comfort for my sleepy eyes.

It felt good. Really good.

Until it didn't.

A Bouquet of Red Flags? For Me?

Small things began happening that just didn't sit well.

He began to speak ill of others in our mutual friend group. *If he's talking about them like this, what is he saying about me?* Then I'd dismiss it. *No, Jennifer. He's a good friend.*

Once, when I asked him to repay money he owed me, I received a semi-scathing text accusing me of not being a "real friend," because "[real friends](#)" don't expect repayment. *Am I here to subsidize your income?*

You'd think I walked away entirely at that point. No, not quite.

When There's No Communication, There's No Friendship

Instead, I [drank too much](#) one night and made out with him. (*Stop judging me.*)

I felt uncomfortable and needed to talk about it. I asked if I could come over for a quick chat. He declined. He was "too busy gardening."

Right. Gardening. Okay.

The good morning texts stopped. The invitations to hang out vanished.

Days later, I texted, *"Are you upset with me? We usually see each other all the time, and I haven't heard from you."*

His reply: *"I'm not upset."* No explanation. No elaboration.

Five weeks passed. Silence. Crickets.

And it hurt—more than I expected. I had let someone in after a

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traumatic experience. I was vulnerable, open, willing to trust again. But the friendship only existed on his terms. Everything was fine—until I asked for emotional accountability.

Inner Work and Uncomfortable Truths

After doing a lot of inner work, I realized something painful: I have a pattern of projecting qualities onto people that they simply don't possess. I *want* people to be kind, emotionally intelligent, and loyal. So, I make them that way in my mind.

But people are who they are—not who I wish them to be.

And for my own well-being, that pattern had to end.

Not everyone is ready to do the work. And that's fine. I can only be responsible for my healing, [my boundaries](#), my growth.

In any relationship—be it romantic, familial, professional, or platonic—every individual has a right to be seen, heard, and valued. To be acknowledged as a complete person with thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Our voices and wants should be respected and celebrated. Without this foundation of trust, emotional safety, and genuine connection, we begin to feel invisible, diminished, or invalidated.

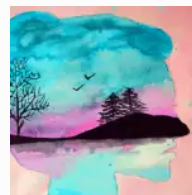
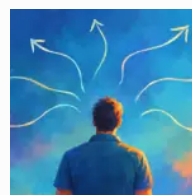
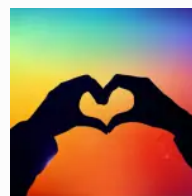
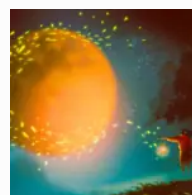
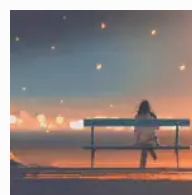
And sometimes the most loving thing we can do for ourselves is to leave a space that no longer aligns with who we are.

It's not about giving up on people too quickly but recognizing when staying becomes a quiet betrayal of our own needs.

Self-Respect and Goodbye

So how did I move forward?

After acknowledging a deeper truth—that I had lived in a place of unworthiness for far too long, repeatedly allowing myself to be manipulated and [emotionally abandoned](#)—I decided to no longer chase breadcrumbs and worked hard on setting clear boundaries. And if those aren't respected, I give myself permission to walk



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away.

And I walked away from him. I declined invites where I knew he'd be present and performed a digital detox: the phone number, the photos, the threads—all deleted. Unfollow. Unfollow. Unfollow.

And none of it happened out of anger or malice, but from a place of peace. A place of self-respect.

In the end, we teach others how to treat us by what we allow, and leaving is sometimes the most powerful way to be seen and heard—by ourselves most of all.

I was whole before I met him. And I remained whole after saying goodbye.

A Final Note

Not every friend is meant to stay. Not every connection nourishes the soul.

Some buzz in for a bit, give a quick sting, and buzz right back out.

The lesson? To stop letting ourselves be stung over and over again.



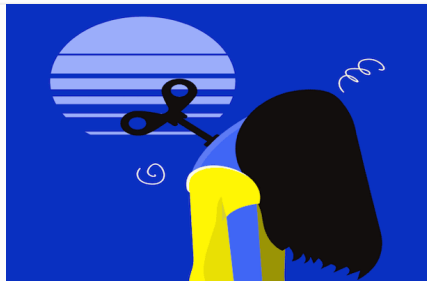
About **Jennifer Tomlin**

Jennifer is an advertising copywriter with over twenty-five years in the creative services and corporate communications field. A lover of animals, coffee, and music, she resides in the Philadelphia suburbs. Contact Jennifer at jennifertomlinwrites.com.

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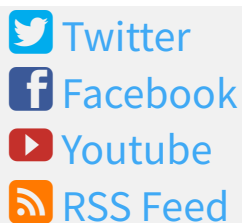
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