

NAJAHALL

HOW I RE-HUMANIZED THE BITTER EX



WF *Stepmom*

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CHAPTER TWO

WHEN THE EX IS THE ENEMY

The Enemy Narrative

I remember one Saturday morning when her name lit up my phone. We were eating pancakes at the table. The kids were laughing, syrup dripping from their forks. My husband was sipping coffee. And then — that ringtone. I froze. My chest tightened. I braced myself.

The call lasted less than three minutes, but by the end of it, my heart was racing, my mood was ruined, and the joy in the room had evaporated. That's what it's like when you live in **enemy mode**.

The biological mother doesn't have to be physically present to dominate your day. The anticipation of her next move becomes a kind of haunting. You live with your guard up, rehearsing comebacks in the shower, venting to friends until they're tired of the story, scrolling back through text threads just to remind yourself how wrong she is.

Enemy mode isn't just about what she does — it's about what it does to *you*. It narrows your world. It shifts your focus. It makes you reactive instead of intentional.



Why We Default to Seeing Her as the Enemy

Humans like clear categories: good vs. bad, hero vs. villain. When someone hurts us, the simplest story to tell ourselves is: *she's the bad one, I'm the good one*. And sometimes, she makes it easy to believe.

But the enemy narrative is seductive because it feels empowering while actually disempowering. When she becomes the villain, she also becomes the center of your story. You measure your peace by her behavior. You define your worth by how she treats you. You anchor your energy to her moods.

That's not empowerment — that's entrapment.

The Psychological Toll of the Enemy Role

There's a strange comfort in keeping her in the enemy box. It feels empowering at first. It's a clean narrative: she is bad, I am good. She is wrong, I am right. If she's the villain, you get to feel like the hero. If she's the aggressor, you get to claim the role of victim. But these roles are exhausting and over time, it backfires. They keep you locked in a cycle that steals your energy and joy. Because when you define her as your enemy, you also tether yourself to her. She becomes the axis around which your emotions spin.



Conflict experts call this **enmeshment by hostility**. Even though you despise her, you are still tied to her. Your nervous system fires up every time she enters the picture. The stress chemicals in your body — cortisol, adrenaline — spike every time she shows up. Over time, this damages sleep, mood, and even immune function. You may not want her in your life, but she is living rent-free in your mind.

The Cost of the Enemy Narrative

- Constant stress and anxiety.
- Strain on your marriage as you and your partner argue about how to respond.
- Emotional exhaustion that seeps into work, friendships, and health.
- Children caught in the middle, learning that loyalty means choosing sides.

Signs You're Stuck in Enemy Mode

- You replay her words in your head long after the conversation.
- You stalk her social media for evidence or validation.
- You feel your chest tighten when you see her name on your phone.
- You vent about her more than you talk about your own goals or joys.
- You secretly fantasize about “winning” or proving her wrong.

If any of these sound familiar, know that you're not alone. This is what enemy mode does — it takes up mental real estate and keeps you tethered to a battle that never ends.

Shifting Out of the Trap

You don't have to forgive her. You don't have to like her. But you can begin to ask: *What do I gain from this cycle? What do I lose?*

When you recognize that being her enemy costs you more than it costs her, you open the door to another way of living. That's the first step.

The enemy narrative doesn't just pit you against her — it can pit you against yourself, your partner, and even the kids.





CASE study

Melissa's Breaking Point

Melissa married a man with two children, ages 8 and 11. From the start, his ex-wife saw her as a threat. She would send emails copying the children's teachers, claiming Melissa overstepped by helping with homework. She told the kids, "Your stepmom is trying to replace me."

At first, Melissa fought back. She sent long rebuttals to every email. She defended herself passionately to her husband. She even tried confronting the ex directly. Each attempt only escalated things.

Within a year, Melissa was exhausted. Her marriage was strained, and she felt consumed by the conflict. "I didn't even recognize myself anymore," she said. "I was living in reaction to her instead of living my life."

The turning point came when Melissa stopped trying to prove herself to the ex. She and her husband set a new rule: they would only respond to messages about the children's logistics, and only once per day. Melissa also started therapy to process her triggers and learned to pause before reacting.

The ex didn't magically become peaceful. But Melissa did. She reclaimed her mornings, her marriage, and her sense of self. The enemy was still hostile — but Melissa was no longer her prisoner.

1. How do you know when you're in "enemy mode"? What are the physical signs? The emotional ones?
2. How much time each week do you spend thinking, talking, or worrying about her?
3. If you stepped out of the enemy narrative, what space would that free up in your life?
4. In what ways might your marriage, your health, or your relationship with the kids improve if you stopped centering her as "the enemy"?

Affirmation: *I can see her as harmful without making her my whole focus. My story is bigger than her actions.*



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