The Good Faith Problem

Why decent people get exploited –
and what the science says you can do about it

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A companion guide to The Extraction Pattern

This is not your fault.

If you are reading this because someone exploited your trust, manipulated your perception, or made you question your own sanity – the first thing you need to know is that what happened to you has a name, a mechanism and a three-hundred-thousand-year history. You were not foolish. You were not weak. You were targeted precisely because of the qualities that make you a decent human being.

This guide explains why.

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1. The Design Flaw in Cooperation

Human cooperation is the most successful survival strategy in the history of life on Earth. Language, agriculture, law, cities, medicine, every achievement of civilisation was built on the ability to trust strangers enough to work together. Trust is not a weakness. It is the technology that built everything else.

But cooperation has a design flaw. Two features that look like weaknesses but are actually essential to making the whole system work.

The first is trust itself. Without trust, no coalition holds, no institution functions, no society coheres. You extend trust because the alternative – verifying every interaction, suspecting every motive – would make cooperation impossible. Trust is fast. Suspicion is slow. Civilisation runs on fast.

The second is belonging. For three hundred thousand years, exclusion from the group was a death sentence. Not a metaphor – actual death. The human alone on the savannah did not last long. So your brain evolved a powerful drive to maintain your place in the group, even when the group is wrong. Even when you can see it is wrong. Even when the cost of staying is higher than the cost of leaving.

I call the combination of these two vulnerabilities **the good faith problem**. Not because you are naïve or gullible or easily deceived. You are none of those things. The good faith problem describes something deeper: the cooperative majority extends trust and suppresses doubt as a design feature, not a personal failing. It is how cooperation works. And it is precisely what the extraction pattern exploits.

2. How Villages Solved It Without Knowing

For most of human existence, the good faith problem was contained naturally. The village solved it through proximity.

Everyone knew everyone. Reputation followed you from birth to death. The cobbler knew your feet – not from a measurement card but from years of watching you walk into his shop. He couldn't make bad shoes. Not because he was virtuous, but because bad shoes would follow him home.

Everyone knew who couldn't be trusted with the grain store. Not from a criminal record check – from thirty years of watching. Gossip was not triviality; it was an early-warning system. Shame was enforcement. The architecture of daily life required you to face the people affected by your decisions.

Critically, the village also solved the *doubt* half of the problem. In every community there was a figure I call **the grandmother** – not necessarily a literal grandmother, but someone who had been watching for decades, who remembered what everyone else had forgotten, who held the long memory of who could be trusted and who could not. When you sensed something wrong about a person, you didn't have to wonder if you were imagining it. You could check with her. She validated your perception. She made it safe to see. The grandmother is this book's shorthand for the function that kept the good faith problem contained: community memory that confirmed your doubt before the pattern could talk you out of it.

That is what broke when the factory came.

The young man who'd never have been trusted with the grain store moved to Manchester. New city. No reputation. No grandmother. No memory. He could cheat someone he'd never see again. This was new. For most of human history, you lived with the consequences of your behaviour. Now you could extract and move on.

And when someone in the new factory sensed something wrong – the same instinct that had protected your ancestors for millennia – they had no one to check with. No grandmother. No thirty-year memory. Just a feeling they learned to suppress, because doubt without confirmation feels like paranoia.

The modern world didn't create the good faith problem. It removed the solution.

3. What Happens in Your Brain

The good faith problem is not a metaphor. It has a neuroscience.

Dr Katalin Gothard, a primate neuroscientist at the University of Arizona, has shown that the amygdala – the brain's social processor – is not a single alarm but a multidimensional system tracking faces, reading expressions, registering eye contact, monitoring social dynamics in real time. Her work demonstrates that the same neural hardware processes both social threats and social rewards.

Complementary research by Bartels and Zeki at University College London reveals something directly relevant to anyone exploited by someone they trusted: **in bonded partners, the amygdala's threat detection is significantly reduced.** The system that would normally flag danger signals goes quiet in the presence of someone you have bonded with. This is not a malfunction. It is how bonding works. You cannot simultaneously maintain a deep attachment and keep your threat detection running at full capacity.

This is why "just trust your instincts" is inadequate advice. Your instincts are being neurologically suppressed by the very bond that makes you vulnerable. The closer the relationship, the less your brain lets you see.

> **Why you didn't see it**
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> Your brain is designed to suppress threat detection in bonded relationships. This is not stupidity. It is neuroscience. The person who exploited you did not outsmart you – they

> exploited a feature of mammalian bonding that has existed for millions of years. You were operating exactly as your biology intended.

This is also why containment must come from outside the bond. You cannot see clearly from inside because your neurology prevents it. The village grandmother worked because she was *outside* the relationship – close enough to observe, distant enough to see. Recognition almost always begins when someone outside the bond validates what you are experiencing.

4. The Pattern That Evolved to Be Invisible

Roughly one in twenty people – about five per cent of the population – carry what this framework calls **the extraction pattern**. They are not monsters. They are not rare. You pass them in the supermarket. You sit across from them in meetings. You have probably had dinner with one this month.

The extraction pattern is not a disorder in the conventional sense. It is the same neural hardware that everyone carries, differently configured. Lisa Feldman Barrett's research shows that the brain does not contain dedicated circuits for specific emotions. It constructs emotional experience from general-purpose components. The extraction pattern is what this hardware produces when affective empathy – the felt resonance with another's experience – does not fully develop or is overridden.

Same hardware. Differently configured.

For three hundred thousand years, visibility meant containment. The village could see you. The village remembered. So the pattern adapted. It developed what I call **stealth adaptation** – the ability to appear cooperative whilst operating extractively. The pattern's primary evolutionary pressure was not to become more aggressive. It was to become more invisible.

The engine underneath the toolkit is **cold empathy** – the ability to read other people's emotions accurately without feeling them. The extraction-wired don't lack social perception. They have superb social perception. They can read a room faster than anyone in it. They know what you're feeling before you've finished feeling it. They simply don't feel it with you.

Warm empathy means you feel what others feel. Their pain registers as your pain. You hesitate to cause suffering because causing suffering hurts you too. Cold empathy means you perceive what others feel without engaging the self, and use the information strategically. The smile that makes you feel understood is a tool, selected with the precision of a surgeon choosing an instrument.

This is why charm is the first sign, not the last. The warmth you feel in their presence is not connection. It is a read.

5. How the Toolkit Works Against Your Good Faith

The extraction toolkit – charm, gaslighting, triangulation, the silent treatment, love-bombing, DARVO – these are not separate phenomena. They are an integrated system, and every tool in it has a single purpose: preventing you from seeing what is happening.

Charm prevents you from looking behind it. That is what charm is for.

Gaslighting prevents you from trusting what you saw. “That didn’t happen.” “You’re remembering it wrong.” “You’re too sensitive.” The function is to destroy your trust in your own perception.

Triangulation prevents people from comparing notes. The function is to stop coalitions forming – to stop the grandmother.

The silent treatment punishes without leaving evidence. No bruise. No record. Just absence and withdrawal – and you can’t explain to anyone why it hurts.

Love-bombing drowns recognition before it surfaces. The moment you begin to see the pattern, attention arrives. Flowers. Apologies. The version of them you fell in love with. And your doubt retreats, because you wanted to be wrong.

DARVO – deny, attack, reverse victim and offender – is the nuclear option. You name the pattern. They deny it. They attack you for saying it. Then they claim they are the victim of your accusation.

> **The entire extraction toolkit is an arms race against the grandmother.**
>
> Every tool evolved to defeat a specific function she performed. Gaslighting defeats reality validation. Triangulation defeats coalition. Love-bombing defeats emerging recognition. Remove the grandmother – remove proximity, memory, community validation – and every tool in the kit works perfectly. That is what industrial scale did.

6. Five Recognition Anchors

You cannot rebuild the village. But you can rebuild what the village did. These five practices restore the containment functions that proximity once provided naturally.

Anchor 1: Trust your body before your mind

Your body calculates faster than your conscious mind. The tightening stomach, the racing heart, the urge to flee, the sudden exhaustion after a conversation that should have been simple – these are not anxiety. They are data. The extraction pattern triggers your threat detection even when your bonding system is suppressing it. Learn to notice the physical signals. A pattern journal – thirty seconds per entry, logging the physical response alongside what happened – turns invisible patterns into visible evidence. One entry is a data point. Ten entries show pattern. Fifty entries become evidence that defeats gaslighting completely.

Anchor 2: Rebuild the grandmother

Find your reality anchor – someone outside the bond who can validate your perception. Not someone who tells you what to do. Someone who confirms what you saw. Brief, regular check-ins with trusted others. The extraction pattern’s primary weapon is making you think you are alone.
Coalition defeats isolation. It always has.

Anchor 3: Document in real time

Email yourself after important interactions. Thirty seconds. When they insist the conversation never happened, forward the email. Contemporaneous notes carry more weight than later recollection – in your own mind and in any future legal proceeding. Documentation is the pattern journal at institutional scale. It defeats the rewrite.

Anchor 4: Watch the cycle, not the moment

Every extraction pattern follows the same cycle: assessment, investment, extraction, maintenance, discard or reset. Individual moments are confusing – designed to be confusing. The cycle is clear. When the improvement comes (and it always comes, just when you're about to leave), that is not change. That is recalibration. The pattern hasn't stopped. It has entered the maintenance phase.

Anchor 5: Match your response to the threat

Not every situation requires the same response. Grey rock – becoming boring, unrewarding, emotionally flat – works because extraction requires reaction. Low contact – structured interaction with documented boundaries – works when you cannot fully disengage. No contact is the final response when the pattern threatens serious harm. Graduated response protects you without escalating unnecessarily.

7. When the Language Gets Turned Against You

Within weeks of any recognition framework becoming public, the extraction pattern picks it up and reverses it. "You're the narcissist. You're the one without empathy. You're the extractor." You need a diagnostic. Here it is.

Recognition arrives with grief. The person who genuinely sees the pattern doesn't feel powerful. They feel devastated. The years lost. The relationship that wasn't what they thought. The trust that was architecture, not connection.

Weaponisation arrives with triumph. Energy rather than devastation. A label found. An argument won. A new tool for the oldest game.

The language is identical. The emotional signature is opposite.

Watch for the speed. Recognition is slow. It arrives in waves, often over months. It hurts every time. Weaponisation is instant.

Watch for the self-examination. Recognition always turns inward at some point: what did I miss? How did I contribute? What do I need to change? Weaponisation never turns inward. It is entirely outward-directed.

Watch for the function. Recognition seeks safety. Weaponisation seeks control. The person protecting themselves wants distance. The person weaponising wants proximity – close enough to keep extracting.

> **Grief versus triumph. That is the diagnostic.**
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> If you are reading this and feeling grief – the slow, painful realisation of what happened and what it cost – that grief is the proof that your good faith is intact. You are not the pattern. You are the person the pattern targeted.

8. Architecture, Not Character

This framework operates on a principle that matters: **contain, don't blame.**

The person with extraction wiring didn't choose that wiring. Twin studies show heritability of 63–71% for these traits. They didn't choose it any more than you chose your good faith. What they do with it is their responsibility. What you do about it is yours.

The question is never "why are people so gullible?" The question is: what architecture makes trust safe and doubt visible? The village answered both naturally. Industrial society has spent two centuries failing to rebuild what the village did without thinking.

Samuel Plimsoll didn't try to reform the shipowners. He didn't appeal to their better nature. He painted a line on a hull. Ships that loaded past the line were stopped. The mechanism worked regardless of whether the shipowner cared about drowning sailors.

That is what containment looks like. Not cure. Not punishment. Architecture. A line painted on a hull. The difference between a building that stands and one that burns is whether someone painted the line.

Your protection works the same way. Not by changing the other person – you cannot change the wiring. But by building architecture around yourself that works regardless of their nature. The pattern journal. The reality anchor. The coalition. The graduated response. These are your Plimsoll lines.

Fierce protection with maintained dignity. Always.

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9. Where to Go Next

If you are in immediate danger: call 999 or the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (24 hours, free).

If you need support: visit www.trueregard.com/help for a full directory of UK helplines, therapeutic resources and support organisations grouped by situation.

If you want the full framework: *The Extraction Pattern* by Vaughan Smith explains the complete architecture – how villages contained the pattern for three hundred thousand years, why industrial scale broke containment, and what we can rebuild. Available at www.trueregard.com/the-books.

If you want the practical toolkit: download the Personal Protection Toolkit – the pattern journal, morning check, 48-hour challenge and weekly synthesis – free at www.trueregard.com.

If you are dealing with family courts: the Family Court Survival Guide is available at www.trueregard.com. It explains the architecture of the system, how to navigate it and what to do when you wake up.

If this helped, share it. Send it to someone who needs it. The pattern's primary weapon is isolation. Every person who reads this is another grandmother rebuilt.

THE EXTRACTION PATTERN

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The five per cent who design extraction. The ninety-five per cent who live inside it. The architecture that could contain it.

THE CAPTURE

Vaughan Smith

How They Stole America. The extraction pattern captured democracy, economy, healthcare, media and accountability – domain by domain.

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