

Chapter 14

RUSSIAN ROULETTE

There was something about Roger that was intriguing. A Vietnam vet who had seen some horrific things as a U.S. Marine. The veterans of that war faced much criticism after returning to the U.S. The American public's opinion was divided. Some criticized them for losing the war, while others criticized them for killing innocent civilians. In any case, they had to live with the consequences. Combine that with a dose of P. T.S.D. and you have a walking disaster.

Many of these men turned to drugs and alcohol and lost everything, many becoming homeless. Stan and Roger were both vets. They were quite congenial and amusing personalities. I felt a great deal of compassion and connection with Roger. One day, he told me that we're going to get some beer and hang out at the Iron Furnaces. He asked if I would stop by and say hello on my way home from work. I did and it was just Roger, Stan, and me. I had a beer and went home.

I tended to be too open and friendly with people. I was never judgmental of anyone's circumstances. They all had a story and a path that would lead them to where they needed to be at the end of that journey. So, a couple of times I stopped on the way home and had a beer with the homeless guys. I think the YMCA and the Salvation Army allowed the homeless to take showers and get a meal. The two I had befriended always looked neat and clean. The only smell emanating from their bodies was alcohol.

There came a day when it was just Roger and me at The Iron Furnaces. It started to rain so I let him sit in my car. He made a move to kiss me and I let him. After that kiss, I knew I could never go back to the Furnaces after that day. However, it was too late to stop Roger from developing a romantic fixation on me.

I was at work at the Plasma Center when FTD came in with a bouquet of roses for me. There was no card so I assumed they were from my husband. When I walked in with the flowers, Jack looked very angry. He demanded to know who they were from. I told him I thought they were from him because there was no card. He firmly reminded me that anytime he gave me flowers, it was in person. I told him I must have a secret admirer. Jack threw the flowers in the garbage straightaway.

Of course, I now realized it was Roger. He started waiting for me after work. I didn't find him threatening, but I didn't want to lose my job. I told him I was afraid he would get me fired. Then he started waiting for me in the parking lot down the street. I firmly reminded him that I was married and didn't want to continue a clandestine affair. His reply was that if my husband met with him man to man, he would leave me alone.

What was it with this man-to-man nonsense? As hard as it was to fathom, I knew he needed that showdown for closure. Telling Jack was not as hard as I thought it would be. After all, his cheating score card was more filled in than mine. He was upset and angry. But he knew how determined Jack B had been at the showdown at My Place. He had been very close to losing me then. He reluctantly agreed to the meeting.

There was a bar downtown called The Dutchman. It was always quiet there. The agreed time was after I got off work, the three of us would meet. I walked in and Roger was already there. I went straight to the bar and ordered a double vodka on the rocks. Jack came in and I made the introductions.

Neither one raised their voices or threw a punch. Roger

told Jack that I was an admirable and beautiful woman and should be valued as such. He wanted a promise that Jack would always be good to me. Jack told him in an annoyed manner that he knew how to take care of his wife. They even shook hands.

We left the bar to walk to my car in the parking garage. Jack realized that Roger was following us. He turned around and said "Look buddy I have been very civilized so far, but if you need to get physical, I will be glad to oblige." Roger turned and walked away. Although an ambiguous one, I now had another infidelity check on my scorecard.

I hadn't given Jack all the details, just enough to paint the picture I wanted. I had made it seem like all the advances had been by Roger. I certainly did not tell him about the kiss.

Just an aside: Years later, I ran into Stan downtown. I almost didn't recognize him. He looked healthy, clean, and sober. He told me a woman named Betty took him in. She literally picked him out of the gutter. She brought him into her home and took care of him and grew to love him. They were now married and he was a re-born Christian. Miracles do happen.

My relationship with Jack was a sick addiction. Waiting for a miracle in my life did not seem to be the road for me to stay on. Infidelity is a betrayal, one that is deeply traumatic. It's normal to experience a range of complicated thoughts and feelings in the aftermath.

But what about serial infidelity? The pattern that Jack and I now appeared to have. There is a phenomenon called Hysterical Bonding. Juxtaposed with your agony and distress, lies the desire to reconnect, to be comforted, to win them back from their affair partner. The need to feel wanted can prompt a desire to reconnect sexually. This rekindled intimacy may feel new, different, or unlike sex you had in the past. That was us for a short while after every extramarital dalliance.

Our other problems were still there, lack of money, drinking, abuse, and mistrust. Jack's drinking was just out of control. I liked to drink at home, but he would start right after work and not come home till late at night. One night, he came home drunk and demanded dinner. I had made stew in the crockpot. When he began to eat, he made a remark that it was cold. I threw the crockpot at him. My long-repressed anger was about to erupt. We couldn't go on like this.

A week later he came home drunk as usual but surlier than customary. He took his revolver out of the gun case. He started to berate me about my failings and past indiscretions. He told me I made him feel less of a man and that was what led to his cheating. Then he held the gun to my head. I didn't even

flinch. I had learned from my college gun classes that if the safety was on, the gun wouldn't fire. That was not the response he expected.

He then put the gun in my hand and held it to his head. This time he took off the safety. He told me to pull the trigger and I did. The gun had no bullets. He grabbed the gun and pushed me further back into the chair. He screamed "What if there were bullets in that gun?". I answered, "Then you would be dead". Now if there was a shred of sanity left in either of us that should have been the end of the marriage. But it wasn't.

You can't stay in an abusive relationship and not be affected by it. As a normal, feeling human being, it is not possible to be in such a situation and not be affected profoundly by it. Jack was so much better at destroying my boundaries and pushing me beyond my limits than I was at keeping him in place. As always, there comes the straw that breaks the camel's back. Believe it or not I still needed one more betrayal to be the final catalyst.