

## A STORY THAT PERFECTLY DESCRIBES EMOTIONAL ABUSE

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 272 of the Flying Free Podcast. I've got a story for you today. Let's begin. Let's pretend for a minute that your relationship is like a game of tennis. Can you visualize you and your partner on the tennis court? The game has just begun and the ball is going back and forth, back and forth.

Once in a while, the ball drops. This represents relationship conflict. Sometimes the ball drops on your side and sometimes it drops on the other side. When it drops on your side, you take the initiative to resolve the conflict. You pick up the ball and try again. But when the ball falls on the other side and you ask your partner to pick up the ball and lob it back, he responds with, "Well, it fell because of how you hit the ball. Not my problem, not my responsibility."

Hmm, that's odd. Not really how you've experienced other relationships, but whatever. You want to be cooperative and make this game work. So you walk around to his side of the net and pick up the ball for him. Then you go back to your position to get the ball going again because the game matters to you. The relationship is important, and you take your vows seriously.

But life happens. The ball drops again on his side of the court, and once again, he makes no move to pick it up. You make the logical point that if he doesn't pick up the ball, you won't be able to continue the game. He scowls at you and tells you, "It's your fault and your problem, and if you care about the game, you'd figure it out." You argue with him because this logic does not make sense. You wait longer, but he refuses to pick up the ball. So you sadly walk over to his side and pick it up again. You have made a commitment for better or for worse, right? Well, this must be what worse means. Bummer.

And this goes on for an entire year. Two years. Five years. You pick up all the balls on your side and you pick up all the balls on his side. You feel resentful because the entire game is up to you. The responsibility to keep the game going falls completely on your shoulders, and that's a heavy weight to bear.

The books you read, your church, and your spiritual friends all tell you that if your partner won't do it, the godly thing is to do it yourself. You can keep your relationship alive. Don't let bitterness creep in. Do it with a cheerful heart. Let him off the hook. He's a guy, and guys are not like girls. Be okay with the differences. Get over there and pick up the balls. God will give you the power you need to make that man happy. Fulfilling

your duty as a female will eventually be rewarded with an awesome game.

Besides, your partner is always so happy, smiling and waving at everyone who passes by. Such a friendly, sweet man. If someone outside the court needs help, he interrupts your game to help them out. He is an incredible human being with a magnanimous heart. Johnny on the spot for everyone. Then he returns to you and requests that you get the balls going because he is oh so very tired.

Ten years. Fifteen years. Utter exhaustion sets in for you. Panic, even, as you contemplate doing this with gray hair and crispy bones. The future looks grim. Now you are stomping around, complaining, frantically waving your hands, frowning, yelling. Your eyes are bloodshot and your hair is a tangled rat's nest. You look and sound like hell, while he looks happy and rested and helpful to everyone who passes by.

And then an idea hits you. You'll stop picking up the balls on his side of the court. Why not? Everyone already thinks you're a lunatic. Why not see what would happen if you didn't cooperate?

The first ball drops on his side. He looks at you like, "Well, aren't you going to get your tushy over here to pick up the ball?" You stare at him triumphantly, crazily, almost drunk on this strange sense of power, and you say, "No!" He waits. Surely you are bluffing. But you're not. Time passes. He looks around uncomfortably and waves at people. The ball remains at his feet. Someone passes by and yells at him, "Hey! The ball is at your feet!" He waves back, "Yep, got it covered." They walk away, assuming the problem is taken care of, but it's not. The ball remains quietly lying there. You sit down on the tennis court pavement and wait.

He gets an idea and goes to the back of the court where a huge bin of balls sits. He grabs a brand-new ball and lobs it at you. You aren't expecting that, and the ball drops. But at least the game is moving again. So, ever — if not insanely — hopeful, you haul yourself up, grab the ball, and lob it back. It falls. You wait. He leaves that ball on the ground along with the other one, and he grabs a second new one from the bin, and starts the game again.

You play like this for another pull-your-hair-out-in-frustration five years until the entire court floor is covered with balls because you've decided that if he doesn't want to pick up any balls, you're not going to pick them up either.

The game grinds to a halt as you both trip and stumble around all the balls with no conflict ever resolved. Stupifyingly enough, it doesn't seem to bother him. He's fine with

the ball-covered pavement as long as everyone who passes by thinks he's amaze balls. And they do. After all, look at his long-suffering patience in the face of utter negligence on the part of his wife. He smiles sadly, almost pathetically, and waves a friendly hand at all who pass by.

Meanwhile, you are thinking about how this game never changes, thinking about the fact that your head hurts from banging it on the same damn wall over and over and over again, thinking about the fact that this man has never picked up a ball in twenty years, and the chances that he will pick one up now are dismally low.

You are thinking, and then you decide: You're done. You don't want to be the one who is done. You've invested twenty years of your life picking up this guy's balls, and you really, really want it to be worth something. But you know now that you could pick them up for the rest of your life and die an early death or you could walk off the tennis court and find something else to do with the last remaining days of your life. So you do.

But before you go, you stand by the fence of the court and yell at your partner, "Hey, I'm leaving now, but if you want to pick up your own balls and try again, I'm still open to coming back." He looks angrily at you because you talked about his balls that way, and he sullenly chokes out, "What? Look around me. I'm doing my best, but you can't possibly expect me to clean this whole thing up by myself. You made this mess too. Why should I be the one to have to clean it up?" You walk away.

Your spiritual friends grab you and tell you, "You're crazy to leave such an amazing man, and what is your freaking problem anyway? What a quitter! You must not know God, and now your kids will go to hell." So you hesitate, worrying about these things. You look back at the court where some men are talking in hushed whispers to your partner.

Suddenly, you see some movement. What? Is he going to pick up a ball? Seriously? Why, yes, he does pick up a ball. It's a miracle. You stare with your mouth gaping open as he walks toward you with the ball. He's actually going to take responsibility for something. Maybe there is hope after all. They must have convinced him that to play this game, you need to be willing to pick up some balls.

He gets to where you are standing, looks compassionately at you, and says, "See this ball here? It's a real problem. I see that now. I'd like to get rid of it, but I'm pretty sure it's yours." And that, dear friend, is how you know it's game over.

What you just heard is the Audible version of chapter 59 of my newest book, All the

Scary Little Gods. When you get my new book, you'll be getting more than just a memoir. You'll be getting a handbook for freedom that will make you cry, scream, laugh out loud, and basically feel all the feelings. You'll get to read chapters called "Satan's Children," "Red Heifer," "Saddle Up Your Horses," "Sex at the Beach," "I Am a Sheep," "Soap and Vodka," "Goo," "Burn the Ships," "Tsunami," and more.

There are 89 chapters, all short, but each one packed with a punch — a blow, if you will — that will begin to dismantle everything in your life that is keeping you stuck and paralyzed with fear. I promise you have never read anything like it, and you'll be thinking about it long after you're done because it's going to change your life. If you're ready for that, head over to Amazon and search up All the Scary Little Gods. You can get it in Kindle, paperback, and Audible formats.