

Chapter 28-Peg (“Pearl”)

Peg is in her mid to late 50's and has been married for approximately 20 years. She has worked for the city as a social worker for about 18 years. Her career has provided her with excellent benefits, ample time-off, and the opportunity to be fairly independent. Peg has worked very hard to get to the point she is at. Her coworkers consider her to be very adept at her job. Once Peg is given a referral she is very quick to gather and provide the necessary information that is needed to make a decision on a case. She is very conscientious, hard working, and dependable.

Like most people, Peg is complicated. On the one hand, she is a mentally tough individual. For example, whenever there is a problem with one of her clients and someone is expected to make a home visit, Peg will immediately go to the home to gather information. Anyone who has ever worked in the social services knows that mandated visits to the homes of troubled clients can be a very challenging task. City employees are regularly expected to go into neighborhoods that most people would be afraid to drive through in broad daylight, let alone go into the home and be expected to gather lengthy social, medical, and family histories. In many cases, city employees are expected to investigate suspected sexual and/or physical abuse reports. Having to go to unfamiliar homes in very impoverished neighborhoods can be mentally exhausting. Seeing the level of poverty and its detrimental effects on a repeated basis can wear almost anyone down psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. One can only imagine how difficult it must be to live in those conditions. City workers are often either not welcome or downright resented. Workers may get invited in, welcomed, or yelled at, screamed at, treated disrespectfully, ignored, or worse. Many city employees who are required to go on home

visits truly deserve a medal, and Peg has been doing this for almost 20 years.

But there are also other sides to Peg. She not only allows herself to be controlled in her personal and professional life, but also has some control issues of her own. At times, Peg may seem generous. On the other hand, while Peg has no problem spending excessive amounts of money on the car she drives, the food she eats, the clothes she wears, and the vacations she takes, when it comes to leaving a tip for someone in the food service industry, she refuses to leave one extra penny even when the service has been excellent. Peg's need for control is very strong at times. She will often keep friends at her disposal whenever she feels she has the need to talk. If she could, Peg would buy off her friends for as cheaply as possible. Peg has this method of drawing friends in when she feels the need to talk. She will begin by getting them to dwell on their problems so that she can in turn dwell on hers. When she wants company, Peg is very good at pretending that she is interested in listening, but in reality she listens only in a superficial manner. Her real goal is to control her friends by keeping them at her level. I guess the saying "misery loves company" fits in well with her need for control. Peg does not give of herself unless she is feeling desperate or insecure. For instance, when hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, Peg felt empathy for the flood victims who were forced to leave their homes, but not long after the news reports aired, she was on the phone to her realtor to see if there were any good investments available or real-estate bargains.

On the surface, Peg tries to convey the notion that she is in control of her life. She is generally well liked and takes pride in doing a good job. However, a look under the surface may reveal a bit more about Peg. She may appear competent and adept, but in some ways Peg lives in fear that some day she may be fired for not having done

something exactly correctly. At times, she has great difficulty standing up to a boss who is the domineering, controlling, and micro-managing type. One of Peg's most current bosses is exactly that--domineering, controlling, with an excessive need to micro-manage everyone and everything. Despite the fact that Peg's boss treats her very disrespectfully, Peg still has a strange admiration for her, perhaps because she has a higher level of status than Peg. For the most part, it appears that Peg's high regard for her boss is based upon her boss earning about twice as much money as Peg does annually. Although her boss shows no desire to get along with others, Peg may admire her aggressive ways and seems to have taken her on as a role model.

In still another side, Peg will often bend over backwards to appease people who are controlling in both her personal and professional life. Rather than address the person and make an attempt to explain how he or she is making her feel uncomfortable, Peg will often just take the abuse. She passively tries to get even in a round-a-bout way. For example, whenever she has an argument with her husband (and they argue almost constantly), rather than communicate with him directly, she will write things in her diary that are intended to provoke hurt or frustration and leave it out on the counter the next day for him to read. Like many men who have a need to control women, his method is to act kindly toward her. Once he has Peg's attention he will start treating her badly. Her next move is to retreat until he draws her in again by pretending to be nice. This pattern of control and dysfunction has been going on for many years.

Peg lives in fear of many things: 1) losing her job, 2) losing her husband, and 3) losing her financial status. Rather than face her fears, she regularly tries to make light of the problems in her personal and professional life. She often begins by saying "Do you

want to hear something funny?” but then tells a very, very sad story. When making light of her problems does not work, she often tries to escape her fears via prescription drugs (including sleeping pills) and alcohol. Peg takes sleeping pills so often she has a strong tendency to fall asleep right in the middle of a phone conversation. In her attempt to avoid being controlled, she has also sought another unhealthy way in which to escape. For the past 10 to 15 years, Peg has been having an extramarital affair.