



A Roll of the Dice: Luke's Story

Kelly Delaney

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Following a family's work to overcome the impacts of addiction, A Roll of the Dice is a discomfiting memoir about losing a relationship to vice.

Kelly Delaney's memoir *A Roll of the Dice* is about the exasperating impacts of addiction on families.

Delaney's ex-husband, Luke, was addicted to gambling. Here, he is characterized as someone who saw life as a competition and who refused to be a "loser." The book notes that after Luke's father abandoned his family, he felt compelled to provide for his mother himself. Even as his gambling intensified, he felt driven to excel at it. He dreamed of financial freedom but sought to achieve it in dangerous ways, including skimming from accounts at the bank he worked at.

The book also details Delaney's relationship with Luke. She entered his life as the friend of a friend; she writes that she ignored her concerns about him, regarding him as an affectionate, passionate man. Later, though, she faced violence and aggression in their relationship, and she found that his addiction corrupted their relationships with people beyond their immediate family circle, including with work colleagues.

Throughout the book, Delaney attempts to reconcile her memories of their relationship (and its troubles) with Luke's, working from a place of empathy and balancing recognition of Luke's flaws with positive notes about him, as when she recognizes that his gambling was, in part, about his hopes to provide for his growing family. However, elements of this work are both too personal and too unreliable to convince general audiences: the text guesses at, but cannot confirm, Luke's inner thoughts, and too much is gleaned about his intentions from too little evidence. Despite the book's efforts to flesh Luke out, its delivery remains one-sided.

Further, while the book emphasizes the impact of Luke's actions on his family throughout, there's a notable lack of emotion in the text despite its quite personal subject matter. Its diction is often sterile and distant, even when it's detailing traumatic events and moments of triumph: a terrible car crash and work toward recovery after it are recorded in bland terms, for example, beyond Delaney's initial relief over surviving—and fears over Luke's reaction. And the pacing is uneven: there are extended sequences depicting the couple's daily life beyond the issues of addiction that clash with the book's leaps forward in time at the expense of developing important events more thoroughly.

The reflective memoir *A Roll of the Dice* takes retrospective stock of the warning signs of addiction.

JOHN M. MURRAY (March 12, 2024)

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