

For Keeps

► My husband, Scott, and I have been searching for our first house, and while trolling the real-estate section, I was thrown by a front-page story about an ex of mine we'll call Jake, who'd renovated an old barbershop in a shady-but-cool area. His studio was a far cry from the colonials I'd seen with Scott, and the contrast made my head spin. These two men, and their values, couldn't be more unlike; yet at different times, I managed to be compatible with both.

Reading about Jake's offbeat home made me question whether Scott takes things too seriously and if I'd be just as happy in Jake's relaxed, bohemian hide-away. I'd always secretly imagined what life would've been like had I married Jake, and here was a small indication. Why

does bumping into an ex—around the holidays, on the street, even in the paper—flood our brains with so many what-ifs? And is it wrong to wonder?

Alternate Reality

I feel guilty for imagining life with someone other than my hubby. But Dorree Lynn, PhD, coauthor of *Sex for Grown-Ups*, assures me, "It's normal to have pangs about the path not taken, and as long as you're satisfied in your marriage, there's no need to worry." She explains that the feelings Jake stirred—curiosity, a little sadness, a sense of loss—weren't the result of missing him but instead pining for what he'd brought out in me.

Give ghosts of boyfriends past the boot.



Imagine If You'd Married Your Ex

Every month, author and journalist Kristina Grish contemplates the sweet, surprising, and often totally confusing world of marriage.

Jake, a free-spirited painter, inspired my adventurous side; we tried exotic foods, met quirky people, stayed out all night. With Scott, who has a solid job, is down-to-earth, and is wise beyond his years, I'm more reserved—still fun but in an adult way.

Lynn suspects that since it's human nature to sugarcoat the past, I've let exciting memories override the day-to-day reality of life with Jake. So it's not enough to remind myself why I dumped him or how happy Scott makes me, as friends suggest. "Don't deny how it felt to read about Jake," Lynn says. "That only feeds desire."

Instead, she urges me to mentally play out being back with him: Our date

begins with drinks and dancing at a sweaty underground bar (sexy)... but ends with my paying the bill and having lumpy futon sex in an unsafe part of town (no, thanks!). The fantasy makes me remember how cheap, irresponsible, and inconsiderate Jake was. While I may crave a bit more adventure, I adore Scott's generous, responsible, and warm nature (he's also funny as hell). Most reassuring? "The part of you that Jake coaxed out isn't lost," she says. "You just need to return to it in a way that's appropriate now."

Pigs and Pong

Lynn says I can use my newspaper run-in to enhance my marriage by planning activities with Scott that spark my old daring side. To this end, Dennis Lin, MD, director of the Psychosexual

Medicine Program at Beth Israel Medical Center, recommends I invite Scott on creative dates. When I suggest a crazy cooking class where you work with a whole pig followed by a late-night beer-pong match, Scott gets excited and mentions it reminds him of how up-for-anything I was when we first met.

Dr. Lin adds that bringing pieces of my wilder past into my current life will help fulfill my Jake-ish streak, like occasionally staying up 'til sunrise or christening the patio furniture at our new house. We recently bought a cottage near the beach that feels very right: a little bohemian but solid enough to last. ■