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Love vs Fear

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# LOVE VS. FEAR

A Romantic Thriller

Don Fenn

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1. Romance 2. Thriller 3. Mystery

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The bright sun warmed the early winter day. It seemed like the beginning of spring, allowing fantasy to assert that the cold of this darkest time was more illusion than fact, the brilliant light of a cloudless sky making imagination believe that the pretense of a more hopeful season was real.

The cold air sharply focused everything. The kaleidoscope of hues—dark red, purple, brown, yellow, magenta and many more—of the late fall leaves littering the ground revealed the leaves' true colors normally obscured by chlorophyll, nature's oxygen-producing, greening energy drug. In its absence the leaves exposed their true character.

Rachel always walked three miles twice every day, even when she was sick, except feverish. But that hadn't happened for months since Damian had managed to convince her that massive daily nutrition of the right kind could prevent illness for years.

Her tall five-foot-ten, lithe yet voluptuous hourglass body was dressed in blue jeans, a green blouse blended with a touch of blue, and a light grey sweater. Her dark brown hair perfectly framed large brown eyes. A pretty oval, usually smiling face, with a touch of oriental in its character, beamed as she walked briskly, yet deliberately.

With roving and educated eyes she took in everything around her, smiling at nature's splendor, very glad to be alive. Her mood was gay, friendly and earnest in its acceptance of what was given her. She found great comfort in this optimism, which contributed happiness and inspiration to the day's experience. To an intimate friend she would have described her walk as an uplifting "spiritual journey".

As she looked about she loved to see the constant display of dark and light mirroring each other, framing one dramatic

image after another for her hungry eyes to perceive, creating the nooks and crannies of nature's unlimited supply of small spaces available for imaginary restructuring.

She was walking on one of the few flat streets in the hilly regions of Oakland. She couldn't help noticing the expensive debris thrown out by the large fashionable houses for pickup. This made room for the new purchases of prosperous people filling their lives with things to make it sumptuous—as if plenty could create comfort. She wondered whether they were really happy.

The wind was quiet, slightly flurrying its coolness only in the shade, as if the darker regions of earth encouraged adversity to move more vigorously about. The ground was covered with prickly seedpods, some an inch in diameter. They'd fallen from walnuts lining the street spreading their ankle-busting issue everywhere in sight, along with an abundant supply of multi-colored dry leaves.

Rachel was very skilled at dodging these formidable, ankle twisting obstacles. Her slender pretty feet found the few open spots in between the seedpod morass that threatened to molest her comfort.

She was extraordinarily happy today. Life had brought her a gift of immeasurable value—someone special to replace the recent huge loss of a dear father, her closest parent. Though Damian entered her life as an enormously mixed bag, he had since proved to be a dream-come-true. Having found a woman whom he respected even more than himself, he had been unknowingly saving a treasure chest of previously unexpressed love that he now showered upon her with great thoughtfulness and admiration. Rachel was overwhelmed with what she had never entirely believed in—a man who seemed to fulfill her every dream, who felt and

said things the way she had believed only women could feel and say them.

Since his entrance into her life, her walks were the special time she set aside to think about what had happened between them after they'd decided to live together. In the days, and then weeks after she moved into his huge condo in Oakland everything seemed like a miracle. In the course of whatever happened they fit each other like a glove. The example she often thought about, that continued to amaze her, was fitting all their separate things and habits into one kitchen. Both Rachel and Damian were amateur cooks with very different menus, food preferences, and utensils relating to food and its preparation. This could have posed enormous problems for them as an example of fitting two lives into one place. But everything had gone entirely smoothly. He had simply moved aside and welcomed her into half the space, taking turns cooking different things, sometimes helping each other. This prompted her to relax her misgivings about what she was doing, allowing her to accept his different ways and believe that things would work out.

She had issues with men filling up her space. As dear and loving as her father had been, he was a man who possessed, and readily expressed very strong demands and expectations as part of that closeness. Because they loved each other so much she had fit him into her life, sometimes in ways that didn't really suit her.

'Why do I keep thinking about that?' She privately asked herself. 'It's just worrying. Why should I mistrust what seems to be real?' She added thinking of Damian. 'Perhaps I mistrust men when I thought I didn't. I certainly never felt that way about my father.'

No sooner had she thought it, that she knew it wasn't entirely true. She hadn't worried like she did sometimes with

Damian. But she had struggled in her mind with the compromises she'd made for her father's sake. Though she usually relied upon the habits she'd learned as a child in adapting to him. She'd always told herself that he was not going to live forever, that one day she would have her chance to be more independent of his expectations. Like for instance his assumption that she would come whenever he felt he really needed her, which often had meant canceling psychotherapeutic sessions without sufficient notice for her patients adequately to adapt to her temporary absence. Her father had lived halfway across the country in Denver.

'Sometimes I wonder if these walks are happy times or unhappy times,' she thought. 'I feel so happy about Damian, though sometimes a little disbelieving. But invariably I think about my father. And for the first time in my life I have troubled thoughts about him. Why is this happening? If I was my own shrink I would wonder if prosperity is making me uncomfortable, perhaps even disloyal to my father for loving Damian so much.'

Her thoughts turned to Damian and who he was. She felt great pleasure remembering all the wonderful things that happened with him. They loved to sit and talk, to watch good movies, listen to music, visit an art gallery, have a meal out, or sit keeping the sun company as it sunk below the horizon. But most of all twice a week they adored making love. They had both slipped into this sequencing without ever discussing it, making sex work as smoothly as the kitchen and cooking had.

In some ways he was a strange man for her to think of living with. Her friends were mostly other psychotherapists like herself, who spoke quite openly about the good and bad parts of their emotional experience. But Damian didn't like to talk about himself or his feelings very much. Mostly he

enjoyed being with her, doing things for and with her, listening to her ideas, attitudes and experiences. Her life was full of things that he didn't know about, had never experienced and loved to hear.

"I saw the most androgynous person I've ever seen on Bart this morning," she related.

"Like some of the medieval paintings you've showed me," he replied very interested. "But what was her...his...the sex? Couldn't you tell?"

"He was man. Though at first I thought he was female. In fact it took me a while—several glances—before I got it right."

"I had the same bloody experience walking to my office from the parking lot! It sort of pulled me off balance. Ever since we talked about androgyny I notice it much more. Nowadays I don't look at anybody, though I didn't used to be that way.

"Really. What did you used to do?"

"Stare at everybody."

"Why the change?"

He didn't respond right away. He had never been terribly introspective before he met Rachel, so it took him several moments to find an answer.

"Must be you," he insisted. "Maybe I was looking for you the whole time," he added with an ironic laugh.

"Ooh," she crooned touched by his sweet words. "You say such nice things to me."

"Didn't your father?"

She wished he hadn't asked. A bolt of sadness flashed through her when Damian mentioned her father. It was followed immediately by a feeling of discomfort that puzzled her.

“Come to think of it he didn’t. Our love was assumed between us. We both knew it was very strong. He used to say to me that our love was so strong it never had to be mentioned.”

She looked at Damian realizing for the first time clearly that his affectionate words, which he liked very much to express, made her feel both wonderful and slightly uneasy. Until this moment she’d always written this off as unfamiliarity. Now she wondered.

They were sitting at the dining room table eating dinner. She loved to mix spinach leaves with vegetables and cooked ground turkey, while he ate a bowl of cold cereal. His main meal came at noon.

“Bart was really crowded tonight,” she said. “I had to stand all the way home. If I catch it just five minutes earlier there are plenty of seats.”

“You must have gone overtime with your last patient.”

“She needed it. She was still very frightened when the time was up, so I stayed that extra five minutes. I think she needs to prepare herself for leaving the session.”

“Sounds like your patients wore you out today.”

“Oh, a little. Though I don’t usually think about them that way,” Rachel replied. “How was your day?”

“Oh, boring as usual.”

“Why do you keep saying that?” She queried a little troubled. She’d heard it many times before.

“Ever since I met you the insurance business is such a drag.”

“It wasn’t like that before?”

“Probably was but I didn’t notice,” he replied. “I didn’t have anything better to do.”

“So I’m something better to do.”

She'd said it as if she were disappointed...perhaps that he was using her. Though consciously she didn't really feel this way.

He brightened, enthusiasm spreading over his face.

"Oh, definitely! Being with you is my very best thing to do!"

"It's very sweet of you to say that," she said. "But it bothers me a little that you don't like your own work."

"It's okay. It's a living."

"But are you going to be happy just making a living?"

"Oh, I don't know. What else can I do? We've eliminated detecting."

"You mean spying, don't you," she corrected him.

"Yeah, I suppose."

"Do you miss it?"

"I don't know. But there's no point in talking about it because we've already agreed I'm not going to do anything dangerous."

"You seemed so sure when you decided not to do it again. But now I wonder sometimes whether you've discovered that you miss it, that you like doing dangerous things?"

"Not particularly."

"But then..."

He stood up and walked over very close to her.

"Can I have a hug?"

She couldn't resist touching him. They both loved it. She stood and they embraced for a long time holding firmly to each other. But when they let go and sat down again she resumed the topic.

"Honey? Can we talk a little more about this?"

“I don’t think it’s a good idea, sweet Rachel,” he said gently. “We’ve already settled it. It’s part of our bargain. I never go back on my word.”

“But you’re not happy.”

He laughed.

“That’s not true!” He said with great enthusiasm. “How could I not be happy when I have the most wonderful woman in the world living in my house! Sometimes I have to pinch myself to be sure it’s really happening!”

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