TITLE : THE CURSED WIDOWER

SUBTITLE : WHEN A PROMISE BECOMES A PRISON

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PREFACE

Some promises are made in moments of happiness, while others are born from the deepest wounds of the human heart. When grief overwhelms the soul, a person may make decisions without fully understanding the consequences they will have on the years ahead.

This is the story of Dave, a man who loved Floriane so deeply that, after her death, he believed he could never love another woman again.

Before she passed away, Dave made her a solemn promise : he would never marry another woman. At the time, those words seemed to him like the purest expression of devotion. He believed that remaining alone would preserve the memory of their love and prove that death could never diminish what they had shared.

What Dave did not know was that Floriane had left him letters. In those letters, she had expressed her love, her hopes for his future, and her desire that he should not condemn himself to a lifetime of loneliness. She wanted him to understand that her departure did not mean the end of his life.

But Dave had not yet discovered her message. Instead, he carried his promise like an invisible chain, convinced that breaking it would amount to betraying the woman he had loved.

Determined to escape the memories that surrounded him, Dave travelled far from home.

In Japan, he met Aiko, a woman whose love was sincere and whose dreams extended beyond the present. She wanted marriage, a family, and the security of a shared future. Dave cared for her, but he could not offer the commitment she needed. He wanted her presence without the obligations of marriage, unaware that his refusal to make a decision was slowly destroying the future she hoped to build with him.

Their relationship lasted for some time, but love alone could not overcome the difference between their expectations.

Dave eventually left Japan and travelled to Australia, where he met Claire. Their relationship began without serious promises, and Dave felt comfortable with a woman who did not initially demand marriage. Yet Claire's desires changed as their relationship developed. She began to long for a stable family and a future she could call her own.

When Claire announced that she was pregnant, Dave experienced a hope he had almost forgotten. He accompanied her to ultrasound appointments and imagined holding the child in his arms. If the baby were a girl, he thought, he would name her Floriane, after the woman whose memory still governed his life.

For a moment, he believed that fatherhood might give him a new purpose without requiring him to abandon his vow.

Then Claire revealed that another man was the child's father.

The revelation shattered Dave's hopes and forced him to confront yet another disappointment. Feeling humiliated and wounded, he left Australia and travelled to the United States.

In Las Vegas, a city alive with lights, music, and restless crowds, he met Jennifer, who worked in a casino and was raising two children. Their relationship gradually deepened. Dave found himself becoming part of a family again, sharing moments of affection and discovering the comfort of everyday life.

As the years passed, he became increasingly aware of his own age. His hair began to turn grey, and he could no longer ignore the question that had followed him through every relationship: would he spend the rest of his life alone ?

At last, Dave decided that he would marry Jennifer. He bought her a beautiful diamond ring, believing that he was finally ready to break free from the promise that had governed his existence.

But Jennifer had her own painful history. Having experienced the failure of a previous marriage, she feared repeating the same mistakes. She was not ready to marry again or to expose her children to another uncertain change. She preferred to preserve the relationship as it was rather than make a commitment she could not honestly fulfil.

Once again, Dave's hopes collapsed.

Convinced that he was condemned to a life without the family he desired, he returned home. There, in the silence of the house he had once shared with Floriane, the past waited for him. It was only then that the letters she had left behind would begin to reveal their meaning.

But sometimes, the truth arrives after years of unnecessary suffering.

The Cursed Widower explores the fragile boundary between love and guilt, loyalty and fear, remembrance and self-imposed punishment. Through Dave's journey across three continents, the novel examines how a promise made in grief can influence an entire life when its meaning is never questioned.

This is not merely a story about a widower searching for love. It is the story of a man who struggles to understand whether he is honouring the woman he lost or denying himself the right to live.

It is also a reminder that the dead cannot return to change our decisions, but the words they leave behind may still offer us a way forward.

Dave's tragedy lies not only in the disappointments he encounters, but also in the years he spends believing that he has no freedom to choose another future.

And when the final truth emerges, the reader must confront a painful question: what happens when a person discovers too late that the prison he has endured for years was never meant to hold him?

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of those whose love remains alive long after their departure, and to the hearts that continue to search for meaning in the silence left behind by loss.

To those who have loved with all their strength, who have made promises with sincere hearts, and who have sometimes mistaken suffering for loyalty, may these pages remind you that true love does not demand the sacrifice of your entire future.

To every widow and widower who has struggled to accept life after the loss of a beloved spouse, I dedicate this story with the hope that you will find the courage to cherish yesterday without closing the door to tomorrow.

To those who carry guilt over words spoken beside a hospital bed, promises whispered through tears, or farewells made when death seemed impossible to overcome, may you find peace in the understanding that love is greater than fear and that grief should never become a life sentence.

This dedication is also for those who have waited for love, those who have offered their hearts to someone still imprisoned by the past, and those who have learned that affection alone cannot build a future when fear prevents commitment.

Through Dave's journey, I wish to honour the complexity of the human heart: its capacity to love deeply, to hope again, to suffer disappointment, and to continue searching for a place where it belongs.

Above all, this book is dedicated to everyone who needs to hear that remembering someone does not mean refusing to live, that moving forward does not erase the past, and that the most beautiful memories should become a source of strength rather than chains that bind us to sorrow.

May love remain a blessing, never a prison.

CHAPTER ONE : BEFORE THE WORLD FELL SILENT

There had been a time when Dave believed happiness was something a person could build with patience, honesty, and the right companion. He was thirty-three years old, established in his professional life, and confident that the most important decisions of his future had already been made.

He had not become a wealthy man, nor did he possess everything he had once imagined achieving. Nevertheless, he considered himself fortunate. He had a woman who loved him, a home where he could find peace after a demanding day, and plans that made the future seem welcoming rather than uncertain.

Her name was Floriane.

At thirty, she possessed a quiet elegance that attracted attention without requiring her to seek it. She had expressive eyes, a gentle voice, and a way of listening that made people feel their concerns mattered. Her beauty was undeniable, but Dave had fallen in love with something far more enduring: her character.

Floriane knew how to disagree without humiliating anyone. She could challenge Dave's decisions without diminishing his confidence, and she never confused love with possession. When he returned home exhausted, she did not always ask him to explain himself immediately. Sometimes, she simply prepared something for him to eat, sat nearby, and allowed him the silence he needed.

Their relationship had not been perfect from the beginning. Like most couples, they had experienced misunderstandings, moments of impatience, and disagreements about ordinary matters. Yet they had learned to return to each other rather than allow pride to determine the outcome of every argument.

For Dave, that was the true meaning of companionship.

One evening, after a particularly difficult day, he found Floriane standing near the window of their living room. Rain traced delicate lines across the glass, and the last light of the afternoon was fading behind the neighbouring buildings.

She turned when she heard him enter.

“You look as though the whole world has been asking something of you,” she observed.

Dave placed his briefcase beside the sofa and loosened his tie.

“Perhaps it has.”

“And did you give the world everything it wanted?”

“Not everything.”

“Good. I would hate to discover that I am living with a man who has nothing left for himself.”

He laughed and approached her.

“You are the only person who can make exhaustion sound like a personal failure.”

“Then sit down before I find another accusation.”

He obeyed, and she joined him. For several minutes, they spoke about the day, their neighbours, and a family they knew who had recently welcomed a baby. Floriane listened attentively when Dave mentioned a possible change at work. She asked questions, weighed his concerns, and reminded him that professional success was not worth sacrificing his health.

Later, while they prepared dinner together, she began talking about the future.

“I would like us to travel more,” she said.

“Where would you like to go ?”

“Somewhere we have never been. Somewhere neither of us can pretend to know everything.”

“Are you suggesting that I know everything?”

“Not at all. I am suggesting that you occasionally behave as though you do.”

Dave turned towards her in mock indignation.

“That is a serious accusation.”

“Then prove me wrong.”

He caught her hand and drew her closer.

“If we travel, you will have to choose the destination. I will choose the hotel.”

“And what if I dislike your choice?”

“You will tell me, and I will find another one.”

“What if you dislike mine ?”

“I will pretend to enjoy it until we return home.”

Floriane laughed, and the sound filled the room with a warmth that neither of them knew how precious it would become.

They spoke about places they wished to visit, a house they might one day buy, and the possibility of welcoming children into their lives. Their conversations were not declarations of certainty. They were invitations to imagine a future together.

Neither understood how fragile such plans could be.

During the following months, their life continued along familiar lines. Dave worked, Floriane attended to her own responsibilities, and they reserved time for one another whenever their schedules allowed.

On weekends, they sometimes visited friends or went out for dinner. On other occasions, they remained at home, preparing meals and watching films. Floriane enjoyed music and occasionally sang while she worked. Dave often pretended not to notice, only to join her when she deliberately stopped in the middle of a song.

“You are doing that on purpose,” he told her one Saturday morning.

“Doing what?”

“Stopping when you know I am listening.”

“Perhaps your attention deserves to be tested.”

“My attention is perfectly reliable.”

“Then finish the song.”

He attempted to sing the next line, forgot the words, and burst into laughter.

Floriane shook her head.

“I shall never understand why you are so confident about everything.”

“Because you are here to correct my mistakes.”

She smiled, but her expression softened.

“Dave, do you ever think about how quickly life passes?”

“Sometimes. Usually when I realise that another year has gone by.”

“I mean something else. We spend so much time planning what we will do tomorrow that we forget how fortunate we are to have today.”

He regarded her carefully.

“Has something happened?”

“No. I have simply been thinking.”

He touched her cheek.

“Then tell me what is on your mind.”

She looked at him for a moment before shaking her head.

“Nothing that needs an answer today.”

He accepted her response, believing there would always be another evening when they could return to the conversation.

That was one of the assumptions people make when life is still generous: that difficult questions can be postponed because time will remain available.

Dave had no reason to suspect that the ordinary moments he barely noticed would one day become the memories he would protect most fiercely.

The first sign that something was wrong came quietly.

Floriane had been feeling unusually tired. At first, she attributed it to the demands of daily life. She had occasionally experienced discomfort, but she did not immediately consider it serious. Like many people, she hoped that rest and a change in routine would resolve whatever was troubling her.

Dave noticed that she was sleeping more than usual.

“You have been exhausted lately,” he remarked one evening.

“I have not been sleeping very well.”

“Perhaps you should take a few days off.”

“I may do that.”

“Have you seen a doctor?”

“Not yet.”

He studied her face.

“Floriane, promise me you will not ignore this if it continues.”

She reached across the table and placed her hand over his.

“I promise I will take care of myself.”

He wanted to ask more questions, but she appeared reluctant to discuss the matter. He did not wish to turn his concern into pressure, so he allowed the conversation to end.

A few days later, she agreed to seek medical advice.

The appointment led to further examinations. The waiting period was uncomfortable, but neither of them anticipated the result that would eventually change their lives.

When the doctor asked Floriane to return for a more detailed discussion, Dave accompanied her.

He remembered the room clearly: the pale walls, the desk between them, and the medical files arranged in a neat pile. He remembered how the doctor paused before speaking, choosing each word with unusual care.

The diagnosis was breast cancer.

For a moment, Dave did not understand what he had heard. The words seemed to belong to someone else's life, to a conversation taking place in a room far away from the one in which he was sitting.

Floriane remained silent.

The doctor explained that additional investigations would determine the extent of the disease and help establish the most appropriate treatment. There were decisions to make, appointments to arrange, and information they would need to understand.

Dave heard the explanations, but his thoughts had already begun to race.

Cancer.

Treatment.

Uncertainty.

He looked at Floriane, expecting her to ask a question or turn towards him. Instead, she stared at the floor, her hands folded tightly in her lap.

When they finally left the hospital, the afternoon appeared strangely ordinary. Cars moved along the road, pedestrians hurried towards their destinations, and people spoke into their phones as though nothing significant had happened.

Dave wanted to stop every passer-by and tell them that his world had changed.

Instead, he opened the car door for Floriane.

Neither spoke during the first part of the journey.

Eventually, she turned towards him.

“Dave ?”

“Yes, my love ?”

“Look at me.”

He glanced at her.

“I am still here,” she said.

His hands tightened around the steering wheel.

“I know.”

“No. I need you to understand. Whatever happens, I am still the woman who loves you. A diagnosis does not change that.”

He pulled the car to the side of the road. For several seconds, he could not speak.

Then he reached for her hand.

“We will face this together,” he said. “You will have every treatment the doctors recommend. We will find the best specialists. We will do whatever is necessary.”

Floriane listened, and tears gathered in her eyes.

“I know you will try.”

“Try ? I will do everything I can.”

She leaned towards him, resting her forehead against his.

“I know, Dave. I know.”

He held her there, unwilling to let go.

At that moment, he believed determination could protect the woman he loved. He had not yet learned that love could accompany someone through suffering without being able to control its outcome.

That evening, when they returned home, Dave prepared dinner while Floriane rested. He called the hospital to confirm the next appointment, wrote down the information they had received, and began researching treatment options.

He refused to imagine a future in which she was absent.

When he finally joined her in the bedroom, she was awake.

“Come and sit with me,” she said.

He lay beside her and drew her into his arms.

“Are you afraid?” she asked.

He considered giving her the answer he believed she wanted to hear. Instead, he chose honesty.

“Yes.”

“So am I.”

He kissed her forehead.

“But we are going to fight.”

Floriane closed her eyes.

“Yes, my love. We are going to fight.”

Outside, the night settled over the city. Inside their home, two people held each other more tightly than they had the previous evening, unaware that the greatest test of their love had only just begun.

CHAPTER TWO : THE BATTLE THEY COULD NOT CONTROL

The days following Floriane's diagnosis became a succession of medical appointments, difficult conversations, and attempts to preserve the ordinary rhythm of their lives.

Dave approached the situation with the determination of a man accustomed to solving problems. He gathered medical reports, asked questions, compared treatment options, and ensured that Floriane had everything she needed before each appointment.

He wanted to become useful in every possible way.

If she was tired, he prepared her meals. If she had an appointment, he rearranged his schedule to accompany her. When she needed help understanding medical information, he sat beside her and read through the documents with her.

Yet the more he learned about the disease, the more he understood that there was no simple solution.

Some days brought encouraging news. On others, the treatment left Floriane exhausted and discouraged. They learned to appreciate small improvements without assuming that every difficult period had ended.

Their home gradually changed. Medical papers occupied spaces that had once held magazines and photographs. Appointments determined their schedules, and telephone calls from the hospital could interrupt even the quietest evening.

Nevertheless, Dave refused to allow illness to become the only subject in their relationship.

He continued to bring her flowers. Sometimes he bought them on his way home; at other times, he arranged them himself in a vase on the dining table.

Floriane noticed his efforts.

“You do realise that flowers cannot persuade the doctors to change my results?” she said one afternoon.

“I have never claimed to possess such powers.”

“Then why do you keep buying them?”

“Because they make the house look better.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“Is that the only reason?”

“No. They also give me something to do while I wait for you to tell me that I have arranged them badly.”

She laughed.

“You have arranged them badly.”

He looked at the vase.

“They are flowers, Floriane. They are not supposed to stand at attention.”

“Perhaps you should ask them to be more cooperative.”

For a moment, they were simply a couple teasing one another in their living room. The illness had not disappeared, but it had not taken every part of their lives.

Those moments became precious to Dave.

He began to understand that courage did not always appear in dramatic acts. Sometimes it consisted of getting out of bed after a difficult night, attending another appointment, or finding a reason to laugh when the future seemed uncertain.

Floriane displayed a strength that surprised him. She did not pretend that she was never afraid, nor did she insist on appearing cheerful every day. There were mornings when she wanted to remain in bed and afternoons when she needed to cry without explaining herself.

Dave learned to recognise the difference between offering comfort and demanding optimism.

When she spoke about her fears, he listened.

When she wanted silence, he stayed beside her.

When she became angry at the unfairness of her situation, he did not tell her that she should be grateful for what she still possessed. He understood that gratitude and sorrow could exist together.

Yet, despite his growing understanding, he carried one private fear that he could barely acknowledge.

He was afraid of losing her.

As the treatment continued, Floriane's condition placed increasing demands on her strength. Some days she managed to smile through the discomfort; on others, the effort required simply to complete an ordinary task left her exhausted.

Dave tried to anticipate her needs, but she occasionally reminded him that she was still capable of making her own decisions.

“You do not have to ask me every twenty minutes whether I am comfortable,” she told him one evening.

“I am making sure you have everything you need.”

“I know.”

“Then why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because I love you, but I do not want to become a patient in every conversation we have.”

He fell silent.

She took his hand.

“I need you to remember that I am still Floriane. I still have opinions. I still want to hear your stories about work. I still want to argue with you about what we should watch in the evening.”

“I would never forget who you are.”

“Then do not let the illness take over every room in this house.”

Her words stayed with him.

From that day, Dave made a conscious effort to preserve their shared life. He asked about her thoughts rather than only her symptoms. They spoke about people they knew, memories from their early relationship, and places they had once hoped to visit.

One evening, he found an old photograph of them taken shortly after they had begun dating.

In the picture, Floriane was laughing at something outside the frame. Dave stood beside her, looking at her rather than at the camera.

She examined it for a long time.

“You were always looking at me,” she said.

“I had good taste.”

“You were also very serious.”

“I was trying to impress you.”

“Did it work?”

“Obviously.”

She smiled.

Then her expression became thoughtful.

“Do you remember what you told me the first time we discussed marriage?”

Dave considered the question.

“I told you that I wanted to build a life with you.”

“You said you wanted us to grow old together.”

He felt a tightening in his chest.

“Yes.”

“I believed you.”

He moved closer.

“I still want that.”

“I know.”

Neither spoke for several moments.

Floriane placed the photograph on the table.

“Dave, there are things we cannot promise one another.”

He looked at her.

“What do you mean?”

“We can promise to love each other. We can promise to be honest, to do our best, and to stand together when life becomes difficult. But we cannot promise that nothing will ever separate us.”

He disliked the direction of the conversation.

“Why are we talking about separation?”

“Because we are living through something that has reminded me how little control we have.”

He stood and walked towards the window.

“I do not want to discuss a future without you.”

“I am not asking you to imagine one tonight.”

“Then let us talk about something else.”

Floriane did not insist. She knew how deeply the thought frightened him.

But she also understood something that Dave was not ready to accept: love could not guarantee that two people would have the same number of years.

The months passed, and their hopes rose and fell with the medical assessments.

Dave tried to remain attentive to every development. When a treatment appeared to be helping, he allowed himself to hope. When the doctors expressed concern, he searched for another question to ask, another possibility to investigate.

He could not bear the idea that there might be limits to what he could do.

One afternoon, after a difficult consultation, he remained in the hospital corridor while Floriane went to the restroom.

A doctor approached him and asked whether he had a moment to speak privately.

Dave followed him into a small office.

The doctor explained that Floriane's situation required careful monitoring. He discussed the treatment response, the uncertainty surrounding the disease, and the importance of preparing for different possibilities.

Dave listened without interrupting.

Finally, he asked the question that had been consuming him.

“Can she recover?”

The doctor did not give him a false guarantee.

He explained what was known, what remained uncertain, and what the medical team intended to do next.

Dave left the office with a file in his hand and a heaviness that seemed to settle behind his ribs.

When Floriane returned, she studied his face.

“What did he say?”

“He explained the next steps.”

“And ?”

“We will continue the treatment.”

She waited.

“Dave, did he tell you something you do not want to repeat?”

He looked away.

“He said we must be prepared for different possibilities.”

Floriane's face became still.

“I see.”

He immediately regretted his words.

“That does not mean we should lose hope.”

“I know.”

“We still have options.”

“I know that too.”

He reached for her hand.

“Then why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because I can see how hard you are trying to find a promise in every sentence.”

He had no answer.

She squeezed his fingers.

“I need you to be with me, Dave. I need your love. But I cannot carry your fear as well as my own.”

Her words were not cruel. They were the words of a woman who loved him and wanted him to remain present rather than become lost in the future.

He sat beside her, ashamed of how often his fear had prevented him from listening.

“I am sorry,” he whispered.

“You do not have to apologise for being afraid.”

“What if I lose you?”

Floriane's eyes filled with tears.

She rested her head against his shoulder.

“I do not know what will happen. I wish I could tell you that everything will be fine. But I cannot promise you that.”

He held her hand in both of his.

For the first time, he allowed himself to cry in front of her.

As time passed, Floriane began thinking about what she wanted Dave to understand if she were no longer there to explain it.

She did not wish to frighten him, and she had no intention of turning their remaining time together into a series of farewells. Nevertheless, there were thoughts she could not keep inside forever.

One evening, she asked him to bring a small notebook from the bedside table.

“What are you planning ?” he asked.

“Nothing extraordinary.”

“You have that expression you wear when you are preparing to tell me something important.”

“Perhaps I simply want to write something down.”

He handed her the notebook.

She opened it, read a few lines she had written earlier, and then closed it again.

“Dave, I want you to remember something.”

“I am listening.”

“If life takes an unexpected turn, I do not want you to make decisions because you feel guilty.”

He frowned.

“Why would I feel guilty?”

“Because you are the sort of man who believes he must carry every burden himself.”

“I would never abandon you.”

“I have never asked you to.”

He sat beside her.

“I would do anything for you.”

Floriane looked directly into his eyes.

“That is precisely what worries me.”

He did not understand.

She continued gently.

“Sometimes, loving someone means accepting that you cannot control everything. It means allowing them to make their own choices, even when those choices are difficult. And sometimes, it means allowing yourself to live when the person you love can no longer remain beside you.”

He shook his head.

“Please do not speak as though you are already gone.”