The Other Dances

FIRE AGAINST FIRE, AND THE QUIET DRIFT

> *Not every distressed couple has a chaser and a runner.*
> *Some are two storms. Some are two silences.*

Pursue-and-withdraw is the most famous dance, but it has two siblings. The first is fire against fire. Both partners escalate, neither backs down, and every disagreement becomes a battle. These couples often love fiercely and fight the same way. Volume as proof of caring. But under the roar, both are pounding on the same door, and neither can hear the knocking over their own.

The second dance is quieter and easier to miss: the polite drift. Both partners withdraw. No scenes, just two considerate people managing logistics and slowly becoming roommates. Friends call them stable. But each one privately aches, each decided long ago that reaching wasn't safe, and each reads the other's silence as the final answer. It is the most dangerous dance because nothing looks wrong. The bond starves politely, with no fight to sound the alarm.

Both dances end the same way the first one does. Someone risks a different move. In fire against fire, the turning point is the first softened voice: “Wait. I don't want to win this. I want you.” In the drift, it is the first reach across the calm: “I miss you. I've missed you for a while, and I stopped saying so.” In every dance, the music only changes when one dancer does something the choreography never taught.

NAME YOUR REAL DANCE

1. Together, be honest: which dance is usually yours? Chase-and-retreat, fire-fire, or the drift? Many couples do two.
2. Fire-fire couples: agree on a white-flag phrase. “I'd rather have you than the win.” Either can wave it. Waving is never losing.
3. Drift couples: each name one thing you stopped saying, asking for, or starting, and when you stopped.
4. Identify your dance's turning move, the one thing the choreography forbids, and who is willing to try it first.
5. Agree on the tell: the earliest sign your dance has started, so either of you can call it by name.

WHEN IT’S HARD

If you are a drift couple, be careful of the comforting thought “at least we don't fight.” Fighting couples still believe the other person is worth fighting with. The drift's quiet is not peace. It is two people grieving separately in the same house. The good news is that bonds this quiet are often surprisingly ready to come back to life. Someone just has to say the first true sentence.

TO SIT WITH

What does your dance protect each of you from feeling? What has that protection cost the bond?

If your partner made the turning move tonight, would you recognize it? Would you catch it?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris