The Pursuer and the Protector

TWO PROTESTS, ONE FEAR

> *One fights for the bond by reaching loudly.*
> *One fights for it by not making things worse.*

In most couples caught in the dance, the two roles are remarkably consistent. The pursuer feels the disconnection first and cannot sit quietly with it. They bring up issues, push for talks, and escalate until something happens. It sounds like anger, but it works like a smoke alarm. Loud because the stakes are high.

The withdrawer experiences the conflict as flooding and failure. Every raised voice confirms a private fear: I can't get this right. I make it worse by opening my mouth. So they do what feels responsible. They go quiet, stay calm, and wait for the storm to pass. To them it is damage control. To their partner it feels like abandonment.

Both roles are loyalty in disguise. The pursuer refuses to let the bond die of silence. The withdrawer refuses to let it die of combat. The painful part is that each strategy triggers exactly what the other fears most. Seeing the loyalty inside your partner's worst habit is often the first bit of warmth to make it across the gap.

HONOR BOTH ROLES

1. Each of you name your usual role. Most people know within a few seconds.
2. Pursuer, finish this: “When I push, what I'm really trying to do for us is ___.”
3. Withdrawer, finish this: “When I go quiet, what I'm really trying to do for us is ___.”
4. Say them to each other and listen for the loyalty inside the habit.
5. Thank each other, sincerely, for fighting for the relationship, even in a way that hurt.

WHEN IT’S HARD

If your roles sometimes flip, or you both withdraw into a polite, distant truce, that is common too. The map matters less than what is under it: you have both been protecting the same bond with opposite instincts.

TO SIT WITH

What does your role cost you personally? What do you swallow, carry, or lose in it?

What might your partner's role have protected the relationship from over the years?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris