

Worst Fears *by* Fay Weldon



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Author: Fay Weldon

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The author's twenty-first novel features a celebrated London actress who suffers nervous delusions when her husband dies under mysterious circumstances and her friends seem strangely eager to smooth out all the complications of the tragedy.



Reviews of the *Worst Fears* by Fay Weldon

Samowar

What if the husband you love drops dead and you discover, inch by inch, he left a mystery life behind? Your worst fears would become realities. This is the dilemma of the widow in "Worst Fears." At first she mourns her husband. Then she refuses to attend his funeral. She didn't know the person being buried. It's a good read. No untruth is left unturned.

Era

This one caught me. It was so quirky, and yet believable. Am still thinking about it days after finishing. Very satisfying ending.

If you are in the mood for a new adventure, please read this book.

Molace

I loved this book! Totally off the wall and delightfully absurd, with subtle humor that is utterly priceless. This is my first book by this author, but definitely not my last. Certainly not for everyone, but if you possess somewhat of a wacky sense of humor (like me) you most likely will enjoy this ride! I found myself rooting for Alexandra the whole time, and I thought the ending was perfect!!

Otrytrerl

Fay Weldon's novel *Worst Fears* starts and finishes with bereavement. It examines how a woman deals with simultaneous loss and revealed betrayal. Alexandra is an actress, if I might be excused such gender specificity. She is also quite successful. She is currently appearing in a London West End production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. She is therefore away from home a lot.

Her husband Ned has just died, apparently discovered on the floor of the family home by a visitor. It was a sudden and massive heart attack. Alexandra wonders what might have brought it on. She takes time off work, thus allowing an understudy temporarily to take her role. She returns to the rickety, old, antique-stuffed cottage in the country. It is perhaps a rural idyll that now has to be rewritten.

Her worst fears are that there is more than meets the eye. She also has some hopes, but from the start it seems unlikely they will be realised. She is greeted by the dog, Diamond, who seems to know something is wrong. She contacts local acquaintances, Lucy and Abbie, whom she suspects know more than they are saying. Hamish, her husband's brother, comes to stay to help sort things out. Sascha, Alexandra and Ned's little boy is with Irene, Alexandra's mother. It happens often when Alexandra is away at work. Her husband Ned, as usual needed space at home to concentrate. He was, by the way, was an authority on theatre, a critic, an expert on Ibsen and also interested in costume design.

As Alexandra delves into recent events, she discovers a tangle of interests, relationships and liaisons. All of them have implications for her, despite the fact that she was often not directly involved. The protagonists relate directly to one another. They socialise, if that might be the right word. They interact. They act. They play-act. Alexandra's worst fears begin to materialise.

Ned's surname is Ludd. It is surely not a coincidence that he shares a name with one of the wreckers of history. He is the only developed male character in the novel, despite his being dead. He never speaks, but his presence pervades, perhaps even controls everything that the still living can do. The truths of his life have been at best partial, his interests specifically personal. It seems that the women are positioning themselves to lay claim to ownership of his memory. And thus recollection, rumour and revelation unfold their tangle.

The above may suggest a rather one-dimensional approach towards a feminist moral, but it is much more subtle than that. This thread is there, of course, and is epitomised when Alexandra's part in *A Doll's House* - itself a play about women and emancipation - is exploited to success by her understudy via sexual stereotyping. And *Worst Fears* opens with two of the women involved viewing Ned's body, their attention drawn to a part of his anatomy that is to become one of the book's main actors. Their reverence is sincere as they genuflect before their flaccid altar.

This accepted, it seems also that the book deals more fundamentally with the more universal issues of self-interest and selfishness. All of these characters, despite their often social or private relations, are in conflict. They compete with one another and even with themselves. When liberation becomes a possibility, it is revealed as no more than an opportunity for even greater self-obsession, a means of shutting out the interest of others.

As the plot of *Worst Fears* unfolds, the impression it leaves is that these accomplished, middle-class, apparently comfortable people are all still engaged in a primeval struggle for raw animal dominance. The currency that is hoarded in the process remains the same as it would have been if the characters had never evolved from quadruped apes in a forest gang. There is no liberation here, for anyone, except, that is, via their words, the very weapons they use to prod, punch, pierce the reality that effectively confines them to themselves. These could be anyone's worst fears.

Washington

Throughout the book I felt little sympathy for Alexandra, the insipid, self-centred, child neglecting, actress whose shallow experience was deepened by the sudden death of her husband and the subsequent revelations that recast her whole married life. Weldon deliberately undermines our sympathy for Alexandra by emphasising her acquiescence in the face of every other character. Her thoughts are peppered with compulsive cash valuations of everything she looks at. I felt schadenfreude when her husband's voice delivered the final confirmation of the lie that she had been living through his betrayal and her vanity. Weldon's conclusion is a damp squib which sees Alexandra sailing into the future looking forward to doing it all again.

Qus

The brilliant Fay Weldon skewers and punctures hypocrisy in this wonderfully sly first-person narrative. Protagonist Alexandra Ludd is the only real, genuine, honest human being in this disturbing but ultimately triumphant (in a way!) tale of adultery/infidelity, backbiting, lies, and false friendship. Alexandra, a beauty and successful actress, is in a sham of a marriage, but she's the only one who doesn't seem to know it. Her late husband Ned, a failed theater critic consumed by jealousy of her success -- she makes the money, he spends it -- porked all available females in the environs of their country cottage to get even with her for the failures of his professional career. He lived a devious double life and was unfaithful to her in nasty and sundry ways much worse than mere physical infidelity. Additionally, he maligned her character and twisted the reasons for her behavior. Alexandra is a great character, and I was rooting for her all the way, even when it seemed that all had fallen apart like Humpty Dumpty, never to be put together again. It's a terrible aspect of human nature, but success/beauty/talent are resented by those who lack any of these three attributes; Weldon exposes it for what it is, from the obsequious pseudo-friends to the horny brother-in-law Hamish, who, feigning assistance to the grieving widow, is just itching for the opportunity to get into her pants; to the country folks' envy -- there is a wonderful cameo of a resentful child-minder, the servant of everyone's nightmares -- of the city folks, who seem to have too much and they too little. It's a witty page turner typical of Weldon's best work. Am already casting the film with Angelina Jolie as Alexandra, Brad Pitt as Ned, Heath Ledger as his brother Hamish, Helen Mirren as the older, Slavic femme-fatale Vilna, Julianne Moore as the duplicitous best friend and neighbor, Abbie (playing against character), et al. Am only stumped by the worst of the bunch, the dumpy lump/unfaithful wife Jenny Linden and the unethical therapist/counselor Leah. They are perhaps the most contemptible of the rich and subtle cast of characters. Weldon has the typical counselor's mealy-mouth platitudes down pat, but the manipulative Leah is evil to boot. A terrific read that would make a fabulous film.

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