

Robert Thornton

Fatal Impact

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By

Robert Thornton

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Dedication

To Pamela, my one and only, forever.

Chapter One

Three hours before he died, Jared Burch cut himself while shaving.

A red dot bloomed. He continued to scrape his chin, taking short, swift strokes with the razor. Marion Burch watched the reflection of the crimson circle expand in the bathroom mirror.

“Cut yourself,” she said.

Jared took a styptic pencil from the edge of the sink, wet it, and dabbed the spot.

“When’s your flight to Houston? Eleven, isn’t it?” asked Marion.

He rinsed the razor in the sink.

“Cause I was thinking, since you’re not dressed—”

Jared was naked. He always shaved right after he stepped out of the shower and dried off. The blood was now burgundy stippled with specks of alum.

“Gotta go,” he said. “Besides, weren’t you about to leave?”

Marion was dressed for work: grey skirt and jacket, white ruffled blouse, and black heels. As the newest partner at Newman, Peterson, and Rush, she was expected to look the part. “I can be a few minutes late. Perks of the new position.”

Robert Thornton

“I can’t.” Jared wiped his face with a towel and splashed on some cologne. “Be back really late. I’m taking the red-eye. Don’t wait up.”

She fingered a six-inch scar that ran diagonally along his lower back, a souvenir from a kayaking accident. She then pressed herself against his back and kissed his shoulder, letting her fingers explore the ridges of his abdomen. “Sure you won’t change your mind?”

He grabbed her wrists and dropped her hands to her sides.

“I said no”. Jared pushed past her.

She grasped the sink’s edge and stood there staring into the bathroom mirror at her reflection, pondering the minefield their marriage had become.

Jared never wanted kids, but she hinted at the idea with a wink or glance at every opportunity on seeing couples with infants at the park, in the grocery store, or upon sighting vans with a child seat in traffic.

Then there were the arguments over work. He wanted her to cut back, spend more time at home. Be there with dinner waiting when he arrived. Was it jealousy over her salary outpacing his? But how could she give all this up? She was moving up in the firm. It would be idiotic to relinquish her position.

And sex. Or more to the point, the lack thereof. They were mister and missus hard body and should have been going at it like minks.

Fatal Impact

It had been nearly two months since they'd actually slept together. Without having to stare into the glass, she knew she was a looker. Short-cropped auburn hair. Large brown eyes that could suck one in. Movie starlet features. Clear café-au-lait complexion. All of this and a dancer's body. It was easy for people to think she was ten years younger than her thirty-five years.

The conclusion? To her analytical lawyer's mind, it was patent. The foundation of their marriage was crumbling. The whole thing would eventually implode. He was probably poking some twenty-something bimbo from the secretarial pool.

Marion released her grip on the edge of the sink. Her fingers ached. She took a deep breath and entered the bedroom.

Jared was standing just outside the walk-in closet, his back to her. He was dressed in gray slacks and an undershirt. The white cotton fabric clung like a second skin, outlining his muscular physique.

His head turned, revealing his profile: penetrating brown eyes, rich chocolate skin, and succulent lips. She paused. He still had the looks that could steal her breath.

"Jared, I—"

He wheeled full around. "Look at this. Look at this." He held out a white cotton shirt, revealing a brown neck stain inside the collar.

Marion glanced at the shirt. "Yeah?"

Robert Thornton

“I told you a week ago to take those shirts to the cleaners.” Jared pointed to a pile of white shirts in a corner.

“I forgot. I’m sorry.”

“Great. I’ve got no clean shirt.”

“Well, you could have taken them.”

“I’m too busy,” said Jared. He put the shirt on and selected a tie.

“And so am I.” As they both brought extremely sensitive work home, they’d long ago agreed a maid was out of the question.

Marion took a deep breath, bracing for the impending storm.

“My work is important,” said Jared. He buttoned his shirt.

“So is mine.”

“Oh, yeah. Getting white collar criminals off after they bilk stockholders out of millions? That’s a great job.”

“Jared, please.”

“I’m on the cusp of the greatest discovery of the millennium. Don’t tell me what’s important.”

“What are you talking about?”

Jared faced the mirror and tied his tie.

“Jared, talk to me.”

“You know I can’t tell you about my work. Suffice it to say that in five years the name Jared Burch will be uttered alongside names like Einstein, Newton, and Oppenheimer.”

“You’re scaring me, Jared. That sounds like megalomania.”

Fatal Impact

Jared knotted his tie. “Megalomania?”

He stepped to within an inch of her, his brown eyes intense with anger. “Don’t worry about my state of mind. You just take my damn shirts to the cleaners.”

Jared grabbed his blue blazer from the mahogany caddy and walked out.

Marion stood there trembling. As fights go, this was their worst. Others had lasted longer with greater volume. But this was the first time she’d actually felt physically threatened. Tears came and mingled with spittle on her cheeks from Jared’s close quarter’s tirade.

The garage door hummed. Jared’s Porsche 911 rumbled to life. She listened to the car’s sound fade.

She began to make the bed, hoping the mundane chore would somehow sooth her. She smoothed the sheets over the down comforter on her side and walked around to Jared’s side.

Life suddenly bore down on her shoulders like a ten-ton weight. She sat on the edge of the bed as she wept for the impending demise of their marriage.

But wait. Maybe there was a way to save it. They could seek counseling. She would be more compliant. More loving.

She dropped her head and wiped her tears with the back of her hand. Then she saw it: a corner of white protruding from the bottom drawer of his night table.

Robert Thornton

Marion pulled the drawer open. She immediately recognized the sheaf of papers as a legal document. She removed it and began to read.

What she read seared her gut. A bilious taste rose in the back of her throat, sending her scurrying back to the bathroom.