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A
Love
for
Life

Penny Hancock

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Contents

Chapter 1	It's over	5
Chapter 2	After the summer	12
Chapter 3	Instant attraction	18
Chapter 4	An important visitor	25
Chapter 5	The decision	31
Chapter 6	Not an easy child	37
Chapter 7	Meeting Mark	45
Chapter 8	Trouble at school	52
Chapter 9	A difficult period	58
Chapter 10	The brown envelope	65
Chapter 11	Lunch with Rod	71
Chapter 12	Betrayal!	77
Chapter 13	A dinner ruined	83
Chapter 14	The kiss	87
Chapter 15	Fanella's choice	93
Chapter 16	Another kiss	100
Chapter 17	A wonderful surprise	105
Chapter 18	The sound of laughter	110

Characters

Fanella: an editor in a publishing company.

Steven: Fanella's ex-boyfriend.

Ellie: a five-year-old girl.

Teresa: Fanella's best friend.

Paulo: Teresa's husband.

Timothy: Teresa and Paulo's son.

Mark: a friend of Paulo's.

Rod: Ellie and Timothy's teacher.

Leah: Rod's wife.

Mrs Grey: the headmistress at Rod's school.

Mr Simpson: Rod and Leah's neighbour.

Norma: a woman who looks after Ellie.

Dan: a boy in Ellie and Timothy's class at school.

Mrs Bedrock: Dan's mother.

Chapter 1 *It's over*

'Teresa, I wondered if I could come round to see you. Something's happened.'

It was eight o'clock on a Monday evening. It wasn't the best time to telephone a friend with a young child. But this was a crisis and Fanella needed to speak to Teresa urgently.

'Of course you can come round,' said Teresa, 'if you don't mind giving Timothy a good night kiss. He'd be furious if he thought you'd been here and he hadn't seen you.'

Fanella smiled, swallowing back tears. She loved Teresa's little boy, but right now it was going to be difficult to see him. 'I'll be there in about ten minutes,' she said.

'Good,' said Teresa. 'See you soon then.' Fanella pushed her bike round to the front of her small house. She cycled across Cambridge, avoiding tourists and students as she went, unable to share the happy atmosphere everyone else seemed to be enjoying. The river was alive with boats, the grass full of people picnicking. It was June and the time for end-of-term dances and university ceremonies.

Fanella envied the younger people. They had so few worries. She was trying to fight back the tears that had threatened her all day at work, and were now clouding her eyes as she cycled.

She rang on Teresa's smart brass doorbell, parking her bike by the side of the large house.

'Come in,' said Teresa, opening the door. Her long

brown hair was piled on top of her head, and as usual she was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. 'I think Timothy's still awake, and I promised you'd go up and say good night.'

Teresa always talked about her son before anything else. Fanella was used to it. She smiled and went straight up the stairs to the little boy's bedroom.

Timothy was lying in his bed flying imaginary aeroplanes through the air.

'I've come to say good night,' said Fanella, sitting down on his bed and thinking how much she liked him.

He looked so lovable, under the sheets in his clean pyjamas. The curtains were pulled to keep the summer evening light out.

'Is Mummy going out?' he asked. Fanella often looked after Timothy when his mother and father went out.

'Not tonight.' Fanella smiled. 'I've come to see your mummy. We're both here this evening.'

'Then I've got two mummies today,' he said, and Fanella laughed.

'I'm not your mummy,' said Fanella. 'I'm your special grown-up friend.'

'Whose mummy are you?' asked Timothy suddenly.

'Nobody's,' said Fanella, afraid the tears would start rolling down her cheeks again.

'Why not?' asked Timothy.

'Well, not all grown-ups are somebody's mummy,' began Fanella, feeling this whole subject was too much for her right now. 'Some grown-ups choose not to have children, and some grown-ups want to have children, but they can't.'

'Do you want to have children?' asked Timothy.

'Yes, I do, very much,' said Fanella, thinking how strange

it was that Timothy wanted to talk about this today of all days. ‘Now it’s time you went to sleep, and I’m going to go and talk to your mummy.’

Timothy put his arms up and Fanella leant over and kissed him on the cheek. Then he shut his eyes and began to breathe deeply. It was very pleasing, Fanella thought, when a little child trusted you enough to go to sleep in your presence.

She went down the stairs and into the kitchen where Teresa was putting dishes into the dishwasher. Fanella thought Teresa was so lucky. She had this large beautiful house, a happy marriage and a lovely little boy. But because Teresa was such a good friend, it was difficult to feel envious.

Fanella’s own home was quite different. She loved where it was, in a busy area of the city. There was an Asian grocer’s nearby, selling all kinds of food, and a pub at the end of the road.

But Fanella’s house was tiny and she and Steven had done all the interior decoration themselves. In contrast to Teresa’s soft shades of cream and natural wood, Fanella and Steven had gone a bit wild and had painted every room a bright colour, according to the mood they wanted to create. And always, in the back of Fanella’s mind, had been the thought that one day, the little second bedroom would become her child’s bedroom – the child she and Steven were going to adopt.

‘Sit down,’ said Teresa, waving a hand at the kitchen table. ‘What would you like? Tea? Or something stronger?’

‘Tea would be lovely,’ said Fanella. ‘I haven’t had a thing since I got back from work.’

‘Have something to eat,’ said Teresa. ‘There’s some lasagne in the oven. Paulo’s had to work late this evening. He just phoned to say he’d get something to eat on the way home.’

‘No, thank you,’ said Fanella. ‘I couldn’t eat anything. Just tea, thanks.’

‘So,’ said Teresa sitting down beside her friend, ‘what’s happened?’

Fanella took a deep breath. She wanted to tell Teresa the whole story without crying. But she could only manage two words. ‘Steven’s left,’ she said.

‘Left?’ Teresa was horrified.

Fanella looked at her friend, and nodded. She swallowed hard.

‘I can’t believe it,’ said Teresa. ‘You two were so much in love. You could see it. Everyone could see it. What do you mean he’s left?’

‘Left,’ repeated Fanella. ‘He’s moved out. He’s gone to live in London. We’ve finished. Broken up. It’s over.’

Teresa looked genuinely upset. ‘What happened? When?’

‘It’s been going on for some time, actually,’ said Fanella, feeling relieved now she had told Teresa. ‘He’s been seeing another woman. I don’t think he really loves her or anything, but we’ve both been under so much stress with trying to adopt a child – I think he just cracked. This other woman was an escape route.’

‘My goodness!’ Teresa sat, not knowing what to say. This really had come as a shock to her. ‘What . . . what about the adoption?’ she asked, at last.

‘It looks like that’s out of the question now, doesn’t it?’

said Fanella, holding her mug of tea tightly. 'The social services make it difficult enough to adopt a child when you're in a steady relationship. When they witness the relationship fall apart before their eyes, I expect they reject you immediately.'

Teresa couldn't help thinking this was probably true. She tried to think of some words of comfort for her friend, but found it difficult to know what to say. 'Fanella,' she sighed at last. 'I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry.'

'It's OK,' said Fanella. 'I just needed to be with someone this evening.'

'When did Steven leave?' asked Teresa.

'This morning. He came back last night from her house and told me he was moving in with her,' Fanella answered.

'Didn't he give you any warning at all?'

'Well, actually I knew about the other woman,' Fanella said. 'I've known for a few weeks. He started staying in London more and more. I guessed something was going on and I asked him. He said he was trying to stop the affair. I really believed him. He said it was one of those things that was difficult to end because he didn't want to hurt her. She's younger. She's only twenty-one, not ready to settle down or anything, and she doesn't want children yet. It's strange because, like me, Steven wanted children so badly. We were so close to getting one.'

Teresa looked at her friend and passed her a tissue. She knew all about the pain Fanella had gone through since she discovered she couldn't have her own children. Steven had been very understanding about it. He had moved in with Fanella and had lived with her for a few years before they decided to try to adopt a child.

Despite the difference in their lives, with Teresa now at home and Fanella still working at the publishers where they had met, the two women had remained close friends. Fanella and Steven had been very involved with Timothy ever since he was born. They had often looked after him, or taken him out at weekends. Fanella was never happier than when she was out with Steven and Timothy, imagining that one day it would be their own child who ran along between them. But now Fanella had to face the fact that the little second bedroom, reserved in her mind for the imaginary child, would probably remain empty forever.

Watching her friend, Teresa wanted to tell Fanella that there were other men out there. A lot of men found Fanella attractive. She was small, with a natural, country-girl face, short dark hair and dark brown eyes. She looked a little tired these days but that was hardly surprising, knowing what she'd been going through.

However, Teresa knew that Fanella did not want to hear this right now. Finding a man was one thing. Finding a man who was willing to accept that you could never have children, and who would support you through the difficult process of trying to adopt a child, was quite another. Steven had seemed perfect, but even he had weakened under the demands of the situation.

'The truth is,' Fanella went on, 'I can bear to live without Steven, I think, once I get used to the idea, but I cannot bear the thought of living without a child.'

'Timothy is almost your child,' Teresa said, putting her arm round her friend. 'He's always loved you. I sometimes feel he'd rather have you for a mother than me!'

Fanella knew Teresa was trying her best, but it didn't soften the terrible pain of not having her own child.

'I must go,' said Fanella, hearing Paulo's key in the lock. She didn't want to spoil the little bit of evening Teresa and her husband had left together. 'Thanks for listening. I don't know what I'd do without you.'

'I just wish I could help,' said Teresa sadly. 'Please come round any time you feel like it.'

As she watched Fanella cycle into the dusk, Teresa felt a little guilty at her own good fortune.