The Fool: A Short Fable
Nick Rogen

One day after class, a troubled student went to his old professor and asked him for advice. He told the professor that he was dating two women, each one not knowing of the other one, and he didn't know which one to ultimately pick. He told him that he loved both equally but that he wanted to pick the best one.

The professor thought about this dilemma for a few seconds and then asked the young man to describe each woman's house.

The young student looked confused. "Why their houses?"

The professor said nothing.

"Well," the young student began, "both of them are beautiful and gorgeous and—"

The professor interrupted him and again reminded him that he cared only for the condition of their houses.

The young student sighed. "All right," he said, "the first woman lives in what some may call a complete mess. There are always dirty dishes in the sink, to the point of tipping over out onto the floor. She's a painter and hangs her artwork on the wall like a museum. They are odd pieces that, to be honest, don't really add anything to the look of the house, and they make no sense. In her living room, her couch is torn and messy and books litter the house because she doesn't really own a bookcase..." The student trailed off.

"What does she do for a living?" the professor asked.

"Her job? She jumps around and never stays anywhere for too long. She doesn't know where she's heading and, to me, it seems pretty scary to be in a relationship with someone like that."

"And the other woman?" the professor asked.

"The second woman is the exact opposite. Her dishes are always put in the dishwasher, organized in the cupboards. You know, spotless clean. She also has art on the walls, but from famous painters that must have cost her a fortune to buy, real classic, beautiful pieces. And her couches and chairs have white cushions that look like they were brought yesterday. Her dining room
The student trailed off, again.

"And what does she do for a living?" the professor asked.

"Well, she works at a law firm, very stable, and makes quite a bit of money. She knows exactly what she wants and has planned everything in her life almost to the second. It's all very safe."

The professor stayed silent for a long time. He tore off a piece of paper from his notebook on his desk and scribbled something down. He folded it and gave it to the young student.

"Open this when you make your decision," he said.

The student suddenly felt cheated. "But you haven't said what I should do!"

The professor smiled. "I already know who you've picked by what you've told me, but let me ask you these questions before you go just to make sure."

"The first woman. Why is her sink full?"

"I don't know," responded the student, "because she's messy I guess."

"Could it be because she just had a party with some of her closest friends the night before?" the professor asked.

"I don't know," responded the student.

"And the second woman. Does she actually like the paintings she bought and hung up?"

"I don't know," responded the student. "What do you mean?"

"Or did she buy them just because they were famous? Does she truly love them for what they mean to her own life? Do they truly mean something to her?"

"I don't know," responded the student.

"The first woman has a worn couch, why?"

"She doesn't take care of it?" the student guessed.

"Or maybe it gets much use. She watches the television, or sits there with a friend or a lover for endless conversations. Or maybe it sometimes serves as second bed when someone stays the night? Maybe, by it being torn and used, it shows that it has served its purpose well."

"I don't know," responded the student. "But if that's so then she'd have to buy a new one all the time."

The professor went on. "Why doesn't she know what she wants out of
life?”
“I don’t know,” responded the student. “Because she’s lost?”
“Could it be because she knows that the best part of the journey is the
adventure itself?”
“I don’t know,” responded the student. “That doesn’t make any sense--
isn’t the reward of the find the best part?”
“Hmm,” the professor said. “You see, these are all very interesting
questions.”

The young student could feel his blood boiling. “But, Professor, you’ve
answered nothing for me! You’ve just posed hypothetical questions.”

The professor just smiled—a sort of sad smile. “Just open that piece
of paper when you’ve made your choice,” he said. “And I hope you consider
that it’s the content and angle that matter most in the questions you choose to
ask in life.”

The young student shook his professor’s hand and left quickly. As he
drove to the woman’s house, he thought about how pointless it was to ask his
professor anything.

The professor seemed to know nothing about true value, the student
kept repeating to himself even as he was knocking on the woman’s door. The
woman who let him in was indeed quite beautiful. She kissed him and led
him to the living room. He passed the empty sink, the famous pictures on the
walls, and the dining room set that was untouched. The young student took
off his shoes and was about to sit on the white sofa when he remembered it
was meant for decoration only. He took a seat at the dining room table and the
woman went upstairs to get ready to go out for their dinner at a local upscale
restaurant. As the young man waited, he decided it was time to read whatever
his old professor had written, for he said to open it when he had made his
choice. He unfolded it. It read:

You should pick the woman who truly lives life.
The one who is not afraid of the beauty in the mess.
And you picked the wrong one.

The woman came down the stairs attaching her white pearl earrings.
“You ready?” she asked.
The young man quickly crumpled up the piece of paper.
“Yeah,” he said, “let me just throw this away and I’ll be right with you.”