



The Fence And Then The Trees

J.F. Smith

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What would you do?

Jack Carber was in a bad spot. Betrayed and thrown in prison, he had to figure out fast how to survive, and with no idea who to trust and who not to trust. To make matters worse, he had already gotten on the bad side of The Kennel on day one. But his biggest threat was the vacant psychopath named Adder, whose cell he found himself sharing. And with this one, his best tools for survival, his skills as a con man, had no effect at all.

How would you survive?

Jack faced dangerous enemies, an indifferent prison administration, and an inmate advocate with his own twisted agenda. He was determined to keep himself alive and sane, even as he began to slowly give up on himself.

As long as he kept his head down and didn't fall prey to the fatal mistake of trusting anyone ever again, he'd eventually get out alive... in body if not in spirit. And that seemed like the most he could expect.

What would keep you going?

A sudden revelation and the resulting puzzle, though, throws his world into a wildly different light. He's unexpectedly clutching at a glimmer of hope, something more than mere survival, and yet fighting to not repeat the mistakes of his past again. But something deep inside him begs him to take that risk one more time.

Because, exactly how far would you be willing to go to protect the best thing that ever happened to you, especially when it hadn't even happened?

The Fence And Then The Trees Details

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From Reader Review The Fence And Then The Trees for online ebook

Kat says

Couple of chapters in I was convinced this was going to be a 5 star read. I was so excited, I nearly peed myself.

But...

Then the intriguing character-building and good writing morphed into a soppy mess of disappointing character reveals, annoying flashbacks, and other cheesy nonsense. One of those books where the great sample is NOT what you'll be getting.

In the mood for "don't drop the soap" books? I highly recommend Protection instead. And if you're in the mood for fanfic; Shark Tank. Or in case you need some nasty nitty gritty; The Last Rebellion. And I think I'll have a go at Cold myself.

Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says

Thank you, Rachel C, for the gift!

Natasha says

spoilers!

This book is incredibly lovely. It's basically the adult version of Cold. This story is about prison, and a very, very slow burn kind of love.

It was also kind of hard to read in some places because... you know... this story *is* about prison and with prison comes rape. A lot of rape, actually. There was many instances where I was thinking: Noooo! Someone come save him! But, again, it's prison, and prince charming can't always ride in just when you need him. :(

But this story is beautiful. Some parts I found absolutely hilarious. Other parts were pretty frightening. Oh, and there's one part that is so satisfying and you're thinking: Do it do it do it do it do it do it!!!!... and then he totally does it.

But, one warning: pretty much no on page sex.

BUT RECOMMEND. HIGHLY. READ NOW.

John The Cosmic Wanderer says

This is so different from the author's previous works. This was dark and most of the time upsetting. It was a bit of a surprise. You know those stories you hear about what happens to men who go to prison? Well, it happened here.

There is romance between Jack and his cellmate, Adder but there were a lot of sad, upsetting and sometimes sick moments in the book that when the MCs finally get together towards the end, it was already unsatisfying for me. I was already drained. I was just glad that it was over.

It's not bad, it was just too heavy for me. I was expecting this to be like Latakia, Falling Off the Face of the Earth and The Last Day Of Summer, maybe that's why I didn't like this as much.

Juxian says

[While the ending is wonderfully sweet, I'm not sure I think Adder deserved it. I'm not sure he "paid his debts". He kept silent and grieved, yes, but he also was beating and

JustJen "Miss Conduct" says

A review by The Blogger Girls.

Wow, this is one jam packed story. I was pulled in immediately, loved Jack right away, and was cringing and rooting for him (and Adder) through to the very last pages.

Jack was a con man. Unfortunately, on his one last big con, he was stabbed in the back and set up by his bf and their friend. He is sentenced to three years in prison where he is really unsure of how he will survive. Right off the bat, he finds out his cell mate is one scary mother*****r. But, Jack has a plan, and is forced to put it into action right away when he is forced to stand up to another inmate on his first day. Just as with every action in this place, there are two sides of results. Jack makes a positive statement about his position, but he also pisses a lot of people off in the process. But, better that than become the whipping boy to every inmate there, right?

There are so many thing to watch out for, so many different things going on with different groups, and Jack bides his time trying to soak up all the intricacies before deciding how best to act in any given situation. One thing he has going for him is that no one knows he is gay. This is all in addition to the whole cell mate problem Jack has.

Adder is a big dude who nobody messes with. He is serving a 15 year sentence in which he has not spoken a word. There doesn't appear to be anyone who has or even wanted to get close to the man, but Jack decides that is exactly what he needs to do to get through the next 3 years in one piece.

There is a lot of violence with inmates getting beat, raped, etc. but there is so much more to this story. I

found the entire Adder/Jack relationship fascinating. Jack works very hard to get through to Adder in some way, often having to take steps back, or having to deal with negative attention as a result. But, eventually, he does what no one else has managed to do. He earns Adder's trust, and the two carry on a very symbiotic relationship for the duration of their stay.

There is actually very little on page sex in this story, but the emotions and sexual tension are very vivid. I was hung up on every word, and while I wanted the story to end so these guys made it out, I was sorry to see it end, as I was not quite ready to say goodbye to them.

I definitely recommend this well-written, fascinating and exciting story about enduring hardship, finding love and starting over. This was my first book by this author, and I can't wait to try something else.

Ricardo says

3 1/2 stars

Smith's writing was technically impeccable but it felt really heavy. I had a difficult time finishing the book and at times it felt too slow. A lot of the "action" happened inside the character's mind instead of actually happening. I also did not like how long the author waited to let us know the reasons for Adder's behaviour.

The story has a happy and romantic ending but it sure took its time to get there

Jenna says

[prison rapist and victim to lovers (hide spoiler)]

Karen says

I guess I fall into the category of many other readers for whom some of Mr. Smith's works are favorites, and so I bought this book as soon as it was released. I read the blurb and the warnings, and knew that the subject matter was going to be considerably darker than his other books that I love. I was looking forward to see how he handled it, and I'll be honest, I would never have chosen to read a book about prison and rape if I didn't already know and enjoy an author's work.

And it was a hard book to read. I want to love my MCs, but Jack and Adder are both criminals. Neither one is wrongfully imprisoned (though Jack would not have had such a harsh sentence if he hadn't been set up). Yeah, they have their reasons for doing what they did, but in the end, individuals are responsible for the path they choose, and they chose fraud and theft. I was happy that by the end of their prison sentence they decided to go straight (hah!), but it made it hard to warm up to them.

And then there is the violence and perversion. I was expecting it (OK, I was bracing myself for it and reading at arms length with one eye squinted and ready to turn away). But I guess what surprised me was the fact that the characters, main and secondary, didn't react more to it. How is it that Jack can go through the beatings

and the rape and the constant fear, and come out the other side the way he did? What about Wilson -- how did that guy not commit suicide? I think I have my own feelings about how people would react to that kind of abuse -- probably fueled by what I think I would do in that situation -- and so although it all made sense as I was reading, at the end I thought about it again and now look at it with disbelief. It is to the author's credit that I didn't think that as I was reading it though, and I believed that they paid their dues (and then some), and changed their ways. If I was convinced that it truly could happen that way, I probably would have rated the book higher, but though the author was persuasive, he wasn't that good.

So bottom line for me is that I shouldn't have read this book. Rape and violence frighten and disgust me, and even in the hands of a favorite author, I should stay away. I'm not traumatized, but I'm not going back for a reread either. Too bad you can't give away ebooks. . .

Xing says

"...There is an infinite number of ways to get hurt. And only a tiny number of ways to find happiness."

Jack is a con man, specializing in insurance fraud and identity theft that was inspired by a painful past. He gets caught and sentenced to three years in the Patterson Correctional Facility (PattX) by his double crossing partner-in-crime/lover, who also makes away with most of his money. With a heavy heart and the taste of betrayal, Jack must learn to navigate the political climate of PattX, which includes its two rivaling factions, the apathy of prison guards, and being cellmates with a man labeled a psychopath. This said man is nicknamed Adder - a prisoner of 13 years who doesn't speak, and has a violent temperament when provoked. However, Jack soon realizes that the best way to survive PattX would be to forge a friendship with Adder and will be surprised with the consequences of doing so.

The setup for *The Fence and Then The Trees* is such: it takes place in the year 2000. Each chapter is a snippet of time that spans two years, with some chapters skipping months ahead in time. The story is told in third person, from Jack's point of view. There are a few flashback chapters, some of which explains Adder's past (these are the only chapters that are told from Adder's perspective). I'm not a fan of flashback chapters sprinkled here and there, but was fortunately kept short in this book (yay!).

Honestly, I really enjoyed Jack. While his occupation as a con man didn't garner sympathy points from me, he still had his reasons that spoke of a man who was wronged in the past. He is intelligent and can read people's emotions, as needed for anyone successful in his field of specialty. Even though he's a criminal, he's still honorable and compassionate. I believe his biggest downfall is the fear of ever loving anyone again (which may sound cliché and overly dramatic, and I would normally agree), but he's also old enough to know that being ignorant of his own feelings doesn't solve anything (thank God!).

Then there's Adder. I can't say much about him, since knowledge of his character is part of the fun of reading. Though there's nothing "fun" about his past, and I just felt my heart aching for him.

The story started off kind of slow for my liking. The setup for PattX, introduction of secondary characters, and some early scenes delayed any consistent Jack x Adder interaction for a good 15-20% of the book. It wasn't boring, but my inner romantic was screaming for these people to meet for more than a page. But once it did, I was interested in how their relationship develops. It's a sloooow burn, and is reminiscent to an enemies-to-friends-to-lovers type of development, though they weren't really enemies in the typical sense.

There is non-con and violence, which is pretty different from what I'm used to from this author. But it's not described in too explicit a detail, and Jack isn't the type to be emotionally traumatized for life if he's forced to bend over (doesn't mean he likes it though). Even consensual sex in this book is glossed-over or mentioned briefly - again, nothing explicit. Maybe I'm just too experienced in the non-con and violent scenes of M/M, but the book didn't really push me out of my comfort zone (I would label it "border-line" dark).

A trademark of JF Smith's books are the entertaining, yet vital casts of characters. While *The Fence And Then The Trees* had some okay secondary characters, they didn't really make a lasting impression (meh). I was more interested in the silent Adder than anyone else besides from Jack. Most of the story also didn't pack an emotional punch, but I guess he was saving it towards the end! (and damnit, I don't care if Mr. Smith likes recreating a certain type of scene in all his books, it's still beautiful regardless). So While most of the book got a 3.5 stars, the later 1/3 of the story pushed it to a 4 star read for me.

Also, I know prison stories don't always have a happy ending. If you are curious to know if it's a happy ending or a sad one: (view spoiler)

So overall, I think JF Smith tried to branch out into something different with this book. I think he did a good job, with minor irritations to yours truly (i.e. characters and flashback chapters). *The Fence And Then The Trees* is a story about the price we pay for past mistakes, yet finding salvation and a second chance in the people we least expect.

(Note: when I first saw the book cover, I thought "WTF, it looks so plain and ugly." When I was done, my heart went a-flutter <3. And also, the book is only \$2.99 for a little over 100,000 words. I pay like over twice that for books I like LESS! Absolute madness - you should just buy all his books like right now).

Lori says

How long have I been on goodreads and I've only just figured out how to do that recommended by thing...smh!

Loved, loved, loved it.

Wow, this book was everything I wanted to read right at the moment I did. It left me squidgy and happy. Sex between two characters in the harsh reality of a prison is easy to write - a slow burn love story, not so much. Yet JF Smith managed it. And managed it in a way that was respectful to the characters and to the setting. I love love and this book was full of it, after the horror and the pain anyway. A really brilliant read.

Sara says

This was lovely.

This book stole my heart page by page.

This book was everything.

Once again, Natasha knows me and knows what books are total "Sara" reads. She hasn't missed on a rec yet and I doubt she ever will. When this came as a rec from her, I looked at that cover and wondered what the

hell I was getting myself into...

How do you fall for a man in a book who doesn't speak, who is violent and stoic and just not... kind at your first meeting? You believe in second chances, that's how. This whole book was about second chances and what you do when you get them.

I seem to have a thing for stories set in prison, a desolate, feral and hopeless setting to find kindness let alone love. But for Jack and Adder, it's done well. The slow, very slow burn of two men forced to be in one another's space and live confined to a cell, was beautiful. Yes, the story starts with the two in a rough way but I really enjoyed the growth of their relationship.

Everything about this situation had hurt written all over it in multiple ways.

The story is told in days, in stamped days of Jack's incarceration and the beginning lays out the land of PattX, its inmates and their allegiances. The side characters in this story weren't there for filler, I remember each one of them as their lives in that cinderblock prison painted cinderblock entwined with Jack's and to Adders through degrees of separation

Be warned: there is abuse in this book, there is rape and violence...

it's prison. I am not a fan of violence, let me say this, but I know it happens and when it's placed appropriately, I can deal with it. Not that I liked what happened, but I have been told time and time again by my husband: Prison life, rules, ethics (if you call them that) are NOT the same as the outside world. It's expected and it's the way it is, you either bend to the laws of prison life or you die. Harsh, but honest.

Now, those looking for hot prison sex of the smut variety, look elsewhere. This story has more intimacy than sex, even in the beginning when it wasn't consensual between Jack and Adder, it was more tender than smuttastic. Yeah, I know that doesn't quite make sense but trust me, the simple touches Adder gives... they are everything.

While the story is told in present day, we do get flashbacks of both men and I really liked the flashbacks in this, they gave me the depth and history with each man and how they came to reside at PattX and they broke my heart. Jack's was awful, the betrayal at the hands of those he trusted most was hard to read, to see how much he was in love and have that question of "was it all a con?" play over and over again in his head in the solitary moments he had. But Adders history? Adder's history tore my heart out and put it through a blender. I saw red when we first get his back story (and the only time you get his POV btw) and I wanted to toss my Nook across the room. Talk about two completely different backgrounds to come from, the way Jack was raised and Adder... ugh.

That cover, it means more than you would think and that title? When you read it in the book, it just makes you hope and it kills you to have that hope. How can you have hope in prison? How can you not? How can you not sit and wonder all the "what ifs" of the past and the future?

So much I want to say, SO much, this was so much. It doesn't seem like it would be and I didn't expect it to but I am glad it was. I am blissfully happy with that ending and get chills thinking of whispered words... yeah, this book was good.

I am sure it won't be a book for everyone and could even be compared to that of Cold, and while there are similarities, Jack and Adders story is special. Special to me and I will just leave this bit here and be done with my ramblings...

If you find someone you love, your heart will tell you even before your head realizes it. Listen for that, and pay attention. Love doesn't come along often. Return that love. Cherish it. Protect it. It's everything in the world. It can be scary, and there's a million ways to get hurt. And only a tiny handful of ways to be happy, but it's worth the risk. If you find it, it's worth any risk in the world.

Kaje Harper says

This story is set in prison, and as it opens, Jack has just arrived as a new inmate into the vicious, stultifying, compassionless world that is incarceration in America. There are multiple rapes on page, and a relationship that begins with rape. Jack is put into a cell with Adder, the most feared and emotionless man in the block. At first, Jack's only goal is survival, whatever that takes. But in the calculated process of trying to win some measure of safety around Adder, Jack also begins to see flashes of a different man beneath the huge, cold and impersonal facade.

This book is an indictment of the prison system, where torture is casually handed out by the inmates, and little effort is made to control or prevent that. The relationship develops very slowly, and feels like a Stockholm syndrome situation for most of the book. Or perhaps, "better the devil you know". I wasn't completely satisfied with the emotional connection between the two men, but both were damaged souls and coming together was better than any other option they had.

I was a little thrown, after half the book in only Jack's POV, to suddenly be handed some of Adder's history and back-story in his third-person POV, on the page. Those leached some of the force of the book for me.

Because Adder is electively mute and doesn't speak, it was clearly going to be hard for the author to give us readers a good feel for what was going on with him, but that's part of the appeal. Jack is desperately curious, needing to know more about this man he is beginning to connect with. His curiosity and frustration move the story forward. So this info-dump to the reader, but not to Jack, felt a bit like undercutting the story - Adder was a mystery, which Jack longs and needs to solve. By handing readers a key to Adder which Jack does not yet have, the tension and driving force of the story is drained away. It does serve the purpose of helping us understand and perhaps sympathize with Adder, but I was annoyed, wishing that I could remain in Jack's head only and track the mystery of Adder in time with Jack's own discoveries.

There is a HEA to this book, and it's plausible and well-earned. Jack is a very well-drawn character, and Adder a force within the story, particularly in the first half. If you are interested in a prison romance that begins in brutality and ends in sweetness, this is a fast and smooth read.

Simsala says

My opinion:

This one worked for me - I got dragged through mud and dirt for ninety percent of the book...made reaching the oasis all the sweeter. I was kept glued to the pages because I wanted answers and it was like pulling teeth to get them (damn author did that on purpose - that's what I call storytelling btw.!), I got teased with

flashbacks at totally unexpected places (When? Where? Who? WHAT??? Grrrr...), they slowed things down but they were important to the here and now.

I didn't find it overly dark or violent - it's not even that graphic - certainly not a dumb rape-fic, thanks for that.

It has its sad, holding-breath, and raising-eyebrow moments but I was entertained and closed the book with a contented sigh.

That's all I ask for so it gets the full five stars.

Hmmmm....something about the story...

What popped up in my head - as I reached the oasis - was the last two verses of Bette Middler's song "The Rose":

When the night has been too lonely
And the road has been too long
And you think that love is only
For the lucky and the strong

Just remember in the winter
Far beneath the bitter snows
Lies the seed that with the sun's love
In the spring becomes the rose.

FIN

Irina says

Quite a disturbing page turner. I haven't read a book in less than 24 hours for a very long time. I wanted to BR this with Sofia and opened it just to check the beginning but ended up not being able to put it down instead.

We always wonder what does it say about us as readers if we end up 'liking' really violent books. It still puzzles me that the darkest reads would hold my attention and later the memory of such stories longer. Is it out of pure boredom or something deeper - because we have some hidden issues? I still don't know why I'm often drawn to this kind of books but despite my bulging eyes at some acts in the book and horror or disappointment at others, I ended up 'liking' this brutal story of survival in prison.

When imagining Jack thrown in a cell with Adder, I pictured my favourite childhood story, *'Lion and the Puppy'*, even though Adder had turned out to be much more cruel. I couldn't forgive him for what he did and it took me a long time to start liking him but, as always, I ended up being a sucker for this anti-hero.

I wish we've had more insight into Adder's life though, more of his voice and more time with both our 'boys'

when they finally crossed that fence and reached their freedom. After such an intense journey, I craved to see them build their future without the walls squeezing in on them. I might not have agreed with many things they've done but everyone deserves a second chance, after all.

4.5 stars
