

MECHANICS of LOVE

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“The physical world is not simply a sum of spatial and temporal single worlds running one besides the others, and many phenomena escape understanding when one does not consider a physical object as a whole”

(Max Planck, Aus der neuen physik, 1929)

CHARACTERS

FRANCESCA A ballerina, agile, intensely present and attentive-like a cat

GEORG A mechanic, devoted to engineering problems, entirely unused to expressing emotion

GLEN A chronic forgetter—or emotionally unavailable? (*both?*)

FAIZI Chronically busy, obsessive compulsive, fashionable

THE WORLD

A mythical European city.
Pressed up against a communist state.

THE TIME

Post (a very) cold war.

THE WAY

Characters feel intensely and emotions turn on a dime.
Fast. No transitions. It hurtles.
Pauses are fleeting.
But like a rare creature sighting should be observed.
Actors should speak in their natural accents, whatever that may be.

THE BALLERINA

FRANCESCA speaks to the audience.

FRANCESCA

I am a ballerina.

I have worked for Mother Russia for fifteen years.

I have no spine.

It was broken in a terrible accident several years ago.

So Mother Russia had no place for me.

And I had no place for her.

That's why I came here.

I wanted to be free.

I was not expecting love.

But suddenly, I've become the sort of person who's good at being in love.

I'm not patient, usually. But with this man, I'm patient and I'm forgiving, I'm kind. I feel all those things churning inside me that would make a good long-term spouse. I'm full of muted good humor. Of mild tolerance bordering on indifference. I stare at him a long time with affection instead of lust. It's like we've sped on to our tenth year of marriage together when I've only known him a week. My life's taken on this incredible momentum since I met him. All the gears are turning and we're speeding through the universe. I love Mother Russia! But I think I might have found something better.

THE MAN WHO FORGETS EVERYTHING

FRANCESCA and GLEN sit together.

A long silence

FRANCESCA

I don't understand.

Is this a medical condition?

GLEN

It's just like I told you. I feel very intensely and then I forget. We might have gone on vacation together, or perhaps I did your accounts once or maybe-we were engaged, but then I wake up one morning and I don't recognise you. Then I leave.

FRANCESCA

Forever?

GLEN

For a while. The women they always want to know what happened (women always take everything personally) they come to my house, they throw my things out, they scream and yell-but by then I have moved to another apartment, bought a cat and settled in.

FRANCESCA

Can you get treatment?

GLEN

I'd never considered that. But if that's what I'm going to do, we shouldn't see each other while the treatment's happening.

FRANCESCA

Why?

GLEN

Because I might forget you.

FRANCESCA

Will you forget the treatment?

GLEN

No.

FRANCESCA

But then that's all that matters. You get better and then we can be together.

Because I think we're meant to be together.

That's all.

GLEN

I'm overwhelmed by your generosity, your attention, just overwhelmed.

He cries. He cries some more.

She goes up to him.

GLEN

Don't touch me I might-!

FRANCESCA

It's ok. I was just going to give you some tissue.

GLEN

Oh thank you. I don't deserve you! Already I feel like I don't deserve you and we haven't even really had time not to deserve each other.

FRANCESCA

Glen.

GLEN

Yes?

FRANCESCA

I have a problem too.

GLEN

What is it?

FRANCESCA

I forget nothing.

THE MECHANIC

GEORG and GLEN. GEORG wipes grease from his hands.

GEORG

The mechanics of cars are a strange thing. Today when I turned the engine on I heard the sound of a cat meowing. And it was always at the exact moment when I turned the engine on. And this was incredibly confusing. Every time. I turn. Meow. Turn. Meow. Turn. And then I tricked it. I made as though to turn the key but I didn't! I had the key in my hand the whole time, so it was just the motion of my hand turning. And then I heard a little squeak and I looked around and there was a big black cat sitting in my car. He obviously liked the sound of the car turning on. But what are the mechanics of that? The cat and the engine. What are the mechanics of cloud movements? Or grass growing. I mean, I think about these things as I'm changing a flat or the oil. Simple things that people don't do to their own cars anymore because nobody has any time.

GLEN

I need your help.

GEORG

What's happened?

GLEN

I'm in love.

GEORG

Uh huh.

With whom?

GLEN

My wife.

GEORG

Ok.

GLEN

And this other woman. I think I might have married her Georg.

GEORG

Your wife?

GLEN

No this other woman.

GEORG

When?

GLEN

Yesterday. I think we went to the church and we got married.

GEORG

Are you kidding me? But everyone here knows you. The pastor knows you.

GLEN

We went one town over.

GEORG

To Lentz?

GLEN

Yes.

GEORG

That's a two hour drive.

GLEN

It was very pleasant.

GEORG

What's she like?

GLEN

She's a ballerina.

GEORG

Wow.

GLEN

With an artificial spine.

GEORG

Amazing.

GLEN

So we can't be too...you know vigorous, or she'll snap.

GEORG

Right.

GLEN

But she's beautiful.

And she has this very womanly.... patience about her.

Yes, I think she's got something strong in her will that could make my life very interesting.

GEORG

I don't think life should be interesting. It's hard enough to get by as it is.

GLEN

Georg.

GEORG

Yes?

GLEN

What am I going to do?

GEORG

You should ask your wife.

--

THE WIFE

FAIZI and GLEN.

FAIZI

You forgot you were married?

GLEN

Yes.

FAIZI

I thought we'd been through this. I'm too tired to be jealous and too busy to have guests.

GLEN

She was just so kind to me.

FAIZI

So where is she?

GLEN

In the Kuntstrasse.

FAIZI

Kuntstrasse. How appropriate.

GLEN

Above the bread shop.

FAIZI

Uh huh. Did we pay the mechanic? What's his name?

GLEN

Georg.

I went to see him yesterday.

Nice guy.

FAIZI

Go back. Tell her you're married. Tell her it slipped your mind but you got home and you remembered and this is not something that your wife can accommodate right now.

GLEN

It's going to be hard.

FAIZI

I know.

GLEN

She's not going to like it.

FAIZI

She won't like coming here and finding me here.

GLEN

Ok right, no, you're right.

Ok. I'll tell her. No you. You tell her!

THE WIFE and the BALLERINA

FRANCESCA and FAIZI.

FRANCESCA

He told me he has this condition...

FAIZI

That he's a child?

FRANCESCA

That he forgets everything. Childhood is not a condition.

FAIZI

Well, it's conditional. Oh I see what you mean, it's not an affliction.

FRANCESCA

Children are precious.

FAIZI

Well afflictions can become precious and children can certainly become afflictions. I don't want any.

FRANCESCA

I want hundreds. But I don't know if my back can support childbirth. I have an artificial spine.

FAIZI

How incredible. Is it stronger than average?

FRANCESCA

Yes, in some ways. But I also have to be mindful of it.

FAIZI

No wonder Glen was fascinated with you. Do you want to have these children with Glen?

FRANCESCA

From Glen.

FAIZI

With Glen.

FRANCESCA

With Glen. I'm sorry. I'm a feminist but sometimes I forget I'm a feminist. Or my language forgets I'm a feminist.

FAIZI

Well, you look like a feminist.

FRANCESCA

Oh, thanks.

FAIZI

It's the jacket I think. And your hair. I'd never mistake you for anything else.

FRANCESCA

Oh that's sweet.

Would you like some water?

FAIZI

No I have some...I have a water bottle here.

FRANCESCA

Oh that's a lovely water bottle.

FAIZI

I searched for months for the perfect one.

FRANCESCA

Size is so important in water bottles.

FAIZI

And weight.

FRANCESCA

You don't want to be carrying around something that's too heavy in weight because you're already

FAIZI

Carrying other essentials.

FRANCESCA

Right.

FAIZI

I like you.

FRANCESCA

I like you too.

FAIZI (*suddenly*)

Would you like to come and live with us?

FRANCESCA

But then he'd be married to us both.

FAIZI

I know. I'm not interested in any ménage-a-trois business.

FRANCESCA

Me neither.

FAIZI

But you could always stay with us.

FRANCESCA

Would I be like the nanny without children to look after?

FAIZI

A bit.

FRANCESCA

I'd be around and have maybe the odd chore to do?

FAIZI

Yes! I always have unfinished things on my things to do list.

Oh that reminds me-may I borrow your phone.

FRANCESCA

Yes-go right ahead.

FRANCESCA gestures to her phone. FAIZI looks up the number in her diary and dials.

FAIZI

Frank? How are you? Well, I'm well. Yes it's working but when I flush two times in a row, it seems to jam. Right. Right you know the problem. It could be in our building, but if it's something mechanical just with the flush handle then it would be great if...yes, well, I won't be home during the day tomorrow but...wait, what's your name?

FRANCESCA

Francesca.

FAIZI

Francesca will be home. She'll let you in.

She's...she's like our new nanny. Mine and Glen's.

No I'm not pregnant. Ok. Bye!

FRANCESCA

Well okay then!

FAIZI

I'll have sheets ready for you. And in the evening we could play charades.

FRANCESCA

I love charades. I get very competitive.

FAIZI

Wonderful. Me too. Glen hates it. He hates anything competitive. And he can't keep his accounts in order.

FRANCESCA

I'm good at accounts. When I broke my spine, I'd keep books in the office for the ballet company. I like it. I like the way you use pencils and the lead gets mushy sometimes and breaks if you've pressed too hard. It gives me a feeling of ritual and contact with my ancestors who must have kept books in the same way. It feels sacred to me.

FAIZI

Ours are all electronic.

FRANCESCA

Oh.

I could get used to that.

FAIZI

Wonderful. I'll see you tomorrow then. You know where we live?

FRANCESCA

No.

FAIZI

Then where did you and Glen...

FRANCESCA

Do you really want to hear this?

FAIZI

Yes.

FRANCESCA

We had coffee.

He took my hand.

He had this sweet face of a child

And I thought, I've met the man of my dreams.

I didn't think about anything else for a whole week.

And he would come to see me here.

And then at the end of the week

We got into a car and got married in Lentz

And then we drove back. And then he went home to do his accounts.

FAIZI

Oh.

FRANCESCA

It doesn't sound romantic. But it was.

No one had ever married me like that before.

I'm not soft.

But with him, I'm soft. Even my spine you know, it seems to-bend.

FAIZI

Let me give you our address.

1220 Hamburg Strasse.

FRANCESCA

Let me write it down...1220 Hamburg Strasse.

Thank you.

FAIZI

My name's Faizi

We met travelling in Bali. Glen and I.

I was teaching yoga.

I was naïve at it then. Now I'm very good at it and it's made me very efficient.

FRANCESCA

I thought yoga was supposed to make you relaxed and intuitive.

FAIZI

Not if you live here. We take eastern traditions and snap them into two so they fit our way of thinking.

FRANCESCA

Like a broken spine.

FAIZI

Exactly.

FRANCESCA

Ok.

Let's kiss.

They kiss each other twice on the cheek.

FRANCESCA

Tomorrow.

FAIZI
Tomorrow.
