

Dancing.

(2F, sample)

by Maxim Vinogradov

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Act I: A Hotel Room at the Heron Inn

There's no bed, and the carpet that would be underneath it's been removed, revealing a hard surface. The rest of the room's pleasant, with the exception of the pieces of foam stapled into areas with open wall space and around the room's door. There's a door to the bathroom, a closet, a window, a dresser, a small table with a lamp, a counter hiding a mini-fridge, and a sofa with a sheet laid over it with bed pillows.

Someone collides with the room's door, shaking the door handle. A key clicks and the

door opens, bleeding in the sound of dozens of musical instruments. Enter J., who holds an ice bucket and closes the door behind herself, mostly silencing the instrumental cacophony. After some confused inspection of the room, J. sets the ice bucket, grabbing a fountain pen, having it prepared as a weapon. J. goes to the closet, pulling out a black duffel bag, by her confusion not her own. J. goes to the sofa, lifting the hanging sheet, peeking under, jumping back, yelping, falling onto the hard floor, pointing the pen under the sofa, terrified.
Beat.

J.

I... I have a shotgun! *(beat)* Whoever you are, you need to... get out right now! Or I'll shoot!

S.

(from under the sofa; English accent) Yes! Yes! Okay...! Do you mean need to get out from under the sofa though, or get out of the room?

J.

I... I mean, out of the *room!* Get out of the *room!*

S.

Okay! One second! *(beat; poking her head out; she's 17; relieved)* Oh... Is that your gun?

J.

What are you doing in here?

S.

Very understandable question. The front desk said *every* room was full, and...

J.

I—because, it's—*yeah!*

S.

Yes, but... Yes. That is a terrific point, but... Is it all clear for me to come out or are you going to stab me? (*not letting J. respond*) I'm sorry—I've never done anything like this! The door was open and I didn't realize someone was actually staying in here—this room is clearly dreadful—and I do need this exact room for a moment—how much worse would it be if I just used it for two—?

J.

Okay, that doesn't mean you—Wow! This room is full! Jesus Ch—Get out of here! I—I paid for this room!

S.

Wait—I need it for two seconds—and you're still pointing that pen like if I do com—You *paid* for it?! It doesn't have a bed!

J.

They gave me a discount! You—

S.

Let's just enjoy our breathing for a bit. Let's learn a charm or two about one another before we make rash evictions. First, are you—and my deep apologies if this is completely out there—are you... a ghost?

J.

What?

S.

Yes, you—'cause, a girl was... y'know... in this room, yes? (*looking around*) Yes. Are you a ghost?

J.

No...! Don't change the subj—!

S.

It just seemed appropriate for a room in which a girl was killed to have her ghost threatening guests! So, why *are* you in this room?

J.

Are you kidding...?! Why are yo—?! We are clearly talking about *you* right n—I got a discount! Can you please go already?

S.

I can't! There's some type of symphony event happening in this town!—The rooms are all full!

J.
Why do you *think* I'm in *here*?!

S.
Did they *move* you to this room?

J.
Please leave!

S.
I'm sorry. You're right. I... I should not have introduced myself from under a sofa. Can I...? Please, can I stay for a moment and a half? That's all I need. I just need... your floor.

J.
No.

S.
I just need to rehearse. I just need to rehearse. Please.

J.
What...? Are you with the symphony? Didn't they give you *all* the rooms?

S. emerges from under the sofa, revealing expensive leotard and tights.

S.
Hi. It is very nice to fully meet you. (*extending hand*)
I'm—(*withdrawing*) Actually, no. Let's... “Why am I

under your sofa?” It’s weird. I’m sorry. I’ve done all the warming up I can do on carpet and went to the conference room but then these men with tubas came into the conference room so I went to the lobby and they were quite loudly unhappy with my barre work in there and threatened to call the police and then (*re: this room*) the door was open and there was a hard—I’m sorry for closing the door, I didn’t realize anyone was staying in here, as in, there isn’t a bed—But I was just hiding for a minute to be sure, and I know that doesn’t look good for me but there was a hard floor and this is a great mirror here... I picked a bad weekend to be here. (*re: foam*) Well, she probably picked a worse one but—

J.

Who are you?

S.

Um... What would you just *love* to hear to make sure I’m not dangerous or a burglar or... anything and I only need the only available hard floor in the entire hotel?—I’ll pay for your stay! I can pay for you. Plus some. I have money—(*cautious*) Not a *lot* of money. I don’t have a lot of money, but I can... pay for your stay. Just to be here a little bit longer and use this floor—and we can talk! I just... would prefer if you didn’t ask about...

S. looks at the door, pausing.

J.

(beat) You need to use my floor for dancing?

S.

That's it. Only the floor.

J.

Why... does it have to be hard floor?

S.

Uh... Sure! One can get hurt on carpet. Easily twist an ankle. Rug burn. Nasty thing.

*J. thinks on this, then grabs a notepad,
writing a quick note.*

J.

Uhh... *(preparing notepad)* What do you need to do specifically?

S.

Barre work...? Then, if you'll let me: center.

J.

“Barre?” As in R-R-E? *(writing)* How long?

S.

(frowning) Not long. Just would love to practice with a mirror. *(re: J. thinking)* I'll be courteous. I won't be long, I promise.

J.

I mean, I'm not gonna leave you alone with my stuff.

S.

Stay! I'm all right with that! We can talk! You're alone here and could use some—Not that there's anything wrong with—I'm alone too!

J.

You want to dance and talk and are actually gonna pay for the room?

S.

Yes! We don't need to talk, but yes, abso—

J.

Um... I mean, okay: you can dance for a second...

S.

Great! (*looking through bag*) This is just overwhelmingly sweet. You're really a pretty person,...! What's your name?

J.

(*pausing*) Wait, but you didn't... What's *your* name?

S.

Well... (*smiling*) What's yours first?

J.

Hold on, is there like a specific reason you can't tell me who you are?

S.

Just my name... I think. Why can't you tell me yours?

J.

Because...

S.

I have a reason.

J.

I've got reasons.

S.

Fine. Very understandable. (*going back to bag*) Can I call you something? Anything you'd like?

J. pauses, then goes to her notepad, finding a name:

J.

Jessica.

S.

(*looking; thinking*) Yes, so, your name actually isn't Jessica, though? You really don't look like a Jessica.

J.

Yes, I do!

S.

I'll call you Jessica if you want to be called that. It's a lovely name.

J.

It's... Right. (*beat*) So... what's barre work?

S.

A lot of things.

S. removes trash bag pants from the duffel bag, putting them on. The newly christened JESSICA points to them in question.

S.

These? Oh, these are trash bag pants! They're very warm. Good for... warming.

JESSICA

(*writing*) Uhh... what happens if you're not warm enough before dancing?

S.

(*frowning at JESSICA writing*) I break into little pieces. What are you writing?

JESSICA

I just write things.

S.

Oh...! (*concerned*) Why...? Are you doing that?

JESSICA

I just... to write.

S.

(beat) So! I would love to use this dresser as a barre if that's okay. Can you help me move it closer to the space?

JESSICA

Move to...? *(looking at door)* I mean, let's be careful not... Why?

S.

Lower barre is a pinch over eighty centimeters: so this drawer. And higher barre is about a hundred and five: so this drawer. And sturdiness. This is a healthy, sturdy barre.

JESSICA

(moving to help) Okay.

S.

Ready?

JESSICA

Yeah.

The two lift the dresser and move it towards the center, by the hard floor.

JESSICA

Okay, (*preparing notepad*) what do you do on a barre? Like, what are the terms?

S.

Mm... First: do you write *for* something?

JESSICA

Uh, yeah.

S.

(*beginning barre work*) Oh! What for?

JESSICA

Some magazines.

S.

(*stopping*) You write for magazines?

JESSICA

I mean I write stories and try to get them in magazines. Why?

S.

Okay... Where are you published, if you don't mind me asking?

JESSICA

(*she isn't*) I mean, y'know... I mean you'd find out my name if I told you where, and...

S.

Right. Okay, we shan't ask about that then. Either of us. Deal? Let's sleep on it?

JESSICA

What?

S.

Shake—wow! That was very off. Shake. Let's *shake* on it. I won't ask who you are and you won't ask who I am and I'll just rehearse.

S. holds out her hand. JESSICA is cautious, but the two shake. It happens too long. S. frowns, then smiles at JESSICA. JESSICA releases.

S.

Barres?

JESSICA looks at her, confused.

S.

What I do on barres?

JESSICA

Yeah!

S.

Splendid. Look here, *Jesse*, because they're not words.

JESSICA

Jessica—

S.

(doing barre work) On a barre, you do this—the word is *plie*—it's French for... warm up your knees and ankles. But it looks like this. See it? Lovely. After that, I'll do *tendus*, or *dégagés*: which are feet and inner thighs—

JESSICA

Thanks. *(writing)* How do you spell those, uh... uh...? I mean, what should I call you?

S.

(thinking) Whatever is fine.

JESSICA

You want me to... name you something?

S.

Oh...! Sure! If you'd like to, I'm sure you have good names.

JESSICA

I'm actually terrible at that—Like, my characters have bad names—Can you just pick one?

S.

No. Don't stress yourself; give me a bad one.

JESSICA

A bad...?

S.

Try the worst one you can think of for me!

JESSICA

(beat) Megatron.

S.

(beat) No, not that one.

JESSICA

Yeah, that's what I...

S.

Try again. Different direction.

JESSICA

Like... Starscream?

S.

Starscream...? *(hearing it)* Okay.

JESSICA

No, no I didn't mean for it to like—

S.

No, it's what I'd pick too. It's a good choice.

JESSICA

You want to go by...?

S.

I like it! You picked a really good name! It's pretty!

JESSICA nods, then writes a note. The newly christened STARSCREAM continues barre work.

JESSICA

Okay... Cool. So, Starscream, how do you spell "tendus"?

STARSCREAM

T...O...? You don't need to—It's spelled like this... Look. Look here. *(as she does it)* Start in first. Front. Come back. Second. Come back. Back. Come back. Make sure not to cross. Always straight. Tendu!

JESSICA

Okay... So should I just look up how to spell it?

STARSCREAM

Yes.

JESSICA nods and scribbles in her notepad.

JESSICA

So they don't write things down in dancing school?

STARSCREAM

I... haven't gone yet—I'm auditioning!

JESSICA

Oh, are you going to Toronto?

STARSCREAM

(taken aback) No.

JESSICA

I... I just figured Toronto 'cause I know they have a good—

STARSCREAM

It isn't Toronto. It's one in New York.

JESSICA

Why are you in Pennsylvania if it's in...?

STARSCREAM

I'm traveling to New York from England and have to get up early to get there tomorrow.

JESSICA

I mean... you missed it.

STARSCREAM

My mistake—That's why I have to get up early! *(back to barre work)* I'm doing rond de jambes now, which are essentially tendus but I don't return to first position until I cycle through all of them. These are very good for hip joints.

JESSICA nods, miming the motion herself.

STARSCREAM

No, no, no! You have to... Take your shoes off.

JESSICA is a deer in headlights.

JESSICA

What?

STARSCREAM

(like JESSICA is being weird) Take your shoes off!

After a moment, JESSICA takes her shoes off using her feet and goes to the barre, holding onto the drawer.

STARSCREAM

(NOT touching JESSICA) Straighten your back. Start in first, like this...

JESSICA doesn't do anything.

JESSICA

Hey, so I'm not good at dancing.

STARSCREAM

This isn't dancing; it's a tendu. First position, feet like this.

JESSICA looks at her things in the room.

STARSCREAM

If you still think I'm here to rob you, you're not more vulnerable in first position.

JESSICA

Well, I mean, then you do it.

STARSCREAM

I... (*doing it*) Tada. Now you; I won't leave first.

JESSICA cautiously does it too.

STARSCREAM

Try a bit... mm...

STARSCREAM gets out of first to adjust JESSICA as JESSICA breaks, clearly nervous. JESSICA goes back into position. STARSCREAM tries to fix her stature without touching her. STARSCREAM goes back to first.

STARSCREAM

More like this... Now forward, letting your foot massage the—No, hold your arms out.

STARSCREAM goes behind JESSICA, pointing to the "mirror" and miming the action. Her hands are close to JESSICA's waist.

STARSCREAM

I'm not going to attack you.

JESSICA

No! No, I just... What is it?

STARSCREAM

You're very rigid.

JESSICA

Okay...

STARSCREAM

Try—

JESSICA

(undoing position) I'm not very good at dancing

During JESSICA undoing her position, STARSCREAM had unknowingly pulled her arms back before the two could touch, but it was close and the two felt it. The two pause.

STARSCREAM

You want to know... *frappes?*

JESSICA

What?

STARSCREAM

It's another warm up. More feet and toes. Then adagio with high legs, though I like to stretch my heels before

that. And end it with grande battlements. Then get on my leg with center.

JESSICA

I don't think I can do any of that.

STARSCREAM

No! For your story!

JESSICA

Oh! I don't know if I'm gonna—Like, (*re: the two of them*) this isn't gonna be a story.

STARSCREAM

Do you *often* have random women in your hotel rooms?

JESSICA

No. (*nervous laughing*) No! (*it's the truth*) No.

STARSCREAM tentatively returns to barre work.

STARSCREAM

Can I ask you something?

JESSICA

Sure...

STARSCREAM

Do you know what happened in here?