

The Case For Foreign Independent Flicks

by Katrina Gray

All her friends call her Mike. When I say, “You’re beautiful, Mike,” she says, “You’re not my friend. You’re my date.”

I shrink away from her and keep driving. We park, and the theater line is long. She asks why I did not order tickets online.

“You can order tickets online?” She looks at me as if I have just called her Mike.

I wonder if I should offer her my suit coat, and I decide no. It will not match her dress, and the shoulders will make her look like David Byrne. I cannot make love to a woman who looks like David Byrne. But her deciding to have sex with me, as of now, feels like a stretch.

She glares at me when I crunch ice during the film. I wonder if this is the last straw. No, I decide, because when she crosses her legs, she crosses them toward me, a sign that she is warming up.

Maybe Thai food was not the best choice, not for a first date. Maybe I do not make good choices in general. I think of this as I feel a painful wet burp rise during the quietest part of the movie—the part where the elephant is dying, and village children gather to cry. Mike darts her eyes toward me when I make a small, froglike sound to keep the burp inside.

I look over, and her arms are crossed. This is not good. She is not softened by the mourning children or the tenderness of the moment. She looks at her watch and scowls. I should have let her choose the film.

I have spent nineteen dollars on movie tickets, twenty-two dollars on concessions, and nearly sixty bucks at Bangkok Gardens. Plus gas. I think of what else I could have bought for a hundred dollars. Tennis shoes. Cable for a month. Half a lawnmower. A freestanding basketball goal. Her friends told me she would be worth it. Mike's a card, they said—a real trip. I miss half the movie wondering if I picked up the wrong Mike.

I'm feeling like want my money back, like I wish I could return her, and I decide there is nothing here to lose. I say, loudly: "Mike, you're a bitch."

Voices chirp in the theater. A few people shush me. Her eyes turn to slivers. "You have no right—" She is just as loud as I am. Everyone stares.

I turn around to glare at a heckler, but the crowd is no longer looking at us. They are staring at the screen. Someone has discovered that the elephant's body is twitching, and points. "Look!" he whispers. "Did you see that?"

"He's still alive!" a woman shouts.

We look at the screen, me and Mike, and we, too, see that the elephant's tail wiggles a little. Children in loincloths rejoice. They join hands in a circle around the elephant and sing. A couple of the bigger kids beat on the animal's chest where they suppose the heart might be. The elephant's foot shuffles the dirt. It opens one eye just a little, like a toddler pretending to be asleep. The audience claps.

Mike looks at the screen, stunned, then looks at me as if I have betrayed her. "Did you know this was going to happen?" she asks. I have been accused of something hideous, something I did not do.

"No," I say. "God, no."

Shining in the light of an African sunset is a single tear trickling down Mike's cheek. Her mouth opens a little, and she shakes her head in disbelief. The elephant's trunk makes a deep rumbling primal sound, and it is too much for her. She buries her face in her hands. I reach out to her, skittish at first, and wrap my arm around her shoulders. She does not swat me away. The elephant blinks.

It is not dead after all.

