

Synopsis

On a park bench, long-term couple Jason and Emma are interrupted by Doris, a sharp-witted stranger with strong opinions about relationships. As her amusing observations expose tensions, habits and unspoken truths, the pair are forced to reconsider what keeps them together. A warm contemporary comedy about love, communication and unexpected wisdom.

Benchmark

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Characters

DORIS – late seventies. Cheerful, observant, and entirely too interested in strangers. Possesses the confidence of someone who has survived decades and no longer sees the point of keeping quiet.

EMMA – mid-thirties. Practical, organised, and quietly exhausted from being the responsible one.

JASON – mid-thirties. Good-natured, enthusiastic, and convinced that every problem can be solved with a gadget or an app.

Setting

A park bench on a sunny afternoon.

DORIS sits feeding imaginary pigeons and enjoying the world going by. She carries a handbag large enough to contain emergency supplies for a small village.

EMMA and JASON enter with takeaway sandwiches, coffees and a picnic bag.

SCENE

JASON

Perfect. A bench with a view.

EMMA

A bench with shade.

JASON

Shade with a view.

(They sit.)

DORIS

You're sitting in the honeymoon seats.

JASON

Sorry?

DORIS

Young couples always sit there. Middle-aged couples sit at opposite ends. Divorced people stand by the duck pond pretending to enjoy nature.

EMMA

We'll keep that in mind.

JASON

We're not honeymooners.

DORIS

No. Too many reusable shopping bags.

How long have you been together?

JASON

Five years.

DORIS

Mm.

EMMA

"Mm" good or "mm" bad?

DORIS

Five years is sandwich-sharing territory.

(JASON unwraps his sandwich.)

JASON

Actually, I've got chicken.

EMMA

And I've got falafel.

DORIS

Separate fillings.

Oh dear.

EMMA

Separate fillings?

DORIS

Every marriage has signs.

My Albert and I started with shared fish paste. Forty-two years later he insisted on pickle. That was the beginning of the end.

JASON

Did you divorce?

DORIS

No, he died.

But the pickle certainly didn't help.

(JASON laughs.)

EMMA

We're fine.

DORIS

Good.

Who's Gary?

EMMA

Excuse me?

DORIS

Your phone flashed up.

"Gary calling."

Neither of you answered.

That's always suspicious.

JASON

It's Gary from work.

EMMA

It's Gary from accounts.

DORIS

Two different Garys?

EMMA

Same Gary.

DORIS

Ah.

Never trust a man who works in accounts. My Albert lost three hundred pounds to one.

JASON

Three hundred pounds?

DORIS

Yes, terrible fellow.

(EMMA tries not to laugh.)

JASON

So what else are you seeing with us then?

DORIS

Oh, plenty.

You're annoyed with him.

EMMA

No, I'm not.

DORIS

You corrected him three times before you'd even opened the sandwiches.

And you're trying too hard to be funny.

JASON

I am naturally funny.

DORIS

See?

(EMMA snorts.)

JASON

Whose side are you on?

DORIS

Whoever brings me biscuits.

Nobody yet.

(EMMA unwraps a packet of crisps.)

(DORIS watches hopefully.)

(EMMA sighs and hands her one.)

DORIS

Lovely girl, you must keep her.

JASON

I intend to.

DORIS

Do you?

JASON

Of course.

DORIS

Interesting answer.

Not "I love her."

Not "She's my world."

Just "Of course."

Like someone talking about an extension cord.

EMMA

See!

JASON

See what?

EMMA

Exactly that.

You never say romantic things.

JASON

I bought you an air fryer.

EMMA

That's not romantic.

DORIS

Depends.

Was he inside it?

(EMMA laughs.)

JASON

Look, I do romantic things.

EMMA

Name one.

JASON

—

I made you a playlist.

EMMA

Called "Driving Songs."

DORIS

Oh dear.

JASON

I booked us a mini-break.

EMMA

To Swindon.

JASON

There was an offer.

DORIS

No woman has ever dreamed of being swept away to Swindon.

Not even women from Swindon.

(JASON groans.)

JASON

I'm being attacked by two people.

EMMA

Three. The pigeons look disappointed too.

DORIS

I don't like to interfere...

...which is why I make observations.

And my observation is that you're trying very hard.

Both of you.

EMMA

We've been arguing all week.

JASON

Not arguing.

Discussing.

EMMA

At volume.

DORIS

Over what?

EMMA

Nothing...

JASON

...and everything.

DORIS

Ah.

The two great categories.

Albert and I nearly separated over a kettle.

EMMA

A kettle?

DORIS

He wanted green.

I wanted cream.

Didn't speak for four days.

Then the shop ran out and we got blue.

Problem solved.

JASON

That's reassuring.

DORIS

Most things are silly when they're old enough.

Mind you, some things aren't.

EMMA

Like what?

DORIS

Like staying together because you've forgotten you don't actually enjoy each other.

(A silence.)

JASON

That's cheerful.

DORIS

I'm old, not cheerful.

It's a different department.

Tell me something.

When was the last time you laughed together?

EMMA

We laugh, all the time.

JASON

Yes, all the time.

DORIS

What? together?

Not at the television.

Not at other people falling over.

But together.

(Long pause.)

EMMA

On Tuesday, at the cat in the cone, after the vets.

(They both burst out laughing.)

JASON

Ran straight into the laundry basket.

(They're laughing helplessly.)

(DORIS smiles.)

DORIS

There you are.

I thought you'd misplaced yourselves.

JASON

Maybe we have.

EMMA

Maybe.

DORIS

Or maybe you've become one of those couples who schedule happiness.

Terrible habit.

Like booking the dentist.

JASON

You know what?

EMMA

What?

JASON

I don't actually want to go shopping afterwards.

EMMA

I don't either.

JASON

Really?

EMMA

Really.

I mostly wanted you to suggest not going.

JASON

Why didn't you say?

EMMA

Why didn't you?

DORIS

Because nobody says anything.

You all communicate through sighing.

(JASON laughs.)

EMMA

You know, that's so true.

DORIS

So.

Question.

If you met today, would you still fancy each other?

(Long pause.)

JASON

Probably.

EMMA

Probably?

JASON

Definitely.

Though I'd wear the blue shirt.

EMMA

I'd still say yes.

(JASON smiles.)

DORIS

Lovely.

Now another question.

Would you choose the same afternoon?

EMMA

What do you mean?

DORIS

This one, on a bench, with sandwiches.

Would you choose this?

(EMMA & JASON thinks. Then simultaneously...)

EMMA

No.

JASON

Absolutely not.

DORIS

Excellent.

Then don't.

You're grown-ups.

You can simply leave.

EMMA

Can you do that?

DORIS

I've been old for eleven years.

Turns out nobody can stop you.

(JASON stands.)

JASON

Fancy skipping everything and going to the cinema?

EMMA

In the middle of the day?

JASON

Scandalous, I know.

EMMA

All right.

JASON

Really?

EMMA

Yes really.

(JASON kisses her cheek.)

DORIS

Good.

Off you pop.

(JASON gathers the bags.)

EMMA

Thank you.

DORIS

For what?

EMMA

I don't know.

Whatever that was.

DORIS

Years of being nosy, it's a gift of mine.

JASON

Have you got family nearby?

DORIS

No.

Just strangers.

They're far more interesting.

EMMA

Well... enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

DORIS

I shall.

(JASON and EMMA begin to leave.)

DORIS

Oh!

EMMA

Yes?

DORIS

Take the falafel.

I hate chickpeas.

(EMMA laughs.)

JASON

And the chicken?

DORIS

I'm not a miracle worker.

(Jason & Emma exit laughing together.)

(DORIS watches them go. She smiles. After a moment, she reaches into her handbag and produces another sandwich.)

DORIS

Albert, my love, if you've sent me another pair to sort out...

(looking upward)

...you owe me a biscuit.

(She takes a bite.)

DORIS

And I still prefer cream custards.

(Blackout.)

End