

Falling Back

by Robin Russin

Setting: a café

Cast: FRED, a multiple divorcee

GINGER, also a multiple divorcee

LIGHTS UP

FRED brings two identical drinks
over to the table.

FRED

Sorry for the wait--the service in this place has always
sucked, huh.

GINGER

Doesn't that tell you something--that we keep coming back
here after knowing the service is always terrible?

FRED sits across from GINGER.

FRED

I wouldn't say we "keep coming back here." We haven't been
here in a year. But it's our place. "America, right or wrong!" -
Right?

GINGER

Oh my God, are you still using that stupid phrase to justify
everything you do? It doesn't even make sense--it never made
sense!

FRED pouts.

FRED

You used to say it was cute.

GINGER

Well, it stopped being cute about fifteen years ago.

They fold their arms defensively,
mirroring one another. They suddenly
sit forward, each about to say
something. There's an uncomfortable
laugh.

GINGER

See, that's the problem. We're too much alike.

FRED

No. You have much nicer breasts than I do.

GINGER

That stopped being cute about fifteen years ago, too.

FRED

Hey, the truth never goes out of style.

GINGER

Fred--!

FRED

OK, OK. Look, Ginger, I know why you think I asked you here--

GINGER

It's why you always ask me here. You're breaking up with your latest girlfriend. So who is it this time, that roller-skating bimbo, Sally?

FRED

Rebecca. Sally was two times ago. And she wasn't a bimbo, she was an actress.

GINGER

Oh, that's right...but only in bed, as I recall. Isn't that why she broke up with you? Because she was tired of faking it?

FRED

That was Alicia, and she only said it to hurt me. And I'm hurt that you would choose to remember that.

GINGER

Look, I'm sorry, but they all blend together at this point. They leave you, you leave them. And then you want me to take you back.

FRED

I took you back after--who was it last time? Roger something or other? The one you thought was so exciting, "Mister Extreme?" The sky-diving, scuba-diving, cave-diving, muff-diving show-off.

GINGER

That was Richard, Roger was...four times ago? And you should be ashamed, he died!

FRED

He deserved it. What kind of idiot tries to swim the English Channel?

GINGER

Lots of people have done it!

FRED

With their arms tied behind their backs?

GINGER

He was being original! And speaking of muff-diving, you should give that a try some time, it might improve your batting average.

FRED

Look, I'm trying. You got me to eat sushi. It's a start.

GINGER

I can't believe you actually said that.

FRED

It used to make you laugh.

GINGER

In high school! That was half a lifetime ago!

FRED

Speak for yourself. For me, it was just yesterday.

GINGER

Fred, we can't keep doing this--Oh, my God--there, you see? We've been through this so many times, even I can't even open my mouth without coming out with a cliché. I mean, even our names, Fred and Ginger-- we are a cliché-- You and I!

FRED

It's "you and me."

GINGER

No, it isn't, because "You and I" are still the subject, short for "You and I are a cliché" -- and I hate it when you try to correct my grammar, you always get it wrong.

FRED

I do that on purpose. It turns me on when you get all hot and bothered. And don't tell me it doesn't turn you on either. Come on, confess!

GINGER

Augh! All right! It does! But that's what makes me sure this relationship is insane!

FRED

Maybe--but not cliché! Who else uses bad grammar as foreplay? No one I know has had the kind of relationship we've had.

GINGER

Yeah, and what should that tell you?

FRED

That we're...unique.

GINGER

No, it should tell you that there's something wrong here. There always has been. It's not normal; it's not even crazy--it's--how did Dr. Miller put it? Co-dependent.

FRED

Please, no more psycho-babble--I was done with all that after our fifth marriage.

GINGER

It's not psycho-babble if it's true! And besides, that was our third marriage.

FRED

So who's counting?

GINGER

We should be! It's ridiculous, we can't even remember how many times we've been married!

FRED

Nine.

GINGER

Nine! Even a cat would be dead by now!

FRED

Lots of couples renew their vows.

GINGER

Not after being divorced every time!

FRED

So maybe we're just a bit more "extreme"--eat your heart out, Richard. Wherever you are.

GINGER

Fred, it is not "extreme" to get prenuptials in the mail like other people get credit card applications!

FRED

That's not fair. I stopped asking for those at least four marriages ago. Unless these other clowns have been asking you to marry them...?

(beat; GINGER hesitates)

Have they?

GINGER

If you must know, yes.

FRED

Who?

GINGER

Richard. Roger. Harry--

FRED

OK, OK, I get the picture, you can stop now!

GINGER

--And most recently, Alphonse.

FRED

Alphonse? Who the hell is Alphonse?

GINGER

The guy I've been dating. He's a handsome, successful attorney, and he asked me to marry him last week.

FRED

Last week! Why the hell would you go out with someone named Alphonse? What kind of psycho would even name their baby Alphonse? No wonder he turned into some bloodsucking shyster!

GINGER

Calm down, will you?

FRED

Calm down! You've never told me that anyone else asked you to marry them before!

GINGER

Because I knew you'd freak out, just like you're doing now. Besides, don't tell me you've never asked anyone else to marry you.

FRED

I have not! Never!

GINGER

What about Debbie? I thought you said you were going to tie the knot with her.

FRED

That was until it started looking like a noose. She was a bit...unstable. Last I heard, she was making real progress and might be released in a few years.

GINGER

So...you've never asked anyone else to marry you? Really?

FRED

Cross my heart and hope to die.

GINGER

You will, if I ever hear you say that again. But...all this time, why not? You're the marrying type, no one knows better than I do.

FRED

Because...because there was always something wrong with them. As you always were so happy to point out, I might add. You thought Cheryl was too clingy--

GINGER

Excuse me, but wasn't she the one who bought you that cell phone?

FRED

It was nice gesture. She just wanted to be able to keep in touch when I had to go out of town.

GINGER

Every half hour?

FRED

Well, that was a bit much. Especially when it got to be three in the morning.

GINGER

And don't even get me started on Nympho Nancy. You're lucky your thing didn't fall off, after her.

FRED

I don't recall your complaining, when we got back together.

GINGER

No. But I hope you're still taking tests to be sure you didn't catch anything. I know I am.

FRED

Well, you can stop. To tell you the truth, Nancy and I only did it once. I only told you she was insatiable to make you jealous.

GINGER

You only did it once with her?

FRED

The...the others too. Sometimes not even that.

GINGER

What? You...I don't understand.

FRED

I told you. Something was always wrong.

GINGER

With all of them? What could have been so wrong?

(beat)

Well?

FRED

They...they weren't you.

GINGER

(stunned beat)

Wow. Talk about not being fair.

FRED

"All's fair in love and war," remember. I'm nothing if not true to my clichés.

(beat)

So what about this "Alphonse?" Why don't I see a ring on your finger?

GINGER

I haven't given him an answer.

FRED

Are you going to?

GINGER

Yes.

FRED

Yes, you're giving him an answer? Or yes, you're going to marry him?

GINGER

No. As in no, I'm not going to marry him.

FRED

(relieved)

Why not?

GINGER

I guess...I don't know. Maybe something's wrong with him.

FRED

Well, his name, to start with.

GINGER smiles for the first time.
For the first time they both take a
sip from their drinks. Then both
just knock the whole drink back.

FRED

When it comes right down to it, maybe we keep coming back together because we're the most normal people we know.

GINGER

I don't think so. I think we just keep choosing to go out with the wrong other people. People who aren't normal.

FRED

Why would we keep doing something like that?

GINGER

Because we've been afraid of getting too comfortable. Too Fred and Ginger.

FRED

They sure looked good together. Didn't they?

GINGER

That was fantasy. This is us.

FRED

When you think about it, though, aren't we just as fantastic? I mean, even this place--here we are, halfway through our lives, in the place where I took you on our first date.

GINGER

Fred, please--

FRED

And this is where I first asked you to marry me.

GINGER

It's also where we signed our first divorce papers.

FRED

And our last ones. Well, who knows, maybe they'll be the last ones, ever.

FRED gets down on one knee and offers
GINGER a ring.

GINGER

Oh no. This is deja vu all over again. That's even the same damn ring!

FRED

Of course it is. Because it's for the same girl, it's comfortable, I know it will fit. Ginger, I'm tired of being afraid of being comfortable. Maybe comfortable is good. Fred and Ginger looked so good because they were comfortable together. Maybe comfortable is what fantasy ought to be about. Like take this place.

(MORE)

FRED (Continued)

We've been coming here since we had to use fake ID's to get a drink, and we know everything that's bad about it. But I still like coming here. This is my fantasy. And that makes it...I don't know. Good. Like you and I.

GINGER

Jesus Christ, Fred! It's "you and me" -- as in, "that's what makes you and me--"

FRED

Good?

GINGER

You bastard. That was so sneaky.

FRED

And unfair. And strangely, fantastically, ungrammatically arousing. Sometimes, you just gotta fall back on what works. So...Ginger, will you marry me? Again?

GINGER thinks for a beat, then takes the ring.

GINGER

What the hell. America, right or wrong. Right?

FRED

You can say that again.

They kiss.

LIGHTS OUT