

TRANSCONTINENTAL

by

David Schreiber

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Cast:

Jacob Krause Male, mid-30s

Laura Stewart Female, mid- to late-20s.

Time:

1870.

Place:

A chocolate store in San Francisco.

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(Lights up on a chocolate store in San Francisco in 1874. Laura is behind the counter, working on the books. Jacob enters from left, carrying a large package.)

LAURA

(Looking at books; doesn't see Jacob)

Four dollars and 75 cents on “mechanical whatsits”?

JACOB

Good morning, Miss. Stewart.

LAURA

Oh! Mr. Krause. I...I...how do you do.

JACOB

I'm sorry. Did I startle you?

LAURA

No, no. I was just...I am trying to balance the books for the month, and my father...he doesn't make it easy.

JACOB

I didn't know you managed the finances.

LAURA

I have a knack for it. Which is fortunate because my father he, well...

JACOB

He doesn't.

LAURA

Exactly.

JACOB

He's fortunate to have you.

LAURA

Thank you. Mr. Krause...I was wondering if, well, if you would...

JACOB

Yes?

LAURA

What brings you into the store today? Your usual?

JACOB
(Puts package on counter)

Well, this, to begin with.

LAURA

What is it?

JACOB

You ordered a bolt of cloth from—

LAURA

Oh, yes. Yes! Thank you!

JACOB

Luca...Mr. Romano apologizes for the delay in getting it to you.

LAURA

Oh, that's fine.

JACOB

The shipment was delayed. Twice. It finally arrived this morning.

LAURA

Give Mr. Romano my thanks.

JACOB

And while I'm here...

LAURA

Yes? Oh, your usual?

JACOB

A double order, actually.

LAURA

A special occasion?

JACOB

And I would like to buy two one pound sets of chocolate. They're gifts.

LAURA

Gifts? Of course. What would you like?

JACOB

Whatever you think is best. I trust your judgment.

LAURA

Do the recipients have any preferences?

JACOB

I don't know. Put together a variety, please. I'm sure it will be wonderful.

LAURA

Thank you. I know just the thing.

(Silence as Laura starts to assemble order)

You're rather quiet today. Everything all right?

JACOB

I'm just... a little distracted.

LAURA

Nothing serious, I hope?

JACOB

No, no. How has business been?

LAURA

Doing well. Surprisingly well, given the economy. Of course, we'd do better if I could keep track of expenses. Someone in the store—I won't say who...

JACOB

Someone not so good with bookkeeping?

LAURA

You could say that. Someone spent an entire four dollars and seventy-five cents on "mechanical whatsits". And I'm left to figure out how to categorize it.

JACOB

Ah, a "whatsit".

LAURA

Yes...?

JACOB

A very important piece of equipment. We sell them at the dry-goods store.

LAURA

Really? I thought it was just a made-up term.

JACOB

No no no. You need a "whatsit" in your grinder to anchor the thingamajob.

I see.

LAURA

Without it, you could have a grinding accident.

JACOB

Mr. Krause, I do believe you're teasing me.

LAURA

No! A grinding accident is a terrible thing to witness. Why, you could have half-ground beans embedded in the walls.

JACOB

Mr. Krause...

LAURA

And then it would get warm, and the chocolate would melt. No, wait, this is San Francisco. We don't need to worry about that.

JACOB

I can never tell when you're joking.

LAURA

Yes.

JACOB

Mr. Krause...The Presbyterian Church on California St. is having a social on Saturday night.

LAURA

Yes, I heard about it.

JACOB

You have? Well...good. Would you be inclined to go?

LAURA

I'm afraid I won't be able to.

JACOB

I would very much like to go. But no one has asked me. Yet

LAURA

Yes, well...Miss Stewart—

JACOB

LAURA
 Call me Laura.

JACOB
 I would happy to take you to the social—

LAURA
 And I would be honored to go with you.

JACOB
 —but I will be unavailable. You see—

LAURA
 Mr. Krause. I have been ladylike. I have been appropriate. Yet I would think my feelings would have been clear by now.

JACOB
 Miss Stewart...

LAURA
 You are not married. I am not married. There is a social.

JACOB
 I know. It's just that—

LAURA
 What else could you possibly be doing on Saturday night?

JACOB
 I'm...Laura, I'm going home.

LAURA
 Home?

JACOB
 Back to Wisconsin. To my family.

LAURA
 Oh.

JACOB
 I was going to tell you...

LAURA
 Oh, my. I'm sorry. I...I apologize for being so forward. That's a good reason, a very good reason for missing the social. Is that who the chocolate is for? Your family?

JACOB

Yes. Plus a little to eat on the trip.

LAURA

Well, then. I'll wrap it up well. This time of year it shouldn't be too warm, but keep an eye on it nevertheless.

JACOB

I will.

LAURA

Have you been back there since you left?

JACOB

No, I haven't.

LAURA

It's been several years, hasn't it? I think it's marvelous that you're going back to visit. We should be thankful that the railroad makes it so much easier. How long will you be there?

JACOB

I'm...

LAURA

It's still quite a trip, though. I suppose you would want to stay for a while.

JACOB

I'm not coming back.

LAURA

You're not...you're not coming back?!

JACOB

No. I'm moving back to Milwaukee.

LAURA

Why?!

JACOB

My father is dying.

LAURA

Oh. Oh, no.

JACOB

I just got the telegram a week ago.

LAURA

Jacob, I'm so sorry.

JACOB

He's been ill for the last year, but he's recently...he's getting worse. My mother is elderly. And since I'm the oldest son...

LAURA

You have responsibilities.

JACOB

I finished my last day at the dry-goods store yesterday. I've been packing. Making arrangements...

LAURA

When...when do you leave?

JACOB

Tomorrow. Luca is going to put me up tonight.

LAURA

Tomorrow?!

JACOB

I'll cross to Oakland in the morning. My train leaves at four in the afternoon. I'll be in Omaha by Thursday, Chicago by Friday, and in Milwaukee by Saturday.

LAURA

I'll be very sorry to see you go.

JACOB

Laura, don't think I haven't noticed your interest in me these last few months.

LAURA

You're a good man. That you're going home is proof of that.

JACOB

I've never been much of a ladies man. But if things were different...I would have been honored to take you to the social

LAURA

That's very kind of you. And don't worry. I'm sure you'll be married before you know it. Mothers are very good at making sure of that.

JACOB

That's an important topic in all the letters she sends me. I'll probably be married within the year.

LAURA

Oh. Well, there you go. You can't remain a bachelor forever.

JACOB

I could out here.

LAURA

If you were to stay, I would make that difficult.

(Beat)

I'm sorry. That was...

JACOB

No no no. I'm flattered. But you know, Laura...some men are just not the marrying type.

LAURA

Don't sell yourself short, Jacob.

JACOB

I'm just being honest.

LAURA

But you're a...wait, Jacob, what are you saying?

JACOB

You deserve a man who is.

LAURA

So you...but you said your mother...

JACOB

There are different rules back home. Different expectations. I'm thirty-six. It's about time I settled down.

LAURA

Oh. I see.

JACOB

Really?

LAURA

I'm not nearly as unsophisticated as my father would like me to be. I can't be, in this city.

JACOB
(Laughs)

No, I suppose not.

LAURA

I'm sure you'll make a fine husband.

JACOB

I'm not.

LAURA

You could be. With the right wife. A wife who would understand you.

JACOB

Yes, well, in Milwaukee I think the possibility of—

LAURA

What's Milwaukee like?

JACOB

What's it like? Well, it's very...Oh, come now, Laura, that's ridiculous.

LAURA

Oh. I see.

JACOB

No, no. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that. I meant...I couldn't do that to you.

LAURA

But—

JACOB

No. I couldn't. Stay here. You're a beautiful and charming girl. You will have no problem finding a good husband.

LAURA

Thank you. It's sweet of you to say that.

JACOB

I'm sorry it can't be me.

LAURA
So am I.
(Hands Jacob the chocolate, wrapped)
Here's your order.

JACOB
Thank you. How much?

LAURA
No charge.

JACOB
Laura, that's a whole dollar's worth. I can't...

LAURA
Take it. Please.

JACOB
But...

LAURA
Think of it as a farewell gift.

JACOB
That's very kind of you. Thank you.

LAURA
I hope you have a safe trip.

JACOB
Thank you for your friendship, Laura. I will miss you.

LAURA
Likewise, Jacob.
(Jacob exits, left)

LAURA
(Returns to books)
Four dollars and 75 cents for "mechanical whatsits". One dollar for...friendship.

(Lights down)

THE END