‘The Albanian Librarian’

Synopsis

We open with newsreel footage from 1960s & 70s Albania, some black & white, some in grainy colour - Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha preaches to obedient crowds; salutes at military parades; poses for photoshoots outside imposing brutalist buildings - huge Stalin-style posters of Hoxha are everywhere. The newsreels are accompanied by on-screen titles telling of Hoxha’s iron grip over the population - of how his policies were forced on an subjugated, compliant people, most of whom hated the Regime - of how his paranoia over what he saw as 'Western Decadence', saw him outlawing everything from rock music to chewing gum to long hair to flared jeans to… beards!

Present Day

Late night at a bus depot in Glasgow - two people sit next to each other, waiting for the airport bus. Albanian librarian ARTUR KOÇI is voluntarily deporting himself back home - Scottish paralegal A waits with him. They look distressed and downbeat and hold hands lovingly. This seems to have been more than a client-lawyer thing.

A Year Previously

The first time Artur encounters Ailsa is in a Starbuck’s-style coffee shop. Artur is nearing the end of his holiday in Glasgow - this is a casual coffee in his downtime, prior to meeting the person he has come to Glasgow to meet a man named Danny McGrain. Ailsa is waiting expectantly for someone - her waiting time allows her to reflect on her situation - her trainwreck of a domestic life; a partner who’s recently dumped her; a heartbreaking miscarriage; her desperation for a child and her consideration of co-parenting - indeed, the prospective co-parenting ‘father’ is who she’s waiting for, and he’s late! Artur & Ailsa catch each others’ eyes across the busy café - Artur takes one of the last vacant chairs, which is next to Ailsa - Ailsa is convinced this is the man who’s come to meet her… a man named Arthur! Ailsa introduces herself, but it’s immediately and clumsily clear that Artur is not Arthur. When Arthur shows up, Artur excuses himself and leaves.

The second time they meet is late at night, outside the gents toilet in Ailsa’s office block where Ailsa, who’s been working late, is surprised to see that the suave Artur is actually a night-cleaner with a toilet-plunger. Intrigued but confused by the disconnect as to Artur’s actually identity, Ailsa tells him that she’s just been transferred to her law firm’s immigration department. She asks him if he needs help with his ‘situation’ - he says no.

The third time they meet is when Artur walks into Ailsa’s office - he’s been disturbed by his declining of someone offering help - he now realises that Help is exactly what he needs. Artur tells Ailsa that he’s recently been made redundant from his beloved librarian job back home, it’s all he has ever known. He also tells her that meeting a certain Danny McGrain was the fulfillment of a family obligation… the honouring of his recently deceased beloved father, who spoke often about McGrain and Glasgow. Artur, during his short sojourn, has become attached to the city, for which he now has deep affection & connection. He’d like to settle there, but all he has is tourist visa with an expiration date. He needs leave-to-

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remain… a work permit… settled status. Ailsa explains the options, but it's not looking good. He has no family ties to the UK so there's no 10-year route; he hasn't 'integrated into the local community'; he doesn't have an 'exceptional talent'; he's not an 'orthodox minister of a recognised religion', he could try for a sham marriage but the Home Office is all over those and it wouldn't work, and he can't claim asylum. Artur is effectively a guy in limbo.

Everything changes on the day Ailsa witnesses an incident in the office - a foreign client is saved from deportation because he's fathered a child with a local woman, and a Discretionary Visa is in the works via his 'rights to a family life'. Ailsa's mischievously ingenious legal brain ticks over - if Artur were to father a child with her, then they'd both get what they desperately want - he'd get to apply for a family visa - she'd get a baby - it's the perfect quid-pro-quo!

Ailsa however is conscious of the questionable ethics of her plan, not to mention the borderline illegality. Can she steal herself and muster up the *chutzpah* to pitch the proposal to Artur? She tries, on the rooftop of her office building, late at night, Glasgow sprawled out around them. Artur is clueless as to Ailsa's thoughts, but sensitive to her distress - "*You have my sympathy*"; to which she replies "*I don't want your sympathy… I want your semen."*

Despite his reservations and suspicions, Artur accepts - he's going to go along with it - the journey towards pregnancy and conception has begun.

Ailsa & Artur agree that artificial insemination is the preferred and obvious method of conception - this is a 'business arrangement' after all! Ailsa stocks up on sterile cups, syringes, ovulation predictors and pregnancy testing kits - Artur stocks on some 'visual stimulation'. Over the months they settle into a regular routine at Ailsa's flat - the 'action' takes place in their singular 'private' time in her bathroom - Artur produces his deposits - Ailsa takes immediate delivery for injection. Their anticipation is defined by that biological wait - fertilisation or failure - both crave signs that Ailsa's monthly pregnancy test will be positive... morning sickness, nausea, tender breasts... anything!

Artur understands why the success of their plan is so important for Him, but he struggles to grasp the reasons and depth behind Ailsa's biological imperative… her desperation to conceive… to be a mother. She owes him an explanation. She's had it with Men-Boys… guys who couldn't commit to the want of starting a family - her relationships have been train-wrecks - she's single, the 'wrong side' of 35 - she has a biological clock ticking so loudly that she's got the condition Whining Womb Syndrome. And then, there was 'The One', the long-termer, the would-be family man - but he left her for a younger woman, a younger woman who, Ailsa has found out on the grapevine, now has The One's baby. That was the final straw… the one that broke the camel's crib. It was her call to action. Ailsa convinced herself that life's fulfilment could now only come from single motherhood - she's been down the anonymous-father sperm-bank route - she's even had temperature-controlled sperm flown in from Denmark - but neither are not for her - she wants to know exactly who the father of her child would be. And now, fantastical as this serendipity is, cue Artur!

Artur becomes more and more enthused and optimistic about the prospective success of their plan - not only for his chances of a visa, but also by the prospect of fatherhood. Even the chore and indignity of his cleaning shift has lightened - he's got to know his fellow comrades… his co-workers, waiting for the outcome of their asylum claims, all alienated,

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scared - optimism and pessimism abound. Although bound up in his camaraderie, Artur has to keep a distance - he's part of a secret plan.

Ailsa, however, is starting to realise she may be out of her depth - she questions her ability to handle the responsibilities of single motherhood - she wonders if desperation and recklessness has got the better of common sense. She was always aware of the immorality of her illicit plan, particularly as a legal professional - but when her law firm hires an Ethics & Oversight Officer, her nerves really kick in. She agonises - domestic expediency versus professional ethics - tough call.

Ailsa can't go through with it - she calls a halt to proceedings. Artur takes it badly, disgusted at being shafted by Ailsa's flakiness.

It's back to the hopeless humdrum of their singular downtrodden lives. Ailsa feels herself stagnating - her career going nowhere and hopes of motherhood fading - life becomes a self-inquisition as she tries to convince herself that she was right to bag the plan - that her salary was more important than a baby.

Artur is drained of optimism for his future - his salvation has gone - he lives in a shabby bed-sit - he polishes floors and cleans toilets every night on his shift. He ticks off the calendar days… the countdown to the expiry of his visitor visa… limbo will soon give way to doom! He'll soon be 'illegal', constantly looking over his shoulder, status-less.

It doesn't take Ailsa long to realise that loneliness and limbo go hand in hand - she misses Artur, and realises that she's made a terrible mistake in giving up on him. She sheepishly confronts Artur for forgiveness late at night while he's in the middle of a cleaning shift - an unnerving moment for both, but Artur's pride can't pretend that he doesn't miss her too. They kiss… Artur's yellow rubber-gloved hands grasping Ailsa tightly.

The plan is back on.

The dam of pent-up sexual frustration has burst - syringes and sterile cups give way to sex, even if their pillow talk revolves around industrial-strength disinfectants.

At Ailsa's suggestion, Artur moves into her flat with her. On the surface, it's for convenience… they're cohabiting to procreate!… but we can see that these two people have tip-toed into a relationship. But relationships come with trust, and Ailsa wants to know something… "*What's the connection between you and this Danny McGrain person?"*

It's time for Artur to explain. He travelled here for his recently deceased father, Erjon, a political activist and Partizani Tirana footballer during Albania's communist years… a time when the people lived in fear of the regime, which banned anything that looked or smelt like The West. Virtually the only foreigners allowed into the country were football teams - and there was one particular match, Partizani Tirana v Glasgow Celtic. Some weeks before the match Hoxha, the dictator, had banned beards! The visiting Celtic captain, Danny McGrain, wore a heavy beard - the match was to be televised - the regime was nervous about the population watching this bearded man on the country's TV sets - for days before the match everyone was wondering… will Danny McGrain play wearing his beard?… will he even be allowed into the country?… will he maybe, like other dissenters, be detained? In the end, McGrain played in the match, and he was loved by many for his perceived 'defiance'. He was particularly loved by Erjon, who saw McGrain as a hero. After the match, Erjon was desperate to do the traditional shirt-exchange with McGrain, but

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if he was seen doing so then who knows what punishment he would have received. For over 40 years Erjon had harbored the hope of giving his shirt to McGrain. During Erjon's dying days, Artur promised his father he'd deliver the shirt to McGrain - which is what he came to Glasgow to do - and what he eventually did. His father has been honoured - duty has been done - except, Artur is still here!

Ailsa and Artur settle into a routine, of sorts - Artur works nights, Ailsa works days - Artur does the laundry and the ironing and he cooks Ailsa traditional Albanian dishes for her nightly arrival back from the office. They don't see much of each other except for their brief crossover time - but there's always the weekends - their purpose in life is at the forefront of their minds… quality time equals shagging time, but those pregnancy tests are always negative.

Artur's tourist visa is close to expiring - he'll soon have to go back to Albania - his visa can only be extended in 'exceptional circumstances' - the mountain of negative pregnancy tests in Ailsa's bathroom bin don't count.

For Artur, the flight home lurks round every corner, and if Ailsa can't get pregnant before that happens then the whole thing's been for nowt!

Ailsa's plan was pure mutual expediency but, ironically, their blossoming relationship is a snapshot of how cosy their life could be if Artur got her pregnant. Their verbal jousting exemplifies two people in love - worried about his overheating scrotum is a perfect excuse for a shopping spree for looser boxer-shorts - a browse round The Mitchell Library with Ailsa in hand is sheer bliss for Artur - lessons in Albanian cuisine descend into kitchen frolics - likeminded familiarity abounds - weekend days by the seaside in Largs are a welcome opportunity to forget that, for a while, the clock ticks for both of them.

Their joint purpose has been a reawakening for Ailsa - time to address that other issue in her life's un-fulfilment… the label of indispensable paralegal was not what she envisaged years ago when she wanted to be an actual lawyer - but now the time has come. Buoyed by bravado, Ailsa demands a summit meeting with the law firm's chief partner - she lays it on the line… she's going to finish her LPC exams.

But then, the one thing that was never meant to happen, happens - Artur is apprehended - he's been working illegally. Ailsa & Artur's next rendezvous is not in the cosy confines of her bedroom, but instead it's in a police station.

<u>This is where we came in</u>

Late night at a bus depot in Glasgow - Ailsa & Artur sit next to each other, waiting for the bus to the airport. Artur is voluntarily deporting himself back home - Ailsa waits with him. They look distressed and downbeat and hold hands lovingly. This was definitely more than a client-lawyer thing.

The bus to the airport will soon be departing - time to reminisce over their adventure - and time for Ailsa to chastise herself for not just marrying Artur - their marriage, after all they've been through, would not be a sham, it'd be genuine!

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The tannoy tells us that the airport bus will depart in 2 minutes, Artur's sentiment sums up his feelings…"*Right now I am thinking not so much about the plan… I am just thinking of the woman… I liked the plan, but I love the woman*."

Ailsa doesn't know if Artur will be allowed back into the UK - they hope they'll see each other again, but they don't know where, or when.

Artur and Ailsa walk out the depot to the imminently departing bus. A last long lingering kiss - Artur gets on the bus and sits down. Ailsa takes a few steps along the outside of the bus and stops where he's sitting - a window between them. Artur slides the top of the window open and asks Ailsa if she'll be okay. "… *well… I'm nauseous, my boobs are tender to the point of being sore, and I threw up this morning*." Artur offers his sympathy. And then, as the bus moves off, Artur realises what Ailsa has said. He frantically stares out the back window of the bus - Ailsa's gone. Artur sits back down and smiles to himself.

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