Let's Do It (Let's Fall In Love)

by LifeLover

Summary

Post-movie (1948) with James Cagney. The reality of Tom leaving hits Joe; Nick helps in the aftermath.

Notes

No one has written fanfic, any fanfic about this movie. Nick/Joe just leapt out at me as I watched (and re-watched, and re-watched and ... you get the idea.) It's one of my favourite movies and an unacknowledged classic. Please any of you who read this - please add more fics to this just-started (by me; why do I have to start fandoms that should already exist!?) fandom. Please!! Oh, the title is the song by Eartha Kitt. Lyrics are from "Falling Slowly" by Celtic Thunder.

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I don’t know you but I want you all the more for that

/Words fall through me and always fool me and I

can’t react/ Take this sinking boat and point it home
Nick locked the kitchen door, having said goodnight to Sam. As he turned to face his saloon (his joint! he thought proudly) he spied a slouched figure in one of the shadowy booths. Going over, he groaned inwardly as he spied the familiar head of blonde hair. Joe. He shouldn’t be surprised – the other man delighted in irritating the heck out of him. He would admit though, that he would miss the man if he left.

“Whaddya doing here, Joe?” he asked, annoyed. “Everyone’s left already. Wesley, Harry, Kit – even Sam’s gone. Why you gotta be here annoying me, huh?” As he spoke, he sat opposite Joe’s shadowed form and the change in position brought the mild, mischievous face of the other into the light.

“Tom’s gone,” Joe said blankly, face unaccountably weary and voice tight. Nick’s brown eyes darkened in concern. As much as he complained about Joe’s eccentricities, the daily presence and very liveliness of the man was a welcome companion. For Joe to look so tired, his sparkling eyes dulled – it caused his heart to ache. Joe wasn’t the only one to study others. As a bartender, a saloon owner, it was ingrained in him to read people and their actions. It was why he’d agreed with Joe’s observation earlier in the day that Wesley and Harry would probably end up together. Harry could give the young African-American a place to stay; the piano player would hopefully calm some of the tap-dancer’s insecurities. But it wasn’t only staff or customers he observed. He’d observed Joe.

He knew there were shadows in Joe’s life. Sometimes, the bright face that generously helped others and always had a kind word would dim for a moment or two. At the very least, there were major abandonment issues. “I believe in dreams sooner than statistics” Whenever Joe made remarks like that, Nick wondered if it was because Joe didn’t feel he had the strength to really face reality. No way to shore up protective walls should they crack and splinter. For all the optimism and kindness, Joe kept everyone at a distance.

Except Tom. And now, in the throes of young love, Tom had left. Nick had liked Tom well enough. He was youthfully selfish and proud, but he had a kind heart and good intentions. Nick had expressed his concern when he’d realized Tom was leaving earlier, but Joe had shrugged it off. It seemed as though the fallout had happened now and it was bringing down Joe’s defenses as though they were so much castles in the sand. Nick’s heart suddenly swelled with sympathy and the urge to comfort.

“Hey,” he said, reaching over and grasping one of Joe’s hands where it lay limply on the table. “Yeah, Tom’s gone. But I’m here with you. You understand that, you nut?”

There was a spark of confusion. “But – you’re going home. You’re leaving.”
Nick tightened his hold. “Well then,” he said, nervous (though he wouldn’t admit it) “You’ll just have to come home with me. And keep coming to my joint every day.”

There was a thick silence during which Nick swallowed, suddenly terrified he’d read this wrong. His mother, God bless her, had always known about his liking both girls and boys and his daughter wanted him to be happy. Maria liked Joe as well and would ask when Daddy would make Joe happy so they wouldn’t be lonely anymore. During the days, while Tom did whatever and Joe sat and studied people, the two of them would end up talking. It didn’t much matter what the subject matter was – there was an easy awareness and ‘married couple’ quality to their conversations. During certain conversations or statements Nick would make in passing, he would notice Joe gazing fondly at him or sometimes wistfully. He thought he knew what the looks were, but …

Joe shifted forward and Nick was struck by the look of wonder and desperation on his face. “Nick? You mean ….”

Joe trailed off, unusually diffident. Nick pulled him upright to his feet and ended up holding him steady when he swayed forward from the champagne’s effects. The redhead was suddenly glad he was slightly taller than the educated man he now clasped in his arms. “Yeah,” he murmured hoarsely, unable to keep from stroking his cheek. “I’m saying I’m here, you crazy lug. No point in thinking you’re alone, cause you’re not. I’m here, you dope, and I’m not leaving. I don’t leave those I love.”

The insecurity and hesitation in Joe’s blue eyes was heartbreaking. Nick wasn’t sure if he was an expert at reading Joe or if the reality of Tom’s absence had shattered all the other man’s shields into so much dust. He didn’t really care at this point. “If you let Tom make a sucker out of you, you’re a dope,” he said bluntly, mirroring his earlier statement about Tchaikovsky. It had the desired effect and Joe smiled, albeit shakily.

“It seems I’ve underestimated you, Nick,” Joe said ruefully and shyly, he brushed his lips across Nick’s mouth. Before he could pull away, Nick caught the kiss and held it, deepening it as he poured all the tangled mess of emotions he felt for this beautiful, aggravating, vulnerable man into the kiss. His frustration, his bewilderment, his affection, his possessiveness, his love. Joe moaned as his body sagged into Nick’s hold, surrendering and trusting in the other. When they broke away, Joe buried his face in the other’s shoulder, trembling slightly. Nick cupped the back of his head as the other spoke.

“I come with a boatload of issues, Nick. I won’t stop drinking champagne or buying weird things. The real me is emotional and desperate and needy, always needy. I need touches, need to care and study, need to belong to someone. Need stability and someone who I can trust won’t leave me. If I do this with you, it won’t be casual – not for me. I already love you far too much. A relationship
Nick tightened his hold and pressed a kiss to those mussed locks. “Not casual for me, either. Let me in, Joe and you won’t regret it. I won’t regret it either. I can wait for as long as needed, because I know we’ve got all the time we need. And I will be whatever and whoever you need. I know I don’t seem sentimental, but I do care for you. I do love you, Joe.”

Joe nodded slightly and Nick led him home. As they lay under the covers in Nick’s bed, Nick getting Joe used to the idea of physical affection before they tried anything more, Joe whispered, “You’ll have to bet on the horses I’ll tell you to bet on, Nick.”

“You wish, y’dope,” Nick retorted, feeling himself grin. “You pick the worst odds. I don’t know how you do it.”

“Faith!” came the drowsy reply. “I’ve told you, y’have no more faith th’n a flea …” Joe’s voice was slurring as the champagne, the emotional exhaustion and the lateness conspired to pull him to sleep quickly. Nick brushed a stray lock of hair off the man’s face and met his gaze. “In horses – no. When it comes to what we can have Joe? I have more than enough faith to bet all I have. And we’ll win this bet.”

“How d’you kn’w?” Joe asked unsteadily, feeling his limbs sink down as his eyes closed, too heavy to stay open. He heard Nick’s smile in his reply, “My name’s Nick, isn’t it? We’re in love. We’ll win this bet, no matter the odds.”

Maybe we will, mused Joe inwardly as he slid off to sleep, secure in the strong embrace of a steady, dependable friend. One who’d promised love and safety. Maybe we will…

Well you have suffered enough and warred with yourself
It’s time that you won.Raise your hopeful voice you have a
Choice you’ve made it back/Falling slowly eyes that know me

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