

GERALD'S GOOD IDEA

by

Y York

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Characters.

GLADYS: 35-45, black.

SYLVIA: 35-45, black. Has an advantage and is able to put things together fast, but she is always trying to work it out and doesn't know everything in advance.

GERALD: 35-45, white.

SIMONE: 35-45, white.

ELAINE: 35-45, white.

BOBBY: 35-45, white.

WAYNE: 35-45, black.

STANLEY: 35-45, black.

LOUISE: 35-45, black.

FRANCIS: 35-45, white.

None of these characters smoke. None of these characters end their sentences up? As if they were asking questions? When there is nary a question to be found?

(Scene 1. Sylvia sits at a table on a cloud. She wears rags. Gladys enters wearing a maid's uniform and carrying high heels. Gladys sits.)

SYLVIA: Nice dress.

GLADYS: It's a maid's uniform!

SYLVIA: Just say "thank you."

GLADYS: I'm not feeling particularly grateful!

SYLVIA: Thank you is always the best reply to a compliment.

GLADYS: How come you're wearing those rags?

SYLVIA: If you say something besides thank you, something like "oh, do you really like it?" Or, "You look nice, too—"

GLADYS: I wasn't going to say—

SYLVIA: Then I have to respond. Whereas, "thank you" puts an end to the whole thing. Any other reply, any other reply, and we're deep into it.

GLADYS: ...I'll remember.

(Brief pause)

SYLVIA: Nice dress.

GLADYS: Thank you!

SYLVIA: What are those? (Points to shoes)

GLADYS: High heels.

SYLVIA: What are you going to do with them?

GLADYS: They're shoes.

SYLVIA: But you're not wearing them.

GLADYS: I'll wear them, okay? (Puts them on.) Ouch ouch ouch.

SYLVIA: Oh, I see, I see.

(Gladys removes shoes, picks up menu.)

GLADYS: Is somebody coming for our order?

SYLVIA: No one is coming.

GLADYS: I always get this. (Points in the menu)

SYLVIA: What about one of these? (Points)

GLADYS: Fattening!

SYLVIA: You never had one of these?

GLADYS: They make you fat.

SYLVIA: (Points) What about this?

GLADYS: That's raw. They don't cook that. You catch stuff if you eat that.

SYLVIA: What did you eat?

GLADYS: This, this, I told you, I ate this.

SYLVIA: What's in it?

GLADYS: Lettuce. It's mostly lettuce. Let's not discuss it anymore, alright? (A pause. GLADYS looks around.) Isn't there anything else? TV, or something.

SYLVIA: TV? Well, there's...

(A TV appears.)

GLADYS: Oh, a movie! (Deep relief) Great, great.

SYLVIA: This isn't a movie; this is a real life.

GLADYS: Are those ant hills?

SYLVIA: ... People hills.

GLADYS: I love special effects. ...That raggedy woman ...she looks familiar. I've seen her.

SYLVIA: (Sarcastic) Recently?

GLADYS: Yes. I saw her in something recently. What's in the pouch?

SYLVIA: A baby.

GLADYS: Have you seen this before?

SYLVIA: Oh, yes.

GLADYS: What's the man doing?

SYLVIA: Looking for food.

GLADYS: Look at the air! Looks sort of— sticky. It's all... why is the air that color? When is this?

SYLVIA: Many years into the future.

GLADYS: (Watches intently) The man's dizzy. Yep, he's going down— kerplop. He looks dead. There she goes; she'll never find him. She shouldn't take the baby. (watches, reacts) Yuk yuckity yuk. I wouldn't go up to my waist in that gooey... yellow... whatever-it-is.

SYLVIA: Water.

GLADYS: Oh good, she's pulling herself out. Oh no! It's alive, it's alive!

SYLVIA: Snake.

GLADYS: I thought it was a branch.

SYLVIA: So did I.

GLADYS: (Watches, shouts at TV.) Hey! Hey! Don't go down there. Don't go down there! Why's she taking the baby into that steaming pit?

SYLVIA: She's looking for drinking water.

GLADYS: I wouldn't go down there for champagne. (Happy) Oh, look, look! There he is; she's almost there. (Shouts at TV.) Hey! Hey! He's across the bog, just across the bog. Go get him, go on girl, go on! (film ends) What happened? What happened to the reception?

SYLVIA: There isn't any more.

GLADYS: What? You showed me an incomplete movie? An unfinished film? I want to see the end of that movie.

SYLVIA: That was the end.

GLADYS: A bit abrupt, don't you think?

SYLVIA: Yes, I do.

GLADYS: That's a very unsatisfying end. I'd prefer to see a better end.

SYLVIA: Personally, I'm hoping the whole thing can be reworked.

GLADYS: That woman? Really cool. Sees what has to be done, does it. Doesn't matter what's in the way. Bogs, slime, snakes, just goes ahead and does it. You know, you have to be like that in life, just to rise to the challenges of everyday existence. Now, I didn't have bogs or stuff, but I, you know, I rose to the occasion. I think I lived a lot like that lady. A lot. Like her. (Sylvia stares at Gladys, Gladys fidgets.) So! You ever want to go back? (Looks at Sylvia's rags) Oh! I guess you wouldn't want to go back. I guess it was pretty raggedy for you.

SYLVIA: Pretty raggedy.

GLADYS: Yeah, it was raggedy for me, too. Sitting alone through the night.

SYLVIA: Staying alive through the night.

GLADYS: Dieting.

SYLVIA: Scavenging.

GLADYS: Boys.

SYLVIA: Gangs.

GLADYS: White people.

SYLVIA: No white people.

GLADYS: ...Pardon me?

SYLVIA: No white people.

GLADYS: What do you mean no white people?

SYLVIA: There were no white people.

GLADYS: Aren't we from the same time?

SYLVIA: No. My time is much later.

GLADYS: Wow. No white people.

SYLVIA: And that isn't all.

GLADYS: You didn't know any white people? White people, let me tell you about white people. You're standing there, you're next in line to get waited on, the sales person, the white sales person, she walks up to the white person who is standing in line behind you because she can't even see you. And when they do see you, If they do see you, if they talk to you, they get a southern accent. And then they get English-brain-drain and completely lose their syntax and talk to you in unintelligible fragments. You should go back. Check out white people.

SYLVIA: I've seen them.

GLADYS: Where have you seen them? You haven't seen them. There weren't any white people in that movie.

SYLVIA: True, but there are white people in this.

(Sylvia snaps at TV.)

GLADYS: (watches, rooted.) That was...

SYLVIA: Your life.

GLADYS: That wasn't all of it.

SYLVIA: That was all of it.

GLADYS: Noooo. What about the time I—

SYLVIA: That was there.

GLADYS: I didn't see it.

SYLVIA: You better watch again. (Snaps) See it that time?

GLADYS: Yes. What about the—

SYLVIA: They were there.

GLADYS: I don't think so.

SYLVIA: Sure, here. (Snaps) See them that time?

GLADYS: What about my—

SYLVIA: That was just an idea. You never actually did that. Let's watch it again.

GLADYS: (Fast) No, no that's fine.

SYLVIA: No, let's watch it again! (Snaps)

GLADYS: No! (Short pains) Ah, ee, oh, ah. (Pause, breath)

(Sylvia snaps.)

GLADYS: (Short pains) Ah, ee, oh, ah. Will you please stop that?

(Sylvia snaps.)

GLADYS: (Snaps at the TV) Stop it, stop it, ah, ee, oh, ah. (Breath) That's enough, that's enough, don't do that anymore. Put on the other one.

SYLVIA: Not until it's reworked.

GLADYS: Fine! Just don't put me on again.

SYLVIA: You could read the menu. Or...you could watch again. (Snaps)

GLADYS: No, no! Ah, ee, oh, ah. (Breath) Give me the menu. (Reads menu) I never had one of these, I never dared have one of these, One of these was on the table once and I turned it down! I can't read this. (Puts down menu, The movie starts) Ah ee oh ah. Ah ee oh ah. Ah, ee, oh, I...I...I gotta, I gotta, help! I gotta go back!

(The TV snaps off. A staircase appears.)

GLADYS: (Scared) Oh.

SYLVIA: Don't forget your tall shoes.

GLADYS: High shoes. Um. Goodbye. I'll be seeing ya.

(Gladys exits. Sylvia stands up and walks on tiptoe, as if walking in high heels.)

SYLVIA: Ouch ouch ouch.

(Scene 2. The living room of the amazing apartment of Simone and Gerald. They are rich.)

GERALD: Did you get... um...?

SIMONE: What? Did I get what?

GERALD: That nice cheese. Did you have a chance to get that nice cheese?

SIMONE: I didn't go downtown.

GERALD: Too bad! That's a nice cheese. Damn. The bar looks good, though. Don't you think?

SIMONE: It's fine.

GERALD: No, it's really good. Did you see it? I put out the good stuff. Do you think that's a good idea?

SIMONE: It's what we always do.

(Simone lies on the floor.)

GERALD: Then it's a good idea. This bar looks good. It's a fine line between generosity and ostentatiousness. Don't you think?

SIMONE: I don't know.

GERALD: What are you—?

SIMONE: I'm exhausted.

GERALD: Well, the place looks great.

SIMONE: Don't thank me, I watched TV all day.

GERALD: Why did you do that?

SIMONE: So I didn't have to think.

GERALD: Did it work?

SIMONE: No. I thought about how how disgusting I am.

GERALD: Why didn't you just...turn it off?

SIMONE: If I move from the bed, I am going to have to decide what else to do and I can't decide what else to do. I'm melting.

GERALD: Do you think I should make a pitcher of something in advance? Daiquiris maybe? Daiquiris are so fey. Maybe I should make a pitcher of martinis. (He does.)

SIMONE: I'm a pig.

GERALD: Don't say pig.

SIMONE: Pig. Pig.

GERALD: (Bolstering her) If you had gone downtown and gotten that nice cheese, you wouldn't feel this way.

SIMONE: If you had told me to go downtown to get it, I would have gone downtown to get it.

GERALD: I did tell you.

SIMONE: You didn't.

GERALD: Right before we fell asleep. Remember? I kissed your neck and said, get that nice cheese for tomorrow night. You said, mmm hum.

SIMONE: ...You should have told me again, today. You should have reminded me. You should have.

GERALD: You're sure I should have?

SIMONE: Of course I'm sure.

GERALD: (Happy) Well, Simone, that's pretty decisive. I mean, you seem decisive enough now.

SIMONE: Now, sure, now I do.

GERALD: Why not before?

SIMONE: Before was during the day. Now is night. I'm decisive at night. Just fine. The daylight confounds me.

GERALD: ...I don't understand.

SIMONE: Of course you don't understand. You only see me at night. At night all things are possible because you won't start them until tomorrow. Then, when it is tomorrow, and it's day, it's all too confounding.

GERALD: I see you on weekends.

SIMONE: Same as night.

GERALD: No.

SIMONE: Yes. Because on the weekend you won't start anything until Monday. I'm useless.

GERALD: You're not! Don't say that. I...couldn't get through a single day without your help. And if you had gone downtown, and gotten that nice cheese, you'd feel... great!

SIMONE: I'm melting away.

GERALD: (At a table.) Here it is!

SIMONE: What?

GERALD: The cheese. This is the nice cheese I wanted you to get.

GLADYS: (off) I got the cheese.

GERALD: Oh. (Shouting) Come here a second, Gladys!

(Gladys enters looking around.)

GERALD: Thank you for getting the cheese, Gladys.

GLADYS: (Embarrassed) Oh, I..

GERALD: No, it was very thoughtful.

SIMONE: Gladys...?

GLADYS: Yes?

SIMONE: How do I look?

GLADYS: Nice. (Awed) Look at this room. Everything is so... nice.

SIMONE: ...Thank you.

GERALD: Yes, thank you, Gladys. (Brief silence.) Bye bye.

GLADYS: Oh, right. (Can't quite leave the room)

GERALD: Gladys, do you want...

GLADYS: Fine, I'm fine. I'm leaving. (Exits)

GERALD: You could have asked me how you look.

SIMONE: How do I look?

GERALD: You might have mentioned that Gladys got the cheese.

SIMONE: How do I look?

GERALD: Did I tell her to get it?

SIMONE: Look look look.

GERALD: Oh, well. This is great. This is going to be so great. (A little dance) Did you tell everybody we were having a surprise?

SIMONE: Yes!

GERALD: And you called her? That Sylvia woman?

SIMONE: Sure.

GERALD: And she's coming?

SIMONE: Yes, she's coming— we're having the party, aren't we?

GERALD: You're amazing.

SIMONE: I'm melting.

GERALD: This is going to be so...great! Great, great.

SIMONE: It's just a party, Gerald.

GERALD: It's a Gerald Party, and a Gerald Party is never just a party. How much does she charge?

SIMONE: I don't know. I gave her the Visa number.

GERALD: She took a credit card number?

SIMONE: ...Well, yes, I think she did.

GERALD: I suppose it's all right. Did you make the list?

SIMONE: Yes, I made the list!

GERALD: This is going to be the most amazing thing we've ever done.

SIMONE: I'm not up to the most amazing thing we've ever done.

GERALD: (Hugs Simone) Yes, you are. You rise to every occasion. Simone always comes through for Little Gerald.

(Doorbell.)

GERALD: Hooray.

(Gerald answers the door. Sylvia stands in doorway. Gerald does not see her.)

GERALD: There's nobody there. That's funny...

SYLVIA: You really don't see black people. Oh! I forgot.

(Sylvia makes herself visible.)

GERALD: I could have sworn— Ahhhhh! I'm sorry, I didn't...My goodness! (A breath) Can I help you?

SYLVIA: I'm Sylvia.

GERALD: I beg your pardon?

SYLVIA: Sylvia. I'm expected.

GERALD: You're Sylvia?

SYLVIA: Yes. I am.

GERALD: Oh. Hello! We're expecting you.

SYLVIA: I know.

GERALD: How are you?

SYLVIA: (Still in doorway) Fine. You?

GERALD: Uh, fine. Darling, this is Sylvia. She's expected.

SIMONE: I know. Hi.

SYLVIA: How do you do?

SIMONE: Okay.

SYLVIA: ...Can I...come in?

GERALD: Of course, of course. Come in, come in. Yes, yes, come in, please. Darling, this is Sylvia. This is my wife.

SIMONE: Hi, again.

GLADYS: (Entering) Ahhhhhh.

SYLVIA: Hello. I'm Sylvia. I'm expected.

GLADYS: Not by me!