

An excerpt from

SOMEONE'S KNOCKING

an odd little comedy by Rich Orloff

Primary characters

GLADYS, a timid woman, afraid of "out there"

JACK, Gladys' self-satisfied husband

PHYLLIS, Gladys' contented older sister

BILL, Gladys' amorphous brother-in-law

OPPORTUNITY, a compelling concept

GLADYS' & JACK'S TV SET, the family pet

Setting

A neighborhood not far from yours. The present.

Act One, Scene One: A kitchen of a modest home. The room has the basic kitchen appliances, a few clocks on the wall, and a breakfast table in the center of the room. There is a door to the outside and a doorway to the rest of the house. The room should somehow feel slightly askew, to match the feel of the play. Perhaps there is something off about the kitchen sink.

Somewhere on the wall is a sign that says "HOME SWEET HOME".

It is morning in America. JACK sits at the table, reading the newspaper with one hand and holding out a coffee cup with the other. His loving wife GLADYS pours him a cup of coffee. Jack and Gladys are a middle-aged, middle-class couple, innocuously dressed. (Unless noted, all of the characters can wear one outfit each throughout the play.) They've just had breakfast.

GLADYS

I had a dream last night.

JACK

(barely listening)

Mm-hm.

GLADYS

I dreamt I was pouring a cup of coffee for that French philosopher smart people always talk about, what was his name?

JACK

Mm-hm.

GLADYS

Anyway, I was pouring a cup of coffee for this highly regarded French philosopher, and he was reading the newspaper, and I looked straight at him, and I said, "I think, therefore I am." And you know what he said back? "Think again." What do you think that means?

JACK

Maybe you have a subconscious fear of French toast.

GLADYS

I don't think so.

JACK

Did you ever have a bad experience with French pastry?

GLADYS

Not that I can recall.

JACK

Well, I wouldn't worry about it.

GLADYS

Why not?

JACK

Because dreams are nothing more than God's way of telling us we've overslept.

Jack turns a page in the newspaper.

GLADYS

I understand so little.

JACK

That's funny. I understand so much.

GLADYS

You understand everything, don't you?

JACK

Not really. I only understand everything worth understanding.

GLADYS

I wish I did.

JACK

You should read the newspaper.

GLADYS

I can't. It scares me.

JACK

Everything about life is in the newspaper.

GLADYS

That's why it scares me.

JACK

Here's an interesting item: Over two thousand murders last year were caused by husbands reading their wives meaningless newspaper statistics.

GLADYS

How awful.

JACK

There are a lot of insensitive men out there.

GLADYS

I'm so lucky to have you.

JACK

And I'm so glad you realize how lucky you are.

GLADYS

Sweetie?

JACK

Mm-hm.

GLADYS

Can I... can I ask you a personal question?

JACK

How can you even wonder about such a thing? I'm your husband. Of course, you can ask me a personal question.

GLADYS

Oh, good.

JACK

It's not *too* personal, is it?

GLADYS

No, no, it's just something I've been wondering the last eight years.

JACK

What?

GLADYS

Jack... Why do you love me?

JACK

I'm your husband. By definition, I love you.

GLADYS

I know, but, it's just that, well: You're so rational and confident. You're so intelligent and worldly. But I'm never sure what you see in me.

JACK

Well, for one thing, you're a shrewd judge of character.

GLADYS

I know, but with all the beautiful and intelligent and worldly women out there, why would you choose someone like me, a run-of-the-mill agoraphobic. Why would you choose someone who's afraid of the newspaper... who's afraid of people... who's afraid of "out there".

JACK

You shouldn't dwell on the negatives, Gladys. Think positive. Think about how wonderful it is that I love you despite your many flaws.*

(*Many of the lines in the play, such as this one, must be said as if the characters aren't conscious of what they're really saying. And they usually aren't.)

GLADYS

You're too good.

JACK

Well, that's *my* flaw.

GLADYS

Honey...

JACK

Mm-hm?

GLADYS

Do you *have* to go to work today?

JACK

Gladys...

GLADYS

I know. I wouldn't ask, but, well, today *is* our –

JACK

If you want bread on the table...

GLADYS

I know.

JACK

Especially whole wheat. Now for white bread
I might be able to come home an hour early.

GLADYS

I'd like that. After all, today *is* –

JACK

I had thought of putting in a few extra
hours to get you some sourdough.

GLADYS

I'd much rather have you than sourdough.

JACK

Then I'll see what I can do.

GLADYS

Thanks, Jack.

JACK

Delicious coffee, darling. And now
it's time for me to euphemism.

Jack exits into the hallway. Gladys clears the breakfast dishes.
There's a knock on the door. Gladys gets nervous.

GLADYS

Who – who is it?

OPPORTUNITY (off-stage)

It's Opportunity!

GLADYS

What do you want?

OPPORTUNITY (o.s.)

I want to offer you all the wonders and joys of life.

GLADYS

I think you have the wrong house.

OPPORTUNITY (o.s.)

I'm sure I don't.

GLADYS

I'm sure you do.

OPPORTUNITY (o.s.)

Are you... you?

GLADYS

I'll have to ask my husband.

OPPORTUNITY (o.s.)

Let me in.

GLADYS

But I have to do my dishes.

OPPORTUNITY (o.s.)

It's now or maybe never.

GLADYS

I haven't cleaned up my crumbs yet.

OPPORTUNITY

Then goodbye.

GLADYS

Maybe some other time.

OPPORTUNITY (o.s.)

(off in the distance)

Goodbye.

Gladys breathes a sigh of relief. Jack returns.

JACK

Ah, what a satisfying euphemism.

GLADYS

I wish you could stay home today.

JACK

If you want bread –

GLADYS

I know; it's just that today's --

JACK

I'll be home as soon as I can.

GLADYS

(less than happy)

I know.

JACK

Besides, it's not as if I'm leaving you home alone. You do have the TV.

GLADYS

That's true.

JACK

And the TV loves you so much.

GLADYS

You're right.

(as if calling a dog:)

Here TV, here TV.

The TV SET enters enthusiastically and sits by Gladys. The TV is a full-sized set with arms and legs, and it tends to move like a clumsy sheepdog. It is capable of great emotion and passion, and it has a deep attachment to Gladys.

JACK

Good morning, TV.

GLADYS

And what are we going to do today?

From the TV, we hear a laugh track, a canned "awww", applause, a daytime show music riff, and a game show bell. The TV is capable of producing all of the sounds of television, including sound effects, TV theme songs, short sound bites and cliched phrases, but it should never reproduce lengthy excerpts from television programs.

JACK

Ah, there's nothing like a full day of television to distract one from their existential void.

GLADYS

(to the TV; like a dog owner
or someone talking to a baby)

Will you distract me from my
existential void? Will you?

From the TV, we hear a game show "ding-ding-ding",
which is the TV's way of agreeing.

GLADYS (cont'd)

You're so precious.

From the TV, we hear a canned "aww".

GLADYS (cont'd)

You like that I'm home all day, don't you?
You accept me, don't you?

The TV responds affectionately.

JACK

Look at the time. And I haven't yet protected
my body against the possibility of bodily odors.

Jack exits.

GLADYS

We're going to have fun today, aren't we?

The TV responds enthusiastically.

GLADYS (cont'd)

Can we watch those shows where people
who are foolish enough to go out there
talk about how horrible it is out there?

The TV responds positively.

GLADYS (cont'd)

You know, I used to be foolish enough to go
out there. I was always shy, but I did go to
grade school and high school, and I was a
humanities major at the local college until lack
of interest made them eliminate humanities.
And then my parents and I decided it was time
for me to leave home. However, it was raining
that day. The next day my mom needed
my help pickling the furniture. The next day
my dad needed me to stereotype a letter for him.

(cont'd)

GLADYS (cont'd)

The next day, well, something else happened. Pretty soon I forgot *why* I was supposed to leave home. We all forgot. I was comfortable here. I knew every square inch of here.

When my parents died, my older sister encouraged me to leave. I'll never forget what she said: "If you don't leave, you're a jerk." But by then I forgot *how* to leave. So I stayed...

And then, just when my money was about to run out, Jack came along. And he was selling...

(calling out to Jack:)

Darling, what were you selling the day we met?

JACK (o.s.)

Nothing of importance.

GLADYS

That's right. He was selling nothings of importance. And he was so good at it, too. He made those nothings sound so important that I had to buy all of them. And him, too. And ever since then –

Jack enters, carrying an extremely heavy cube, covered with wrapping paper and a ribbon.

JACK

Happy anniversary, darling.

GLADYS

You remembered!

Jack drops the box on the kitchen table. There's a noticeable thump.

JACK

Open it up.

Gladys unwraps the paper to reveal a block of granite.

GLADYS

Oh, darling. How thoughtful.

JACK

You like it?

GLADYS

Of course. And it's so much bigger than last year's block of granite.

JACK

I think in a successful marriage, each year's block of granite should get larger.

GLADYS

I got you something, too.

JACK

Without leaving the house?

GLADYS

Close your eyes.

JACK

They're closed.

Gladys brings out a nicely-wrapped box with a lid.

GLADYS

Open them.

Jack takes the lid off the box and likes what he sees.

JACK

Oh, wow.

GLADYS

They're non-dairy creamers from around the world.

Jack reaches into the box and scoops out a bunch of small plastic creamer containers and packets. He reads the names:

JACK

"La Creme Phonay Balonay"...
"Halfski-Nyet-Halfski." How did you ever –

GLADYS

All year long, I sent letters to international airlines, hotels and restaurants asking for samples.

JACK

You really know how to please a man, don't you?

GLADYS

(turning shy)

Oh, well...

JACK

And now, you know what would make me the happiest man in the world?

GLADYS

I think I do.

Jack sits down and resumes reading the paper. He lifts up his coffee cup, and Gladys fills it. They smile at each other.

JACK

Happy anniversary, dear.

GLADYS

Happy anniversary, darling.

Jack resumes reading the paper and drinking coffee. The TV comes over to Gladys and leans on her. Gladys puts her arm around the TV, looks at her husband, and feels a rich sense of bliss.

The lights fade.