

Leaf Meal

(with apologies to “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry)

by

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DESCRIPTION

An experiment to modify humans to make them able to photosynthesize sunlight makes for a very interesting love story.

CHARACTERS

- Gerald
- Geraldine
- Or any names director and actors wish—it makes no difference

SET

- One table with two table clothes: one indicates a kitchen, one indicates a diner
- Two small tables (one to stage right, one to stage left) with documents on them
- Chairs

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Lights up on a pair of arms, GERALD's arms, bathed in sunlight. Then on GERALD sitting at a table in GERALDINE's kitchen, arms outstretched, eyes closed. He is absorbing the sunlight. GERALDINE, sitting to one side, watches him.

GERALDINE

Tell me again what you feel.

GERALD

Be more specific.

GERALDINE

What do you feel? God—

GERALD

You mean, do I feel something “gastro”-related?

GERALDINE

Yes.

GERALD

Something like what I feel when my stomach calls for food?

GERALDINE

We can start with that.

GERALD

I don't feel anything like that.

GERALDINE

Then what—

GERALD

There's nothing—mechanico-gastro—about it. It's quieter.

GERALDINE

Then describe “quieter” to me. Please.

GERALD

More like a wash of—no—a shift in—a shift in states of being.

GERALDINE

From low to high? First gear to second? Solid to liquid—or gas?
Autumn to winter? The reverse? Soap accidentally stinging the
eye? A puncture wound?

GERALD

From empty to filled.

GERALDINE

What does “filled” feel like? Sorry.

GERALD

Without bloated or heavy—without the rumblings or gases or
hunger pangs. Just—I feel empty—vacant, really—vacated—then
the sunlight strikes my arms and the chlorophyll in my arms does
its work, and then I am not empty—no longer vacant.

GERALDINE

So “filled” does not mean “filled up.”

GERALD

No.

GERALDINE

I’m trying to understand.

GERALD

I appreciate that. So am I. So am I.

GERALDINE

It’s easier for you, though, isn’t it, since it has all been unfolded within you—all of it is unavailable to me, that is, outside of—

GERALD opens his eyes and looks at GERALDINE. He touches her.

GERALD

I’m sorry—I’ve been too absorbed—

GERALDINE

You mean “absorbing”—

GERALD
(half-smile)

Yes, true. Absorbent.

GERALD puts his arms back into the sunlight.

GERALDINE

You know why I am afraid.

GERALD

I have my guesses.

GERALDINE

Don’t “guess”—I want you to know.

GERALD

Then tell me so that I’ll know everything.

GERALDINE

I don't want to have to tell you—I just want you to know.

GERALD

This is what I know. I know that what I have had inserted into these arms is important—whole-world important, if the experiment works.

GERALDINE

But why you as—the sponge? The beta? I'm sorry.

GERALD

Why not me?

GERALDINE

Your question is a measure of the distance between us.

GERALD

Someone has to take the leap—

GERALDINE

Not you—

GERALD

—make the forward move.

GERALDINE

Go backward.

GERALD

This chlorophyll that we've reengineered—it has to exist in someone's skin—subcutaneous—

GERALDINE

I don't know what that means.

GERALD

We've even been able to re-color the chlorophyll so that no one would have to walk around looking green. The chemical pathways have to be tested, the nutritional curves, effects on health—

GERALDINE

But you will never become the same.

GERALD

I will always be the same, chlorophyll'd or not—but if this works,
the world will be made different. Imagine—

GERALDINE

You've already gone through this with me.

GERALD

Maybe not hard enough.

GERALDINE

(in sing-song)

If people can process their own nutrition through human
photosynthesis, with little or no regard for agricultural inputs, then
hunger will be eliminated, environmental decay halted—

GERALD

You make it sound stupid—

GERALDINE

Of course I make it sound [stupid]--

GERALD

Like I made a mistake in inventing this.

GERALDINE

Of course I will make this sound stupid because I am being
completely selfish. Let me bring it to you on a completely selfish
childish level, a stamp-my-feet-in-a-tantrum shift of a state of
being: you and I will never. Cook. Together. Again. Why would
you want to?

GERALD

Of course we can—

GERALDINE

As an exercise, a ritual spasm—but not with joy. How could you?
No appetite, no mechanico-gastro impulse—

GERALD

I can still eat as a regular [person]—

GERALDINE

Without desire. Without desires. For me. Food is so much of how we share each other. Here, in this kitchen, how many times—how many—but now you will be sufficient unto yourself, and I will always feel—accommodated. Added on. Until, of course, you make a chlorophyll woman, at which point I shall be completely superfluous, a relic of the emotionally outdated nutritionally backward species who likes a good Thai basil chili sauce with her salmon—who loves sharing a forkful with—you—

GERALDINE has said all she can say. GERALD, hesitating, takes her hand, stretches out his arms to the sun, closes his eyes. She does the same.

GERALDINE

I can pretend.

* * * * *

They sit separately at separate tables in separate worlds. Documents lie on each table. They sign the many documents.

GERALDINE

There.

GERALD

There.

TOGETHER

Done.

GERALDINE

And yes, I am sure I want to do this.

GERALD

Yes, I am sure about the amputation and, no, I don't need the counseling—this is a choice—.

GERALDINE

—freely made. I realize my apartment's selling price is lower than I could've asked for, but—

GERALD

I don't think it's too high a price.

GERALDINE

But time is of the essence.

GERALD

If we had world enough and time—but we don't. I don't.

GERALDINE

Let's move forward.

GERALD

Let's move forward.

Transition.

* * * * *

GERALD sitting at a diner table. He now has two advanced-design prosthetic arms, perhaps shown by the fact that he wears black gloves and a bulky jacket, perhaps in some other imaginative way, such as a sound design with servo-motors. GERALDINE enters. Both stare at each other.

GERALDINE

You disappeared.

GERALD

Not completely. Why did you want to meet here?

GERALDINE

I didn't know where you were for—

GERALD

But you knew I was alive—I let you know that much.

GERALDINE

That wasn't very much. Something's—

GERALD

What aren't we at the apartment?

GERALDINE

I sold it.

Sold [it]—
GERALD

Something's—
GERALDINE

GERALDINE feels one of his arms, then the other.

—changed—what did you do?
GERALDINE

GERALD stands up.

What does it feel like I did?
GERALD

GERALD moves his arms in a mechanistic way.

What does it look like?
GERALD

Engineered. Reengineered
GERALDINE

Take my hand.
GERALD

GERALDINE takes one of his hands and massages to examine it.

Now this one.
GERALD

GERALDINE does the same to the other hand, then takes both of his arms and puts them around her. GERALD hugs her. GERALDINE begins to laugh, and GERALD more or less lowers her into her seat at the table.

You're laughing.
GERALD

Oh yes yes yes—
GERALDINE

GERALD

Not the emotion I expected from—this—

GERALDINE

Oh, you'll see why. Wait, wait—

GERALD

Why did you sell—

GERALDINE

Wait—oh my—I sold the apartment to get money for an operation—the mother of all operations—to become Chlorophyll Woman!

GERALD

Did you actually—you didn't—

GERALDINE

Couldn't find any offers on Craig's List—I hadn't gotten much beyond the intention because I didn't know where you were, but that was where I was headed—Chlorophyll Woman! But, no, I did not—no loss of my mechanico-gastro. And you—

GERALD

And I go and get my chlorophyll arms deleted and replaced because of my loved one's desire to cook—

GERALDINE

I can see. Feel, that is.

GERALD

Aren't we a pair?

GERALDINE

Which is why I had to—had to!—laugh.

GERALD shrugs. They both laugh.

GERALD

A good experimental trial for advanced-design prosthetic arms was not easy to find—but I had my Defense Department/DARPA connections.

GERALDINE

Do you get hungry now?

GERALD

In all the old usual ways—for all the old usual hungers.

GERALDINE

Can you still cook?

GERALD

Haven't tried. There is much I'd like to try—need to try—these neural-networked arms learn from doing, so more doing—more [learning]—

GERALDINE

Come here—let me learn you.

GERALDINE puts up her dukes. GERALD puts up his dukes. They shadow-box with each other. Then patty-cake a few times. Then grab each other's hands and hold them.

GERALDINE

I am so completely without-apology selfish.

GERALD

I've found out that I'm no different.

GERALDINE

Will the world survive us?

GERALD

Not likely. No, it's true.

GERALDINE

I know. But we have a right to happiness.

GERALD

Indeed.

GERALDINE

To pursue it.

GERALD

Yes.

GERALDINE

Everyone does.

GERALD

Yes.

GERALDINE

Then what should we do with my money?

GERALD

Something that involves food. And feeding.

GERALDINE

As long as we do it together.

GERALD

What else would you expect?

GERALDINE

I wouldn't expect anything else.

They continue to hold hands. Rays of sunlight falls across them and grow and grow. And then, of course, blackout.