

*From Badger by Don Zolidis*

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*1943. IRENE and GRACE are co-workers at the Badger Ordnance Plant. They have feelings for each other but are trying to figure it out.*

*GRACE has arrived at IRENE's house for dinner. Maybe it's a date?*

*IRENE, 21, gender non-conforming.*

*GRACE, 19, a free spirit.*

See, I do own a dress.

IRENE

It looks very fetching.

GRACE

And, I'd like to add, I can cook.

IRENE

No kidding. It's like I don't even know you.

GRACE

I'm full of surprises.

IRENE

Thanks for the dinner, by the way. I was getting a little tired of ravioli.

GRACE

Don't mention it. I don't ever get to cook for anyone, so I figured it would be fun.

IRENE

Yeah the kitchens in these houses are less than spectacular.

GRACE

They threw up these apartments in about a week, so I'm just glad the walls are still standing.

IRENE

Did you hear about Jenny Weissman's house? Her door fell down. Apparently the wood for the doorframe was rotten – the screws for the hinges ate right through it. She was just standing there and it fell straight in on her, landed on her cat.

GRACE

IRENE

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I guess they figure this place is temporary.

GRACE

Let's hope.

IRENE

I'm just glad there's a roof. When I was growing up we didn't have a roof.

GRACE

You didn't?

IRENE

We didn't have a lot.

GRACE

That's too bad.

IRENE

For two years we lived out of a car.

GRACE

Oh.

IRENE

There were five of us. In the beginning. My father had a little store when I was real young, but then that went out of business, so... We stayed with relatives for a bit but we wore out our welcome pretty quick – We had nothing. I remember I stole a pair of shoes. We were staying near a lake and this girl and her family had gone swimming – and I just... took her shoes. Ran out – snatched `em off the ground, and ran off without looking back. Like I was some kind of animal living in the woods. I get back to the car and I'm crying and I'm holding these shoes in my hands like I've killed someone, you know? They didn't even fit. They were too big. My father was so angry – I made up this lie that I just found them in the forest but he knew – he had to have known... and... there were a moment when I was sure he was going to beat me and make me take them back – humiliate me – but he didn't. He just said okay. That's when I knew...

GRACE

Knew what?

IRENE

He'd given up. I was maybe nine years old. And he uh... he hung himself a few months later.

GRACE

I'm sorry.

IRENE

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It is what it is. After he was gone, things got a little better. But I still think about those shoes. I still feel awful about stealing them. First thing I did when I got my own checking account was buy myself a pair. You know there's something holy about having your own money – not having to ask, not having to beg, to be able to walk into a store with money in a pocket from a job you worked at, and get what you need. For yourself. It's like every day I'm filled with brilliant white light and that light is called dignity.

*GRACE raises a glass.*

GRACE

To dignity.

IRENE

Damn straight. Dignity.

*They clink glasses.*

Speaking of which... I talked to Chester.

GRACE

Ugh. Anything?

IRENE

Like talking to a wall.

GRACE

He's a chicken. And he's not the one that makes the decisions anyway. I'm sure it comes from above, but he's such a coward he doesn't want to ruffle any feathers.

IRENE

Right.

GRACE

I think you should fight him.

IRENE

That didn't work out so well for me last time.

GRACE

Not with your fists, goof. With your brain. You're ten times smarter than him on his best day. Outsmart him.

IRENE

Maybe I'll just dress like a man and they'll be confused and pay me more. When I had short hair\* I got mistaken for a man all the time. 'Excuse me sir here's the extra money we've been keeping away from the girls.'

*(\*If the actress playing IRENE has short hair, this line can be "I get mistaken for a man all the time.")*

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GRACE

I never realized there was a trouser bonus before.

IRENE

There's a trouser bonus for a lot of things. That's why they don't want us wearing 'em.

GRACE

Sometimes it feels good to be in a dress, though.

IRENE

Sometimes. It's nice to have somebody here.

GRACE

Yeah.

IRENE

You got any family nearby?

GRACE

I grew up outside of Madison -

IRENE

City girl -

GRACE

Nope. On a farm.

IRENE

Oh right. You told me. And you came out here by yourself?

GRACE

I got slightly kicked out of my house.

IRENE

Slightly?

GRACE

It was strongly suggested that I get the hell out. It was a good suggestion, honestly. And I heard about the jobs up here so I figured to make a few bucks before I headed west.

IRENE

To make your fortune.

GRACE

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Right. 'There's gold in them thar hills.' But... my father is a pretty strict man; we didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. He wanted a perfect little princess and I wanted to be a human being. So I split. Best decision I ever made, honestly.

IRENE

I'm glad you made it.

GRACE

Yeah?

IRENE

Yeah.

*GRACE laughs.*

GRACE

Me too.

*A moment.*

IRENE

You want me to turn on the radio?

GRACE

Sure. It's your place.

IRENE

All right.

*She turns on the radio. Something like the Andrews Sisters plays.  
Irene tries to gather her courage.*

GRACE

You okay?

IRENE

Just a little nervous.

GRACE

What for?

IRENE

I should probably let you get ready for work.

GRACE

All right.

IRENE

I'm supposed to train another boy at the cutting house today. Who's still getting paid more'n me.

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GRACE  
You should refuse.

IRENE  
Not sure that's a possibility.

GRACE  
You'd be surprised what the possibilities are.  
*Pause.*

IRENE  
Hey – before you go... you wanna dance?  
*GRACE laughs.*

GRACE  
In the kitchen?

IRENE  
It's silly – forget it –

GRACE  
Nah – I would love to dance with you in the kitchen.  
*GRACE tries to take IRENE's hands.*  
Who's leading this time?

IRENE  
Who knows?  
*They dance.*  
*The music rises as the lights fade.*

*To read the rest of this play, please visit [www.playscripts.com](http://www.playscripts.com)*