

Something Wonderful

Leah Halper





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SOMETHING WONDERFUL

by

Leah Halper

CAST

SILVIA: Well dressed, attractive, brunette, any age over 60. Speaks standard American English but her name is pronounced the Italian way, *Sil-via*. Gestures a bit more than the American norm but not excessively.

DALE: Casually dressed, male or female, around Silvia's age.

Place

An apartment.

Time

The present.

Setting: *DALE's living room, with a kitchen attached.*

At Rise: *DALE checks oven nervously, dips finger into a pot, tastes, perfects table setting, checks watch, sits down, pops back up to stir pot. Knock at door. DALE checks mirror, leaves kitchen, opens door to SILVIA, who carries a large box.*

DALE: *(taking box)* I was getting worried. You found the place.

SILVIA: You bet. Looked forward all week. *(she pecks DALE)* Are we kissing?

DALE: *(gently setting down box)* Absolutely. *(DALE holds her and they kiss)* I hope we're beyond kissing. I hope we're...well, one thing at a time.

SILVIA: That's inviting. What a nice place. Thanks for asking me. *(They kiss. She sniffs)* Smells like...

DALE: We'll take it slow. Right? Dinner first. Right? *(they kiss again)*

SILVIA: *(smiling)* Well, I place myself in your hands. But I can hope.

DALE: You don't know how I've looked forward...but one thing at a time or I'll get nervous. Actually, I'm already nervous. Dinner. *(taking box)* What's all this?

SILVIA: *(She moves towards chairs. DALE follows)* My contribution.

DALE: *(setting box down, removing items)* A nice cognac. A very nice red wine. That'll go perfectly. *(shakes a Tupperware container)* This is...?

SILVIA: *(sits)* Hors d'oeuvres. I know you like mushrooms, right?

DALE: *(He tastes one, offers. SILVIA takes one)* Ummmm. Absolutely, Wow. Good. And—*(lifts lid on another Tupperware)*

SILVIA: *(chewing)* I had some soup. If you can't use it tonight, just eat it later.

DALE: *(uncertainly, swallowing)* Thanks. And...bread?

SILVIA: *(helpfully)* The best sourdough. From the bakery near the bus station. I wanted you to try it.

DALE: *(excavating heavy container, peeking inside)* You cooked a roast? *(rummages further)* What's this?

SILVIA: Just a few cookies I had around...

DALE: *(sets cookies down heavily)* I don't know what to say.

SILVIA: *(pleased)* They're amaretto. You'll love the texture.

DALE: You forgot a tablecloth. *(Triumphantly, SILVIA produces one, but DALE doesn't notice, having turned away to survey the pile. Puzzled)* I invite you to dinner, and you bring the meal.

SILVIA: *(guiltily stashing tablecloth, smile fading)* I forgot a vegetable. But we could run to the store...

DALE: *(turning towards her)* Are you provisioning to stay the week?

SILVIA: I'm not even assuming you want me for the night, Dale. It's just stuff I had around.

DALE: You had a roast warm from the oven around? When I've been cooking since yesterday? You always bring the food when you go to someone's place for dinner?

SILVIA: Dale, you're not someone. I've told everybody how much I like you.

DALE: I like you, too. And I know you're a great cook. But Meals on Wheels seems premature. *(picks up one of the containers, looks inside)* If you're worried—

SILVIA: *(takes it from DALE, sets it down)* If you're sensitive...

DALE: *(sits, fights emotions)* Our first misunderstanding.

SILVIA: *(sits)* God, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to. Should I leave?

DALE: Not until you explain.

SILVIA: *(teary)* Oh, first explain, then leave? *(starts to gather stuff)*

DALE: *(stops her)* Can you just tell me?

SILVIA: *(gathers stuff again, brushing a tear)* Maybe my sister's right.

DALE: About what? *(silence)* Silvia. Without communication we have nothing. What is it?

SILVIA: It's just that...you know I'm Italian.

DALE: *(touches her face)* I love that you're Italian. I love this dark beauty.

SILVIA: Italians love...to eat. *(with difficulty, taking his hand)* And...at least in my family...maybe not other Italians, but everyone I know...we don't really like other people's food. I mean, sometimes it's fine. But we'd really rather—

DALE: *(draws hand away)* Wait a minute. You only like Italian food?

SILVIA: I didn't say that!

DALE: How could you live without burritos? I couldn't survive a week.

SILVIA: (*retakes DALE's hand*) Mexican food can be very... um... edible. A little greasy. And there's a tendency to oversalt—

DALE: What about Indian? I love Indian food.

SILVIA: It's fine. Subtle, complex. It's just kind of processed. Textureless. Lots of stewed things and pickled things. Not much fresh.

DALE: (*stands, walks away, turns back*) French. You gotta love French.

SILVIA: It's okay. Sorta fussy. (*shrugs*) Predictable. Everything distinctive they learned from the Italians. Catherine de Medici's cooks went to Paris in 1600.

DALE: (*approaching cautiously*) Are you some kind of racist Italian supremacist?

SILVIA: No! I'm not! I just think...Italians tend to use simple ingredients and techniques that...what I mean is...other *people's* food...

DALE: Other people's. Like...untested individuals. Like...neighbors—

SILVIA: (*relieved*) Yeah! That's it! `

DALE: Or co-workers. Or me.

SILVIA: (*puts food back into box*) Why are you taking it this way? I was trying to help.

DALE: (*stopping her*) What don't you like?

SILVIA: There's no one thing. It's just...(*gesturing*) give the same ingredients to an Italian and to someone else, there's no comparison.

DALE: Silvia, people other than Italians...and I assume you mean Italian-Americans since you were born here...other people know how to cook.

SILVIA: Yes, but how can I explain? (*dreamily*) We dress our salads with a light hand. We cook vegetables al dente. We're judicious with seasoning. It just all works. (*laughing*) The worst is when other people try to cook Italian.

DALE: What's wrong with other people cooking Italian?

SILVIA: (*with amused gesture*) It's all pizza and marinara sauce.

DALE: Well, some of it **is**.

SILVIA: That's southern Italian! My family's from the north! (*gesticulating*) We use sage! Polenta! Pine nuts! Risotto!

DALE: Well, it's all Italian—

SILVIA: For us pasta isn't some naked nest of white noodles with a smear of red in the middle. That's gross! That's Freudian! We toss our pastas. And we hardly even use tomato. People who think they cook Italian crack me up. They buy all these expensive imported ingredients, then they pass through one little clove of garlic, like they're scared of it. In my family, the best cook is the one who takes (*gestures*) a couple heads of garlic, a potato, an onion, a carrot and makes something wonderful. It's poor peoples' food. It's not pretentious. It's just fresh and good.

DALE: (*a longish incredulous pause*) How do you get through life with these *impossibly* high standards?

SILVIA: I cook.

DALE: (*resuming the repacking of box*) So I see. But we've gone out, what, three times. What'd you do, transfer it all to your lap?

SILVIA: I suggested the places. Remember? Usually I don't go around criticizing people's food. Especially when I'm hoping to spend the night. (*gestures toward the stove*) It's burning.

DALE: (*sniffing*) Shit. Stay here. (*He exits to kitchen area, juggles and slams, adjusts knobs, and burns himself*) Ow, ow, ow.

(*SILVIA grabs an hors d'oeuvres and sidles as close to kitchen as she can get without being seen, sniffing. As he returns, she swallows, scrambles to an innocent posture*)

DALE: How can you spend the night when I can't even cook for you?

SILVIA: You can cook for me.

DALE: You'll reject it.

SILVIA: I won't reject it. Why would I reject it? *(beat)* What is it?

DALE: We'll go out.

SILVIA: I wanna eat what you made.

DALE: It's garlic-impaired. It's scarlet. It's Freudian. And it burned. What'd your sister say?

SILVIA: Something stupid.

DALE: If you can't tell me things...

SILVIA: She said it's best to date other Italians. That no one else—

DALE: *(slowly)* I see. Well. There's the door.

SILVIA: You want me to be honest. I'm happier lying. Why don't all you people cook *your* cuisine? Recipes from *your* grandmother?

DALE: My grandmother's cuisine was Campbell's soup and lime Jello. I'm like millions of Americans. I'm Heinz 57. A mutt without a culture. I love Italian food. It's the American way to appropriate someone else's cuisine. I've taken classes and everything.

SILVIA: *(tentatively)* We could eat the roast.

DALE: *(shrinking)* The roast.

SILVIA: *(despairing)* Why'd you force me to tell you? You're ruining everything.

DALE: No. I'm opening everything up. You're ruining everything. We're not going near the bedroom.

SILVIA: *(pauses, then plucks DALE's sleeve)* There's another thing about being Italian.

DALE: What? My fashion sense is off too? No *bella figura*?

SILVIA: No. We're kind. We don't like to hurt people or make trouble.

DALE: It'd help if you'd try not to laugh at my food.

SILVIA: Did it really burn?

DALE: It's...crisp.

SILVIA: Is it eggplant parmesan?

DALE: (*indignant*) No, it's not eggplant parmesan. Nobody makes that anymore.

SILVIA: Is it pizza?

DALE: Do I look like an idiot?

SILVIA: What's the tomato in?

DALE: A very subtle, very simple mussel soup.

SILVIA: (*brightening*) That sounds good. I'm hungry. (*picks up the wine*)

DALE: And some cannelloni you'll laugh at.

SILVIA: (*starting towards kitchen*) It's hard to ruin cannelloni. Come on. I'm hungry.

DALE: (*panics, blocks her*) Don't go in there! You were right! Expensive imports and—

SILVIA: Jeez. You're high strung.

(*they circle each other warily*)

DALE: We haven't even left the living room, and we have a dozen issues.

SILVIA: (*stopping*) Dale. What's a relationship? Issues. And nourishment. How you work with it is all. (*she offers, and he takes the wine*) Can we eat now? My stomach thinks my mouth left town.

DALE: (*leading her into kitchen*) Okay. We'll eat. But if I underdid the garlic, I don't wanna hear about it. I was thinking of kissing, all right, so yeah, naturally, I only put in one clove....

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN