

GOLDEN GIRLS

“Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner”

ACT ONE

(FADE IN:)

INT. KITCHEN – DAY

(Dorothy, Rose, Sophia, Blanch)

(DOROTHY IS FRETTING OVER SOME POTS AND PANS AT THE HOB, AS ROSE PACES THE ROOM LOOKING ANXIOUS. THERE’S MESS FROM RECENT FOOD PREP ON THE COUNTERS. SOPHIA IS SITTING AT THE TABLE ON THE CHAIR NEAREST THE HOB, LEANING BACK AGAINST IT WITH A HAPPY SMIRK, EYES CLOSED, WEARING A LOOK OF ZEN-LIKE BLISS ON HER FACE. SHE’S POSSIBLY ASLEEP.

DOROTHY

Honey, I thought you said you were going to deal with those potatoes for me?

(ROSE STOPS PACING AND TURNS AROUND WITH CHILD-LIKE INNOCENCE)

ROSE

How would you like me to deal with them, Dorothy?

DOROTHY

Stop them from unionising, Rose!

(ROSE LOOKS UNCOMPREHENDINGLY AT DOROTHY)

Put them in the oven.

(DOROTHY FLAPS THE BACK OF HER HAND IN THE DIRECTION OF THE OVEN, THEN STARTS PACING THE KITCHEN NERVOUSLY. ROSE DASHES TO THE COUNTER, GRABS A TRAY OF SLICED POTATOES AND POPS IT INTO THE OVEN. DOROTHY IS MUTTERING TO HERSELF AND COUNTING OFF ITEMS ON A MENTAL LIST, FLIPPING OUT HER FINGERS ONE BY ONE. ROSE TENTATIVELY APPROACHES)

ROSE

You don’t have to be mad. I had a look at them as they were going in, and they weren’t oniony at all. Not even a little.

DOROTHY

Rose, did you confuse the bath salts for Alka-Seltzer again? It’s potato rosti. One of the main *ingredients* is onion.

ROSE

Then I’m really confused, Dorothy. Do you want those potatoes onionised or not?

(DOROTHY STARES IN DISBELIEF)

SOPHIA

Rose, you've heard the expression 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'? Well, in your case, too much broth has spoiled the cook. Your brain, Rose. It's like soup.

(DOROTHY MOVES TO ROSE AND GENTLY LAYS A HAND ON HER ARM)

DOROTHY

Oh, honey, I'm sorry for being short. I appreciate all your help. I'm just so anxious about this dinner tomorrow night. The faculty is expecting me to woo this visiting professor, who we were only introduced to this week, and I'm supposed to try to sweet-talk him on to our faculty. And I just don't know how I'm going to pull it off.

ROSE

I think you're putting too much pressure on yourself, Dorothy. I haven't seen someone this anxious since the time our neighbour old Mr Fluergen was milling around outside of our house in St Olaf, waiting for the results of his Melinda's paternity test.

DOROTHY

(WITH PATIENT INDULGENCE) That must have been terrible for him. And for the family.

ROSE

I'll say. Old Mr Fluergen knew the father had to be either Hector or Barnaby, but he didn't know how he'd break it to Hector if it turned out that Josephine had been seeing Barnaby behind his back the whole time.

(DOROTHY AND SOPHIA SQUINT IN CONFUSION)

DOROTHY

Rose, did this story take place in St Olaf, or *Utah*? What's the marital situation here?

ROSE

Oh, old Mr Fluergen was a life-long bachelor. He never married.

SOPHIA

Sounds like this Josephine was a regular Hugh Heffner though.

ROSE

More like Hugh *Heffer* actually. You see, Josephine was old Mr Fluergen's prize Norweigen breeding cow. Old Mr Fluergen just knew that he'd never be able to look Hector in the eye again if it turned out that he was the one who'd allowed Barnaby to seduce his beloved Josephine and get her pregnant. All because he'd forgotten to fix the latch on the gate to the lower grazing field, even though old Mrs Gerhuergen-Bergen never stopped warning him about it as she passed by, and she passed him every day that summer as she was on her way to the village hall to rehearse for her big choir solo at the St Olaf Potato and Carrot Festival.

DOROTHY

(TAKES ROSE'S HAND, AND SPEAKS WITH WITHERING SINCERITY) Oh, Rose, Rose. I'm so glad that somebody finally understands my pain. Now let's never speak of it again. And I mean that. (DOROTHY SQUEEZES ROSE'S HAND) Oh, Rose, do I mean that.

SOPHIA

So who turned out to be the father? Hector or Barnaby?

(DOROTHY TURNS AND GLARES AT SOPHIA)

What? You're going to put me in a home where they sit me down in front of soap operas all day for years and not expect me to want closure on a cliff-hanger like this? Come on, Rose. Spill it.

(ROSE STARTS TO SPEAK, BUT DOROTHY PUTS HER FINGER OVER ROSE'S MOUTH, WHICH STARTLES ROSE INTO SILENCE)

DOROTHY

I'm quite happy to go to my grave not knowing, but I need you to know that I'm equally happy to take you with me if you decide you want to tell us.

SOPHIA

I'm amazed they hold a Swede and Carrot festival in that town. If there's one thing St Olaf doesn't lack, it's vegetables.

(ROSE GAZES AT SOPHIA WITH A FACE THAT SUGGESTS SHE'S NOT QUITE SURE WHAT JUST HAPPENED, BUT PRETTY SURE THAT SOMETHING DEFINITELY HAPPENED)

ROSE

Oh no, Sophia, I think you're getting confused. The Vegetable Festival is in October. It used to be held in December, but we moved it back a couple of months so we could combine it with Halloween.

DOROTHY

Of course you did, Rose. And now it's that magical time of the year when the neighbourhood kids go door to door dressed as vampire courgettes, juggling turnips in the hopes of having their baskets filled with radishes.

ROSE

(AMAZED) You've been to the festival, too, Dorothy?

DOROTHY

(GLARES, THEN LETS OUT AN ANGUISHED MOAN) Oh, girls, girls. You were right. The pressure of this meal is really getting to me - and all this talk of vegetables isn't helping. I just need the food to be perfect, and I just can't get it right no matter how many times I try. (TURNS TO SOPHIA, WITHERING AND SARCASTIC) Incidentally, Ma, thank you so much for your help these past few evenings. You've been indispensable.

SOPHIA

God helps those who help themselves, pussycat.

DOROTHY

Well, it isn't God who owes me three weeks' back rent.

SOPHIA

How do you think I feel? You think there aren't people out there who owe me money, Dorothy? Minnie Matruska still owes me \$1200 from that canasta drive at the recreation centre the other week.

DOROTHY

You're going to pay your rent with your share of canasta winnings? Where are we: Vegas?

ROSE

Why hasn't she paid you?

SOPHIA

She's claiming foul play. There weren't any prizes, you see, it was an endurance event, get people to sponsor us, see how long we could keep a game of canasta going. Me and Minnie had a little side-hustle going. Whichever one of us dozed off first, the other one got \$1200.

(DOROTHY STARES AHEAD FLATLY)

ROSE

But how could there could have been foul play with something like that?

SOPHIA

She says I swapped out her breath-mints for sleeping pills.

DOROTHY

And did you, Ma?

SOPHIA

No, of course not. (PICKS UP MUG FROM TABLE) I slipped them in her tea.

(AS SOPHIA TAKES A SIP, DOROTHY LOOMS OVER AND GIVES HER MOTHER A LIGHT SLAP ON THE HEAD)

DOROTHY

Ma! If that \$1200 is going anywhere, it's going straight to that charity.

SOPHIA

Doesn't charity begin at home?

DOROTHY

So does elder abuse, ma.

ROSE

Which charity was it for, Sophia?

SOPHIA

Oh, a real worthy one, Rose. (SIPS TEA) Gambler's Anonymous.

DOROTHY

Oh, that's great, ma, maybe when we drop off the donation at their headquarters we can place it underneath one of three hollowed-out coconut shells, and get them to bet on which one contains the money.

ROSE

I think it would be real mean of you to try to collect that money, Sophia. Mrs Matrone is an old woman.

SOPHIA

And what am I over here? Orphan Annie? Now you listen here, Rose Nylund, I'm from Sicily, and I'm telling you that if Minnie Matrone doesn't pay up by nine o'clock next Saturday night, she's going to wish she'd never heard the phrase 'Sicilian neck-scarf'.

(DOROTHY AND ROSE SPEAK AT THE SAME TIME)

DOROTHY

Ma!

ROSE

Sophia!

SOPHIA

What? I'm talking about my Sicilian neck-scarf. I'm gonna stop lending it to her. It's made of the finest material, cost an arm and a leg - probably literally in this scarf's case - and most importantly it drives the men at the centre crazy. That scarf has brought more wealthy widowers to Minnie Matruska's door than a funeral notice in the Miami Post, and she knows it. And if she wants it, she's going to have to pay for it.

DOROTHY

That was a lovely story, Ma. Do you still have the scarf? I have the sudden urge to throttle myself with it.

(EVERYONE SNIFFS THE AIR)

ROSE

What's that horrible smell?

(DOROTHY TURNS AROUND IN PANIC, AND DASHES TO THE OVEN, SAYING AS SHE GOES -)

DOROTHY

Oh my God! The Goulash! The Goulash!

SOPHIA

That's what people usually say as it's being brought to their table.

(DOROTHY RUSHES TO THE OVEN AND THROWS IT OPEN, BUT ROSE LAYS A CALMING HAND ON HER SHOULDER. ROSE TAKES ONE LOOK INSIDE, THEN CLOSES THE OVEN GENTLY)

ROSE

It's okay, Dorothy.

DOROTHY

But that smell, Rose, something has clearly gone very wrong.

ROSE

Oh, I know Scandinavian food, and, trust me, that's what it's supposed to smell like.

SOPHIA

That's what it's supposed to smell like? No wonder the Viking women sent their men out on longboats into the middle of the ocean. Who'd want to smell the village two hours after 300 men had gorged themselves on that muck? And, anyway, whoever heard of Swedish ghoulash?

DOROTHY

It's a thing, ma.

SOPHIA

So, so's dysentery, pussycat, and I don't want that on my plate, either.

DOROTHY

(LAUGHS, SHAKES HER HEAD) Oh, I am far out of my comfort zone here. (DOROTHY MASSAGES HER FOREHEAD WITH ONE HAND) I don't know what I was thinking. I don't even know if the professor likes this kind of food. Maybe I'm being a bit too on the nose. Too eager to impress. Maybe he's expecting something more traditional; something a bit closer to home. Something a bit more American.

ROSE

Like hot dogs, Dorothy?

DOROTHY

Sure, Rose. Then maybe once we've chowed our dogs and washed them down with ten beers, we can catch the game at O'Malley's, then finish the night at a strip club.

ROSE

Oh no, Dorothy, I don't think you should do that at all.

SOPHIA

I agree. (PAUSE) O'Malley's has been closed for three years now.

DOROTHY

Oh, what am I going to do? The meal is tomorrow night and not one of my attempts has turned out. And even the ones that do turn out are disgusting. I just need it to be special.

SOPHIA

OK, what gives here, pussycat? You've been climbing the walls all week. This is something more than just work pressure.

ROSE

Sophia's right. I don't think you're just trying to impress the university. I think you're trying to impress the professor, too. I think you really like him.

DOROTHY

Oh, come on, stop.

SOPHIA

Rose is right. You're looking to crack more than the books with this guy.

DOROTHY

Ma, Rose, please. Please. All I'm doing is showing the faculty that there's a lot more to Dorothy Zbornack than just brains.

SOPHIA

Sure. You've got brawn, too.

(DOROTHY GIVES SOPHIA A WITHERING STARE)

ROSE

(AFFECTIONATELY TEASING, KNOWING SMILE) You like him, though, don't you, Dorothy?

DOROTHY

(STERN FACE) Like him? He's a brilliant English professor, who also happens to be an expert in the field of romantic poetry - and something of a writer himself, I may add. And all he's done since he arrived five days ago is walk around that campus like some kind of rock star, doing private readings of his poetry, charming the pants off of everyone with his olive-hued skin and his smoky grey-green eyes, and his words that burst and bloom from his mouth with radiance and beauty, and oh MY (DOROTHY BECOMES MORE ANIMATED AND UNRESTRAINED) GOD I would give my right ARM for a night with him. I have been following that man around campus staring at him like he's the last slice of caramel cheesecake in the fridge on Christmas Eve. (RUBS HEAD BRIEFLY) And hanging around his poetry recitals like some horny groupie. (DOROTHY HOLDS HER HEAD IN HER HANDS) Oh, girls. Girls. Look at me. A new face appears at work, and suddenly I'm a love-struck teenager again.

SOPHIA

It's been a *long* time since you were a teenager, pussy cat.

DOROTHY

And it's been a long time since we've sat down and flicked through nursing home brochures, Ma.

(SOPHIA STARES AHEAD IN AWKWARD IRRITATION FOR A FEW SECONDS. THE GIRLS HEAR THE FRONT DOOR OPENING, AND SOON AFTER SLAMMING SHUT. ROSE IS OBLIVIOUS, DEEP IN THOUGHT ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE. SHE LOOKS HALF-WAY BETWEEN CONFUSED AND SUSPICIOUS)

DOROTHY

That'll be Blanche.

ROSE

One thing still confuses me about all of this, Dorothy.

SOPHIA

Just one thing, Rose?

ROSE

If this professor is English, then why are you cooking him Swedish food?

DOROTHY

Rose, his name is professor Lars Johansson. He's a *professor* of English. But he's *from* Sweden.

ROSE

Well then my next question is this. Are you sure you can trust this man? That he *is* who he *says* he is? Because I once knew a Lars Johansson from Sweden, Dorothy, and *he* wasn't a fancy English professor. He was just a pig farmer.

DOROTHY

Well maybe the classical French poetry came later, Rose. Once he'd been inspired by all the mud puddles and pig droppings.

(BLANCHE STORMS THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR AND SLAMS SOME SHOPPING BAGS ON THE GROUND AND HER HANDBAG ON THE TABLE)

BLANCHE

Never until this cursed day have I truly tasted the bitter fruits of cruelty and injustice.

(BLANCHE SITS DOWN IN THE CHAIR NEAREST THE DOOR. THE GIRLS GATHER CHAIRS AND CROWD ROUND AT THE TABLE)

DOROTHY

Blanche, honey, what's happened?

BLANCHE

I got a speeding ticket.

(MUTED REACTION FROM THE OTHERS)

DOROTHY

I'm not sure Amnesty International will take your case, Blanche, but I'd hate myself if I didn't at least try to plead your case.

ROSE



Were you speeding, Blanche?

BLANCHE

Well, of course I was, Rose, I was rushing to reach this new Chrysler show-room manager I've been seeing before his lunch hour ended, but that's not the point.

DOROTHY

Well, what *is* the point, Blanche?

BLANCHE

Oh, I don't care about the ticket. Not really. I mean I'll pay it. It's just that in all my years of being on the highway - and being fast-of-heart and heavy-of-foot as all good southern girls are - never have I ever had a policeman go all the way through with issuing me a ticket. Usually I just drop my sunglasses a little way down my nose, and unhitch my dress a *big* way down my shoulders, bat my little eyelashes, and toddle off on my pretty l'il way. Usually, I might add, with his number on a business card slid under my visor.

SOPHIA

Later he pops the hood.

BLANCHE

(LOOK OF MOCK OUTRAGE) Well, not this gentleman. (IMITATES GRUFF VOICE) Ah'm sorreh, mam, ah'm gonna have to write you up for this one.

ROSE

So behaving like a slut didn't work this time?

(BLANCHE GLARES AT ROSE BUT WITH A GRUDGING SMILE ON HER LIPS)

BLANCHE

It's all about using to your advantage the gifts of passionate femininity and irresistible womanliness God gave you. (BLANCHE LOOKS ROSE UP AND DOWN) You must have been off that day.

ROSE

Maybe the officer thought that you were speeding because you were late for a client.

BLANCHE

(GLARES THEN CONTINUES) My *first* thought was that he was probably gay. Especially when the sight of my sensuous, slender shoulders seemed to have no effect on him whatsoever. But he had a big old wedding ring right there on his finger. (BLANCHE STARTS TO FORGET HERSELF AND GET CARRIED AWAY) Right there on his big old hand. At the end of that big old arm of his. And those big muscles. Tight. Bulging against his tight-fitting shirt, with that cop badge gleaming in the glare of the early evenin' sun. Hair sittin' there lookin' like it was sculpted out of butter. Eyes like ocean pools just suckin' me in like whirlpools, and a chiselled jaw you could just cut yourself on if you weren't careful. And those pert buttocks,

oh my heaven, like a couple of coconut shells, I just wanted to grab em and clonk em together so they made a...

DOROTHY

Blanche, I'm about to give you a ticket. I feel like there's a twelve-car pile-up happening in my throat.

SOPHIA

How old was this cop?

BLANCHE

Oh, about five or so years younger than me. So... (WAGGLES HAND) twenty-five, thirty.

SOPHIA

Twenty-five or thirty years *younger*, you mean

(BLANCHE GLARES AT SOPHIA)

Blanche, you've been around so long you invented some of the crimes he's out there arresting people for.

(DOROTHY GIVES BLANCHE'S HAND A SOFT PAT)

DOROTHY

Honey, we're entering a new stage of life now. There's no shame in not being able to turn the head of a 25-year-old. Besides, what could you possibly have in common with someone like that?

SOPHIA

An extensive collection of hand-cuffs.

BLANCHE

Oh, I'm not deluded. I know all that. It's just it's sad, that's all. And frightening. I'm not ready to lose my powers just yet. I've spent my whole life using my exceptional good looks to open doors, pour drinks, jump queues, entice men, evade speeding fines. What can I use them for now?

SOPHIA

A 25 per cent senior citizens' discount on the Miami metro.

DOROTHY

Ma, you're not helping. Mind you, at least it's in-keeping with this week's theme. Blanche, you need to put this in perspective. You are a beautiful, vivacious older woman. But you *are* older, so maybe you need to stay away from the creche.

BLANCHE

(SMILES, PLAYFULLY SLAPS DOROTHY'S HAND) Oh, I'll get over it. Meantime, I can't help but feel a little old and vulnerable.

SOPHIA

Look on the bright side. In a few years you'll be able to feign heart attacks to get out of paying for stuff.

(THE DOORBELL RINGS)

BLANCHE

(RISES TO HER FEET) I'll go get it.

SOPHIA

If that's one of Matruska's goons, you tell them I'm personal friends with John Gotti.

BLANCHE

(SNIFFS) What is the dreadful smell?

DOROTHY

Dinner.

BLANCHE

Who's comin'? Every dog in the neighbourhood?

(THE DOORBELL RINGS AGAIN)

DOROTHY

You'd better hurry, Blanche. It's maybe the under-25s Olympic swimming champion.

(DOROTHY MOVES OFF TOWARDS THE KITCHEN COUNTER, AS BLANCHE EXITS THE ROOM. WE CUT TO FOLLOW BLANCHE AS SHE ENTERS THE LIVING ROOM...)

INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY

BLANCHE

Alright, alright, I'm comin'.

(BLANCHE OPENS THE FRONT DOOR TO BE MET WITH LARS, THE PROFESSOR)

LARS

Hi. I'm Professor Lars Johansson.

BLANCHE

Hi. I'm single. I mean, I'm Blanche. Single in the respect that there's only one of me.

LARS

Yes, yes. I can quite believe it. I'm here to see Dorothy.

BLANCHE

Dorothy? (NODS) Are you from the new house across the street? Did you get some of Dorothy's mail? I'd be happy to discuss the whole mix-up with you over dinner.

LARS

That's why I'm here, actually. Dorothy is cooking me dinner tonight.

BLANCHE

(CURLS LIP) Well I hope you already ate.

LARS

(SMILES POLITELY) I'm sorry?

(BLANCHE TAKES THE PROFESSOR BY THE ARM, LEADS HIM THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR, AND CLOSSES IT BEHIND HIM. SHE THEN WALKS HIM TOWARDS THE KITCHEN, ARM IN ARM)

BLANCHE

Let's go through and say hello. What was it you said you was a professor of?

LARS

Romantic poetry.

BLANCHE

You ever hear the one about the man from Nantucket?

(BLANCHE AND LARS WALK THROUGH INTO THE...)

INT. KITCHEN – DAY

(DOROTHY IS VISIBLY SHOCKED AS LARS WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN WITH BLANCHE. ROSE AND SOPHIA LOOK CONFUSED)

BLANCHE

Ladies, I'd like you to meet Professor Lars Johansson. Lars, this is my friend Rose, this is my friend Sophia, and this is Sophia's elderly daughter who lives with her, Dorothy.

DOROTHY

You'll have to excuse, Blanche, Lars, we're having her fixed at the end of this mating season. (MOVES TOWARDS HIM AND THEY EMBRACE) Have I got mixed up here, because I thought you were coming to dinner tomorrow night?

LARS

I'm sure we said Saturday?

DOROTHY

Today is Friday.

ROSE

I didn't think there was that big a time difference between Sweden and Miami.

(LARS LAUGHS – ROSE LOOKS CONFUSED BY HIS LAUGHTER – SHE WAS BEING SERIOUS)

LARS

It's not jetlag, it's brain lag. Forgive me, I've been under enormous pressure this week. Meetings, all the people, all the travelling. I think I left a part of myself behind in Europe.

ROSE

Which part?

SOPHIA

His ankle, Rose!

DOROTHY

Well, as luck would have it, I was just cooking myself some Swedish ghoulish anyway, there's plenty of it, and it's pretty much ready?

BLANCHE

Ready to come back alive and start crawling out of the oven for help.

DOROTHY

And even then it'd still be able to get out of a speeding ticket.

(FLAMES WHOOSH AND RUSH INSIDE THE OVEN, THEN A JET OF BLACK SMOKE DRIFTS OUT OF THE OVEN – DOROTHY RUSHES OVER TO TURN IT OFF, TAKE OUT THE FOOD, WAST THE SMOKE. ROSE RUSHES TO OPEN THE BACK WINDOW. SOPHIA STARTS WASTING THE AIR WITH HER HANDS)

BLANCHE

I stand corrected. Rest in peace.

(BLANCHE GRABS LARS UNDER THE ARM, LINKING THEM TOGETHER, AS SHE ABOUT TURNS HIM TO THE DOOR THAT LEADS INTO THE LIVING ROOM)

Listen, Dorothy, I'll give you some time to call out the fire brigade, and you'll need some time to pick out an evening dress that suits you. Meanwhile I'll take this hungry and handsome gentleman out for a bite to eat at my favourite Scandinavian restaurant. And we'll be back in just no time at all.

(BLANCHE AND LARS TURN AROUND AT THE DOOR TO FACE THE GIRLS. THE SMOKE HAS ABATED)

ROSE

Which restaurant are you going to go to, Blanche? "Bjorn's Baltic Fjord Smorgasbord"?

BLANCHE

No, the one that's a blend of Scandinavian and Mexican food.

SOPHIA

"Nor-way, Jose."

BLANCHE

That's the one.

DOROTHY

Blanche, there's no need to...

BLANCHE

(INTERRUPTS) Oh, now, Dorothy, don't you be too proud to accept my help. What are friends for?

DOROTHY

I'm beginning to wonder.

LARS

(to DOROTHY) How about a coffee when we get back, then tomorrow maybe I can take you out for dinner as both an apology and a thank you?

DOROTHY

(SMILES SOFTLY AT LARS) I'd like that very much.

(BLANCHE MANOEUVERS LARS OUT OF THE DOOR)

BLANCHE

Come on now, Lars, these elk-meat fajitas 'aint gonna eat themselves.

(THEY EXIT. DOROTHY LOOKS ON WITH A GLARE)

DOROTHY

OK, Blanche. If that's how you want to play it. All I have to do is wait until Lars figures out that Blanche's appreciation for literature begins and ends with the dating ads at the back of the Miami Herald. And then the stage is set for sparkling conversation, urbane sophistication, academic discussion, and sex so animal it could make a Viking blush.

(DOROTHY STRIDES FROM THE ROOM WITH PURPOSE)

(MUSIC CUE, FADE TO BLACK)