

HAPPY LITTLE SUNBEAM

by

Jason Paul

FADE IN:

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY TURNOUT - DAY

MARIE GRAVES (82)- button-down sweater, wide-brimmed straw hat - sits at a warping wood picnic table under an oak tree in a roadside clearing. Behind her, a dirt trail cuts through lush meadows.

IN THE FOREGROUND - A Lincoln Town Car is parked at the turnout's edge. Marie gazes toward the roadside.

A Buick Lesabre - travelling from the opposite direction of the Lincoln - rolls to a stop inside the turnout, parks hood-facing-hood with the Town Car.

GEORGE SMITH (85)- a windbreaker over a plaid-patterned collared shirt - labors out of the Lesabre's driver's seat, ambles across the clearing toward Marie. He carries two brown paper lunch bags.

GEORGE

Hullo there.

George stops short of sitting at the picnic bench. He stands at the edge of the table, flashes a friendly smile.

GEORGE (CONT.)

Could hardly believe it when I seen
a friendly-lookin' gal like you
sittin' out here all by her
lonesome.

MARIE

I've had company ever since I sat
down.

GEORGE (CONT.)

Is that right?

MARIE

Can you hear them?

Marie gestures toward the high branches of the surrounding trees, to the soft melody of scrub jays. George tunes in to their singing.

GEORGE

A bird watcher, are ya?

MARIE

That's right. I come out here when
the scrub jays start calling. It's
a favorite place of mine.

GEORGE

Isn't that something.

MARIE

Not a pastime of yours, I'm
guessing.

GEORGE

I'm an admirer of a different aspect of nature.

MARIE

And what would that be?

George nods toward the fields behind Marie.

GEORGE

Buttercups. I come to have a peek at all the pretty wildflowers this fancy patch of hillside offers a curious old gent.

MARIE

Well that sounds lovely.

GEORGE

'Name's George Smith, but don't tell me who you are, 'cause I'm fairly certain you have a name the likes of a pretty flower.

MARIE

You believe that, do you?

GEORGE

Yes, ma'am. Not something so stuffy like Rose or Hazel. Something charming, but not Violet or Iris.

MARIE

You've certainly given this a lot of thought.

GEORGE

I sure have. Matter of fact, I'm game to wager a seat next to you for an afternoon picnic lunch if I can guess your name.

George hoists the paper bags, winks at Marie. She chuckles at the unexpected direction of the conversation.

GEORGE (CONT.)

Something sweet. Lily, I'm guessing.

MARIE

That's kind of you to say, and I'd've offered you a seat anyway. My name is Marie. Marie Graves.

GEORGE

"Marie". Not altogether flowery but fits you dearly in any case.

George sits next to Marie.

MARIE

My mother warned me about
smooth-talking sailors. I gather
you must've been one.

GEORGE

Cowboy, actually.

MARIE

Ah. The herding-cow-kind or
bullriding-kind?

GEORGE

Bankrobbing-kind.

Marie chuckles.

MARIE

I'd love to believe that.

George turns toward Marie, hands relaxed in his lap, eyes
fixed on hers.

GEORGE

You wanna see a fast draw?

George sits statue-still. After a pause--

GEORGE (CONT.)

Wanna see it again?

He remains motionless. After another pause--

GEORGE (CONT.)

Wanna see it again?

Marie grins.

MARIE

How 'bout that. All you're missing
is the black hat, I see.

She notes the paper bags on the table.

MARIE (CONT.)

I hope your taste in lunch foods is
as keen as your sense of humor.

George slides a sack in front of Marie.

GEORGE

It's not something I whipped up
myself out on the ranch, mind you.

MARIE

Well, the sentiment's just the same, so I thank you kindly.

They both dip hands into the bags, pull out sandwiches wrapped in butcher paper, small bottles of water.

GEORGE

Though I imagine you were a dancer or starlet-type, I'm sure modesty will lead ya to tell me otherwise.

MARIE

I suppose we're all the things we imagine we can be. But I was a wife, mainly. Can't say I'm the widow of an outlaw, but we got along happily.

George nods, pulls butcher paper away from his sandwich. His hands clamp the bread slices as he prepares for a bite.

MARIE (CONT.)

So, was your better half named after flora, or fauna?

George's hands hold steadily on the sandwich, caught off guard by the question. Marie notes his sudden silence.

MARIE (CONT.)

I'm assuming all that cowpoke charm didn't go to waste. Must have landed you quite a catch. Don't think I don't appreciate the gesture, but this lunch sack couldn't have been meant for me.

George picks at bread crust, tries to stymie discomfort.

MARIE (CONT.)

Is she still your little wildflower? Your prize-winning bouquet?

George's hands fidget for a brief moment more.

GEORGE

Them a...scrubs sure are a pleasant-sounding bunch.

Marie looks to the branches overhead, considers.

MARIE

Hadn't given them much thought, but yes, I suppose they are.

George ponders a moment, sets the sandwich atop the bag, takes a deep breath, turns more intimately toward Marie.

The pair lock eyes. George's face is now awash with honesty. He extends his open hands to Marie.

GEORGE

I'm gonna hold your hand, 'cause there's something I really need to share with you that I think is very important you know about me.

Marie offers her hands.

MARIE

Okay.

GEORGE

I used to be very, very smart. Used to manage big projects; built bridges, airports, towers and roads of all kinds. Made lots of people lots of money, made a lot myself, had a lot of people respect me.

But now I can't hardly recall much that goes on. I have a heck of a time with little things. In fact, I sit here and find I'm having trouble remembering your name.

Marie nods sympathetically.

GEORGE (CONT.)

Mine's George. I can't remember things from time to time, see. I try well enough, but I can't keep it from getting worse, and it's not because I don't wish I could, and it's nothing wrong you did. I just wanted you to know that.

Marie clutches George's hands more tenderly.

MARIE

Thank You, George. And I'm Marie. And George... earlier today, I waited until The Boss left the house - that's what I call her because she's a younger lady and I don't always know her name. She left, and I drove off in the car I'm not allowed to drive because they took away my license. I drive anyway, George, but I get to where I can't remember where I'm supposed to be going, or from where I came.

George nods, understands their newly-revealed connection.

MARIE (CONT.)

I was sitting here because I'm lost and didn't want to get any more lost. I have a phone in my pocket that I can call with, or The Boss can call me. I'm sure she's tried but I turned it off.

GEORGE

Why turn it off if you don't want to be lost?

Marie shrugs.

MARIE

If she finds I went driving again, I'm afraid she's gonna send me away somewhere; a home, maybe.

But you see, there's something else. You came along, George. You came along, and I was hoping I wouldn't feel lost any longer.

George flashes Marie a sweet smile.

GEORGE

Well, if you believe everything else I told you, I suppose you'd believe how I wound up here. There's some folks that told me if I get lost driving one more time, I'll never drive again. People just don't understand how that can take the life out of a man.

The phone I'm supposed to have with me, I don't bring it along. Can't say for certain where them sandwiches came from. I can't give you my wife's name 'cause the truth is I can't always recall what it was. I was driving around without a clue where, then I saw little old you.

Marie smiles gently. She sympathizes.

MARIE

So when they find you, they'll take your license.

George shakes his head at the conundrum.

GEORGE

But we can't have folks worrying to death over us, either.

MARIE

They're worried, George. And
folks'll find us both soon enough.

George gives a conceding nod.

GEORGE

I know it.

He exhales as his eyes pan the landscape.

GEORGE (CONT.)

Well...

George releases Marie's hands gently, rises, paces toward the perimeter of the clearing. He stops, looks to the turnout, to the parked cars tempting him.

Marie rises. George looks back to her. Marie's lips curl into a compassionate smile.

GEORGE (CONT.)

You have a phone, you say?

Marie nods. George offers a resigned sigh, walks back to the picnic bench, stands face-to-face with Marie but with a crestfallen spirit that prevents him from looking at her.

MARIE

George, I don't suppose we have
much choice.

George exhales, nods. His gloomy eyes fix on the ground.

Marie's look falls from George as she pauses somberly. Her eyes then flash back to George's face.

MARIE (CONT.)

We're having ourselves a picnic.

George looks up abruptly at Marie.

MARIE (CONT.)

Those cars can't do us a lick of
good, and we don't have a license
to drive them anymore anyway, but
what we do have is some pretty
views, lovely company, sandwiches,
and sunshine.

George glints.

MARIE (CONT.)

It'd be a shame to see all that go
to waste on account of not enjoying
a moment 'cause we're too afraid
we'll forget it.

GEORGE

I reckon we still have our good sense.

MARIE

That's right, George. That we have.

GEORGE

Folks aren't but a phone call away. Don't need to make that call 'til we really need 'em.

MARIE

Mm-hm.

George extends his hands to Marie. Her hands meet his.

GEORGE

After your precious face, next thing I noticed was that trail cutting through this here meadow. I figure a few patches of wildflowers and some shady trees would make for quite a stroll.

MARIE

Indeed it would. I'd like that very much.

George and Marie hold a look on each other, gather courage.

MARIE (CONT.)

Folks aren't but a phone call away.

George nods. They turn toward the picnic table. George puts his arm around Marie as they walk back to the table.

They pack the lunch items back into the bags, scoop the bags up and pace toward the trail. Marie pauses, considers, then lets out a satisfying giggle.

George eyes her curiously. Marie shrugs.

MARIE

I never imagined getting lost would be so much fun.

George smiles.

GEORGE

Isn't that something.

They start toward the trail again. George shifts the lunch bag in his hand, offers his hand to Marie. She shifts her lunch bag, clutches George's hand. They walk hand-in-hand toward the trail.

FADE TO BLACK