

A Cold Day in December

by David Stea

Setting: front room of a small house in Brooklyn

Cast: Sylvia Garson, mother, dressed in a housecoat
Bob ("Robbie") Garson, her 14-year-old son
Moses Schreiber, orthodox neighbor

Sylvia and Bob are seated at a right angle to each other near the front door of the house; Bob has a view of the outside of the entrance door through a window adjacent his seat

[doorbell rings]

BOB; Mizzabul night for anyone to be out. Oh well, there goes the doorbell

SILVIA; Yes, I heard it. Don't get up, I'll answer it. [makes motions of opening the door]

SYLVIA; Hello

MOSES; I'm Moses Schreiber, your next door neighbor

SYLVIA; Yes, I know who you are. Please come in. It's freezing out there!

MOSES; Sorry, I can't.

SYLVIA; Why not? I'M freezing

MOSES; We're not permitted to enter non-Jewish houses...

SYLVIA; But I'm Jewish!

MOSES; I know that, but you're not our kind of Jewish.

SYLVIA; What do you mean by kinds? What kind are you?

MOSES

What we think of as real Jews. [looks down, sniffs disdainfully, then brushes at his pants leg] [shouts] Get that cat away from me! Sorry...we don't like animals.

SYLVIA

The cat's gone out. Now, what do you want? [shivers, wraps housecoat more closely around her] How can I help you?

MOSES; I have to go to *schul* and my car won't start.

SYLVIA

My husband's the expert on that and he's in the city. Won't be back for several hours. Why don't you call a taxi or a car service?

MOSES; We can't take taxis or car services?

SYLVIA; Please excuse my abysmal ignorance, but I think I know why...don't I?

MOSES; You do?

SYLVIA

Yes. The drivers are not from your community. Transportation to the Catskills seems to work the same way. However, if you haven't any other requests, I need to close the door to keep from turning into an icicle [coughs repeatedly]

MOSES; Well, sorry to have bothered you. [sound of door closing]

SYLVIA [returns to her chair, coughing some more, addresses Bobby]

This isn't the first time something like this has happened, but these "community members" usually use the telephone. This guy wants me to catch pneumonia!

BOB

Sometimes I've had to answer those calls but I can't understand what they're getting at and can't answer them. I guess that I can't explain myself, either.

SYLVIA; I'm not sure I get what you're about.

BOB

Well, I'm not complaining, but...then again I guess I am because there are some things you just haven't explained to me.

SYLVIA; Like..... what?

BOB

Well...in my last school, kids got released time for religious instruction on Wednesday afternoons. Jewish kids went to the synagogue and Italian kids to St. Edmund's down the street on Ocean Avenue.

SYLVIA; Yes, I know.

BOB

So I was the only one left in our classroom. At first teachers just gave me something to read, then left me alone...later they devised challenging things for me to do

SYLVIA

You never complained about this. Anyway you're not in that school any more...

BOB

Yes, well...now the Jewish boys go to an after-school program to prepare for their bar-mitzvahs. They asked me "are you Jewish?" So I said yes...

SYLVIA; Go on.

BOB

Then they asked "when you gonna get bar-mitzvahed?" I didn't know what to answer...

SYLVIA; So you said...

BOB

I didn't know what to say, either. So they would reply "you're not a real Jew unless you're bar-mitavahed". The guy who came to the door just now said his community was the "real Jews". That means that we're not, right?

SYLVIA; No, wrong.

BOB

I dunno. When I was younger I thought there were two religions: Jewish and Italian. Then one day a new kid appeared in the classroom. And a guy in the next row turned to me and said "hey you know that new kid, Eric Sanders? He's a Protestant! I asked "what's that?"

SYLVIA; The majority of Americans are Protestants.

BOB

They don't go to my school. Do they live around here? I never met any. At least, none of whom I knew were Protestants. Are they like Italians?

SYLVIA;

No, but they're both Christians. You've got a few things to learn yet. I'm beginning to regret that your dad and I decided to skip the religion issue altogether. Religion divides people, so we just didn't have any religion in this house. We were all supposed to be Americans, even though our parents came from other places. And we were supposed to practice "tolerance".
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