

## WORDS WON'T HELP YOU HERE

*(Inside a gas station. The CLERK is reading a paper, bored. He never looks up from it if he can help it. There is a sign that reads WORDS WON'T HELP YOU HERE by his register. A man enters.)*

**RUEBEN.** *(Referring to the sign:)* That's cute. *(Plunking his selections on the counter:)* There we go.

**CLERK.** Where?

**RUEBEN.** What? Oh. Um. Ha ha ha. I mean, this is all I need.

**CLERK.** On earth?

**RUEBEN.** Let me start over.

**CLERK.** I'm game.

**RUEBEN.** The candy bar, a pack of Gettysburg Ultralights and ten dollars on pump six.

**CLERK.** A cement mixer, a blow torch and 28 buckets of dead fish.

**RUEBEN.** I'm sorry?

**CLERK.** Weren't we being declarative?

**RUEBEN.** Declarative?

**CLERK.** I thought we were declaring random nouns to the universe.

**RUEBEN.** Uh, well, no. I was giving you my —

**CLERK.** No you weren't. You listed a bunch of objects.

**RUEBEN.** Yes, but the implication was that you would ring me up.

**CLERK.** I can't rely on implications. What if I'm wrong?

**RUEBEN.** How could you be —

**CLERK.** I was just now.

**RUEBEN.** All right. Let's try this again.

**CLERK.** I'm game.

**RUEBEN.** I would like this candy bar, a pack of Gettysburg Ultralights and ten dollars on pump six.

**CLERK.** We vend those.

**RUEBEN.** Sorry?

**CLERK.** We vend those. You could buy them here. Just tossing that out as a solution.

**RUEBEN.** I...uh...

**CLERK.** I mean, how do you think we stay open? Takes more than just the music to entice quality personnel like me to work in a dump like this.

*(A silence.)*

**RUEBEN.** You're going to be difficult, aren't you?

**CLERK.** How have I been so far?

*(A silence.)*

**RUEBEN.** I would like to purchase these items that you so fortuitously have for sale. Please.

**CLERK.** Would you now? Would that please you? Would that tickle your girlish fancy?

**RUEBEN.** Now hang on.

**CLERK.** To what?

**RUEBEN.** See here!

*(The CLERK looks up at him. Then he returns to reading. RUEBEN's wife JANINE enters.)*

**JANINE.** Honey, it's hot in that car.

**RUEBEN.** I know.

**JANINE.** What's taking so long?

**RUEBEN.** Honey, go back to the car. I'll be there in a minute.

**JANINE.** Don't forget my smokes.

RUEBEN. Yup. Fine.

*(She exits.)*

RUEBEN. Look. I don't mean to be a problem.

CLERK. You don't?

RUEBEN. No, I don't!

CLERK. So it's unintentional then.

RUEBEN. What's your problem?

CLERK. I don't feel like we've gotten to that stage of vulnerability in our relationship yet.

RUEBEN. This is incredible.

CLERK. Oh?

RUEBEN. To be perfectly honest, you are starting to annoy me.

CLERK. To be *perfectly* honest?

RUEBEN. You have no intention of selling me these things, do you?

CLERK. Of course I do. It's my job. How could I not do my job? It would contradict my entire reason for being here.

*(He flips a page. JANINE enters again.)*

JANINE. Just curious, honey, when did buying cigarettes gain so many levels of complexity?

RUEBEN. This *isn't easy*, Janine!

JANINE. You're no further along than when I left you.

RUEBEN. YOU try it.

JANINE. The kids are getting really fidgety...

RUEBEN. I'LL BE THERE IN A MINUTE.

*(She exits.)*

CLERK. Charming wife you've got there.

RUEBEN. Don't get smart.

**CLERK.** Remain stupid then?

**RUEBEN.** Damn it!

**CLERK.** I freely damn it. Damn it, I do. Damned it is, I deem it damned.

**RUEBEN.** Listen you. I intend to complete this transaction.

**CLERK.** Will I be a part of it?

**RUEBEN.** I can't see how you can avoid it.

**CLERK.** Watch and learn.

**RUEBEN.** I've got money right here.

**CLERK.** Ah, money. This changes everything. I am now vendor, you the vendee. Our whole relationship has transformed. I see you through new eyes. We have a common ground – money. Hallelujah.

*(He flips the page.)*

**RUEBEN.** God damn it!

**CLERK.** Oh, I wasn't good enough to damn it, you had to drag God into it now?

**RUEBEN.** Be quiet!

**CLERK.** I'm hurt. How could you do this to our newfound trust?

**RUEBEN.** Shut up!

**CLERK.** I don't see how I can recover from this staggering emotional blow.

**RUEBEN.** SELL ME THESE ITEMS.

**CLERK.** Right now, in the midst of my despondency? I can barely look at you, much less conduct a transaction.

*(He flips a page. JANINE enters again.)*

**JANINE.** What the *hell* is taking so long?

**RUEBEN.** *(Staring furiously at the CLERK:)* He's not going to win.

**JANINE.** Win what?

**RUEBEN.** Just...just hold on.

**JANINE.** For God's sake.

*(JANINE storms up to the counter, takes some bills out of her purse, snatches the items for sale and slams some money down on the counter. Wordlessly and without looking up, the CLERK rings her up and gives her her change. She takes the change, snatches up the items, and starts to work past her startled husband.)*

**JANINE.** Now come out to the car. Honestly.

*(She leaves. RUEBEN is dumbfounded. He slams his fist onto the counter.)*

**RUEBEN.** Hey. Hey.

**CLERK.** Welcome to the 24<sup>th</sup> Street Pump N Munch. May I help you?

**RUEBEN.** Aw forget it.

*(He starts to leave.)*

**CLERK.** All righty then. Have a good one.

**RUEBEN.** Yeah, well, I'll try.

**CLERK.** That's all you can do.

**RUEBEN.** Yeah, nothing more you can do.

**CLERK.** That's what they say.

**RUEBEN.** *(Unwilling to let the CLERK get in the last word:)* Yeah. Right. Well, take it easy.

**CLERK.** Hey, I do it every day.

**RUEBEN.** *(Lamely:)* Well...that's good for you.

**CLERK.** What's good for me is good for you.

**RUEBEN.** Yeah, um, right. Well, good bye.

*(He tries to dash out the door before CLERK can say something, but fails.)*

**CLERK.** Come and see us again, sir.

**RUEBEN.** Well, I just may do that.

**CLERK.** Looking forward to it.

**RUEBEN.** So take care.

**CLERK.** Rightbackatcha.

**RUEBEN.** *(Exploding:)* DAMN it!

**JANINE.** *(Entering back into the store, irritated:)* COME to the CAR.

**RUEBEN.** I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT THE LAST WORD!

**JANINE.** Have you LOST your MIND? *(Pushing him out the door, to CLERK:)* Thanks a lot!

**CLERK.** Have a great day!

*(RUEBEN screams in frustration offstage. The CLERK, without looking up, marks off a notch on a chalkboard which already has a lot of notches on it. He contentedly reads. Blackout.)*