

Let him Retrogress (6-25-01)

Time line

SCENE I. Friday. Anthony and Joseph. Joseph's living room.

1. Anthony finds out Melissa left Joseph.
2. Anthony asks why he didn't talk to her
3. Joseph says he feels like shit (reluctantly)

SCENE II. Friday Night. Anthony and Nicole. Their living room.

1. Anthony tells Nicole Sherry/Larry marriage.
2. They decide to play tennis again. Have tennis rackets for week.
3. Discuss 2 ½ years until Nicole graduates.

SCENE III. Thursday. Anthony and Nicole's living room.

1. Back from first jog.
2. Joseph tells Anthony Sherry/Larry marriage
3. Joseph says he feels like he's in a rut
4. Melissa gets a new job at hospital
5. Anthony says why he became Chemistry teacher
6. Anthony says he'd marry Nicole in a heart beat
7. Joseph says they had four-year last week (pizza/movie)
8. Joseph says what he likes about Melissa
9. Joseph says he doesn't know if he's in love with Melissa
10. Joseph says Melissa and he aren't interested in marriage
11. Anthony tells Joseph he should talk to Melissa

SCENE IV. Sunday. Anthony and Nicole's living room.

1. Melissa says she hasn't heard from Joseph since they split up
2. Nicole tells Melissa about Anthony's love letters
3. Melissa says Joseph and her don't talk
4. Melissa says she left Joseph because she doesn't think he's in love with her
5. Melissa tells Nicole what they did for their anniversary (pizza/movie)
6. Melissa says there's a difference between love and in love

SCENE V. The Prior Friday. Joseph and Melissa's living room.

1. Anthony borrows tennis rackets
2. Joseph says Melissa's been offered a later job.
3. They decide to start jogging again
4. Four year anniversary tonight
5. Joseph says he brings Melissa in public like showdog
6. Anthony says he gets into rel. for personal betterment

SCENE VI. Monday. Anthony and Nicole's living room.

1. Nicole's on the phone with Melissa
2. Nicole learns Melissa's at nurse's place
3. Anthony and Nicole discuss phone call
4. Anthony finds out Nicole's unconditional love
5. Anthony denies the way he feels
6. They leave to have sex

SCENE I. Friday. Joseph and Melissa's living Room. [\(top\)](#)

Anthony: What do you mean she's gone?

Joseph: I don't know how I can be more clear, Anthony, she's gone.

Anthony: She just left?

Joseph: That's normally how they do it.

Anthony: I can't believe she's gone.

Joseph: You're telling me.

Anthony: What did she say?

Joseph: The usual.

Anthony: The usual? What's *the usual*? How come you know *the usual*?

Joseph: You know, the usual.

Anthony: I can't believe you're taking it like this.

Joseph: You'd think I should be more broken up, huh?

Anthony: I think you should be more human.

Joseph: What the hell does that mean?

Anthony: Jesus, Joseph, you're girlfriend of four years dumped you.

Joseph: Left me, not—

Anthony: And you're telling me it's usual.

Joseph: Not usual. *The usual*. She said the usual—

Anthony: And you're not even broken up—

Joseph: —Hey—

Anthony: You're just sitting back sipping a beer—

Joseph: —HEY—

Anthony: Acting like this happens all the time.

Joseph: It DOES happen all the time! *(beat)* All over the world, guys are getting dumped—*left*—by women. It happens every day, Anthony.

Anthony: But not to you.

Joseph: Why should I be any different?

Anthony: Because you were good together. You've been together for a long time.

Joseph: Since sophomore year.

Anthony: A long time. And now it's over and it happens all the time.

Joseph: Beer?

Anthony: No. I mean, yes, please. But no it doesn't happen all the time.

Joseph: Sure it does.

Anthony: I can't believe you're acting like this.

Joseph: Glass?

Anthony: I'd like to think if it were to happen to me I would feel a little more, more—no, thanks—I guess just feel *more* right now.

Joseph: Me too.

Anthony: It *is* happening to you.

Joseph: No shit.

Anthony: And as far as I can tell, you're not feeling anything. You were more broken up about the Mets losing the Subway Series last year.

Joseph: God, don't bring it up.

Anthony: Or, or, or the time you dropped your beer at Barney Mac's and dumped a whole pack of cigarettes in it when you bent over to pick—

Joseph: Jesus, Anthony, are you *trying* to make me cry?

Anthony: Of course not. I don't know, maybe. I just, I think you're taking this *too* well.

Joseph: Look. Melissa has made up her mind. What use is it going to make to pine over her?

Anthony: That's stupid.

Joseph: No it's not.

Anthony: It's stupid!

Joseph: How is that stupid?

Anthony: That's like saying, Melissa got hit by a cab. She made up her mind to die. What's the use crying over her?

Joseph: Now that's stupid.

Anthony: It's the same thing.

Joseph: It is not the same thing. Melissa didn't die, she dumped me.

Anthony: Left you.

Joseph: Yeah. See? It's entirely different.

Anthony: I guess you're right.

Joseph: I am.

Anthony: I guess. I'd like to think that if I got transferred to another city you'd be a little broken up.

Joseph: Of course I would.

Anthony: Yeah, but why? Why would you be sad? Why would you be sad if I left town if you're not sad that Melissa doesn't want to be with you anymore?

Joseph: I don't know. Just 'cause.

Anthony: Why, though?

Joseph: Maybe because I've known you longer.

Anthony: What? That's ridiculous!

Joseph: I have.

Anthony: So! We're not lovers, Joseph. I haven't been dating you for the past four years. I haven't been living with you for the past three. I sure as hell haven't slept with you for the past—

Joseph: That's a good thing.

Anthony: What the hell is wrong with you???

Joseph: What? That's a compliment.

Anthony: That you'd miss me, but you don't miss your fuckin' girlfriend? That's not a compliment, Joseph. That's just wrong.

Joseph: So now it's my problem?

Anthony: Of course it is! It's always been your problem! She left you, remember?

Joseph: Dumped.

Anthony: Whatever. She's gone. She left because of something you've done, or said. That makes it your problem. And it's even worse to not feel a thing about it. I bet you didn't even talk to her, did you?

Joseph: No.

Anthony: You promised me you'd talk to her.

Joseph: I didn't promise you.

Anthony: Why didn't you talk to her?

Joseph: I never got a chance. She's working later hours.

Anthony: I know, you told me. So?

Joseph: So, it never came up.

Anthony: Never came up? That's bullshit!

Joseph: Now you're on her side?

Anthony: Joseph! There are no sides here. This is supposedly love! Christ, you're probably the type of person that counts how long you've waited for her each week; the kind that keeps a running tally of who-called-who last and who's turn it is. This isn't a game, Joseph. You don't wait for your turn to spin and collect your cash.

Joseph: It sounds like you're on her side.

Anthony: Well maybe I am, then. If you can't get past the trivial little things involved in a relationship, maybe you shouldn't be in one.

Joseph: That's not fair.

Anthony: For fuck's sake, Joseph, open your eyes. You're future left you and you didn't even bother to inquire why.

Joseph: She told me why.

Anthony: Oh right, sorry, I forgot. The usual. Well, if it's so usual, did it ever occur to you that that was easier to say than why she really left? Christ, you can be so thickheaded. What did she say? That you two have grown apart? That you've changed? That she's changed?

Joseph: No.

Anthony: That you two need to take some time away to figure out things and see if it's all worth it?

Joseph: No, that's not what she said.

Anthony: What'd she say then?

(beat)

Joseph: She said...she was confused. That she didn't know what she wanted, but she did know that this wasn't it.

Anthony *(sarcastic)*: Oh, the usual.

Joseph: That's what I said.

Anthony: God you're so fucking stupid, sometimes!

Joseph: What?

Anthony: Do you think she was telling the truth? Do you think that's why she left? Because she was confused?

Joseph: That's what she said.

Anthony: So you just let her walk out? Bye Melissa, thanks for the last four years. Good luck figuring out what you want.

Joseph: No.

Anthony: But she did walk out, right?

Joseph: Yes.

Anthony: And you let her, right?

Joseph: What was I going to do? Try to stop her?

Anthony: At the least, Joseph. At the least. And because you didn't, you let her walk out. The last thing you gave her was the impression that you don't care; that you're apathetic about the whole thing. Just let her decide what she wants and if she wants to come back, so be it. If she doesn't, she's made up her mind and it's nothing to get broken up about.

Joseph: I guess.

Anthony: You guess. *(exasperated)* Fine. You guess you got it all figured out, then.

Joseph: Where are you going?

Anthony: I can't be here anymore.

Joseph: You're dumping me too now?

Anthony: It's a joke to you, huh? This whole thing is some big drama. You let it go on as long as you can, like a *(gesturing with fingers)* fuckin'...fuckin' *(shaking head in desperation)*

Joseph: Puppeteer?

Anthony: —*puppeteer* until the show's over and when it is, you just sit back and have a beer.

Joseph: It's not like that, Anthony.

Anthony: Good bye, Joseph.

Joseph: Fine go.

Anthony: Yeah, *fine go*. Your answer for everything: *fine go*. But tell me, before I do, what was it that she was confused about? Do you know what you want? After four years, could you not know what you want?

Joseph: I guess she didn't. I don't know, women are weird like that.

Anthony: No, Joseph. No they're not. They think just like us. They use their brains the same way. They just care more than us. They're considerate, they're sensitive. They devote. (*Joseph laughs*) When you're wondering if you're going to get laid every night, they're wondering how they can make you happy. We talk the same language. It's just that the focus is different. (*beat*) And as far as I'm concerned you just focus on yourself.

Joseph: Anthony, wait. (*Anthony turns from doorway. Joseph is reluctant*) Of course I feel. I feel awful. If you want to know the truth, I feel nauseas. I'm mortified she's gone for good. I'm scared to death that she meant what she said about not wanting to be here, with me. I'm all over the place. I just, it's hard for me to talk about this and the easiest way for me to cope is to, to...

Anthony: Pretend like it didn't happen?

Joseph: Yeah.

Anthony: And act like you don't care?

Joseph: Yeah. (*beat*)

Anthony (*smiling*): Good. You should feel bad. (*Joseph give a half-hearted laugh*) You should feel like complete shit (*They slightly laugh a bit more*). Now tell her that. (*Anthony reaffirms his statement with a gesture and leaves. Joseph puts his beer on the coffee table, sits down, and leans forward with his elbows on his knees. Lights out.*)

SCENE II. Friday night. Anthony and Nicole's living room. ([top](#))

Anthony (*calling from offstage*): Nicole!

Nicole: Hey honey.

Anthony: Melissa left Joseph.

Nicole: Yeah, I heard.

Anthony: Of course you did.

Nicole: Melissa called me, in tears.

Anthony: I figured. Did she say why she left him?

Nicole: Nope, she just called him a mistake.

Anthony: Wow, so this is for real, huh?

Nicole: It would seem.

Anthony: Hey, you've got access to the campus gyms all semester, right?

Nicole: Yeah, why? You want to play tennis again?

Anthony: Sure, it was fun.

Nicole: Ok. Let's play this weekend.

Anthony: Perfect.

Nicole: Do you think they'll mind if we keep their rackets for an extra week? We've had them since last Friday.

Anthony: Nah, I doubt they'll be playing doubles for a little while, at least until they make up.

Nicole: Hopefully, it's soon. I can't stand seeing them like this.

Anthony: Me neither. *(beat)* How's studying going?

Nicole: All right. It's taking me a while to get back into the groove of it. I never wanted to open up a textbook again when I left the first time.

Anthony: To think, in two years I'll be sleeping with a social worker. I'm proud of you.

Nicole: I know you are, Anthony, and it's two and a half years. Now, you can mess up a bunch of high school girls' minds by seducing them in their Chemistry classes, and I can fix them.

Anthony: Hey.

Nicole: I'm just saying we're made for each other. I appreciate your support too.

Anthony: What support? I cook you dinner sometimes, which I should be doing anyway, quiz you now and then, and give you back rubs while you're studying.

Nicole: I'm convinced your back rubs are what got me an A on my Psych test the other day. *(They kiss)*

Anthony: Nah, I think you're just smart.

Nicole: Yeah, you're probably right *(they laugh)*.

Anthony: You know, something like what's happening with Melissa and Joseph is enough to wake you up. They say that most people who don't marry within five years of living together end up breaking it off.

Nicole: That's better than marrying and then breaking it off. It's less humiliating.

Anthony: And costly. Ooh, you know who Joseph says is getting married?

Nicole: Who?

Anthony: Remember Sherry from the Delta Chi house, the take-one-down-pass-her-around girl?

Nicole: Be nice. She couldn't help it if she sang that every time she got drunk.

Anthony: It wasn't every time she got drunk, it was every time she got laid.

Nicole: I figured they were one in the same. Poor girl. How can someone have so little respect for themselves.

Anthony: The frat boys didn't mind. In fact, I seem to remember them all singing along.

Nicole: Anthony, stop.

Anthony: She's getting married to, of all people, Larry Naughton.

Nicole: You're kidding! I thought he'd never leave frat mode.

Anthony: I guess you were right. And to the sorority whore.

Nicole: Anthony!

Anthony: I mean to the clean, wholesome, virtuous sorority whore.

Nicole (laughing): That's better. Wow, Sherry and Larry.

Anthony: I always hated that. When couples' names rhyme. You don't think that's why they're getting married, do you ?

Nicole: Because their names rhyme? No, I doubt that was the reason.

Anthony: Like, what if my name was Cole or something.

Nicole: Nicole and Cole? That sounds silly.

Anthony: That's what I mean.

Nicole: I wouldn't marry you.

Anthony: If my name was Cole?

Nicole: Yeah.

Anthony: I thought you said that'd hardly be a reason to make or break a relationship.

Nicole: I said that it wouldn't be the reason to marry. It would, however, be a major reason not to.

Anthony: You seriously wouldn't marry me if my name was Cole? *(beat. Exchange glances. They laugh)*

Nicole: Anyway, I'm sure there was a different reason they're getting married.

Anthony: Yeah, what's that?

Nicole: Larry had quite the reputation.

Anthony: Sherry had one herself.

Nicole: But Larry's had a little more...girth to it. *(They glance to each other again)* Speaking from speculation, of course, I heard that Larry had quite the Little Larry.

Anthony: That's certainly not a reason to marry.

Nicole: Oh, I don't know... *(beat)*

(Anthony charges Nicole on the couch. Both of them are laughing. Anthony gets on top of Nicole and they look at each other. Slowly they kiss)

Nicole: Don't worry, Anthony...you're well worth marrying in that aspect.

Anthony: I hope so. It doesn't matter, though, I wouldn't marry you anyway.

Nicole: What? Why?

Anthony: Not unless you change your name to Bethany. *(they laugh)*

Nicole *(singing while pulling his head to hers):* Anthony and Bethany, sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love...

(Lights out.)

SCENE III. Thursday. Anthony and Nicole's living room. [\(top\)](#)
(Joseph jogs in the door. Talking to Anthony, off stage)

Joseph: I grabbed a water.

Anthony: That's fine.

Joseph: I swear if it weren't for the last fifty-or-so feet, I wouldn't feel like I was getting a workout at all.

Anthony: That's because it's uphill. Besides, you're getting old.

Joseph: I'm in the peak of my prime.

Anthony: Yeah, but once you hit 26 it's all downhill from there.

Joseph: What?

Anthony: I said once you hit 26 it's all downhill from there.

Joseph: Bullshit.

Anthony: Yeah, I'm just trying to scare you.

Joseph: Do you ever think about school?

Anthony: No, not so much anymore.

Joseph: Yeah, me neither.

(beat)

Anthony: Why?

Joseph: I was thinking about it today. I used to think about it a lot. When we graduated, we were perfectly ready to go into the working world, you know? Ready to take our slice of the pie.

Anthony: I was just ready to date teachers.

Joseph: Yeah, you had a thing for your chemistry teacher, didn't you?

Anthony: And my lab partner.

Joseph: Ooh, a threesome in the science wing. I can see it now: candles, the smell of incense and formaldehyde. Making sweet love with two women on top of the Petrie dishes.

Anthony: That's sick.

Joseph: I know.

Anthony *(emerging onstage)*: Anyway, it'd be by the eyewash sink. There's better mood lighting under the sterilization lamp.

Joseph: Good call.

Anthony: I wonder if that's why I decided to become a chemistry teacher.

Joseph: To get a second shot at lab partner and science teacher ménage-a-trois?

Anthony: No, because of the atmosphere in that class. We were so horny back in school.

Joseph: Still am.

Anthony: Agreed.

Joseph: But that's not what I was thinking about. We didn't know life kept going in the same routine after four months, you know? When each semester was over, it was time to start over. No one ever got in a rut.

Anthony: Yeah, now it's the same job over and over. Same schedule over and over.

Joseph: Same girl over and over.

Anthony: There's nothing wrong with that.

Joseph: No, but it's just different.

Anthony: That was four years ago. Things change.

Joseph: No, that's just it. They don't change. It loses its appeal when you know what's going to happen 16 weeks down the road.

Anthony: What does?

Joseph: Life. *(beat)* Speaking of school, Melissa told me Sherry McKenzie is getting married.

Anthony: *(singing)* 99 bottles of beer on the wall, 99 bottles of beer...

Joseph: Yeah, Sherry McKenzie. And guess to who she's getting married.

Anthony: Whom.

Joseph: Whatever. Big Larry Naughton.

Anthony: No shit. When are they tying the knot.

Joseph: Don't know. This summer, maybe. They're so young.

Anthony: They're our age, Joseph.

Joseph: That's what I mean, they're so young.

Anthony: So you two haven't even considered marriage?

Joseph: What, Melissa and me? No. We're just taking it easy.

Anthony: You've never discussed it?

Joseph: Not really.

Anthony: Not really?

Joseph: Not really.

Anthony: How are you two doing?

Joseph: Fine.

Anthony: Really?

Joseph: Yeah. We just had our four-year anniversary last week.

Anthony: That's what Nicole said. What'd you guys do?

Joseph: Blockbuster and Dominoes.

Anthony: Pizza or the game?

Joseph: Huh?

Anthony: The dominoes.

Joseph: Oh, the pizza.

Anthony: Four years and you haven't even discussed marriage?

Joseph: Oh, she'll bring it up the way only a woman can. Mention it off the cuff when we see limos with "Just Married" signs going down 5th Avenue, or when it's in a movie or something. We're not ready for all that, yet.

Anthony: She's not, or you're not?

Joseph: We're both not.

Anthony: I don't know, Joseph. If she brings it up...

Joseph: What about you two?

Anthony: Nicole and I? We've talked about it.

Joseph: Yeah, and...

Anthony: We decided to discuss it when she graduates.

Joseph: Lucky. You get a two-year deferment.

Anthony: Two-and-a-half year.

Joseph: Even better.

Anthony: You make it sound like a mortgage.

Joseph: It is, in a way. You get all the comforts of a home—

Both: And pay later.

Anthony (*They laugh. Anthony, sarcastically*): Ha Ha. (*beat*) But if she wanted to get married now, I'd do it.

Joseph: You want to spend the rest of your life with her? Talk about ruts.

Anthony: Yeah. That's a rut I'd love to be in. Imagine waking up every morning next to a woman you love. Sleeping with the same woman over and over, but still the only woman you every want to sleep with. The only one you ever fantasize about.

Joseph: That's bullshit.

Anthony: What?

Joseph: Are you telling me that you never fantasize about other women?

Anthony: Yeah.

Joseph: Hey, I know you. We shared a dorm freshman year, remember? There's no way that guy I knew doesn't fantasize about other women.

Anthony: Well, I do, but—

Joseph: I knew it!

Anthony: But it's not the same. There's these women that are completely fake. All I know about them is their picture in a magazine, or their role in a sitcom. Some of Nicole's greatest attributes are the ones you can't see.

Joseph: Well obviously, she keeps them covered.

Anthony: No, I mean her mind. I can honestly say it's the most attractive part of her.

Joseph: Really?

Anthony: Her tits are a close second though.

Joseph: I knew it.

Anthony: She's just, God, she's infectious.

Joseph: That's why you'd marry her? Because she's infectious? Maybe you'd better let me write your engagement proposal, man.

Anthony (*snickering*): You know what I mean.

Joseph: Yeah.

Anthony: What is it about Melissa?

Joseph: Melissa? Hmm, there's so much to choose from.

Anthony: You've been with her four years and you don't know what you like best about her?

Joseph: No, I know, but I'm trying to be more prolific than just the erogenous zones.

Anthony: Well, what?

Joseph: Well, this is going to sound stupid, but when she's deep in thought, I like the way she tilts her head and her forehead wrinkles.

Anthony: And?

Joseph: And when we're driving somewhere, and someone'll say something funny, she forgets she's smiling. It's hilarious. She can drive ten miles before she realizes she still smiling. *(they laugh)*

Anthony: And?

Joseph: And...she knows me inside and out. She knows the way I feel just by walking in the room and looking at me.

Anthony: Yeah.

Joseph: She knows how to make me feel better without saying a word.

Anthony: Yeah.

Joseph: And we don't even do anything, either. We're just *together*.

Anthony: She holds you?

Joseph: No.

Anthony: It's all right.

Joseph: Well, kinda. She sits next to me on a couch and tucks her toes under me. She brings her knees around me and wraps her arms around both me and them. She drives me insane stroking my hair.

Anthony: I thought you said nothing sexual.

Joseph: That's the weird part. It *isn't* sexual. It's nurturing.

Anthony: Yeah.

Joseph: She'd make a great mother.

Anthony: Anything else?

Joseph: I like to listen to her breathe. Especially when she's asleep and she doesn't know I'm listening.

Anthony: Comforting?

Joseph: You wouldn't believe.

Anthony (*nodding*): And this is the woman you're afraid to marry.

Joseph: I'm not afraid. It just, it's just not a priority right now.

Anthony: Sure. (*beat*) So how are you two?

Joseph: Good. Same as normal, you know. Good.

Anthony: Yeah?

Joseph: Yeah. I don't see her as much. She got a new job at the hospital. They promoted her, thank God. Now I don't have to worry about her smelling like the old guy she used to sponge bathe.

Anthony: Sick.

Joseph: She's a second shift EMS Assistant. She takes care of them when they leave the ambulance and wheels them to their rooms, assigns them doctors or surgeons. You know, ER stuff.

Anthony: I've seen the show.

Joseph: I worry about her though.

Anthony: Why?

Joseph: Who's to say some sicko in the stretcher doesn't have a knife or gun? And if they're still all messed up on drugs or adrenaline from a turf war, who's to say they're not gonna do something to her.

Anthony: Have you told her this?

Joseph: No.

Anthony: Why not?

Joseph: I don't know. I don't see her as much anymore. And I don't want to seem to overprotecting.

Anthony: That's not overprotecting. That's concern. Anyway, women like protection to a degree. They like to know you worry.

Joseph: Thank you, Dr. Drew.

Anthony: You're welcome. Glad to help.

Joseph: And when she comes home, she's normally too tired to talk. I miss our quality time together.

Anthony: Tell her that too.

Joseph: And we're both a little short-tempered with each other lately.

Anthony: Did she say why? Or if she's noticed?

Joseph: No, I haven't mentioned it to her yet.

Anthony: Jesus, don't the two of you talk?

Joseph: Yes! But, well, we're at an awkward stage right now, what with her new job.

Anthony: It should never be awkward to talk to the woman you love.

Joseph: Do we have time for another caller?

Anthony: Stop. *(beat)* You do love her, right?

Joseph: Yeah.

Anthony: So talk to her.

Joseph: I just don't know if I'm in love with her.

Anthony: There's a difference?

Joseph: Of course there is.

Anthony: I don't follow.

Joseph: Well, you can love someone like you love your parents or your pets or children, and you can be *in love* with them.

Anthony: You love Melissa like you love pets?

Joseph: No.

Anthony: Or children?

Joseph: Jesus, no, Anthony. That's sick *(Anthony laughs)*. I just feel like she's...I don't know. Never mind.

Anthony: Joseph.

Joseph: Yeah.

Anthony: Talk to her.

Joseph: I will.

Anthony: I mean soon, Joseph.

Joseph: I will!

Anthony: You're not getting any younger.

Joseph: I know.

Anthony: And you can't even make it up the hill anymore. *(Joseph flips him off. beat)* Seriously.

Joseph: I will.

SCENE IV. Sunday. Anthony and Nicole's living room. [\(top\)](#)

Melissa: Are you sure you're not busy?

Nicole: I need a break. Come on in.

Melissa: I don't want to interrupt your studying.

Nicole: Melissa, we've known each other for how long now? You've never apologized for interrupting me before.

Melissa: I'm sorry. I don't know why I said that.

Nicole: Will you stop apologizing?

Melissa: Sorry. *(exchange glance)* I don't know what's going on with me these past two days.

Nicole: I do.

Melissa: Yeah, well, maybe that may have something to do with it.

Nicole: Of course it does. Do you want anything to drink?

Melissa: Only if it's not a problem. And then I'll get going so you can get back.

Nicole: No, you won't. You're going to stay here until I say you can leave.

Melissa: Why?

Nicole: Because we need to talk. I haven't seen you since Thursday and it's already Sunday. Then Friday you called me and said you were breaking up with the light of your life and wouldn't tell me what happened. We used to talk every day. You haven't even told me about your job yet.

Melissa: You've obviously heard from Joseph.

Nicole: Kinda. After we spoke on the phone, Anthony came home from visiting with him.

Melissa: Yeah? What'd he say?

Nicole: Not much, just that you dumped him.

Melissa: I didn't dump him, I left him. There's a difference.

Nicole: You left him. He didn't say why. And all you said, on the phone, was that he was a mistake. What happened?

Melissa: I'm going to need that drink first.

Nicole: Keep talking. I'll fix us both one.

Melissa: Thanks. You know I bet he wasn't even upset.

Nicole: Anthony said he was broken up.

Melissa: Joseph? Broken up?

Nicole: That's what Anthony said.

Melissa: I find that hard to believe.

Nicole: He said Joseph was worried that this is for good.

Melissa: Why is he telling Anthony this instead of me?

Nicole: You know how men are. They can't let anyone in on how they really feel.

Melissa: Anthony's not like that.

Nicole: He can be, at times. *(she hands Melissa the drink)*

Melissa: Thank you. What do you do?

Nicole: I give him the look.

Melissa: The look? *(Nicole give her an evil stare)* Oh, the look. And that works?

Nicole: Normally. Either that or we both end up laughing and he just breaks down and says "You make it impossible for me to be mad at you."

Melissa: That's cute. He's always been that easy to talk to?

Nicole: Not really. When we first started dating, I had to write him a note every time I was upset. I couldn't look him in the eye and tell him the way I felt.

Melissa: Why?

Nicole: I don't know, I felt stupid. Or humiliated, or embarrassed. Either way, I would always start to cry, no matter how trivial the matter was.

Melissa: So you wrote him a note?

Nicole: Mm-hmm. And he'd write one back.

Melissa: He did?

Nicole: Mm-hmm. They'd normally be an apology with a way of fixing the problem and the second half would be a love letter.

Melissa: He writes you love letters.

Nicole: Til this day. Sometimes they're sweet. Sometimes they're raunchy.

Melissa: Which ones do you like better.

Nicole: It's tough to say. They're both pretty good. I guess it depends on what mood I'm in.

Melissa: I'd kill for a love letter. I used to get them all the time in college, remember?

Nicole: Yeah, I used to envy you.

Melissa: You don't write notes anymore when you're mad?

Nicole: Nope.

Melissa: But he still writes love letters?

Nicole: Yup.

Melissa: Why'd you stop?

Nicole: Eventually, it got easier to confront him. I know there's no problem we can't work out and that I don't have to feel stupid anymore. I don't cry anymore about things like that. Besides, I'm lazy and a letters too much work. *(they laugh. Beat)* What?

Melissa: You just have it so good. That's one thing Joseph and I can't do. We can't relate.

Nicole: You don't talk? You two always talk when we double.

Melissa: We talk, all right. But not when it's important.

Nicole: That's bad, Melissa.

Melissa: I know.

Nicole: Is that why you left him?

Melissa: No. *(finishes drink)* I left him because he's a jerk. Can I get another one of these?

Nicole: Sure.

Melissa: I don't think he's in love with me anymore.

Nicole: That's why you left him?

Melissa: Among other things, yes. I left him before he could leave me.

Nicole: What makes you so sure he was going to leave you?

Melissa: Because that's what guys do when they're not in love with you anymore. We've been together for four years, Nicole. Our anniversary was last week.

Nicole: Congratulations. What'd you do?

Melissa: Blockbuster and Dominoes.

Nicole: The game or the pizza?

Melissa: The pizza.

Nicole: I bet that wasn't your idea of a romantic evening.

Melissa: It shouldn't have mattered. As long as I was with him, I should be happy, right?

Nicole: I don't know, I think we need to go out, in public, to feel happy. Kinda a *"lookie what I got. What's your man doing for you right now?"* sorta thing.

Melissa: Maybe, but I honestly don't care what we do or how much it costs as long as we're together. But that night, it was like we weren't even together. We didn't talk at all. He hates when people talk during movies.

Nicole: Anthony too, but he normally ends up talking the whole time. It's just when others talk...

Melissa: But we're in the same position we were four years ago. He never mentions marriage. He treats me like his mother.

Nicole: And that's why you think he doesn't love you?

Melissa: I didn't say he doesn't love me.

Nicole: Yes, you did.

Melissa: No, I said he's not in love with me. There's a difference.

Nicole: Oh.

Melissa: I think he thinks of me as compassionate, not passionate.

Nicole: Safety instead of sexy.

Melissa: Yeah.

Nicole: Is sex suffering as a result of it?

Melissa: God, is it ever. Remember what I told you he used to do to me? With the—

Nicole: YES, Melissa. I remember.

Melissa: Well, he doesn't do it anymore.

Nicole: Well, he's not as agile.

Melissa: He's only 26. But that's not the problem. The problem is that he doesn't do anything anymore. We don't try new things. We still have sex, but it's fallen into what everything else in our relationship has fallen in.

Nicole: Routine?

Melissa: Yeah. Or as Joseph would say, a rut.

Nicole: Anthony too.

Melissa: Anthony's fallen into a rut?

Nicole: No, that's just something he'd say too.

Melissa: Oh.

Nicole: So what are you going to do?

Melissa: I'm going to wait.

Nicole: For what? For him to come crawling to you asking you to come home? For him to say he's miserable without you?

Melissa: Maybe. Or, in the least, for him to try to contact me.

Nicole: He hasn't even contacted you?

Melissa: Nope.

Nicole: It's Sunday. You haven't seen him since Friday morning!

Melissa: I know.

Nicole: Do you want me to send Anthony over there to find out what's going on with him?

Melissa: Thanks, Melissa, but no. If he does call me, I want it to be by his own volition. You guys don't need to be involved anymore. Let him retrogress. The rest of us will move forward.

Nicole: You sure?

Melissa: I'm sure.

Nicole: You want another?

Melissa: Sure.

SCENE V. The Prior Friday. Joseph and Melissa's living room. [\(top\)](#)

Anthony (*holding a set of tennis rackets*): Thanks, Joseph, I'll get these back to you.

Joseph enters with a cutting board, condiments, and sandwich materials on it. He sits down on the couch and starts making a few sandwiches. He hands Anthony a Coke.

Joseph: No problem. You said that NYU will let spouses play?

Anthony: Yup. As long as Nicole's going to school there we'll have access. I haven't swung one of these in years, but it's good for us to have hobbies together. You know?

(He places them by the door, on his shoes).

Joseph: I guess. Just remind me you have them. I always forget who I lend my shit to. Melissa's normally better at things like that.

Anthony: Will do. You sure you won't be needing them?

Joseph: Yeah. Melissa called me from work and said she's been offered a later shift for a pay raise. I think she's going to take it.

Anthony: What time is that?

Joseph: Three to eleven.

Anthony: What's she doing?

Joseph: I don't know. Nurse stuff. Cheese?

Anthony: Sure. So you guys won't have time to play?

Joseph: We actually haven't been playing for a few months now.

Anthony: You're kidding. You guys used to go every weekend.

Joseph: Yeah, I guess we just fell out of it. I can feel it too. I'm starting to get out of shape.

Anthony: No kidding. Maybe you should cut back on the cheese and mayo. *(beat)* Hey, if you like, I've got Thursday evenings off early, we can start jogging again. My last class is at one.

Joseph: Just like the good old days, huh?

Anthony: College? Yeah.

Joseph: I still think we'd make a great relay.

Anthony: I don't know, man, I've never liked the competition of it. I'd rather just jog and talk.

Joseph: Yeah, that's what you used to say. My theory is that you're afraid of losing.

Anthony: Could be.

Joseph: Sure. Let's start next Thursday.

Anthony: Great. I'll drop by at two. Would Melissa start her late shift next week?

Joseph: I don't know. We haven't talked about it yet. We're supposed to discuss it when she gets home.

Anthony: If she is, we can start at three if you want to get some quality time before she's off to work.

Joseph: Maybe. We've been kind of slacking in that department too.

Anthony: No kidding. I thought you guys were nymphos.

Joseph: Used to be. I guess we're getting old in many aspects. That should change tonight, though.

Anthony: What's tonight.

Joseph: Our four-year.

Anthony: Holy shit, you've been together for four years now? She kept you for that long?

Joseph: Hard to believe, huh?

Anthony: Yeah. Four years. Jesus. *(beat)* Bet you never thought that'd happen.

Joseph: What's that?

Anthony: You with a girl. Four years.

Joseph: Oh, yeah.

Anthony: What's up?

Joseph: We're so different from when we met.

Anthony: Think so?

Joseph: Yeah. She used to be this popular girl in school that everyone wanted to be with.

Anthony: Everyone?

Joseph: Well, almost everyone.

Anthony: She's different now?

Joseph: Maybe. I like to take her out sometimes. You know, to expensive restaurants and things just to watch the other guys' eyes.

Anthony: I thought your idea of a fancy restaurant was Famous Ray's Pizza.

Joseph: Funny.

Anthony: That's weird, Joseph.

Joseph: Why is that weird? Can't a guy get off watching others drool over his girlfriend?

Anthony: Yeah, I guess. But you should take her out because you want to be with her. You shouldn't do it because you want others to be envious. No offense, or anything, but that sounds self-satisfying.

Joseph: It is.

Anthony: And it's also something you do when you bring a dog to Central Park.

Joseph: What?

Anthony: You know, showcase it. Talk it up. Let all the other purebreds get jealous of your dog's form, its coat. I don't know, whatever else dog people do with their dogs.

Joseph: Yeah, I guess it is kind of similar.

Anthony: So you treat Melissa like a dog?

Joseph: No.

Anthony: You just said it was similar. Listen, next time you take her out, try not to look at the other guys' reaction. Who knows, maybe you'll have more fun just being with her.

Joseph: I didn't say that's the only reason I go in public with her.

Anthony: No, of course not.

Joseph: And I do have more fun just being with her. That's just an added perk.

Anthony: Nicole would shoot me.

Joseph: What? Why?

Anthony: If she ever thought I was bringing her to places just to watch other people get jealous.

Joseph: I told you that's not the only reason I—

Anthony: I know, I know. But think of how she'd feel if she found out. You think she'd be happy that that's a reason you take her to bars or clubs?

Joseph: Probably not.

Anthony: Would you be happy if she did that to you?

Joseph: I wouldn't care.

Anthony: Well, maybe not, but she's probably different. I know Nicole is.

Joseph: Yeah, girls think different.

Anthony: No, not women. Just some women. Some guys would too. I'm pretty sure there's some guys out there that would feel like they're being used.

Joseph: Well, that's what relationships are about.

Anthony: Being used?

Joseph: Using each other.

Anthony: What?

Joseph: Yeah, think about it. Why do you get in a relationship in the first place?

Anthony: The sex, I don't know. It's been a long time since I was single.

Joseph: How about with Nicole, then?

Anthony: Jesus, that's a couple years back. With her, I think it was because I found her interesting, unique. I wanted to find out more about her. I was curious.

Joseph: Come on, Anthony, you don't date a girl because you're curious. That's why girls date girls.

Anthony: Ok, fine. Maybe it was self-subservient. Maybe I just wanted her.

Joseph: And not just sexually, right?

Anthony: I can't believe you're under-rating sex.

Joseph: Oh, don't get me wrong, I'm still the same horn-dog I've always been and sex is still a huge part of a relationship to me.

Anthony: That's your libido talking.

Joseph: Whatever, but you see what I mean.

Anthony: Yeah. I wanted Nicole, initially, because she was gorgeous. She was popular, respected, smart, strong. I wanted her because she would add so much to me.

Joseph: It's like in high school when people date to make vertical moves on their own reputation.

Anthony: Maybe.

Joseph: But, it was more than that?

Anthony: Obviously. I wanted her because she'd make my life better. She'd make me better.

Joseph: Now, think about it, honestly. Have things really changed?

Anthony: It's a wonder the two of you made it four years.

Joseph: I'm serious, answer the question. Have things really changed?

Anthony: Am I still with her because she makes me better, you mean?

Joseph: Yeah. *(beat)* Don't worry, I won't tell anyone. *(beat)* Scouts honor.

Anthony: I think I am.

Joseph: Well, it's normal. Think about it. Why would someone bother to get in a relationship because the person they're with makes them worse? You'd have to be sadistic.

Anthony: Yeah, but I always thought . . .

Joseph: What, that your relationship was built on this higher emotion of love? This pinnacle of connection?

Anthony: I guess, but—

Joseph: It's not true, Anthony. No one can love someone without expecting something in return. No one can do anything without expecting something in return. Think about it. You do it just to please her and what do you get?

Anthony: Nothing?

Joseph: Maybe, but ultimately you expect her to please you.

Anthony *(sitting)*: That seems so . . .

Joseph: Petty.

Anthony: Yeah.

Joseph: People are petty. Relationships are petty. They're self-serving and ego-satiating. They're build on the Golden Rule, only it's warped. Do unto others as you will later expect them to do unto you.

Anthony: It can't be only that.

Joseph: It is. You're a science teacher: Every reaction has an equal reaction, right?

Anthony: Equal and opposite, and that's Physics, not chemistry.

Joseph: Same difference. You stroke her and she strokes you. That's the way it is.

Anthony: I don't think Nicole believes that.

Joseph: She probably doesn't know it. Did you?

Anthony searches deeply for an answer. After a second, he sets his Coke down and attempts to change the subject.

Anthony: Hey, thanks for lunch. How about the four of us get together sometime?

Joseph: Sure. Let me talk to Mel about a good day. I'll get back to you two. You'll be home tonight.

Anthony (still unable to shake the thought): Of course. Listen, I gotta get running. Thanks again for the rackets.

Joseph: Good luck with the stroke.

Anthony: What? *(Joseph points to the tennis rackets. Anthony understands)* Oh, yeah. Thanks.

He exits. Lights out.

SCENE VI. Monday. Anthony and Nicole's living room. [\(top\)](#)

Nicole is on the phone with Melissa.

Nicole: I can't believe he hasn't called you back yet. *(beat)* Where? *(beat)* Ok, I've got the number. Doe's she work the same shift you do? *(beat)* You know you're welcome to stay here. I really wish you would. *(beat)* I only have two classes on Mondays and Wednesdays, Tuesday and Thursdays are my busy days. *(beat)* Yeah *(beat)* How could you tell? *(beat)* Did he ever say anything? *(beat)* That's ridiculous. *(beat)* No Mel, you're right. If a man wants to date for the sole purpose of you serving him he's— *(beat)* Ok, maybe not serving him, but no one gets into a relationship for themselves only. They get into one for each other. *(beat)* I know you know this. *(beat)* I'm not patronizing you, I'm reaffirming you. *(beat)* Of course you are. *(beat)* I told you to stop apologizing. *(beat)* There you go again. *(beat)* and

again. *(beat)* That's better. Ok, call me later. Maybe the three of us can get together sometime, like we used to before. *(beat)* No I guess it wouldn't be the same. I really wish you'd let Anthony or me talk with him. We haven't heard from him since Friday either. *(beat)* I sure hope you're right. *(beat. Anthony enters and walks over to Nicole)* Love ya too. Don't forget to call. *(beat. Anthony gestures "who?" She fans him away as if to say she'll talk with him later)* And start blaming yourself, you're in the right here. *(beat. Anthony kisses her briefly)* I said stop apologizing. *(beat. Anthony sighs recognition and whispers "Melissa". She nods)* ok. *(beat)* bye. *(to Anthony)* I swear to God if they don't make up soon, I'm sending you over there to date her.

Anthony: What?

They kiss again.

Nicole: She's driving me insane.

Anthony: What'd she say?

Nicole: Same as usual. She called him a jerk a couple times. You know he still hasn't talked to her.

Anthony: Since Friday?

Nicole: Yeah, I wonder if he's all right. She doesn't want us to interfere.

Anthony: Where is she staying?

Nicole: With another nurse. Apparently they met while holding some guys ribcage together.

Anthony: Stop.

Nicole: Yeah, but it's a cute story.

Anthony: For Hannibal Lector.

Nicole: I offered to have her stay here.

Anthony looks appalled by the idea, but hides his reaction from Nicole.

Nicole: She declined.

Anthony rejoices.

Nicole: She said she'd rather stay there because she's already given him her friend's number and if Joseph comes over here then it's kinda cheating.

Anthony: Cheating?

Nicole: Yeah, she wants him to take the initiative to call her. Not to meet her *by chance*.

Anthony: Gotcha.

They get cozy on the couch, holding each other.

Nicole: You know what she said?

Anthony: What's that?

Nicole: She said he's got this twisted philosophy about how couples work: they coexist as a symbiotic relationship. It's almost codependent.

Anthony: Ok, you've hit me with the social worker mumbo jumbo again.

Nicole: It means each of them are in it for themselves and they're around it to make themselves happy rather than each other and both, or something. I'm not sure, I haven't gotten the coursepack for that chapter yet. That's how he treats her. Have you ever heard of something like that?

Anthony: Like every action having an equal and opposite reaction?

Nicole: Sure, change it to your major.

Anthony: I do what I can. Anyway, that's physics. I'm chemistry.

Nicole (*cuddling*): No, we're chemistry. (*beat*) How could they coexist like that?

Anthony: Newton said the effect that gravity has on a mass is—

Nicole: I'm not talking about Newton.

Anthony: Oh, Joseph and Mel? I guess it could make sense.

Nicole: What? How?

Anthony: Well, why are you with me right now?

Nicole: Because I love you.

Anthony: Yeah, but why else?

Nicole: Because you're wonderful.

Anthony: Why else?

Nicole (*searching, she's trying to figure out what he wants her to say*): Because you have a big penis?

Anthony (*laughing*): Well, obviously that, but really. Can't you see how people can think that we please each other?

Nicole: We do please each other, Anthony.

Anthony: Well, maybe some people think that they're only with each other to get something in return.

Nicole: Like what?

Anthony: Well, if all you want is sex, you get sex. If all you want is someone to be home when you get home, you get that. If what you're looking for is someone to cook for you, clean your house, make you feel better when your upset, make you feel proud when you're feeling useless, you got that too. Could you understand that?

Nicole: Well, maybe if someone's shallow, I could understand that.

Anthony: Well, then, why are you with me right now?

Nicole: Because I love you. And I don't care how you treat me in return. Doing things for you, to please you is a part of being in love with you, Anthony. If you treated me bad, it might make it difficult to love you, but I don't expect anything from you. Not even your love back.

Anthony: Really?

Nicole: You loving me is a huge perk to being with you, Anthony, but that's not why I'm with you.

Anthony: And you don't think being with me makes your life better?

Nicole: That could be an added perk too, but not the reason. When you're in love, you don't really look at your life and the other person's life. It's like they cease to exist separate. You think about your life together. As if it were one. Our life. It's what us Social Worker's call *Unconditional Love*.

Anthony (*lost in thought*): Oh.

Nicole: You think the same way, right?

Anthony: Huh?

Nicole: If I asked you the same thing, *Why are you with me right now*, you'd respond the same way, right?

Anthony: Yeah. YEAH, Of course.

Nicole: That's what I thought. (*beat*) But I'm also with you because I think you have a big penis.

They laugh.

Anthony: Oh yeah?

Nicole: Yeah.

Anthony: Shall I conjure up some ways for us to please each other, Ms. Social Worker?

Nicole: Equally (*They kiss*) and oppositely (*Again*), Mr. Newton.

Anthony: I'll give you a 9.8 second start, then and then I'm coming to push some gravity on your mass.

She runs off laughing as he's counting aloud.