

Happy Anniversary

A play in three acts

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CHARACTERS

ROBERT: A man in his early-mid 30s. A brash, confident businessman with occasional charm.

BETH: A woman in her early-mid 30s. Intelligent and bookish, lacking in self-esteem.

ANTON: A man in his late 40s. Elegant, unfailingly polite, and nosy.
NOTE: Anton may be played as “Tonya” by a woman in her 40s.

LOCATION

A fancy restaurant in the New York metropolitan area.

TIME

Early 1990’s.

ACT I

Scene 1

LIGHTS UP on the restaurant, evening. BETH and ROBERT are seated center-stage at a table across from each other, examining menus. They are both in their early thirties and are fairly well dressed. Both have dark hair, cut to fashion for the time. The other tables are not occupied.

BETH

Will you be having the stuffed crab, as usual?

ROBERT

(A trifle impatient.)

If you want stuffed crab, you should order it.

BETH

I don't. I was just asking what you planned to get.

ROBERT

Because you want some of it.

BETH

Well... if you get it...

ROBERT

(Sets menu on table.)

You were always doing this to me while we were married.

BETH

(Sets her menu on table also.)

What?

ROBERT

This passive-aggressive thing. Making a "suggestion" that's not really a suggestion.

BETH

I do not. What do you mean?

ROBERT

Of course you do. Or did. You can't now, because I'm calling you on it.

(Smugly.)

Anyway, I'm having the clams.

BETH

You know I hate clams.

ROBERT

So order something else. What do you care what I eat?

BETH

Usually we share.

ROBERT

We used to share everything. But the death of our marriage did us part. Now we get to make our own independent choices again. Remember that little court document we got a year ago this very day?

BETH

(Picks up menu again and studies it.)

Cut it out, Robert.

ROBERT

Well, it just seemed that you were having trouble remembering.

BETH

I have no trouble remembering how you ruined our marriage. Sleeping with those sluts -

ROBERT

One woman. And Amanda is NOT a -

BETH

(Slaps menu onto table.)

Do NOT speak her name in my presence.

ROBERT

Don't call her a slut. We're still together, Beth. Like it or not, and believe it or not, I love her. And she loves me.

BETH

Pah! Don't talk to me about love. You said you loved me once, too.

ROBERT

I did. I still do. But -

BETH

Oh, puh-lease. Look, Robert. It was sweet of you to ask me to dinner tonight. I'm happy that you still want to be friends. But if you want this to be a pleasant experience, at all, then you're going to have to live with two rules.

ROBERT

Oh, here we go. More rules.

BETH

(Holding up one finger)

One. No mention of that woman.

ROBERT

Even though she's the center of my life now.

BETH

(Counts off second finger)

And two: Do not talk about our past.

ROBERT

What the hell are we going to talk about, then?

BETH

If that's all you have to say to me, maybe dinner wasn't such a hot idea.

ROBERT

Why are you so angry with me?

BETH

Why? What? Hello! Mr. Cheater, two-timing playboy. Mr. Six-years-of-marriage-means-nothing. Mister –

ROBERT

Now who's talking about the past?

BETH

(Pause)

Okay. Fair enough. You're right. Let's both work hard to stay positive.

ROBERT

Great. So.

(Picks up menu)

What are you having?

BETH

I guess the crab. Since you're having clams.

ROBERT

(Pause)

I could get the crab if you wanted the scampi.

BETH

If that's okay.

ROBERT

Sure.

(ROBERT picks up the wine menu and studies it.)

ROBERT

Shall we order some wine?

BETH

I was thinking of getting a glass of Chardonnay.

ROBERT

Beth. Chardonnay? After all I've taught you.

BETH

I don't care. I like Chardonnay. What's wrong with me ordering what I like?

ROBERT

Nothing. It's just - well, get Chardonnay if you like.

BETH

I don't need your approval, you know.

ROBERT

I thought we might share a bottle of something we both like. A Cab or a Pinot Noir.

BETH

Something you like, you mean.

ROBERT

You always liked red wines in the past.

BETH

I always preferred whites.

ROBERT

That's not true. Remember how we used to get those flights of reds at that wine store on Sunday afternoons? Always reds.

BETH

Because you chose them. You were always such the wine expert.

ROBERT

I prefer the term "oenophile."

BETH

Excuse me, would you like change for your twenty-dollar word? I only caught the first five dollars' worth.

ROBERT

Now, what is that supposed to mean?

BETH

It means - I'll tell you what it means. It means I'm ordering my own damn wine. Chardonnay.
(Sets menu on table.)

You can get what you want.

ROBERT

Fine. Order a Chardonnay. It's just that if we order a bottle, we'd get five glasses for the price of four.

BETH

And who would drink the extra glass?

ROBERT

We'd split it.

BETH

No, you'd drink it. And you don't need three glasses of wine.

ROBERT

(Slaps his menu on table)

Now you're telling me how much wine I can have?

BETH

The doctor already told you to cut back on your drinking.

ROBERT

Oh, great. Here I'm trying to save us a few bucks on our dinner bill, and instead I get a lecture on my alcohol consumption.

BETH

What's all the worry about money? You've got plenty. That software company of yours is making big bucks now.

ROBERT

It's not software. It's an Internet service provider. Thank you for noticing that we're doing well, but you know it's not all mine. Preston and I split everything, and anyway, we're still plowing most of the money back into the company. We want it to grow.

BETH

It's okay, Robert. The divorce is final. I can't touch any of your money and your flings with secretaries are none of my business anymore.

ROBERT

Amanda is not a secretary and we did not have a "fling." We are still -

BETH

I asked you not to talk about her.

ROBERT

You brought it up.

(ANTON enters and refills their water glasses.)

BETH

Just - don't say her name. All those nights you said you had to work late to make the business happen. Yeah, you made it happen all right.

ROBERT

Didn't we agree not to discuss the past?

ANTON

Are the lady and gentleman ready to order?

ROBERT

Not just yet on the food, but I'd like a glass of 1992 Elk Cove Pinot Noir, and she'll have the Chardonnay.

ANTON

Very good sir. Would you care for an appetizer?

ROBERT

Not just yet. Thank you, Anton.

(ANTON hovers. ROBERT glares at ANTON.)

ANTON

Will there be anything else, sir?

ROBERT

No, Anton. That will be quite enough.

(ANTON exits.)

BETH

Do you know what I miss about being married to you, Robert?

ROBERT

(Flustered)

No, what?

BETH

Our house.

ROBERT

Our house?

BETH

It was beautiful. That big front porch, those gorgeous shutters, the ceiling-to-floor draperies, the beautiful garden.

ROBERT

Six years of marriage. Six years of sharing dreams and heartbreak and trips to Aruba, and all you miss are plants and window treatments?

BETH

I loved that spiral staircase up to the attic.

ROBERT

I bumped my head on those stairs all the time.

BETH

That fireplace.

ROBERT

The fake gas one?

BETH

The kitchen was perfect.

ROBERT

You never cooked. We always ate out.

BETH

I want to live in a big house again. I really miss it. My apartment is so small and dingy.

ROBERT

You have money from the settlement. Why don't you buy a house?

BETH

I couldn't possibly afford one like we had. Anything else would seem so... disappointing.

ROBERT

Well. That's part of divorce. Splitting of our joint assets. We both end up poorer.

BETH

Not you. Look at the house you live in. It's big and beautiful, out there in the suburbs.

ROBERT

It's not mine. It belongs to -

BETH

(Shouting)

Don't say her name!

ROBERT

Fine. You know whose it is. But listen, it makes no sense to wallow in self-pity. If you want a bigger place, go get one. You're not stuck in that apartment for life. It's a transitional place.

BETH

I don't want to go deep into debt right now – even if the banks would lend me the money. It's not as easy for divorced women as it is for men, you know.

ROBERT

They'd lend you the money. But not for a mansion in The Hamptons. You have to be realistic.

BETH

Realistic! Yes, wasn't that always your buzzword? Be realistic. Don't follow your own dream. Wait for everything to be perfect before you start living your life. Then, after years of waiting, one day your husband will come home with a busty blonde on his arm and tell you he's bored with you, and, realistically, it's time to move on.

ROBERT

That's not at all what happened.

BETH

That's exactly what happened - to me. I set my own life aside, played the role of the dutiful supportive wife, while you were out massaging your ego, making tons of money, having fun –

ROBERT

Having fun? Slaving away to support you is having fun?

BETH

... having a great adventure in life and fucking every admiring floozy with a C cup and a bottle of blonde?

ROBERT

Enough! Enough, Beth. That's total bullshit and you know it. Yes, I had an affair - one. With Amanda - and yes, I'm saying her name.

(BETH begins to cry. ANTON enters and pretends to straighten up at the waiter's station.)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I fell in love with her after your love went dead to me. And I still love her. So there. You had to go there; now, that's what you get.

BETH

You bastard. I don't know what I ever saw in you.

(ANTON seems to think about this, then shakes his head slowly as if he can't see it either. He starts to approach them, very slowly.)

ROBERT

Let me help you out with that. Remember what you told me on our wedding night?

BETH

That's not fair -

ROBERT

I remember it very clearly.

BETH

No, Robert!

ROBERT

(Imitating her voice)

"You make me feel so safe, Robert. So secure."

BETH

Stop it!

ROBERT

"You'll take care of me, won't you, Robert?"

BETH

Shut up!

ROBERT

"So strong. Such a good provider. So smart."

ANTON

(Approaching them.)

Would madam care for -

BETH

I said SHUT UP!

(ANTON beats a fast retreat. BETH stares at ROBERT, who stares into his water glass. ANTON picks up the water carafe at the waiter station, and cautiously refills their water. ANTON begins to say something, then stops and quickly exits.)

ROBERT

I was nothing but a paycheck to you. A free ride to the mall.

BETH
(Menacingly)

That is NOT true.

ROBERT
You complained about me working long hours, but what do you think paid for all those dresses and hair appointments and the new SUV's every two years?

BETH
I worked too.

ROBERT
(Disdainfully)
You're a secretary.

BETH
Law clerk.