

REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY

(A Comedy in One Act)

By

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THE CHARACTERS

AMY, 30s, a Bank Teller

ALICE, 40s, a marriage counselor, former EMT

FRED, 40, an attorney

BOB, 40s, a car salesman

ABBY, 50s, AMY'S supervisor

THE SCENE

AMY's living room

THE TIME

Yesterday Afternoon

REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY

(AMY's living-room, tastefully middle-class: AMY is on the phone. She is rather nervous)

AMY

Of course it's always nice to see you, Ms. Gruenwald. Um, when can I expect you? Not sure? Earlier or later? Not sure? No, no. Why would that be inconvenient? I'll be here all afternoon. Do I have anything to drink? I'll make some coffee if you let me know when you're coming, or I have some nice Chamomile tea—Oh. That wasn't what you had in mind? Well, I have a nice Pinot Grigio. All right. Then I'll look for you around...um, whenever. See you then. (She ends the call) Wow! What is *that* all about? And on a Saturday afternoon! And her sense of humor makes Captain Ahab seem like a stand-up comedian. I wonder if it could be about...No, it couldn't be that. Well, it could be, I suppose. It *is* that! It *must* be! Oh my God, I'll never forgive him! NEVER! I already told him that, I think. Well, I could call him and tell him to go to...No, I'm too much of a lady to say that. (Pause) The hell I am!

(Then the doorbell rings)

AMY

(Stares toward the door) Whenever?! I can put up with a lot. But really!

(AMY opens the door and ALICE barges it)

ALICE

I'm glad you're home.

AMY

Oh, it's you. Hello, Alice.

ALICE

Skip the formalities, honey.

AMY

What formalities?

ALICE

(Loud laugh) I love your sense of humor.

AMY

Get to the point, will you? I'm expecting someone.

ALICE

How'd you know?

AMY

She told me. I just talked to her.

ALICE

Her? Okay. That's okay. Got anything to drink?

AMY

Oh boy. Well, I have a Pinot Grigio—

ALICE

That's not what I meant.

AMY

I can get you some coffee real quick.

ALICE

You know I can't drink wine. I get incredibly talkative. Oh boy, you should hear me, I ramble on and on and on and it never makes any sense. Sometimes *I* don't even know what I'm talking about. And I know I get on people's nerves. Oh boy, do I? But I can't seem to help myself. I just can't. There was this time at a funeral and I took a glass of brandy, just to fortify myself for the ordeal, I don't even remember whose funeral it was. I made a spectacle of myself. I think I even started reciting the Gettysburg address. They had to call 911. So you see what I mean?

AMY

Was it Abraham Lincoln's funeral?

ALICE

Hey, I'm not *that* old! (Laughs loudly) I love your sense of humor. Did I tell you that?

AMY

I won't give you any wine.

ALICE

There was another time. At a wedding I can't stand to think about it—

AMY

Please don't. I'll get you that coffee. What does coffee do to you?

ALICE

It makes me horny. So you're safe. (She roars with laughter)

AMY

I don't think much of *your* sense of humor.

ALICE

You think I'm vulgar?

AMY

Awfully—What are you here for, Alice.

ALICE

Don't rush me. I have to work into it.

AMY

I'm not going to like this. You picked a bad time.

ALICE

Now don't take that attitude, Amy. If I've told you once I've told you a thousand times, Okay, maybe not a thousand, but an awful lot of times. Remember when we went to the gym together to lose some weight? You had a terrible attitude and look how that ended up. I gained twenty pounds worrying about you and I threw out my back. My back still bothers me and it was your fault. I still get that pain in my back. You have no idea how much—

AMY

I'm getting a pain somewhere else right now! I'll get you that coffee. (She exits)

ALICE

Don't forget the sugar. She always forgets the sugar. I think she does that just to aggravate me. Why do people always aggravate me? They ought to know how sensitive I am.

(AMY returns almost immediately with coffee and a towel)

ALICE
Is that instant?

AMY
You're lucky I'm even giving you that.

ALICE
That makes me puke.

AMY
You won't have time for that. Now get to the point.

ALICE
I have a wonderful surprise for you.

AMY
Oh no! I'm not going to watch another one of those X-rated movies.

ALICE
Now there you go again, jumping to conclusions! You couldn't be more wrong. Why do you jump to conclusions? I think you do that just to aggravate me. If I have told you once, I've told you—(AMY shoves the towel in ALICE's mouth).

AMY
What was your point, Alice?

ALICE
(Removing the towel) That was naughty.

AMY
I'm sorry. But I told you. I don't have a lot of time. Now what is this all about?

ALICE
I'll bet I looked funny with this in my mouth though. (Laughs) Amy, you're going to kill me, I swear.

AMY
Any minute now...

ALICE
Is that any way to talk to me, when I've done something nice for you?

AMY

I'm sorry, Alice, but I'm a little nervous. My boss is dropping by some time today, and I'm worried about what she's going to tell me.

ALICE

What's she going to tell you?

AMY

I think she's going to say two little words. You're fired!

ALICE

Oh my! Why would she tell you that?

AMY

It's all because of Fred.

ALICE

No! You mean that cute guy you've been dating?

AMY

Yes, I do. And for the record we only had two dates. And I wish I could forget the second one. I made the mistake of inviting him to our office party last week and he was drunk and made a complete ass of himself. It was terribly embarrassing, and I'm sure it reflected on me.

ALICE

Oh no! I'm sure you're exaggerating.

AMY

Oh am I? First he danced with my boss and they fell over. Then he spilled his drink all over her husband. Then he vomited at the dinner table.

ALICE

He sounds like fun, Amy. By the way, this is the worst coffee I've ever had. (She looks sick) I think I better use your rest room. (She then bolts from the room, failing to stifle a loud belch) Gas pains! (She's gone).

AMY

Oh my. What's the line about with friends like that?

(ALICE returns, smiling)

ALICE

False alarm...Now what was that you were saying about Fred?

AMY

I said if I never see him again, it will be too soon!

ALICE

Oh but Amy, you had such a nice time on that first date. And if he was really sorry and sincerely apologized and had a good explanation, you'd melt. I know you, my girl. You could never be that cruel.

AMY

If you think that, you don't know me. In fact, I'm ready to be that cruel to somebody else

ALICE

Who would that be?

AMY

If she doesn't get to the point!

ALICE

I invited Fred over.

AMY

You *what*! How could you do that?

ALICE

But he begged me, Amy. And he was so sweet.

AMY

I'll bet the manipulator brought you candy!

ALICE

I can't resist turtles.

AMY

Do you mean Fred?

ALICE

(Laughs) I shouldn't laugh that wasn't nice.

AMY

Of all the nerve!

ALICE

Fred?

AMY

No, *you*! How could you do something like this without even telling me?

ALICE

But if I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise.

AMY

I refuse to talk to him, Alice. He makes me sick!

ALICE

So do I sometimes, but you talk to me.

AMY

And I always regret it!

ALICE

Now you listen to me, Amy Roland! Fred is a very nice man. He really likes you. And he's genuinely sorry about what happened. He deserves to be heard and you ought to at least listen to him. You could do worse you know?

AMY

I did worse the time you got me that blind date.

ALICE

I said it was a blind date.

AMY

I didn't think you meant he was actually *blind*!

ALICE

You should always take me literally.

AMY

And if he hadn't already been blind, by the time he'd had those eight cocktails, he would have been. It was very embarrassing when his dog started eating off his plate.

ALICE

What does all that have to do with Fred? He deserves a chance to explain.

AMY

I said no, and I mean no! When he comes to that door, you are going to tell him to—

(Then the doorbell rings, ALICE quickly answers it)

ALICE

Why, Fred. How mice? Come on in.

(FRED enters sheepishly)

FRED

Hello. Er, hello, Amy. (AMY does not even look at him, remaining silent).

ALICE

How about a cup of coffee, Fred?

FRED

Okay.

AMY

(Can't resist) That's a switch!

ALICE

(Laughing, to FRED) She's a riot, isn't she?

FRED

Amy, I have a feeling you're upset with me.

AMY

What would give you that idea? Listen, Fred Franklin—

ALICE

Why don't I go and make some real coffee? Wouldn't that be nice?

AMY

I want to speak to you, Alice. I'll come with you.

ALICE

For heaven's sake, I don't need help making coffee? You sit down and talk to Fred. He has something to say to you. Don't you, Fred?

FRED

(Clears his throat) Er—

AMY

I have something to say to him, too. Goodbye!

FRED

(Shrugs) I can take a hint.

AMY

That wasn't a hint.

ALICE

It was a joke. (She forces a laugh. Then walks FRED over to the sofa, pushes him down beside AMY) Now sit right there and talk! And do not move until I get back with your coffee. Do you understand? And Amy, behave! No more jokes! Everyone doesn't understand your sense of humor like I do. (She exits).

FRED

An uncomfortable silence) Amy, I can explain everything, if you'll let me. (She remains silent) But I guess there's no point in trying if you won't listen to me. Alice led me to believe you'd at least listen. (Pause) Alright, I'll just leave. Will you make my apologies to Alice? (He stands up, hesitantly).

AMY

Oh, you might as well drink your cup of coffee. Alice has gone to the trouble of making it. (He quickly sits) *Then* you can leave.

FRED

I don't know where to begin.

AMY

First, you pick up the cup, then you lift it to your mouth. *You* might want to use both hands for that—

FRED

I thought I'd start a little further back.

AMY

How about when you asked my boss to dance and pulled her down on the dance floor? Or back to where you spilled the drink all over her husband's new suit. Or how about when you vomited at the dinner table? Or maybe—

FRED

A little further back...

(ALICE then returns with a cup of coffee)

ALICE

Here you are, Fred: a nice cup of coffee. (FRED takes a drink and starts to cough) Did I forget to mention it was boiling hot? I hate it when I do that.

FRED

Thanks, Alice. You're too kind.

ALICE

Actually, I'm *one* of a kind. I suppose a lot of people say thank God she is because if there were more of her, there'd be more murders than there already are! Don't you just hate people with no sense of humor? But of course I know they're kidding.

AMY

No they're not.

ALICE

(Roars) Don't you just love her, Freddy? Now drink up! Coffee is good for you. (FRED nervously sips his coffee).

FRED

Sometimes coffee doesn't agree with me.

ALICE

I hear you! Oh boy, coffee does weird and wonderful things to me. I get all warm and loving inside and it makes me want to—

AMY

Stop!

FRED

Well, it gives me a headache sometimes. But I guess this is okay. (He takes a large gulp and smiles).

ALICE

I hope I didn't interrupt your conversation.

FRED

I was just going to tell Amy—

AMY

(To ALICE) No, you didn't.

FRED

Oh gosh, here it comes! (He grabs his head) I really hate to ask, but does anybody have an aspirin?

AMY

(Exasperated sigh) It's in the bathroom cabinet.

ALICE

Aspirin! That rots your stomach. What you need is, Amy, do you have ibuprofen?

AMY

It's in the same place.

ALICE

Did I say Ibuprofen? I meant to say Tylenol.

AMY

That's there, too.

ALICE

But is it, er, Tylenol 4?

AMY

There's no such thing.

ALICE

Yes, there is. It's just out. It's the best stuff ever. Do you have any?

FERD

That's okay, just forget it. I didn't mean to—

ALICE

Nonsense! You stay right there. There's a drugstore right down the street. I won't be a minute. You can go on with your conversation. I'll be right back. Don't move!

FRED

I might have to use the bathroom.

ALICE

Do it later. (She exits)

(Another uncomfortable pause)

FRED

Amy, can I ask you something?

AMY

(Snaps) What?

FRED

Well...Do you think Alice is just a tad bossy?

AMY

(She turns away, stifling a laugh) No. She's extremely bossy!

FRED

Now listen, Amy. I'm going to explain about last Saturday. You can listen or not, but I'd appreciate it if you'd just please hear me out. That's not asking too much, is it? And when I'm finished explaining, if you want me to leave, you don't have to say a word. I'll just get the heck out and I promise you'll never see me again. I guess that's fair, isn't it? There were two reasons why I did what I did, Amy. The first is because I liked you so much—

AMY

You sure proved that one!

FRED

I wanted to make an impression on you.

AMY

You did that.

FRED

You can be very intimidating.

AMY

Are you saying it was *my* fault?

FRED

Yes! I mean No! Will you please listen? Anyway, that's why I got these. (He takes a pill bottle out of his pocket).

AMY

What are those?

FRED

Valium. I brought them with me to prove my point. See—

AMY

What *is* your point? Not that it matters. You humiliated me.

FRED

I told you how nervous I was, so I took them to relax. I don't know much about these things. I guess I took too many—

AMY

For heaven's sake! How many did you take?

FRED

Only six...

AMY

What!

FRED

I guess I took too many. And they don't go well with alcohol—

AMY

You definitely proved *that* point!

FRED

And after a couple drinks, I hardly knew where I was or what I was doing. I'm lucky I didn't pass out—

AMY

You did.

FRED

Not soon enough! Amy, I feel rotten about everything. That was not me. I know I never should have done it. I'd do anything to make it up to you. If you'd only give me another chance, I'd prove that wasn't me.

AMY

My boss is coming here today!

FRED

She is? Well, that's a good thing.

AMY

No, it isn't!

FRED

You don't like her? I don't really remember her too well.

AMY

I think because of the way you behaved at our party, she's coming over to fire me.

FRED

That's not fair! But does that shoot my chances for another try?

AMY

Oh, Fred, darn it! We had such a nice time on our first date. Why did you *do* it?

FRED

I liked you so much on that first date, I got nervous. Well, I blew it. I'm so sorry. (He stands) I might as well leave. At least I was able to tell you how much I liked you, Amy. I promise you won't be bothered by me again. (He starts to go slowly, then turns back) I guess you're really going to let me leave, aren't you?

AMY

Oh, wait a minute.

FRED

Yes?

AMY

I hate to ask this, but could you do something for me?

FRED

Of course. (He takes out his wallet) Is it a loan? How much do you need? I have a couple credit cards—

AMY

No, no. Look, if you told my boss what you just told me, it might be embarrassing for you, but it might help me.

FRED

Of course I'll do it. (He takes the valium out of his pocket and hands them to AMY) Don't let me touch these.

AMY

I'm really feeling nervous about this.

FRED

Now don't *you* take any of those.

AMY

Don't be ridiculous.

FRED

I thought I'd try a little humor.

AMY

I suppose it can't get any worse.

FRED

Of course it can't. Oops. That's not what I meant.

(Then the doorbell rings)

AMY

Oh god!! That's her!

FRED

I'll be fine, Amy. I'll be great. Just you watch.

AMY

(She looks at FRED) Do I really need this job that badly?

(She goes to the door, but before she can open it, BOB bursts in)

BOB

Amy, I've got to talk to you. But you've got company! Fred?

AMY

You two know each other?

BOB

Fred bought a car from me? When was that Fred?

FRED

It was just last year, I think.

BOB

No, it was more like two years ago, Fred. Don't you recall?

FRED

Maybe it was a year and a half.

BOB

Nope. I recall distinctly. It was two.

FRED

You could be right.

BOB

I'm definitely right. I got a memory like a steel trap, Fred—

AMY

For heaven's sake! What do you want, Bob? I don't mean to be rude, but you look like you've been tumble dried.

BOB

Thanks! I'm glad you don't want to be rude!

AMY

I'm sorry. But I'm a little rushed. I'm expecting someone.

BOB

Did I snap? I wouldn't be surprised. It's that kind of day. Do you have anything to drink?

AMY

Well, I have chamomile tea, orange juice, diet pepsi—

BOB

Are you trying to be funny?

AMY

I'm looking at you, Bob, and it's not funny. You appear to have been drinking all day. I don't think you need any more.

BOB

You know what appearances are?

FRED

I'm looking at you, Bob, and I'm sorry, but in your case, I'd say they were on target.

AMY

And I don't have a lot of time, so what did you want, Bob? What happened? Did you lose your best girl.

BOB

That happened four years ago.

AMY

Four years! And you're still not over it?

FRED

I know how you feel, Bob.

BOB

She went out to get a pound of butter!

FRED

You mean four years ago she left you to go to the *supermarket*?

