

Three Times

A ten-minute play

By

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CHARACTERS

THURBER – A scientist and mathematician.

WINNIE – a professor of literature.

TIME

Present

SETTING

Thurber's apartment

NOTES

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Thurber steps into his study, a calm passive look on his face. At a loss for a moment, Thurber looks around the room as if seeing it for the very first time.

Suddenly he bursts out in a frenzy of energy, ripping and tearing things from his desk, shelves and walls. Though his movements contain a frenzied fury, the expression on his face is still one of innocence. He stops in the center of the room, looking at the mess he had made.

Winnie enters. Thurber looks over at the doorway where Winnie has entered and stands looking at him.

Thurber
Oh, hello Winifred.

Winnie
Hello Thurber.

Thurber
Umm. As you can see, I've just experienced one of my very rare emotional outbursts.

Winnie
I can see that.

Thurber
Would you like some tea?

Winnie
Tea would be lovely.

Thurber
(after a moment)
I . . . uh, . . . I'm all out of tea it looks like, bad news, I apologize. I apologize for the mess and disarray .
. .

Winnie
Thurber, it's all right . . .

Thurber
Please sit, have a seat, I just wasn't expecting you quite so quickly.

Winnie
Thurber . . .

Thurber

Good news, the good news is that all of your personal effects survived the . . . the outburst quite intact. I have them here in this box, your contact lens case and disinfectant, bath oils and incense, bathrobe, towel, the Winnie the Pooh socks that you, that you . . .

Winnie

I love those socks.

Thurber

Yes, that. I knew that. Um, also your blue blouse that you left here last Easter, your feminine hygiene products, the autographed copy of Bridges To Infinity: The Human Side of Mathematics that I gave you for your birthday, your earrings, one gold necklace, two pairs of paisley panties, one aqua-colored sports bra and last but not least, all of your CD's, I arranged them in order alphabetically by artist. I know how you feel about that but I just couldn't help myself.

Winnie

I can see that you went to a lot of effort and I appreciate it.

Thurber

I uh, I felt that . . . that it was the very least I could do, after all . . . after all . . .

Winnie

Yes. It's very kind and sweet of you. Most people would not be so gracious were they to find themselves in your position.

Thurber

Really?

Winnie

Yes.

Thurber

(after a moment)

Mother always said I was a bit of an over-achiever.

Winnie

I think you're a really great person.

Short pause as they look at each other.

Winnie
Thurber?

Thurber
Yes?

Winnie
Are you . . . are you going to be all right?

Thurber
Oh yes. Yes, absolutely. No question about it.

Winnie
You don't . . . um, I'm very concerned about you.

Thurber
You are? Why?

Winnie
I worry about you, how you're going to take all this, how it will affect you, I worry so much I can barely breathe sometimes.

Thurber
Winnie, don't worry about me, I . . . know appearances are a bit off at the moment, but I will be fine, I have no doubts. I've identified the problem and I am set to finding a solution. Don't worry about me, I'm a scientist, that's what I do. I solve problems.

Winnie
Remember what you once said to me? There are no problems, only . . .

Thurber
Only probabilities, yes. I remember. Got me, I used a figure of speech that was inappropriate. Good catch. But I feel confident of an early resolution.

Winnie
It isn't always that simple, Thurber. Life isn't that simple.

Thurber
Sure it is, it's all science, all numbers, all math, all the time. That's life, it all breaks down to numbers, pure and simple, sooner or later. There's always an answer for

any question you have and always a question to any answer you have that doesn't have a question attached to it as of yet. It's all a matter of study, work and dissemination. What are you smiling at?

Winnie

Nothing, . . . I've just always liked listening to you. Talking with you has always, from the very beginning, been an electric experience. So what have you discovered so far?

Thurber

Well. There's just a WEALTH of information on this issue, thousands upon thousands of books, I've managed to gather some of the best from the best in the field. Let's see, we have HEALING & HELPING BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS – LOVE YOURSELF BEFORE ANYONE ELSE – LETTING GO, SPLITTING AMICABLY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY – HEARTS BROKEN, HEARTS AFIRE – LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE, SHE'S GONE – COMING UP FOR AIR, LIFE AFTER LOVE – KICK THE BITCH TO THE CURB, A SURVIVORS GUIDE FOR HOMEBOYS LOST IN LOVE– BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO, SO DO IT FAST – STITCHES, REPAIRING THE DAMAGE AFTER SHE'S GONE – and finally, THE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO GETTING OVER HER. These are just a few of the titles.

Winnie

My. Have they been of any help?

Thurber

Actually, no. But it is a start, I have to narrow down the field some more but it's simply a matter of time. I can do it. I can do it.

Winnie

I know. I still worry about you.

Short pause.

Thurber

It's not a fling, is it?

Winnie

No. No, it's not.

Thurber

I thought not, I'd hoped . . . but I thought not. So but this is certain, isn't it? For the record, as an absolute certainty, our romantic relationship is over. Correct?

Winnie

Yes.

Thurber

Ahh. I see.

Winnie

Thurber, you are, quite possibly, one of the most fascinating, loving and brilliant men I have ever known. Ever day, every moment I spent with you was like an exotic adventure. I'd never met anyone that viewed the world quite as you do, and when I'm not with you or able to talk to you on the phone I miss you so terribly. I miss sharing things with you. You touch me in places in my soul and my life that no one does or ever has. I've never loved anyone like you before.

Thurber

(after a moment)

This is quite an unusual way of breaking up with me.

Winnie

I just wanted you to know that I love you.

Thurber

(thumbing through the books)

I mean, this wasn't covered in any of the literature.

Winnie

Thurber. Thurber!

Thurber

Yes?

Winnie

I never wanted to hurt you, Thurber.

Thurber

Well, it's . . . you didn't . . . it . . . this is just a setback, you know, an unfortunate event, but it's not a cancer or a terminal brain lesion, it's an evolving relationship, it happens, it happens, untold numbers of people all over the country go through this kind of thing everyday and survive it, according to the books, anyway. It happens, it's a breakup, it's not a hurricane.

Winnie
(looking around the room)
It's not?

Thurber
Well, visible evidence aside, it's not a tropical storm that kills people, it's a breakup. It's difficult but percentage-wise rarely fatal according to the charts and graphs. People survive them. The numbers are on our side.

Winnie
I don't care about the numbers, I care about you, I want you to be all right after this.

Thurber
I'll be all right, I'm telling you, the numbers don't lie, math is on our side . . .

Winnie
I don't care about the numbers, I don't care about math, there's a lot more to life than math.

Thurber
More to life than MATH? What are you talking about? There is nothing more, that's what LIFE is! Science is the process of examination and breaking down of systems and MATH is the tool used to do so and the only poetic language CAPABLE of EXPRESSING the TRUTHS DISCOVERED THEREIN – it's the ONE way all cultures communicate, the ONE thing we ALL have in COMMON, the ONE TRUE ABSOLUTE IN LIFE AND THERE ISN'T ANYTHING MORE THAN THAT! THERE IS NOTHING ELSE! THERE IS NOTHING ELSE!

Short pause as Thurber and Winnie look at each other.

Thurber
Winifred, I'm sorry.

Winnie
I'm sorry too. I didn't mean to upset you. I caused yet another very rare outburst of emotion.

Thurber
You're right, that's TWO in one day, this is unprecedented, I have to make a note of this in my logbook. What are you smiling at?

Winnie

Nothing, it's . . .I was just remembering the first time we . . . made love. You were so . . . enthusiastic. The first emotional outburst out of you I'd witnessed.

Thurber

Yes. I remember. I hadn't been that excited about anything since I first started studying Calculus.

Winnie

You weren't even all that INTERESTED in sex in the beginning, I'd never met a man like that, you said, you actually said, "all that effort and exercise for a two second physical contraction? A waste of time better spent in study and vibrant conversation," That's what you said.

Thurber

I did, didn't I?

Winnie

Then when I actually GOT you into bed and did the deed, you were like a little boy at Christmas, jumping for joy, "Let's do it again, let's do it again!"

Thurber

I did, I was, I had miscalculated, I failed to figure in the unknown factor of shared sensuality and thus it's affect upon shared intimate physical relations. I erred.

Winnie

You were jumping up and down on the bed, going "I get it, I get it, now I get what all the excitement was about!"

Thurber

Like Isaac when the apple fell from the tree on his head.

Winnie

You were so adorable.

Short pause.

Thurber

So . . . um, so if all of what you've told me thus far is fact, why . . . why . . . why . . .

Winnie

Why am I leaving you for Richard?

Thurber
That's it.

Winnie
Well. I'm not going to pretend he's as smart as you are, or as interesting or even as cute. He's not any of the things that you are. But there's something about him that draws me, makes me want to touch him, feel him and it pulls me, magnetically. I feel a pull from him physically that I don't feel from you, or anyone else. I fought it for quite some time, because I do love you and want to be with you. But I can't. I can't, I think of him, too. He pulls at me. I hoped he could only be a fling, I hoped maybe I could get him out of my system, but I couldn't. I can't. He's not the man you are, and I wish, wish desperately that he were. He may not be the man you are, but he may be the man for me. The man I will love and live with the rest of my life. That may not make sense, but it is what it is. I'm sorry Thurber. I'm really, really sorry.

Thurber
I see.

Winnie
I keep having this silly dream, of the three of us someday becoming friends, sitting on a porch sipping tea and talking, maybe when we're all retired, and the dream makes me so happy. But I know it's just a dream, I know how you feel about him, and I understand. I just wanted you to know how I felt about him. And you.

Thurber
I understand. Pulled, drawn, almost magnetically.

Winnie
I just want you to be happy, and someday someone will make you happy.

Thurber
Pulled.

Winnie
Happier than I ever could.

Thurber
Wait a minute, I got it! I got it!

Thurber takes out his notepad and scribbles on it furiously. He shows it to Winnie proudly.

Winnie
What is it?

Thurber
The answer! In 1831 Michael Faraday proved with a series of simple experiments that, and this is the historic statement – whenever a magnetic force increases or decreases, it produces electricity; the faster it increases or decreases, the more electricity it produces. Get it?

Winnie
What?

Thurber
The two of us, you and I, we had an electric connection because we were drawn to each other, and electricity can be a good thing, it gives us light and power and illuminates. But it's also a dangerous entity, electricity, they still use it to kill people in certain barbaric states. You have to be careful with it. Now as our magnetic attraction grew and increased, so did the electricity it produced and the more that was illuminated. But suddenly you found yourself drawn to another, and the magnetic force of our relationship decreased at a startling rate, decreased faster than it increased. The electric pulse produced from that decrease, that's what it is, that's what caused it.

Winnie
Caused what?

Thurber
Caused . . . caused the pain. It's right here in the formula, right down in cold hard true math. Which means . . . which means . . .

Winnie
Means what?

Thurber
Nothing. It means I still have more work ahead of me. I need to get to work.

Winnie
Wait, wait. Thurber.

Thurber
What?

Winnie
I'm not a scientist or mathematician. But I remember
another thing you told me, for every action . . .

Thurber
There is an equal and opposite reaction, yes.

Winnie
We feel bad because we have the capacity to feel good. You
feel horrible because we felt . . .

Thurber
Great.

Winnie
And I feel horrible now, Thurber, so horrible because at
how this turned out, what I've done to you, how much I'll
miss the little things I shared with you, so horrible that
you have no idea.

Thurber
I have a pretty good idea.

Winnie
But I would do it again, because the joy I got out of it
was worth the pain. And I know there is more out there
waiting for me. And for you. There is so much happiness
out there waiting for you, there is, I know there is and I
know it without a formula. Some day, I wish, wish, wish
WISH we can be friends again. I really do. I do.

Short pause.

Winnie
I have to say good-bye now, before I start having an
emotional outburst of my own. I just wanted to tell you
how special you are to me.

Winnie moves to him and kisses him softly.

Winnie
Good-bye Thurber.

Thurber
Good-bye Winifred.

Winnie picks up the box and leaves as quickly as she can. Thurber looks dazed for a moment, then brings his finger up to his eye, feeling the moisture gathering there. He tastes it.

Thurber

Look at that. Three times. Three times in one day.

THE END