



NICE GIRL

BY MELISSA ROSS



DRAMATISTS
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NICE GIRL
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For my Gram

NICE GIRL was originally produced by Labyrinth Theater Company (Mimi O'Donnell, Artistic Director; Danny Feldman, Executive Director) in May 2015. It was directed by Mimi O'Donnell; the set design was by David Meyer; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Japhy Weideman; the sound design was by Ryan Rumery; and the production stage manager was Hannah Woodward. The cast was as follows:

JOSEPHINE Diane Davis
FRANCINE Kathryn Kates
DONNY Nick Cordero
SHERRY Liv Rooth

CHARACTERS

JOSEPHINE (“Jo”) — 37, a secretary

FRANCINE — 68, her mother

SHERRY — 34, Jo’s co-worker

DONNY — 38, a butcher

PLACE

A middle-class suburb of Boston

TIME

Fall — 1984

THE TEXT

A slash in the middle of a line indicates overlapping dialogue.

Internal punctuation inside of a sentence should serve as a guide for emphasis and intention and not be considered true stops.

A beat is a quick shift in thought — a momentary breath — and should not be given too much significance. Pauses have a bit more weight. Silences should be allowed to linger.

NICE GIRL

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A simply furnished and neatly kept home in a small suburb of Massachusetts outside of Boston. It's not a wealthy suburb. This is not the Massachusetts of the Kennedys. And it is not terribly poor or blue-collar. It is decidedly exactly-in-the-middle-class. And it's happy to be that way. This is a town that doesn't color outside of the lines.

There is a living room and an adjacent kitchen. A staircase leads to an upper floor. A small screened-in porch with an outdoor set. A glider. Some slightly rusted chairs. All with the same flowered cushions. Faded from years in the sun.

The furnishings are clean but old. A mix of relics from generations past. And a few new things here and there. Not cluttered. And kept nicely. The house was built sometime in the fifties. And has been updated only as needed since then. So. A new fridge next to the original stove.

The entire play should take place here. All settings should be created from and suggested by the house itself. A kitchen counter becomes a supermarket's butcher shop. A table and chairs turn into an office break room. But the general feeling should be that wherever we go. We're still here.

Jo gets ready for work. Drinking coffee. Reading the paper. Busying herself in the kitchen.

Francine drinks coffee at the kitchen table and watches television. She wears a nightgown. Perhaps a housecoat. And slippers. This is her everyday attire. Even in this ensemble — she looks neat and put together. She wears lipstick.

They are in the midst of what appears to be their every-morning ritual.

JO. I'm leaving money over here by the microwave / OK?

FRANCINE. Yeah yeah.

JO. You gotta call the taxi an hour before / you wanna go.

FRANCINE. Yeah yeah.

JO. And it takes a half-hour to get to Dr. Elliot's.

FRANCINE. I know I know. Stop nagging me / to death.

JO. Not *nagging*, Ma. *Reminding*.

FRANCINE. I don't need all this. Constant. Looking after / you know.

JO. Yeah yeah.

FRANCINE. I don't!

JO. Fine I'll. Move out then.

FRANCINE. Go ahead. Whado I care for.

JO. What wouldja do if I moved out, Ma.

FRANCINE. Whatever I want. I'd do just fine.

JO. (*A little laugh.*) Sure you would.

FRANCINE. I would do whatever I want whenever I want so. So screw you.

JO. Yeah OK so maybe I'll go to work today and I won't ever come back. Whadya think of that.

FRANCINE. Be fine with me! (*Beat.*) You wouldn't really do that

Jo. Not really you wouldn't.

JO. You push my buttons enough, Ma. I may just walk out that door and never come back. And then what / would you do.

FRANCINE. You don't have the guts.

JO. Try me. Push one more button and see. Go on. I dare you. Push it. (*Pause.*) Now who doesn't have the guts. Huh? (*Beat.*) You wanna egg or a bagel.

FRANCINE. Bagel. But just a half.

JO. OK. (*Jo begins to slice a bagel.*)

FRANCINE. Don't cut it like that you'll slice your / hand up.

JO. I know howta cut a bagel! (*She cuts her hand.*) Damnit.

FRANCINE. I / told you.

JO. Shut it.

FRANCINE. Is it bad?

JO. No / I'm fine.

FRANCINE. Don't get blood on my bagel.

JO. (*Shoots her a look.*) I won't. (*She puts the bagel in the toaster and begins to tend to her hand.*)

FRANCINE. (*Beat.*) You'd really just leave without saying good-bye? You wouldn't do that, Josephine.

JO. Maybe.

FRANCINE. Where would you go?

JO. ... Paris ...

FRANCINE. Paris? By yourself?

JO. Maybe I / will maybe.

FRANCINE. Whadya gonna do in *Paris*?

JO. Eat delicious food. See. Art.

FRANCINE. (*Beat.*) Your father took me to Paris for our third / anniversary.

JO. Yeah I know.

FRANCINE. Bought me the most gorgeous clothes. You should go through the boxes in the basement. Take whatever you want.

JO. What I want your old clothes for.

FRANCINE. Styles come back. I had this dress with a nipped-in waist. Looked just like something I saw on TV / the other day.

JO. Or maybe. Spain.

FRANCINE. My waist was so small the dressmaker hadda take it in. Nineteen inches around. She couldn't believe anybody hadda waist / that small.

JO. Or maybe Milwaukee.

FRANCINE. What're you talking about?

JO. Places I could go.

FRANCINE. Who goes to *Milwaukee*.

JO. Me maybe. Or Australia ... Australia takes 24 hours to get to. It'd be like. Getting a day of my life back.

FRANCINE. Not really. (*Pause.*) Maybe I'll come too!

JO. (*A little laugh.*) No thank you!

FRANCINE. Come on! It'll be fun! You and me take a nice trip.

JO. Can't wear a nightgown and slippers on an airplane, Ma.

FRANCINE. Smart mouth.

JO. You *can't*.

FRANCINE. I know that! (*Beat.*) Way people dress nowadays who the heck cares anyway. People wear dungarees everywhere.

JO. It's the style, Ma.

FRANCINE. People useta make / an effort.

JO. Uh-huh.

FRANCINE. Dress nice on the airplane. Men in ties. Women got their best furs on. / Not like now.

JO. I laid your clothes out nice on the bed.

FRANCINE. What'd you do that for?

JO. As a friendly reminder.

FRANCINE. What's so friendly about it. (*Beat.*) You treat me like I'm a moron.

JO. I do not.

FRANCINE. You and your father both useta think you were so smart. With your college degrees and your fancy-schmancy things / you know.

JO. Don't have a college degree, Ma.

FRANCINE. Just *about*.

JO. Not even a year's worth.

FRANCINE. Well. You're still smart. (*Beat. No response.*) You hear me Josephine? You're still a / very smart girl.

JO. I hear you Ma! I hear you! (*Silence. Coffee drinking. Bagel eating. Newspaper reading. TV watching.*)

FRANCINE. What time you coming home tonight?

JO. What time do I always come home.

FRANCINE. Six-thirty.

JO. So ... There you go. Why'd you ask.

FRANCINE. Just. Making conversation. (*Pause.*) You got a phone call yesterday.

JO. You take a note?

FRANCINE. Forgot ...

JO. How many times do we haveta go over this? You wanna answer the phone you gotta / write down a message.

FRANCINE. It's my house! I can answer the phone if I want to without / getting permission!

JO. Fine! But you gotta take messages!

FRANCINE. I got a good memory though.

JO. OK so who called.

FRANCINE. A woman.

JO. That's. Extraordinarily helpful, Ma.

FRANCINE. It was about the reunion.

JO. Oh. Jeez. Forgot about that.

FRANCINE. You gonna go?

JO. Haven't decided yet.

FRANCINE. Go! You should go! You never go anywhere!

JO. I go plenty of places.

FRANCINE. Where do you go? Besides imaginary trips to. *Milwaukee*. (Beat.) Maybe you'll get a romance going.

JO. With *who*?

FRANCINE. Somebody at the reunion!

JO. (A little laugh.) Yeah. Maybe.

FRANCINE. People reconnect at reunions all the time. I read an article in *People* magazine / about that.

JO. They're all married Ma.

FRANCINE. How do you know?

JO. Cuz most people my age live around here are married!

FRANCINE. Maybe somebody's a widower?

JO. (Laughs.) Maybe.

FRANCINE. Or divorced? Lotta people get divorced / these days.

JO. Yeah sure.

FRANCINE. Get a new dress. Get a nice hairstyle.

JO. Maybe.

FRANCINE. You gotta good figure when you don't dress like a schlump. You should put yourself together more.

JO. Like you?

FRANCINE. I always have lipstick on. Even when I'm just in the house. Because / you never know.

JO. You never know.

FRANCINE. And I'm an old lady honey. I don't need to put myself together. But you're young.

JO. No I'm not.

FRANCINE. You're younger than me.

JO. Younger than *you* isn't. *Young*. (Beat.) Maybe we'll go to a movie tonight Ma. Whadya think huh? See what's playing at South Shore Plaza. Go to Brigham's after. Get a cone?

FRANCINE. See how I feel later. / But maybe.

JO. Yeah sure. (Beat.) Get dressed today Ma. Nice sweater. Pair of slacks.

NICE GIRL

by Melissa Ross

1M, 3W

In suburban Massachusetts in 1984, thirty-seven-year-old Josephine Rosen has a dead-end job, still lives with her mother, and has settled into the uncomfortable comfort of an unintended spinsterhood. But when a chance flirtation with an old classmate and a new friendship at work give her hope for the possibility of change, she dusts off the Jane Fonda tapes and begins to take tentative steps towards a new life. A play about the tragedy and joy of figuring out who you are and letting go of who you were supposed to be.

"A tenderly drawn drama ... NICE GIRL presents a slice of middle-class life with unpatronizing honesty and simplicity. ... And while the final image is a hopeful one, Ms. Ross wisely avoids the kind of pat or sentimental ending that would spoil the play's mood of ambivalence, not to mention its truthfulness." —**The New York Times**

"Playwright Melissa Ross' gentle, old-fashioned heart-tugger casts an insistent spell ... It's a simple story that makes you ponder the age-old dilemma about women having it all ..." —**New York Daily News**

"Nice girls finish last. OK, maybe not dead last, but not far from the bottom. At least that's the case in Melissa Ross' play, whose title character, Josephine, is sweet as can be. And miserable. ... The best thing about the sweet, low-key NICE GIRL is that it never makes fun of Jo, and it doesn't pity her, either." —**New York Post**

"Absorbing ... Josephine is sympathetic but not maudlin, and Ross is refreshingly unhurried in depicting her plight. The dialogue gives the characters room to breathe ... [The play] draws your attention to a woman who would not presume to command it." —**Time Out (New York)**

Also by Melissa Ross
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