

**THANKSGIVING SURPRISE**

By

Gabby Rooney

Gabby Rooney  
Gabby.Rooney@loop.colum.edu

## **CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

- MELISSA - Female, 26 years old
- LAUREN - Female, 32 years old, Eric's work friend
- ERIC - Male, 55 years old, Melissa's father
- ANTHONY - Male, 24 years old, Melissa's brother

## **SETTING**

- TIME - modern day, Thanksgiving, evening
- PLACE - Melissa's dining room

Lights up on MELISSA starting to set up a dining room table. She is grabbing placemats along with plates/bowls from a cabinet seen onstage. She is going through these motions when ANTHONY enters, holding 4 sets of silverware.

MELISSA

How many places do we need to set? It's just Dad who's coming, right?

ANTHONY

He's bringing someone. A work friend, he said.

MELISSA

Right. You'd think he'd want to spend Thanksgiving with only family since it's our first holiday without Mom, but the more the merrier, I suppose.

ANTHONY

Maybe he needs a little extra moral support... since it is such a rough time.

MELISSA and ANTHONY continue setting the table, setting 4 places now.

MELISSA

I wonder what kind of work friend he's bringing. Did he mention it to you?

ANTHONY

Umm no, not really. He said it was someone special.

MELISSA

Vague. Very like him. A mysterious man our father is.

(brief pause)

It can't be someone we know or he'd just say their name, right?

ANTHONY

Who knows.

MELISSA

I hope it's Steve or Patrick or someone. They always put Dad in a better mood, and they're not as intolerable as Dick is.

(pause, chuckling)

Get it? His name is Dick. And he's also the worst.

MELISSA laughs to herself while ANTHONY is silent.

MELISSA

Anyways, maybe it's good someone's coming over to spend time with us so we don't wallow so much.

(brief pause)

Everything alright, Anthony?

ANTHONY

Yeah, I'm fine. I'm going to go check on the turkey.

MELISSA

Oh, perfect. I think it should be almost done by now.

ANTHONY exits. The doorbell rings and MELISSA moves to open the front door.

MELISSA (cont.)

(calling to Anthony)

Make sure to take the baster and get all that juice on top of the turkey! I don't want to serve dry turkey, okay!

MELISSA opens the door. ERIC and LAUREN enter.

ERIC

Happy Thanksgiving, sweetie!

ERIC hugs MELISSA, but she's eyeing LAUREN closely.

MELISSA

Happy Thanksgiving, Dad. Who do we have here?

ERIC

This is a friend from work. Lauren, meet Melissa. Melissa, meet Lauren.

LAUREN

Nice to meet you, sweetheart. Thank you so much for having me over.

MELISSA

My pleasure.

LAUREN

I've been so excited to meet you and Anthony. Your father absolutely adores you two; he talks about you all the time.

MELISSA

Oh, does he?

LAUREN

Of course! Work, home, on the phone - he talks about y'all like you're the ones who are gonna save the world one day.

MELISSA

How sweet of him.

(brief pause)

Would you excuse us for one moment?

MELISSA grabs ERIC by the arm and pulls him far away enough from LAUREN that she can't hear. Meanwhile, LAUREN is off in her own world, maybe messing with decorations or other things.

MELISSA

This is your "work friend," huh?

ERIC

Please don't make this more than it is, Melissa.

MELISSA

You've just brought a woman to Thanksgiving, talking about how you spend so much time bragging about your sweet children at "work, home, on the phone." Home, hm?

ERIC

Melissa -

MELISSA

Is she your girlfriend or something?

ERIC

Well...

MELISSA

Oh, hell no.

ANTHONY enters, holding the turkey with oven mitts and sets it down in the center of the table.

ANTHONY

Happy Thanksgiving, Dad!

ANTHONY (cont.)

(to LAUREN)

Welcome, -

LAUREN

(turning, holding her hand out)

Lauren. Nice to meet you, Anthony. I'm close with your father Eric.

ANTHONY

I've heard bits and pieces about you. Dad is a little shy, y'know.

LAUREN

Shy? Oh, I would never peg Eric to be a shy one. That's sweet, though. He's cute, isn't he?

ANTHONY

He's definitely something.

MELISSA notices ANTHONY and LAUREN's

interaction,

then goes to pull ANTHONY away.

LAUREN

(to Melissa)

Oh, sweetheart, your house is the cutest thing I've ever seen. Where did you get all these little knick-knacks?

MELISSA

(still holding onto Anthony)

They're my mother's.

LAUREN

Well, she sure did have taste... creates such a homey feel to it.

MELISSA

How nice of you to say.

MELISSA continues pulling ANTHONY away.

MELISSA (cont.)

Umm... did you realize Dad was bringing a girl here? Can you believe -

ANTHONY

It's not that big of a deal, Melissa.

MELISSA

I'm sorry, what?

ANTHONY

So what if Dad brought someone over? She's nice.

MELISSA

She's barely older than us.

(brief pause)

And how are you okay with Dad letting a random woman spend Thanksgiving with us when Mom's barely been gone at all.

ANTHONY

It's been almost a year. She died right after New Years, Melissa.

MELISSA

Dad can't move on that quickly. They were -

ANTHONY

Melissa. Please don't blow this out of proportion. It's Thanksgiving. You said earlier, "the more the merrier."

MELISSA

Well, I didn't realize "more" meant some -

ANTHONY

Melissa. Be nice.

ERIC leads LAUREN to MELISSA and ANTHONY.

ERIC

I'm so glad we're all getting a chance to spend some quality time together. This means a lot to me. Thank you to all of you.

LAUREN

And especially Melissa for letting us share these moments in her home.

LAUREN smiles at MELISSA who half-heartedly returns the gesture. A timer goes off.

ANTHONY

That's probably the casserole. I'll go grab it.

LAUREN

Is there anything I can help with? I would feel so bad if I let one of our hosts do all of the preparing.

MELISSA

I think he'll be -

ANTHONY

Don't worry about it. I've got everything pretty under control, but thank you for being so thoughtful.

ANTHONY shoots a look at MELISSA before exiting.  
LAUREN and ERIC are flirting with each other as if no one else is around. They've been doing this the whole time.

MELISSA

So... you two met at work?

ERIC

It's actually a funny story.

LAUREN

It turns out we met a little while before we started working together.

MELISSA

When was that?

LAUREN

It was New Year's Eve, and I had gone out with a couple of girl friends to this bar in town called The Pitts. So we're there, and we're having drinks until Eric walks in and sits right down next to me.

ERIC

But the kicker is...

LAUREN

We didn't even speak to each other that night! I had barely noticed him, and he had barely noticed me, but there we were, spending New Years Eve together. Isn't that so cute?

MELISSA

Adorable.

(brief pause)

When did you officially meet then?

7.

ERIC

She started working at the front of the dealership a couple months ago, but we didn't properly meet until recently when she came back into the shop breakroom to give Steve some papers.

LAUREN

Your father was the sweetest thing. I could tell he was joking and goofing around until I stepped in, and he became such a gentleman.

LAUREN and ERIC giggle at each other. ANTHONY returns with two casserole dishes of food and sets them on the table next to the turkey.

ERIC

Looking good, boy.

LAUREN

It all smells so delicious! A man who can cook. I bet you have women all over you.

ANTHONY

(laughing)

Well, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

MELISSA

Speaking of, is the apple pie done?

ANTHONY

We're still waiting on that, but I thought we could start eating while it bakes.

LAUREN

That sounds wonderful!

ERIC

Everyone take a seat!

They all sit down around the table, ERIC and LAUREN on one side, MELISSA on the other, and maybe ANTHONY at the head of the table.

ERIC (cont.)

I think we need to toast! Anthony's prepared this beautiful dinner, and Melissa has graciously let us all into her home for the holiday. There's a lot to be thankful for today.

Everyone raises their glasses as ERIC stands up with his

glass in hand.

8.

ERIC (cont.)

I am thankful for my family always standing by my side even through the darkest times.

(brief pause)

And for new connections.

LAUREN

I am also thankful for new connections. And for those connections to bring me places like this one.

LAUREN and ERIC have a moment.

ANTHONY

I am thankful for everyone at this table and everyone that isn't able to be here. I have so much love in my life, and I am excited to see love between others continue to grow.

ANTHONY, LAUREN, and ERIC have a moment.

ERIC

You're up, Melissa. What are you thankful for this year?

MELISSA

I am thankful for surviving this past year without Mom.

ANTHONY

(under his breath)

Jesus Christ, Melissa.

MELISSA

What? That is what I'm thankful for. What do you want me to say? I'm thankful that my Dad brought his new girlfriend to Thanksgiving?

ERIC

Melissa, don't be this way.

MELISSA

I'm not being any type of way. I'm just telling my truth.

ERIC

You're being inappropriate.

MELISSA

I'm being inappropriate? Says the man that sprung his rebound girl on his children at *Thanksgiving*. Real fun "work friend," Dad.

ERIC and ANTHONY exchange a look like “uh oh.”

9.

MELISSA (cont.)

Hello? Am I missing something?

A timer from the kitchen goes off. ANTHONY immediately jumps up from his chair.

ANTHONY

That’s dessert. I’ll go grab that.

ERIC

I’ll help you.

ERIC and ANTHONY exit. MELISSA and LAUREN sit in silence for a time.

LAUREN

I’m sorry about your mother.

MELISSA

Thank you.

LAUREN

I understand why you don’t like me.

MELISSA

I never said I didn’t like you.

LAUREN

Well, you don’t come off too friendly then... I’m just saying I get it. I wouldn’t want my dad bringing girls around if my mother passed away.

MELISSA

Then why are you here?

LAUREN

I care about your father. He said he needed someone here because he knew you all would be sad your mother wasn’t around.

MELISSA

We’re sad anyways. You don’t change that. If anything, you’re making it worse.

LAUREN

I’m sorry to hear that.

LAUREN (cont.)

(pause)

I'm not going anywhere, y'know.

MELISSA

What?

LAUREN

Your father and I are very close.

MELISSA

Yeah, I can see that.

LAUREN

Eric wants me around, which means I'm staying around.

MELISSA

He just likes you because you make him feel younger.

LAUREN

Excuse me?

MELISSA

You look like you're barely older than me. My dad may think he's being serious with you, but there's no way. He'll never find someone like Mom.

LAUREN

Maybe he doesn't want someone like your mom.

MELISSA

Yeah, right. They were perfect for each other. You can't recreate something like that.

LAUREN

Hm. When he talks about their relationship, it sounds very different.

MELISSA

You talk about Mom?

LAUREN

Of course, she was a very big part of his life for a long time. And a stressful one at that.

MELISSA

Don't talk about her like that.

LAUREN

What? I'm just telling my truth.

MELISSA

You are not part of this family. You shouldn't even be here.

LAUREN

But I am. And you have to be nice to me if you want to make your dad happy.

MELISSA

(starts to walk away)

No, I don't. He doesn't know what -

LAUREN catches MELISSA's arm.

LAUREN

He's happy with me, and there's nothing you can do to stop him from loving me. You said yourself that I make him feel younger, and I'm going to continue to do that until the man dies.

MELISSA

What is wrong with y-

ANTHONY and ERIC return each holding a pie. LAUREN releases MELISSA.

ANTHONY

Now, it's actually time to eat.

MELISSA

Anthony, we need to talk.

ERIC and LAUREN sit down at the table, being lovey-dovey as usual.

MELISSA (cont.)

Lauren has got to go.

ANTHONY

Why? She's been so nice.

MELISSA

I don't think she has good intentions. I just had a conversation -

ANTHONY

Lauren has fine intentions. She obviously has to be doing something right if she can make Dad smile like that.

ANTHONY and MELISSA glance at ERIC and LAUREN who are doing something romantic with each other.

ANTHONY (cont.)

See?

MELISSA

I think it's an act, Anthony. She said some really weird stuff to me.

ANTHONY

You're probably reading too much into it. She seems good for him.

(brief pause)

He deserves to be happy.

ANTHONY walks away from MELISSA. She takes a second to herself before also returning to the table.

ERIC

Come on, people. Let's eat. I don't want this delicious food to get cold.

LAUREN

Thank you, again, Anthony. It was very sweet of you to make all of this for us.

ANTHONY

You're very welcome. Dig in!

Everyone starts to pass around their plates, serving each other. ERIC reaches over the table to grab something when a ring box falls out of his jacket pocket. The whole table gasps.

LAUREN

Oh my god!

ERIC snatches up the box but maintains eye contact with LAUREN. This is a happy moment.

ERIC

Lauren -

13.

MELISSA

(to herself)

No no no no.

ERIC

I know this may seem quick.

MELISSA

(louder)

No no no no.

ERIC

But you have made me so happy in these short months, and I can't imagine a life without you anymore. I wanted to do something big and with my family so that you could feel my love for you and know it's not all for show.

(brief pause)

Lauren, will you marry me?

LAUREN

Yes! Of course!

ERIC and LAUREN embrace. ANTHONY applauds them.  
MELISSA is stunned.

ANTHONY

Congratulations!

Everyone except MELISSA continues celebrating.  
LAUREN moves to hug MELISSA.

MELISSA

(to everyone)

Are you serious?

(to Eric)

Are you serious? You proposed to her? You planned to get engaged to someone at our family Thanksgiving? Less than a year after Mom left?

ERIC

Melissa -

MELISSA

Don't "Melissa" me right now. That's all anyone ever does. "Melissa, don't be like that." "It's not a big deal, Melissa" Bla. Bla. Bla. This is a big deal!

ERIC

It's a very big deal.

MELISSA

So why is everyone acting like this is normal? Anthony, you of all people should be just as upset as I am. Isn't this a shock to you, too?

ERIC and ANTHONY exchange a look.

ANTHONY

Melissa, there's something we need to talk about.

MELISSA

What?

ANTHONY

Can we go somewhere private?

MELISSA

Whatever you're going to say to me, you can say in front of everyone else because apparently I'm the only one out of the loop.

ANTHONY stares at MELISSA.

MELISSA (cont.)

What? Are you gonna tell me that you knew this was going to happen?

ANTHONY

---    ---    ---

MELISSA

You're joking. This is a joke, right?

LAUREN

He knew about me, okay?

ERIC

Lauren -

LAUREN

What? He was taking forever to spit it out. I know you've talked to Anthony about me before.

MELISSA

(to Eric)

So you just failed to mention to *me* that you had a girlfriend that you wanted to marry?

ERIC

It wasn't about you. I -

MELISSA

Obviously, it wasn't about me or I'd think you would feel the need to tell your daughter something like that.

(to Anthony)

And you. Oh my god. I did not expect you to keep such a secret. How long have you known? Did you know Dad was going to propose?

ANTHONY

I've known for a month or so. And yes. I didn't want to tell you because I knew you'd overreact like this.

MELISSA

I'm what?

ANTHONY

You're making a scene, Melissa. We should be happy for them.

MELISSA

I need a second.

MELISSA goes to the kitchen. Everyone watches her leave and stands in silence for a moment.

ERIC

I didn't realize she was going to react that way.

LAUREN

Is she always like that?

ANTHONY

She's just upset.

ERIC

I regret not telling her. I thought this way might be better.

ANTHONY

We both made a mistake.

16.

LAUREN

(to Eric)

Don't beat yourself up so much, sweetie. There's no way you could have known she would act this aggressively.

ERIC

She is definitely her mother's daughter.

(brief pause)

I should talk to her.

LAUREN

Sweetheart, don't entertain her. She's being a child. You can't enable this kind of behavior.

ERIC

She deserves an explanation.

LAUREN

For what? You fell in love, Eric. That's not your fault. She's being selfish.

ANTHONY

You don't need to be like that.

LAUREN

What? It's just true.

ANTHONY

She's upset for a reason. Don't call my sister selfish.

LAUREN

Listen, I'm not one to judge, but you know she's being a little over the top.

ERIC

Honey -

ANTHONY

Don't talk about her like that. I know I kept your secret, but that doesn't mean I don't care about my sister.

LAUREN

I never questioned that. I'm just saying she could be a little happier for your father and I. This is a very big day in all of our lives.

ERIC

Maybe she is being a little much.

17.

LAUREN

See? What did I tell you? You're her father. She's not the one who makes decisions for your life.

ANTHONY

Dad, are you being serious? We really hurt Melissa's feelings.

ERIC exchanges a glance with LAUREN.

ERIC

I don't know. It's all a lot right now.

LAUREN

And that's fair, sweetie. You're allowed to be overwhelmed. But know I'm on your side, alright?

LAUREN sits with ERIC, caressing/ consoling him.

MELISSA enters, seemingly cooled off.

MELISSA

(to Anthony)

I'm sorry I got so upset. I was trying to process everything and -

ANTHONY

Lauren has got to go.

MELISSA

What?

ANTHONY

You were right. I don't think she has good intentions. I just watched her coerce Dad into thinking you didn't deserve an apology.

(brief pause)

I'm sorry by the way. I shouldn't have kept anything from you.

MELISSA

Wait, so what are you saying? We need to find a way to convince Dad she's not good for him?

ANTHONY

I think so. If we don't, I'm afraid we'll lose him... She doesn't seem to like you or me very much anymore.

MELISSA

Yeah, that was obvious.

ANTHONY

We need to get Dad alone. He's completely wrapped around her finger when she's with him.

18.

MELISSA

He'll come to his senses.

MELISSA and ANTHONY join ERIC and LAUREN where they're sitting. LAUREN stares MELISSA up and down.

MELISSA

(to Eric)

I'm sorry I acted so poorly. That was inappropriate of me.

LAUREN

(to Eric)

I told you she'd apologize.

ERIC

Thank you, Melissa. I hope you can accept my relationship with Lauren. I understand that this is a lot for you to digest, but this is what will make me happy.

MELISSA

I understand, Dad.

ANTHONY

We never finished dinner now did we?

ERIC

That's right!

ANTHONY

Oh, it looks like some of the food has gone cold. What a shame. Would mind bringing the dishes to the kitchen with me so we can heat it back up?

ERIC

Of course.

ANTHONY and ERIC exit with dishes of food in hand. ANTHONY makes sure to give MELISSA a look like

"You

know what to do."

LAUREN

I'm so happy you apologized to your father. I would have been so disappointed if your little tantrum affected him all night.

MELISSA

Well, I just felt it was the right thing to do.

LAUREN

And that it was.

(pause)

I can't believe I'll officially be part of the family soon. Isn't that so exciting.

MELISSA

Very. Since you are technically going to be my stepmother in the future, I feel it's only right to get to know each other, right?

LAUREN

Of course, darling. What would you like to know?

MELISSA

Do you always go after older men?

LAUREN

Wow, what an opening question.

(pause)

If you must know, I do have an affinity for the older ones. They've lived more life, and I find them to be a little more generous.

MELISSA

Interesting. And my dad is like that?

LAUREN

Oh, of course. He spoils me rotten. Eric is such a sweet man. That's why I'm marrying him.

MELISSA

You're marrying him because he gives you things?

LAUREN

Well, no, not just that.

MELISSA

What else?

LAUREN

He takes me on weekend trips, he surprises me with little things, he brings me places...

MELISSA

Does your relationship affect how you work together?

20.

LAUREN

Oh, sweetie, that's the best part. Your father is so sweet that he makes sure I'm first in line to sell. He'll let me in on all the clients since he's worked there so long. We make a great team.

MELISSA

That is so nice of him.

MELISSA glances around to see if ANTHONY or ERIC are in the room. They are not.

LAUREN

Why do you ask me those questions in particular?

MELISSA

I think it's interesting that all you've talked about is how much my dad gives you. Is there anything non-physical that you like about him?

LAUREN

Melissa, I believe you're being a little nosy.

MELISSA

Shouldn't I be nosy about my father's new engagement? Afterall, I didn't know about you until a few hours ago.

LAUREN

I guess that's fair...

ANTHONY and ERIC walk in but MELISSA and LAUREN don't notice them.

MELISSA

So tell me. What do you like about my father that doesn't include him giving you anything?

LAUREN

Umm... lots of things! He's very sweet.

MELISSA

You said that already.

LAUREN

He knows how to treat a woman right. He takes care of me.

MELISSA

In what ways?

21.

LAUREN

He... Well, he... buys me th-

(brief pause)

Look, it's not my fault that all your father is good for is money!

ERIC

Lauren...

LAUREN

---    ---    ---

ERIC

Do you mean that?

LAUREN

Sweetheart! Darling! You misunderstood me.

ANTHONY

I think we know what you meant. Loud and clear.

MELISSA

You said he's only good for his money, right?

LAUREN

Well... Listen... I...

(to Melissa)

You set me up!

MELISSA

It was going to come out eventually. I just saved you two a lot of paperwork to fill out.

ERIC

I can't believe you. You were only with me because of what I gave you?

LAUREN

Eric, baby, I didn't -

ERIC

No. You're only trying to apologize because I heard you.

(brief pause)

I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry, we're done.

LAUREN

We're over, just like that?

22.

ERIC

I can't marry someone who only loves me for what I can give her. That's not true love. That's not a relationship.

(pause)

Leave, Lauren.

LAUREN

Fine. I don't think we could have lasted anyways. I can't be stuck with an old man who's pushed around by his kids. That's pathetic.

LAUREN storms off.

MELISSA

(calling off)

Don't let the door hit you!

ANTHONY

(calling off)

See you later, alligator! Or not.

MELISSA and ANTHONY laugh with each other then focus back into ERIC.

ANTHONY (cont.)

I'm sorry, Dad.

ERIC

It's not your fault.

MELISSA

Yeah, it's actually mine... I'm sorry. She wasn't good for -

ERIC

I know. Thank you.

MELISSA

I just want you to be happy.

ERIC

Apparently, you know better than me.

(pause)

I'm sorry. For all of this. I should have made Thanksgiving about family.

ANTHONY

You were trying.

ERIC

And I shouldn't have kept Lauren a secret. You both are entitled to know about my romantic life, especially because your mother hasn't been gone for long. I'm sorry, I don't know what got into me.

MELISSA

Sometimes love is blind.

(pause)

Well, Thanksgiving isn't over yet. Let's make it a good one.

ERIC

For Mom.

They all smile at each other and return to the table once again. They dig into the food and sit there for a little while. Lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY.