

STRAINED RELATIONS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. LEWIS HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Sunlight breaks through the drapes -- highlights a four-poster bed, 50 inch plasma and a Persian rug.

A SPLASH of water takes us into the --

BATHROOM

Water drips from the face of JOE LEWIS, 30s, as he stares at his reflection in the mirror.

He's slender with a youthful appearance. He takes a deep breath and forces a smile as she slips on a pair of glasses.

ROXY (O.S.)

Joe!

The smile drops -- who's he kidding?

INT. LEWIS HOUSE - KITCHEN

Fashionable and expensive. Joe enters to find his wife ROXY LEWIS, 20s, high maintenance and a big bust that she happily shows off in a tight exercise top.

She shares a coffee with CHRIS CORDEN, 20s, slick back hair and ripped jeans. The kinda guy that likes to tell people his name's spelt "Kris" because he thinks it's cool.

JOE

Morning.

With no drink prepared for him, Joe pours himself some coffee as Chris and Roxy snicker.

ROXY

Mornin', sweetness.

Roxy inspects the clock on the wall, and without warning, she grabs the mug from Joe.

ROXY (CONT'D)

You're gonna be late if you don't leave now. I don't want them holding you back tonight.

Joe nods his acceptance.

CHRIS

Oh, that's right. Anniversary weekend. Looking forward to it?

Before Joe can answer --

ROXY

Hell yeah! Who doesn't love a gambling weekend in Vegas?!

From Joe's expression -- he's doesn't. He collects his briefcase from the counter.

JOE

See you later then...

ROXY

You'll be home for four, yeah!

JOE

I promise.

CHRIS

Another busy day at the brain box, huh, Joey?

JOE

What is it you do with my wife again?

Chris smirks at Roxy as she interjects --

ROXY

We've been through this, Joe. My God. He's my personal trainer. You want me to stay fit and healthy, right?

JOE

Of course.

He examines Chris -- the ripped jeans, boots and jacket.

JOE (CONT'D)

You look a little overdressed.

Roxy wraps a hand around her mouth, suppressing a laugh.

CHRIS

My gear's in the van.

Joe nods, accepting the explanation.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe closes the front door, but can still hear the laughter inside. He glares at Chris' dirty van -- completely out of place beside his sedan and manicured lawn.

He steps over to the sedan but hesitates -- gawks back at the house -- a flutter of movement from the bedroom drapes.

Joe ponders before he steps into the sedan, dejected.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roxy sits at the counter with a glass of red wine -- a near empty bottle beside her. She scowls at the wall clock as --

SLAM -- rustling of feet as Joe enters, disheveled. He grabs a water bottle from the fridge...

JOE

I'm sorry.

Roxy stares daggers at him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Work was hectic, and then on the freeway--

ROXY

I don't wanna hear ya lame excuses, Joe!

Joe takes his tie off and drinks the water fiercely.

ROXY (CONT'D)

I hope ya happy?! Ruining my... our whole weekend because of work.

JOE

But it's not ruined. I called the Palazzo - explained to them we'd be checking in a day late. If we leave early tomorrow, then we can still have two whole days... possibly a third.

Roxy's shoulders and spirit lift.

JOE (CONT'D)

I was thinking that I'd take Monday off work, you know, to make it up to you.

ROXY

So we'd get an extra night in Vegas?

JOE

An extra night to spend together...

ROXY

I'm still not happy with you. You'll have to do a lot more to make this up to me.

Joe smiles and takes a worn document from his suit jacket.

JOE
Then hopefully this will go some
way to help with that.

He hands it Roxy -- as she reads, her eyes light up.

ROXY
But...

JOE
I think you're right. We're in this
together... forever. I trust and
love you, Roxy Lewis.

Roxy smiles at Joe before hugging him -- the document rests
on the table, its heading visible: *"PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT"*

INT. THE PALAZZO - LOBBY - DAY

High ceiling, marble floor -- luxurious. Joe and Roxy step
into the activity of a CONVENTION that occupies the hotel.

JOE
What do you think, honey?

Roxy stares at her phone, distracted.

JOE (CONT'D)
You okay?

He places a hand on her shoulder, comforting. She returns his
gesture with a smile.

ROXY
Fine, sweetness. I'm just checking
Facebook.

JOE
I'll check us in. Be back in a sec.

Joe leaves the luggage and takes off to the reception desk.

As soon as he's out of earshot, Roxy types into her phone and
brings it up to her ear.

ROXY
Where the hell are you? Have you
been getting my messages? Text me
as soon as you get this message...
Please, babe.

Roxy's worried expression turns off in an instant as Joe
saunters back, her fake smile enough to convince any man.

JOE
Ready for the best weekend of your
life?

ROXY
Hell yeah...

JOE
Happy anniversary, honey.

They link arms as a PORTER collects their luggage.

EXT. THE PALAZZO - SUITE 11 BALCONY - EVENING

As the sun sets, street lights highlight the Las Vegas strip. Roxy and Joe enjoy the spectacle with glasses of champagne.

JOE
Here's to us.

ROXY
To us.

They clink glasses.

JOE
I love you.

Joe waits a moment but doesn't get the response he wants -- with that, Joe downs his glass and enters the suite.

Roxy takes a brief moment to check her phone -- NO MESSAGES -- she sighs and follows Joe into --

SUITE 11

Beautifully decorated -- fresh flowers, low lighting and red suede chairs. They collect their things ready to go out...

ROXY
Do you smell something?

Joe sniffs and shakes his head.

JOE
No, honey. Can't smell anything over this aftershave.

ROXY
Hey! That was a Christmas present.

JOE
I know and I love the thought you put into it. We'll just leave the balcony door open.

Roxy nods in agreement and they exit the room...

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Low lighting and hordes of SENIOR CITIZENS that pack out the maze of slot machines.

Roxy gambles at a blackjack table as Joe watches and sips on a drink, content.

INT. THE PALAZZO - SUITE 11 - MORNING

The unruffled bedsheets indicates that there was not a anniversary celebration after the casino.

Roxy awakens and as she rubs her eyes -- something takes her breath away -- she rushes out on to the balcony.

The commotion wakes Joe. He pops his head up and glances out at Roxy on the balcony.

JOE

What's happening?

The smell hits Joe, he cringes his nose and attempts to hold his nostrils shut --

JOE (CONT'D)

What is that smell?

INT. THE PALAZZO - LOBBY

Joe and Roxy, disgruntled, wait at the reception desk. The HOTEL MANAGER approaches with unhappy news written on his face.

HOTEL MANAGER

I'm so sorry, Mr and Mrs Lewis but there is just no other suite, or room for that matter available. We're completely booked out with this convention.

Joe accepts the news with grace, but Roxy has different views.

ROXY

So what do you intend to do about our room? It's unacceptable, that's what it is!

HOTEL MANAGER

I agree Mrs Lewis. Please accept our upmost apologies, and please dine at our restaurant, compliments of the Palazzo as your room is taken care of. We will have it cleaned immediately...

INT. THE PALAZZO - RESTAURANT - DAY

Posh and expensive. Joe enjoys a meal as Roxy takes advantage of the situation, guzzling down high-priced wine.

Joe drops his cutlery -- studies Roxy -- bright, beautiful but her worst qualities are on display at this moment.

JOE

Me and you against the world...

Roxy takes note of the sentence, polishes off another glass.

ROXY

What was that?

Joe chuckles -- happy memories.

JOE

That's what you told me on our wedding night... It's me and you against the world.

Roxy CLICKS her fingers at a WAITRESS and shows off her empty bottle of wine. Joe examines the fine restaurant.

JOE (CONT'D)

That motel...

Joe laughs out loud.

JOE (CONT'D)

They gave us a one dollar discount because it was our honeymoon... Cheap bastards.

The Waitress drops off another bottle and takes the empty. Roxy lets a smile slip -- reminiscing.

ROXY

We didn't leave the motel room for three days.

JOE

We didn't leave the bed.

ROXY

The room service was horrible.

JOE

Definitely no Palazzo then.

ROXY

...uh-huh. They were good times for sure.

JOE

They were. You know, we can have those good times again.

It's the awkward moment both have been dreading -- discussing their marriage.

JOE (CONT'D)

I realize that I've been spending too much time at work and for that, I'm sorry. I'm gonna make this right, honey.

Joe places his hand on top of Roxy's

JOE (CONT'D)

It's not too late for us... I can make this marriage work. You want that, right?

ROXY

... Of course.

Roxy removes her hand from Joe's grip and pours herself a glass of wine. Joe nods but it's clear that wasn't the answer he wanted.

INT. THE PALAZZO - SUITE 11

Roxy and Joe enter -- the room's been tidied so Roxy sniffs to test the air before giving Joe an approving nod.

She heads for the bed, and as Joe turns for the bathroom--

ROXY

My God! I can still smell it! It's really strong over here.

Joe spins to Roxy as she opens the glass sliding door and steps on to the balcony. Joe picks up a phone from his bedside table.

JOE

Hello... reception... yes, this is Joe Lewis from suite eleven. I reported a foul smell from our room... well, it's still here.

Joe doesn't seem fussed about the smell as he talks.

JOE (CONT'D)

That would be great... my wife and I will head down to the bar for an hour or so... Thank you.

He puts the phone back on the table and steps out on to the --

BALCONY

Joe rubs Roxy's back, attempting to comfort her.

JOE (CONT'D)
They'll sending another maid to
clean the room.

ROXY
I want to leave! This is Vegas,
there must be hundreds of hotels.

JOE
Probably is but most will be full
with this convention in town. I'm
sure it's just something simple
that was missed the first time.

He spins Roxy so she faces him and places both hands on her
face. He looks into her eyes --

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm really sorry about this.

Roxy, maybe for the first time, feels guilty for her
attitude.

ROXY
It's not your fault, sweetness.

Joe smirks as he removes his hands from Roxy's face. He
offers his hand --

JOE
Why don't we have a go at those
slot machines. They look like fun.

Roxy laughs and takes his hand.

ROXY
You hate gambling.

JOE
What ever gave you that idea?

BEGIN MONTAGE:

-- Three MAIDS clean suite 11, wiping tables and vacuuming.

-- Joe and Roxy laugh at a slot machine in the casino, a
bucket of change in Joe's grasp.

-- One Maid changes the bed sheets as the other two Maids
search the room to locate the smell.

-- Roxy throws dice on a roulette table as Joe CHEERS her on.

-- As the Maids leave the suite, they spray air freshener.

-- Roxy shows off her winnings to Joe as they enter an elevator.

END MONTAGE

INT. THE PALAZZO - SUITE 11 - NIGHT

Laughter as Joe and Roxy close the door behind them -- it's obvious that this is the most fun they've had in a long time.

The fun doesn't last as the bad odor hits them. Roxy's quick to plug her nose.

JOE

I'll call reception again.

ROXY

Don't bother! We're gonna sort this out. I can't stand that smell.

Roxy's a loose cannon as she tears the suite apart: furniture thrown, glasses smash and curtains are ripped down.

Joe helps but is hesitant about trashing the expensive room, putting furniture back into place after he's searched.

Breathing deeply, Roxy charges to the bed and pulls apart her bedside table -- its draws flung to the floor.

After that, she turns her attention to the bed and attempts to remove the mattress -- its sturdy.

ROXY (CONT'D)

Could you please...

As Joe helps out with the mattress, Roxy kneels and peeks --

UNDER THE BED

Blank dead eyes stare back at her --

ROXY

Stutters and puts a hand over her mouth -- shock at what's she seeing as light pours in -- the mattress lifted.

The body of Chris -- still wearing his ripped jeans and jacket. Roxy can't believe it.

ROXY (CONT'D)

What... I don't...

JOE

It would explain why he hasn't texted you back.

She gawks at Joe, surprised.

Joe casually opens his luggage on the floor and rummages through while keeping eye contact with Roxy.

JOE (CONT'D)
I feel like I have to explain for
some reason.

Roxy moves back against the wall, knees tight against her chest.

JOE (CONT'D)
I've had what some Doctors would
call a psychotic break... I think.
Let's keep it simple, that would be
best, don't ya think?

Joe retrieves some WIRE from his bag and rises...

JOE (CONT'D)
Simply... I'm pissed off!

Roxy immediately glances at Chris, and more importantly, the marks around his neck.

Joe approaches Roxy, still very calm with his movements.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm angry with my job, appearance
but most of all, I'm angry with
you. I mean, if had been a model or
George fucking Clooney, I could
take it, I can't compete with
that...

He points at the lifeless body of Chris.

JOE (CONT'D)
But this mother-fucking greaseball!
Give me a break. I ain't accepting
that shit. Well, I did for a little
while...

Joe leans down so he's face to face with Roxy.

ROXY
Please Joe, I love you.

Tears stream down Roxy's face, too terrified to scream.

JOE
Halle-fucking-lujah. You can say
it. Three simple words... pity it
took immediate death for you to do
it.

ROXY
I'm sorry, Joe.

Joe smiles at the apology -- it's actually sincere.

JOE
I know you are, honey.

INT. THE PALAZZO - LOBBY

Joe steps up to the busy receptionist desk, carrying his bag. He places the room key in front of the Hotel Manager.

JOE
Checking out, please.

HOTEL MANAGER
I'm so sorry for all the trouble,
Mr. Lewis.
(frowns)
Your wife not with you?

Joe playfully gawks around.

JOE
It appears not.

HOTEL MANAGER
Was the smell gone? I do hope that
is not the reason you're checking
out early.

JOE
No, but I think it's getting worse
to be honest with you. I left the
balcony door open to air it out.

Joe smiles and struts away, exiting the lobby.

The Hotel Manager turns to one of the RECEPTIONISTS.

HOTEL MANAGER
Why don't you call that Robinson
couple, tell them that their
honeymoon suite is available a day
early.

He puts the key on a hook. It sways back and forth as we --

FADE OUT.