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The Breaking-Up Game

Abstract

Game requires exactly three (3) players, at least one (1) unaware that s/he is playing. The characters are as follows: Primary Player (The instructions are catered to you.) Significant Other (You probably shouldn't read the directions too carefully. Spoiler alert.) Potential Suitor (If you're reading these instructions, we can't play the game.)

Keywords

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February 15, 2013

The Breaking-Up Game

A Game by Liz N. Clift

Players

Game requires exactly three (3) players, at least one (1) unaware that s/he is playing. The characters are as follows:

Primary Player (The instructions are catered to you.)

Significant Other (You probably shouldn't read the directions too carefully. Spoiler alert.)

Potential Suitor (If you're reading these instructions, we can't play the game.)

Ages

Dating age and up. Ideally, you should be beyond those awkward teenage years when you went to the mall to be alone. For best results, the Primary Player and Significant Other should be considering living together in the near future.

Rules & Setup

The game starts with emotional betrayal. Make a friend who will make your Significant Other (SO) jealous, a Potential Suitor (PS). This friend need not be anything more than a potential, but if something develops, all the better for you.

Primary Player: For best results, your SO should be long distance and wildly different from you. See the following chart for examples:

You or Significant Other	Significant Other or You
Atheistic and/or religiously confused	Devout, evangelical Christian
Peace Corps	Military
Pro-social justice	Hates any sort of welfare
Pro-socialized medicine	Pro-private health care
Unaffiliated, left-of-center politically	Die-hard Republican
Pro-gun control	Keeps weapons in every room of the house
Pro-choice	Pro-life
Believes labels like “men’s work” and “women’s work” should be eradicated from the English language.	Classifies “men’s work” as mowing the lawn, anything with hammers or wrenches, changing the oil, and drywall repair. “Women’s work” entails vacuuming, all things with Windex and Scrubbing Bubbles, baking, and cleaning the toilet.
Difficulty with expressing affection; shows emotion by taking care of others	Believes words are enough; verbally expresses affection frequently and is hurt when this is not reciprocated
Comfortable with silence	Uncomfortable with silence
Believes September 11, 2001, was a traumatic day in American history, but	Believes September 11, 2001, is worthy of deep remembrance and patriotism because Americans died unexpectedly, in a way we could not control

realizes almost as many people die each day of heart disease

Directions

1) Your current relationship with Significant Other (SO) should involve high emotional investment. Until recently, you would have called this person one of your best friends. Probably s/he still is.

Note: SO – Don't worry, nothing's wrong. Just keep doing what you're doing. Move backward (mandatory) at your discretion.

2) Spend a rainy Saturday emotionally cheating on your SO with Potential Suitor (PS) at a coffee shop, and later at a local park while walking your dog (walk yourselves if you do not have a dog). Tell PS things you've never trusted yourself to tell anyone.

a. Remember, two to four weeks ago your SO asked you to share something s/he doesn't know about you.

b. Remember, two to four weeks ago you didn't trust yourself to share. Or, more specifically, you didn't trust your SO. Really, it's the same thing, isn't it?

i. If you choose A, do not advance forward.

ii. If you choose B, do not advance forward.

3) Spend eight hours with PS that rainy Saturday. It's not your first time losing hours with/to this person.

a. Realize you're in a kind of shitty relationship and both you and SO are being kind of shitty people. Advance forward at your discretion.

Note: SO – Really, you're doing fine. There's nothing to worry about. Move backward again.

b. Tell PS about it early in the day. S/he will not have feedback directly related to relationship. Try to gauge if there's any jealousy on PS's part.

i. Feel better when you've made the decision to break things off with your SO. Less tired. Less stressed. Advance forward at your discretion but be prepared to move backward.

1. Realize for the first time how long you've really been turning over why the relationship is wrong — longer than you've known PS.

ii. Resolve to end things soon. But not today. It's your SO's birthday. Or it's your anniversary. Or it's just a bad idea to end things on days ending in -y.

1. Go backward one step for every reason you come up with.

4) That evening, call SO. Say Happy Birthday. Or, How was your day? Or think, I can't end this when I hear his/her voice.

a. Remember your SO has told you s/he'd never hurt you.

b. Think of all the ways it could work. Make a list of these reasons. Burn it and lose one day.

Note: SO – This might be a good time to talk about the long-term. Your SO is feeling vulnerable and anxious. Talking about the future will give him/her a sense of security. Or push him/her over the brink because s/he can't think about you in the long term. But hey, isn't it worth the gamble?

c. If applicable, remember s/he didn't want to commit to a long-distance relationship, so whatever you are, you are not dating. Even though if someone overheard your conversations they would conclude otherwise.

i. Perhaps because SO says "I love you" and you say it back. Or because you're talking about a future together. Or because you're both still being shitty people. Lose three days pondering this.

5) Lie to SO when s/he asks what you did with your day, who you were with. Do not lie out of obligation, but because you believe it's the right thing to do.

a. You should feel like shit about lying, because you've already been lying at least five weeks. Remind yourself you haven't ended things sooner because you two have been friends for more than decade.

i. Hope being passive-aggressive will work before you end things. In three days. Or three weeks. Whatev.

1. Take three steps back for being passive-aggressive.

ii. Feel slightly guilty about lying, but only because of what PS might think. Know s/he has little tolerance for passive-aggressive behavior, *because it means you're not taking control of your life, of the situation.*

b. Remember you've been lying about various things since you last saw SO, almost two months ago. Mostly about whom you've been hanging out with. You don't want to trigger the jealous side.

Note: SO – If you're not the jealous type, it doesn't really matter. What matters is that the Primary Player believes you're the jealous type.

6) When your SO tells you s/he loves and/or misses you, respond in kind. Or almost in kind. Reciprocate. Enjoy the feeling in the pit of your stomach that tells you this is wrong. Hush that feeling. Tell yourself that it is good to feel this way. You feel this way because you know the relationship is wrong.

a. Best done over the phone. In person, s/he might be able to read the lie in your body language.

b. If done in person, fake the body language. Do it, damn it. You can fake anything.

i. Like an orgasm. Or love. Or interest in something you're not interested in at

all.

7) Tell your SO you're tired. This is not a lie.

8) S/he does not want to let you off that easily again. Third night in a row. Don't talk much. You're tired, after all, and wishing you were still talking to PS.

a. Advance at your discretion.

9) SO mentions s/he doesn't like it when you're so quiet. S/he can't tell if s/he's done something to upset you, hasn't said something s/he should have, etc.

Note: SO – Ask repeatedly if you've done something wrong. This *never* gets annoying.

a. For every time you reassure your SO nothing's wrong, move backward.

10) Talk until your phone starts to die. Listen to the phone give warning beeps.

a. Consider plugging in your phone.

i. Decide not to. Advance forward at your discretion.

11) Allow the phone to die.

Note: SO – The next time you talk, be sure to point out how the phone *always* dies at the “crucial moment.” Use that phrase exactly. Crucial moment.

12) Send an email to PS about things you talked about during your rainy Saturday together. Title it simply: “Thoughts.”

a. Yes, this is cliché. Go with it.

b. Yes, you're tired. Push through and write the damn email. Lose one night.

13) Get ready for bed. Plug in your phone, but do not turn it back on.

Note: SO – This would be an opportune time to call. Maybe more than once. Leave messages. Text. Your SO won't find this annoying at all.

14) The next day:

a. Listen to voicemail, if necessary. Your SO may have called after your phone died and suggested you call her/him back.

i. If so, do not call back.

ii. Instead, send a text saying you were too tired. It's not entirely a lie.

b. Write the rules for a game about ending a relationship. Begin with a list. Lose one week.

15) Make the decision: I'll end it Tuesday. Or Wednesday. Next month. Soon.

Liz N. Clift holds a MFA in Creative Writing from Iowa State University. Her fiction appears or is forthcoming in *qarrtsiluni*, *Tulane Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, and others. She lives in the American west.

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