

Key Exchange

LISA. If you met her, talked to her, would that all still be there?
MICHAEL. I doubt it.
LISA. Was it like that when you first met your wife?
MICHAEL. Yes. I saw her in a dance concert in Chelsea. It was awful, but she was beautiful. I went back every night to watch her spin around and chant some African tongue. The way she moved, the way she took in the whole audience with her eyes, it conjured up all this rush of images, like just now. I got to know her, and the real flesh and blood images took over. You have to say goodbye to all those projections.
LISA. Great expectations.
MICHAEL. Yes, the great expectations.
LISA. When I was very young, my mother got cancer, and it had spread too far by the time they diagnosed it to do anything but let her die. For about six months she lay in the terminal ward at Sloan-Kettering. When she first went in, she told my father that her only wish was to see her family grow up, but that that was impossible, so to kiss her goodbye and leave and don't hang on for this bumpy ride, as she put it. But the most important thing in the world to my father was that she have her last wish, so he left his job, sold the house, moved us into the city, went through miles of red tape, and arranged for a permit to build a sandbox and a swing next to the parking lot outside her window, where she could see us. And every day that summer, and after school and on weekends that fall, he would take me and my brother there, and we would play, and when my brother asked "Why here?", my father said that Mom was in heaven, but she had a good view of that particular sandbox. (Pause.) My aunt told me that story when I first started going out with boys. She said "What your father did for your mother, Lisa, that is love. Be smart, Lisa. Save your honor for the man who loves you." It was a long time before I could even give a decent kiss without somewhere asking myself whether or not this guy would stand outside my window for six months while I died.
MICHAEL. Have you stopped asking yourself that?
PHILIP. Hey, I'm lonely here.
LISA. Almost completely. (Lisa crosses back up to Philip, kisses him, and packs the camera in her knapsack.) I have some errands to run. You want to play tonight?

PHILIP. Sure. I'll come by around seven. We'll get some dinner.
LISA. It would be easier for me if we met at your place. I have to be in your neighborhood anyway. In fact, why don't you let me have the keys to your place. I'll be over there before you, and I have some clothes to bring over and I don't want to have to haul them around.
PHILIP. Lisa, could we talk about this first . . .
LISA. Your clothes, Philip. I mended your jeans and you left a jacket.
PHILIP. Oh, right. (Philip fishes the keys out of his shorts and hands them to her.)
LISA. Later. (Gets her bicycle, walks it Down to Michael.) See you next week?
MICHAEL. Yeah.
LISA. I'll make a print of that lady.
MICHAEL. Thanks. (Lisa kisses him on the forehead. Lisa exits. A moment, as Michael watches her go.)

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

SUNDAY, JULY 11: Lisa sits, s. r. Philip paces, bends, and waves, s. l. and c.

PHILIP. So great. So we get keys made for each other's apartments. So then you know what happens? I'll tell you what happens. Maybe one night I'm at a party, a bar, whatever, and I meet a girl, and right off we know it's a mutual attraction situation, and we have a little chat and a drink maybe, and next thing you know we're in a cab, and there's a physical thing that's happening, and we're chewing each other's faces and trying to decide where to go, you know, your place or mine, only hold the phone here, there is no decision to be made, because you've got a key to my place, and I don't know if you've dropped by or what, and I don't want to chance putting either you or me

in that awkward situation, so it's off to her place somewhere in the East Eighties where I've got to climb over her two roommates and three cats to do it on a foam mattress on the floor real, real quiet like because Sally my roommate has a commercial call-back at nine-thirty in the morning and this whole time I'm having some resentment towards you because your having a key meant it had to be the cats and the floor and Sally the roommate asleep or nothing.

LISA. (*Sharply.*) Don't sweet talk me, Philip.

PHILIP. I'm just being honest with you. Okay, look, say it's the reverse situation, say you're out with some guy and it's getting personal and you want to invite him up, only you don't know if I've come by to watch a movie on the Home Box . . .

LISA. Okay, Philip, let's just drop it. Exchanging keys isn't really the issue anyway.

PHILIP. I'm sorry. Say what you were going to say.

LISA. Let's just drop it, okay?

PHILIP. You sure?

LISA. Yes. (*Long pause.*) Christ, you make me crazy sometimes.

PHILIP. So you're picking it up again.

LISA. Yes, I am. You give me this graphic harangue about the zipless fuck and then tell me you're just being honest. Well you know what I think? I think you do that to try and keep safe distance, all that jazz like you're just some poor slob who's getting led around by his cock. Well I'm not buying it.

PHILIP. Great. You're going to analyze me now. I love this. I eat this up. Maybe you've got some ink blots I could look at.

LISA. If you're trying to lose me, just say so. You don't need to make up long lurid stories. Do you want to not see each other any more?

PHILIP. Gimme ten more minutes of amateur psychology and ask me again.

LISA. Oh, shit. This isn't going like I rehearsed it at all. (*Pause.*)

PHILIP. You rehearsed it?

LISA. In my head. I knew you might resist the idea. I wanted to make it like exchanging gifts. I want to make this work.

PHILIP. I do too.

LISA. You're a good man. And, usually a sane one, and that's rare. You're spunky. I like you a lot.

PHILIP. I like you a lot too.

LISA. We're good in bed. We like each other's cooking.

PHILIP. You laugh at my jokes.

LISA. I could be in love with you.

PHILIP. Me too. I guess.

LISA. The thing about the keys, it's just sort of a pact. I thought maybe we could give it a go as a couple for a while, see what happens.

PHILIP. You mean exclusively?

LISA. Well yes, exclusively. Just you and me. More than you and me, and it isn't a couple any more.

PHILIP. I see what you mean.

LISA. We do casual real well. Hi, how are you? Saturday night? Okay, call me around five just to make sure. La di da.

PHILIP. I like it. I'm happy with you.

LISA. I like it too. But I feel stagnant. I want to go further.

PHILIP. If we both like it where it is, which we both said we did, why do we have to go and change it?

LISA. I want to see if there's more to it. I want to see what would happen if we made a commitment . . .

PHILIP. Oh, I knew that word would show up here . . .

LISA. Okay, strike commitment. How about an agreement? A trust? If there's a trust between us, will Papa Hemingway still ask you out for some drinks and a bullfight?

PHILIP. All right, Lisa . . .

LISA. I'm sorry. I'm jumping all over you and I don't mean to. (*Pause.*) I can't do casual any more.

PHILIP. You could just stop seeing other guys, just like that?

LISA. It wasn't me who insisted that it was important that we see other people.

PHILIP. You agreed.

LISA. You made a big deal out of it. I have a confession to make. I've been lying to you. Philip, I haven't been seeing other men.

PHILIP. You haven't? For how long?

LISA. Almost since the beginning.

PHILIP. That's over four months.

LISA. I know.
 PHILIP. What about that doctor?
 LISA. I made him up.
 PHILIP. And your old boyfriend?
 LISA. More lies. He's been in L.A. for a year.
 PHILIP. That actor?
 LISA. I photographed him. We had a drink. That was it. I didn't want you to feel pressured, so I invented a busy sex life for myself. I didn't meet any one else I wanted to be with. Do you understand?
 PHILIP. I guess so. Yes. (*Pause.*) Oh, Lisa, I hear you, I hear what you're saying. Half of me says sure, do it, she's a great dame and you're crazy about her and this could surely be IT, boyo, and the other half says sure, go ahead; but realize that somewhere down the line one of you will meet someone else, or it won't work out, and there's gonna be tears and hurt and the whole shebang because you had to take a perfectly good thing and go off and hinge everything on it and weigh it down with keys and commitments and all, because we couldn't leave well enough alone.
 LISA. I want to take the chance.
 PHILIP. No going back, huh?
 LISA. I'm not saying let's get married, sweetie, or even let's live together. I'm not that sure either. But I can't say oh, it was just a thought, no. I can't pretend not to want more.
 PHILIP. Do I have to decide right now, about the keys?
 LISA. No, of course not. I want you to think about it.
 PHILIP. If we exchange keys, can I sneak into your bed in the middle of the night?
 LISA. I wish you would.
 PHILIP. Can I bring my pals?
 LISA. No more than five at a time. (*They kiss for a while. Philip crosses to his bicycle, putting on his gloves.*)
 PHILIP. I'm going to ride for a while. You want to come?
 LISA. No, I think I'll stay here for a while, wait for Michael to come back. I have a picture I want to give him. Come over for dinner tonight?
 PHILIP. Ah, I can't.
 LISA. Oh. Plans?
 PHILIP. Sort of, yeah.

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LISA. You have a date.
 PHILIP. Well, yes, I do.
 LISA. Oh.
 PHILIP. I'll get out of it.
 LISA. No, don't. Keep your date. And while you're trying to think of something to talk about with her between ordering drinks and getting in the sack, oh, shit, never mind. (*Pause.*) Goddamn it, Philip, can't you lie once in a while? Yankces? Box seat? First base line? Great, have a good time, call me tomorrow.
 PHILIP. I'll have a key for you tomorrow.
 LISA. (*Quickly.*) I'm sorry. Just go.
 PHILIP. Lisa!
 LISA. Please. Go.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

SUNDAY, JULY 18: Philip is "truing" the rear wheel of his bicycle, spinning the wheel, adjusting the spokes with a key, and checking the alignment. Michael sits D., staring out, blank faced. He is singing "Stay With Me," an old Rod Stewart anthem. • The melody is there, the delivery is flat

PHILIP. So how's married life?
 MICHAEL. (*Turning to him.*) I wish you'd stop asking me that goddamn question. If you're so goddamn curious, why don't you get married and find out for yourself.
 PHILIP. A little testy today.
 MICHAEL. Fuck you.
 PHILIP. A little cranky.
 MICHAEL. Fuck you.
 PHILIP. Jesus, so serenaded me some more.
 MICHAEL. Look, I'm not playing with you, so just leave me the fuck alone.

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