

“Lisa”

By Dirty Dawg

How do you tell your best friend that you're in love with her?

For a week now, I've been thinking constantly about that question. About a week ago, Lisa called me to tell me the good news. We hadn't talked for about six weeks, and for us, that wasn't atypical. We had that special, intense kind of relationship where time and distance stopped mattering almost from the outset. We could go weeks without talking, and then pick a conversation up where we'd left off, as if we'd only been apart minutes. Once, Lisa called me at work, and when I picked up the phone, I heard, "...so, as I was saying..." and I knew right where she was. That was the kind of relationship we had. We were the best of friends, soulmates.

And now, it seemed like that's all we would ever be.

And for a long time, that's all I ever wanted. Wasn't it? Pushing back from my desk, I walk to the window in my den that overlooks the back yard. I can see some ducks playing in the pond, the mother gently calling to her ducklings to follow her. My thoughts are confused and whirling around inside my head. A thousand memories shared with Lisa flash across the movie screen inside my head, and I fight to regain control. Shaking my head, I walk back to the desk and sit down.

I stare at the phone.

It sits there, silently mocking me. Call her, it seems to say to me, pick up the phone and make a complete fool out of yourself. You've had more chances than anyone has a right to expect, and you've turned away from all of them. Go ahead. Call her.

I push the phone away in disgust and slide my chair back, tilting it so I can put my legs up on the desk. As I settle back, my hands clasped behind my head, my gaze takes in the Lucite picture frame perched on one corner of the desk. It's a photo of Lisa and me, at the beach, taken about three years ago. She's wearing a terrycloth wrap, but it's open slightly, and the banana-yellow bikini she's wearing can be barely glimpsed. Her face is tan, and her smile is wide and eager. It's obvious that we'd had a fun day at the beach, the two of us, and her arm is casually slung around my waist. I'm wearing jams in the picture, and I've got a towel draped around my neck. You can see the top of my hand on Lisa's shoulder, and I'm looking at the camera. Lisa's looking at me, with this stupid dreamy expression on her face.

That single picture sums up our entire relationship. She was always looking at me, and I was always looking elsewhere. She'd gotten tired, apparently, looked elsewhere, and seen someone else looking back. And now they were looking at each other, and I was stuck staring at a goddamned picture on my desk.

I look at the phone again, then back at the picture. How long, I wonder. How long have I been in love with my best friend? When did it start? My sudden, intense reaction to the news that she is getting married tells me that the feelings have been there for a long, long time.

I try to remember. We've known each other for so long. So many years between us. I know that I've always had affection for her, always thought that she was an incredible person...and incredible woman. An incredible friend.

When did it become more than that? And why am I so afraid to tell her that I love her?

I can always take the cop-out that I'm scared that anything romantic, anything intimate between us might turn to shit and ruin our friendship. Even as that thought flits across my mind I dismiss it. It's bullshit and it's a rationalization. I know enough about myself and enough about Lisa to know that if we had gotten involved, and it had turned to shit, we'd still be friends. Maybe not as close as

before, not with the pain of a supposed breakup that hadn't even happened yet, not with the walls that were sure to go up between us, but still friends.

So what was I worried about?

I know what it is. I just don't want to admit it. It's several things, actually. Fear, mostly. Fear of loving someone too much. I know how totally insane that sounds, but remember: I'm a man. I'm genetically insane.

The liquor cabinet called to me. I could hear Mr. John Daniel's calling to me. You might know him as Jack, but when you've been involved with the man as long as I have, he prefers the more formal John. Ah, sweet dark liquid of life. He has the cure for my ills.

No, he doesn't. All he will make me do is get maudlin and depressed. I'll rage against the storm, scream at the walls and have huge conversations with people that aren't even in the room. It's interesting, don't you think, that when you're having a fight with someone that's not there, imagining their responses to your responses...you always win those fights.

I shake my head and try to refocus my attention on something I'm unfamiliar with. My feelings.

What, exactly, are my feelings? I love her. I know that. I love her very...much. I know that, too. Another thing I know is that I am completely terrified of making love with Lisa.

Ah. The crux.

You see, in order to have a fully functioning adult relationship, you have to have sex. I mean, it's not a requirement or anything, but it does help. And it wasn't that I was a horrible lover or that I had a tiny dick that I was ashamed of...it was just the gnawing certainty that I wouldn't be able to satisfy Lisa in bed.

Getting up from behind my desk, I walk to the couch and lay down and put my feet over the edge. I'm relaxed now, or, a little more relaxed than I was a moment ago. I can now look at this dispassionately and dissect it with all the calm coldness of a scientist examining a specimen under a microscope. No problem.

Two things contribute to this feeling. The first is the fact that Lisa has the rather annoying habit of discussing her sex life with me. I knew she wasn't a virgin, or a nun, but I had no idea that women talked about sex as eagerly...as hungrily, as nastily as men did. Lisa had dumped more than one boyfriend because she'd found him lacking between the sheets. More than more than once Lisa has given me a blow-by-blow, you will pardon the expression, description of her sexual encounters. About how one boyfriend actually asked permission to come in her mouth. And how she had turned him down, turned off that he was so wimpy as to even ask. She likes her men strong and in-control. She likes a challenge. She wants someone to tame, someone to bend to her formidable will.

And one more thing. It had happened once already. Well, almost. Two years ago. We went away for the Fourth of July weekend. Neither of us were seeing anyone, so we decided to spend it together. We got very, very drunk, and ended up on the couch together. I was aware that Lisa was on the make, that she was hot and horny and she wanted to fuck me. We started kissing and necking and having fun, and these fears surfaced in me again. I started to pull away, to get distracted. Lisa looked at me strangely, got up and walked into her bedroom. The next day we didn't speak about it. At all. It had never come up again.

I assume that she feels that I don't find her attractive, or that I am not interested in a romantic relationship with her. How ironic that there is nothing further from the truth. How idiotic that when I can finally face my feelings, can finally begin to do something about them, Lisa is beyond my reach.

Or is she? Perhaps this is one last attempt on her part to force my hand. Perhaps this is what I have been waiting for, a galvanizing event to make me realize what is right under my nose, what has been directly in front of me for all these years.

Do I dare? What is it that someone once said? A coward dies a thousand deaths, but the valiant die but once. Time to make a stand. Time to get up and do something about my life.

I stand from the couch and grab my car keys. It's about two hours to Lisa's house from where I live. Two long hours in the car, looking at the road passing under my tires, listening to the radio. Every song is about us. Every song is a love song, every twisted, painful emotion reaching out to me from the speakers, reaching inside my soul. I hear the words, and I feel the music and I know the emotions. Love. Never-ending, undying love. She will be mine. I can feel it. I will make her mine.

I arrive at Lisa's house just after dusk. I can see that she is home, and that she is alone. Or, so I hope. There is no strange car parked in the driveway, just Lisa's Jeep Cherokee, black and sleek in the soft light.

I park my car and lock it, starting the long walk up to her house. The front light comes on; Lisa heard my door slam. The front door opens and she's standing there, barefoot, wearing old jeans and a T-shirt of mine that I gave her one day on the beach. I can tell that she's not wearing a bra, and the thought that her naked, full breasts are pressing against a piece of clothing that I've worn is strangely exciting. I wonder if she would sleep in just my pajama tops, me in the bottoms. A picture fills my head, a perfect mental snapshot of Lisa standing in her breakfast nook wearing my light-blue pajama top, the morning paper, folded over, in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other, reading by the early morning sunlight. In slow motion, she turns, in my head, and looks at me, her eyes finding mine. She's wearing her glasses, the ones that make her look shy and sexy and bookish and devilish all at the same time.

She takes them off and tosses them casually on the table to join the coffee cup and paper, and she walks towards me, smiling, reaching out with her arms, taking me inside them, lifting and turning her head for a good-morning kis-

"Jeff!" She squeals my name and runs down the stairs at me, into my arms for real this time. I feel my arms going around her body, enveloping her, feeling her warmth against me, loving it, inhaling her scent, knowing that it's the most beautiful smell in the world, wanting to smell that smell every morning as I wake up to greet the bright, rational sunlight of a new day.

"Why-? When-?" She's full of questions, this one, but her smile tells me everything I need to know.

"Are you alone?"

Her face clouds for a second. "No, Alex is here." Ah, the dreaded enemy. Alex. Such a name. Reminds me of that damn dog in the beer commercials years ago. He's probably well trained.

"I need to talk to you." I say, and then add, "Alone."

Her face changes expression again, and then she nods once, a decision made, a line crossed. She takes my hand and walks with me back to the house, ascending the stairs slowly. There is a heaviness to her now, a resignation that she knows what is coming and either eagerly anticipates it or dreads it. I cannot tell, and to be truthful, I do not care. The time has come to say what must be said, to face the reality of the situation.

"Alex," she is saying, bringing me into the foyer, "I want you to meet someone. This is...Jeff, my...best friend." The words struggle out of her mouth as if something unseen is pulling them with a tow rope. I can hear the machinery struggling. I hear and sense movement to my side and turn to

face this man, this obstacle in my path, this nemesis.

He is handsome. I see that immediately. I can say that. He is good looking. He has a strong chin and deep eyes the color of the ocean. They will be beautiful children, I think.

"Glad to meet you," he says, and I can hear the strong timbre of his voice. It is a radio announcer's voice, a voice a woman longs to hear call her name in the throes of passion during the wolf hours of the night. It is a voice that I immediately hate.

"Yeah," I say lamely. "Me, too." He shakes my hand, and there is a moment where we both consider attempting to establish superiority by the tried-and-true method of Handshake Olympics. The moment passes, and we drop hands like sulking schoolboys faced to shake on the schoolyard after a fight.

I take the initiative. "Alex, I hate to impose, but Lisa and I need to talk." Again, I add, "Alone." Surprised, he looks from me to her, seeking some kind of ruling on this offense. Lisa is the final arbiter. She can say something hollow and trite like "Whatever you have to say to me, you can say in front of Alex." I know that is what he wants, but I pray that she will deny him.

She does. "Please, Alex," she says softly. "I'll call you tomorrow." There. It is done. Another line has been crossed. I have achieved dominance without having to resort to any mental games. It makes me feel good to see the look on his face. But he is not done yet. He moves to her, smirking at me over her head as he leans down to kiss her goodbye. It is a hungry, possessive kiss, and I see his tongue intrude into her mouth. She pulls away, embarrassed, and glances at me to see if I've noticed, but I'm already looking away, pretending my attention is focused elsewhere.

Alex leaves. Lisa takes me into her living room. She sits on the couch, directly in the middle of that hilariously small piece of furniture. I notice that she has not left me enough room to join her. She is distancing herself from me, pushing me away. She is probably not even aware that she is doing it.

I take a chair opposite the couch. My body language is free and open. I don't cross my legs or arms, choosing instead to use my forearms to lean on my thighs, my hands clasped loosely between my legs. I am the picture of cool, serene confidence.

"Well?" she asks, a small half smile/half frown playing around the edges of her mouth. "What's so important that you drove all the way up here to see me?"

I take a deep breath. Where to begin? Announcing out of the blue that I am in love with her is probably not the best course of action. But I don't want to start a long, meandering conversation that will lead nowhere and will only give me ample opportunity to chicken out.

"Well, the thing of it is..." I start, and then find myself lost in my own thoughts. And that's what I decide to do. I will share my thoughts, my feelings, my emotions with Lisa. Not words. I'll tell her pictures, images, scenes that I've seen before and treasured since. If anything, that will convince the artist's heart and the poet's soul inside her.

I take a deep breath and start again.

"Do you remember the time we went to the beach for the Fourth of July? We had so much fun that weekend, Lisa. It was just two of us, thousands of miles away from here, from each other, from our lives. It was like we went to Mars. We spent four whole days together, just the two of us. It was...incredible, Lisa. The most incredible weekend of my life. Swimming and walking down the beach, holding hands, just laughing about anything and everything. Getting drunk together, seeing how we were together...like that...together..." I take another breath and begin again.

"You see, Lisa...the overriding feeling I have from that weekend is...rightness. It was right that we should be together like that. Together. I keep using that word, together. But that's what I mean. We should be...together."

I stop, and wait for her to respond. She reaches over and grabs one of the throw pillows and starts playing with it, teasing the corners, plucking at the huge button in the center. She waits. I wait.

I continue.

"The more I think about it, the more I come to realize that we belong together, Lisa." There. I'd said it.

Lisa purses her lips a second longer. Sighing, she tosses it aside. "Why am I hearing about this now?" Her tone is cool and modulated. She is testing me, perhaps punishing me. I can feel the panic rising. I fight to quell it.

It's time to give something. To admit. "I will admit that your... plans have made me realize certain things."

Lisa accepts that. Her smile is curt. "What about...you know."

"No, what?"

"About that night. On the couch. When we started...and then did nothing. Why did you push me away?"

I sigh.

"Don't you find me attractive? Don't you know that I loved you?" The past tense scares me. Lisa just spoke about her love in the past tense.

"Loved?"

"Yes. Loved. Love. There. I've said it. It's out. I love you, Jeff. I always have. For the last six years I have loved you and waited for you to notice. And now that I'm getting married, now that I've met a wonderful man who loves me back, you come here and beg me to love you again. That is what you're asking, right? For me to drop Alex and love you again?"

I have no choice, no alternative. "Did you ever stop?"

She grabs the pillow again, pulling viciously at the corners. Her head drops and I can sense that she is crying. When she speaks, her voice is choked with emotions and tears. "No, damn you. I never stopped." And then, quieter, almost in a whisper: "I never will."

That is a beginning. I can work with that. I know that if I can last the next five minutes, I will last the rest of my life with this woman.

"I love you," I say. "I do."

"Who are you trying to convince?" she asks. "Me or you?"

"You."

"Why didn't you make love to me?"

Again. The fear, crawling up my spine like a cold, furry spider. The tendrils of my fear reach out to my limbs. I can feel the sweat at the base of my back.

"I was scared."

Her voice is a plaintive cry in the dark. "Of WHAT?"

"Of getting too close to you."

Her face lifts and she looks at me. "Asshole!" she spits. "That's bullshit, and you know it!"

I say nothing.

"Tell me the truth! Why didn't you make love to me?"

Again, I say nothing.

"Tell me!"

"I was afraid..." I begin. "I was afraid of loving you too much. Of losing myself inside you. You are such a part of me, of my life, I couldn't imagine getting closer to another human being than I am to you right now. And the thought of making love with you...I was afraid that I couldn't

satisfy you.”

That was new. To her, at least. Or, so I thought.

“I know.” Now it is my turn to stare and gape. “I always knew. But I wanted you to try, dammit! I wanted you to at least fucking try!”

I stand. I walk over to her. I hold my hand out. She takes it.

“Come with me,” I say softly. She stands, looks at me, her eyes red from crying, from pain, from the hurt I’ve caused her.

“What will I tell Alex?” she whispers.

“I’ll tell him,” I say. I turn and leave the living room, bringing Lisa with me. We ascend the stairs to her bedroom. I’ve slept in this bed before, with her in my arms. I’ve woken up next to her, watched her sleep, noticed the form of her body under the T-shirt she wears. My T-shirt. Tonight is different. Tonight we will be as one.

We arrive in the bedroom. I can hear the beach. I can smell the salt air. And then all I can smell is Lisa, because she is in my arms, her body against mine. How many times have I hugged her, I wonder. How many times have I felt her body pressed against me. Now the comforting, warm weight of her breasts against my chest is welcome and savored. The feel of her loins against mine is urgent and needy and also welcomed.

We kiss. Our mouths touch softly first, and then harder as the long-awaited passion between us finally arrives. Lisa’s mouth opens against mine, and I feel her tongue against my lips, slipping between them, entering my mouth, softly scraping against my teeth. I feel her moistness and passion and suck at it, eager to have it.

My hands find her ass and I pull her against me. “Jeff,” she whispers into my mouth. “Oh, my God, Jeff...” She can feel my hardness pressing against her, the evidence of my desire for her, my want for her.

My hands move to the hem of her shirt and I go under it, across her belly, towards her breasts. Breasts I have dreamed of, fantasized over, lusted after. My left hand finds one, her perfect, pale white right breast. Her softness is intriguing. It is unlike any other breast I have ever felt. It is alive, I can feel her nipple against my palm, pressing against me.

I thumb the nipple softly. Lisa moans into my mouth again. She opens against me, her slick, warm lips gently sucking at mine. The kiss is so incredible, so deep and wet. The need passes between us, from one mouth to the other.

I take her shirt off. Her breasts bounce as the material of the shirt clings, and then releases. Her nipples pucker harder under the cool breeze.

“Touch me,” Lisa whispers. “Touch me everywhere. Make me yours. Posses me, Jeff.” I know that is what she always wanted. To belong to me. More importantly, for us to belong to each other.

My mouth finds the spot on her neck she has told me so much about. And then the fear is inside me again. I know so much about this woman. A thousand conversations. I know all her secrets, all her vices, all her pleasures. I know what will make her happy, what will turn her on like nothing else. I know she adores having the small of her back lightly kissed. I know she loves to spread her legs and be eaten for hours. I know that she likes to get nasty sometimes, likes to talk dirty in bed and do lewd things. Every once in a while, she likes to let a man spend on her face.

All of a sudden, a feeling that I’m invading her privacy flashes across me. There are no secrets left for us to discover in each other. I know all of it. Everything.

I am tensing, ready to push her away...and then I don’t. I realize that I may know what she likes, but we have yet to experience it together. I remember that sixty people can look at the same

painting and see sixty different things.

My passion rekindles and I attack her. My hands lift her up and carry her to the bed where I dump her. My clothes vanish in a flash, and I join her. Our hands are everywhere at once, finding secret places and touching, caressing them. Her hand finds me and guides me, grasping my length and pulling it closer. I feel her moist center and cleave her neatly. As if we are made for each other, we join on the bed and become one. The passion has never been greater, never been this perfect. This is what I have searched for my entire life. This perfect unison of mind and body and soul.

We move urgently against each other, finding solace and warmth in each other. Her mouth is against my throat, licking my pulse point. Her legs grasp my hips as she undulates against me. She is welcoming me with her body, using herself to squeeze and caress that part of me that is so deep inside her I don't know where I begin and she ends. We are one.

"Fuck me, Jeff!"

I speed my actions, anxious to spend within her, to give her my gift, to prove my desire and love for her. She needs this, this hot, sweaty movement, this give and take of fluids and lust. She needs to feel wanted and desired, to feel lusted after and needed. I give her all I can, drawing on what I know about her to bring Lisa pleasure. My hands find her breasts as I fuck her, as I give her my cock. She is no longer the pristine woman I have known and loved. She is my woman, my cunt, my slut. She is there for me as I am for her, and we move together even harder, faster, deeper.

My hand moves from her breast and slides lower, towards her center. I find her button and caress it, twist it, watching my actions bring Lisa closer to the ultimate release, our first together.

And then it is upon me, as well. I feel her clasp me with herself, drawing me in, milking me as I erupt inside her, emptying myself inside my lover, my woman. My future wife.

I fall against her, finding her mouth with mine. "I love you," I whisper. "I love you Lisa."

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