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Photo Exercise

Unrequited

Usually it was women who picked up on the unsaid things in a relationship. We are the more perceptive ones, picking up on non-verbal clues given off by men, even when they don't intend to. It's not what they say, it's what they don't say. It's not what they do, it's what they don't do. I have caught many lovers in the past in lies. Not even just the ones being unfaithful, but the ones who lie about their feelings by omission.

Anastasio was different. He always seemed to know what I was thinking, doing, feeling. It was as if I was dating a woman. At least in that respect. There was no hiding anything from him. Not out of fear or intimidation, but because he just knew. It drove me crazy.

Having someone know you well, that well, was a scary thing. There was no way to shield him from my vulnerabilities, my insecurities, my fears. He read them not like a book, but like a book he had written.

When I came over Thursday, he was more prepared than I was. I tried to stick to our usual routine of dinner, television, sex and bed. I felt that I had covered my tracks well enough that he couldn't catch on. But he did. I thought I was able to process the dissolution of our relationship privately. But I hadn't. I thought I was ready for anything. But I wasn't.

"We need to talk Stas," I told him after we finished in bed. I had rehearsed my opening line countless times and this wasn't it. I was already off kilter and that wasn't a good way to start. "This... I don't know. This isn't working for me any more," I said fumbling for words that

didn't sound cliché. The script I had prepared was already in the garbage and I realized I was just going to be improvising. Brain racing, I now was trying to give him the honesty he deserved without inflicting any more pain than was necessary. It was a precarious and elusive line to walk that seemed to move every time I thought I had my bearings. I needed something to anchor this conversation and myself. For his sake, not mine. Well, maybe for my sake as well.

"I know," he whispered back. These two words reinforced what I knew and what I feared. It also instantaneously seemed to cement all my worst fears. I had made assumptions and they were right on from the start, so how could I not also believe that the rest of the things my imagination had whipped up for worst case scenarios would not also come to bear?

"This isn't what I wanted, but what I feel or don't feel is out of my control," I said trying to explain away my course of action. His lips tightened as he turned his head and looked away.

"I'm not mad at you. I..." he trailed off, his face still aimed the wall. "I just wish... I know how this goes. I'm not 17, I know there are no guarantees, I just wish..." He just wished things were different. But they weren't.

Anastasio was a sweet man. Possibly the sweetest man I had ever dated. He was everything a woman could ever want. On paper. The hope of finding someone seemingly so perfect had given me months of feeling satisfied in the relationship. He had been patient with me knowing I had just come out of a long term relationship. He made his intentions known, without being pushy. Things progressed at my pace, on my terms. This seemed to multiply if not the feelings, at least what could possibly come. He needed nothing to float on. His feelings provided all the momentum needed to carry him through that time. Being patient and understanding came effortlessly to him. He was in pursuit mode.

On the other hand, I was more hesitant, reluctant. I told him at the beginning, "If I ever

tell you I am looking for a relationship right now, I'm lying." I wanted something fun, easy, no commitment. The sex was amazing, and when the sex is good, I want it often, and even though I didn't want a relationship, it certainly seemed to take the form of and look like one. I occasionally saw other men, but there just didn't seem to be the possibility of what I thought I saw with Stas. I eventually gave in, and we agreed to monogamy. It's hard to argue you aren't in a relationship when there is a commitment.

What I have realized recently is that there was nothing for me beyond the possibility. When the feeling of anything being possible had disappeared, there was nothing left. Despite Stas having told me he loved me, the words slipping out of his mouth and the instant realization that he had said and exposed too much, I never returned the words. I didn't love him. In one of the few if only times he misread me, he mistook obsession for love, and was now feeling the sting of his miscalculation. He wanted to believe we were on the same page so badly, he misread the situation.

The reality of his error and the realization of what life would now look like, a life and future he was desperately trying to establish the new framework of at a blindingly fast pace, was coursing through his mind. The feelings would start deep within in him and radiate outwardly, yet as it reached his skin, the last part of his being keeping all this inside him, he would not find the release he was looking for. Those overwhelming feelings became trapped inside him, with no way to free itself. It was as if he was suddenly blind and had to put a puzzle together. He knew each piece went somewhere, but had no idea how to assemble what he had. He could touch and feel each piece, but the sheer number and thought of trying to put them where they should go overwhelmed him. The only reason I know this, for certain, was because I had been there.

Instead, I was the one crying. When he turned back around he had an almost quiet smile

on his face. Not a gloating smile, not a happy smile, but one that still clung to a desperate and misguided hope that if he played this right, there was still a chance. There wasn't.

"Let's get away. Just you and me. I will pay for everything. We will go to Greece for two weeks," he said taking out his checkbook. "I will write you a check for ten thousand. You can plan the entire trip." He didn't realize that his well-intentioned idea wasn't taken as romantic, but as desperate.

"No. I can't," I said as he handed me a tissue, the smile was still on his face. "We can't."

"Why not? I can afford it. Take two weeks off and if we come back and you still don't want to do this, we don't have to. I won't put up a fight, I won't argue. But please, please give me two weeks," he pleaded.

I wasn't sure at the moment what the best course of action for him, or I, to take at the moment was. But this certainly wasn't it.