

# “Lisa”

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By Dave McClain

A man who is separated from his wife pursues an online correspondence which gives him much more than he could have expected – and less.

Davis McLaren, a middle-aged man in a large office full of desks which had been abandoned for the night, stared at his computer screen. His eyes were open wider than usual and his mouth was slightly agape as he re-read the words in the E-mail he had been staring at for several minutes.

“You’ve been patient long enough. It’s time we meet. Friday after work, check into the hotel at the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and Church. I’m off work Friday, so I’ll already be there. When you get to the lobby, just have the desk clerk call me and I’ll come pick you up... if you know what I mean.”

Davis took out his phone and flipped to a picture he recently received in another Email from Lisa. The picture showed a beautiful young brunette standing in front of a college dorm. She was a graduate student now, many years his junior. But, hey, he was separated from his wife and this hot, young woman was pursuing him, so... why not? He looked back at his computer screen.

“I thank you for sticking to e-mail these past few weeks and respecting my privacy and my space. It means a lot. You might think that meeting like this is a big leap forward since we haven’t even talked on the phone yet, but I think I know the kind of man you are and I’ve decided I’m ready to meet you. And when I do something, I’m ‘all in’. How about you?”

Davis slowly reached out for his computer mouse. He moved the cursor until it hovered over the “Reply” tab. Click. His fingers moved over to the keyboard and paused. Then they began to type.

“I really don’t think this is...”

Pause.

Delete, delete.

“I really appreciate your offer, but...”

Delete, delete, delete.

“I’ll be there. I’m ‘all in’ too.”

Click. Sent.

Almost immediately, a heart emoji appeared on Davis’ computer screen. One of the corners of his mouth turned upward. He returned the same emoji to the sender and closed his laptop.

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Ding!

A heavy-set, middle-aged woman with blonde hair glanced at her computer screen.

“Well, it looks like we got ‘im,” said Cassie, still looking straight ahead.

“Unbelievable,” replied Shannon, standing behind Cassie, looking down at the screen.

“I’m not sure how I feel about this,” said Cassie as she turned in her seat and looked back at Shannon. “This might be taking things too far.”

“What? Are you serious?”

“I mean, pumping him for information about how he was handling our divorce is one thing...”

“Yeah! A divorce he asked for!”

“But we really had drifted apart. We both knew it. He was just the first to say it.”

“Quit defending him! You did nothing wrong! The way he’s responded to these Lisa e-mails shows the kind of man he really is! He deserves whatever happens to him.”

“Yeah, he does. He does.”

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“I know it’s weird, Aaron,” said Davis into his cell phone as he sat in his car, “and I almost said ‘no’, but then I thought about how much time and effort I’ve put into getting to know her with the e-mails and I was afraid if I turned her down this time, I might not get another chance.”

“I hear ya, bro,” replied Aaron from the other end of the call. “Just be careful.”

“Yeah, I know. We’re meeting in a hotel downtown. Public place. No worries.”

“Yeah, well, if you stay overnight and you wake up with some of your organs missing, don’t say I didn’t warn your ass!”

The two friends laughed.

“Duly noted,” said Davis, still chuckling.

“Seriously, bro, good luck and give me a call. Tell me what happens.”

“Will do. Later.”

“Later.”

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This was the longest work week of Davis’ life. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday... Friday morning... Friday afternoon...

Finally! Quitting time! Davis made a beeline for his car. As he tossed his suit coat onto the overnight bag in the back seat, he felt an intense mix of excitement and nervousness rise in his chest. He punched an address into his GPS. Then he paused briefly and entered another stop.

After what felt like hours, he arrived at the hotel. He grabbed the condoms he just bought at the drug store and put them in his pocket. With a bouquet of flowers in one hand and his bag in another, he got out of the car. He paused, tossed the bag back in the car and headed for the lobby.

“Hi. Do you have a Lisa Clark registered?” Davis asked the desk clerk, trying to play it cool.

The clerk typed on his computer keyboard and stared at the screen.

“How do you spell that? Clarke?”

“C-L-A-R-K”

“Ah, Clark with no ‘e’... no, not registered. I do see a reservation, but she’s not here yet.”

“That’s fine. I’ll wait.”

Davis found a comfortable seat in the lobby, set the flowers down next to him... and waited. In passing, he wondered why she wasn’t there yet, but the main thing that occupied his thoughts was the prospect of finally meeting this young woman who came seemingly out of nowhere to contact him through a social media site – and a woman with whom he had so much in common!

After about an hour, and countless glances at his watch, he returned to the check-in desk.

“I’m sorry, but you did say that Lisa Clark has a reservation for tonight, correct?” Davis asked.

“Let me check again,” replied the clerk as he began typing. “That’s... hmmm.”

“What?”

“That reservation was just cancelled a few minutes ago.”

“Is there any explanation? Was it rescheduled?”

“Not that I can see. I’m sorry, sir. May I make a reservation for you this evening?”

“No. Thank you.”

Davis snatched the flowers from where he had left them and quickly walked out to his car. He tossed the flowers in the passenger seat, sat in the driver’s seat, slammed the door and stared into space. After a minute, he grabbed his phone and sent an e-mail. A reply came immediately:

“Message rejected. The address you sent your message to wasn’t found at the destination domain. It might be misspelled, or it might not exist.”

A look of confusion came over Davis’ face. He tried again. Same result. Once more. Third time’s the charm, right? Not this time. The furrows in Davis’ brow grew deeper. “What the...?” He dropped his phone on the seat, started his car and sped off, his confusion turning to anger.

On his way home, his thoughts were racing. He lowered the windows, reached beside him, grabbed the flowers and threw them out the passenger side window, onto the shoulder.

By the time Davis got home, his anger had subsided a bit, but it was still boiling just beneath the surface, competing for his attention with his questions about what had just happened – and why.

He entered his apartment, sparsely furnished, with imprints in the carpeting left by various items that had occupied those spaces just weeks earlier. He dropped his overnight bag near the entrance to the kitchen, tossed his keys on the counter and grabbed a beer from the refrigerator. No sooner had he popped the top and taken his first swig, his cell phone rang. It was Aaron.

Davis immediately started talking: “Hey, I just got home. You’re not going to believe what...”

“Dude, you need to check your E-mail. I just got a message from Lisa.”

“You got a message from Lisa? How did she get your e-mail address? And why do I need to check my e-mail?”

“She sent me a message that was also addressed to you.”

“What the...?”

“Just check your e-mail.”

Davis sat down on the only remaining chair in his livingroom, put his beer and cell phone on the floor next to him and grabbed his laptop off of a folding table nearby. He flipped it open and began typing wildly. His computer seemed to be moving slower than normal, but he finally got to his e-mail account. Sure enough, there was an e-mail from Lisa at the top of the screen.

“Did you really think I was going to meet you at that hotel?!? Who would do that?? Like I said in my last e-mail, I do know the kind of man you are, but I would never get together with someone like you! Even if I did, I probably could never satisfy you anyway, with all your weird sexual fantasies! I’m a pretty patient and tolerant person, but I can no longer put up with your strangeness, your self-centeredness, your...”

Davis continued to read through a litany of character complaints and a reminder of very personal thoughts that he had shared with this person through his keyboard over the past few weeks. He felt stupid for opening himself up so much to someone he hadn’t even met, for believing everything she had told him and even for accepting her invitation to meet. Shame mixed with sorrow and anger produced a scream like none his throat had never produced before.

“Hey! Davis! Are you alright? Davis! Davis!”

As he became aware of someone calling his name, he reached down and picked up his cell phone, his hands trembling with anger. He lifted the phone close to his ear and Aaron's voice became clearer. "Are you okay, man?"

"Can you believe this shit?" Davis shouted. "What kind of person would throw all that personal shit back at me in an e-mail? And then send it to my best friend? What the hell?"

"Take a breath, buddy. Seriously. Take a moment and breathe. I'll wait."

Aaron was silent. Davis listened to his friend and took a long deep breath.

"That didn't help," said Davis dryly.

"Well, hold on then. It gets worse. Did you see all the names in the 'Cc' line?"

"Wait. What?"

"Take a look."

Davis scrolled back up to the header of the E-mail. He scanned the long list of names and a horrified look came across his face.

"You gotta to be kidding me! You've got to be fucking kidding me! Some of my high school and college friends are on this list! Here's my brother and sister! My uncle! My mother! Shit!"

Without thinking, Davis threw his phone across the room and it smashed on the floor. He barely noticed what he had just done. He couldn't take his eyes off of the screen and that list of names.

"No! No! No!" he kept saying.

After he got his breathing under control and calmed down a bit, Davis slowly closed his laptop, shuffled into his bedroom and collapsed onto his bed. In just a few moments, he was asleep.

When Davis awoke the next morning, he hoped it had all just been a bad dream... until he stumbled out into the livingroom and saw the remains of his cell phone on the floor.

Thankful for cell phone insurance, he gathered himself and went out to get a new one. He called Aaron to explain what happened and then he spent the rest of his weekend calling or taking calls from friends and family members who were both concerned and curious. After enduring the humiliation of those calls, knowing what everyone had read in that e-mail, and trying to explain what happened, it was a relief for Davis to return to his job and start another work week.

When he sat down at his desk on Monday morning and opened his work e-mail, he saw several messages from colleagues asking various versions of "What the hell is this?" They were all responding to an e-mail from the same sender: Lisa Clark. Davis was just starting to absorb this latest blow, when his supervisor, Don, poked his head around the corner.

“The boss wants to see you.”

Davis nodded and followed Don into Mr. Waller’s office. The boss was sitting at the small table in the corner of the room. There was one item on that table – a printed copy of Lisa’s e-mail. Davis’ knees almost buckled as he sat in the chair across from Don and Mr. Waller.

“The first thing I want to know is... are you okay?” asked Mr. Waller.

All Davis could do was stare at the piece of paper on the table.

“Do you know how this happened, Davis?” asked Don. “Everyone on this floor got this letter.”

“I think I do. I think I know,” answered Davis quietly. “My family and friends got it too.”

He slowly looked up from the letter and into the faces of the two men staring at him.

“Last month, I sent out a mass e-mail inviting people to my promotion party. It went out to my family and close friends. Co-workers were on the ‘Bcc’ line... to protect their privacy. This woman was invited too. She must’ve just hit ‘Reply to all’ and replaced my message with...”

“I don’t know what you could’ve done to this Lisa woman for her to do this to you,” said Mr. Waller, “but the owner is going to want to talk to you about this.”

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One month, a lot of staring and whispering in the hallways and a couple difficult conversations later, Davis was sitting at his desk at the end of a long day, checking his social media accounts when a new message popped up. It was from a woman whom he didn’t know. She introduced herself, pointed out how much she and him had in common and asked for friendship. Davis’ divorce had just been finalized, this woman was closer to his age than Lisa and there were no romantic overtones this time, but none of that mattered to Davis at this moment. He moved his cursor over the ‘delete’ button and raised his finger over the computer mouse. Then, he paused.

“No,” he thought to himself. “I’m not going to give the haters that much power over my life. I’m wiser now, but I’m not going to let other people change who I am as a person. To hell with that.”

Davis moved his cursor and clicked ‘reply’. He explained to his potential new friend that he was recently divorced and he would like it if they could get together to discuss their common interests and shared life experiences... but friendship was all he was interested in.

The reply came quickly. This woman said she was fine with his terms. She was new in town and just wanted to make some new friends. She seemed like she just might be the person Lisa had made herself out to be. And this person was willing to meet within days, rather than weeks.

“Okay, Bethany Ponder,” Davis said to himself. “Let’s meet.”