

**LISA**  
A Radio Play

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JOE: It started innocently enough. Believe me, it did.

I mean, of course it used to happen as a kid. Happens to everyone. Just not enough real people to go around. Not enough friends.

And so it wasn't terribly strange when...

I found myself at the bus station at one o'clock in the morning. It was deserted. No one anywhere. No buses, either, or I wouldn't be sitting there like I was.

*[Quiet empty sound of a bus station late at night. A faucet drips.]*

LINDA: Hey there.

JOE: Well, hi.

LINDA: Kinda empty, isn't it.

JOE: Yeah. Kinda deserted.

LINDA: Don't you feel lonely in places like this? Like there's no one who... I don't know. Like, if you were to die right now, how long would it take them to find you?

JOE: Please. Stop.

*[To the listeners:]*

I mean, it's innocent enough, right?

*[Pause.]*

*[Back to the bus station.]*

HANNAH: Excuse me.

JOE: Yeah.

HANNAH: Hi. I'm, uh... my name is Hannah. Do you mind if we just, you know, talk a bit? The silence kinda gets to me.

JOE: Sure. I mean, no problem.

*[Long pause.]*

Yeah, it's quiet.

HANNAH: Sure...

JOE: *[Continuing without hearing HANNAH.]* I don't mind it much, I guess. I mean, I guess I'm kinda used to it.

HANNAH: You do this much?

JOE: Once a week or so.

*[Long pause.]*

I'm not very talkative. I mean, personally.

HANNAH: Yeah.

JOE: I don't talk much.

HANNAH: *[Trying to revive the conversation.]* You ever notice the design of this place? I mean—the architecture. They just don't build like this anymore.

JOE: It's nice. *[Pause.]* A bit dirty.

HANNAH: You just have to look past that. I mean, I wish they'd clean it up better. Look at the size of—everything! The marble over the entranceway, and the statuary nooks.... The arched ceiling. The columns. I'm always in awe. What they build now is so, well, *functional*. Stations are just to keep the snow off, in winter. They used to build nice places for the public. Majestic spaces. Like this—look at it!

JOE: I guess.

*[Back out to the audience.]*

That's innocent enough, right? No problem there. Everyone's entitled to their...

*[Pause.]*

But I guess that's not what you're interested in, is it. You want . . .

*[A long pause.]*

Lisa was always my favorite.

LISA: Let's run away, Joe.

JOE: Run away? What from?

LISA: No, *together*. Let's run away.

JOE: I . . .

LISA: Wouldn't it be fun? Everyone wondering, and we'd be off someplace nice. Where'll we go?

JOE: I always wanted to see Montana.

LISA: Really?

JOE: Yeah. You know, streams and mountains. I thought maybe I'd get a cabin by a pond—mountain in the background—and do some, y'know. Fishing. Hiking. Fire in the fireplace.

LISA: And I'd be there.

JOE: Yeah. I guess you would be.

LISA: We'd have so much fun.

JOE: *[Grinning.]* Everything's always more fun with you around.

LISA: Let's go, Joe. We could leave right now. Take the seven bus instead of the eight—just leave.

JOE: *[Doubtful.]* I . . .

LISA: What have you got to lose?

JOE: People will be expecting me.

LISA: No one's gonna miss you, Joe. C'mon.

*[Back out.]*

JOE: She was right, you know.

*[Pause.]*

We did go to Montana. Not that night—but I never could refuse her. And no one ever missed me. No one.

I had a good time in Montana. I did, really. It'll seem strange to you, but... that's the truth. And after Montana we were in Arizona, Mexico, Texas, Colorado... I always enjoyed travelling with her.

It sure beat sitting in an empty bus station at 3 am.

*[Long pause.]*

Well. That's not what you want to hear, either, is it.

*[Pause.]*

I don't remember exactly when I began to suspect. That's funny, isn't it? You'd think it would be one thing that, bam, woke the green-eyed monster. But she was clever. I never thought.

I should start at the beginning. We were in Ontario, working for a lumber company.

*[Soundscape shifts outdoors. JOE and TONY are walking back to their truck. Pine needles crunch underfoot.]*

TONY: So—how long you been working out here?

JOE: Two years yesterday.

TONY: Alone the whole time, eh?

JOE: Yeah. Didn't know anyone. Still don't.

TONY: Well.

JOE: What?

TONY: I'm looking for a partner.

JOE: I don't like to work with people.

TONY: Neither do I.

JOE: So?

TONY: So what's the deal, right?

JOE: Yeah.

TONY: I want to go to Alaska. Always wanted to go. Last land of adventure, you know. I found work scouting a pipe, but they insist on giving me a partner. In case one of us dies or something.

JOE: So?

TONY: Well, I don't work close with no one. You're the same, right?

JOE: Yeah.

TONY: So I figured we wouldn't kill each other if we partnered. We'd leave each other alone, like. Just check in once in a while to make sure each other ain't been killed or nothing.

JOE: Hm. Alaska.

TONY: You and me, we're like jack-of-all-trades, right? We can do anything we're asked. That's just the types they want up there. Scout the pipe, fix anything that needs fixing. Survive.

JOE: I'll think about it.

TONY: Yeah.

*[Brief pause.]*

*[Back out.]*

JOE: I did. I thought about it. And I decided to go. Why not, right? Lisa loved the idea.

*[Soundscape: cabin interior, fireplace lit.]*

LISA: *[Pleased.]* Alaska!

*[Back out.]*

JOE: And Tony was a good guy.

*[Outside, Alaska. Snow blowing.]*

TONY: Joe!

JOE: I'm alive.

TONY: I can see that—you're movin', ain't ya?

JOE: It don't make sense you trekking back out to civilization if I'm still moving, eh?

TONY: Sure. Walk out your own self to get help.

*[They laugh.]*

JOE: It's good to see you again, Tony.

TONY: What? I thought you didn't like people?

JOE: No, you're the one who doesn't like them. *People* don't like *me*, that's how it works here.

TONY: You living in that shack over there?

JOE: Shack? That's a first-rate castle I built.

TONY: Sure, Joe. You got coffee in your castle?

JOE: I can make some.

*[Footsteps in snow, leading away.]*

*[Back to audience.]*

JOE: I never mentioned Lisa to Tony, and he was in my cabin before I remembered Lisa in there. Lucky she wasn't around just then, or was hiding. Don't know why she'd do that. Not much room to hide in that place. She must have just stepped out. To piss, or walk through the snow some. I never knew exactly where she went when she wasn't with me. I never cared before. I just assumed she went out wandering. I did that sometimes. I liked the solitude.

*[Into cabin.]*

JOE: Step outside while the coffee boils.

TONY: What, you don't want me enjoying your mansion?

JOE: No. I... *[A pause.]* There's a bit of the pipeline I thought you could take a look at. A crack, I think.

TONY: *[Joking.]* You're afraid I'm going to discover the girl you shipped in from Fairbanks, eh? Sure, I'll come out with you.

*[Back out to audience.]*

JOE: *[Bitterly.]* He knew. I knew he knew then.

*[A pause. Joe recovers.]*

I don't know how Lisa knew him. She must have seen us wandering around in the blowing snow, examining that pipe I knew was perfectly fine. A bear or somethin' had been testing its claws on it, that's all. The pipe wasn't cracked. It was as sound as I am.

Lisa never let on. I thought I had been clever enough.

*[Back to cabin. Door opens, and we hear blowing snow. Door shuts.]*

LISA: You're blue as a river, Joe. Let me fix you something.

JOE: Just had some coffee.

LISA: How 'bout some food, then?

*[Back out to audience.]*

JOE: *[With sudden resentment.]* Do you want to know how much I loved her? More than anything I knew. More than the sea is wide. You don't even care, do you.

Do you want to know how I knew? How her absences grew longer and longer? What was I supposed to do in an empty cabin without her? In Alaska? I used to know how to deal with that. I'd make up a different girl every night on the bus station benches. I'd forgotten how to do that since her. Five years I'd lived with her! For five years she was the only one. I couldn't make the others come back if I tried. I tried. Night after night. But it was only Lisa. At sunrise every morning I'd still be awake, with her face in front of me. Her damned face! She was out somewhere—God knows where—and her face was just floating there, smiling at me. Like I didn't know where she was. I knew every moment of it.

Tony pretended he didn't know. That's why I had to do it. If he was just honest about it, I think I could have lived with it. But he was the only man alive I knew, and he made like I was crazy.

*[Abruptly back outside, into blowing snow, a blizzard.]*

JOE: Tell me, Tony! Just tell me straight.

TONY: I don't know what you're talking about, Joe.

JOE: You do. Don't do this to me, Tony. *Lisa.*

TONY: Lisa? Who's Lisa? What are you talking about?

JOE: You know who she is. You know her. I don't know how you met her, but you're the only other man out here. If she's not with me, she's with you. Right?

TONY: She's not with me. There's no one with me, Joe. I haven't seen anyone but you for a year, Joe. A year.

JOE: Don't do this to me, Tony. Don't pretend.

TONY: Are you all right?

JOE: She's gone, Tony. Gone. I don't know where she is. Just tell me she's all right, Tony. Just say it.

TONY: Who!

JOE: Just say it, Tony. She's all right. She's with me. Say it, Tony.

*[Back to audience.]*

JOE: He wouldn't say it. He wouldn't admit. Not then. Sure as hell not now.

*[A long pause.]*

She meant a lot to me. Everything. If it had been anyone else. Even Linda, the first.

*[Pause.]*

You don't care. To you they're all the same, right? To you they don't exist. They're just names to put down on your report. But they do. They do exist. All of them. Especially Lisa. They're real.

To me, at least. Real.

That's why I did it.

I had to.