

Risque Pictures Evidence Of Youthful Desperation

Bryan Walker, a recently enlisted, barely 18-year-old airman, has a lot on his mind. Everything is new to him. Basic training camp in San Antonio, Texas, will be his home until he receives his orders.



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INTIMACY, SEX
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As he carefully unpacks a few family photographs, his cellphone vibrates. He recognizes

Kelsey's number. Breaking up with her was one of the hardest things he's had to do. But he knew it was best. The future is too uncertain. It's her fifth call today, and it's not even noon. This one said "I miss you."

Last weekend they ended it. He thought she understood. The cellphone vibrates again. A streaming video flashes across his screen — her naked body undulates as she fondles herself. Bryan can't believe his eyes. He closes the phone. A few seconds later, it rings again. He answers. "Did you get my message?" Kelsey whispers seductively. "I just

want you to remember me this way." Bryan turns the phone off.

It's especially painful to lose someone who makes us feel special, especially when it's your first love.

The first time I met 17-year-old Kelsey, she strutted into my office wearing 4-inch Jimmy Choo heels in bright melon patent leather and a flouncy cream-colored baby-doll dress with pale-green fishnet stockings. A large Gucci handbag was slung over her small shoulders. "Hi," she said nervously, struggling to manage a smile.

I liked Kelsey right from the start. Her haute couture presentation belied her shaky self-confidence. She reminded me of a wounded little bird decked out in spring plumage, denying her vulnerability and shouting, "Look at me, world."

After a few moments, Kelsey settled into one of the leather chairs. She placed her purse on the floor, leaned her head into her cupped hands and began to sob as if her heart was breaking. As she lifted her head, mascara streamed down her face; I thought how overly

mature her face appeared. Vertical lines were etched between her brows. Her eyelids were red and swollen. I thought about her parents, wondering if they knew she was visiting my office and how much she was hurting.

"I'm sorry to break down like this," she said. "I just don't know what I'm going to do."

Kelsey says she's frantic about losing Bryan but seems more upset about something else, something she's more embarrassed about — losing her cellphone. That's right, the cellphone with the naked photos is missing.

"I think I left it in a taxi cab last night," she says, visibly shaken. "What if someone finds it, and it winds up on the Internet? I don't know who to talk to, so I decided to call you."

For the rest of our session, Kelsey talks about her emptiness. She's had many losses in her short life. When she was 5 years old, her dad died of lymphoma.

"I don't remember too much about him," she says. "Except I know he took me to the zoo. I have a picture of us together, and he had his arm around my shoulder. . . . It's framed in my

bedroom. My mom gets sad talking about him, so I try not to ask any questions. I love my Mom. She works hard and buys me lots of stuff, but she's not too huggy. The only person who I can remember hugging me was my Grandma, Marie. She died two years ago. I really hoped she could come to my high school graduation." She reaches for a Kleenex and carefully dabs at her face.

"I still talk to her every day. . . . Do you think that's weird?"

I smile and shake my head. "Not at all, honey." I think about Kelsey's mother again.

"Making friends has always been hard for me," Kelsey confesses. "I think the girls were jealous of me, and they were really mean. When I started to wear a bra, the boys started giving me more attention. Bryan was my first real boyfriend. I had sex with him . . . and now he's gone." I sent those photos to him so he'd think about me and want me back. . . . Now I'm afraid I could get into big trouble."

The more Kelsey revealed, the more vulnerable she became. Like so many kids, she longed for a parent to hold her and say, "It's going to be OK. We all make mistakes.

What have you learned? Remember, I love you."

Sharing risqué photos over cellphones is becoming a widespread problem with teens — girls and guys alike. Photos they think they're sending "confidentially" become public property, and unsolicited shots spread even more quickly, especially when relationships go south. But its not grounds for corporal punishment.

Some parents have considered finding a way to have all of their kids' text messages, photos and videos cc'd to their "main" cellphone or some other policing strategy. But before we rush to implement another form of spyware, parents need to get on the same page to discuss what's going on here. What do teens need? What are they not getting? How can we help them learn to value themselves first, before they can receive love from others?

What I find the most disturbing about technology is that it doesn't improve our communication. It doesn't help us listen. In fact, it creates opportunities for us to be more misunderstood by sending and receiving information more

rapidly, not more effectively. Technology doesn't help us to sit in loving silence and comfort a child who has lost her father, grandma or boyfriend — or has done something stupid out of immature desperation.

Many teens (and adults fixated on their own adolescence) struggle with limitations in foreword thinking. They do not consider the consequences of their actions. That's why impulsiveness and immaturity are developmentally linked.

Kelsey has learned an important lesson — how to love herself more — on the inside. She's not quite sure how to take a photo of that part of herself. But at least she's asking the right questions.

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