

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Lov**ereading** will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Keep Me Posted

Written by Lisa Beazley

Published by
The Text Publishing Company

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Lov**ereading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Keep Me
Posted

Lisa Beazley



TEXT PUBLISHING MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

textpublishing.com.au

The Text Publishing Company
Swann House
22 William Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Australia

© Lisa Beazley 2016

The moral right of Lisa Beazley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright above, no part of this publication shall be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior permission of both the copyright owner and publisher of this book.

Published by arrangement with New American Library, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

This edition published in the United Kingdom in 2016 by The Text Publishing Company

Cover design by Imogen Stubbs

Cover images from iStock and Shutterstock

Page design by Kristin del Rosario

Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Antony Rowe

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Creator: Beazley, Lisa.

Title: Keep me posted / by Lisa Beazley.

ISBN: 9781925240757 (paperback)

ISBN: 9781922253545 (ebook)

Subjects: Sisters—Fiction.

Letter writing—Fiction.

Self-actualization (Psychology) in women—Fiction.

Dewey Number: 813.6

CHAPTER ONE

Later—much later—I would regret pretending to be asleep when Leo sidled up to me in bed that night. Not that it was an isolated incident; it's just that the timing stands out as an apropos kickoff to what would be the year everything went pear-shaped.

“Night, Cass,” he said, coming in for a kiss. When I didn't turn toward him, he planted a soft peck behind my ear and lingered for a few seconds.

“Niii,” I mumbled, my sleepy voice more indicative of my state of mind than my level of alertness. In fact, I was wide-awake and mentally scheduling my morning to somehow fit in packing and an activity to exhaust the boys before sticking them in the car for our eight-hour drive.

Sadly, I'd reached a point where when faced with the options of sex or hours of sleepless anxiety, I chose the latter. Would I like some kissing and breast caressing? Nah. I think I'll formulate snarky retorts to made-up potential insults for ten or fifteen minutes. How about an orgasm or two? No, thanks! I'm good mentally going through my

inadequate wardrobe, trying to figure out what to pack for five days of holiday merrymaking with my family. Fall asleep sexually satisfied and with a grateful-and-therefore-more-likely-to-wake-up-first-with-the-kids-in-the-morning husband? I'll pass. My restless legs syndrome should be kicking in anytime now, and I'm due to be pacing and stretching in the living room.

So steeped in ennui was I that doing something guaranteed to relieve stress, boost endorphins, and strengthen my marriage—all without leaving my bed—seemed like just another chore.

It's not like we were going in for lengthy acrobatic sessions. Quite the opposite, I'm afraid. The tired-parent sex between Leo and me had become what I thought of as a battle for the bottom, with one person (the winner) lying there while the other (the loser) expended minimal effort from the top. My tactics had recently moved beyond polite and passive maneuvering to actual deceit. If you think I'm exaggerating, listen to this one: I told him it was suddenly easier for me to orgasm from down there. (It wasn't.) So that caused a whole other set of problems.

When I was sure he was asleep, I retrieved the iPad from under the bed and opened the Kindle app to read some of my novel. Within a few pages, predictably, my restless legs drove me into the living room, where I could pace, still reading. There was just enough mess-free floor space to make it about three small steps, so I switched to a march-in-place move, periodically shaking out my legs. My mind wandered to Christmas, and I grabbed a pen to write the letter "S" on my hand, hoping it would remind me to pack the scarf I had bought for Leo weeks ago and stashed in a spare purse in my closet. Then, with a flash of panic, I remembered that I'd never placed my online order for the boys' gifts. My shopping cart had been filled for at least a week, yet completing a simple transaction was beyond my band-

KEEP ME POSTED

width: This was far more frustrating to me than my lousy sex life. With very few responsibilities other than keeping my kids alive, not being able to tick simple things off my to-do list was an endless source of chagrin.

I closed my novel and switched to Safari, then paid the rush charges to get the Batcave, Buzz and Woody costumes, and some books and puzzles to my parents' house in Ohio by Christmas Eve.

When I checked my e-mail for my order confirmation, I had a rare treat—a message from my sister. Rare because her electronic-communication habits are those of someone twice her age: She checks her e-mail once every two weeks or so and eschews all social media. A treat because she lives in Singapore, and I hardly ever see her or talk to her—and because I adore her completely.

Cassie—

Arrived at Mom and Dad's yesterday. Loopy with jet lag. Baked cinnamon bread with Grandma Margie today—exactly what I needed to get into the Christmas spirit. Now bring me some figgy pudding! Tried to talk her out of this last-Christmas nonsense, to no avail (sniff). Can't wait to see you!!!

Love you.

—Sid

Buoyed by her cheer, I popped an Ambien and went to bed happy after all, anticipating a reunion with my dear sister.

CHAPTER TWO

Sid and I had taken to calling it “the last Christmas” because Grandpa Joe and Grandma Margie announced that they were done hosting. They wanted their children to start taking turns holding Christmas Eve. It was getting to be too much work for them, they said. My parents and aunts and uncles had taken the news in stride, but Sid and I were in mourning; Christmas as we knew it was over.

To us, Christmas *was* Joe and Margie. The Old English—soap smell of their house mingling with the aroma of a roasting turkey and all the trimmings, the giant tree in their double-height foyer, the big round coffee table filled with snow globes . . . It’s everything a family Christmas should be. Imagining the alternatives—fending off Aunt Faye’s three rambunctious Great Danes while listening to Mannheim Steamroller on repeat; anxiously following the boys around Aunt Linda’s overheated little ranch house with breakable and expensive Chihuly-esque sculptures on every surface; Mom’s and Dad’s utter uselessness in the kitchen—had me contemplating a trip to the Bahamas next December.

My sister and I adore Grandpa Joe and Grandma Margie. Sid is only fifteen months older than me, so we have many of the same magical memories of making cookies and paper dolls with Grandma Margie and reading—always reading—with Grandpa Joe. At his feet, we'd listen to anything. Margie's maiden name was Quinn, and my twin sons, Joey and Quinn, are named for her and Grandpa.

Something about being in their home puts everyone on their best behavior. Probably because Joe and Margie are the epitome of good behavior. You'll sometimes catch them at these gatherings, just the two of them, regaling each other with stories that *can't* be new, the other hanging on every word, asking questions, and then finding something kind and witty to say at the close.

Leo and I have been together only five years, but if he starts in on a story I've heard, I'll hold up my hand and go, "Yeah, yeah, I know this one. The dog dies." But whenever I'm around Joe and Margie, I try to behave like they do—with courtesy and old-fashioned grace.

We are big on traditions. The men always get red sweaters from Margie; the women, gloves and socks. We do a choreographed routine to "The Twelve Days of Christmas." This last bit makes you think really hard before bringing that special someone home for the holidays. In fact, it's rumored that my cousin Lizzy was dumped over it. One theory is that this guy took one look at her mom—my aunt Faye—doing her "lords a-leaping" with abandon, caught a glimpse of his future, and headed for the hills. It was beyond corny. But I think it's the corny traditions that separate the interesting families from the boring ones.

One year when Sid and I and our seven cousins were all in our twenties, we started another tradition: boxed wine. Everyone in the cousin generation brought wine, and it had to be in a box. For years, that meant Franzia white zinfandel, which gives the worst morning-

KEEP ME POSTED

after headaches of all wines. But then better wines started coming in boxes, and it became a contest of who could find the fanciest or best or most expensive box of wine. Despite our best efforts, a box per cousin always resulted in a surplus of wine, and the half-empty containers could be found stashed throughout Joe and Margie's house year-round.

So last Christmas, *the* last Christmas, I was hitting the box pretty hard. I was feeling all warm and fuzzy by the time we'd finished "The Twelve Days of Christmas," and then Grandpa Joe announced that he had something he'd like to read to us. This wasn't unusual. He found a way to read aloud at any gathering—usually a Molly Ivins column or a passage from Thurber or Bud Trillin, as we called Calvin (we considered him to be a family friend since Joe and Margie had many years ago been at a dinner party where he was in attendance, and I had passed him on the street in New York a handful of times, even exchanging a nod once or twice). But this time he announced that he'd found a stack of letters from the early days of their marriage, while he was in the coast guard and Grandma Margie was juggling two under two at home, my dad and my aunt Faye. Sid and I exchanged a look that said, *Swoon!* and perched ourselves at Grandpa Joe's feet like a couple of kids, although, of course, we were well into our thirties.

The letters did not disappoint. Grandma Margie wrote about sweet and funny and maddening things the kids were doing, the kind nurse at the hospital who would play with Faye and hold Dad while she dropped off jars of extra breast milk she had expressed for the orphans, and the hard time she was having as a Chicago girl understanding the accents of their new neighbors in Bar Harbor, Maine. Grandpa Joe wrote about the comically loud snoring of his bunkmate on the boat and how his heart leaped when he could see

the lighthouse in the harbor, because it meant he would be coming home to her and the kids soon.

Enchanted by the romance of it all, I privately lamented that Leo and I had never once exchanged a letter. Why would we? We'd never been separated for any amount of time, and even if we had, there were half a dozen ways to reach him and get an immediate response. I tried to imagine my eventual progeny being anywhere near as impressed by our quotidian communication. "Get milk," "Coming home soon? May kill the children," and the like. It was a depressing thought and made me long for a simpler time, a time when we might not have been able to text back and forth all day long. I wondered if we'd been missing out on the sort of intimacy that could have come from simply catching up at the end of the day. By the time Leo arrived home from work each day, we'd been in near constant contact. In some ways, it made me feel close to him, always knowing where he was and what he had for lunch. But it also made it easy to spend most of our evenings busy on our respective iPhones.

Later that night, back at Mom and Dad's, Sid and I lounged on the big brown sectional in the basement, listening to old mixtapes on an ancient paint-splattered jam box, the container of Y+B Malbec still on tap at my side. Leo was upstairs putting the twins to bed on the floor of my old room. As extremely active three-year-olds, Quinn and Joey were so exhausted at the end of every day that if you could get them to just stop moving, they were asleep in minutes. It's harder than it sounds. We figured out a maneuver likely used in state-run homes for troubled youths and animal shelters, where you kind of held them and pinned down every extremity at the same time. When you're putting them to bed by yourself, as is often the case, there are a couple of ways to go. With both of them on the floor, I would lie down between them on my stomach, looking like a frog that had splatted on the

sidewalk as my left arm and leg restrained Quinn while my right arm and leg covered Joey. Singing—loudly—was the only way to keep them quiet. They each got a request. Quinn usually chose “Tomorrow” from *Annie* and Joey, “Show Me the Way to Go Home,” the drinking song from *Jaws*. (Not that they’d ever seen either movie.)

Leo was less flexible than me, so his plan was probably to slip Joey his phone while Quinn wasn’t looking to let him flip through pictures and get Quinn to sleep first and then move on to Joey. The songs they requested most from him were “Cripple Creek” and the theme from *Cheers*.

I was starting to feel guilty because he had been up there for nearly an hour. But we had an arrangement: He always did bedtime when we visited my family, and I did it when we visited his. Leo was the youngest of four boys in the Costa clan, so I was usually happy for a break from that frat party, but I knew he was looking forward to catching up with Sid and her son, River, too. They’d been living in Singapore for seven or eight months, and there was little chance we’d see them again before next December. Sid’s husband of two years, Adrian, hadn’t come with her and the kids. He had meetings, she told me.

“On Christmas?” I asked.

“Yeah. His meetings are in Jakarta. Unfortunately, they don’t stop everything for Christmas in a Muslim country,” she explained.

Sid’s son, River, who was seventeen, was watching *A Christmas Story* upstairs with my dad. Lulu, who was eight months old, slept peacefully attached to Sid’s breast. Mom was in her room fast asleep.

“Ugh! Cass! How beautiful were those letters?” Sid said. “It kills me that Lulu will never really get to experience Christmas at Joe and Margie’s.”

“Just Like Heaven” by the Cure was the next song on the tape that Emily Van Wey had made for me when I got my driver’s license.

Instead of acknowledging what she said, I sang along and absent-mindedly scrolled through Facebook on my iPhone.

“What are you always doing on that phone?” she said. I wished I had been scanning the headlines on CNN or even playing Tetris, but I let her peer over my shoulder at my Facebook feed of “Happy Holidays” status updates.

Suddenly she gave a little snort, and then, because Lulu was still sleeping on her, whispered, “You’re Facebook friends with Tommy Saronto?”

“I’m Facebook friends with half the people we went to elementary school with and pretty much everyone we went to high school with,” I said.

“Oh my God, he has five kids?”

“Yep. Clara, Ava, Ella, Will, and Tommy Jr.” I felt a little embarrassed that I knew my sister’s eighth-grade boyfriend’s kids’ names.

But she had moved on. “Whoa, look at Tara Lockshin.”

“Yeah. Those boobs are new.”

“She’s so tan. Where does she live?”

“Over near Bowman Mall.”

“How do you know all of this?” Sid looked genuinely shocked.

“I don’t know. It just kind of seeps in. I mean, when I need a break from the kids, I scroll through Facebook and, you know . . .” I trailed off, hoping to move on. Our quality time was turning into a junior high school reunion, and I didn’t want to share my sister with all of these people.

But Sid—dinosaur that she was, without a Facebook account or even an idea of what Twitter or Instagram or Pinterest were—was thoroughly entertained by my knowledge of these people’s lives. To her, *I* was the novelty act. She turned it into a game, and I, being quite tipsy, played along.

“All right. Hannah Canary. Go.”

“Radiologist. Daughter named Devina. Loves Jesus.”

“Correct,” she said in a game-show-host voice, scrolling down. “Becky Applebee.”

“She’s on the Colorado Springs city council. Married to an architect. Has triplets. One of them is . . . um . . . diabetic!” I shouted a little too triumphantly.

I nailed a few more, and then Sid said, “Okay, Cassie. You are starting to scare me. This is not healthy.”

“Oh, everyone does it. You’re, like, the only one who’s not on Facebook.”

“Well, according to River, Facebook is for old people . . . Oh dear, what happened to Jamie Walton?”

“No idea. He was such a sweet little boy.”

Sid is about three notches kinder than me, and around her I sometimes rein in my darker humor. But I could have shared some real zingers on the topic of Jamie Walton, our childhood next-door neighbor, whose profile picture was him, shirtless, draped in ammo.

Actually, Sid and I shared the same basic outlook on many things, but we differed in demeanor so much that we could say the same exact thing to a person and leave them with wildly different impressions. The two summers we waited tables together at Don Pablo’s Mexican Restaurant really brought those differences into focus. I turned out to have a real gift for it—multitasking, food and drink, and pleasing people being among my strong suits. But Sid’s other gifts meant that she made more in tips every night. I would be killing it in my section, turning table after table of satisfied diner, and look over to see her squatting down next to a booth, chatting away like she was out with old friends while the other tables in her section sat with empty chip baskets or margarita glasses. I tried to cover for

her, refilling waters or salsas and running her food as often as I could. But any frustration her customers were feeling evaporated as soon as she returned her attention to them. The way she always touches you when she talks to you or looks you right in the eye and smiles like you're sharing a secret—those things turned out to be worth about sixty extra bucks a night.

Handing me back my phone, she said the thing that got me: “You probably know more about these strangers than you know about me.”

“That’s not true!” I immediately shot back while simultaneously wondering if she was right. “Hey, if you’re feeling left out, just get yourself on Facebook.”

“Nah,” she said, gazing down at Lulu. “It’s not my thing.”

I felt annoyed with myself for not being cool enough to be above the whole thing and blurted out, “I can’t stop looking at it! I don’t like to get behind. It’s like a sickness.”

She just giggled.

Then, in an effort to get her to see my side of things, I tried, “But occasionally there is a little gem . . . like . . .” I scrolled through my news feed, looking for something witty or astute with which to impress her, but all I found were generic holiday wishes and photos of kids I didn’t know.

“Oh, never mind,” I said, tossing my phone onto the table.

In my defense, it had been a rough year. After months of layoffs and salary reductions, the magazine where I’d worked for seven years had finally folded just before the holidays the year before. Leo and I had decided that with the magazine industry the way it was, and with child-care costs the way they were, I’d stay home with the boys, just until the economy recovered. I figured I could pick up freelance writing assignments to keep myself in the game and bring in some money and, eventually, find another job. But I hadn’t so much as sent

a single work-related e-mail, attended a networking event, or even updated my LinkedIn profile since the day late last year I brought home that cardboard box of desk accoutrements. Likewise, the urban planning, architecture, and real estate news that used to occupy much of my headspace went completely disregarded. Since my Twitter identity was so connected to my job as managing editor of *City Green* magazine, I gave that up too. But Facebook was still there for me, a sort of bridge between my old and new lives.

Without my commute time to read the *Times*, I rarely knew what was going on in the world. Even our *New York One* time in the morning had given way to *Sesame Street*. Before I knew it, Facebook and the odd *Daily Show* became my main sources of news.

On the occasion that I did catch a few minutes of real news, there was hardly any context for me, and so I became uninterested. After a while, the only world events that resonated with me were unspeakable tragedies (like school shootings or child abductions), celebrity marriages or divorces, and weather phenomena.

I could foresee a future in which my role as a full-time mother contextualized the world, where topics like poverty, education, food, and gun control could be made more real when viewed through my mom eyes. But despite my substantial efforts to land this job, I'd undertaken my occupation as a full-time mother somewhat reluctantly and couldn't quite bring myself to rally around the mommy causes du jour.

So maybe I got a little carried away, but Facebook was the one thing I found that distracted me from my daily grind just enough to keep me sane.

Lulu stirred, and Sid stood up and started swaying with her to "Here's Where the Story Ends" by the Sundays, which, because our last name was Sunday, was on every high school mixtape anyone ever

made for us. I sipped my wine and stared at my sister, thinking that it was like we were the same person but she had been dipped in some kind of effervescent fluid.

Lulu was sleeping by the end of the song, and Sid carefully lowered her next to me on the musty couch. When she looked up and met my eyes, she wore a satisfied grin, like she had just figured something out. Then she said—slowly, definitively—“I’ve got it. Let’s be pen pals.”

It wasn’t really a question, but she perched herself on the edge of the couch next to me, awaiting an answer. Having continued to imbibe at a steady clip since we’d come down to the basement, I was drunk enough that I had to close an eye to see just one of her. She handed me her glass of water, taking my wine for herself now, and I drank the water as she laid out the plan she’d formulated during the Sundays song.

“It’s perfect. It’s been impossible to talk on the phone with me in Singapore. Let’s not even e-mail. Just the letters. Maybe when we’re old we’ll read some out loud to our grandkids—how cool would that be?” Switching to a singsong voice, then, “I think we have a new tra-di-tion.”

Sid is like a female Bill Clinton. I say that with the authority of someone who once met him. One of the things about growing up in Ohio is that you have plenty of opportunities to meet presidential candidates. He was jogging with his Secret Service guys at the park where Sid and I walked our neighbor’s dog for twenty dollars every Saturday morning. The dog, a golden retriever named Thumper, led us over to a small mutt among a cluster of people taking pictures. We knew he was there, because we’d had to go through a security checkpoint on our way into the park, but we weren’t expecting to have an impromptu chat with him. Yet suddenly, there he was, leaning down and patting Thumper’s head and saying something about him being a

“beautiful animal,” cameras clicking all around us. I can’t remember much about anything else he said, but I do remember feeling like we were friends—like he’d be all, “Of course I do! How have you been?” if I ever called him up and said, “Remember me from the park outside of Columbus, Ohio? I had the golden retriever?” I felt he saw me—really saw me, even though Sid was standing right next to me, which typically rendered me invisible—and I wanted to say the right thing to let him know I was cool. He said something about “young people” being our country’s most important asset, and he nodded right at me, like *I* was our country’s most important asset. I felt sparkly and important for days afterward.

Sid has a similar effect on people. I’ve seen it hundreds of times. When people were around her, you could feel them yearning to lock in the friendship. There was this photo booth at the mall, and in middle school, if anyone was within forty feet of Sid and that booth, they would persuade her to go get pictures taken together, so they could tape the strip of black-and-white images up in their locker or on their mirror at home as proof of their association.

In high school, her turns of phrase and affectations became part of the common vernacular. She used to do this thing when someone paid her a compliment, where she’d kind of comically, kind of sweetly, kind of ironically say, “Ooooh, kitten,” and suddenly everyone was saying, “Oooh, kitten,” all the time.

People assumed I was jealous of her, or that I felt inferior, and I suppose in some ways I did, but it did little to affect my feelings toward Sid. When people would patronizingly suggest this as a foregone conclusion of me being me and her being her, I would direct any negative feelings at them, not at my sister.

Through it all, Sid and I were always best friends. We laughed over nonsense and had deep conversations about life. We fantasized

about the future—what kind of men we'd marry, how many kids we'd have, where we'd live (next door to each other, with a circular connecting driveway). More accurately, I fantasized about the future for both of us, narrating detailed plans while she humored me, occasionally interjecting that she didn't want a blueprint for her life, that she hoped her future held things that couldn't possibly be imagined by a thirteen-year-old.

“Okay,” I said to her. “I'll write to you,” and then I rested my head against the back of the couch and closed my eyes.