

Sincerity
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The Persons:

Claudia: a beautiful woman, very sure of herself

Bob: intelligent, sensitive, timid

Today, in New York. Bob's apartment.

Claudia enters and studies Bob with curiosity, with interest.

They shake hands cordially.

Claudia: Glad to meet you.

Bob: Me too. Very glad. Please sit down.

(Bob is uneasy, uncertain. Claudia keeps observing him, studying him.)

Can I offer you anything?

Claudia: Nothing.

Bob: Tea?

Claudia: No.

Bob: Coffee?

Claudia: No, thank you.

(Bob is nervous and uneasy; he does not know what to do.)

Bob: Anything else?

Claudia (*cordial, but vaguely ironical*): I said "nothing". It means nothing.

Bob: I'm sorry. It's a habit. My mother taught me to say "no" three times. I could say "yes" and accept on the fourth time. I had forgotten that with you...

Claudia: Karl told me about you.

Bob: What did he say?

Claudia: He described your personality. Habits, wishes, tastes, hobbies. They coincide with mine.

Bob: Good. I am happy to hear this. What else did he tell you?

Claudia: That you are intelligent, sensitive, timid.

Bob: Timid... not always... but with you, particularly... you must admit this is an unusual situation.

Claudia: Why unusual?

Bob: We meet for the first time. Karl must have told you a great deal about me.

Claudia: Not a great deal. Just what he knows.

Bob: We have been friends for years. He knows a lot. What did he tell you?

Claudia: About some of your adventures. A dozen of them.

Bob (alarmed): A dozen? No. We went together four or five times...

Claudia: More. You don't have a good memory.

Bob: Did he tell you about us and the two Californian girls?

Claudia: Yes.

Bob: And what happened when one of the two husbands ...?

Claudia: That too.

Bob: And about the night when we ended up in jail because ...?

Claudia: Yes. Everything. From a man, I want complete sincerity. The whole truth, nothing but the truth.

Bob: One can ask for that only when... one is intimate.

Claudia: I have known him for a long time.

Bob: Are you still lovers?

Claudia: No. What did he tell you about me?

Bob: Compliments. Only incredible compliments.

Claudia: Did he tell you how it ended?

Bob: No... he was rather vague on that subject.

Mysterious.

Claudia: He lied to me. I hate hypocrisy and lies.

Bob: Me too. That's why I asked Karl...

Claudia: "Asked"?

Bob: More precisely... I was telling him I don't trust ...

Claudia: ... women, I know. He told me.

Bob: I was burned once ...

Claudia: I know the story. The woman who told you she was pregnant. You mustn't hate all women because one of them lied to you.

Bob: I don't hate all women. I hate hypocrisy, ambiguities, vague shades of truth, false modesty, deceit.

Claudia: It's not only women who are guilty of that long list of sins. Men too. They teach us to lie from the cradle.

Bob: I've tried many times to be sincere. It costs.

Claudia: It costs.

Bob: A high price, at times.

Claudia: So much the better. The rare victories, friendships, relationships, are more precious.

Bob: For instance, if you tell a woman that you love her deeply, passionately ...

Claudia: Don't say it. Prove it.

Bob (*surprised and fascinated*): Karl was right. You are special, unique. Have you ever lied?

Claudia: When I was very young, the first years. White lies. Then one day, years ago, I decided never to lie again. I kept my word.

(Bob looks at her with admiration.)

Bob: How is that possible?

Claudia: It is possible.

Bob: Do you have many friends?

Claudia: Just a few. It doesn't matter. It's better to have a few loyal friends than many hypocritical ones. What about you?

Bob: Not many... Karl... my first love who unfortunately ...

Claudia: ... lied, I know. Karl told me. And he told me about your conversation. You swore all women lie. He told you: "Call this number. Claudia never lies".

Bob: Yeah. Exactly like that. But I am still ... a bit uncertain...

Claudia: ... And insecure, mistrusting. Here I am. Ready for anything!

Bob (*after a brief pause, timidly*): I have always dreamt of an absolutely sincere woman. No pretense, no masks...

Claudia: Here I am. You found her.

Bob: ... If I told you now... let's go to my bedroom and ... (*a vague gesture*).

Claudia: I would say... (*studies him; keeps him in suspense*)... "No". We don't know each other.

Bob: I'm sorry. Forgive me. You see? I started on the wrong foot.

Claudia: No. You desire me. You announced it with honesty and clarity. It's a good beginning.

Bob: A positive one?

Claudia: Positive.

Bob (*encouraged*): There is therefore hope that we...

Claudia: There is always hope. Start by using my name: Claudia.

Bob: Of course, Claudia... (*a brief pause*). Karl, how did you meet him?

Claudia: A friend introduced us.

Bob: For how long have you been...?

Claudia: Lovers? Six weeks. On Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Bob: You are very precise. Did you tell him about... the other men in your life?

Claudia: When he asked.

Bob: Do you prefer a man to ask or not to ask?

Claudia: I want him to be sincere with himself and with others. If he feels like asking, he should. It's a way to know each other. To know **You**.

Bob (*surprised*): To know... me?

Claudia: Of course. The type of questions reveals, betrays, the personality of the inquisitor.

Bob: I am not an inquisitor.

Claudia: Not yet.

Bob: Forgive me if... I just want to know you better.

Claudia: It's the right way. We are beginning to really know each other.

Bob: Your personality is strong, dramatic, very vital... you frighten me a little bit.

Claudia: You told me another truth, what you feel. You are beginning to interest me.

Bob: "Beginning?"

Claudia: It takes time.

Bob: Days, weeks, months?

Claudia: At times.

Bob: And other times?

Claudia: Just a few hours.

Bob (*encouraged*): Am I the type who might... succeed in a few hours?

Claudia: "Succeed?"

Bob: Wrong verb. I'm sorry. It's the type of language we get used to. Brainwashing. They brainwashed us for years. I meant... "succeed" to become a good, intimate friend.

Claudia: Everything is possible.

Bob: Thank you. I am... faintly encouraged... and fascinated, I must tell you the truth.

Claudia: The truth. Good.

Bob: I never met a woman like you.

Claudia: And I never met a man who was not afraid of the truth. You too are afraid of it.

Bob: I must admit that the truth, some truths, may hurt you, wound you. For instance, would you tell a man that he doesn't know how to make love?

Claudia: Using the right words. Humanly, gently, tenderly. When you love, you know how to cement a relationship.

Bob: "Cement"?

Claudia: I didn't mean cement as a binding unity, a marriage. I just meant how to improve a relationship. Speaking openly,

exchanging ideas, opinions, feelings. Revealing oneself. In short, telling the truth.

Bob (*with great admiration*): You are incredible, admirable. Do you always tell the truth to your mother?

Claudia: I answer all her questions. With absolute sincerity.

Bob: To your father?

Claudia: My father is dead.

Bob: If he were alive, would you tell him everything? ... Names of your lovers, how many...

Claudia: If he had that unusual, morbid desire to know details, I would give them to him. I would tell him everything.

Bob: At the cost of hurting him, upsetting him?

Claudia: He who has the need to ask for everything, is prepared for those answers. He had guessed them, felt them. He already knew them. He will not be upset. (*a silence*)

Bob: If I asked you... Look, I am not asking. If I asked you how many lovers you had, would you answer?

Claudia: Sure.

Bob: Would you give me their names, addresses?

Claudia: First names, sure. I've forgotten their addresses.

Bob: You mean... really forgotten?

Claudia: Let's say... cancelled. If I made an effort, I might remember them. It isn't worth the effort.

Bob: You are extraordinary, Claudia. Anything to drink?

Claudia: Nothing, thank you. (*a brief pause*) Later, maybe.

Bob (*encouraged*): I read in that "later" a... vague promise. Was that a promise?

Claudia: To go to bed? No. We don't know each other.

Bob: A little bit more by now, you must admit. We are beginning to know more about ...

Claudia: I admit it.

Bob: Do you like me... a little bit?

Claudia: You are dropping your mask. I appreciate that.

Bob (*nervously, uneasy*): I am... emotional... the way I was with my first date.

Claudia: This is our first date.

Bob: First one, unusual, unique. I am touched, happy.

Claudia: I can read that in your eyes.

Bob: Do you also read... some fear?

Claudia: I read that too.

Bob: Which virtues, qualities, must a man have to deserve your love?

Claudia: It must be manly.

Bob: You mean...?

Claudia: You don't know the meaning of "manly"?

Bob (*timidly*): A real... male, I guess. Sexually active and aggressive?

Claudia: No. You all fear that. I was speaking about other virtues: sincerity, loyalty, courage, love for his fellowman, for mankind. That is manly.

Bob (*happy*): I think I have those qualities. Sometimes, when women say "manly, a real man", they mean passion, frequency of sexual activity...

[the play continues]