



ESL Podcast 199 – A Love Letter

GLOSSARY

to promise – to assure or to tell someone you definitely will do something

* I need you to promise me that you'll always be there when I need you.

love letter – a letter to tell someone how you feel about them romantically

* When I was 10 years old, I got a love letter from the boy who sat behind me in class.

premature – something that happens or is done before the usual time

* Quitting your job before you find out if you're being offered the one you interviewed for today is a little premature.

to pour (one's) heart out – to express or tell your thoughts or secrets completely to someone

* He poured out his heart to his parents and told them that he wanted to become a musician and not a doctor.

love at first sight – to fall in love the first time you see someone

* When Dale saw Angelina Jolie in her first movie, it was love at first sight.

to not be able to get (someone/something) out of (one's) head – to not be able to stop thinking about someone/something

* My boyfriend and I had a terrible fight and I couldn't get it out of my head for all night.

to mean everything to – to be very important or the most important

* Being able to make enough money to move out of my parents' house means everything to me.

sweet nothings – unimportant but nice things about love you say to someone you feel romantically about

* Stop whispering sweet nothings in my ear and start paying attention to the movie.

heavy – serious

* I thought this play was a comedy but it turned out to be really heavy.



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terms of endearment (such as “**my love**,” “**my darling**,” and “**sweetheart**”) – words/names you use to address, call, or talk to someone you love
* Oh, my darling, you make me so happy!

too much – more than necessary; too serious
* I know it’s a special evening, but don’t you think wearing a formal dress to a beach party is too much?

to scare (someone) off – to make someone not like you; to cause someone to lose courage or to run away
* We have three people coming to interview for the job. Be nice and try not to scare them off by telling them how much work the job really is.

head over heels in love – when someone has a very strong feeling of love for someone else
* If she weren’t head over heels in love with him, she’d realize that they don’t have very much in common.

if I were you...I’d... – a phrase used to offer advice to someone, to give them a suggestion; if your situation were mine...I would...
* I think she likes you. If I were you, I’d ask her out on a date.

to play it by ear – to decide your action later, depending on a future situation
* I’m not sure if I’ll have time to stop by after work today. Can we play it by ear?

to play it cool – to remain calm; to act carefully
* We all know that he wants to win the race, but he’s playing it cool so the other runners won’t know his strategy.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Vicky think of the love letter?
 - a) She thinks it's too serious.
 - b) She wants one, too.
 - c) She thinks it needs more terms of endearment.
2. What does Issac decide to do with the love letter?
 - a) He decides to give it to Julie on her birthday.
 - b) He decides to follow Vicky's advice.
 - c) He decides not to give it to Julie, but will send her flowers instead.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

premature

The word “premature,” in this podcast, means to do something before the usual time: “It’s premature to think about retiring from your job when you’re only 40 years old.” “Premature” is also used to describe a baby who is born too early, before the end of the nine months: “My brother was born two months premature, but he was healthy.” You can also say that a baby is “born prematurely.” The babies who are born prematurely are called “preemies”: “At the hospital, the preemies are cared for by special nurses.”

to play it by ear

In this podcast, the phrase “to play it by ear” means to decide on an action later depending on the situation: “I don’t know yet if I’ll need a gardener to help me plant this garden. I’ll get started and play it by ear.” Or, “This project is too important to play it by ear. We need to make a decision right now.” This phrase is also used to mean the ability to play music without seeing it written down on paper: “She never learned to read music, but if she’s heard a song before, she can play it by ear.”



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CULTURE NOTE

There have been several very popular dating shows on U.S. television. One show that everyone knows is an older “game show,” or TV show where people compete to win, called “The Dating Game.” On this show, there is one “bachelor,” an unmarried man, or “bachelorette,” an unmarried woman. This person can ask questions of three “contestants,” or people who are competing. The difficulty is that the bachelor or bachelorette cannot see the contestants who are seated behind a wall. The bachelor or bachelorette must choose one of the contestants based only on their answers to the questions. When the bachelor or bachelorette selects one of the contestants, they go on a date, usually on a trip, which the TV show gives them as a prize.

Another TV show that has been popular in the past few years is a show called “The Bachelor.” The show selects a very handsome and successful man to be the star. He lives in a house for several weeks with a group of beautiful women who want to date him. The women compete to show the bachelor that she is the right woman for him. Each week, the bachelor “kicks off,” or dismisses, one of the contestants. On the last show, he picks one woman to date, and maybe to ask her to marry him. There have been several “seasons,” or years, of this show and some of them have “turned the tables,” or changed things completely, to have a woman as the star of the show. In this case, she lives with a group of men who want to date her and she decides who stays and who goes. These shows were called “The Bachelorette.”

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 199, “A Love Letter.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 199. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com, where you can find a complete Learning Guide to this podcast. This is an eight to ten page guide that includes all of the vocabulary, definitions, new vocabulary that we don't talk about in the podcast, cultural notes and a complete transcript of everything we say on this podcast.

Today's podcast is about someone who is writing a love letter. Let's get started.

[Start of story]

Vicky: What are you working on?

Issac: If I tell you, will you promise not to laugh?

Vicky: All right. What is it?

Issac: It's a love letter to Julie.

Vicky: Isn't it a little premature? You've only been going out for a month.

Issac: Maybe, but I really want her to know how I feel.

Vicky: Let me see it. “Dear Julie. I'm writing this letter to pour my heart out to you. When we met, it was love at first sight and I can't get you out of my head. You mean everything to me. Now that we're together, how can I ever live without you?”

Issac: So, what do you think?



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Vicky: I thought it would have some simple sweet nothings. I didn't expect it to be this heavy.

Issac: Do you think it needs more terms of endearment? Maybe I should have called her "my love," "my darling," or "sweetheart." Tell me the truth, do you think it's too much? I don't want to scare her off.

Vicky: Well, I know you're head over heels in love with her, but if I were you, I'd play it by ear. Give it to her when you feel the time is right.

Issac: Okay, thanks. I'll try to play it cool, for now.

[End of story]

We heard a conversation between Vicky and Issac talking about a love letter. Vicky begins the dialogue by saying, "What are you working on," meaning what are you doing, and Issac says, "If I tell you, will you promise not to laugh," means if I tell you what I am doing, you have to say that you will not laugh at me. To promise, "promise," means to say that you will do something and that you will definitely do it. You will commit yourself to doing it.

Vicky says, "All right. What is it?" What are you working on? What are you doing? Tell me. Issac says, "It's a love letter to Julie." A love letter is a letter in which you tell someone that you love them, or tell them how much you love them, or why you love them. These would all be considered love letters. Some people like to write love letters. Some people like to write poems and put them in your love letters. Now, I guess, we would have love emails!

Vicky asks Issac if it isn't "a little premature." Premature, "premature," means something that is before when you should be doing it. Something that happens before it is supposed to happen or before it should happen. We sometimes use this term to talk about babies who are born, and they may be born a week, or two weeks, or several weeks before they were expected. These are called premature babies. To do something prematurely means to do it before you should do it, before you are supposed to do something. And what Vicky is saying here is that Issac is writing a love letter to Julie probably very soon after they first started going out. In fact, she says, "You've only been going out for a month." To go out means to be dating someone, to date someone.



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Issac says, “Maybe,” maybe it is a little early - and early is another word for premature - “but,” Issac says, “I really want her to know how I feel.” And this, of course, is a very dangerous thing to do when you are dating someone for the first time. That's just a little advice from Dr. McQuillan!

Vicky says, “Let me see it,” meaning let me see the letter, I want to read it, and she then reads us the letter. The letter begins, “Dear Julie. I’m writing this letter to pour out my heart to you.” To pour, “pour,” my heart out, or to pour out my heart, either way, means to tell you everything that I am thinking, to tell you my feelings, or to tell you everything that I am feeling. This is something you would only want to do with someone who's a good friend or someone who you know very well because you may tell them things that are secret, things that you have not told anyone else. So, this is to pour out your heart to someone.

The letter continues, “When we met, it was love at first sight.” The expression, love at first sight, “sight,” means that we fell in love, or Issac fell in love, the first time that we saw each other. Issac is saying that the first time he saw Julie he said, “Oh, I love her!” That happens all the time, of course. Issac continues in his letter, “I can’t get you out of my head.” I can’t get you out of my head means I cannot stop thinking about you. I am always thinking about you. I am constantly thinking about you. Issac says, “You mean everything to me.” You mean everything to me means that you are the most important person in my life. You are more important than anything else, except watching TV, of course! Finally, Issac says, “Now that we’re together, how can I ever live without you?” Oh, so romantic, Issac is! To be romantic, “romantic,” means that you say nice things to someone. You do nice things to someone who you love.

Issac asks Vicky, “what do you think?” What do you think about what I wrote? What is your opinion? And Vicky says, “I thought it would have some sweet nothings.” Sweet, “sweet,” nothings, “nothings,” plural, is an expression that we use to describe nice things that you say someone who you love, but that are not too serious. You could say, “You are the sunshine of my life,” or you could sing that: “You are the sunshine of my life, oh.” That was a song by Stevie Wonder. I used to sing that to all of the girls that I was interested in. That's why I remained single for so many years!

Well, Vicky wants Issac, or expects Issac, to say sweet nothings, things that are nice, but they aren't too serious. She says, “I didn't expect” your letter “to be this heavy.” When we say something is heavy, “heavy,” we don't mean that it weighs



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a lot. We mean that it's very serious. This is an informal way of saying something is really serious. You may go to a movie and say, "Wow, that was heavy." It was very serious. It's a older expression, but you will still hear it.

Issac says, "Do you think" my letter "needs more terms of endearment?" Terms, "terms," are words or phrases. Endearment, "endearment," are things that you say to make someone like you, things that you would say to someone who you are romantically interested in, for example. So, terms of endearment would be things like, "my love," Issac gives that as an example. "My love," "you are my love" - that would be a term of endearment. It's a way of calling someone...a way of addressing someone. It's the title or the name that you give them. So, you could say, "my love." You could say, "my darling," "darling." Darling is similar to my love, someone who I like very much. Or, you could call someone "your sweetheart," "sweetheart," all one word. To say someone is your sweetheart means that they are your girlfriend, or boyfriend, or someone who you are romantically interested in. After you get married, of course, all of this goes away!

Well, Issac says, "Tell me the truth, do you think it's too much?" What he is asking here is do you think it is too serious. When he says, "Do you think it's too much," means is it more than what I should do? Is it too heavy? He finally says, "I don't want to scare her off." To scare, "scare," someone off means that you frighten them. In this case, he is being too serious, and for some girls, for some women, when you first started dating them if you are too serious too soon, you may scare them off. That's true for men. That's especially true for men!

"Well," Vicky says, "I know you're head over heels in love with her." The expression, to be head, "head," over heels, "heels," in love means that you love someone very much. You're crazy about someone. Vicky says, "but if I were you, I'd play it by ear." If I were you means if this were my situation, if I was the person in this situation - "I'd play it" - or I would "play it by ear." To play something by ear means to wait and see what happens. You don't make any definite plans. You wait and see what will happen, and then you act, or react, after you know what is going on. So, someone may say to you, "Should we go to a movie on Friday night," and you say, "Well, it might rain. Let's play it by ear," meaning let's wait and see if it rains and if it doesn't, we'll go to the movie.

Issac thanks Vicky and says, "I'll try to play it cool." To play it cool, "cool," means that I will try not to get too serious. I will try not to seem like I'm too interested in



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Julie. That, of course, is the trick gentlemen, that you don't seem too interested in the other person. Ladies, they already know that!

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

[Start of story]

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Issac: So, what do you think?

Vicky: I thought it would have some simple sweet nothings. I didn't expect it to be this heavy.

Issac: Do you think it needs more terms of endearment? Maybe I should have called her "my love," "my darling," or "sweetheart." Tell me the truth, do you think it's too much? I don't want to scare her off.

Vicky: Well, I know you're head over heels in love with her, but if I were you, I'd play it by ear. Give it to her when you feel the time is right.

Issac: Okay, thanks. I'll try to play it cool, for now.

[End of story]



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The script for today's podcast was by the lovely Dr. Lucy Tse. That's all we have time for. If you have a question or comment about our podcast, you can email us at eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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