

Sometimes Silence Is the Best Answer

Lexi sat at her desk, looking out the window, taking in Kate's arguments. Her comments were vindictive, hurtful, perhaps laced with some truth, and definitely required a response from Lexi at some point. But of what kind, she knew not.

"Hi."

Lexi turned around to see Andrew standing in the door of her office.

"I heard a vast amount of silence up here, so I thought I would check on you."

Lexi got up from her chair and walked over to hug him.

"This must be big. You're not talking."

Lexi looked at him. "You know, I should be crying after everything she said to me, or at least be angry, guilty, or resentful, but I don't feel that way."

"You look like you're thinking."

"I am. I feel like I am on the verge of something big here, one of those big ah-ha moments, but it hasn't quite risen to my brain yet."

"So what did she say?"

"Let's see. I think the words 'fucking bitch' were used several times, with a few references to a 'holier than thou' attitude. A few things about keeping score of past actions, how Jordan is a more loyal friend than I am, and how if Mike called I would be off to the nearest hotel with him."

"Is that true?"

"Hell no. Not for a minute. I don't want to ruin what you and I have. I still love him, and he has a place in my heart, but I am tired of having destructive things in my life and I'm just not going to do it."

"So you're not going to take after Kate and cheat just to keep things fresh?"

"Um, no. I might have done a lot of strange things in my life, and I did date a couple of married men – a big mistake – when I was single. And I saw and felt the incredibly bad aftermath, and I will never do that again. But there is something about marriage, and commitment that I totally buy into. For eleven years I was faithful to Kurt, even when he cheated on me with other women. I know the pain, and just won't do it. That's why it was painful to me to watch her do it. I've been there, but she hasn't. And you mean too much to me to even think about cheating."

Andrew leaned forward to gather her closer. "Well, thank God for that. By the way, I hope you know that you are NONE of those things she accused you of are true. I've never seen anyone as loyal as you, and I can't imagine that your ability to support her in times of continued crisis is brand new behavior that you developed in the 2 years since I've known you."

She felt him kiss her on the top of her head, and stepped back to face him. "As I think about it, I think I know what happened. I think I know how our friendship changed."

"This ought to be good. You're giving her an excuse?"

"No, nothing like that. We switched roles. I used to be the one with all the upheaval in my life. I moved like 20 times, worked a dozen different jobs, married a guy who drained me dry, and dated a few other outlandish characters. Being with you is probably the most stable thing I have ever done."

"And what's different about Kate?"

"She used to be the stable one, chained to a desk in what must have been a friendly, yet unfulfilling marriage. She must have been desperate for a change or she wouldn't have had all this upheaval in her life over the last two years."

"You think she's having a mid-life crisis?"

"Most definitely. But it's not the kind that can be satisfied with a Corvette."

"So you think that she became – what did you call it – a cougar? – to satisfy her, um, 'needs'?"

"Well, let's see. She focused on continuous sex with her husband, kissing old boyfriends, spending a lot of cash, hazing Jordan into the Cougar Club, and getting recognized for all her charitable, albeit genius, marketing work."

"And that's bad?"

"No. They're her choices, and they could be worse."

"What did she say about writing her out of the movie?"

"I think she thinks she is a more integral part of the book than she really is. It's a story about 7 middle aged women, not just her. You'd think her part took up 300 pages, not 30. I seem to remember writing a single chapter about her, not an entire book as she implied. And on top of that, she wasn't all that thrilled with having her life in print, let alone in a movie, so I'm not sure what she's all twisted about now that I want to write her out of it. I'm still going to talk to Sam and Keri about it and what they want to do. I need someone else's opinion other than mine, given the cutthroat reply I just got."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"I am for now. But like I said, I'm waiting for the ah-ha moment."

"And what if that moment doesn't come?"

"I still have to figure out a way to navigate being friends with this New Kate that I don't know very well. Right now, I would still like to write her out of the movie and tell her to shove it up her ass, but I have another plan in the meantime."

"What's that?"

"Silence."

"What's the good in that? Are you punishing her – or yourself?"

"No, I just want to have some time to think clearly and respond appropriately. If I call back immediately, I will either yell at her and end it all, or one of us will end up groveling. I'm too old to grovel and too tired to get angrier than I already am. I'm still not sure how to have her in my life while she's reliving the teen years she never had."

"She actually said that?"

"Yeah. So far this week I have heard that she is in 'favorable slavery' and 'never got to live her teen years'. I'm no psychotherapist, but there is a lot going on here that puts me in unfamiliar territory."

"Maybe it's a good idea to distance yourself from her while you pray for a brilliant therapist to cross her path."

"I agree. In the meantime, I scheduled a phone conference with Sam, Keri, and Jaycee Crue, the screenwriter in about an hour. Let's see what they have to say."

Jaycee was a refreshing addition to the Sam and Keri partnership. They discussed Jaycee's pedigree, from writing life-gone-bad-but-turned-it-around movies for a woman's television channel, to a jump into the edgier world of Indie films, where her creative spirit shown forth in her recent works. For two of the last three years, her films received honorable mention at the Sundance Film Festival. At age 48, she had a good grip on what it was like to be a middle aged woman who might still felt like a teen, but needed to venture into the abyss of adult hood.

"I like all your characters, Lexi, but I need to ask you about a few of them."

"Of course. What did you want to know?"

"Are they all based on women you know?"

"Yes. All seven of them are friends of mine. Did you want to speak with them?"

"No, I just wanted to know if they were real or someone you invented."

"I'm kind of new at this, so help me understand. What is the difference between a real and invented character?"

"A real character is someone other than you. An invented character is someone that usually represents a part of you."

"That sounds a bit Freudian, but I will go with the analogy. Do you treat them differently as a screenwriter?"

"I generally have fewer liberties that I can take with the real character's life. The invented character can go anywhere that you're willing to go."

Interesting concept. Psychological approach, but maybe that's how women worked. "So what did you think of the character of Catherine?"

"I'm guessing she's a real person?"

"What gave it away?"

"You don't seem like the type to try out a mosh pit."

"Very perceptive of you." Lexi sensed that Jaycee knew her characters and could bring them to life in an interesting way. "But I need to ask you, Jaycee, as well as Sam and Keri, an important question."

The trio inhaled, sending a sense of impending doom across the phone. A short, "What is it?" came from Keri.

"What would you think of us writing Catherine out of the movie?" Lexi looked at Andrew, both quizzically wondering what the response would be.

Another inhale from the L.A. group was perceptible on the line. "Why would you want to do that?"

"The real Catherine and I are not speaking to each other at present. On one hand, I think she was a bit embarrassed at being a character in my book, but when I told her I was considering writing her out of the movie, she wondered how I could do that since she felt she was important to the plot. Since I am so close to the situation, yet new to the screenwriting world, I wanted to ask your advice about it."

A few moments of L.A. silence ensued, before they came to a conclusion. "Is this a deal breaker, Lexi?"

"Are there any marketing or other reasons why we should stay committed to the book's storyline?"

"I would imagine that some audiences would notice the difference, but we change characters from books to movies pretty frequently. You'd be amazed how often it's done. "

"I don't want to act rashly, but I do want to look at alternatives – for personal reasons."

"So her entire character, and her relationships, would be out of the script?"

"Unless you want to turn her into someone else – perhaps an 'invented' character?"

Jaycee piped up. "That's very possible, Lexi, very possible. But I would need to know more about you. Perhaps we could create a new character together...."

Lexi's creative juices started to flow. "Hmmm. That sounds pretty interesting. What did you have in mind?"

"I'm due in Portland in two days, so maybe I could come up to see you at the end of the week. We have a short time frame we are working on, and I could show you the pages I have developed so far for a couple of the characters I've worked on. Then if you would let me grill you a bit, we could come up with another character."

Lexi asked Andrew, "Are you okay with that?"

Andrew leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully looked out the window. "There is one character that you didn't include in the movie."

"Who?"

"The real you – your story."

"None of those characters are you, Lexi? Is that TRUE?" Jaycee's voice boomed through the phone.

"Yes, for the most part. I might have put a couple of events from my life where they seemed appropriate to other characters' lives, but I pretty much kept my story to myself."

"Would you be willing to put YOU on the screen?" Lexi's gut twisted a bit at the thought, but overall thought it would be a good idea.

"On one condition. I want the character to be who I am now, looking back on where I have been. All the existing characters started chronologically. I would like my part different – looking back, not with regrets, but with an understanding of how all those events came together into a whole."

"I like it. And we can include Andrew too. I hear he's an amazing catch."

Lexi looked across the table at her loving husband. "That he is. I'm a very lucky woman." Lexi returned her attention to the phone. "So all three of you are okay with the change in plans?"

"Go ahead and get started writing what you can, and then we will have something to review when I get there in a few days. I look forward to meeting you too, Andrew."

Andrew smiled as he spoke into the speakerphone. "We'll keep the guestroom open for you, Jaycee."

"Thanks, Lexi. We'll be anxious to see the new pages."

"So will I." Lexi hung up the phone and looked at Andrew. "There, that wasn't hard. One character deleted, and another one created."

"What do you think Kate will say?"

Lexi looked out the window, searching her heart, returning to Andrew's gaze with a smile. "You know, Andrew, for the first time in 20 years, I don't care. She can think, say, or do anything she wants. I'm me, and she's her. When she first started seeing Steve, I didn't like it, but I told her that I gave her 'permission' to do whatever the hell she wanted. I went back on that promise. Now I'm going to stick to it – for me, not for her." She paused as a resolute expression came across her face. "I'm not going to be her safety net any longer. She's a grown woman who makes her choices, and I'm not helping her with the resulting consequences."

"I see you've had your ah-ha moment."

Write my own damn book, huh? Kate thought. Well, why not? I already have a great concept – the IM Chronicles – and it just needs some better definition. She sat down at her laptop and started typing, copying all of Steve’s text messages from her cell phone for a start.

She worked for four hours, roughing out an outline for what she thought the book should be, and then wrote about half of it. IM-UR – Devotions for the Digital Age? IM-UR – Love Letters for the Digital Age? She flipped through her Rolodex to find her contact at the University Press from her university in Florida and called him to float the idea and her marketing idea – podcasting – by him.

“It’s great to hear from you, Kate,” Kirk Sommers said, as he restacked manuscripts on his desk, “and I appreciate you contacting us with your idea. You tend to set the bar for many of us down here.” He knew Kate Shaw was a high achiever, but this new venture seemed alien to her academic pursuits. The idea sounded good, but he’d have to reserve judgment until he saw a draft.

“It’s good to know that I’m not entirely forgotten,” Kate said, “or totally hated. So, I trust your judgment. Do you think this idea has commercial possibilities?”

“Absolutely. Can you send me about 10 or 20 pages when you have something written, and I’ll review it and see what we’re talking about?”

“If your e-mail address hasn’t changed from what it says on your business card, I can send you about 15 pages in about 10 minutes.”

“Damn, you are good,” he said. “I heard that you were very prepared, that you didn’t ask questions, unless you had a pretty good idea what the answers were.”

“Someone said that about me?” Kate started thinking about the people at the university that she’d worked with, and she could only think that Jack Staunton might have said that she was prepared. She’d certainly successfully pitched her research junket to him with a lot of names and research angles.

“A lot of us really were impressed with your model...” he paused before continuing. “And Dr. MacMillan’s follow up.”

“I’ll tell Steve,” she said, fully aware that Kirk knew that Steve had been a student – her student – and that he was her husband now. The academic world was too small to keep that kind of secret. She opened e-mail on her laptop, and sent Kirk her first draft. “All yours. Let me know what you think, and I’ll do some research on podcasting.”

Kate was no more than 40 minutes into her research online when her cell phone rang. She was surprised to see it was Kirk returning her call.

“Did the e-mail not go through?” she asked.

“Oh, it came through. Please say you’ll sell me the option on this book. It’s got bestseller written all over it. Remember that Everything I Learned in Kindergarten book? This has the same kind of potential.”

Kate shook her head and raised her eyebrows in disbelief. She knew this was a good idea, but she hadn’t expected such immediate enthusiasm.

"It's yours. Make an offer and get a contract ready to send to my attorney," she said. "And thank you for taking the time to look at this."

"No, thank you for thinking of us as a legitimate publisher for your work ."

"I took your text messages and wrote a book," Kate said casually over dinner.

Stephen looked up from his rigatoni with some confusion. "You took my text messages and wrote a book?"

"I originally thought it would be a good book for Lexi to write, but she pretty much dissed the idea. And I had some time this morning..."

"And you wrote a book..."

"Well, it's not War and Peace," she shrugged.

"What's it called – Confessions of A Cheating Bastard?" he said with some skepticism.

"Tentatively IM-UR: Love Letters in the Digital Age," she admitted.

"You amaze me," Steve said, pouring more Pétrus, a merlot he'd come to love while in Paris, into their wine glasses. "What did you do today, dear?" "I did a load of laundry and oh, I wrote a book.' I'll have to read how you turned my groveling text messages into love letters."

"Well, they were love letters in a way. I took the messages, maybe edited them a little and gave them a context. They showed a certain devotion and commitment that makes them love letters."

"Yours was the best, even though it was written in the air. IM here with U," he said, gesturing as she had to spell out the message. "UR 4given."

She smiled and was thrilled that he remembered her exact response to him.

"Did you do anything else while you were having a cup of coffee?" he asked, still trying to grasp how she could not only write a book, but use his pathetic appeals to create it.

"I talked with a publisher, and he's going to send me a contact..." Kate enjoyed demonstrating that she still had professional talent; she had to find some focus while Steve did his lectures at U-Chicago. He got dressed every morning in his new Brooks Brothers suits, and she spent her days in her MIT shirt and a pair of jeans.

"Anything planned for tomorrow? Because if you're going to go into partnership with Warren Buffett or take over a third world country, I'll try to get home early," he laughed.

"Nothing that serious, I don't think. Maybe make an appointment with Chris to talk about the contract, make some calls to talk about buying cell phone numbers for a podcast," she said ticking activities off on her fingers. "Try to get Jordan and Rob on the phone to talk about their adventures, and if Lexi's movie is going to have the same title as her book, I've already got some kick-ass product ideas I could talk to Dex about. And maybe work on the new jewelry designs to come out with my IM book."

Her jewelry designs had become more than just a passing fancy. The ideas Kate had originally presented to Danielle had focused on the Kat House – alley cats, tom cats, fat cats, cool cats. But more insomnia and a couple hours at the white board had produced a flurry of ideas for products to benefit a variety of charitable causes.

She worked with Danielle to develop the 'beCause' brand of jewelry, under which there were several lines of products. The 'Think Pink' line started with the BFF pin with the middle F in pink diamonds, and expanded from there, incorporating some of the other designs, but featuring pink diamonds; this line benefited the Susan Komen Breast Cancer research fund. The 'Paws to Remember' line featured paw shaped pins and pendants that were all dated 9/11/2001 and could be personalized with names; all proceeds from this line went to the Twin Towers memorial fund. The 'Hot Line' featured HOT pins – Heart Of Texas – to assist recovery efforts in Texas after Hurricane Ike. Her latest design was similar to the BFF idea, except it was COME, with an emerald substituting for the O; despite its racy connotations, the pin benefited the Conference on Mother Earth, a grassroots ecological group. She probably had a dozen letters on her desk from other nonprofits asking if she'd be interested in working with them; she would soon be looking for a group that might fit the 'IM Line' she was working on to launch with her new book.

Steve admired her business acumen and her ability to merge her creativity with economic savvy to provide service to these causes. He loved to watch her working at her desk, when she put on her glasses and read through the pitch letters; sometimes she shrugged them off, but more often, she stared off into space, as if she were watching the charity work. Then she'd take a pen and make notes or draw designs. Her ideas – and even some of the drawings – were very good, and the success of the 'beCause' jewelry was a testament to her abilities. She took no profits from the sale of the jewelry, with proceeds going to the charities, and only took fees for the sale of her designs. While her income hadn't replaced his trust fund as a source of support, she was a very wealthy woman.

"So that's probably just your morning schedule... Maybe you could get a manicure or something in the afternoon, you know, tart up a little and meet me for dinner at Les Nomades."

"I think focusing on three characters would give a balanced focus to the movie. Seven characters is usually reserved more for an epic novel or biblical drama."

Lexi and Andrew liked Jaycee's creative, yet practical approach. The three of them sat in Lexi and Andrew's living room, the floor littered with sections from the manuscript. Jaycee's astute eye for detail, while still forming a motion picture in her brain proved she was the right person for the job.

"Marie's story of finding middle aged love with an older man with commitments is good, Lita the internet vixen will throw in some spice into the mix, and Debra the carefree, intelligent middle aged mom is a fresh approach. After we tell all their stories, we'll pan in to include all of them, and you sitting around a table for a girls' night out."

"It's not too 'Sex in the City' is it?" Lexi didn't want to have a 'B' movie version of a famous series.

"No, I think this is a different approach in that most of the time focuses on their personal stories and less time on how they interact as friends." Jaycee sat back on her heels as she looked at the piles of paper on

the floor. "I liked what you wrote about your life, Lexi, where you are now, and how important these women are in your life. You show that you're not perfect, and made some mistakes along the way, but still love these other women."

"That I do."

"So why are you writing Kate out? Is it a personal thing?"

"I love her to death and always will. We have been there for each other in a pinch, but lately we have been driving each other crazy and are kind of going off in different directions."

"You sound like sisters."

Lexi laughed. "That we are. We're just having a family feud at present."

"So how is it going to end?" Andrew surprised Lexi by looking her in the eye and asking a pointed question that she wasn't quite ready to answer.

"Well if I knew, I probably would have written it down, wouldn't I?"

Jaycee looked at Lexi. "Is this one of those things where you have to see who is going to blink first and pick up the phone?"

"Yes." Andrew answered for Lexi. "She's got about 24 hours to let this go on or I'm intervening."

Lexi was still a bit taken aback at Andrew's answering for her. "I thought you wanted to kick Steve's ass?"

"I do, but I'm not going to waste my time. He'll grow up when he's ready. And so will she."

Jaycee interjected. "Can I ask what happened – what caused the feud?"

Lexi had to think for a moment to sum it up. "Kate left her husband for a man about 25 years her junior, whom she met when she was still married. He's young, rich, handsome, and has a family full of trouble."

"Hey, at least he's not from that MacMillan family – that father who was into international money laundering? Did you see the write up on them last year? I can't imagine what it did to his kids. They were in the headlines for weeks."

Lexi and Andrew grew silent, smirking at Jaycee. "Oh my God – it's them?"

"Yep."

"What happened to them? I heard they had to leave the country."

"They didn't really HAVE to, but it was safer for them to do so. Steve finished up his doctorate and she did some marketing consulting and created the Kat House jewelry line that you see plastered all over the TV and media."

"I had no idea that was her."

"She's really quite brilliant." Lexi smiled at Jaycee, noticing a glimmer of amazement in the writer's eye.

"Then her young husband had an affair, she discovered it, and came here to stay with us last week. She came to L.A. with us with her friend Jordan, and hung out while we went to Madison Street to talk about the movie. When we came back to celebrate, she was drunk and obnoxious, and then left unexpectedly the next morning to return to her husband without telling us."

Jaycee wrinkled her brow as she tried to take in what was being said while Lexi continued. "I think I was just insulted that she left during my big moment, and made a choice to return to her husband, which is something I wouldn't have done, but it's not my marriage. I was mad, called her up, and said I was done being her friend."

Andrew looked at her. "Ah, so you admit you were mad?" His loving smirk showed that he was busting her on her stuff.

"Well, of course I was mad. It was my big moment, and she overshadowed it. I just spent the last two years going through all her dramas, and I thought I was due. I guess my ego is starting to get big, and I wanted her to take second place for a while. Turns out we've both been keeping score because when I called her, she shot back a list from the last twenty years of every quirky thing I've done that she didn't agree with, but supported me on." Lexi took a drink of sparkling water as she reflected on the moment. "I guess there's no way to keep score after twenty years, and we shouldn't be doing it to begin with."

"I guess that's the plot twist, isn't it?" Jaycee's mental wheels were turning.

"What do you mean?"

"Even though your character is happy with the choices that Marie, Lita, and Debra have made, she needs to confront the friend that doesn't make her so happy and resolve it. That will be the scene stealer at the end."

Lexi started to see that no matter how her ego felt, no matter how much she thought life would be "cleaner" without Kate's messes, she could either have Kate, or have a grudge against Kate. Either way, Kate's essence would be there, but Lexi had to pick which one it would be.

Andrew leaned back from her, focusing his attention on Lexi. "Well, I'll be damned. You're fighting with your pride. I can see it on your face."

Lexi punched Andrew in the shoulder. "Shut up."

"Lexi, just do it for god's sake. Give it up and go apologize."

When all else failed, Lexi used demeaning humor when she knew she was cornered. Placing her hands around her neck, she mimed being choked. "MUST....NOT...APOLOGIZE....AHHHHHHH!"

Jaycee rolled back on the floor, looking at her hosts on their couch. "You two make quite a team. We'll have to make a story about you two someday."

"Not on your life, lady." Andrew pulled Lexi's playfully dead body towards him. "We haven't even finished the script, and it's already killed her!"

Lexi pulled herself into an upright position. "Ok, I will see what I can do. But can we keep the Big Reunion Ending secret for a while? I'll do what I can to apologize, but I'd like to make her squirm for a bit and make her think she's not in the movie."

Jaycee popped into a standing position. "I've got a great idea. We'll save that to the end, and we'll get a cameo appearance at the end from a big name."

"Who did you have in mind?"

"I'm not sure yet, but I think we could pull off a kitschy idea. You know how everybody loved the TV show 'Cagney and Lacey' in the '70s, and that occasionally you see the two actresses appear together on a movie or talk show?"

"Of course! Those are those moments that make your heart swoon."

"This must be a girl thing, but I get the idea. It's kind of like seeing two former winning basketball teammates together again after forty years," Andrew added.

"Exactly. You just have to make sure the pair of actresses is credible, not pathetic. I'll put some ideas together." Jaycee's enthusiasm for this new approach was apparent and her passion for her work shown through her entire demeanor. "Let me run it by Sam and Keri. They'll have some great ideas – we're lucky to have them."

"So what do we do now?" Lexi asked.

"I'm going to go make some notes and take these papers back with me. Not that I don't want to join you for dinner, but I'll be in my room writing."

"Go to it. Andrew is grilling salmon tonight – we'll slide it under the door so we don't disturb you."