

The Lexicon

Sisters

Lexi awoke from her dream to the tinny sound of Beethoven. *Where am I? What time is it?* Her clock said 4:46 am. *Is that my cell phone?* She stumbled out to the kitchen and grabbed her phone.

Hullo? Lexi's voice was gravelly, indicating her half-awake demeanor.

Did I wake you up?

Yesssss followed by a deep yawn.

Should I call you back?

No. I'm kind of awake now. I meant to call last night but it was too late. You know there are about two people in the world that I would answer the phone for at this hour. You should feel honored to be one of them.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I have big news.

So do I. You first while I make some hot caffeine to pour down my throat.

Steve is coming back today.

Lexi was now awake. *WHAT????*

Herr Professor did not want him, found someone else whom I am guessing is better looking boy-candy for him, and told me that I would be taking Steve back into my care.

Well, that seems a bit awkward. How are you going to handle this one?

I have no idea, but I am expecting multiple brownies out of the deal.

You do remember this is Steve, not Sam, right?

Actually, Dr. Heil called him "Schteve" and spit a lot. I may have to try that.

But seriously, what are you going to do?

Kate's heart fluttered and her voice raised to a pre-pubescent range. *I don't know...*

What, no plans? Oh wait, those didn't seem to work too well after all, did they?

Kate giggled. No, I guess not....

But seriously Kate, you aren't going to do anything stupid, are you? I would hate to see you on the Lifetime Movie of the Week.

I won't. I promise. So tell me more about Mike. What the hell happened there?

I got a phone call out of the blue from one of his work buddies. I was on his speed dial, so they thought I must be important. Please don't ask why I was on his speed dial – I will never know. Anyway, he told me Mike was missing, and nothing else [damn the writer of that part of this novel!]. I was tempted to call my buddies in the DOD and CIA that I have known since birth, but I am not sure they would tell me much since the information is "classified". So I called Joann to have her check in on him...

Did you consult Dionne Warwick and Miss Cleo too?

No, they were unavailable, so I had to use my own connections. He looked very serious and not really in trouble. So I called Mike's buddy back for more info and, get this, he asked me if I "knew" anything I should tell him! Turns out his mom and "grandmamma" were psychics and he believes in this stuff. I told him what I knew and he said he had an idea and would call me back.

So your psychic clue is going to lead the government to find your ex-boyfriend?

He's not exactly my ex, but if they find him that's okay.

You sound way too nonchalant.

I'm not. It's just early. I still love him but can't have him. Can you hear the country music in the background? I'll let you know if they find him.

So did you make your marketing meeting on time?

OH MY GOSH! More big news. Lexi was fully alert despite the limited intake of caffeine.

You're now CFO, President of Marketing and Lead Fileroom Clerk?

Something like that. Unbeknownst to me, Evan scheduled a meeting with Archbold –

The big ass private equity folks? They did a huge deal down here lately and 3000 people lost their jobs, one being a close friend of mine. They aren't exactly nice folks.

Are New York M&A's ever nice? No, I think not.

What did they want?

Just a simple deal. Add equity. Take 25% ownership. Let Evan and I stay – and toss out the owners. We have one week to decide.

WOW! Sounds very slash and burn...

Honestly, I don't care all that much...

Liar.

No – really. It's not part of The Plan, remember? I'm just going to hang out, wait and see, and do my best to create another career. I just don't have the energy to get all emotional about this.

Oh shit. It's 8:30...

Thanks for being understanding.

No – I'm listening – well kind of –

I have a feeling this has to do with Schteve?

I have to get some paperwork done before he gets in at 9 am.

Oh Lord. You better get off the phone. Don't you have some makeup to put on, hair goo to run through your locks, something like that?

Um...not...really.

Okay, time for me to hang up.

No – really – you don't have to.

Yes I do. You have totally lost focus and aren't going to be regaining it for a while.

I don't mean to sound that way, but....

Yeah, I know. Boys trump all other concerns. It's okay. You were there for me when I met Mike and went through all my goofy emotions, so I will cut you a break on this one.

Thanks...I...

No problem. Call me if you need to talk. But you may need professional help before long.

Kate suddenly had a hurried tone in her voice. *Gottagoodbye.* CLICK.

Lexi looked at her phone knowing that the CLICK meant Schteve had just walked in Kate's door.

Steve looked a little more disheveled than he usually did. He didn't shave this morning, Kate noted, and his hair had a little bit of windblown look. Plus the cobalt blue polo shirt under his leather jacket, although it gave the blue in his hazel eyes a dynamic pop, was a little more casual than he usually dressed. He dropped his backpack and plopped into the chair next to her desk. There are no brownies, she sulked.

"What's the matter?" she asked, knowing mostly what the problem was.

"I'm not used to getting hit on by a professor and then getting canned," he said with a matter-of-fact tone with just a touch of indignance.

"I think perhaps it was just a mismatch of personalities..." she began.

"Mismatch of gender preference," he said. "Or was that an intentional move on your part?"

Kate decided this was definitely not a conversation for the hallway to hear, so she got up and closed her office door.

"Do you think I would do something to intentionally hurt you?"

He shrugged. "I don't think so, but after yesterday, I'm not so sure."

She hoped his reference to yesterday was his encounter with Professor Heil and not their brownie incident.

"I thought you would appreciate the work he was doing and that you could contribute your skills to his project," she defended herself.

“And you had no suspicions that he was looking less for a grad student with science skills than a boyfriend? Don’t insult my intelligence by insulting your own.”

Kate looked into his eyes, both of their expressions reflecting defiance. This is one of those deciding moments, she thought to herself. I can throw some anger into the discussion or I can cave in and admit my subterfuge or I can surrender to my heart and one way or another, find a happy ending to this story.

She took a deep breath and reached across the corner of the desk to take his hand.

“You scare me,” she admitted. “You put me in unfamiliar, and therefore uncomfortable, territory. I don’t know how to feel about you, and I don’t know how to behave with you.”

He clutched her hand between both of his. “I guess I didn’t realize how kissing you would turn into this awkward situation. I just wanted to express how I felt, and yesterday seemed like the right time.”

As if there ever would have been a right time, she thought. She needed to shift into her mentoring mode or this was likely to spin out of her conscious control.

“I appreciate your honesty, as well as yesterday’s brownie,” she said smiling with a dash of mischievousness, “and I am truly sorry that the Herr Heil trade didn’t work out, but maybe we need to look at a project with me that can challenge your math skills.”

“The way you say that makes me think you’ve already given this some thought.”

“Well, I read that book Blink and the book about its theoretical underpinnings...” Steve already looked confused. “But then I read an article by Peter DeLegge from Marketing Today about developing marketing metrics for use with new media like social networks, and I thought that might make an interesting study.”

“Marketing metrics?”

“You know, measuring ROI on advertising and stuff like that. He says credibility in marketing comes from accountability, and the old accountability measures aren’t working with new media. Hence the need for new metrics.” She was very pleased with herself for taking an idea that was outside of her ‘marketing as an art’ comfort zone and presenting a project that was clearly ‘marketing as a science.’

He looked at her as if he was pondering the idea, but he had not yet let go of her hand. “So I can still work with you?”

“If you still want to,” she said. And please don’t ask me to define boundaries yet, because I’m not ready for that.

“Can I kiss you again?” he asked with a twinkle in his eyes. Steve lifted her hand to his lips and kissed the back of her palm.

“So polite and so sweet,” and more on instinct than actual thought, she added, “Is that the best you can do?”

He stood up quickly, still holding her hand. With the unspoken phrase ‘you know damn well it isn’t’ reflected in his action, he gently tugged her up from her chair and backed her against her desk before wrapping his arms around her.

There was no surprise impulse this time. There was no mistaken identity with a phantasm of Sam in the background. This was Steve, and she had tried to kick him to the curb in what turned out to be a hateful way, and right now, she was returning his kiss, paraphrasing his words from yesterday. I won’t say I shouldn’t have, and I won’t say I’m sorry.

Lexi looked around the kitchen. It’s 5:30 in the morning, I’m absolutely awake, and I have already talked to my friend in a later morning time zone. I could begin follow-up on my plan and collect everything I’ve written to begin some sort of compilation. Or I could write more, she thought, maybe some sort of introduction. If I write an introduction, that could set up a framework for the pieces to follow. She groaned a little. That sounds like I’m developing a PERT chart, not prefacing my body of ideas. She poured another cup of coffee and opened her laptop on the pass-through counter to begin her creative process.

We all have ideas. Mostly we share those ideas with those close to us, friends and family. Sometimes, we can share those ideas to make a living. But there are times when we need to share ideas to make a life.

I have been sharing my ideas and writing about them for a couple years now, when I was recovering from some tragedy or celebrating some joyous victory. My ideas have certainly helped me, and I think they have also helped others to face their fears and challenge their boundaries.

~~That’s my goal now—to share my ideas, first through my writing to not just offer a positive spin on events and actions, but to move people to accomplish great things in their own perspectives.~~

Our fears and boundaries can hold us back, can keep us from achieving our heart-felt goals, keep us from trying something, keep us tied to the ‘shoulds’ of

life. But once we are willing to venture outside our comfort zones, even if it is just one step, we can accomplish goals that are tied to personal greatness.

She re-read her words and after crossing out what was a bad start to the third paragraph, she was generally pleased. Tie it back to 'make a life', she reminded herself, or otherwise you've written a new motivator, not an introduction.

So to make my life and reach for a heart-felt goal, I am sharing my ideas and my writings with a larger audience than I can just meet for coffee or punch into my speed dial. I hope that we can share through (put in URL of website here) and that you can use my ideas to take your steps beyond your boundaries, and that your ideas will further inspire me to push aside all the 'shoulds.'

Not bad, she thought, can probably still use some editing. Not enough punch where I need it. She shrugged. I can't help it that I still think like a direct marketer; that MBA had its uses in many things.

She glanced at the clock and reminded herself that she should really try to get to work on time, maybe even in early, because even though she wanted to separate herself from Evan's power-grab, she was already intrinsically involved. (Curse you, David in the Armani suit!) She might need to coach Evan a little on positioning Archbold's offer to Veronica and Sydney. They needed to believe it was really their idea and that the buy-out was a blessing for them personally. Evan understood that, but might not sell it as tactfully as it needed to be done. A little TLC might go a long way in making the deal happen. She finished her coffee and padded off to a warm shower.

The office phone rang, jarring both Kate and Steve. He released her from his arms, and she turned enough to see on caller ID that Dr. Heil was calling. She decided not to pick it up, so they could both listen to his message.

"I saw yer door was closed dis morning. I wanted to check to see how things went with Schteve,"

"I would say pretty well," Steve said, sitting down with casual comfort.

"That would be a bit of an understatement," Kate replied. She pushed her hair back from her face and sat down at her desk. This is another one of those defining moments, and now I have to be ready to set boundaries, she thought, wishing Lexi was on her cell phone coaching her through this conversation. She tapped a clutch of papers on the desk to align them and to stall.

"After I sign these," she said, trying to be cool and without the emotion that had just enveloped her for the last half hour or so, "I'll be your supervisor again."

“And we play by the old rules?” Steve said more as a statement than a question.

“And we work by the old rules,” she said as she scrawled her signature on the forms for human resources, the financial aid office and the graduate studies department. She wanted to say something about them having a wonderful interlude and some incredible moments, but she feared how those comments might be interpreted and where they might lead.

He got up and collected jacket and backpack and headed for the door. “I guess I’ll go to the library to do some research on metrics,” he said.

So, he had remembered, she sighed. He knew his role and assignment.

“You can leave the door open,” she said, “I think the fireworks are over for the morning.”

Lexi stepped out of the shower, enjoying the refreshing feeling of after-shower cleanliness topped off by a clean, white fluffy towel. She breathed in the warm steaminess of her bathroom, enjoying a quiet moment to herself before her day began.

It was common for Lexi to get a flash of insight, usually about other people during these times when her mind was at ease and she was one with the Universe. It was as though all the channels opened up and she could feel the people around her that she loved.

She sat on her bed, enjoying the quiet of early morning. Closing her eyes, she first “saw” Kate, in the arms of a young stud, the two of them embracing each other like teenagers. *Kate, I hope you know what you are getting into....* Lexi had been the “other woman” before and knew it was no fun to be in any corner of a love triangle.

Lexi next opened her thoughts to Mike, something she had to force herself NOT to do over the last four years. But now he was back, however tentatively, in her life, and it was a challenge to keep herself from him physically or psychically. She felt his energy, no longer focused and at work, but tired, worn, and resting. *It feels like he’s in a hotel somewhere and the mission is over.* She sensed a lot of protective light around him, and emitted a sigh of relief. She knew that they had found him – thank God. She said a little prayer, as she used to do every night, for him and his safety. His job, even though he would not share it with her, was dangerous and he did his best to keep her at bay.

Now that I have my antenna up, let’s see what’s up with my writing. I really liked that introduction I wrote – it felt very inspired. She felt a wave of gold, expansive energy wash over her, just as the waves in the Waikiki surf felt when she was

there. Lexi knew that she was supposed to do this, supposed to write from her heart, and she had the strength and wherewithal to do it – and like all things – do it well.

She glanced at the clock. Seven o'clock. She needed to get rolling. A picture of Evan flashed through her mind and a sense of anxiety. He was going to have to confront Veronica and Sydney today, and it was tearing him apart. She could coach him on what to say, but in his nervousness, he would probably forget it all, as he had done in previous client presentations. As much as Lexi liked to control situations, Evan was on his own with this gig. *I think I will make sure and stay in my office today and keep out of the line of fire. Keep a low profile.* Sounded like good, non-confrontational advice – that probably would not be followed.

Kate sat back in her chair. *I didn't think anything was better than chocolate. What a great kisser he is.* She marveled at how her devious plan had turned out in her favor. She knew Steve wasn't gay, but only by putting him through a semi-illegal hazing ritual. And now, she would have excellent help on the new annual goal that had been sitting on her performance review for the past 7 months.

The Vice President, a former consultant with Booz Allen, was in the mood to re-vamp the department and institute some corporate methodology into the education world. Kate admired his efforts to move forward through the mired bog of college politics, filled with tenured and insecure muckety-mucks who would block his every effort. As a "Stretch Goal", he had asked Kate to come up with alternative marketing plans – and, of course, measurements – to justify the effectiveness of their outreach. She knew that by "effectiveness" Jack Staunton actually meant cash flow, and it would take all her ingenuity to keep up with him. And now she had the right tool every ambitious administrator needed – a taut, intelligent twenty-something who could do her grunt work.

Kate loved that Steve lusted after her. It made her feel like the woman Bill had forgotten, or maybe the teenager she never got to be. She wanted to look beautiful, in addition to being strong and intelligent, for Steve. But she had to be careful. Bill wasn't the typical male. He could spy a change in the slightest nuance and was forthright enough to say so. If Kate enhanced her grooming at this moment, he would notice and question her. She used to love that about Bill, but now it might just hamper her efforts to take advantage of the Victoria's Secret semi-annual sale.

"Are you Kate?"

The comment snapped Kate out of her inner strategy session. Before her stood a leggy, thin brunette, wearing her Kappa Kappa Gamma skin tight tee-shirt.

"Yes, I am. Can I help you?"

"I was looking for Steve. I'm Stacey. He left kind of early this morning and he forgot his cell phone. I thought I would drop by and give it to him. Is he here?"

Kate's mind took time off after Stacey's first question. Realizing her momentary delirium, she said, "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

"I'm looking for Steve. I'm Stacey – his fiancé. I came to drop off his cell phone. Is he here?"

Kate blinked a few times to put moisture back into her stunned, dry eyeballs. "Um...no, he's not. But if you would like to leave it here, I will be sure he gets it when he returns."

"Thanks so much!" Stacey flashed a smile the KKG's were known for, and Kate knew she was probably as smart and athletic as the typical sister of that sorority. Kate quickly scanned Stacey's left hand, noting what had to be a 2 carat diamond in a platinum setting, thereby solidifying the claim of *fiancé*'.

"Would you like to sit down for a moment?" The cougar hid her fangs, lest she bite into this young kitten and tear her to shreds.

Lexi arrived at work, feeling an emotional chill in the early morning office environment. The typically chatty staff was doing a memorable impression of an old fashioned library. Something was amiss.

Lexi looked at Karol, one of the customer service reps outside her office. "What's going on?"

Karol's face was drained of color. "I've worked here 13 years and never heard the owner's yell – until this morning."

"What happened?"

"We don't know. Evan walked in to see Veronica and Sydney with 3 cups from Starbucks. A few minutes later, there was yelling and a coffee cup got thrown against the glass. Evan left the office and hasn't come back. "

Lexi looked at the mocha smeared glass at the end of the hall. Lexi thought to herself, *Well that didn't take long....*

"Don't worry about it Karol. I'm sure it will all work out."

"I hope so. I love working at this place – we all do – and we don't want to leave."

Lexi walked into her office, putting down her tote bag and purse, reaching across her desk to fire up her PC.

“Can we talk to you for a minute?” Sydney, the younger of the two owners, had silently snuck up to Lexi’s office door, and pursing her lips to the point that they became invisible.

“Of course. Let me put down my coat and I will be right there.”

Sydney turned sharply on her black stiletto heel. *How she walks in those things I will never know...* Lexi preferred flats to a potential ankle injury from dangerous footwear.

Lexi walked into Sydney’s office. No sign of Evan. Veronica sat cross legged, rapidly pumping her toe.

“Did you know about THIS??”

“About what?” Lexi learned a long time ago to answer a question with a question until she knew for sure what the subject was really about.

“ARCHBOLD!”

“Sydney, calm down...”

“I WILL NOT CALM DOWN!” Lexi knew it was time to let her vent, to let the both of them get things out in the open. You had to know how to work with women, and that an emotional blow needed venting. Men didn’t remember this.

“Why don’t you tell me what happened.” Lexi was going to have to play therapist once again this morning. She saw Veronica off to her left, slowly steaming away while Sydney talked.

“HOW COULD YOU DO THIS – WITH EVAN! WE TRUSTED YOU!!”

“And you still can. Why don’t you just let it all out...”

“WHAT?”

“Oh come on. The two of you are pissed because you got faced with new information. Why don’t you just let it out. Scream, yell whatever. How about I order up something from Andrino’s?”

“I *could* use an éclair about now...” Lexi loved that about Veronica. She could come back down to earth fairly easily and appreciate a good distraction.

Lexi stepped out of the room, grabbed Karol, and a \$20 out of her purse. “Buy a éclair, a couple of chocolate chip cookies, and 3 lattes – HURRY!”

Lexi knew that girl therapy needed sugar and caffeine along with ranting and raving. Over the next hour the three of them spewed everything that was on their minds, from neglectful husbands to abusive clients to physical aches and pains. Lexi discovered that what they were really upset about was that Evan did not include them in the Archbold discussions, not the actual offer itself.

“Evan’s a boy. He doesn’t know how women think.” Lexi took the last bite of her oatmeal chocolate chip cookie.

“Oh lord. And he wants to run the company?” Veronica said with a wry smile on her face, heaving a sigh filled with the last of her anger. “I guess it’s time...”

“Time for what?”

“Sydney and I have been speaking with one of our competitors who wants to buy us out.”

Lexi smiled. “So you beat up Evan for wanting to change the company – something you were already planning to do?”

“Oops,” Sydney giggled at the comment. “I guess we owe him an apology.”

“No – let him stew awhile. It will be good for him.” Veronica wouldn’t let him suffer – at least for too long.

“Well, you scared the shit out of the staff. They are extra special quiet this morning, waiting for what you will do next. By the way, who threw the coffee against the door?” Lexi felt all three of them were at ease and had a proper girl venting session.

“Sydney did. It was funny. She was FURIOUS!”

“I could tell. How do you manage to stomp in those 3” heels?”

“She learned in her bar hopping days...”

“Veronica!”

“Well, you did....”

The three of them laughed. Lexi really needed to pee, ever since she got in the door. “Look, I need to go to the bathroom, but we should really decide what to do next.”

“Will you call Evan for us and let him know it’s safe to come back.” Sydney was on the verge of laughing, apparently at the memory of the coffee throwing incident.”

“But wait an hour....” Veronica could be sly.

“You got it. Anything else? Do you know what you’re going to do?” Lexi headed toward the mocha door, dreaming of the ladies room and the relief it would bring.

“We decided last night. We will let you know later.” Sydney leaned back in her chair resting from the ranting session.

“And you’ll be pleased with our decision, I promise.” Veronica now stood, angry toe tapping session now completed.

“I didn’t know Steve was engaged,” Kate said with a feigned calm tone even she admired. “He’s never mentioned anything about you.”

“Typical. Like expressing emotion is such a big deal,” Stacey replied. “He hardly ever flashes about things. But he came home yesterday and was jagged about the new boss.”

“He mentioned that this morning,” Kate said, adding to herself, before we made out for a half hour. “I think he was a little perturbed with me.”

“Don’t think so,” Stacey replied. “I mean he was pissed at the prof who axed him, And besides he adores you. Talks about you all the time.”

Shift gears, Kate thought frantically, before the phrase ‘he adores you’ overcomes your conscious entirely. “How long have you two kids known each other?” It nearly made her gag, but she thought throwing in ‘kids’ made her seem more like a credible adult.

Judging from the easy way Stacey leaned back in her chair and crossed those annoyingly long legs, Kate knew she was comfortable with their chat. She probably thinks of me like her mother, not even a remote rival. Makes it easier to ply her for information, the cougar purred in her ear.

“Feels like forever, but not quite a year, I guess. Like I got here last year, and we met at the midterms block party.”

“So you started your master’s last year when Steve did?”

“Yeah, right,” Stacey said sarcastically. “I’m only a sophomore now.”

Kate was calculating that she turned nineteen in October of her sophomore year, so Steve must be four or five years older than this kitten. But at least he was out of statutory rape danger...

“What are you studying?” Kate asked feigning interest.

“Just core stuff for lib arts. I don’t have a major yet.”

A prime candidate for the MRS degree, Kate thought, and judging by the ring, she’s made progress toward that goal with a very good connection. Kate had always suspected Steve had financial resources, and the diamond confirmed that for her.

“That’s a beautiful ring,” Kate commented. She despised making casual conversation like this, but asking the real questions needed some camouflage. “How long have you been engaged?”

“Just since the holidays,” Stacey said with some enthusiasm. “Way cool way to get engaged, you know like in Aspen with snow. And I could break my housing contract at the beginning of the semester, so it worked out really well. Steve has this great condo on the beach.”

She and Bill had been to Aspen, not in ski season of course, to celebrate some milestone birthday with her friends. Lexi had been there with her now former husband, as had two other friends and their now-exes. She and Bill were the only couple that was still together. That thought was like a quick punch to the gut, and Kate cringed a little. You’re the only couple still together, and you’re making out with a Gen Y Echo Boomer at your desk.

But, she argued to herself, a Gen Y Echo Boomer that you could have gladly worshiped from an ordinary platonic fantasyland (okay, maybe not so gladly...) until his tongue crashed into your reality. That’s not much of an excuse, but I really don’t want to get into psycho-babble without Lexi on the line.

“Have you set a date yet?” Kate continued her probe of the Steve-Stacey liaison.

“No way,” she said. “Steve wants to finish school first.”

“Probably a good idea,” Kate said about to jab Stacey with a verbal letter opener, “because sometimes grad students – especially doctoral students – get so wrapped up in their studying and their research and their dissertations that they lose contact with the people in their lives.” She had no idea if Steve was even considering a PhD, but the idea was sure to plant a thorn in Stacey’s paw.

“Well, I’ve taken up a lot of your time,” Kate said, sensing the drop in Stacey’s interest level, “since you were just stopping by with Steve’s phone. You can leave it on my desk and I’ll make sure he gets it as soon as he comes back from his metrics research in the library.” Kate was still trying to drop stingers about the pre-occupation of graduate students.

“Okay, great,” Stacey said. “It was great talking to you. I guess I understand how Steve feels about you.”

You have no idea, Kate thought, as Stacey left. Especially because I don’t completely understand myself.

She took a deep breath to compose herself, before clicking into the e-mail that had been binking at her. From Lexi.

Edit this. I like it, but it needs some polishing.

Great, Kate thought opening the attachment, at least one of us is moving forward with her plan.

Lexi knocked on Evan’s closed door and waited for some type of response – albeit a grunt -- before just going in.

“You can quit cowering under your desk,” she said. “Veronica and Sydney were already making plans to sell the firm, so if you want them to grab the Archbold deal, you’d better get David back here to sweeten the deal for them.”

“They were already planning to sell, but they raked me across the coals for suggesting it,” he said, shaking his head in disbelief.

“You’ve got to get a better handle on raging hormones,” she shrugged with a smile.

“Not if I can get this deal with Archbold and kick them both the curb.”

“You’ll still have me.”

“You’re not such a stiletto killer though. I think we work well together.”

She sat down on the leather sofa in his office and started a strategy/coaching session with him. So much for the aloof indifference and stay-back attitude about this job, Lexi thought one hour and two yellow legal pads into the discussion. But, she justified her involvement with the temptation to get a leadership role and enough salary boost to make the self-publishing idea more financially secure.

She wondered if Kate had pulled herself away from Steve, either physically or mentally, to read her intro and what she thought of it.

So Lexi said, "Let's talk about what we want out of the deal with Archbold. What does Archbold want?" She began to make notes on her notepad.

Evan began ticking off points on his hand. Lexi had always admired his logical organization. "Presence in the Northwest. Position in the industry. Established firm. Great staff."

"What does our firm want out of this deal?" she said jotting down major points

"Capital investment. A partner with a big stick."

Lexi interrupted, "What do we want them to do with that stick?"

"Crush Kar-Kon?" suggested Evan, invoking their major competitor

"Crush them?" Lexi asked. Kar-Kon was the firm that Veronica and Sidney had been talking to about selling out. Kar-Kon was bigger, and did have better investment, but they didn't have the innovative skills that her firm could offer, and would offer if they had capital to do it.

"Force them into a buy-out," he decided. Lexi smiled as she continues adding to the outline in her notes. A buyout would be sweet, with just a twinge of revenge.

"What do Veronica and Sydney want out of this deal?"

"A fair cash settlement," Evan said tersely. He was still stinging from this morning.

Lexi interrupted again. "Probably a few perks too."

"It's your job to figure that out," Evan said. "I'm not exactly on friendly speaking terms with them right now."

Lexi smirked. He was right, that part of the deal with definitely a girl talk issue.

"So, what do you want out of this deal?" Lexi asked.

"To head up a great and growing company." He paused and said, "The last question would be: what do you want out of this deal, Lexi?"

She resisted the thought of saying I want a lot of cash, and a ticket out of here. But she had to think a little bit about what a good answer might be. There was certainly the politically correct acceptable answer, but she didn't really think he'd buy into the idea -- she wanted to become a leader in the field and use her many

skills to further success of this firm. She didn't believe she could actually say that without laughing. She made a mental note to herself to rehearse a little before they got into the conference call with David.

"I want some authority to go along with responsibility," she said at last. "And maybe a little cash to go along with that."

Lexi looked over her notes. She didn't think that her one course in business law was really enough to handle the legal details involved in this mega-million-dollar deal. "I think we should call Charlene, before we do anything about talking to David," she said.

Charlene Connor Shea was not only a very skilled corporate attorney, but also a very good friend of Veronica and Sidney. She would adore working on this deal, not just to help the firm, not just help her friends, but to stick a knife in the side of the senior partners at the law firm she worked with. Lexi had the distinct impression that despite Charlene's Harvard degree and her work as a clerk for a circuit court judge in California as a law student didn't mean as much as it might have been had her testosterone level had been a little higher. No, Lexi thought, make that significantly higher.

"Let's see if Charlene might also be interested in becoming our full time corporate attorney. I think that for the right price, she'd dump the law firm she's with now."

"Do all of you have some sort of sisterhood pact?" Evan asked, thinking about adding one more woman to senior staff.

"Something comparable to the old boys club." she said. "I'll talk to Veronica and Sydney now, and we should be ready to talk with David after lunch."