

# **CEO**

by Jenny Lyn Bader

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**CHARACTERS:**

HELAINÉ, a CEO

LIZBETH: her assistant

**TIME:** The day after the corporate retreat

**PLACE:** The office

(HELAINÉ's office door is open. Her assistant, LIZBETH, walks in.)

HELAINÉ

Lizbeth, hello!

(LIZBETH nods and smiles, and hands HELAINÉ a small envelope.)

No, no, don't give me anything yet. First, let's the two of us say hello.

(LIZBETH looks startled.)

Yes. You. I think... well, I think you might as well say something. I said hello.

(LIZBETH smiles.)

I know, you smiled back. And I used to enjoy that. Me talking. You listening. And smiling. And never saying anything. But... maybe we should change that. Why don't you tell me what happened on the retreat.

(LIZBETH tries to speak, then shakes her head. Tries handing over the envelope)

Yes, I see you're giving me something. It's an invitation to some event. I understand this is how we usually do our meeting. You ask me about things without words, I reply with words. But today... today is different. I want to know. From you. What happened on the retreat?

(LIZBETH hands her the reply card)

Yes, I see there's a reply card demanding my response. You want to do everything in the usual order. But now I am demanding a reply. A reply from you.

(LIZBETH looks like a deer in the headlights)

I do realize when you first came here, I told you ideal assistants are seen and not heard. And you took a vow of silence. I've been impressed by you every day of these... good lord you've been silent in front of me for five years now?

(LIZBETH holds up six fingers.)

Six? It's been terribly helpful. I hate unnecessary words and none of those have interfered with my doing my job for six whole years. At times, I've even forgotten that you know how to speak, I've almost started imagining you as a mute. Or a mime. Not in a bad way. But it has come to me that during the retreat, in my absence, others heard that you do have a voice and it's a powerful one. Several different sources have told me that you speak in full paragraphs. You inspired ideas about what the company should do next, you have a knack for marketing, you have strong opinions about our restructuring of executives as well as perspective on the junior job applicants. You also improvised a Ted Talk and hosted three cocktail parties. So I release you! From your vow.

(LIZBETH looks concerned, then attempts to speak, but the words don't form)

Archer told me he thinks you don't feel comfortable speaking in front of me, that I intimidate you.

(LIZBETH shakes her head)

No, I didn't think that was right either. It's not intimidation. It's that you want to prove to yourself you could keep this wordless vow of yours. Flawlessly. And this is your proof.

(LIZBETH struggles to speak again — and then comes out with this:)

LIZBETH

Q.E.D.

HELAINÉ

Aha! You do speak to me! Just not in full words. That's a step in the right direction. But it's not going to work. I want to talk to you about the restructuring.

LIZBETH

O.K.

HELAINÉ

I understand what you're going for but you're not going to be able to do this! Now that I've heard you have so much to say... I was going to ask you what to do with Williams. He's so overqualified for his current position.

LIZBETH

CFO.

HELAINÉ

I hadn't thought of that! I heard he gave a great presentation, based on a study out of Harvard?

LIZBETH

MIT.

HELAINÉ

I guess you can say a little this way. I wish I had been able to go on the retreat. How did the Andersons do there? I was worried about having a couple in the mix.

LIZBETH (grimaces)

PDA.

HELAINÉ

Oh dear. How inappropriate. What about Fisk?

LIZBETH

BMOC.

HELAINÉ

Really! You think he should be promoted?

LIZBETH (nods)

EVP.

HELAINÉ

Executive Vice President? Of which division?

LIZBETH

R&D.

HELAINÉ

Research and development! Oh I'm starting to see it. You are good. We replace the retiring execs with the ones you suggested. But then what do we do about these job candidates? Lizbeth I think you're going to have to speak words. What did you think of that first one we interviewed?

LIZBETH

CV?

(HELAINÉ shows her the résumé; LIZBETH remembers the person immediately and gives a thumbs up)

HELAINÉ

Now I wasn't there for that first interview. They were qualified?

LIZBETH

PhD.

HELAINÉ

Really...

LIZBETH

UCLA.

HELAINÉ

Great.

(takes out another CV)

I think this is the one who went on a little bit...

LIZBETH (nods)

TMI.

HELAINÉ

This one I liked the interview, but I wasn't sure. Is there anything on this resume that bothers you?

LIZBETH (points to the bottom of the cv, makes a face:)

NRA.

HELAINÉ

Oh my! Well that solves the hiring situation. Though we may have another opening if Mermelstein doesn't get back from the hospital. Any word on that situation?

LIZBETH (upset)

ICU.

HELAINÉ

Oh no. But I thought the operation was a success.

LIZBETH

LDL, HDL...

HELAINÉ

Oh... so they're checking her cholesterol levels before they can release her. Well, there's a conundrum. We don't know how long she's gone but we have to get her project done. Do we replace her temporarily? And if not, who does the research?

LIZBETH (thinks a moment)

AI.

HELAINÉ

You think artificial intelligence can finish the project? In what format?

LIZBETH

HTML?

HELAINÉ

That had not occurred to me. Now I don't know if the team is going to go for HTML.

LIZBETH

CSS.

HELAINÉ

You're right. This is a job one of the robot prototypes could do. Unless you think Mermelstein's assistant could manage it?

(LIZBETH shakes her head)

LIZBETH

A.D.D.

HELAINÉ

You're kidding.

LIZBETH (nods)

ADHD.

HELAINÉ

So I won't add to his workload before Mermelstein returns. Now Booth wasn't at the retreat. He tore something?

LIZBETH

ACL.

HELAINÉ

Ouch. But in his absence, you spearheaded the marketing meeting, and apparently you thought we should take a different direction?

LIZBETH (nodding)

B2B.

HELAINÉ

Oh wow. Business to business, I like that.... And you thought we should amp up one of our manufacturing divisions?

LIZBETH

PPE.

HELAINÉ

You mean in case of more...

LIZBETH (agreeing)

COVID, SARS, ARDS...

HELAINÉ

Do you know what happened to our tech employee who had COVID-19? Is he still on a ventilator?

LIZBETH (nods)

CPAP.

HELAINÉ

Oh dear. Yes this manufacturing push is a good idea. Of course we'd have to follow the regulations.

LIZBETH

CDC.

HELAINÉ

Now I received a text message about this very thing, and it says to go to a link, but I can't see one.

(LIZBETH points to HELAINÉ's phone)

LIZBETH

URL.

HELAINÉ

Oh that's a URL! So I just add...

LIZBETH

HTTP...

HELAINÉ

Right, and dot com. Just a few letters... and you're in a whole new place. Much like talking to you. You know, six years ago I thought I had never been wrong once. Now you've shown me I was very wrong twice. I was wrong when I asked you not to talk in the first place. And today I was wrong again when I thought abbreviations wouldn't be enough for you. You've shared a whole vision just by using the letters of the alphabet! I'm so dazzled... I forgot what you wanted me to do when you came in here.

LIZBETH

RSVP.

HELAINÉ

Oh right.

(looks at the invitation)

Ah, this dinner. Yes, tell them we'll both be there.

(LIZBETH looks quizzical)

HELAINÉ

You don't want to go?

(LIZBETH points to herself)

HELAINÉ

Yes, you. I thought you might go with me.



(LIZBETH points to the invitation)

LIZBETH

FYI.

HELAINÉ

Oh yes. I know the dinner is for executives only.

(LIZBETH nods)

HELAINÉ (cont.)

Well, this is my abbreviated way of telling you, I think it's time for a promotion. If you can restructure a company without the actual use of words as an assistant without a voice, just imagine what you can do as a senior vice president.

LIZBETH

SVP?

HELAINÉ

SVP!

LIZBETH

I'm speechless.

HELAINÉ

I was hoping for the opposite effect. (beat) Because the vow was based...

LIZBETH (interrupting)

I know what you're going to say. The vow was based on the idea that assistants should be seen and not heard. But it no longer applies if I'm not your assistant. The burden of the flawlessly executed vow has lifted and now I can form sentences at will!

HELAINÉ

I didn't say you should start interrupting me!

LIZBETH

Sorry, I've been bottling a lot in for a long time. It just kind of poured out.

HELAINÉ

I can imagine.

LIZBETH

But thank you for your confidence in me.

HELAINÉ

You're welcome, I —

LIZBETH (interrupting)

I won't interrupt again. (beat.) That was the last time.

HELAINÉ

Good.

LIZBETH

I'm excited to start the new job, and to keep speaking words out loud, wherever things go from here. And glad to be wherever you think I'll land up.

(LIZBETH exits. HELAINÉ looks after her.)

HELAINÉ

Where you'll land up? CEO.

THE END