

Poison Pen: What should this reviewer do with an artist who did her wrong?

Dear C and Dr. B;

Ten years ago, I was part of the music and performance culture; that's where I met Penny. She was from a wealthy family, spoiled, and saw the world as her personal stage, but she was actually very talented, which was why I started to collaborate with her - I felt flattered she wanted to work with me. At first, we were BFF's and did some performances together. But after my divorce, things fell apart.

Penny had been wanting to explore some gay sexual fantasies for a while and she decided I would be her new toy. When I told her I just couldn't get involved right now, she shocked me by announcing that she couldn't be friends with me if I wouldn't play sex games with her. Her reasoning? She didn't want to deal with the frustration being around something she wanted and couldn't have. When people asked why we'd stopped working together, she actually told everyone that I'd made advances on her and she had to turn me down. The experience was so hurtful I haven't spoken to her since.

I now write for a theater magazine, and they asked me to review a two person show coming up. I'd just met one of the two performers and had liked her, so I agreed. But when I got the show info and saw who the other person was, I freaked - it was Penny. I can scarcely be impartial, so I don't think it's a good idea for me to review the show. My dilemma is about the other woman. I already told her I'd do the review. She is friends with Penny and this is crap from the past - I don't even want to go there. What do I do now? - Debbie Deadline

Dr. B says: Is there any benefit to confronting old traumas? I would better recommend confronting your future. What is your goal and objective? What type of person do you want to be? What kind of situation do you want to be finding yourself in? You need to practice the sort of behavior that will lead to that, and the type of people you choose to include in your life is a part of that. Penny sounds like bad news. Her type of erratic and self-serving behavior doesn't often change. I would agree with staying far away.

Professionally, you have to make a choice according to Issues and imperfections at both ends and this is something only you can decide. If it was 1970 would you refuse a job with Harvey Weinstein knowing his reputation - when he's your best way into the business? You know the possible consequence, is it worth it? Do you say no, choose another field, or carry birth control? This is the kind of choice people certainly had to make then. What will you choose?

C says: The choice you have to make now has nothing to do with Harvey Weinstein or the #MeToo movement. It has to do with professional tact.

Of course you can't write the review! It would be like representing someone in court who broke all the windows in your house. But there's no possible threat to you here. If anything, you are in the power position now. If you were a vengeful person, this would be the perfect opportunity to make Penny eat her own liver - just write a review that makes her look like a pathetic wannabe who should hang it up! But I don't recommend it. Reviewers with poison pens tend to die by their own hand.

Unless you want to make a career out of being the critic everyone hates, it is always best not to burn any of your bridges, certainly not out of PTSD issues from the past. Here's what I would do - tell that other woman that your editor decided to give the assignment to another writer, but you made sure that the other journalist knew that this show deserved special attention. You don't owe her anything, you just met her.

Let sleeping dogs lie. If you wake them up, chances are, they'll only bite you again.

You can visit Dr. B's blog at drbrilliantcliche.wordpress.com