

## LL20-How to Handle a Vindictive Ex

Hi I'm Doug Weiss,  
and I'm Alvean Lyons, and this is Love Life.

I was at dinner the other night with a friend of mine, and he told me a story that was absolutely hair raising, and it led to the topic for today's conversation.

He has been in an on again off again relationship how much for many years. After the latest breakup. He decided that he wasn't going back, that this was the last time, and his former girlfriend has apparently engaged in a kind of systematic warfare. She's posted things on social media sites, fabrications, she's made a point of calling all of his friends. She even called the ex boyfriend of the woman he is currently seeing, to tell him what a bad guy my friend is. She's pursued my friend. I mean she's on a mission and this is scorched earth policy so she leaves no stone unturned. It's kind of if I can't have him then nobody will....at least that's my construction of it. And it raised the question for me, because he sought my counsel, what do you do when this kind of nightmare occurs? I think this is not an isolated situation. I've heard this kind of story before and it's always struck me. We've all seen Kramer vs Kramer and other Hollywood stories about divorce which is for an extreme form of this. But what's always struck me about them is people who at one point were deeply in love or at least professed to be deeply in love with one another, had strong feelings for one another then find themselves in absolute antipathy to one another. I mean as strong as the emotion was of attraction, that's how strong the emotion of anger and hatred. One presumes, coming from a sense of rejection.

Well what's interesting. Just recently I was in Richmond for some research training that is done by Dr. John Gottman, who is truly one of the leading experts in connectivity, divorce, relationships, the list goes on and on. Gottman is able to predict divorce with I want to say is a ninety seven percent accuracy rate. Because he's actually used scientific and mathematical analysis of very qualitative aspects in human interaction. And then monitored this stuff in a lot of lab work and has done it for over forty years and has been that good in terms of his research. I was just so interested in what he had to say The long and short of it is that one of the things that Gottman's research indicated is that when people become completely apathetic to one another that in fact is when the relationship is truly

done. When I don't care at all. Your hair can be on fire, you get hit by a car, I don't care what she did, when a relationship hits that point that's when they say it's actually really in trouble. As long as both are still passionate or one of them is still passionate there is still actually real emotion and investment present. It is when it goes stone cold that the likelihood of you being able to recover that relationship is minimal if not nonexistent. I would argue actually that it is not hatred that fuels vindictive rage, it is rejection. When I'm not invested in you that's when you become invisible. I don't care if you breathe, I don't care if you get the plague I don't care, but when I am going through such work to make you hurt it's because I want you to feel what I feel. So I'm not so convinced that she hates him, I would argue that she hates that she still loves him.

Not just to agree but to move the conversation to the next level how then do you respond, if the anger being expressed towards you is coming from real passion maybe it's sort of perversely being directed out of that sense of rejection. As the recipient, assuming in this scenario that we're not talking about something that obviously is jeopardizing somebody's physical safety or their life..... that obviously takes things to a different level but when we're talking about the venom of just noxious and aggressive verbal kind of behaviors and all these covert and in some cases very overt actions what are the most effective way to handle the situation?

What most women are looking for is a reflection of passion on your end so I want to trigger you too so that you will elicit emotion because your passion would say to me that you're not done with me yet. Your complete indifference about my behavior that you could care less what I do, that's what scares us most, because that means you're really over. So that to line up again with Gottman's research that's reflecting back that lack of passion. If you reflect passion apathy has to mean you're still into me.

Over the years I've seen a number of relationships go south and different ways that got resolved. Sometimes it got resolved with a big bang, a huge explosion after which in picking up the debris both parties realized how completely ridiculous it was. I have seen, in a few circumstances, a quiet dissipation, a kind of learning to be in each other's lives in a different way, that led to a transmutation into a form of friendship or at least mutual concern.

But I think that. Sometimes we find ourselves, citing old aphorisms that have some truth to them, that a tincture of time is an important factor in dissipating the intensity of that passion in whatever form it's being manifested. But it's challenging, and this fellow was fortunate, because the woman that he's dating knows him; knew him before he was in those relationships. So when these stories started to surface she was able triangulate, go back and find out what the source was of all the stories and that of course, knowing that this came from the now ex girlfriend put everything into a perspective for her. But this intentional damaging of trust you've got to be pretty angry to want to do that.

And that's why I say that I really argue that she's still very much invested in the process and there's no magic way to make it go away unfortunately because managing someone else's emotions is an impossible task. Managing one's own emotions is absolutely within our capacity, so really it's how are we going to respond to this because we can't control what somebody else does.

I love what you're saying there because this really squares with the truth that I've learned over time that we can't change anybody else as you said, we can change ourselves. And either people will react differently because of that change or not but either way by taking responsibility for some action in response, we take charge of the situation and we're better able emotionally to address it.

The whole idea of expressing not a reaction, but no action signals very clearly your power over me, your power to excite me whether it's with anger or love, no longer exists. It sends a very clear message. It's a very hard one for women in particular to be able to accept, but eventually they do; eventually they do so and while it's never a comfortable situation to be in it's one that we have the capacity to manage if we choose to manage our own emotions.

There you have it, another episode of Love Life.... some difficult topics coming your way. Stay tuned next week for more on this and thank you for listening but do stay tuned next week because we will talk about the flip side of this, about getting back with your ex... an interesting topic. We'll see you next week. Thank you to you our listeners, to Todd Washburn our recording engineer to Barbara Hamm Lee, our producer. Thank you Douglas and see you next week folks.