

Dear Mr. Knightley: Interview with Katherine

Are there many similarities between you and Sam?

That's a tough one because I think so many struggles are universal, perhaps made larger by the history I gave her. No, our backgrounds are not at all similar and any mistakes in the logistics of Sam's childhood are my own. I spoke to so many people and read so much, but I know there is much I couldn't capture.

Is there anything autobiographical in the story?

Very little, but I did attend Northwestern and I have run a marathon – and I do have a black belt in tae kwon do. Hmm... That sounds like a lot. There is another incident that cracks me up: The scene when Sam corrects Alex and Professor Muir on their Shakespeare is from my life. I am sure many of you recall a similar moment in the wonderful 1995 movie, *Clueless*, but, as my husband can attest, it happened to me first – on the night I met my future in-laws. I was so nervous that I said nothing until I opened my mouth and set their *Othello* straight. Humiliated, I then closed my mouth for the rest of the evening.

What was your inspiration?

In 2009, I was seriously injured and while most people receive flowers in the hospital, my friends brought me books. I left my three-day stay with over thirty titles – and a bit of time on my hands for recovery. Yet, despite all these new stories, I wanted to spend time with old favorites – including *Daddy Long Legs* by Jean Webster. The idea grew from there. As for Sam's hiding behind characters, I do not do that, but I have been known to belt out song lyrics when someone conversationally uses a phrase. It's highly embarrassing for my kids, but don't let them fool you... They do it too.

What is the story behind Sam's faith? You bring many themes into the book, primarily forgiveness.

Forgiveness is paramount. We can think of it writ large in terms of our relationship with God and Christ or in terms of our daily interactions with friends, family and ourselves. Now that said, I did not feel led to finish Sam's journey in that regard. She forgave Alex, but there is still much more for her to lay down. Great people surround her though, so I'm not worried.

I mentioned that the book came from a time of recovery: It also came from a wonderful time of prayer. And while I wouldn't want to be in such physical pain again, I feel blessed it happened because of all I learned from it and all that came from that entire experience – including this story and the extraordinary opportunity to write another.

Final Unpublished Letter from Sam to Alex

May 10th

Dear Mr. Knightley,

Alex, you've created a problem. I can't sleep. As you know, I wrote to Mr. Knightley when I couldn't sleep. He's been gone for some time now and I don't miss him; but the problem remains... it's 2am and I'm awake. So after we marry, I'm passing this problem to you...

You were sweet to talk to me for so long tonight, but when you fell asleep about an hour ago, it was time to let you hang up. I hope you are sleeping well and dreaming of tomorrow. My mind is full of it.

I can't believe it's here. I'm delighted it's just the two of us tomorrow evening. The calm before the storm. Our last evening of sanity. I love your plan: grab you at the airport then head straight to Chicago Pizza and Oven Grinder. We won't let anyone know you arrived early. And I get you all to myself for a few hours. Thank you.

And Topolobampo for the Rehearsal Dinner? What an incredibly thoughtful treat. Yes, Mom told me you arranged it; but you must not blame her. Ashley's *thoughtlessness first betrayed to me that you had been concerned in the matter; and, of course, I could not rest till I knew the particulars*. Thank goodness, darling, you not only find this habit endearing, but you participate fully. Otherwise, we'd be in trouble. Lizzy Bennet really does express things well, doesn't she?

Speaking of "well," I'm so pleased that my last day at the *Tribune* was so smooth. I know I told you all about it; but I don't think I thanked you. I wouldn't have

taken that internship if you hadn't pushed me. It felt bold and risky and it was everything I needed.

And now I move on. I think this may be the first time I anticipate "change" with joy and anticipation. I'm so thrilled to move to New York, Alex. I can't wait to share that city with you. And I think magazine work will suit my writing style even better than newspaper feature work. *The New York Review of Books* is ideal for me. For now. I've been thinking of some story ideas as well. What do you think of children's books? I have so many ideas bouncing around my head.

You were right on another point too – although I've missed you so desperately, I needed to stay in Chicago these past months as you needed to work in New York. I don't think I could've gotten much done with you in reach. And look what you've accomplished. You really did finish the manuscript by our wedding. I'm so impressed. And it's your best yet, Alex. You are truly a gifted writer. Just one point — Cole's girlfriend will need more flaws and fears in your next book. I want her to stick around for years and years. She reminds me of someone. But I must say – it took a lot for them to come together. Goodness, what lies! What conflict! Hits close to home, darling...

In the end, though, it did work out, didn't it? And it culminates in three days. Saturday will be a celebration like nothing I can imagine. Mom and Dad have taken care of that. There is first a brunch, then all sorts of dressing details, the ceremony and then the reception. A whirlwind. Mom even says we must attend the brunch at different times. Seems you're not supposed to see me before I walk down the aisle. I wanted to protest, darling, but she's vibrating with excitement — I can't steal a single moment from her.

So your first sight of me Saturday will be in the church. All in white. If you can find me. Mom has packed the place with so many lilies I may get lost. It's everything I never knew I wanted. Part of me adores it all, but the sensible part wanted to reign her in. Dad says I must accept that parents live to dote on their daughters. You'll be the same someday, I'm sure.

Enough now. I will send this — I hope your phone doesn't beep when an email arrives. It's time to shut this computer down and try to sleep. I will dream of you. I will dream of your eyes. Locked on mine during one single shining moment.

"I do"

Those are the only two words I want to hear and say this entire weekend. Mom and Dad can have their parties and I will try not to retreat from all the fun — just keep a tight grip on my hand and I'll stay.

But that moment, Alex. That's ours. Only ours. I promise not to cry. I will only smile. No, I may laugh. You once said Jane Bennet was too timid for me; she smiled during her wedding in *Pride & Prejudice's* conclusion. Lizzy laughed. But, seriously, only you and I know what it's taken to get us here. That's the journey, the love that may bring tears to my eyes.

Good night, My "Dear Mr. Knightley." And Alex, I'll see you tomorrow...

Yours forever,

Sam