

Almost a month had gone by and I was starting to have such vivid dreams of what Kat might be like when we finally became lovers. Her gentle ways were so sensual and warm, turning into amazing embraces that made me feel safe and yet taken at the same time. Letting go with Kat seemed to take up most of my thinking, be it asleep or awake.

I was enjoying one of my blissful daydreams when suddenly reality came crashing back in. I heard my cell phone start ringing and, not a few seconds later, my home phone was ringing. This was a first—both phones ringing at the same time. Sam’s name popped up on my cell and the land line caller ID was showing Jo’s number. Oh no, what was wrong now? I thought they had made up and that things were settled. I decided to take the safe route and let voice mail pick up on both phones. I couldn’t talk to both of them at once.

My cell’s voicemail revealed that Sam’s tone was quiet and low. That was a change.

“Mimi, oh my, you won’t believe it. We finally got closer. Jo and I went further than ever before. I feel like a teenager! I got to second base! You have to call me later. I don’t want her to hear me calling you, so I gotta go.”

I started laughing thinking, how adorable was that? Sam *was* acting like a teenager. It reminded me of when she used to drive over the speed bumps harder than she had to. Years later she told me that she liked to watch my boobs bounce up and down. She had always been like that. You should have seen her face when her mother caught her and me reading *Playboy*. That was a scene to remember for all of us.

When I checked the answering machine I found Jo’s excited voice.

“Amanda, damn, where are you? OK, well, I have to make this quick. I’m at Sam’s. Last night was amazing. I feel like a kid who let her girlfriend get to second base! You didn’t tell me I wouldn’t be scared all of the time, that I would actually be feeling like this again! Oh, I can’t wait to talk to you. She’s making breakfast, the only thing she can cook, and all I can think about is her playing with my breasts. Talk to you later. Wow! I am so happy.”

I remembered well that feeling of excitement again after being closed up and not wanting to feel anything for so long. I was so genuinely happy for Jo, knowing just how much fun lay ahead for her, but at the same time knowing how she would have her setbacks like all of us did. At least she was finding the joy now. Sam must have made her feel very safe and I was proud of both of them. I felt light and somewhat relieved too.

It was time to make some tea since I would not be able to get back to sleep after all of that. Before I could even put the kettle on the stove, I heard the phone ring again. I

picked it up without checking to see who it was this time.

“Hello.”

“Amanda, I’m sorry to call so early. Were you up?”

“Yes, Jackie, is that you?”

“Yes, sorry about that.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Can you come in today? I need to see you. It’s about one of your clients.”

“Sure, I can be there in about two hours.”

“That would be great. Um...Amanda, do me a favor and don’t turn on the news.”

“Why? What happened?”

“Listen, just don’t. Trust me on this.”

“Okay then, I will be there in an hour.”

“I thought you said two?”

“Well, now I want to know what’s going on.”

“Just get here.”

I hung up and a sick feeling ran through my body. I knew something was wrong and apparently it had made the news, which meant one thing. One of my clients was in trouble, at best.

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I arrived at the clinic in record time. I walked right past Jo, who apparently had gotten into work late, and headed into Jackie’s office. I closed the door behind me. When Jackie looked up at me, I knew. The look on her face was one I’d seen only a few times before.

“Who is it?”

“Ellen.”

“How? Her ex?”

“Yes.”

“And where is he now?”

“Dead, right next to her. He killed her and then turned the gun on himself.”

I stood there frozen, not moving at all. I was cold. Ice ran through my veins. “Good.”

“Amanda!”

“He got what he deserved. Karma gets everyone, Jackie.” The look on her face was that of utter shock.

“He was still a human being.”

“No, he wasn’t. He was an animal and, quite frankly, a coward. What about the kids?”

“They are safe with her Aunt.”

“Okay. Turn on the news, Jackie. Let me see what they are saying.”

She looked at me incredulously, “I can’t believe your reaction.” She turned around and pointed the remote at her television mounted on the wall.

“What? That I am upset about losing Ellen, but more pissed about that bastard ex of hers? We’ve both been doing this for far too long not to know that this happens several times a year. How shocked am I supposed to be?”

“I think you *are* in shock.”

“Maybe I have just grown up.” I *was* pissed. “Did you ever think of that? Maybe I have been doing this too long to be shocked anymore. Maybe I have cried so much I don’t have anymore tears left in me.”

“Sit down and talk to me, for heaven’s sake.”

I sat down and then, as Jackie knew that I would, I broke. I grabbed the tissue box, allowing my frustration to pour out. “I just saw her last week.”

“I know.” At that moment Jackie pulled up a chair right next to me and held my hands in hers. Her eyes were full of compassion. I was brought back to the first day we met all of those years ago when I was a broken young college girl. And now here we were again and it was still Jackie who was comforting me.

After a few minutes I looked up through my tears, which were now subsiding, and told

her what I knew had been coming for a while now.

“Jackie, I just don’t think I can do this anymore. I am so tired. Just so damn tired.”

“Amanda, give it some time. You don’t have to take on anyone new now. Just take your time, write, and live your life. You’ve given so much back. Maybe it’s time for you to take a break. A long one.”

“Are you firing me?”

“No, for heaven’s sake. I don’t even pay you, since you return your checks every two weeks.”

“I don’t need the money, you know that.”

“I know, sweetheart, but now, as your friend, I am telling you it’s time.”

“You are firing me!”

“No, I am giving you a leave of absence for as long as you need. If you ever want to return you know that you will always have a place here.”

“I can’t believe this, but I think you might be right. I really need to focus more on my writing and deadlines.”

“And maybe Kat?” She stood up and walked toward her chair on the other side of her desk. As she turned to face me again I looked at her with eyes that said, don’t go there, but she ignored it as usual.

I tried the evasive tactic instead. “We are just good friends.”

“Sure you are.” That smile of hers let me know she didn’t believe me.

“Jackie!”

“Amanda, everyone who knows you two can see it but you.”

“Oh, I see it, believe me. I feel it.”

“Then let go and let her in. What’s the worst that can happen?”

“She breaks my heart.” I looked away, pretending to closely examine the wallpaper.

“Like Cassie?” Jackie’s voice was tender.

“Yep.”

Before she could sit down she came back over to me and bent down. She reached out and gently turned my face to her, “Honey, you can’t be afraid to love that deeply again, because you miss out otherwise. You and Kat have waited. You’ve taken your time. It’s okay to go further and see where it goes. You will never know what you are missing unless you try.”

“Why are you always right?”

“Call it a gift,” she laughed, “and being a bit older helps.”

With that I stood up hugged Jackie and left her office heading out to the garden, where a stone would be placed with Ellen’s name. I sat there looking at all of the women who didn’t make it out and I wept again. My heart felt like it was bleeding. Suddenly I felt someone’s arms around me. I looked up to find Jo, concern clouding her young face. She wiped my tears and held me closer.

“I am so sorry, Amanda.”

“Me too, Jo. Me too.”

We sat there together in silence for awhile because there really was nothing left to say. Jo and I survived to smell the flowers, soak in the beauty, and experience the loss in our hearts for our sisters—those women who would never again get to appreciate even the simplest of joys.

I left the clinic and walked by the shelter. I wondered how many would ultimately make it out and how many would slide back into a life of misery. I wondered how many angels above looked down upon us all and walked the journey, trying to lead us away from harm and into safety. I cried on and off for most of the day, thinking about Ellen and her story. I grieved for her children, although I silently thanked whatever angel kept them from harm today. I was truly ready for a break. I needed it.

I finally made that cup of tea and went to lie on the sofa when my cell went off.

“Angel, how about dinner? I just got into town.”

“Sure, Kat, that sounds great. I don’t know if I’ll be good company though, it’s been an emotional day.”

“That’s fine. Do you want to talk about it?”

“Maybe later, thanks. It’s work-related.”

“Oh, okay. Are you alright?”

“Yes, just emotional.”

“Well, I closed on the house this morning. So I will be moving in within the month. Can you believe it? And it’s so close to your house!”

Smiling I replied, “Well, I couldn’t be happier to have you in the neighborhood, so to speak.”

“Ah, at least I won’t have to make excuses as to why I am in Phoenix all of the time.”

“True!”

“See you in a few hours, angel. I love you.”

“I love you too, Kitty Kat.”

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Suddenly she was touching me, looking deep into my eyes and then it happened: our first real kiss as more than friends.

Kat’s beautiful lips were upon mine, so soft, so gentle and full. Her embrace was sweet, yet strong enough to let me feel her passion running through. Her lips laid butterfly kisses upon mine. Then she pulled way, looking at me. Her amazing eyes could see right through to my very soul.

Her hand touched my face then played with my hair. I felt like I was in heaven. She made me feel alive, excited and, most of all, safe and loved. As she pulled me closer, her tongue begged entrance and found my mouth full and open as I moaned my pleasure.

She whispered to me, “Mmm, I love that you make sounds when I kiss you, that’s lovely.”

My shy expression and blushing face amused her and she let me know it. “Oh, angel. You are so precious. I just love you how you get.”

She kissed me for what seemed like hours and then moved her hands under my shirt. My body responded to her touch as if we had been lovers for years. Her gentleness made me relax even more and I found myself making soft purring noises as she took her time lifting up my shirt and removing it. Her eyes and fingers traced my pink bra. I was so full of want, of need.

And just as she went to unhook my bra my cell phone went off.

I woke with a start, completely disoriented. What? Where’s Kat? What is going on? I realized that I had just been dreaming and it took me a few minutes to come back down to reality. I picked up my cell phone to see that I had missed Sam’s call again. Still

feeling lightheaded, I took a few minutes to compose myself before calling Sam back.

“Hey.”

“Where have you been, Mimi?”

“It’s been a long day, Sam.”

“Are you okay?”

“I will be.”

“Oh, Mimi, it was amazing last night!”

“All of this excitement over getting to second base. You are too cute. You know you sound like a teenager, right?”

“Yeah, but wow. After all this time she finally let me touch her breasts and hold her close all night, neither of us wearing anything from the waist up...oh man, it was pure heaven, I swear.”

“I am happy for you, Sam. How was she this morning?”

“Oh, she is so adorable. She purrs when she sleeps, you know, like you do.”

“Well, that’s what you tell me I do.”

“You have done that ever since we were in college. I would pass out and wake up to hear you lightly purring.”

“So, Jo purrs too?”

“Oh yes, quite the little sweet purr. It makes me melt and want to hold her in my arms forever.”

“That is so precious, Sam. I am so happy for you both.”

“I can’t wait until Saturday when she spends the night again. I miss her when she isn’t here.”

“It sounds like someone is in love.”

“You know, Mimi, I think for once I really am.”

“I mean it, Sam. I really am happy for you.”

We continued to talk for a few more minutes and then I realized it was time to get

dressed; Kat would be here soon. After that dream about her it would be a little strange seeing her, but of course I couldn't wait for her to get here.

I felt bad thinking of Kat and dreaming of her while I was still, deep inside, shocked over losing Ellen. We had met only a few times but it felt as if I had known her for much longer. My heart ached and my mind was a jumble from taking a leave of absence, all of the day's events, and my growing feelings for Kat. I needed a shower and to let my mind relax before I saw her for dinner.

When I answered the door Kat was there, wearing her jeans and a beautiful blue shirt that I had never seen on her before. Her hair was pulled up and so was mine, as if we had known what each other would be doing. My dress matched the color of her shirt. She walked in and gave me a hug, but it was different this time.

And that's when it happened, without warning. She took my face in her hands and kissed me like one would a girlfriend, not just a friend. It was a sweet light kiss that changed everything from that moment on.

Then, after that first kiss, she traced my lips with her finger and kissed me full on, still sweet and tender, but with more passion.

She pulled back and looked into my eyes, "I have waited a long time to do that. I just couldn't help myself."

I returned her gaze, blushing. I felt shy, yet fully there in the moment with her, "I am glad you did."

I felt excited, happy, scared, and loved all at once. But, most of all, I felt alive. I didn't want to waste another moment being afraid of what could happen. I just wanted to let whatever was going to happen blossom forth in all its glory.