

The next week was hectic for Kat, and I was buried in my writing. I would catch myself thinking about Kat and the previous weekend. I was just wondering when things would quiet down. I hated having to share her with the world. We had to coordinate everything; even a trip over to her house or from hers to mine was a nightmare.

Ever since the awards announcements things were only worse. The paparazzi seemed to be swarming. I understood the fascination with a celebrity's life; I just wished that there was some level of privacy.

I was feeling very inspired sitting in my plush office chair on Wednesday morning. The flowers that Kat had sent the previous day filled with room with an incredible fragrance. The phone rang, suddenly jolting me out of my creative reverie. I was putting the finishing touches on my latest chapter and had hoped to be finished by noon.

"Hello."

"Amanda, oh God, I don't know what to do."

"Jo, calm down. What happened?"

"I just can't believe it."

"What?"

"There is a picture of Sam and me in some celebrity magazine."

"Okay, calm down. How clear can you be seen?"

"Oh, just so well that half of my friends have already called, asking me why I didn't tell them I was sleeping with Sam."

"I'm afraid what's done is done. There is nothing you can do about it now."

"Sam is coming unglued. We have been so careful but, sure enough, they caught us the night we went to Kat's party."

"Oh, bloody hell."

"When did you become English?"

"Funny, little one. I guess I am picking up Kat's phrases now."

"This is driving me crazy. I didn't want my life exposed, you know?"

“Oh, I know all too well. But life with Sam includes the public. I am so sorry. Didn’t she explain this to you when you got together?”

“Sure, but I had no idea to what lengths someone might go to expose us.”

I started to panic just then, realizing that if they got them going to Kat’s party then what other photos might surface?

“I am going through a lot too, Jo, trying to figure out how much of this I can take.”

“But Kat is so worth it.”

“And Sam isn’t?”

“Of course she is. I just wasn’t ready to tell my friends and now the press has gone and done it for me.”

“Are you going to be able to handle this? You have to let me know because if you can’t Sam is going to lose it.”

“I can handle it, though I feel like running. Our time together has healed so much in me. I can’t just touch and release, not now Amanda. But I am scared to think of how my life is going to change.”

“Life is all about change. I spent too much of it trying to keep it the same—safe in my world with Cassie. And now I realize that I would have missed out on Kat if Cassie hadn’t ended it.”

Silence. Jo said nothing. She seemed stunned at my mention of Cassie.

“Jo, what is it?”

“I just haven’t heard you mention Cassie in a long time. Do you ever hear from her?”

“Sadly, no I don’t. Maybe it was for the best; I have no idea.” I started tapping my pen on the desk, a nervous habit picked up while in college. The smell of the flowers brought me back to the present moment.

“Amanda, thanks for listening. I am going to go back inside and talk to Sam. She probably thinks I am going to bolt. Believe me, I thought about it, but she is so gentle and amazing. Honestly, I can’t imagine my life without her now.”

I was smiling, so happy for Jo, for Sam and the life they were truly starting over together in so many ways. But this life would bring Jo many times when she would wish that she could have her privacy back. Somehow, though, it was all worth it to be with the woman she loved.

“I am happy for you, sweetheart. Go tell her before she falls off the wagon.”

“Thanks again, Amanda. Kat is really lucky she found you, and so am I.”

“Thanks, Jo. You made my day.”

I hung up the phone and switched on the CD player. Anastacia’s *Where Do I Belong*. Somehow it seemed so very appropriate. As I looked outside of the large picture window I noticed the cloudy sky. It looked beautiful actually. Rain was such a treat here in the desert. Suddenly the gentle tapping of raindrops upon the window lulled me back into the past. I thought about all of the special times I had spent with Cassie listening to the storms at her home in Sedona, AZ. The desert landscape nestled into the red rocks provided a place of relaxation, creativity, and enlightenment. A place I loved and missed, along with ease and comfort of a long established relationship.

I wondered about Cassie, how she was, if she was happy. It had been a while since I had felt a tug at my heart like that. I could only wish her the best. I didn’t want to interrupt her and her new life. It wasn’t easy to acknowledge that someone who had meant so much to me was no longer a part of my everyday life, and yet her memory, our memories would always remain etched upon my soul. She was now a part of my past and that created an ache that sometimes was unbearable. In letting go of Cassie I did learn to open up to Kat and everyone else in my life even more. But was the price I paid for it worth it? I knew that in the end I wouldn’t trade one moment with Kat to be with Cassie again. That revelation sat with me for hours.

The memories continued flooding back fast all day long. It was early evening when I heard my cell phone ring with Kat’s song playing. I had been resting on the sofa after a long bath. It had felt so good to soak in the warmth of the roman tub with the candlelight and bubbles all around me. Afterward I made a cup of chamomile tea. I reached for the phone and before I could even say hello Kat spoke.

“I am on my way over.”

“Well, hello to you, too.”

“Amanda, this is serious, baby girl.”

“Kat, what is it? Are you okay?”

“No, I am not and I don’t want to lose you.”

“Lose me?”

“I am coming up the driveway right now.”

We hung up and I went to the door to have her breeze in and grab me tight. I could tell she had been crying.

“What is it, Kat?”

“I am so, so sorry Amanda. I had no idea.”

“What is it?”

“Here, look.”

She handed me a trash magazine and, sure enough, there I was with Kat, outside with her hands on my waist from behind. Fortunately, they didn't know who I was, but they certainly could tell that Kat was more than friends with this woman. You really couldn't even make out my face, since it was so dark.

“Wow.”

“Yes, wow.”

“So, where do we go from here?” I smiled as I took her hand and walked her over to the sofa, motioning for her to sit next to me.

“You're not more upset?”

“If you had shown me this earlier in the day I might have been, but after going through this with Jo, no, I am not so surprised.”

“What happened with Jo?”

“Her picture and information were released in a celebrity magazine. I think Sam was worried she would just leave her.”

“So, she isn't freaked out?”

“Oh yes, she is very upset, but she loves Sam, pain in the ass that she is. So, she's sticking it out. But of course this moves their relationship into a new phase. I know Sam wants her to move in; maybe now she will have the balls to ask her.”

“Now dear, does she really have balls?”

“Okay, you want me to say, ‘has the clit to ask her’?”

“Hmm, I see your point.”

“They have a lot to work out, that's for sure.”

“So, what about us? Do we have a lot to work out?”

I looked at Kat. She was inquiring as to where I was at, where *we* were. Now we had the

added pressure of her coming out and the privacy that I cherished being in jeopardy.

“Kat, we are just at the beginning of our intimate relationship and we already have so much to deal with. This is just another layer. I am tired of being afraid of things because of the past. I don’t want to miss out on loving you fully and if this is truly what you want then I do too. I don’t want to be out in public with all of this, but I am willing to see an occasional picture, if they get my best angle.”

The look of relief on her face was evident. Then she started to cry. I held her next to me very close, soothing her, and stroking her hair.

“What is it Kat?”

“I thought for sure you would leave me.”

“It will take a lot more than a photo and a bunch of annoying ‘stalkerazi’. As Jo said earlier, how could I just touch and release you?”

“Especially since we haven’t totally touched yet.”

“Kat!”

“Well, you have touched me deeper than anyone, ever, in my heart.”

And with those words I began to cry and it was her turn to hold me. I snuggled into her warmth and enjoyed feeling her stroke my forehead and hair. Kat was so loving and compassionate, a real woman in every sense of the word.

“Amanda?”

“Mmm yes, Kat?”

“I love you.”

That got my attention. I had felt it for a long time but, for some reason, at this moment it meant more.

“Kat?”

“Yes?”

“*Amore mia bella.*”

I looked into her eyes to see them light up and see her smile became wide and effervescent.

“Next week is going to be difficult with the shoot and all of this extra attention. Are you

sure you will be all right to do this?”

“Never more sure of anything.”

As I snuggled up even closer in Kat’s arms I looked around the room. So many beautiful pictures of my friends lined the bookshelves. Gifts, artwork, and a sense of my past and my present seemed to mix together as I was thinking about the future. The smell of Kat’s hair was intoxicating and her strong arms provided a shelter of sorts for me. I couldn’t remember the last time I had felt so loved, so comforted. I was used to being the one who gave the comfort. Something had changed inside of me that day. I knew that I wanted to be with Kat, and that would mean a lot of changes. But her willingness to let me keep what I could of my private life meant a lot to me. Being there for her was never a question in my mind. Being her lover was still something I wanted and was scared of. I didn’t ever want to lose the friendship between us, but now it had gone far beyond anything I ever could have imagined.

My love for Kat was so deep and came from such a pure place that putting up with her celebrity status was something I was willing to do. We still had so much to discover about each other. And I was still nervous about opening myself up to her totally in a sexual way. I had not done that for a long time, not since Cassie, actually, so it was a good thing we were waiting until her final scene was shot.

“You know, Sam is really lucky to have Jo, and I am very lucky to have found you, angel.”

“Well, every kitty needs an angel. Since you are here, why don’t you stay for dinner?”

“Thought you would never ask!”

“So, what would you like? Some pasta, salad, garlic bread?”

“You always know just how to feed me.”

“One of my many talents.”

“I can’t wait to find out what the other ones are.”

“In time, Kat, in time.”

“You’d better be good. I have waited a long time!”

“And you are going to have to wait a little bit longer.”

She smiled at me, one of those amazing smiles of hers that could have lit up a city. I had no idea what was ahead or how life would change, but deep inside, I knew I was ready for it. At least I thought I was.