

One event can change your life so dramatically, can set you on a new course. Many such events had happened in my life. I had never really realized before what a privilege it was to be there to share and witness such a moment in someone else's life.

It was a hectic morning. Kat and I were racing around very early so that we could catch our flight to Los Angeles. We each seemed to know that that day could be the start of something very dramatic for both of us. All I knew for sure was that I had to keep it together for Kat, no matter what happened.

Kat was a bundle of nerves. She knew her lines, of course, but she would keep the emotions behind them buried until she needed them. We took the studio's jet so the flight to LA was quick and private. We were picked up without any fanfare and taken right to the set.

As requested, the set was closed. Very few people were there, just the essentials. It was then that Kat was about to get her first surprise. I hadn't known how to tell her that I knew the director. I wasn't even sure if he would remember me from college. Kat went to introduce us and before she could do so he jumped out of his chair and came over to me.

"Amanda, my heavens! How long has it been, beautiful?"

"A long time, Mike. I'm surprised you recognized me."

"I never forget talent or beauty, darlin'."

With that he gave me a big hug and we chatted about the old days when I was acting and then finally did a little directing in college. That was before I gave it all up, gave up everything after my life was torn apart in one night. Then he turned to Kat who was so caught up in preparing for her scene that she gratefully missed the fact that I knew the director.

"Are you ready, Kat?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Listen, Mike, I need to talk to you while Kat gets ready."

Kat smiled at me, knowing exactly what I was about to tell him. She walked over to her trailer and I sat with Mike, explaining why I was there and what he needed to know now.

"Mike, I am here for Kat; I know that you know that. What you don't really know is why. This scene is going to take her somewhere very dark in her life, very personal and it will

probably be the most intense and emotional thing you will ever capture on film. This will take everything out of her and I will have to be there to make sure she comes back to the reality of where she is now.”

“I thought this story was personal for her; I could tell by what an extraordinary job she is doing with it.”

“Mike, once you have what you need you have to clear the set, and that includes you. I will need to get her out of here and back home. Make sure you have it, every angle, everything you need because you won’t get another chance like this again with someone of her talent.”

“I understand, Amanda.” He hesitated, “I have a question for you now, if you don’t mind.”

“Yes?”

“Why did you quit acting, directing?”

“Honestly, Mike, my story isn’t that different from the one you are shooting, only substitute a woman for the man and you have my story in college. That’s why I never took it up again. I found my calling in helping others and left any dreams of performing behind. It just seemed meaningless.”

“And now, you and Kat?”

I smiled at him, knowing what he was asking. I was still amazed at myself for being able to just say it, what had happened, as if I were detached from it now. Somehow it seemed so long ago, and it was, and now my life was very different indeed.

“Well Mike, I think one personal disclosure a day is enough, don’t you?”

“Yes, I will give you that, Amanda. Thanks for telling me what happened because I always wondered. You were an amazing talent, and by the way, I have read everything you have published. Your writing is still breathtaking.”

With that he hugged me and I headed off to Kat’s trailer. I knew just what this was going to take. Just how much it would take out of Kat that day was yet to be determined. I just prayed she would have the strength to let it go once she gave, what I suspected, would be the performance of her life.

I sat with Kat in her trailer, and what a beautiful trailer it was yet very devoid of any personality. It was stark as she had already removed her personal affects the last time she had been there. The box was still sitting in her foyer at home. I remember seeing the pictures of her and other actors, actresses, and directors in frames. And of course a few of her favorite mugs from throughout her travels. Now the trailer was empty except for what she was going to need to wear from her wardrobe. After she changed I took her

street clothes and put them in the canvas bag I had brought along. I knew she would not be returning to this trailer, or this set, ever again. And, if she was lucky the memories from her past would begin to fade. I looked up to see she was pacing and nervous; I could tell she was coming apart inside. When she started to shake I made her drink tea to calm her down. She continued to pace after that, like a cat. It wouldn't be long now.

I knew better than to speak to her. She was enveloping herself in the part, becoming this abused woman at the hands of a violent man, a friend of the family in the film, and it was all too close to real life. This was the most pivotal scene in the movie and it would take every ounce of her strength to let the emotions out, to be that vulnerable and to do it in front of a camera. She had more courage than I. I had the safety of a pen, of writing about it, she was choosing to relive her pain in front of the camera for the whole world to see. Only very few of us were privileged to know that it wasn't so unlike her own story.

They called for her and I walked with her to the set, the bedroom set. Mike had set up a chair next to him for me and I thanked him. Kat and I looked at each other with no words; we spoke everything we had to say with our eyes. I loved this woman more than I had ever loved anyone and to watch her go through this was killing me inside. Every extraordinary artist suffers for their work. It is the price paid for the ecstasy of the moment.

I went with Mike and sat next to him.

“Amanda, I will let you know when I have what I need. Any advice?”

“Get every camera on her. You will want the coverage and that way, if it is what you want you have it. Make it a one-take Mike, for heavens sake, make it a one-take. You know she can do it.”

And sure enough, Kat brought herself back to that place so many years ago and the lines fell out of her mouth, her eyes showing the fear and her body shaking. My heart was breaking in half and I knew I never wanted to see her go through this ever again. It was too much to bear, too much to make someone relive. I waited nervously for Mike to say the words I needed to hear. I was like a cat ready to pounce. I wanted to get to her quickly.

Finally, after what seemed like hours later, even though it was only minutes, Mike said it.

“Cut, that's it. Clear the set, NOW.”

I was at Kat's side as everyone was leaving. They all knew to say nothing. Mike was the last to walk off his own set.

I sat on the bed, looking at her, reaching out to her. She looked at me with that frightened look and then I saw it. Under the covers was a knife and she was holding it. I

realized that she must have put it there while I was talking to Mike, she had to have planned it. I looked her right in the eyes, a tear running down from one of mine. I calmly pleaded with her, squeezing her hand gently yet firmly.

“Choose me.”

She looked at me, confused, and then she realized that I had seen the knife. I repeated myself.

“Choose me, Kat, choose me.”

This was her choice and it was one she would make over and over. Not to cut, not to go there to relieve the pain that was so deep inside. She had to reach out for me to let herself be comforted, to find refuge in my arms and not in that knife. It was a choice, her choice, not mine. My heart, which I didn't think could break anymore today, broke again. I didn't know if she had it in her to find the courage to let me help her now.

“I don't want to do this anymore.”

I wasn't sure what she meant.

“I can't do this anymore.”

I thought she meant the cutting.

“OK, Kat, then don't. Choose me. Let me help you.”

“No, you don't understand. I don't want to act anymore.”

That statement made me realize she meant her career, not the cutting.

“The knife?”

“Because I had to know. I had to know, Amanda. I just had to know.”

She was crying uncontrollably now. She had to know what? I had to know what she was saying. I needed to know. As I held her in my arms and soothed her with my hand running through her hair, I asked the question I had to have answered.

“What did you have to know, Kat?”

“That I could stop cutting. That I could go through this and leave it there and choose your arms over the knife.”

She looked into my eyes as I held her close to my chest. I was relieved, sad, knowing that part of the relief for her was the fact that she was ready to let go of this part of her life.

“Let’s go home.”

“Whose home?”

“Anywhere with you is home, Kat.”

And there it was, that smile that could light up a city. Through her tears, her fears, she managed to smile and let me know that she would be alright now.

I gathered her up and we walked out to the limo, which was waiting to take us to our plane, to head for home. As we walked out, the crew, who had been there, who had witnessed her amazing performance, gathered on either side to make way for her to get safely to her car. And then it happened. She looked up to see them and all at once they began to clap. They all knew that they had just seen a woman put everything on the line to embrace the part of a lifetime, and anyone who knew anything about acting would have known that they would never see anything like it again.

Mike held the door open for us and she got in. I hugged him tight.

“Thank you.”

“It was the least I could do, especially after all you did for me in college.”

“Debt paid, my friend, more than you will ever know.”

I had still kept Mike’s secret all of those years later, and he had never forgotten it. There were confidences that should never be broken, no matter how much time went by. It was something between him and me and I would never betray him, not even in a novel.

Kat curled up next to me as I held her in my arms during the whole ride to the airport. Once we were safely on the plane she reached out for me and held on so tight I thought she would never let go. It was dusk as the plane’s wheels left the ground on our return to the place we both called home now.

As I stroked her hair and kissed her forehead I felt so protective. I knew it would take time before she was ready to talk about the day and all that had transpired. That was fine with me because all I wanted was to get her home. All I wanted was for her to feel safe, loved, and back in the reality of her life now.

The knife had been left on the set and I was grateful for that. Maybe we could leave a lot of things behind us now and start our life together. If only life were that simple. For now, being in the moment on the way home was all I needed as long as Kat was sharing these moments with me.

I was so proud of her, so humbled by her talent and, now, her ability to see beyond the pain of the past and decide to do whatever she needed to do to take care of herself. Finally, she was going to put herself first and my heart was finding the pieces that had

been shattered earlier and rejoicing in knowing that a new path was being taken. Her courage and strength that day would stay with me—etched into my memory forever—and, of course, so much of it was on film now.

The woman in my arms was extraordinary and I was so fortunate to be the one who knew it from a very personal and sacred place. She chose me and ultimately, in doing so, she chose herself.