

It had been only a very short time since Kat had called. Ever the night owl, I was in my den writing even though it was approaching dawn. My friends all knew that they could call up until five AM, easily. It was best to not call me before one in the afternoon, though. I kept to an artist's schedule and enjoyed it very much.

I did start to wonder what I might be getting myself into, becoming friends with Kat. This was all I needed, another famous woman in my life. However, I mused, a friendship with Katherine might be worth the annoyances that would come with it. I tended to be a very private person, so I made the decision to follow the same path with Kat that I had with Sam and keep any relationship between us to myself.

I didn't even want to tell Sam; I really didn't need to be answering all of the questions she would bombard me with. I was grateful that they didn't know each other. Then I realized, knowing her, that maybe they did...no, if she had bedded this gal she would have told me all about it, I was sure. She loved to try and make me jealous. After 20 years it still hadn't worked. It was hard to believe that Sam and I had known each other since high school. It seemed so far away and so long ago.

Funny how friendship can blossom even under the most bizarre circumstances.

I hadn't told anyone that Sam and I had been friends after college. After all, we had drifted apart, and keeping the friendship that I once had with Sam on the DL was something I had chosen to do. I had plans that didn't include my life being opened up for public consumption. So many people didn't realize that someone in the public eye was still a person with problems, fears, hopes, and dreams, just like everyone else. That person was real, with a depth that was greater than the public could ever know.

The phone was ringing. It was three AM. Big surprise, must be Sam, I thought. She knew that I was the late-night writer. How I loved my life and the hours I kept!

"Hi, Babe," I said into the speaker phone.

"How do you always know it's me?" I could always recognize her unique, deep, and sultry voice.

"That isn't difficult," I told Sam. Heck, her show had been out for a while, and I knew she was wound up and wouldn't be able to sleep.

I continued, "So how was it tonight? Were you brilliant as always?"

"Like you care about that shit," she said.

"Come on now, tell me, how was it?"

“Well, if you had been here, you would have heard me dedicate a song to you, my best friend,” she said, annoyed.

“Let me guess, 'Honky Tonk Woman'?”

“Ha ha. No, *our* song, my song for you—just like I did it in my bedroom in high school.”

“Oh my, that could be anything from Rod Stewart's 'Maggie May' to Journey's 'Lights'.”

“No, the song that always reminds me of you: Bowie's 'Lady Grinning Soul', actually,” she said breathily.

“Oh,” I said, knowing what was coming next, especially if she called me Mandy.

“I still wonder about us, Mandy, what might have been.”

“Sam, don't do this, please. We have had this conversation so many times; you know I love you, but I couldn't live the life you wanted. You know that. It would have drained my spirit and crushed my soul. But, I will never forget you singing that to me or the times we danced to it, never.” My eyes welled up and my heart ached for the second time that night, knowing what my choices in life had done to the ones who had wanted more from me than I had been willing to give.

I could still feel her holding me close, still hear the piano, the guitar, and Bowie singing those words which echoed in my mind. I had not forgotten that song, ever. At least, I thought that I remembered all of the words.

I changed the conversation. “So, tell me about the girl you picked up tonight.”

She happily recounted her latest conquest. “Blonde, short, and about 22, I would guess, really young....but it was just sex, you know. They get what they want and I send them packing. She was a moaner, though. Actually, I hit a triple with her.”

“Hmmm, let me see, that would be moaning, whimpering, and screaming,” I recalled, laughing.

“Yep, the trifecta! So easy to do with the young ones; maybe that's why I like them so much.”

“Yes, that, and the fact that you love being known as quite the top girl, Babe.”

“So, Mimi, after all these years do you really care about what I do? You listen, but I wonder if you give a damn.”

OK, we were back to Mimi. She was leaving “what-if-we-were-lovers” world.

I continued, “I care about what you do; I just don't let it define who you are to me. You

know, I couldn't care less if you were a famous actress, a bartender, or a stripper. Although, a stripper might be fun." We were both laughing now. Somehow, neither of us could picture that.

"You always know what to say. Damn, I love you. How did I ever get so lucky to reconnect with you after college?" Sam asked, still laughing.

"That was amazing, for sure. I never really imagined you would find me again. After I received your email I was shocked that you had been keeping up with me through my work. I never really knew how many people actually read my poetry until I started getting emails. So, how is life on the road treating you these days? Or is it just all about the girls you are doing from city to city?"

"Well you know, I can't connect with any of these girls in any real way. I'm not really drawn to anyone except, of course, for some lusty fun. I keep comparing the women I meet to you!"

"Oh no, not this again. Honey, you can't compare them to me. I am able to be real with you and close to you because we are such trusting and intimate friends. If it was sexual that might all go to hell. Our friendship allows us a special safe place that exists as long as it remains just that, a deep friendship."

"OK, that explains why straight women have such great relationships with gay men: no chance of sex."

"Not always!" I had a few fond memories, but was grateful that that was all they were at this point in my life.

"Oh, really? Hmmm, I'd like to hear that one someday! So, Mimi, are you ever going to tell me about the men or women in your life?"

"You know me, I like to keep that part of my life very private."

My mind drifted to Cassandra. Damn, it had to be time for her to visit soon. The need in me was beginning to drive me crazy. Cassie was my lover. We weren't technically girlfriends in the traditional sense. We were "close friends with benefits," let's say. We were well matched, as she adored my femme side and I loved that she was a femme top girl all the way. We got each other, and the fact that she whispered little French nothings in my ear was enough to drive me into ecstasy. We led very separate lives, and only saw each other every other month or so, but those weekends more than made up for the time in between. No strings, no fuss, no promises other than friendship.

"Damn, we could have some fun," Sam said to me, breaking me free from my lovely reverie.

"I am not here for that kind of fun; you can get that from any of your groupies. Plus, they're a lot younger and have much better bodies!"

“Yeah, but you’ve ruined it for me. All I seem to be attracted to are voluptuous women now.”

“Glad to be of service. Now, tell me, what’s really on your mind tonight?”

“I miss being in love. I miss having someone waiting for me.”

“Hmmm, the last time you had that you were miserable. Didn’t you get enough of that with Miss PC?” Her last girlfriend was a real piece of work.

“You sure get right to the point, don’t you?” she said as she sipped what I suspected was a rum and Coke.

“I don’t have time to waste on the road taken too many times. But of course, isn’t that why you pay me?” I was laughing really hard now.

“You know, I think you’re the only person I don’t pay, Mimi.”

“You couldn’t afford me.”

“That’s for sure. I think I’m finally feeling sleepy,” she said, yawning.

“Good, now go have some wonderful dreams and stay safe, Honey. I know you need your energy for tomorrow night’s conquest.” I laughed, knowing her mind was already there.

“Love you, Mimi...see you on my next break.” There was a long pause, and then, “Hey Mandy, I wish I were there, now.”

“Goodnight, Sam.” I said, laughing at what a little devil she was. She was the only one who got away with calling me Mandy. It reminded me of that Barry Manilow song from so many years before about his dog. Was she calling me a dog? It made me laugh now, but I was glad that she didn’t use it too often. I knew what kind of mood she was in when she called me that, though. If anyone else called me Mandy I usually shot them a look that would have made most people crawl away and bury themselves.

So, I thought, should I go back to writing or lie down and have a wonderful dream of my own? I decided to continue on. Sam was adorable, a pretty tough little gal with some great tattoos. She was quite something, but still learning not to be caught up in drama all of the time. My love for her was strong—our history long and filled with amazing depth. We had seen each other through some of the hardest times and through some of the best.

Women had the kind of love and deep bond that could only be shared with someone of the same sex. It was an emotional connection on a level that could only be achieved in a setting of complete trust; knowing one would never let the other fall. Women were there

to catch each other emotionally, spiritually, sensually, affectionately, and sometimes sexually...but that was another story all in its own.

I tended to be a bit of a recluse. Happy to be here, right where I was, at any time. I loved being home, nested, comfortable, and oh so connected. It hadn't always been that way. I traveled a lot when I was younger. So whenever Sam called from one city or another, I had usually been there; just not with her, which drove her crazy.

Both Sam and I had lived through a lot in our lives. Sam's mother was a drunk and had never really been there for her. My mother had died when I was only three. You may have wondered what that did to a child. Well, it was devastating, but you never really knew just how much until you became an adult. One wondered if their own attraction to women was one born of trauma or perhaps it was just nature. I identified as bisexual and Sam was pure lesbian. At this point in my life, I didn't really care what led us to our sexuality.

Nothing healed me completely; it never would. Once I had accepted this, life became easier. Yes, that sounds strange, but once you embraced who you were in all of your forms, emotions, etc., life got so much easier because you were not constantly looking to fill the void that had been left.

I was a happy woman now, seeing and feeling the emotions that I had always tried to hide. I'd been trying to be strong all of the time because others hadn't allowed for the emotions of a child. I wanted to feel my way through life now, not hiding my feelings or thoughts...well, okay, maybe keeping some hidden. But yet it remains that my reclusive nature had enriched my life beyond belief. I was still connected to friends and family, and was indulging myself in the pleasures of the sight and sound of purring kitties! Yes, I was a cat lover...was there a more sensuous animal in the world? If something that cute and furry jumped in my lap I was definitely going to pet it.

My thoughts turned back to Sam. If anyone had known how close we were, or that we were even friends, they would have asked to meet her along with all sorts of embarrassing questions. Who needed that? Our relationship was close because we didn't have to pretend with each other. I knew that she was so much more than her career, and over time she had gotten to know this about me, too. These days it was rare that we get to know the person underneath the surface that we show the rest of the world.

I knew what fame had done to Sam, how she had to fight for every bit of privacy. How the bodyguards protected her and kept her from living a normal life. How the drivers took her places when she really would rather have been driving herself. It had taken its toll on her in the past. Her life on the road was hard. Days and nights melded together. She had tried for years to get to me come with her. I had never gone, and finally she had accepted that I wanted nothing to do with her life in that way. I could not even count the times I'd picked her up off the floor when we were younger. She still loved a good drink, but at least now she didn't get drunk.

Samantha Stanley, my dear friend and rock star. It made me laugh that we were such an unusual pair. It had worked so well that our schedules seemed to be so similar. I could calm her after a show and after she'd kicked out the latest girl that had found her way into her bed that night. She never let them stay, the poor little darlings. So young, eyes filled with admiration for the bad girl of rock. She gave them a night to remember, well, at least an hour or two, and then she was done. No attachments, no long goodbyes. It sounded cruel sometimes, but she didn't seem to get any complaints, either.

I, on the other hand, reminded her that our friendship worked so well because she knew that there was at least one constant in her life. She knew where to find home when she needed to, and that home was in Phoenix, very close to mine. Though, when she was in town she seemed to be here a lot. She always seemed hurt when I was busy, but she had learned that I had my life to attend to as she did hers. The time we did spend together was wonderful, and the calls and texts from the road were lovely.

All these years and she still wondered why some weekends I didn't see her, at least for dinner, but those rare weekends belonged to Cassie and me. Something told me that Sam suspected something, but telling her about Cassie wasn't my idea of a fun conversation; I knew how she got. Besides, some things were just between me and the women I shared them with.

Sam was sweet, though. She always sent blue flowers when she was away. She told me that it was because she was homesick. But, knowing her the way I did, there was nothing she liked more than playing in front of a live crowd. It fed her soul and filled her with the passion she needed to continue to write music, to put up with the road and all of the time away.

So much had happened between us. I was amazed that we were able to move forward and become close friends without dragging up the past too often.

It had been a long night, and I didn't think that things were going to be getting any less complicated now that Katherine Lucette and Samantha Stanley were both friends of mine. Who would I ever have told, anyway; who would ever have believed it? I hardly did.

That night I thought to myself that I would search the Net for those lyrics to "Lady Grinning Soul," and then put on the CD Sam made for me with those old songs on it and drift off to sleep. But that night I fell asleep dreaming of being held in Cassie's arms, where I felt safe and loved.