

The weeks that followed Kat's final performance were busy, yet filled with a lot of soul searching. We spent as much time as we could together—talking, letting go of the past, and sharing as much as we could possibly get out. The dam had broken for both of us now. The more she shared the more I did. We found a trust, a bond with each other that neither of us had ever felt before. We were both extremely affectionate and gentle with one another. Somehow we became closer every day, even with such a hectic schedule. There were many nights we stayed up talking until the light of dawn would start peeking through the blinds. As we lay in bed or on the sofa, we would instinctively reach for the other just to be touching. In a way I knew we were grounding each other, staying close to the reality of our lives right then, in the moment.

So much was happening, especially with everyone needing a piece of Kat. There were dresses to be tried on, jewelry to be chosen, an endless fussing over her hair, the kinds of details that drove her crazy. All she wanted to do was talk and feel whole again, something she felt when we were together. It seemed as if everyone needed her or wanted her attention since her nomination. The same held true for Sam. In the midst of all of the craziness, Jo and I found refuge in our friendship. We made it a point to see each other for lunch at least once a week so that we could help each other blow off steam. It was wonderful that we each understood the other. It wasn't easy to share your woman with the rest of the world, especially when all you wanted to do was be together in private, something most couples could do anytime they so desired.

Pulling up to our favorite restaurant I felt relieved knowing that Jo would understand all that was going on. Suddenly her car pulled in beside mine, though at first I didn't recognize it as hers. Apparently someone had a new vehicle. I smiled at her from my car as she waved to me. We both got out at the same time. The car was a Jaguar XF in azure blue. I knew the color well as it was Kat's favorite color, as well as Sam's. Funny how the two of them had so much in common, maybe that's why they didn't exactly get along so well.

“Nice wheels kid.”

“Thanks Amanda, I'm kind of embarrassed.”

“Why?” I walked around the car and took in its beauty.

“I've never driven anything so expensive. It handles like a dream. Though I do feel spoiled, and I think I could get used to it.”

“This certainly looks like a gift from Sam, am I right?”

“You know her so well.”

“Well, after all of these years you would think I would. It’s gorgeous, very sexy, and sleek. Kat and Sam both seem to have an affinity for azure blue.”

“That’s right...Kat drives a Jag, too, doesn’t she?”

“It’s one of a few cars she drives. Hers is the top-of-the-line XK convertible and of course in azure blue.” I started to laugh thinking about how many wonderful moments she and I had already shared in that car of hers.

“Sam wanted to get me the XK but I wouldn’t let her, I was just fine with XF. She always goes for the top-of-the-line, like Kat apparently, but I insisted that it be the XF. As it was, this to me cost a small fortune. I actually felt guilty about it for the first 10 minutes. After I drove it I felt lucky to be Sam’s girl.”

“She’s lucky to have you Jo, and I’m sure she wants you be safe when you’re out driving. It’s certainly a luxury she doesn’t get to enjoy as much as she would want to. I know being driven many places actually frustrates her.”

Jo smiled and hugged me close before we made our way into the restaurant. The sunshine felt so good today, the warmth of it was comforting. We were back at the Quilted Bear in Scottsdale.

After the waitress brought us our gazpacho and sun teas with lemon, we grabbed our large plates and prepared to attack our favorite salad bar. It ran the length of the restaurant with every kind of lettuce, vegetable, fruit, and toppings you could think of. I was a fan of Thousand Island dressing and would indulge myself with their homemade version before topping it all off with some freshly grated white cheddar cheese, another one of my favorites.

As we made our way back to the table I noticed that the restaurant had already cleared out from the lunch crowd. This certainly created a perfect atmosphere for a good long chat. We usually came in around two in the afternoon so that we would miss the lunch rush. Today it was no different and I was grateful. I began to spread some whipped butter on a piece of warm sourdough bread when Jo started to laugh.

“What?”

“I don’t know, it’s just such a crazy life. I’m sitting here with you looking out at my new wheels, living with Samantha Stanley, and trying to remember what my life was like before meeting you or Sam.”

Then Jo grew quiet. I could tell her mind was racing; she was deep in thought. I reached out my hand and put it over hers.

“I know Jo, I know.”

She started to tear up a bit holding my hand tight.

“Then, I do remember, it all comes back. I wonder to myself, ‘how can this be my life?’ How can I enjoy it when so many others are suffering?”

I smiled at her with a lot of love in my heart, feeling almost like a mother to a daughter. It was painful to watch her go from happiness to sadness in such a short time, but that was how it happened for many of us. You would be right there enjoying your life, cherishing it, and then it would happen. A memory would surface, a feeling would come over you, and you would wonder whether it was okay to feel good. I had experienced this myself and had seen many women do the same over the years, including Kat.

“Jo, it’s going to be alright. I know how even good things coming into our lives can make us feel scared. I still go through that myself, honey.”

She composed herself and started to smile. I was so hungry that I took a bite of the delicious bread. After a few minutes of eating I looked up to notice Jo smiling at her new car. And it could happen that quickly; she came back to the reality of now, a beautiful place to be for both of us.

“Thank you. I know you understand me, sometimes I’m not sure that Sam does, or ever will about certain things.”

“But, that’s okay Jo, she doesn’t have to as long as she’s understanding with you. Too often we think we should find everything in our partner and that’s not realistic. You will have interests and needs that will be different from hers and she has ones that are different from yours, too. We need to give each other space to grow, otherwise our relationships become dull and stagnant. Friendships go through the same kind of thing. We need different connections in life.”

“I never thought about it like that before. She doesn’t understand why I continue to work at the center. She wants to take care of me but I need to work. It’s such a big part of who I am.”

I was smiling at the moment, realizing that the young woman in front of me in her twenties was probably a bit more mature than another friend in her forties. Just then, Jo’s cell phone went off with the distinctive ringtone that meant that Sam had texted her. She looked at it, smiled and quickly texted her back.

“So sorry Amanda, you know how Sam is.”

“I do know she worries if she doesn’t get a text back within minutes. You would think she could figure out text etiquette by now. She thinks the world should stop when she wants something. Sam is used to getting things her way. She pouts when she doesn’t get what she wants. It’s good that you stood your ground with her. Your career is important to you and she needs to respect that.”

“I’m so grateful to her for all she shares with me, but she has to understand that helping others, my work at the center, is a big part of my life. I’m not willing to give that up to

make her happy.”

“If you did give it up, Jo, you wouldn’t be you. She loves you for who you are, so let her know that. Ask her if she would give up touring or writing music. She can’t, and you can’t give up such a big part of your life, either. Sometimes Sam is like a child, with a big heart. She just wants to make your life easier and because she has the money to do it she thinks that will solve everything.”

We continued to enjoy our delicious lunch while listening to the music in the background. Suddenly one of Sam’s slower love songs came on. We both looked up and laughed.

“Even at lunch I can’t get away from her.”

“Welcome to the club. I haven’t been able to get away from her for decades now.”

“Speaking of Sam’s music, I was wondering, do you want to get together and watch the show at your place or ours?”

“So, you decided you’re not going then?”

“No, I’m like you. I’m keeping as much of life private as I possibly can.”

“I would love to watch the show with you. Let’s just order in and watch at my place, if you don’t mind.”

“Okay, it will be fun to watch it together. Is Kat going with anyone?”

“No, she doesn’t feel right about it. She’s going to go with a few of the actors from the movie though, a group thing.”

“That’s how Sam feels. She’s going with her band and then coming right back home. She’s already arranged for a private jet.”

Neither of us had realized just how much work went into preparing for an awards show. There was constant attention from their agents, the press and, of course in Sam’s case, the rehearsals that went on into the night.

Jo and I finished up our lunch and made plans to meet again next week at the same time. As I hugged her goodbye I felt her pull me even closer.

“It’s all going to be okay.”

She smiled up at me. “I know, thanks to you.”

As Jo drove off I started my car up and decided to take a drive up Camelback Mountain. I wanted some time to look over the city and just think about all that was happening

right now. As I parked the car I felt relaxed. It had been a lovely afternoon. Lunch with Jo was something I looked forward to. We had an understanding between us and a bond that went beyond most women's friendships. I was grateful for Jo, and for all the women in my life who had helped me get to where I was right at that moment. For a few seconds my mind wandered to thoughts of Cassie and how much she had helped me heal. I missed our friendship, but understood why we couldn't really see each other, even as friends, right now. I hoped that all the time that had passed without seeing her had given her and Julia a beautiful foundation on which to build their lives together. I wished her well, even though a part of me would always miss her.

The sound on my cell let me know that a text from Kat had arrived. I smiled to see her worried, wondering where I was. She had a very similar way with texting as Sam did. Maybe it was because they were both famous, but I suspected it was just part of their base personalities. When I didn't text right back she called.

"Hello Kitty."

"That sounds so funny now, am I a doll?"

"Most of the time, yes, but you would be a sexy Hello Kitty doll."

Her laughter made me smile. Here I was, looking over the city I had loved for years, feeling peaceful, an emotion I treasured, talking to my actress. Could life get any better?

"I hope you're heading home soon, I miss you."

"Didn't you just get done with your latest fitting?"

"Yes, but I've been here all of 10 minutes, expecting you would have been home by now."

"I decided to take a drive. I'll be home in about 30 minutes."

"That seems like such a long time, but drive careful baby."

"I will, and Kat?"

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"I love you too."

The drive home was blissful. The desert mountains surrounded me, and the palm trees and setting sun were picture-perfect. Little did I know, the picture would be even more beautiful when I stepped through the door. There was Kat, lying on the sofa surrounded by candles and flowers and wearing her baby blue boxers and a tank top. The music playing was familiar. I recognized Chris Botti and was immediately pulled in by the

ambiance of it all.

“I thought we would spend the night concentrating on the sensuous side of life.”

She got up and walked over to me, taking me into her arms. Melting into her, I was entranced and weakened by her perfume. Then her beautiful hands cupped my face as she placed a feather light kiss upon my lips. Somehow the world disappeared. No other kiss had ever been so meaningful in my life.

We made our way over to the sofa and cuddled up. After a few minutes I stood up and took off my dress, laying it gently on the chair. Kat reached for my hand and pulled me back onto the sofa.

“I love this pink bra and slip you’re wearing baby.”

“Seemed like a good time to get comfortable.”

She reached for the stick in my hair and I let her. My hair came cascading down over my shoulders and all around my bra. We kissed for what seemed like hours, neither of us rushing. It felt so good to kiss and to be kissed. We had been through so much together and now finally we were enjoying each other in a very sensual way. We had already shared our minds, and our souls, one could say. Now it was our bodies that were expressing what we felt inside. Every gentle touch, every kiss and caress meant so much more.

As we snuggled closer I heard her stomach grumbling.

“Kat, when did you last eat?”

“This morning.”

“That was twelve hours ago.” I patted her stomach.

“Mmm...I am hungry but it feels so good kissing you I don’t want to get up.”

“I think we can take a break to eat.”

“Only if you promise to feed me, and we remember where we left off.”

“That can be arranged.”

We untangled from each other and went into the kitchen. I decided to make some pasta with fresh vegetables sautéed in some extra virgin olive oil. The chocolate cake with cream cheese frosting I had made for Kat was still fresh and moist. We took our dinner and dessert out to the living room.

“Delicious as always.”

“Why, thank you. You did mean the food?”

“Actually, you taste even better, which is very high praise.”

It was special, the way we had to sit next to each other, touching even as we ate. Being with Kat was easy now and yet still exciting. We had so much to discover together.

“I was wondering, would you go away with me next weekend?”

“Where do you want to go?”

“I’d like to look at property up in Sedona. I know it’s your favorite place to get away to and I’ve always wanted to share it with someone special. I think it would be good to get my other girl out on the road.”

“You have another girl?”

“Yes, she’s sleek and has her top off a lot.”

“I don’t know, you think she’ll be willing to share you?”

“I think she will. After all, you’ve already met.”

“Is she azure blue and known by the initials XK?”

“I believe you know her well. The X is for extra special and the K is for kitty Kat.”

“Oh that reminds me, guess what Sam purchased for Jo?”

“A Jag?”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“I ran into her when she was picking it up for her.”

“You didn’t mention it.”

“I didn’t want to ruin the surprise for Jo, just in case it was a surprise.”

“You didn’t think you could trust me?”

“Amanda, of course I knew I could trust you, but I figured it would be fun for Jo to surprise you, even if it wasn’t a surprise to her. By the way, Sam has great taste in cars, colors, and friends.”

“You do seem to have that in common.”

We finished our pasta and then I proceeded to feed Kat her piece of cake. Watching her expressions and hearing her swoon over the delicious decadent treat was a treat all its own for me.

It had been a wonderful day, and night and it was only getting better. We would be headed to Sedona the following weekend. I couldn't think of a better way to spend time than alone with my XK girl.