

It seemed like the only thing on my mind that day was Kat and the dream I had had about her. I couldn't believe that I was actually entertaining the possibility of sharing my bed with her. But if I did, that would mean she would have to know more about me than I was willing to reveal right now.

We had already spent many hours talking, getting closer as friends. I had to really think about this; I didn't want to ruin a friendship. Or take on something that I wasn't ready to handle. The honest truth was that I was scared. Letting someone in on that part of my life was rare; even Sam didn't know after all of these years. I had never told her, because I knew what her reaction would have been.

The ringing phone jerked me from my reverie. Ah, the joy of caller ID, deciding to answer only when I wanted to. Wasn't technology grand? It was Kat, another secret kept from Sam and everyone else at this point. It seemed that all of us kept secrets, some of us so many that we forgot that hardly anyone really knew us.

"Hello, Kitty Kat!"

"Well hello, sexy angel!" Her voice was exuberant.

"You must have accepted the part?"

"Yes I did," Kat said with a level of a happiness I had heard rarely from her.

"So, they agreed to your conditions. Was there ever any doubt? Who wouldn't want the hottest, sexiest actress in la la land? Not to mention, intelligent and hard working!"

"Stop, I am blushing."

"Now that's something I'd like to see," I said, knowing that she looked so adorable when she did blush. Maybe all women do.

"You make me blush like no one else, though."

"I really know how to get at that tough girl, huh?"

"Stop it, you are so bad! Listen, I have a week off and I would love to spend it with you and the kitties, if that would be okay?"

"Sure, I would love a visit from you. Besides, Deanna is missing you terribly. She is here purring up a storm. Somehow she always knows when it's you."

"Well, I will be there soon to make her purr in person!"

“Like you do for so many men, on the big screen at least!”

“And women,” she reminded me.

“Oh yes, and women too.”

“Too bad I have never made you purr,” Kat said in a very sexy, playful tone.

“Kat, you are terrible!! What is it today? Everyone is pulling my chain.”

“You have no idea how much I would love to see that! Besides, who else is pulling your chain? Are you even seeing another woman? Just how many women are vying for your attention?”

“Oh, are we seeing each other? Isn't it enough that every male in the world is in love with you?”

“You mean, every teenage boy...and probably a few girls, too.”

“Ah, yes, the woman who turns on even the females. Damn, you are almost as sexy as I am! That is, if you're into voluptuous older women,” I was laughing so hard I dropped the phone. “Oops, sorry about that.”

“Did you drop me?” she was playing with me, I could tell.

“Never, darling, never. Isn't that what girlfriends are for? By the way, when will you be here?”

“Next Friday. And I hate to ask, but would you please cook for me? You know I never get good home cooked meals, made with love the way you do.”

“Nice. You are coming to visit and I get to work. Okay, I will make your favorite.”

“Manicotti with your eight hour sauce?”

“Yes, if that's what you want.”

“Well, it is one of the things I want,” she said, almost purring.

“What would I do without you to boost my ego, anyway? I am looking forward to being with you. I have missed our snuggling and our all night chats.”

“Me too. All of this traveling can get to be a bit much at times. I need to take a break and to be with the one person who doesn't treat me like a movie star.”

“Being a movie star is only a small part of who you are. Don't let it define what you are.”

I had had this conversation before, only it was with Sam about being a rock star, I thought to myself with a smile. I continued talking to Kat. "You are so much more than that, Kat. I suspect others are seeing that in you, too, these days."

"I love you, Amanda...you truly are my best friend in the world."

"And you are mine," but even as I said it, I had to pause. Kat had become a good friend, but I guessed that Cassie would always be my best friend, or would she be? I wasn't sure that I had a best friend, someone who really knew me, well, all of me. But did anyone ever really know someone?

"See you next week."

"Goodbye, kitty Kat."

"Bye, my hot Italian angel!"

Kat was quite something else. That woman could make *me* blush, which wasn't an easy accomplishment.

Sammi, the cat (not be confused with Sam the woman), had just jumped onto the back of my chair. She nuzzled up to my nose and purred. She was an amazing Calico that I had found on the streets—one of several rescued kitties in my home. I couldn't believe that no one had claimed her. I was so happy that she had been able to stay. I loved the simple things in life. It was a gift to live in the moment, to enjoy her purrs and kisses, and it broke me free from thinking too much about Kat.

I knew that she was going to want to talk more about the two of us becoming lovers, but I really needed to take my time with that. I hoped that we could just enjoy the week together. I knew that she would be learning her script while I was writing. She was easy to have around; she didn't need to be with me every second.

There went the phone again. This time it was Sam the person, not Purr Girl in my lap.

"Hey, rock star."

"Damn, Mimi, that never gets old, you know?"

"Yes, I know, babe."

"Well, I stopped by the center today to drop off a donation. While I was there I met your friend Jo. Wow, I just about lost my cool when I saw her, Mimi. She is so beautiful."

"I knew you would make up some excuse to meet her; you're such a player." Now I would be worrying how this was going to turn out.

"That was the old me. I told you I stopped that not long after I stopped drinking."

"True enough. You have been very good."

"Well, I asked her out and she said something very interesting to me. She said she wanted some time to think about it, but if I was willing to take her to lunch and just lunch she would be okay with that."

Good for Jo. I was extremely proud of her at that moment.

"Well, I told her that you and I were good friends and that if she had any questions about me to ask you," Sam informed me. Then she continued, "She seemed intrigued by the fact we knew each other. I guess you don't really tell many people about us, do you Mimi?"

"No, I never really have; you know that, Sam."

"I know, but at the center it's fine. I figured they all knew already."

"Well, darling, my private life is just that, private."

"You have always been this way, Mimi. You would think I would be used to that by now."

"Well, Sam, I will be happy to tell Jo about you, but I can't influence her decision, you know."

"I really enjoyed the little time I was able to talk with her. I told her I would call her to make a lunch date," Sam said to me. I thought that I detected a little disappointment in her voice.

"You know, not every woman is going to be falling at your feet, rock star."

"I think I might be paying for the past, my reputation and all."

Little did Sam know, this had nothing to do with her, at least not yet. But I could not, and would not, divulge a confidence, professional or otherwise.

"Maybe she has heard about your antics, or maybe it has nothing to do with you. Either way, Sam, try to just go slow, okay? For me?"

"Sure, Mimi. She definitely seems like the kind of girl that you could take the trouble slowing up for."

"Well, I would totally agree with that, Sam. Listen babe I have to go, but I'll talk to you later."

"Okay, bye, Mimi, thanks."

“You’re welcome, rock star. Bye for now.”

Who knew how this would work out? All I knew for the moment was that when two friends hooked up it could either be great or it could be disastrous. I had lost friends over such a thing before and losing either one of them was not an option.

My mind drifted to Barbara and Jessie. Jessie and I had been very close. I had loved our friendship and how affectionate and easy going it had been. She and I had been together so often that people had thought that we were a couple when, in fact, we hadn’t been. When Jessie went after my new friend Barbara it seemed fine at first. But when they broke up it was horrific.

I had been friends with Jessie for a long time, years actually. Barbara and I had been friends for only a few months when she joined Jessie and me for a women’s poetry reading. We all had a great time, but Barbara developed a crush on Jessie that very night. Since Jessie could never resist a pretty girl she went after her. They didn’t tell me that they were dating until about a week after they had started. By that time they had been out three times and were having fun shooting pool, going dancing, or whatever Jessie wanted to do.

Although I felt a bit sad at the loss of Jessie’s company, I couldn’t be too upset, as they seemed to enjoy each other. Sure enough, not three weeks later, Jessie broke up with Barbara. From then on Barbara couldn’t see me, not even for lunch; she said that it was too painful. Jessie, of course, didn’t see a problem. But I had lost a new friend and I wasn’t thrilled about it. After that I told Jessie not to date any more of my friends; there were plenty of other women that she could date. Not long after the whole fiasco, Jessie and I started to drift apart and eventually she moved away.

I certainly didn’t want a repeat of that with Sam and Jo. But these were different times and different women. All I could do was hope that if Jo made the decision to date Sam that Sam would have it within her to help Jo transition back. If so, she certainly had her work cut out for her.

As the day went on I made a list of Kat’s favorite dishes and decided which day during the next week I would spend cooking. She would be arriving on Friday night so I wanted everything done ahead of time. I was looking forward to seeing her and being able to relax with her for a week.

Now, what to tell Sam? Well, I would just let her know that I was under a deadline and ask her not to call me unless it was an emergency. I’d tell her that I would be checking my messages, but that I would be out of touch that week. She was working on new songs so she would be creatively absorbed herself. Also, I wondered when she would be taking Jo out for lunch.

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Her flight delayed, Kat arrived late that Friday night. She headed off to take a shower while I commandeered the kitchen.

As I stood in the kitchen chopping red and green peppers I heard the shower shut off. I knew that soon she would be in here; she would hear me moving about the kitchen. I was making one of her favorite dishes tonight: an Italian frittata, potatoes, and homemade biscuits. Cooking for someone who appreciated it was a real joy for me.

Suddenly she was there, embracing me, her arms around my waist from behind as I kept chopping. She was thrilled to see what I was doing. She knew that her taste buds were about to experience the familiar taste of my cooking that she had missed so much.

“Thank you, angel.”

“You are very welcome. Good shower?”

“Oh, yes. I love that lavender soap. You sure know how to live.” She paused, and then, “I was wondering if I could ask you a question.”

I turned around. “Of course.”

She looked at me with those beautiful eyes, drawing me in. Then she said, “Tell me about your mother.”

At this moment my knees became so weak that I almost fell.

“Are you alright?” she asked, alarmed, as she held me up.

I needed to get my bearings. Her question washed over me and all of these thoughts and feelings came hurtling to the surface, about to burst from within. No one had ever asked me this question before. I felt as if she had looked right through me to strum the place that hurt the most.

I couldn't speak. I must have looked like a deer in the headlights.

Finally I was able to choke out, “No one has ever asked me that before.”

“I am sorry, Amanda, I just wanted to know you better. I shouldn't have asked.”

“No, you just don't understand, I don't know, I don't know, oh God, I just don't know.”

The tears were streaming down my face now and her concern was growing; she had never seen me like this. I was shaking and crying and it all rushed over me, the total abandonment. I felt as if I was three again and my mother had just died. No one could explain it to me; she was just gone and my life was changed forever.

Kat had never seen me like this because I had never let anyone into this part of my life. I

was so used to being the one everyone came to, a tower of strength. Cassie was the only person in my adult life who knew the worst of what had happened to me.

But inside I knew my weakness: the moments when missing my mother was unbearable and would rip me apart, even at this age, even after all of these years.

It was Kat's kindness and her willingness to ask such a sensitive question that had touched me. All of a sudden, I couldn't stand anymore and collapsed on the floor.

She held me close and rocked me in her arms. Her compassion and understanding totally surprised me. Here she was, younger and so beautiful—not just on the outside, but even more so on the inside. I had never thought that I could be comforted by a younger woman, but her maturity was well beyond her years. She was amazing, letting me cry, wiping my tears, and gently talking to me. I was used to doing this for others.

“It is alright, Amanda, I'm here. I am not going anywhere. Just let it out,” she kept saying to me. The floor was cold but I couldn't feel it. I couldn't feel anything but the deep chasm of loss from all those years ago.

After awhile I looked up to her and she kissed my face where my tears had fallen. She was gentle, sweet, and held me as close as she could. She suggested getting off the floor and led me into the living room where we lay on the sofa. She was holding on to me. Her eyes connected with mine and for the first time I was about to say that which had been kept inside for my whole life.

As I looked around the room I could see pieces of my mother's furniture. Her picture on the bookcase from so long ago was directly in my line of sight. The room was so warm, inviting, and comfortable. Yet, right now my world felt dark, small, and there was no comfort within me.

“I wish that I could tell you about my mother, but I can't. I never really got to know her. I was so young when she died. I remember that night so well, though. I had brought her dinner to her that night. I jumped up on her bed; it must have hurt so much. She was so thin and fragile. Then my Dad yelled at me for jumping on the bed and made me leave so that she could eat. I saw her just before I went to bed. I jumped up and gave her a big hug.”

I started to cry again and it was coming from a place so deep inside of me that I could barely stand it. The softness of the sofa and Kat's arms weren't enough to break me free from what was welling up inside and now spilling over. The flowers on the table seemed out of place to me as I tried to find a distraction from my pain.

Kat's arms tightened around me, and she urged me on. “Go on, when you are ready. I am here, I am here,” she said as she looked into my red and swollen eyes.

“I have never told another person what I am telling you. It has been inside of me for so long,” I said to her, trying to talk coherently through my tears.

“I awoke to see the EMT’s taking my mother from the house on a stretcher. I pretended to be asleep. I really didn’t understand at the time what was happening. All I knew was that in the morning my grandmother was sleeping where my father had slept and he was in the bed my mother had been in. It was so awful, to be so young and not understand what was going on. They told me that Mom had gone to heaven. What in the hell kind of answer is that to a child?”

I looked into her eyes and she was crying now, like she was feeling what I was feeling.

“Oh God, Amanda, I had no idea.”

“The worst part is that no one would talk about her with me. No one in my family would tell me about her when I got older. I wanted to know who she was. But it was too hard. We weren’t supposed to talk of emotions or about my mother. That was made very clear to me. To this day I still resent my sister for not sharing with me what she knew or remembered about her. I know it isn’t her fault or my father’s, but it still hurts, not to ever know who your mother was. To know that the knowledge is there, but is it too hard for the people who knew her to tell you. Maybe that is a tribute to how much they loved her, I just don’t know.”

I continued to talk as she held me tightly. “But the hardest thing is the feelings I have carried for so long, fearing that I made her go away because I jumped on the bed, I hurt her. I have never forgiven myself for that.”

She spoke to me in the gentlest of tones while stroking my hair. “I am so glad you told me. I feel so much closer to you, so privileged to know this side of you. Honey, you have to know that it wasn’t your fault. You have to forgive yourself.”

“As an adult with logic and reasoning, of course I know that. But that child inside of me still fears that I did something wrong and made her go away. I hate it when I feel that way.”

I looked into her eyes and for the first time felt comforted—relieved—that someone knew this deep pain of mine. That she knew. Somehow I had come to trust her, in a way that I had never trusted another woman ever before, not even Cassie. So what did this mean exactly?

I had no idea how the rest of the week was going to turn out, but I knew that I felt, for once, truly at peace and comforted in her arms. Suddenly, the flowers looked like they belonged there and as I smelled the fragrant buds in the air my heart lightened.

Kat just held me that night for the longest time. It wasn’t until the next morning when I woke up in her arms on the sofa that I realized we had been there all night.

Kat’s tank top was all bunched up near her breasts, exposing her taut stomach. It was then that I noticed them, the scars on her legs and lower abdomen. I knew then that I wasn’t the only one who kept secrets. Kat either was, or had been, a cutter. There was



always a reason for that kind of self-mutilation.

All I could do was hold on to her as she lay there sleeping, wondering what was buried so deep that she had tried to cut it out of her. My heart broke into so many pieces. Her compassion certainly wasn't lacking, for I now knew that she understood deep emotional pain. But this new knowledge led to more questions than I had answers for right now. We had a week ahead of us to either close up or open up. I hoped that it would be the latter.