

Days passed and Kat kept her promise to call every day or night. The additional text messages I received made me feel that much more connected to her.

I longed for Cassie, even with all of Kat's attention and that of my friends. It seemed that no one could replace Cassie. But that was foolish, of course. No one *could* replace Cassie and no one would ever *be* her, either. I knew that once you had loved someone you would never love like that again, because each person was unique and when you loved again it was different. Sometimes it was more intense, sometimes it was less, and many times it was just a newfound bliss and joy that touched your soul. Yes, I knew these things logically, but did I know them in my heart? Maybe buried deep inside I knew, but my logic and emotions had not caught up to each other yet.

How did you get over a lover whom you'd had for so long, someone who took you from one horrible place in your life to learning to rediscover joy and peace again? I had no idea. I knew that my life was changing and that I had to move forward. But, honestly, I struggled so deep within, scared of so many things. There had been other women, but none like Cassie. I had never felt comfortable enough to open up to anyone the way I had with her.

Kat's sweet attention brought me comfort and new fears, mixed in with some old ones. To successfully open up to another woman meant going through telling her about my past. I knew that, but to reveal that part of my past again just seemed to be too much to bear right now. Getting closer to her meant so much more in the moment. She was dealing with her own past and doing quite well at it. I wanted to be there for her and I was. Yet inside I felt that a part of me had died. I would listen to Alex Parks' "Cry" over and over again because that's how I felt.

No matter how much I went through the details of daily life I felt abandoned. The sadness was so deep that I thought it would consume me.

Cassie and I had both developed a fondness for Tibetan Buddhism and had studied for years. So, after a week I decided it was time to treat this like a death and give myself 14 more days to mourn and then move on. The first 21 days of the 49-day period after a death were the most important, and since this was the death of a relationship the practice felt appropriate. I remembered from the teachings that it usually took two years to mourn the death of a loved one. But this was not a death in that sense. As long as I knew that she was happy and moving on I just had to let go of what had been us. She was moving on and I also needed to do so. It would be time to release the spirit of us and only look back fondly on the time that we had shared.

Her leaving made me question whether she had stayed around because she wanted to or because she had thought that I couldn't do without her. Was what we had real or was it all illusion? Those thoughts would rip me apart and I had to just continue to feel what I

needed to so that I could find my way to acceptance.

Slowly I released a lot of anger and sadness, finally coming to accept that it had been what it had, no more, no less. I would have questions that would haunt me, but just going through the paces of my daily life helped to bring focus back. Work was good now, I was meeting deadlines and taking on a new client. It was good to get outside of myself and be there for someone else.

So, two weeks later, after removing many of Cassie's gifts and putting them in boxes, I had one last night to pack away the final items. I told my friends, including Kat, that I would be busy that night. I wanted time just to cry, to let it go, and to find some peace in the process.

I packed the last item into a box and moved it into the spare bedroom closet. I remembered that, no matter what, I had experienced something so profound with Cassie that I would not have traded one moment with her to relieve the pain of now. That was what finally brought me peace. I realized that all of the healing, sharing and love between us had been nothing short of magical. One day I would look at these items again, but with love and not sadness. For now, it was time to draw a bath and relax.

Lying in the tub with the candles lit I remembered all the times that I spent with Cassie in here and although the memory brought tears to my eyes. It also brought a smile, which was a blessing. If I had had so much with Cassie then why could I not have something again with another woman? Someone who would be different, but special, in her own way?

As I dried off I wondered how long it would be until another woman would make love with me. I smiled knowing that I had better keep putting that lotion on if I wanted soft skin to be touched one day by another. My heart was feeling lighter and I knew that I would still be missing Cassie, yet somehow the promise of a new day was appealing, too.

I finished my evening lying in bed, listening to Melissa Etheridge sing "The Letting Go." I knew that I would always hold our memories dear, but the letting go had begun and I was ready to move forward.

As I settled further into the softness of the featherbed I saw Kat's pink tank and held it close. I looked up to see the beautiful pink roses that she had delivered, which had filled the room with such a beautiful scent since I had moved them in here. Ironically, it was then that the phone rang. The caller ID revealed that it was, indeed, Kat, and I picked up the phone.

"Hello."

"Hello, angel, how are you? Do I hear Melissa in the background?"

"Yes, you do. Finally I have gotten past Alex and moved on to Melissa."

“Let me guess. ‘The Letting Go’ from *Never Enough*, right?”

I smiled. She was beginning to prove to me that she surely did indeed know me better than I wanted to admit. Or rather, that I had the courage to admit.

“Yes, kitty Kat.”

“Oh, my. Now I know you are making progress; you haven’t called me that in weeks.”

I smiled, my heart lighter, my spirit brighter. Somehow in that moment I realized that life was indeed continuing on.

“I’m sorry, Kat. It took me a while to find my way back. Speaking of which, I thought you weren’t going to call tonight?”

“Well, I know you said not to, and I didn’t think you would pick up, but I had to. I missed you, and the thought of you being alone just broke my heart. I so want to be there for you.”

“You are, dear, so much more than you could even realize. I am doing much better now and I am surprised that I am able to be at this place now. Sometimes it just takes time to gain some perspective.”

“I know that, baby.”

Again there was a smile upon my face. I loved it when she called me “baby,” as I was the older one.

“How are you doing?” I asked. “With everything, and I mean everything.”

“Are you sure you want to talk about me right now?”

“Yes, I have had quite enough of my own ass, thank you very much.” Again I was laughing and that felt like magic.

She laughed and I could tell that she was relieved that I was coming around to being myself again.

“The shoot is going well. We are actually slightly ahead of schedule, which almost never happens. Craft services are taking very good care of me. A delightful little Latina gal named Nina has been making sure I have everything I need. I just adore her.”

“So, how attentive is she?”

“Oh, you, she is just a doll. Actually, I think she has a crush on Rosa in the film. Then again next to me Rosa is the hottest young actress in the business. I am certainly not the one she is pining for, which is kind of fun to watch.”

“Oooo, Rosa. Well, I can’t blame her for that; she is gorgeous!”

“Oh, so someone is feeling better, isn’t she? Hey, why aren’t you pining for me? What’s Rosa got that I don’t?”

“I don’t know. Why don’t you ask your new friend Nina?”

“OK, here I am calling to check on you and you want another woman!”

“Oh, right, yes, like I really want another woman now. Are you kidding me?”

“Well, I thought you could at least feign interest.”

“Isn’t it enough that practically the whole world is in love with you, dear?”

“I am not interested in the whole world, angel.”

“Damn, woman, you are good for my ego.”

“Yes, and you are killing mine!”

We both laughed at our playful banter. I didn’t realize at the time just how serious Kat was about being more than best friends, which we were still working on.

“So, any young hotties on set that you have shown the light, so to speak?”

“No, I am taking some time off from those pursuits, especially since Jackie is checking in with me weekly. She warned me to ease up and spend more time with myself. I think she was right about a lot of things, even that.”

“I understand.”

“I will get the whole weekend off starting this Friday, so how about I fly out late Thursday and we can really talk and spend some time together. I miss you terribly, dear.”

I thought that my heart would jump out of my body. As I looked at her pink tank I thought about how much I needed to be held right now and how wonderful it would be to feel her arms around me.

“That sounds perfect.”

“Don’t cook. I will take care of everything. Let’s just relax and talk. If you don’t mind, there are a couple of things that have come up that I could use your perspective on.”

“Of course, I would love to talk; you know that. It would be nice not to wallow in my own self-pity, anyway.”

“No, I still want to hear what is going on with you. I want you to share your thoughts with me, baby.”

“Okay, okay! But please tell me we will be having more than breakfast all weekend, won’t we?” I said laughing.

“Smart ass, yes. I didn’t say I would be cooking!”

“Only kidding and that’s right; you didn’t say you would be cooking, hmmm.”

“Goodnight, angel. I can’t wait to see you.”

“Goodnight, kitty Kat.”

“Amanda?”

“Yes?”

“You know I love you, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do, Kat, and I love you, dear.”

I could hear the lift in her voice when she continued.

“Thank you, angel, for so much.”

“No, thank *you* for everything. I have no idea how I would’ve gotten through all of this without you.”

“I feel the same. Nighty night, baby.”

“Night, kitty.”

For the first time in weeks I went to sleep feeling a lot lighter and somehow even excited knowing that I would see Kat at the end of the week. Somehow I held on. I had to let life work its magic.

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Jo checked in often. From the beginning she knew that something was different, and I finally told her about Cassie ending our relationship. She was surprised, which shocked me in a way because I thought that somehow she might have known. I appreciated the way that she and Sam kept in touch yet gave me the space that I needed.

Jo was on her way over to talk to me about Sam, again. They had had several dates in

the past few weeks and she certainly seemed to be relaxing with Sam a lot more than she thought she would. I was so proud of Sam for taking it slow and for being the woman who she really was on the inside with Jo. I could see the changes that were taking place in both of them, and it warmed my heart to see Jo start to find her joy again in this way.

She arrived for lunch right on time, as usual. I went to open the door to find her standing there with flowers. She looked radiant.

“Jo, you have to stop this!”

“Wait a minute. These are from Sam and myself, not just me.”

“OK, well, I guess that’s supposed to make things better.”

“Why, yes, it does, and since when do you turn down flowers?”

I laughed. I had to admit to being a flower whore. I adored their amazing fragrance, fragile beauty, and the realization, again, that nothing is permanent.

“Come in, dear.”

“You look amazing, Amanda, so much better than a few days ago.”

“Thanks, Jo. It’s been a rough few weeks, but I think I have regained my composure now. The logic has finally caught up with the emotions. Now that some days are better than others.”

“Oh, good. Well, if you need to talk I’m always here.”

“You have been wonderful. By the way, thanks again for bringing dinner over the other night and spending time with me. You have been very supportive and it means so much to me.”

“I’m glad you let me.”

“So, how are you and Sam getting along?”

“She is amazing— so kind and sweet. She just continues to hold my hand and kiss me goodbye on the cheek, which makes me feel comfortable around her. I still can’t believe that we are dating. It feels like some kind of dream, you know?”

I smiled. It warmed my heart to watch her face light up. Could this be the same girl that I spent so much time with who was so broken? And then my heart ached when I realized what it must have felt like for Cassie to watch me go through those same steps, taking them with me and gently leading me back to feeling whole again. And now Sam was taking Jo the rest of her way. Somehow I knew that she would make it through and I was so proud of her and of my dear friend. Rock Star, indeed. Underneath that edgy

exterior beat the heart of a very special woman. They both were.

“Yes, I do know, Jo.”

“Why did you keep your friendship a secret for so long?”

“Because I never wanted to answer questions about it or have people try to get to her through me.”

“I can understand that. I haven’t told any of my other friends yet that we are dating. I am still amazed by it, actually. Getting to know Sam the woman, not the persona, has been enlightening, to say the least. I can’t believe what she has to go through just to get out of the house.”

“It is a different life. We have been such good friends because I understand and don’t want to be out in any spotlight. We enjoy staying home or maybe heading up to Sedona and finding time to hang out together without anyone snapping a picture. I know she loves her fans. Sam is so giving of her time and energy — she really does adore them. But everyone needs to feel some sense of normalcy.”

“How do you know when it’s time to go a little further?”

“That comes from within, Jo. Have you told her what happened yet?”

“No, I haven’t told her much yet, but little by little I tell her bits and pieces. I watch to see how she reacts, to see if she can handle it. I’m afraid of scaring her away. But, I would really like to have that first kiss, you know?”

“Yes, I do,” I said, smiling at her and wondering just how many phone calls I was going to get when that finally happened.

“It has been great to spend time dating. Just getting to know each other and not having to worry about sex right now.”

“Ah, the lost art of dating. What a concept, huh? No U-Haul on the second or third date.”

The euphemism wasn’t lost on Jo. She smiled because she knew exactly what I was talking about.

I then asked her about other things with Sam, kind of curious myself, as well.

“So the age difference is still no problem?”

“Not at all. I do notice our differences, her hands, her eyes. But I find all of that so lovely, her experience is a comfort actually. I’m sure you understand.”

“Yes, I do,” I said smiling.

“Last night she called when we were both at home in bed and we talked for hours. One thing she said to me is when it gets tough you can hold on to me. And maybe, just maybe, I am ready for that at least.”

She was on her way to healing, the final journey of this process, and I was moving on with my life. I knew that I would have more Cassie moments, but hopefully they would be fewer and there would be more time in between. Looking at Jo I could see her maturing right before my eyes. It was a beautiful thing to watch. I wondered again how it was for Cassie and Jackie as they watched me and so many others heal, grow, and move forward.

After Jo left I walked through the house and noticed the gifts that Kat had given me, as well as those from Sam and from Jo. They filled up and warmed the house. There were the beautiful pictures, small sculptures of cats and of women from all over the world, my paintings; so many reminders of friendship with so much love behind them. In the end, it was these close connections that made me feel loved beyond anything that I could express with mere words.

As I got into bed that night I got a text from Kat.

kkataacts: Goodnight angel hold on to me as I do you

femangel: Goodnight kitty thank u for holding on as I do you

I had changed from “poetgirl” to “femangel” since I was no longer Cassie’s poetgirl; that just hurt too much to see.

kkataacts: always xoxo

These women were truly the icing on the cake. Was it possible to have your cake and eat it too? Something inside told me that I would find out the answer to that question one day, maybe sooner than I thought that I would.