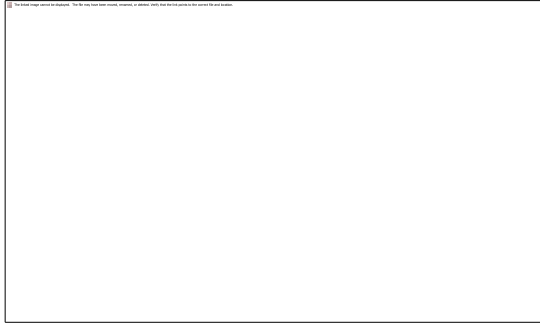


~ This Moment On ~

by Ambrosia



Disclaimers: Although these characters may have some resemblance to certain characters we know and love, they solely belong to me, myself, and the other one ;)

Subtext: If intimate relations between those belonging to the same gender in any way makes you uncomfortable then you need not proceed any further. I would also insist that those under 18 years of age

not proceed any further as well, but let's be honest-would you really listen to me? I can only suggest that the younger readers (17 and under) please bow out now ;)

Strong Language/Violence: A lil' bit of the former but none of the latter. We're keeping the peace in this particular piece. By the way, there will be some borderline explicit sexual verbalization happening. Consider it Sex Ed. for adults ;-)

Feedback: Feedback is welcomed and loved. If you feel so inclined to do so, you may send me some at SumrBrezze@aol.com.

Gratitude: Thank you Shania Twain for your assistance in the making of this lil' story. I don't personally know the Canadian beauty, but unbeknownst to her (unless she's an avid reader of fan fiction) she did give me a few ideas. So muchas gracias Shania! ;-)

Other Stuff: This story mainly takes place in a department store called Shopaholics. Now as far as I know (I tried to find one) there isn't a store that has that name so I will hereby call it my store! And as far as I'm concerned, it kicks Wal-Mart, Target, and K-mart all rolled into one bootay's! Bwhahahaha! Okay, I'm reeeeeeally not as crazy as I sound...honest! ;) Anyhoo, enough of my rambling. On with the tale!

"ATTENTION SHOPPERS! THE STORE IS NOW CLOSING SO PLEASE PROCEED TO A CHECKOUT LINE WITH YOUR PURCHASES AND THANKS FOR SHOPPING AT SHOPAHOLICS!"

Paying rapt attention to the message blared over the intercom, Kori Eaton remained in her usual hiding place, patiently waiting for everyone to vacate the expansive building. Glancing at her Mickey Mouse watch, she noticed the time. 8:48 p.m. Based on the last few nights she'd spent here, she knew that everyone would be gone by 9:15. Then she would have the versatile department store all to herself.

Nearly thirty minutes passed by before Kori unzipped the large navy blue tent and peeked out.

Looking from side to side and straight ahead, she failed to neither see nor hear anyone. Pleased, the young woman crawled out of the tent and stood to her full height, leisurely stretching her 5'5" frame.

After finishing her stretches, Kori proceeded to quietly walk throughout the entire store in order to guarantee that she was completely alone. One could never be too careful. Though the lighting was now a bit dimmer since the store was closed, she could still easily see as she ambled through the many aisles and sections of Shopaholics. Ending at the restrooms as she always did, Kori slipped inside the door that held a picture of a stick figure with a skirt on.

After quickly taking care of some important business, she walked up to a sink and proceeded to thoroughly wash her hands as she peered at her reflection, seeing a twenty-five year old sporting spiritless emerald eyes complete with dark circles under them. Rosy lips which had lost the ability to genuinely smile months ago, released a soft sigh as Kori turned off the water before grabbing a paper towel.

She was about to toss the towel in the trash bin and leave when something in the mirror caught her eye. Looking closely into it, she noticed that the door to a stall had opened a crack. It was open just enough that Kori could detect a single blue eye peeking at her. Now who was that and what were they doing in *her* store? Okay, it wasn't her store but she was supposed to be the only vagabond living in it! The nerve of some people.

"Are you playing hide and go seek?" Kori asked while still looking at the eye through the mirror. Though she didn't receive a swift reply, the door began to open revealing a figure. Green eyes opened wider as Kori practically stared at the image behind her via the mirror. And what a delightful looking figure it was! She did a quick inspection of the person from head to toe while trying to remember if she had ever seen anyone so breathtaking. She had a strong feeling that the answer was no.

Slowly turning around, Kori felt her bottom pressing against the edge of the sink as she openly admired the near six foot, eyes of sapphire, hunk of a woman before her. Her libido, which had been dormant for many moons suddenly sprang to life again. Since neither of them had spoken a single word since her unanswered question, Kori decided to try again.

"Um...are you mute or something?" She nearly rolled her eyes at the question that spewed from her mouth before her brain could process it. *Way to go Eaton. She's gonna be putty in your hands now!* Receiving a semi-dirty look, Kori sighed.

"No, I'm not mute," answered a low smoky voice that made the young woman weak in the knees. Unfortunately, she evidently didn't find it necessary to offer further explanation.

"So, what are you doing here?" The expression on Kori's face turned curious as she observed a lovely shade of red coloring the raven-haired beauty's cheeks.

Though she was blushing, the woman managed to haughtily reply, "I don't see where that's any of your business. Now if you will excuse me I must be on my way." Not bothering to wait for a

reply, she brushed past Kori and headed for the door, quickly tossing a small box, which had been concealed in her hand in the trash.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Running after her, Kori pushed the door open and followed the woman who was busy taking long quick steps. When she failed to stop, Kori placed herself in front of the taller woman. Not making eye contact with her the woman stepped to the left only to be blocked again. She tried the right and had the same thing happen. She then growled low in her throat. However, instead of frightening Kori, the young woman only grew more aroused. *I totally need to get laid.*

Before she could continue with her internal dialogue, she saw angry blue eyes staring down at her. Though remaining where she was, Kori loudly gulped. She preferred the sexy growl.

"I don't know who you think you are, but you need to get out of my way *now*. I'm already not in a good mood so don't attempt to make it worse."

Kori raised a brow, thinking that this was the longest sentence she'd yet to get. Although it was far from friendly, it was a start. "Need to talk about it? I'm here to listen."

"Thanks but no thanks. I've got somewhere I need to be. Goodbye," sounding much like the former host from that game show The Weakest Link, the brunette pushed past Kori and headed north.

Turning, Kori watched the woman with her head cocked to the side questioningly. "Somewhere you need to be?" she called out. "Do you have a hot date at the eatery?" She thought she heard another growl but she couldn't be sure due to the distance between them.

Stopping, the woman turned back around to face Kori. If the expression on her face was any indication, she was ticked off with a capital T. "If you must know I have a bachelorette party to get to. Now if it's alright with you may I go?"

Uh oh. It suddenly dawned on Kori that this woman didn't have a clue that she was locked in for the night. She decided to fill her in. "Actually you're not going anywhere until tomorrow because the store closed over twenty minutes ago."

The woman looked at Kori as though she had just told her that the world had ended and they were the only people left. "You've got to be kidding me!" As she looked around, it occurred to her that the lights weren't as bright as they had been earlier. Also, it was eerily quiet.

Kori shook her curly auburn head. "I kid you not!" Having just discovered that she had a sadistic streak, she fought to keep a smile (an honest to goodness smile) from showing. It was actually quite hard.

Placing her hands on her slim yet curvy hips, the woman looked around again. "Aw shit!"

For some strange reason, Kori found that funny. So, she laughed her head off, long curls

bouncing around while icy blue eyes glared at her.

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Following the determined brunette around like a lost puppy dog, Kori sighed as she watched the woman attempt to open the double doors she'd located in the supply room toward the back of the store. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell the woman for the hundredth time that there was no way out until morning but she had already been glared at enough to last her an entire lifetime or two.

After pulling on the doors one more time, the woman released a heavy sigh as she slowly turned toward Kori asking if there were anymore exits. She had tried to open every door she could find as well as any windows. She was beginning to realize that Shopaholics was locked up tighter than Fort Knox. Shaking her head, Kori repeated her earlier statement of, "There is no way out until the store is opened tomorrow morning."

Hands on her hips, the brunette stared at Kori before asking in rapid-fire succession, "Don't you work here? Can't you let me out? They don't give you a key?"

Sighing again, Kori leaned against the wall feeling the coolness of it through her T-shirt. "One, I am not an employee here. Two, if I could let you out I would have done so by now. And three, obviously they don't give me a key since I don't work here."

The woman's eyes narrowed in what looked to be suspicion. "Then why are you here? You don't seem upset about being locked in."

Kori casually shrugged. "That's because I'm not. You could say that I'm temporarily living here unbeknownst to anyone." She winked, a small grin tugging at her lips.

One delicate eyebrow arched toward short bangs. "You've taken up residence in a store." It was put as more of a statement than a question. Sapphire eyes lost their suspicion to be replaced with a mix of curiosity and confusion. What kind of nut wanted to live in a department store? Though she never shopped here, she had heard that Shopaholics was a great retail department store but it was hardly conventional to live in.

An auburn head slowly nodded. "Yep, that's right. Though it's only for a few more nights until I save up enough money at my job to get an apartment." Kori had been working at Carmine's Car Wash for the past three weeks and had so far collected nearly eight hundred dollars. She figured that with another paycheck she could start looking in the want ads for someone who was in need of a roommate.

"So you're homeless?"

"Yeah, my girlfriend kicked me out on Monday." Closely watching her face, Kori waited to see how the woman would react to her declaration. Having come out of the closet nearly ten years ago, Kori made it a point to never hide her lifestyle from anyone. If they didn't like it then that

was their problem. To her credit, the brunette didn't bat an eyelash. *Hmm, I wonder if she could be...*

"That's too bad. I'm sorry," the woman replied in a genuine voice, her expression sympathetic.

"Thanks." Kori gave her a brief smile. It wasn't a big deal that Anna had permanently put her out of their apartment. Neither of them had been happy during the last two months of their relationship and Kori took most of the blame for that. Truth be told, she deemed herself a lousy excuse for a girlfriend. For reasons unknown to her, Kori never put her whole heart into nurturing her relationships with women. She never had an inclination to try. "And I'm sorry that you're going to miss that bachelorette party. Who was it for?"

The woman pointed at herself. "Me."

A pair of brows elevated slightly, as Kori had not been expecting that answer. Glancing at the other woman's left ring finger, she then caught sight of a diamond that she figured would take her at least two years worth of paychecks from Carmine's Car Wash to pay for. Even the dulled lights hanging from the high ceiling managed to strike the rock, causing it to sparkle. *So, she's getting hitched. And if that ring is any indication, she's marrying someone with deep pockets!* In that moment, Kori felt an emotion, which had been dormant for so long she almost didn't recognize it. Jealousy. On very rare occasions, Kori had experienced jealousy and here it was making its presence known for the first time because of a woman. A woman whose name she didn't even know, though she had managed to affect her in a way that no other person ever had. Kori wanted to punch the lights out of the guy who would get to spend the rest of his life with the blue-eyed gorgeous thing before her.

"Wow. You, eh? When are you supposed to be tying the knot?" Kori asked in what she hoped was a casual sounding voice.

Though it was faint, Kori heard a sigh escape the brunette and wondered about it. "Tomorrow actually. The wedding is at eleven in the morning." As she continued to talk, she started to head out of the supply room with Kori following along. "Now I'm supposed to be at my bachelorette party, which my sister put together and I'm MIA."

Kori's brows scrunched together as she sidestepped a coffeetable in the furniture department. "MIA?"

The taller woman glanced her way. "Missing In Action."

An auburn head nodded. "Ah, I see. You learn something new everyday." She smiled and was just a tiny bit thrilled when she received one. Pushing through a set of swinging double doors, they headed toward the main sections of the vast department store. Since she had scoured the entire store numerous times during the last few nights, Kori knew that they were next to the restrooms where she had found her sleepover buddy.

"I'm sure everything will be fine."

"I hope so," the woman responded in a voice, which gave Kori the impression that deep down she might hope the opposite. Hmm, something was very strange here. She didn't seem too happy for someone who was intending to get married in the morning.

As they continued walking, they came upon a bank of public phones hooked onto a wall. Stopping, the brunette began to rifle through her pockets in search of change. She mentally chastised herself for forgetting her cell phone, which was inside her purse and both were locked in her Lexus. She had only grabbed her wallet and keys before heading into Shopaholics determinedly. What good was a purse if she didn't carry the thing?

Watching as the woman successfully found two quarters, Kori concluded that she didn't want her to leave just yet. So, she did the first thing she could think of. She lied through her teeth. "The phones don't work." An eyebrow curiously arched. "It's true!" Kori quickly nodded. "I found that out the first night I stayed here. I picked up the phone and there was no dial tone. I tried them all. Apparently, they shut them off when they lock up the store."

The woman folded her arms over an ample chest. "And why praytell would they do that?"

What are you? An attorney? Kori tried out a combination 'your guess is as good as mine' shrug and expression. "I dunno." To her chagrin, the brunette wordlessly sauntered over toward a phone and picked up the receiver, bringing it to her ear where she heard the strong dial tone. Smirking, she looked at Kori, the phone still within her grasp.

"They must have forgot to turn them off tonight," she dryly stated.

Kori sighed, doing the second thing she could think of. She lied again, yet this one should sound a bit more believable and perhaps there was a hint of truth in it. "Okay, listen. The truth is, if you call someone then certain people will find out that I've been staying here and then I could be in trouble and would go to prison. Look at me. I'm short and I don't look like much--okay none-- of a threat. I'd end up being someone's little bitch in two days!"

Despite her best efforts not to, the brunette laughed as she hung up the phone. "I think you're being a tad over-dramatic, don't you?" She inquired, blue eyes dancing with sudden mirth.

Kori chuckled. "Maybe but..." She sighed. "Could you just please do me a favor and wait until the store opens in the morning? I realize that I shouldn't be here but I really don't want to run the risk of being caught." A grin slipped onto her lips. "'sides I bet your sister can't throw a slammin' bachelorette party like I can. You do me this favor and I'll show you a good time tonight. We'll have a par-tay!"

The woman burst into laughter while nodding. "Okay, okay. You have a deal. But, can I at least call my sister and give her an excuse as to why I won't be able to make it tonight? I won't tell her that I'm locked in Shopaholics with a homeless lunatic."

After sticking out her tongue at the other woman, Kori agreed to this. She felt like doing a happy

little jig as she watched her temporary roommate make the call to her sibling. Now all she had to do was make good on her promise to throw the tall beauty a slammin' bachelorette party. Kori tapped a lone finger on her chin as she thought. Where to begin?

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"Okay, first things first," Kori said as she turned to face her newest companion. The brunette had just ended the phone call to her sister after having to promise the woman nearly half a dozen times that she wouldn't be late to her wedding. "I think we should exchange some pertinent 411, so my name is Kori Eaton."

They shook hands as the taller woman replied, "Nice to meet you Kori. My name is Skylar Whitney."

Kori smiled, while vaguely thinking that the last name reminded her of something. However, not recalling what it was, she easily pushed the thought out of her mind. "Skylar. I've always liked that name. It's lovely so it fits you perfectly." Her smile increased in width as the other woman blushed.

"Thanks," Skylar shyly replied.

"Quite welcome," Kori answered with a wink. *Flirting with a straight woman. I have no shame.* Inwardly, she grinned.

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Deciding that they needed to get out of their street clothing before the fun could commence, Kori led Skylar through the department store until they arrived at the women's apparel. Each woman proceeded to find something to wear for the evening and within five minutes, they had made their decisions. Taking their pajamas into separate dressing rooms, they proceeded to change into them. Kori had insisted that Skylar leave her own clothes in the dressing room so that she could change back into them tomorrow morning.

Done first, Kori patiently waited outside of the dressing rooms for her companion wearing a pair of powder blue pajamas. The loose-fitting pants were covered with miniature pink, white and lavender flowers along with a Winnie the Pooh pattern. The mischievous bear sported a pair of fairy wings and in his right paw held a wand with a small yellow star on top of it. Embroidered on the top of the short-sleeved shirt was a single fairy-winged Pooh Bear surrounded by tiny flowers. It was to say the least an adorable outfit and Kori wore it proudly. Ever since she was a child she couldn't get enough of Disney characters, Mickey and Winnie being amongst her favorites. Sure she was a grownup now, but you were never too old to enjoy Disney.

Hearing footsteps, Kori looked up to see Skylar walking out of the dressing rooms wearing simple black silk pajamas with the most exciting detail being a pocket stitched on the upper left side of the long-sleeved shirt. Hanging her auburn head, the smaller woman sighed because of the sight standing before her. Immediately, she looked up when Skylar asked her what was wrong. She didn't see what the problem was. She wore these type of pajamas all the time.

Wordlessly walking toward her, Kori slowly circled the woman as her green eyes wandered over the outfit while trying to ignore the gentle curves and the firm looking rear encased in silk. Her initial diagnosis held firm. There was nothing...absolutely nothing exciting about these pajamas. In fact, they practically screamed boring. She told Skylar as much and watched as her expression turned incredulous.

"What? These are made of silk! They're comfortable, cool and--"

"And about as delightful and exciting as sitting in a dentist's office waiting to get a root canal," Kori interjected. Raising a hand, she indicated for the other woman to take a seat in the nearby chair. "Have a seat Ms. Whitney. I'm gonna hook you up." Not bothering to argue, Skylar walked over toward the chair and sat as she watched Kori flit from rack to rack filled with sleepwear, her brow furrowed in deep thought, the very tip of a pink tongue inserted between her lips. *She looks so adorable*, Skylar thought, not bothering to examine her internally spoken phrase.

Finally making a decision, the young woman pulled a couple of clothing items off of hangers before coming back over to her new friend where she dropped the pajamas in her lap, a broad smile on her face. Fingering the soft cotton, Skylar glanced up at Kori doubtfully, asking if she truly expected her to wear these pajamas.

An auburn head nodded as Kori graced her with an expression that clearly read 'duh'. "Yep. Why? What's wrong with them?"

Thinking that they would be perfect in honor of Valentine's Day, which happened to be tomorrow, Kori had chosen a pair of white drawstring pants that had a pattern of pink and red hearts all over them along with a matching snug fit pink T-shirt. Being inclined to purchase clothes in colors such as black, navy, and tan, Skylar failed to remember the last time she had worn pink. And if she had her way, she wasn't about to do it tonight!

Picking up the pajamas, Skylar held them up to Kori as though she didn't already know what they looked like. "They're too busy. I prefer my clothes to be..."

"Boring? Drab? Plain?"

The brunette smirked. "There is nothing wrong with black, Kori."

Kori shrugged. "Yeah, sure. If you're going to a funeral." As her new buddy smirked again, she prompted, "Just put them on. Live dangerously for once. This is your bachelorette party so relax!"

Sighing, Skylar decided to relent since it was plainly obvious to her that Kori wasn't about to. Besides, what could it hurt to wear pink just this once? Plus, she found herself not wanting to disappoint her new friend. With a silent nod, she arose from the chair, catching Kori's contented smile just before she vanished back into the dressing room to change into...sigh...a heart infested pink outfit. Skylar vowed to never breathe a word of this to anyone and sincerely hoped

that Kori would decide to keep this little detail of the evening between them.

Within in a few minutes, Skylar returned, good-naturedly enduring the appreciative oohs and aahs from a grinning Kori. Apparently, she approved just by the look on her face. She then vocally confirmed it.

"You look very cute, Skylar!" Her grin widened when the other woman blushed slightly while thanking her.

"Now!" Clapping her hands together, Kori asked her friend if she was hungry. Kori was, since that sandwich she ate on her lunch break had vacated her stomach hours ago. Having not eaten a bite since the garden salad she had for lunch, the brunette readily nodded while replying that indeed she was quite famished.

After they found the appropriate slippers to compliment their pajamas, Kori choosing a pair of Pooh Bear adorned ones and Skylar practically having to be begged to wear pink fuzzy slippers, they headed toward the eatery near the front of the store. Patting a barstool at the counter for her friend to sit on, Kori walked behind it, leaning on the clean shiny surface as she asked Skylar what she would like to eat. Whatever she wanted, if the eatery had it, Kori would fix it for her. Thanks to many lessons from her mother, Kori had turned out to be a proficient cook.

Studying the various the choices on the menu, it was difficult for Skylar to find something that she considered nutritious. However, finally she made a decision. "I'll have the BLT without the bacon, bread and any dressings that might be on it." When Kori didn't readily give a response, Skylar figured that she was waiting to hear what she wanted to drink. "Along with an iced tea please."

Still, Kori didn't respond right away. With a curious expression, she leaned more of her weight on the counter as she looked at the other woman. "Um, well that leaves the lettuce and tomatoes."

Skylar nodded. "I know."

"So," Kori slowly drew out the minute word, "you're saying that you only want naked lettuce and tomatoes for dinner." She received another nod, which caused her to sigh. "What kind of meal is that? I won't go for it," she added, not waiting for a reply to her question as she shook her auburn head. "You're going to eat more than that. You told me that you were famished so Skylar I'm going to make you something with substance," Kori thoughtfully paused. "A hamburger sounds good. You want cheese on that?"

Skylar quickly shook her head in the negative. "I don't want a hamburger. I don't eat those." There was absolutely no way on God's green earth that she shoving all of that grease, senseless calories and fat down her throat. True, she didn't want to disappoint Kori, but she had her limits. Pink she would wear but hamburgers she would not eat!

"Didn't I insist that you live dangerously for just this night at least? When's the last time you had

one? I'm sure it'll be alright if you splurge for one night."

"Actually, I never have."

For nearly twenty seconds there was such an abundance of silence that one could have heard a pin drop into a haystack. That is, if Shopaholics sold hay. They did have pins though.

Kori slowly raised an eyebrow and then the other one quickly followed its mate. Surely, Skylar couldn't mean that she had never eaten a hamburger. She would bet that the majority of those on earth had tried at least one or two hamburgers somewhere in their lifetime. It would be pitiful to go through one's life without eating one of the beefy juicy treats. That is unless one happened to be a vegetarian. Kori shuddered at the thought. Though she sympathized with animals, she could never completely cut meat out of her life. She loved it too much. Speaking of vegetarians, perhaps Skylar was one.

"Are you a vegetarian?"

Skylar shook her head. "No, I eat meat, just not hamburgers. Mostly fish and chicken, sometimes beef and rarely pork."

Green eyes widened in surprise. It was the other way around with her. Mostly beef and pork, sometimes chicken and rarely fish. And that had to be fried red snapper along with a healthy dose of fries. Yes, so Kori realized that she wasn't the smartest when it came to nutrition but she enjoyed her food. Besides, it wasn't as though she didn't make up for her less than satisfactory eating habits in other ways, such as exercising. Shopaholics by the way, had an excellent bit of equipment set up for possible customers to try out next to the sporting goods section. Kori had taken advantage of it on a nightly basis.

"You've never ever had a hamburger?" Kori inquired, not being able to believe what her ears were transmitting to her brain. "Not even one?"

The dark head shook. "Not even one."

"So you don't know how they taste?"

"Don't have a clue."

Kori cocked her head to the side as she studied the other woman. "Aren't you the least bit curious?"

Skylar shrugged. "I admit that I have been a time or two, but I just didn't indulge."

Kori leaned further, almost close enough for their noses to touch even with the width of the counter separating them. She gazed into two blue eyes, having the errant thought that she could just happily drown in them. "So indulge your curiosity tonight, Skylar," Kori whispered. She ignored the digging that the edge of the counter was busy doing into her stomach as she watched

the blush creeping onto Skylar's bronzed cheeks. It was so lovely. Her eyes wandered down to a set of full lips, which were almost close enough to kiss. Kori blinked her eyes rapidly as she settled back on her feet, instantly relieving the ache that her stomach had been enduring. There was no use thinking such thoughts. Skylar Whitney was going to be a married woman in less than twenty-four hours. That thought left a bad taste in Kori's mouth.

Her voice momentarily deserting her, Skylar briefly wondered if they were still discussing hamburgers and then gave herself a mental shake. *Of course, we are. She couldn't possibly mean anything else*, Skylar thought. She was reading too much into the other woman's words. Regardless, she still didn't intend to eat a hamburger and said as much.

Sticking out her bottom lip, Kori pretended to pout. "Please?" Skylar shook her head. "Pretty please? I'll fix you one and all you have to do is take a bite. That's all I'm asking for is one little itty-bitty bite. Okay?" She threw in a bit of eyelash fluttering along with the pout. Kori figured that if she could get the woman to agree to eat just one bite of a hamburger, that certainly she would continue to devour the entire sandwich once she had a taste. Who could take a bite from one of Kori's 'famous burgers' (as she had dubbed them years prior) and then not finish it? *One bite Skylar and then I know that I'll have you hooked!*

Skylar felt her resolve beginning to crumble as fast as a house of playing cards in a hurricane. Oh, why, oh why was she having such a difficult time saying no to this woman? She had only known Kori about forty-five minutes and yet found herself wanting to please the adorable little thing. Once more, Skylar ignored the word she chose to describe Kori Eaton.

"Okay," Skylar acquiesced while nodding. "I'll sample a hamburger."

Kori beamed, glad that she had gotten her way. Until tonight that hadn't occurred very often. "And french fries."

"Oh no." The brunette wagged a finger at her. "I've already agreed to eat one bad thing. I'll just have that lettuce and tomato we talked about earlier, thank you." She was starting to sound like a broken record, but Skylar meant it this time. Not one french fry was going to pass her lips!

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"Oh my God, this is *so* freaking delicious!" While Kori grinned in delight, Skylar dipped another golden battered french fry into a cup of ketchup before popping it into her mouth and then taking a sizable bite of her hamburger. Never in her life had she tasted something so decadent. It should have been a crime for anything to taste this good. No wonder such places, as McDonald's were so popular. Though she had never been there, Skylar had a feeling that not even...what was it called? Ah, yes, the Big Mac. It undoubtedly could not hold a candle to Kori's famous burgers. Not to mention her french fries. They were both simply divine.

Kori gushed with the appreciation being showered upon her. She had no idea that Skylar would enjoy the food *this* much, yet she was thrilled. *Well when you switch from eating lettuce and fish the majority of the time to trying out my famous burger, I suppose that it could be a delightful*

shock to the palate.

Starting on the second half of her hamburger, Kori wondered about the woman sitting next to her. What did she know about her thus far? Her name was Skylar Whitney-dang, that sounded familiar but Kori just couldn't place it. Based on the clothes she'd been wearing earlier, she came from money. Her name even sounded like someone who was wealthy. She didn't usually indulge in treats, which was a shame, though it made Kori believe that she had a lot of self-control. She was practical, elegant, and conservative. Her choices in clothing styles and colors proved that. She wore a huge rock on her finger, was getting married tomorrow morning, and yet didn't seem thrilled over her upcoming wedding. This was a mystery, which Kori was determined to unravel tonight. And why was she hiding in the restroom, peeking out at Kori as though she was a member of the Mafia and they happened to be chasing after her? Kori recalled the box her new friend hurriedly threw in the trash bin before exiting the restroom. One eyebrow elevated in curiosity. Or was she was trying to hide something from the eyes of others?

Thinking that it was time to get some questions answered, Kori swallowed the food in her mouth with the help of some Pepsi. Swiveling around on her barstool, she faced Skylar who was nearly done with her meal. "Sky can I ask you a question?"

Skylar smiled at the use of the nickname. Nearly everyone referred to her by her full name except for her nieces and nephews who called her Aunt Sky. She nodded. "Of course you may."

Idly twirling a french fry around on her plate, Kori asked, "Why were you hiding in the bathroom?" She didn't miss the blush that instantly colored Skylar's cheeks. It only proved to make her even more curious.

In that moment, Skylar decided to be completely honest. Yes, she hadn't known Kori very long but she instinctively knew that she could trust her not to tell. This couldn't get out because the press would have a field day with it. Her family didn't need that type of publicity.

"After being ten days late," Skylar started, "I decided that I needed to find out for sure, although I was already ninety-five percent positive. Passing by Shopaholics, I made the decision to come here for the confirmation. Buying what I needed I went into the bathroom and did the test. I was right." She took a deep breath, knowing by the look on Kori's face that she already knew what she was about to say. "I'm pregnant."

Kori managed to keep the sigh that wanted to escape inward. And the plot thickened even more. That bad taste in her mouth returned as the unbidden thoughts of Skylar and her fiancé later this year bringing a life into the world together rushed into her mind. Kori took a deep breath while chastising herself. *What do I care what she does and with whom? I don't know her and after tonight, I'll probably never see her again.* After all, why would the daughter of the may-Kori softly gasped! That was it! That's what was so familiar about Skylar's name. Surely, it just couldn't be a coincidence.

Kori looked toward the other woman just in time to see a curious expression directed at her. "Weston Whitney. Is he your father?"

Skylar nodded with an unreadable look now on her face. "Yes, he is," was all that she offered.

Green eyes widened considerably. Kori could hardly believe it. She was locked in Shopaholics with the daughter of Dr. Weston Whitney, the second time mayor of Dominoe County and one of the top retired surgeons of a prestigious hospital in Boston. What were the odds of something like that happening? It then slipped back into her mind what Skylar had just relayed. She was pregnant. Oh, man. Now what would the straight-laced Mayor Whitney think of his daughter being with child before her wedding? Though she had never personally met the man, unless one counted that parade she saw him at late last year, Kori had a strong feeling that he wouldn't take the news well. No, not at all. No wonder Skylar looked a bit worried when she admitted that she was pregnant!

"Do you know how far along you are?"

"Three weeks and four days," Skylar promptly answered before taking a long sip from her glass of tea.

"Wow. You have it down to the very day?"

The brunette shrugged as she stared at her near empty plate. There were five fries and two bites of hamburger left but she had suddenly lost her appetite at the mention of her father and her pregnancy. "That was the last time I allowed him to-I mean that was the last time Brad and I made love."

Two eyebrows skyrocketed over what Skylar might have said had she not edited her statement at the last second. *That was the last time you allowed him to what, Sky? Make love to you? And why use the word 'allowed' as though making love was something you endured for his sake?* The plot was as thick as a rue now.

"Did you let him know that you suspected you were pregnant?"

Skylar shook her head. "I'll tell him tomorrow before the wedding." Releasing a loud breath, she continued, "I'm sure Brad will be thrilled. He did want us to start having children as soon as we got married," a slight pause. "He and my father."

Kori got the impression that Skylar wasn't as close with her father as he alluded to the public. She recalled once reading an article in the newspaper about him, he had described himself as the 'All American Family Man' and doted on what a close-knit family he had. He made them sound like the Walton's. Perhaps things weren't as perfect as Weston Whitney wanted them to appear. *Figures*, Kori thought. *Is anyone involved with politics one hundred...or at least ninety-five percent honest?*

Noticing the discontented look on her companion's face, Kori concluded that she would probably rather be discussing anything else other than the current topic. Thinking it wise to change the subject since she didn't want Skylar to continue to be upset, especially since this was her

bachelorette party, Kori brought up one of her favorite subjects. It was actually in the top five where subjects were concerned.

"Hey, have you ever had an ice cream sundae?" She smiled when the other woman abruptly laughed.

"Does a fruit smoothie count?" Skylar asked, a twinkle returning to her blue eyes as she smiled. She briefly contemplated how someone so small could have such a tremendous love affair with food.

"Nope, not exactly, Sky." Kori sighed, though a chuckle escaped her lips. Oh, what in the world was she going to do with Skylar Whitney? Obviously, she could teach quite a few things to her, yet there was so little time. Well, she would get in as many 'new experiences' within the next few hours as was possible.

◆◆◆◆◆

After sharing a gigantic mouthwatering sundae, complete with all the works including nuts, sprinkles, bananas (Skylar insisted on a fruit--something nutritious), and whipped cream, Skylar was given a tour of the grand store. However, this wasn't just any tour where you walk around following a pointing loquacious tour guide. No, Kori added a bit of zest to it by nabbing them a go-kart, which was comfortable and large enough for two full-sized adults. The cherry red framed adorable go-kart fit them perfectly as they zoomed (well if one could refer to 8-15 mph as that-of course Kori was intentionally going slowly) around the many facets of Shopaholics.

Beginning in the toy area where they'd picked up their ride, the two women headed toward the front of the store, Kori indicating as they came upon the arcade. She even drove inside so that her friend could look at the multitude of pinball machines and video games along with the air hockey and foosball tables. Noticing the interested look on the brunette's face, Kori made a mental note to suggest that they return to the arcade after the tour. As she drove out of the arcade, she gave an almost imperceptible shake of head. *She's probably never even played a video game before. Poor baby.* It was beginning to occur to Kori that her new friend's childhood most likely couldn't be correlated with fun and merriment. And perhaps she was being presumptuous, but Skylar's adulthood didn't seem much if any better. Pushing the troubling thoughts out of her mind, Kori continued the tour.

Next to the arcade was Snack Sity, which of course was a place to get one's fill on snacks including candy, baked goods, and awesome buttered popcorn that Orville Redenbacher himself would love the secret to. Kori licked her lips, remembering the freshly prepared chocolate fudge that she'd had the opportunity to sample yesterday afternoon by shelling out a few precious dollars. It was to die for.

Moving forward, they bypassed the checkout area making a quick right. Kori occasionally made comments as they drove by the fifteen spacious aisles consisting of a mini grocery aisle, pet supplies, hardware, items for one's home, and periodicals among other things. Once again turning right at the end of aisle #1, they ended up by an immense shelf filled with camping

equipment, which was across from a nicely decorated camping scene. Sitting on a large patch of realistic looking grass was a navy blue tent that appeared roomy enough to hold up to three or four adults. There were also two laid out sleeping bags, one blue, and the other red adjacent to each other. Next to the red bag were a flashlight, canteen, and a pair of binoculars. A few feet from the sleeping bags was a fake fire pit made of small paper mache rocks that surrounded a glowing 'fire', which actually might appear authentic from afar. About eight inches from the pit were a couple of pots, pans, cups, and some utensils.

Halting the motion of the go-kart, Kori indicated the camping scene with a sweep of her hand before she looked toward Skylar. "And this Sky is my temporary home away from...no other home." She grinned. "As you can see I've been camping out under the," she glanced upward, "high ceiling."

Throwing her head back, the brunette chuckled. "It looks very nice. This will be my first time camping." She graced Kori with a warm smile. "And I'm looking forward to it."

Despite her best efforts to keep it from manifesting, a blush found its way to her cheeks. Returning the smile, Kori nodded. "As well am I."

Starting up the go-kart, they left Kori's temporary home behind and scurried through the jewelry section and both women's and men's apparel before ending up by the eatery again. Next to the restaurant were the photo department and the eyeglass boutique. Having an idea, Kori parked near the door leading into the photo store. Turning to Skylar, she asked the woman if she would be interested in taking a few pictures with her. She claimed that she wanted a memento from this night. Though she had never been a fan of the camera, Skylar found herself eagerly nodding. She hadn't figured why she desired to please Kori so. Perhaps the little auburn haired woman had put a spell on her. Chuckling, Skylar arose from the kart, stretching her limbs before she followed Kori inside the store.

Deciding to use one of the instant photo booths instead of attempting to work the high-tech looking camera already set up on a tripod, the pair gathered inside the machine, which was about the size of a walk-in phone booth and took their seats, thighs pressing close together. Both felt the heat from the other but strove to ignore it. Well, at least Skylar did. Kori inwardly grinned due to the close proximity. She wished that the short padded bench they were occupying were a tad smaller so that she would be 'forced' to sit on gorgeous Blue Eyes' lap.

They would be able to obtain six wallet size color or black and white (their choice of which) photographs for three dollars a copy. They each wanted one so the grand total would be six dollars of course. It then occurred to them that they didn't have any money. Looking at each other, they burst out in a fit of giggles before Skylar offered to go get some. Stubbornly shaking her head, Kori insisted that this was her idea and her treat. Skylar easily gave in and then proceeded to wait in the booth as Kori went out to the go-kart and drove over to the camp scene where she kept money in her backpack inside of the tent. Within a few minutes, she returned to the photo store with six crisp dollar bills in hand.

"Now we're in business," she said as she retook her seat next to Skylar, making sure to close the

dark thick velvet curtain well. Having already discussed that they wanted color photographs, Kori inserted the dollar bills one at a time into a slot that sucked them up as vigorously as a vacuum devours lint. After doing so, the thirteen-inch screen in front of them prompted her to make the necessary selections for the pictures. Pressing a sequence of buttons, they were told (yes, the machine actually spoke to them) that they would have thirty seconds between each photograph taken in order to change poses if desired. The first photograph would begin in approximately one minute. Looking in the narrow mirror above the screen, the pair looked at their reflections, almost simultaneously, reaching up to neatly arrange their hair.

"How do you think we should do these?" Kori inquired, secretly wanting to get a picture of her kissing the other woman right on the lips. That move might get her slapped. She nearly chuckled. *Wonder how Mayor Whitney would react to seeing **that** photo!*

Skylar glanced at her, noticing the faintly amused expression she wore but chose not to comment on it. At least she wouldn't right now. They probably only had about forty seconds left! "Not sure. Maybe a couple of goofy but the rest...not?" *So eloquently put Skylar!*

One eyebrow arched. Goofy? Did her friend who had never until night eaten junk food just utter the word goofy? Did she really know the definition of it? *I guess I'm about to find out.* Kori gave her agreement with a shake of her head. They quickly decided to do a not, then a goofy, then a not, a not, goofy, followed by a last not. Both women nodded succinctly. It sounded like a great plan. Now all they had to do was pull it off.

As the pleasant electronic female voice warned them that they had ten seconds left, Kori and Skylar posed for their first shot. Wrapping their arms around each other's shoulders as though they had been best friends all their lives, the two women brilliantly smiled for the small lens focused on them. They only had to wait a few more seconds.

FLASH!!!

Thirty seconds and counting, they moved to find a position for the next shot, quickly discovering what they were going to do for their first goofy picture. Sticking their tongues out as far out of their mouths as was possible, both blue and green eyes crossed. Kori and Skylar inclined their heads enough so that they were touching. Each one had a difficult time keeping still until the photo was taken because they desperately wanted to laugh, imagining how silly they looked.

FLASH!!!

For the next pose, they wrapped their arms around each other again, but this time they smiled without flashing any teeth.

FLASH!!!

For the next serious shot, they decided to get a little more intimate. More than a little surprised that she wasn't at all uncomfortable with the idea, Skylar scooted toward the middle of the short bench before the other woman settled onto her lap. Slipping long arms around Kori's waist as she

leaned back into her, Skylar perched her chin on a convenient shoulder. She was rather enjoying this contact and hated for the next flash to arrive. That was another surprise. *What are you doing to me Kori? You've surely put a spell on me.* While she decided to smile with her teeth showing, Kori chose the closed mouth beam.

FLASH!!!

It was goofy time. Reluctantly removing her bottom from a comfortable lap, Kori waited until Skylar scooted over before she reclaimed her seat. They discussed their next pose for a few precious seconds before they looked toward the camera and sucked their cheeks in until their lips resembled those of a fish. Well, if one could say that a fish possessed lips. Just for the heck of it, they raised their hands, lifted their first and index fingers, and presented the camera with four rousing peace signs.

FLASH!!!

Now for the last picture, serious number four. It was decided that they would press their cheeks ever so slightly together as they graced the waiting lens with what they referred to as half smiles. However, Kori had a trick up her short sleeve as she inwardly counted down until the camera would take the picture. Could she be slapped or yelled at for the move she was about to make? Oh, yes she definitely could but she was willing to take that risk! 5-4-3...Gently pressing two fingertips on Skylar's cheek, Kori turned the unresisting head in her direction and pressed her lips to the mayor's daughter's.

FLASH!!!

Although the picture had already been taken and the electronic voice was now informing them that the pictures were being made and that they would be done in just a few moments, their lips were still in an intimate position. So far, her cheek was sting free. In fact, unless it was just her imagination, Skylar's lips were firmly pressing into hers, and she could have sworn that she briefly felt a hand touch her side. Becoming a little bolder, Kori slipped her tongue through her lips and was just about to take a little sample of the incredibly soft ones on hers when they were suddenly detached. Damn.

As startled blue eyes gazed at slightly anxious green ones, silence reigned in the photo booth for long moments until the unexpected speaking of the voice belonging to the machine caused both women to jump.

"Please take your photos and thank you for your order. Have a nice day!" Chirped the fake female just before there was a loud ping sound and two sets of wallet size photos landed in a silver tray under the computer screen. Wanting something to do, Kori tore her eyes away from the other woman's and removed the two long strips of photographs, which would have to be separated with scissors. Wordlessly, she handed one copy to Skylar while wondering what could possibly be going through her mind. Without a doubt, she knew that Skylar had responded to the kiss, even it was only for three seconds.

"Thank you," the brunette quietly stated, lifting the photo sheet to let Kori know exactly what she was thanking her for. She lightly cleared her throat as an auburn head nodded without comment. Perhaps it was best to behave like the kiss hadn't occurred. Yes, that was the best solution. Turning to her new friend, Skylar pasted on a smile. "Shall we continue the tour now?"

Looking up at her, Kori attempted to read her mind but that proved impossible. She still had no idea what Skylar was thinking. One thing was obvious though. She didn't wish to discuss what had just transpired between them. *Okay, two can play that game*, Kori thought, feeling hurt all the same. Nodding again, she waited for Skylar to vacate the instant photo booth before following her out. Heading back to the go-kart, they wordlessly slipped inside, each now contemplating on what the other could be thinking but not wanting to be the first to inquire.

Placing her photographs on the floor of the go-kart, Kori then wrapped her hands around the steering wheel as she gazed ahead where the pharmacy was located. She made no move to start the vehicle as she furtively glanced toward Skylar, who was observing the photos in her hand. Kori sighed. She hated the tension that had settled between them and wanted more than anything right now for it to dissipate. *Forget the game. I'll gladly forfeit.*

Removing her hands from the wheel, Kori turned in her seat in order to face Skylar's, whose attention she now had. "Look, I'm sorry for what I did back there. I shouldn't have."

A few heartbeats passed before the brunette offered a reply. "Why did you?" she softly questioned.

Swallowing hard, Kori felt as though there was an un-peeled banana lodged in her throat. Should she answer with the truth? *And the truth will set you free.* Yeah, right. Kori almost smirked. Sometimes the truth just got you in a barrel full of trouble, which was a reason why a lot of people lied! However, she chose to be veracious.

Holding contact with inquisitive sapphire eyes, she answered, "Because I wanted to. I wanted to see how it felt to kiss you." To her relief, the other woman started smiling.

"And how did it feel?" Skylar asked in the same soft tone.

The banana returned with a vengeance. The brunette had yet to reveal her occupation. Surely, she must have been an attorney. Kori suddenly wished that she hadn't brought this subject up. What did it matter to Skylar anyway? She was getting married in the morning so why should she care how a stolen kiss felt for a virtual stranger?

Once more, Kori chose to behave the opposite of Pinocchio before he learned his lesson. "Though it was rather short, I enjoyed kissing you. Your lips are soft, warm, and even sweet. I imagine that might have something to do with the sundae." When the brunette chuckled, she started to grin. She could almost feel the tension melting away. What a relief. Kori realized that she was interested in knowing how the kiss felt to Skylar, so she tossed the woman's question back at her.

Naturally tanned cheeks reddened slightly. "How did it feel to be kissed by you?" Skylar asked, stalling. The other woman mutely nodded. How was she supposed to explain that a fleeting kiss from a female was the best kiss of her life? That neither Brad nor any man who preceded him had been responsible for her heart beginning to flutter and caused an onslaught of butterflies in her stomach? She could not and would not say that. *I just have to forget it*, Skylar lectured herself. *I'm going to become Brad's wife tomorrow. I have to think about that and put this inane attraction for another woman out of my head.*

Looking toward Kori, she nonchalantly replied, "It was nice."

Kori attempted to conceal her disappointment. She'd had her suspicions that Skylar had been more affected by their brief kiss but perhaps she was wrong. Nice. All she got in return was nice? No woman had ever told her that her kisses were nice. That even included the ones who referred to themselves as straight. Yes, her pride was most definitely wounded and she was tempted to pull Skylar into her arms and show her just how much more than nice a Kori kiss could be. However, she didn't want to push the possibility of being the recipient of a slap.

Kori tried to put on a happy face. "Good." She slowly nodded. "So...we should go then."

Skylar eagerly nodded, glad that they were no longer going to discuss kissing. "After the tour may I try one of these?" She tapped the frame of the go-kart.

"Oh, you want to drive?"

"Yes, I do. You never asked me if I wanted to. It looks like fun." Folding her arms over her chest and protruding her lower lip, Skylar pretended to pout.

Chuckling, Kori nodded, glad that her ultra conservative friend was loosening up. "I'm sorry hon." Reaching over, she patted the 'pouting' woman's back. "We'll get you one as soon as I finish giving you the tour." Green eyes brightened as Kori came up with what she thought to be a fantastic idea. "Hey! Why don't we race go-karts? That could be fun."

An interested smile lit up Skylar's face as she nodded. "Sounds like it. I'm in. I've never-

"Done that before. Yes, I know," Kori finished, a teasing smile on her lips. "Tonight there are a lot of firsts for you and I'm honored to play a part in that."

Briefly squeezing her hand, Skylar replied, "I'm honored to be experiencing these firsts because of and with you. Do you want to make this particular first a little more interesting?"

Cheeks glowing from the compliment and the affectionate touch, Kori shortly nodded. "Sure, I'm always up for more interesting. What did you have in mind?"

"A wager. The winner of the race gets a prize from the...non-winner."

Smiling broadly, Kori sat back in her seat knowing exactly what she would like for a prize from

Skylar. Of course, if she were to mention it she might actually earn that slap she had wondered about earlier. No, it was best to attempt to stay out of trouble. Looking at the other woman, Kori asked her what she would want if she were to win the race.

"You said that you're an artist right?"

"Yep. That's what I said." Well, she was an aspiring artist anyway since she had yet to truly sell any of her artwork. Though Kori had done numerous lines of work, ever since she was a child she had a fascination with drawing and starting from the age of eight proclaimed that she wanted to be a professional artist. Seventeen years later, it obviously hadn't occurred yet, but Kori wasn't giving up hope that her work would soon be showcased in an art gallery.

"Well, if I win I would like you to sketch me a picture. You get to choose whatever you draw. I just want an Eaton original." A bright smile on her face, Skylar winked at Kori.

Kori softly chuckled. "You've got a deal. Now let me see what I would like as a prize." Pausing, her expression grew thoughtful, the wheels in her head churning round and round. Looking at Skylar she said, "You know I *aspire* to be an artist but you haven't mentioned what it is that you do yet."

"I'm a dentist."

Immediately thinking of the comment she had made earlier concerning dentist's, Kori's expression turned sheepish. *And about as delightful and exciting as sitting in a dentist's office waiting to get a root canal.* "Oops. Sorry about what I said when we were discussing your choice of clothing. But I was referring to the procedure not those who perform it. I think dentist's are great!" Green eyes nearly rolled. *Let's not over exaggerate Kori.*

To Kori's relief, the other woman started to laugh. "It's fine Kori. I don't do root canals anyway. I'm in the cosmetic field of dentistry. So, if you want some veneers as a prize if you win the race then I'm your woman. And that's a pretty good prize since those tend to be expensive."

Kori chuckled while shaking her head. "Thank you but no thank you. I'm proud to say that I've never had any dental problems. Well I did have one filling when I was sixteen but that's all." She winked and the other woman grinned.

Leaning toward her, Skylar conspiratorially whispered, "That will be our little secret. I shan't ever tell another living breathing soul."

"I appreciate it," Kori answered in a whisper. "Do you like being a dentist?" She asked because the brunette's expression almost looked crestfallen at the divulgence of her occupation.

Skylar didn't give a prompt answer, her expression suddenly difficult to decipher. "It's quite lucrative. I have my own practice in Boston, which is where I reside now."

"But do you like it?"

"I've been doing it for five years. I should." Skylar tried to laugh but it sounded hollow to her own ears. Glancing at her friend, she noticed that the petite woman wasn't buying it either. She sighed. "Not particularly, no. I mean I don't detest being a dentist...I just don't love going to work."

Kori gazed at her quizzically. "Then why do it? Because of the money?"

Another long pause ensued before Skylar opened her mouth to speak. "Because of my father. You see he had a plan for all his children-my sister Elaine, my brother Derrick, and me. He originally wanted me to be just like my older sister. Go to college and graduate with a four-year degree, which we would do nothing with. Meet and marry a man who comes from a distinguished family, have children and stay at home with them. And he didn't mean just for the first few months. He meant until they're old enough to move out on their own. Elaine is living up to his plan perfectly with her unused degree, lawyer husband who comes from 'old money' and their four children. I on the other hand was different and he knew that so he edited his plan some by allowing me to continue schooling after the mandatory four years. He insisted that if I wanted to be a 'career woman' I could go into dentistry. More importantly, cosmetic dentistry since he deemed that I could make even more money in that field. So, I let him make my choices for me."

Not answering right away, Kori let what she had just been told sink in. It occurred to her that Weston Whitney was a control freak. Who would want their child to attend college only to become a housewife or as some would call it these days, a domestic engineer? Kori thought back to when Skylar had informed her of her wedding. It was crystal clear that she wasn't thrilled about her impending marriage so was that another choice she had allowed her father to make?

"Are you still allowing him to make choices for you?" Kori inquired as gently as she could manage. She didn't want the other woman to think that she was reprimanding her. Quite the contrary. Kori just wanted to understand the entire situation and help in anyway if it was feasible.

"What do you mean?"

"This marriage. Is it your idea or your father's?"

"During the fall Brad asked me to marry him and I said yes so what does that tell you?" Skylar retorted, beginning to sound defensive.

Though she heard the tone in Skylar's voice, Kori refused to back down. Perhaps she was sticking her nose where it didn't belong, but so be it. She desperately wanted to help this woman, whom she was beginning to realize had been kept in the dark for far too long by an oppressive parent. Kori was determined to pull her into the light.

"It doesn't really tell me what I want to know," Kori gently stated. "Do you love Brad? Do you love him with all your heart and soul? Are you going to burst if you don't get to say 'I do' to him soon?"

"I said I would marry him, so what do *you* think?"

"*I* think you're still evading my question. Do you love him passionately?"

"I love him," Skylar answered between clenched teeth.

"With passion?"

Skylar gave a short mute nod, looking for all the world like she wanted nothing more than to slug the woman sitting beside her.

Cocking her head to the side, Kori looked at her curiously. "Really? How can you love someone passionately while allowing them to make love to you?"

Skylar's expression changed into confusion. What in the hell was she talking about now?
"What?"

"Earlier you said-well you almost said-that you allowed Brad to make love to you. That sounds a little unromantic to me."

Based on the way her mouth kept opening and shutting, Skylar was having a difficult time getting it along with her voice box to work properly. Finally, she fixed the problem when she replied, "I didn't mean it like that."

"Then why didn't you continue with the thought instead of switching to 'Brad and I made love'?"

Sighing, Skylar slowly shook her head from right to left and then back again before she looked up at Kori. "Listen to me. I wouldn't be marrying Brad if I didn't love him."

"Just like you wouldn't be a dentist if you didn't love it?"

"Kori you don't know me so please just stay out of my business. I think you should worry about yourself, seeing as how you don't even have a reasonable place to call home."

Tearing her eyes away from glaring blue ones, Kori looked at the wheel of the go-kart. "Touché," she softly said. Starting the go-kart, she began to drive in silence. Kori continued the tour but didn't bother to point out the sites as she drove the go-kart at a snail's pace.

As they came upon the electronics section, Skylar glanced at the forlorn look on Kori's face and her heart nearly broke in two. Guilt seeping into her very bones, she released a soft sigh, regretting her recent words and behavior. Kori had only been trying to help and she repaid her concern with animosity. *No wonder I don't have many friends. I don't know how to treat them.*

Laying a hand on Kori's shoulder, she quietly asked her to stop. Wordlessly, the petite woman obeyed, the go-kart coming to a swift halt. Keeping her eyes straight ahead, Kori waited for the

other woman to speak. She was both hurt and angry and therefore did not want to look at Skylar right then. Was that childish? Maybe. Did she care? Nope.

Removing her hand from Kori's shoulder, Skylar placed it on her chin and gently tugged until reluctant green eyes made contact with her blue ones. Noticing that her finger was beginning to stroke the smooth skin beneath it, Skylar immediately dropped her hand since she had Kori's attention.

"I'm sorry Kori. You were trying to help me and I snapped at you. For that I sincerely apologize and I hope you can forgive me for behaving like an ass."

Slowly, a smile curved Kori's lips. "All is forgiven. And in my opinion you didn't actually behave like an ass." She started to grin as she added, "But if you don't mind my saying so, you have a great one!"

Blushing and laughing at the same time, Skylar playfully nudged the smaller woman with her shoulder. "You're too much."

"Would you like a bit of me to be shaved off?"

A dark head quickly shook. "No, never."

◆◆◆◆◆

Within thirty minutes each woman was sitting in her own go-kart, ready to start the race. They had strategically attached blown up bright red balloons to the highly polished floor, creating a track that led around the store starting at the arcade and ending there. The rules stated that for every balloon that they broke (if any) they would have to talk about themselves non-stop for one minute. Originally, Skylar didn't like this rule since she was positively sure that she would bust a few balloons but Kori who unknowingly had the other woman wrapped around her little finger got her way.

The first woman to successfully complete the course and make it to the finish line would receive a prize from the other. Skylar of course, wanted a drawing from her new friend. Thinking that Skylar needed to loosen up just a tad bit more (okay, tad bit might have been an understatement) Kori came up with the idea for her to perform karaoke if she won the race. Skylar wanted to object that since she had never excelled at singing, but one look at that adorable pleading face and she couldn't say no. No doubt about it, the little one was dangerous for her. Skylar just hadn't decided whether that was a bad or good thing.

Looking across to the brunette, Kori graced her with a broad grin. She knew that she had an advantage since Skylar had never driven a go-kart before and she planned on exploiting that. She fully intended to win this race with little if any competition and then Skylar would owe her a song. Yes, she was bad. Very bad.

"You ready?" she asked, her hands already gripping the steering wheel.

Skylar nodded. "As I'll ever be." Kori had showed her how to operate the go-kart and she'd taken a practice drive around the course before they put the balloons down, so hopefully she wouldn't make a complete fool of herself. She would have crossed her fingers for luck, but then it would have been even more difficult to drive. Plus, the finger-crossing method had never seemed to work for Skylar.

"Okay, on the count of three we'll go."

Kori started the countdown when she was interrupted. "Wait a minute. Do we go after you say three or during the utterance of three?"

A faint smile touched Kori's lips. The brunette looked as serious and focused as a participant in the Indy 500 would be. "After."

Nodding, Skylar asked her to restart counting before returning her attention to the 'road'. One, two, three, and they were off!

It didn't take long before the race was over and of course, Kori was the champion. She showed what great sportsmanship she had by jumping out of her go-kart and dancing around it as she whooped, hollered and gave herself a few rousing high-fives. A couple of minutes later, a smirking Skylar pulled up to the woman jumping across the floor like a few hot potatoes were rolling around in her pajama bottoms. Suddenly thinking about it, she reminded herself to clean up the bit of mess she created while careening through aisle three, hardware. Some hammers, pliers, screwdrivers, and nails were currently taking up residence on the floor.

Leaning back in her go-kart, Skylar folded her arms over her chest as she watched the other woman in amusement. Finally, Kori finished her happy dance and turned toward the brunette with a triumphant smile on her face. When she made it a point to inform Skylar that she had won, she earned another smirk along with a brief nod.

"Yes, I realize that you did." Unfolding her arms, Skylar pointed an accusing finger. "Though you know it was unfair."

"Unfair?" Kori looked as innocent as a newborn lamb. At least she attempted to. "How so? I think I won fair and square."

"It was unfair because I've never raced before. You had an advantage over me."

The smaller woman shrugged. "Tough luck Doc."

Skylar chuckled while getting out of the go-kart. "You are merciless!"

"Yep, that be me. Kori the Merciless." She grinned devilishly. "So, I believe that you owe me a song. Plus, how many balloons did you pop?"

Briefly, the dentist thought about lying but then convinced herself that Kori would find out the truth anyway. She sighed. "Four. And you?" She already knew the answer. Kori cruised through the course like someone who had been behind the wheel of go-karts since childbirth. The auburn haired cutie hadn't killed a single balloon. Skylar fought hard to keep a pout from showing. That was so very unfair.

"One," Kori answered after a moment.

A dark eyebrow arched. "One? When? I didn't hear it. I wasn't *that* far behind you." She knew, she just *knew* that her likable competitor hadn't burst any balloons.

Kori faintly grinned. "It was one. Trust me."

A few wordless seconds ticked by before Skylar walked up to the short woman and planted a butterfly kiss on her cheek. "Thanks," she said while smiling.

"What for?" Kori wished that she could go through the duration of her life without having to wash her face again.

The brunette shrugged, still smiling. "Just thanks."

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Before they proceeded to the electronics section for karaoke, the pair decided to check out the arcade first. Skylar was more than happy to do this since it gave her the opportunity to stall having to sing. By no means was she a horrible singer, but she would never be chosen to compete on the brand new Star Search.

Having brought along a twenty dollar bill (she refused to let Kori pay since she had purchased their pictures) Skylar found the token machine and inserted the money. Within seconds gold colored coins about the size of quarters made clinking sounds as they fell into a plastic cup she had positioned in the holder. Splitting the eighty coins between them, they started to try out the numerous games in the arcade. Jurassic Park pinball turned out to among Skylar's favorites and she ended up nearly spending five dollars worth of tokens on it. She was quite pleased when she made the top players' list and eagerly punched in her initials.

Announcing that she would return shortly, Kori left the arcade just as Skylar strolled over to play Tetris. She made it all the way to level four and then lost as her carefully stacked blocks reached the top of the screen. Softly growling in frustration, she was about to insert another token, determined to make it onto the top players' list on this game as well. It was quickly occurring to Skylar that these games were lots of fun and she made plans to buy one of those Xbox's her nieces and nephews were always raving about. They might even sell them there at Shopaholics.

Before Skylar could successfully put another token in the slot, she found a small dark brown square held in a petite hand placed in front of her. Instructed to bite, she did so without any comments or questions. As she chewed the smooth sweetness of rich chocolate caressed her

tongue. Blue eyes closed in ecstasy as Skylar released a moan that could almost be described as passionate. Swallowing, she took another bite, this one much bigger treat out of the treat and moaned again, unknowingly making the woman standing closely behind her quite damp in a certain place.

Kori swallowed though there was nothing in her mouth except teeth, gums, and a panting tongue. "Um, I take it that you approve?"

"Oh God yes!" Gently grabbing Kori's wrist, Skylar brought the woman's hand closer so that her mouth could swipe the remaining bit of fudge left. Lost in a chocolate haze, she didn't even realize it when she began to idly lick Kori's fingers clean of the fudge. She only came to her senses when she heard a soft mewl coming from behind her. Her eyes widening in shock, she immediately dropped Kori's hand before turning around to face her. "Uh, sorry about that Kori. Didn't mean to...you know."

Despite the fact that she was even damper now, Kori managed a shaky grin. "Oh, hey it's okay. I rarely object when a beautiful woman licks my fingers. Even if she is only after the chocolate." The grin became a little steadier, though the wetness increased. *I'm going to need a few minutes alone with my friend lefty tonight!*

Although she returned the grin, Skylar looked thoroughly embarrassed by what she had just done. She had never licked anyone's fingers in her entire life (even her own) and was loath to admit that she had sort of enjoyed doing it to Kori. Okay, more than sort of but no one else including the party licked ever had to know that. *What is happening to me? Now I enjoy licking a woman's fingers? I'm losing it.*

Coming to Skylar's rescue, Kori pointed toward the air hockey table while asking if she would like to play. Relieved, the brunette nodded as she grabbed her token cup and hurried over to the game, which she had to yet to play. After Kori explained the basic rules and goal of the game, each woman inserted two tokens each in order to play it. The first person to score seven goals would be declared the winner.

After a coin was flipped, it was decided that Kori would go first since she called heads and that was what came up. Grabbing her red mallet, Kori placed the puck in front of her and started to strike it when she changed her mind at the last moment. Lifting the mallet from the table, she looked across it to her curious opponent and offered a smile. Something in her smile must have alarmed Skylar because she commenced to rapidly shake her head back and forth.

"What have you got cooking in that devious head of yours now?"

A soft chuckle departed Kori's lips. "What makes you think I have something cooking up there?"

"I just have this feeling. This very strong feeling that you're about to say something...an idea perhaps that I might not agree with."

Kori smirked. "As if that's anything new."

Skylar revealed that she could smirk too. "Ha ha. What do you want to say? Come on. Out with it Kori."

"Well I have an idea to make playing air hockey juicy. I just created it." Kori appeared to be pleased with her imaginative self.

Two dark brows slowly lifted, as the expression on Skylar's face became cautious. "How juicy?"

"I propose Truth or Dare air hockey. Here's how it goes. For every goal one of us makes we get to ask the other person a question and they must answer that question."

"And if they refuse?"

Kori grinned mischievously. "That's where it gets *really* juicy. If the party absolutely refuses to answer the question then they must remove one article of clothing or a slipper."

Looking down at herself, Skylar quickly counted. "But I'm only wearing six items and there are seven points total in this game."

"Six? Funny, I'm wearing five and we both have on tops, bottoms, underwear, and slippers." She held up one hand with five outstretched digits, which she wiggled. "That definitely makes five."

"Thank you so very much for the mathematical lesson Professor Eaton, but I am indeed wearing six items." Skylar didn't bother to reveal what the elusive sixth item was.

With hands on her hips, she stood silently waiting as Kori proceeded to do a visual inspection of her attire from across the table. It only took a few seconds before emerald eyes lit up and Kori pointed her mallet at the other woman's chest victoriously. "Oh, your boob holsters! That makes six! You know," pausing, she cocked her head to the side looking thoughtful, "I'd wondered how they stayed so high and motionless. Didn't realize that they were still locked up."

Skylar didn't have time to be embarrassed seeing as how she broke out in rambunctious laughter. What made the situation even funnier was that she knew that Kori hadn't meant to tease. Skylar's inert breasts had truly mystified her. Boob holsters! That was a cute and humorous way of describing a brassiere. She would have to remember that one. Though, Skylar highly doubted that she would use the bra synonym on anyone that she was affiliated with. *I need more laid back people in my life. I need Kori.* Thinking over that last thought, Skylar realized that it was true. She didn't want to lose this woman who had brought so much into her life within such a little amount of time. Kori was quickly becoming someone special to her.

"So now you know the secret," Skylar replied as her laughing fit winded down. She wiped at the corners of her eyes where a couple of joyous tears had gathered.

Nodding, Kori laughed, delighted that she had inadvertently caused Skylar to laugh. She enjoyed hearing the sound. "Okay, so you're wearing six. To answer your question I doubt that you'll pass

on seven questions, don't you? I know that I don't plan on passing on any."

Skylar released a dramatic sigh. "Alright. I have another inquiry before we begin. What kind of questions do we ask? Anything?"

Kori grinned so broadly that nearly every tooth in her mouth was put on display. "I'm so glad that you asked that question. This is where it gets even juicier. The questions must be R rated. Not even PG-13 is acceptable. R rated," she repeated, evidently liking to say that. She watched, as the other woman's expression plainly read something akin to, 'not in this lifetime!' "C'mon, Sky. Live a little. Be brave."

"I think I've been plenty brave tonight thank you very much! No way am I playing strip Truth or Dare R rated air hockey!"

"This is your bachelorette party, therefore we *have* to make up for the absence of strippers and naughty banter some kind of way! And you've been brave doing what? Eating a hamburger and racing go-karts? You haven't even performed karaoke or given your four minute long oral autobiography because you popped four balloons. In fact, I'm even willing to waive that speech if you do this."

Skylar's interest was suddenly piqued. She'd actually rather have sung then talk nonstop about herself for four minutes. And she would also rather take her chances with this 'juicy' game. "Really?"

"Yes, really. We can forget about the speeches. However you still owe me a song."

After a moment's silence Skylar nodded. "Deal." Positioning her mallet on the table, she said, "Let's play then."

Gracing her with a delighted grin, Kori put the puck into position before lining her mallet up behind it. Using a light tap, she sent it smoothly sailing over the centerline into the other woman's domain. Skylar managed to strike the puck and sent it back in Kori's direction. Closely watching its progress, Kori hit the round skinny object with enough force to send it flying across the table and successfully into the brunette's goal. The electronic scoring unit attached to the table gave her one point. Hearing a soft curse, Kori bit her lower lip to keep from smiling.

"Seems I get to ask you a question." She grinned, green eyes twinkling with mischief. "More importantly, an R rated question."

Blue eyes rolled. "Yes Kori?"

"What are the names of all the lovers you've had?"

Skylar refused to blush. She wasn't going to give this albeit adorable--little deviant the satisfaction. "How tricky, asking two questions yet it sounds like one." The other woman smiled and she smirked. "However, I will tell you. First Greg and then Brad." She placed her mallet on

the table again. "Shall we proceed?"

Only two? And you allow the second one--your fiancé-- to make love to you and the last time that happened was almost a month ago? Kori curiously wondered about her friend. She was starting to seriously question whether Skylar enjoyed sex at all. That would be a shame if she didn't.

"Do I sense a pattern here? You only sleep with people who have four letters in their names?" Kori inquired, looking thoroughly amused.

Skylar glanced up at her and unthinkingly replied, "You have four letters in yours."

The petite woman's expression switched to intrigue. "Is that your way of telling me that we're gonna get it on?"

"Oh God!" Skylar slapped a hand over her face as she slowly shook her head. When she thought that she heard a chuckle, she peeked through her fingers at the other woman, but Kori suddenly found something interesting about her slippers. Dropping her hand, Skylar sighed. "That's not...I didn't...you shouldn't..."

"Keep trying. I'm sure you'll find the words you're looking for sometime this century." How nice. She obtained another smirk just for her!

"I didn't mean to say that," Skylar finally articulated.

"And what *did* you mean to say?"

Silence fell and the brunette slowly shrugged. "I'm not sure actually. But I wasn't propositioning you or anything like that. Honestly."

Chuckling, her friend nodded. "I know you weren't. It was just funny the way you put it. Sorry for teasing you hon."

Skylar smiled. "It's fine." She indicated the air hockey table. "So, are we going to play?"

"Sure. It's your serve."

Pulling the puck out of the goal, Skylar placed it on the table, trying her best to center it. Using Kori's technique, she lightly struck the puck and watched as it barely made it over the centerline before a swift mallet caused it to make a U-turn. This time Skylar was prepared. Focusing on the goal, she hit the puck in its direction and before Kori could block it, it slipped inside. With a triumphantly shouted 'yes', Skylar jumped up and down twice before coming to her senses. She grinned and Kori jovially chuckled although the score was now tied.

"Very good Sky! You have a question for me?"

The brunette nodded. "Indeed. My question for you is the same one you asked me." When Kori

responded that she would go in order, Skylar wondered just how many lovers there had been. She was about to find out as the other woman started naming names using her fingers.

"Let's see..." Kori started, looking thoughtful. "My first was Charlotte, then Rebecca, Mandy...no Melanie...no her name was Melody!" A wide smile spread across her lips. "Such a sweet name for a sweet girl." Skylar attempted to return the smile, but it came out looking rather feeble as she briefly thought of Kori's hands all over sweet Melody. She refused to question why the thought made her sick to her stomach. "And then," Kori went on, obviously not catching on to her friend's condition, "there was Lindsay, Vanessa, Delores, Tia, Helen, and then the last one was of course Anna."

Nearly speechless, all Skylar could successfully enunciate was, "Wow."

Kori nodded, correctly guessing the thoughts roaming around in her companion's head. "Yes, I know it sounds like a lot, but they were spread out over a nine year period if that makes it any easier for you to deal with." She sincerely hoped that Skylar didn't have a major problem with the amount of people she had slept with. Kori wasn't at all embarrassed that there had been nine sexual partners in her life starting from her high school days. She cherished every one of those women and her experiences with them, including Anna who had kicked her out on her rear.

"So that's one a year?"

Kori chuckled. "If I had traded in one girlfriend for a new one every New Year's, yeah. However, it wasn't quite that neat."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-five. I was sixteen my first time with Charlotte," she added before the other woman had the chance to inquire. "And you were?"

"Eighteen. And you know that was with Greg. We were prosaic by having sex for the first and last time on prom night."

Surprise flickered across Kori's features. That was the first *and* last time? And that was how long ago? "How old are you Sky?" The petite woman asked in a casual sounding voice.

Absently tossing her mallet from palm to palm, the brunette answered, "Thirty-two." Skylar indicated the air hockey table while asking if they were going to continue the game.

Briefly raising the hand holding her own mallet, Kori distractedly replied, "In just a minute. How old were you your second time?"

"Thirty-two." Taking note of the younger woman's expression, Skylar wondered where all the questions were leading. More than a little self-conscious with discussing this section of her life, she again asked if they could proceed with their game. "Besides you're supposed to ask questions when you score a goal."

She offered Kori a smile, hoping that she would agree to continue now.

Kori nodded, though there were more questions hanging from the tip of her tongue, which she was dying to have answered. Obtaining the puck, she sent it soaring toward Skylar as her brain processed this latest information. Skylar was eighteen the first time she had sex and then didn't have an encore until she was thirty-two. That meant there was a fourteen-year gap with no sexual activity. Was it so horrible the first time that she couldn't bear to try it again until over a decade had passed?

As the puck found its way back to her, Kori tapped it with her mallet though she was barely paying attention to the game. And evidently, Skylar wasn't enjoying it too much if any now considering it had been over three weeks since she and the man she intended to marry had made love?

Kori hit the puck again and it slid untouched into the other woman's goal. Bottom line, she didn't care much for sex. The million-dollar question was why.

"Now you may ask me a question," Skylar stated, attempting to look calm as she subconsciously held her breath. There was no telling what her small friend might say next. She was quickly learning that Kori was a verbally unrepressed person.

Already knowing what she wanted to ask, Kori readily opened her mouth to speak. "When was the last time you came?"

"Came where?"

Kori shrugged. "You can tell me where it was or not. I just want to know when."

Skylar's brow knit in confusion. "I'm afraid that I don't understand what you're talking about."

Kori gave her a look, which was pitiful enough to make one burst into tears. Placing her mallet on the table, she then gripped the edges of it as she simply gazed toward the other woman for a few hushed seconds. "Tell me you know what an orgasm is honey," Kori softly questioned.

Bronzed cheeks turned a light shade of crimson as Skylar wordlessly nodded that she did, causing her companion to breathe a sigh of relief. In that moment, the brunette felt rather naïve.

"Good. Came is another way of saying that you've had an orgasm. As in you come when you reach the highest peak. Understand that?"

Skylar nodded again. "Yes, I do."

"Okay, so what I want to know is when was the last time that you had an orgasm."

"Never have."

Temporarily rendered speechless as she stared in astonishment, Kori was positive that she would have ceased to breathe had it not been something she did automatically. And she would have collapsed to the ground had she been one prone to fainting spells. Surely, she hadn't heard Skylar correctly. Surely, the woman had not just admitted that in all her thirty-two years-albeit the first dozen or so shouldn't have counted-she had never, not even once had an orgasm. The mere thought of the woman before her never having reached a climax was incomprehensible. However, the pieces of this puzzle were starting to come together.

"You're telling me that you've never come? You've never reached the state of sexual fulfillment?"

A dark head slowly shook. "That's correct," Skylar admitted.

"Doesn't that bother you?" It could have been Kori's imagination, but her friend didn't appear upset about being a thirty-two year old woman that had slept with two men and never achieved an orgasm.

"Sex isn't important to me so no it doesn't bother me that I've never...you know."

Green eyes widened. Kori could hardly believe that this conversation was taking place. *Well that explains why she allowed her fiancé to make love to her three weeks and four days ago. She obviously doesn't care if they do it or not.* That part of the mystery was solved. Kori just needed to know *why* Skylar's attitude toward sex was so apathetic.

Before Kori spoke again, Skylar apprehended the puck, wanting to continue the game and drop the subject of sex, something that had never interested her. "Ready to continue?" she asked.

"Yeah, shoot." Kori grabbed her mallet from the table.

Relieved, Skylar struck the puck, watching as it sailed down the table and right into Kori's goal without the small woman even attempting to block it. Skylar was about to say something when her friend obtained the puck and then tossed it into the goal again, again and then three times after that. Immediately, the brunette's side of the scoreboard rapidly blinked seven, declaring her the winner.

Skylar looked across to the other woman in bewilderment. "What did you do that for?"

Kori tossed her mallet on the table and walked around it toward Skylar, choosing to lean against the air hockey table next to her. "I don't want to play anymore so congratulations you win. I rather we have a talk." The expression on her face was a combination of wonderment and compassion.

"About?" Though she already had an inkling what 'about' was.

"Well to put it bluntly sex and your lack of interest in having it." When Skylar started to turn away, Kori reached up and gently cupped her cheek, waiting until blue eyes connected with her

own. "I want to help you Sky. I just need you to try to open up to me."

The tall woman shook her head, trying to ignore the soft warmth pressed against her face. "Thank you, but I don't need any help. I don't particularly enjoy sex. It's not that big of a deal."

"Not that big of a deal? Honey, making love can be a beautiful intimate heart pounding experience shared between two people. And I gather that it has never been that way for you. I'd like to figure out why."

"Not everyone enjoys sex Kori."

"Sure and among those people are nuns and monks." She ignored the smirk that comment earned her. "Were Greg and Brad aware that you've never had an orgasm during intercourse?"

Though she did not want to be having this conversation, Skylar figured that it was inevitable. So, the best thing to do was to answer Kori's questions and get this over with. "The one time I did it with Greg, I told him that I had one and most of the time with Brad I've done the same thing."

"So you faked it?"

"Faked it?" Skylar looked almost confused as she had when Kori used the word come in the place of orgasm.

"Yes. You know, pretended you were having an orgasm while making love."

"How would I go about doing that?" The brunette asked, sounding curious.

Okay, perhaps you don't know. "Have you ever seen an R rated movie?" Not surprisingly, Skylar shook her head in the negative. "So it's conceivable that you've never witnessed anyone else having an orgasm or at least acting like they were in a movie or something such as that." Again, she shook her head, beginning to look even more curious. "Okay, have you seen *When Harry Met Sally*?"

"That's a movie right? I think I've heard of it."

Kori slowly nodded. If she didn't know any better she would have sworn that her new friend had spent the majority of her life living underneath a rock on a deserted island far far away from any land that was inhabited by other human beings. It didn't make any sense for anyone to be this clueless. What must life have been like growing up in the Whitney household? Kori had an image of Mayor Whitney putting bars on all the windows and only letting his children out every so often to get a breath of fresh air.

"It's a very good movie, among my favorites. You should check it out. Anyway, there is a scene in it where Meg Ryan-you have heard of her correct?"

Skylar eagerly nodded, glad to finally know something. "Yes, she's that blonde actress, isn't

she?"

Kori gave her an unreadable look. "Uh huh. Yep, that's Meg. The *blonde* actress in Hollywood," pausing, she took a deep breath. "Anyway, in this particular scene her character and Billy Crystal's, character are discussing sex in a diner. During the discussion, he basically tells her that he knows when a woman is faking it--meaning an orgasm-- so she fakes one right there at their table and does an incredibly good job because it sounded so genuine."

"How? I mean, how can you fake that?"

Kori hopped onto the air hockey table choosing to sit in front of the other woman. Gazing up at Skylar, she unhurriedly allowed a sensuous smile to curve her lips while her friend looked back quizzically. A low very faint moan started in her throat gaining volume second by second until Kori was moaning audibly enough to be heard next door at Snack Sity. Throwing her head back, she lightly caressed her throat before heading downward until petite hands were cupping a heaving bosom, squeezing the globes of flesh rhythmically. Meanwhile, Skylar had to snap her mouth closed because she was on the verge of drooling. Her heart rate picked up considerable speed as she observed the scene before her.

Half-lidded eyes looking toward the ceiling, a wet tongue emerged between Kori's lips, the tip beginning to trace around them. "Ooh, God yes," she softly intoned, now tweaking her nipples through her top, knowing that sapphire eyes were paying rapt attention to everything she was doing. "Mmm, yes that's it...ooh, yes! Yes! Mmmm, Skylar I love it when you're deep inside me...please don't stop...don't stop!" Kori's hips gyrated on the air hockey table as her hands abandoned her breasts and slid down her stomach and in between her parted thighs, fingers languidly stroking the apex of them through the fabric of her pajamas. Bringing her head forward, emerald eyes connected with sapphire, immediately recognizing the look. Desire. *Gotcha.*

"Oh, yeah, ooooh yeah, faster Sky...I'm gonna come for you baby...I'm coming...mmmm...do me baby...harder...harder..." Her breath coming in spurts, Kori's hips picked up their pace as she ground against her fingers, pleased that Skylar was keeping eye contact with her all the while. "Uuuh, ooh, that's it...that's it..." Her whole body moving on top of the table, Kori squeezed her thighs together, trapping her hands between them. Breaking eye contact, she tossed her head back again, releasing a guttural moan between glossy parted lips. "Yees, ooh yes, yes, hell YEES!!! Ooh, Sky, oh, oh..." Gasping, Kori rested her chin against her chest as she allowed her thighs to relax. After a few seconds passed, she looked up and caught an obviously speechless and still brunette staring at her. If the quick movement of her chest was any indication, she was breathing faster than normal. Very good.

"Was it as good for you as it was for me?" Producing an amazingly sweet smile, Kori leaned forward and lightly pecked her immobile friend on the cheek. "I do believe that someone in this arcade owes me a karaoke performance and I'm ready for it," she stated in her usual tone of voice. Jumping down from the table, she grabbed Skylar's limp hand. "So, let's get going."

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Concluded in Part 2

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ This Moment On ~

by Ambrosia

Disclaimers: Although these characters may have some resemblance to certain characters we know and love, they solely belong to me, myself, and the other one ;)

Subtext: If intimate relations between those belonging to the same gender in any way makes you uncomfortable then you need not proceed any further. I would also insist that those under 18 years of age not proceed any further as well, but let's be honest-would you really listen to me? I can only suggest that the younger readers (17 and under) please bow out now ;)

Strong Language/Violence: A lil' bit of the former but none of the latter. We're keeping the peace in this particular piece. By the way, there will be some borderline explicit sexual verbalization happening. Consider it Sex Ed. for adults ;-)

Feedback: Feedback is welcomed and loved. If you feel so inclined to do so, you may send me some at SumrBrezze@aol.com.

Gratitude: Thank you Shania Twain for your assistance in the making of this lil' story. I don't personally know the Canadian beauty, but unbeknownst to her (unless she's an avid reader of fan fiction) she did give me a few ideas. So muchas gracias Shania! ;-)

Other Stuff: This story mainly takes place in a department store called Shopaholics. Now as far as I know (I tried to find one) there isn't a store that has that name so I will hereby call it my store! And as far as I'm concerned, it kicks Wal-Mart, Target, and K-mart all rolled into one bootay's! Bwhahahaha! Okay, I'm reeeeeeally not as crazy as I sound...honest! ;) Anyhoo, enough of my rambling. On with the tale!

Arriving at the electronics section, Kori pulled the go-kart to a halt and turned toward her friend who had yet to utter a word since before the show she put on in the arcade. Since Skylar was looking straight ahead, Kori called her name to get her attention. However, when she didn't respond Kori had to call her twice more before blue eyes blinked and glanced in her direction questioningly.

"Are you okay? You're pretty quiet."

Nodding, Skylar briefly smiled. "Yes, I'm fine. I was just thinking."

"Penny for them? Quarter even?"

Smiling again--although this time for a longer period-- the brunette shook her head. "I'm not putting them up for sale just yet."

Returning the smile, Kori nodded. "That's fine," pausing, she leaned toward the other woman. "So are you ready to do it?"

"Do it?" Skylar very nearly whispered.

"Yeah, do it. To show you what a nice girl I can be I'll do it with you." Skylar started to speak then closed her mouth, looking reflective and a little puzzled. Kori barely held in a giggle. "I figure the sooner you do it the sooner you can get it over with." She indicated some equipment set up on a shelf. "There's the karaoke machine."

Blue eyes glanced to what she was referring to. "Oh! Right. I'm supposed to sing." Skylar nodded. "Yes, I'm ready."

That captive giggle nearly breaking free, Kori coughed in the hopes of masking it. Evidently, it worked because Skylar didn't look in the least bit suspicious. "What did you think I was talking about?"

For a moment, the dentist resembled a deer caught in the headlights of an approaching mack truck. "Exactly what you *were* talking about." Not wanting to wait for a response, Skylar jumped out of the go-kart and headed in the direction of the karaoke machine, trying to look casual. She thought she detected a giggle but when she glanced over her shoulder toward the other woman, her expression was sober.

"Have any ideas on what you would like to sing?" Kori asked, sidling up to Skylar. "Do you listen to music?"

Fingering one of the microphones attached to the karaoke machine, the brunette nodded. "Yes, I do. My favorite is country."

Green eyes brightened with both surprise and delight. "Really? I love country. Well some anyway. Who are some of your favorite artists?"

Skylar thought for a moment before answering. "I like LeAnn Rimes, Reba McEntire, Shania Twain, Faith Hill, and Lonestar."

"You have great taste." Smiling, Kori began to leaf through a book she found sitting next to the karaoke equipment. Using her index finger, she scrolled down a particular page until she found a possibly good song for them to perform as a duet. Showing her selection to Skylar, she asked her if she would like to sing it.

"Perfect. That's one of my favorite songs by Shania." She smiled. "Which part do you want?"

"Which do *you* want? It's your party so you get to choose." Kori winked and the other woman's smile broadened.

Skylar wanted to sing as little as was possible. "In that case I'll take Bryan's lines. I don't think he sings as much."

"Hon, I think we sing a lot of it concurrently." Chuckling, Kori located the correct disk and inserted it into the machine. It took her and Skylar a few minutes to figure out just how the tall rectangular box worked and when they did it was time to start their short concert. After they picked up the corded microphones, Kori pressed a button and the music to the song began to play over the speakers. Words appeared on the small screen built into the karaoke machine, but neither woman needed to look because they knew the lyrics by heart. Instead, they looked toward one another.

Waiting for the precise moment to do so, Kori began to sing and Skylar discovered just how well she could do so. She was instantly mesmerized by the younger woman's voice.

*I just swear that I'll always be there. I'd give anything and everything and I will always care.
Through weakness and strength, happiness and sorrow, for better, for worse, I will love you with
every beat of my heart.*

*From this moment life has begun
From this moment, you are the one
Right beside you is where I belong
From this moment on*

*From this moment I have been blessed
I live only for your happiness
And for your love, I'd give my last breath
From this moment on*

*I give my hand to you with all my heart
Can't wait to live my life with you can't wait to start
You and I will never be apart
My dreams came true because of you*

*From this moment as long as I live
I will love you, I promise you this
There is nothing I wouldn't give
From this moment on
Ooooh*

*You're the reason I believe in love
And you're the answer to my prayers from up above
All we need is just the two of us*

My dreams came true because of you

*From this moment as long as I live
I will love you, I promise you this
There is nothing I wouldn't give
I will love you (I will love you)
As long as I live
From this moment on (on)
Mmmmmmmmm*

"Well...that was actually not so bad. Nice really," Skylar quietly admitted to the microphone still in her hand. She had a difficult time meeting Kori's eyes because if that happened she might take the smaller woman in her arms and never want to let go. Their duet was so powerful that she almost felt that they were truly singing to each other and meaning every single word. "You have a beautiful voice, Kori. You really do."

Placing her fingertips under Skylar's chin, Kori prompted her to raise her head until they were face to face. Tenderly, she smiled. "You're beautiful period." As she leaned forward, Skylar thought that she was about to kiss her on the lips but Kori missed them when her mouth landed on a smooth cheek instead. She also missed the disappointment that flashed across Skylar's face.

"I...I dig you Sky."

Though she had never heard dig used in that context, the brunette knew what she meant and a smile graced her lips. "And I dig you too Kori."

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Laying on their respective sleeping bags outside of Kori's temporary tent home, she and Skylar chatted about this and that. Since Kori already knew a little about hers, Skylar asked her about her family situation. Her parents met during the following fall after having graduated from high school, conceived their 'accidental miracle' within a couple of months, and promptly married before Kori's grandfather had the opportunity to threaten Jared Eaton with one of his numerous shotguns.

They remained married for the next seven years, mainly trying to stay a couple for the sake of their daughter, until ultimately they both decided that it wasn't working out and amicably divorced. Although they truly loved each other, it wasn't a deep romantic love one should have for their spouse. Three years later, Jared had to move to Boston because his job relocated there. However, he still called, saw, and kept his daughter on a regular basis. In fact, for the first few weeks of every summer and on alternate winter and spring breaks, Kori went to stay with him up until her senior year.

Meeting the love of his life not long after arriving in Boston, Jared married her the following year and they had two children, first a boy and then a girl two years afterwards. At first, Kori attempted to resist the new woman in her father's life but soon couldn't help but to like Melissa

and then grew to love her. From the first moment she laid eyes on them, she adored her younger siblings Daniel and Alison. They became the main reasons she couldn't wait to go to Boston and visit.

Claire, Kori's mother finally remarried a couple of years ago to the wonderful man who had courted her for over half a decade prior. Roy had a grown daughter of his own, but he and Claire didn't have any children together. Kori's mother once humorously told her that she had been in labor with her for twenty-two hours so she was the only miracle she needed.

Skylar smiled, wishing that her family were similar to Kori's. She would love to be happy to see her siblings and be closer with them as well as her parents. "Sounds like you have a nice family. That's terrific," she momentarily paused. "I have a question though."

"What's that?"

"Surely, you would be welcome at mother's or your father's house so why are you choosing to stay in a department store? Do they know you're here?"

Sitting up on the sleeping bag, Kori folded her legs underneath her. "No, I haven't told them yet that Anna and I parted ways so of course they still think we live together. I'll let them know when I get a new place. Until then, I just hope they don't call my former address to find out from Anna that I don't live there anymore. I called Mom yesterday from a public phone and pretended I was at home so that might deter her from calling in the next few days. The reason I haven't asked to live with either of them is probably because I'm too stubborn and don't want to move back home, even if it's just temporary, to live with my parents." Kori shrugged. "I don't like that idea."

"I don't know your parents, but based on what you've told me about them I know that they'd love to have you. Your stepparents too."

A wistful smile on her face, Kori nodded. "I know they would too. I just wouldn't feel right going home again unless it was a visit."

"Moving in for a week or two would be a visit in a sense..."

The petite woman softly chuckled and shook her curly head. "Still ain't gonna happen Sky."

Shrugging, Skylar moved until she was laying on her back and folded her hands beneath her head. "Well I tried." Glancing at the other woman she winked and earned another chuckle.

Reaching out, Kori lightly squeezed her shoulder. "Yes, you did and I thank you. Be right back." Instead of getting up and walking, she crawled toward her tent and disappeared inside for a few moments. Though still lying on her back, Skylar craned her neck so that she could look toward the tent, but since the flap was down, she wasn't able to look inside. However, she heard Kori moving around in there. When Kori reappeared, Skylar reluctantly averted her eyes after having caught a hint of firm bouncing flesh since the petite woman's Pooh Bear shirt had fell forward

due to her crawling position.

With a tan backpack large enough to use for camping purposes, Kori repositioned herself on the red sleeping bag and then unzipped the backpack pulling out a long thick sketchpad along with a sticker littered purple box large enough to contain a toaster. Sitting up and looking a tad amused and a lot interested, Skylar indicated the animated box, asking what all the stickers were about. Among them, she spotted a rainbow colored peace sign sticker, an ice cream sundae that even looked delicious on paper, a bright yellow happy face along with a few smaller pink, green, and blue ones and of course, there were some Disney character stickers.

Glancing down at her box, Kori grinned. "The stickers represent some of my favorite things."

Skylar chuckled richly. "I should have guessed that! So what do we have here?"

Kori opened her sketchpad and flipped through the pages until she found a blank one. Looking up at the other woman she replied, "I'm going to draw. I said I would draw for you and although I won the race, I feel inspired to do it. Is that okay?"

If the brunette's smile became any broader there was a slight possibility that her face would crack. "That's much more than okay! What are you intending to draw?"

"You."

Blue eyes widened and Skylar pointed toward her chest hardly believing what she had just heard. "Me? Why me?"

Kori focused on the person sitting before her. "Because I want to do you." When Skylar's eyes widened further, she had a difficult time not laughing. "Whoa, I know what just popped into your mind." Tapping the sketchpad in her lap with a finger, her dark brows wiggled suggestively. "First things first Sky. I have this urge to draw you...it's as though I need to do it almost as much as I need to breathe."

Not for the first time, Skylar was caught speechless. Kori had a knack for making that happen.

"Will you let me Skylar? Please?" Kori inquired in such a sweetly soft voice. She smiled when the other woman nodded her assent. "Great. Now I just need you to remove your clothing," she finished in a rush while inspecting the stickers on her box. Kori didn't have to wait long for the expected outburst from her friend.

"My WHAT? You need me to what my WHAT?!"

Funny, Skylar wasn't as loud as the artist thought she would be. Looking so very innocent, Kori pointed toward the brunette's festive pajamas. "Need you to get undressed so that I can draw you. That includes your boob holsters and all." She observed Skylar's face but she didn't even crack a hint of a smile at her last statement. Ah well. You win some you lose some.

One eyebrow arched. "Would it be impossible for you to draw me *with* my clothes on?"

"No, but I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"'cuz I rather you take them off. I want to draw *you*-your body, not your clothes. I'm interested in what is underneath your pajamas. This is not a sexual or perverted thing--honestly. So if you're embarrassed or think doing this would be immoral, don't. The human body is a beautiful thing that should be admired and adored. Allow me to adore yours with my pencil and paper," Kori fervently finished.

Skylar didn't give a ready reply as she merely looked at Kori. "But I'm not used to being naked in front of people. Only a handful of people have ever seen me naked."

Coming to a quick decision, Kori stood up, kicking off her slippers. While the other woman curiously watched her, she folded her arms across her middle before tugging the end of her shirt upward until she was drawing it over her head. Slack-jawed, Skylar couldn't turn her eyes away from the glorious full breasts swaying before her as Kori continued to undress by pulling down her pajama bottoms along with underwear. Kicking them off into the same direction of her slippers, Kori allowed her friend to get a good long look before she kneeled on her sleeping bag.

"Bold enough to join me Sky?" She simply inquired.

Though her heart furiously beat beneath her chest, the brunette slowly nodded once she remembered how to, seeing as how the stunning form in front of her had her hypnotized. When she made no move to free herself of her clothing, Kori decided that she should help her out. On her hands and knees, the smaller woman crawled behind Skylar and placed her hands on the bottom of her shirt. Starting to lift, she met no resistance and Skylar even helped by raising her arms. Dropping the shirt on the floor, Kori lightly ran her fingertips along the other woman's back, all the way down to her waistband and then up toward the clasp of her silky bra. She heard Skylar's breath hitch as she proceeded to undo the three hooks keeping her bosom in place.

"You're so beautiful Sky. I could simply gaze upon you for countless hours," Kori whispered in her ear as she slowly pushed the straps of the bra down Skylar's long arms. A shudder went through the dentist as breasts pressed into her naked back. She could feel Kori's nipples stroking along her skin as the smaller woman moved and began to detect an unusual moistness in her womanhood.

Kori craved to reach out and touch the recently freed breasts mere inches from her hands but resisted the urge. She had a drawing to complete and didn't need any distractions. Instead, she gently pushed aside the dark strands hiding Skylar's neck before placing a tiny kiss on it. Coming around to face the other woman who now had her eyes closed, Kori began to work on her lower body and soon had her pajamas and panties off within a couple of minutes. Sitting back and crossing her legs Indian style, she stared, thinking that it should have been a crime for Skylar to conceal such an amazing body.

"Are you okay?" Kori quietly asked.

Lifting her eyelids, Skylar looked at Kori and nodded. "Yes." She actually didn't feel as exposed as she originally thought she would. Though Kori's eyes were on her, following every curve, observing every detail Skylar was managing to brave it with very little self-consciousness. *I can't believe that I'm sitting here naked with another woman and I haven't passed out or looked for the nearest item to cover myself with!* Her head faintly shaking in wonder, Skylar glanced down between the other woman's legs, noticing something that she hadn't before. A slight grin turned the corners of her mouth upward. "You're a blonde."

Looking toward the neat tuft of golden curls covering her mound, Kori grinned back. "I'm so busted." Skylar chuckled and so did she. "What can I say? The night before last I was bored so I went to the beauty aisle and nabbed a box of Clairol. Luckily, the restroom faucets run hot water as well as cold."

Skylar laughed more. "I was wondering how you got clean since you don't have access to a bathtub. I know you smell nice."

"Well thank you. I would hate for you to say that I stink!" Green eyes twinkled merrily. "Actually, I go to the hotel down the street. Don't tell anyone but I wait until one of the maid's almost finishes cleaning an uninhabited room and then I stealthily slip inside and hide. After she leaves I take a long luxurious shower using a bar of moisturizing and lovely scented soap, which I 'borrowed' from Shopaholics."

Throwing her head back, the brunette heartily laughed. "Your secret is safe with me Kori," she got out between giggles.

The closeted blonde winked. "Thank you very much," she answered in her best Elvis impersonation, causing her friend to start laughing all over again. "So you do know Elvis!"

"Of course! Who doesn't know the King?"

Chuckling, Kori nodded. "Very true."

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Skylar was spread out on top of her sleeping bag and resting on her left side with her left hand tucked against the side of her head as Kori busied herself trying to decide where she wanted her subject's remaining arm. Having made it limp, Skylar let her move it any way she pleased and watched Kori's thoughtful expression in amusement as she gazed at the arm sandwiched between her small hands. Once more, she moved it until Skylar's hand was resting against her abdomen, but then shook her head, deciding that she still didn't care for that pose.

Sitting back in her Indian pose, Kori thought for a few moments while the other woman discreetly gazed at her, admiring every smooth and silky looking contour. Skylar could no longer

deny her growing attraction for the charming little artist. She had never felt this drawn to anyone in her entire life. Skylar inwardly sighed. That included the man who was going to become her husband tomorrow.

With a snap of her fingers, Kori unknowingly pulled the brunette out of her thoughts. "I've got it!" she exclaimed, looking as though she had just discovered a cure of great significance. She smiled at her model. "I know how you'll pose. It's perfect."

Less than three minutes later, Kori had Skylar just the way she wanted her. After inquiring if her friend could comfortably stay immobile in the pose for a good length of time and gaining a positive answer, Kori sat down quite pleased. She openly admired the female equivalent of Adonis with an awe filled smile on her lips. Skylar truly did give new meaning to the word beautiful.

Still sprawled on her left side, Skylar had her left leg bent just enough that her kneecap visibly showed. Instead of resting her right leg on top of its partner, the sole of her right foot was pressed against the floor behind it creating a right angle all the way up until her knee before her thigh sloped downward. Her left arm curved at a perfect ninety-degree angle, Skylar put the majority of her upper body weight on its elbow. No longer out of place, her right forearm molded against her inclined thigh, hand reaching up to comfortably cover her knee. Having decided that she didn't want Skylar's raven locks covering nary an inch of the front of her body, Kori brushed them all behind her shoulders so that the soft strands trailed down her back.

Head up, Skylar looked at the other woman, a hint of a smile on her lips. Was it just her imagination or the longer she had her clothes off, the less inhibited she became? The brunette felt incredibly relaxed laying there on the sleeping bag without a stitch of clothing on, her most private areas exposed to someone whom she had met only mere hours ago. *Never would have thought I'd become a nude model. Even if it is just for this one time.*

Rifling through her purple box, Kori chose which tools she would use in creating Skylar's drawing. Pulling out a partially used compressed charcoal stick and a sharpened graphite pencil, the artist asked her subject if she was ready to begin. After giving her acquiescence, Skylar watched as her friend picked up her sketchpad and then proceeded to draw while continuously glancing in her direction. Evidently, Kori had decided to start at her feet, since that was where her eyes concentrated. She looked for all the world like a professional who had drawn nude models numerous times in the past. Skylar felt as though she could have just as easily been a basket of fruit and Kori would have looked at it the same way she did her body. The dentist didn't know whether to be impressed or insulted by that. Inwardly, she sighed. *Well you don't want her ogling you, do you?* The small voice in her head asked. Skylar ignored it.

"Have you done this before?" Skylar asked. "I mean drawn anyone who was without clothing?"

Without looking up from her sketchpad, Kori nodded. "Yep, but just a few people-- more specifically women. Except this is the first time I've ever done it and my subject isn't the only one butt naked. A new and interesting experience drawing in the buff." Glancing at the other woman she grinned and then after a thoughtful pause added, "My first was Melissa."

Two identical eyebrows arched as high as was possible. "Your father's Melissa?"

Kori nodded, continuing her beloved work. "Yep. You're actually the first person I've ever told this to. It was summer vacation and I was visiting them for a few weeks before I would begin my sophomore year. I was fifteen at the time-nearly sixteen because my birthday is at the beginning of September. Anyway, I hadn't fully come out of the closet yet but I admitted to myself that I had a huge crush on my stepmom. And I do mean huge!" Grinning, Kori slowly shook her head as the memories invaded her mind. "Hell, I practically worshipped the ground she walked on." Temporarily halting the movement of her pencil, Kori continued her story. "This one day I was sitting on the front porch with a notepad and a pencil trying to replicate the tree sitting in their yard. Soon Melissa came out of the house with a glass of iced cold lemonade, which she offered to me before walking over to the railing of the porch and leaning on it.

I completely forgot all about drawing the tree since the object of my affection had showed up. I watched her standing there in her cutoff blue jean shorts and sleeveless button down blue and white checkered shirt, the tail of which she had tied into a knot showing an inch or two of her belly that was flat even after having given birth twice. She was quite a vision. Still is actually." It had occurred to Kori over the years that Melissa was destined to be one of those women who the more they matured, the more their beauty enhanced. Much like a fine wine perfects with age.

"How old was she at the time?"

Thinking quickly, Kori replied, "She was about your age." Nodding, Skylar indicated for her to continue. "I was about to force myself to return to my drawing when a ray from the sun struck her face in just a way that made my breath catch. I can't exactly explain it..." pausing, Kori shook her head from side to side, looking as though she were desperately trying to locate the correct words. "Long dark curly hair framed the exquisite face of an angel. An angel that the sun chose that precise moment to bestow a warm kiss on." Smirking at her own words, Kori added a bit of detail to her sketchpad. "I know it sounds corny, but in those few seconds one could have undoubtedly convinced me that she was a spirit sent from high up above."

Skylar smiled although the other woman's eyes were focused on the drawing. "No, not corny. Just touching." After a brief pause, she asked Kori what happened next.

"Before I had even given it a good amount of thought, I asked Melissa if I could draw her. She readily responded with a yes and then from somewhere I gathered the courage to explain that I wanted to draw her without clothing. I think I even rambled on about it being art-which I said with a fantastic flourish and how even the great Michelangelo had painted nude figures. When it became obvious that I wasn't about to shut up, Melissa walked over and placed two fingertips over my lips, effectively silencing me. She wore a tender smile that reached her expressive and remarkably warm gray eyes.

Without saying a word, she then grabbed my hand and led me into the house and up the stairs. After checking on Danny and Alison who were both still napping, we went into my bedroom and she proceeded to get undressed as easily as if she had posed nude for me many times before.

After the initial shock of seeing my stepmother naked passed-and believe me it was definitely a *very* delightful shock," Kori grinned and Skylar was powerless to return it, "I set to work on capturing the womanly curves and angelic features of my crush on paper.

When I was finished, I gave it to her to critique. Quietly, she observed the black and white drawing while I attempted not to fidget in nervousness. I so wanted to please her and I knew that I had achieved doing that when she looked up at me with a proud and thoroughly delighted smile. She commented on what a good job I did before she did something that I hadn't expected. Leaning toward me, she kissed me fully on the lips." If it were possible, Skylar's jaw would have dropped to the floor as she listened closely. Kori failed to see her expression since she was gazing down at the uncompleted drawing in her lap. "It was neither a passionate nor a 'stepmotherly' kiss. It was just...extraordinary."

A smile forming on her lips, Kori raised her head, looking toward Skylar. "If I kept a list of my ten most favorite memories that day might fall around number three."

"And what might be number one? Do you have any idea?"

Nodding, Kori's smile grew. "That's an easy one. Tonight. With you."

Speechless again, Skylar wondered if that would occur on a regular basis if she and Kori continued their budding friendship after tonight. She certainly hoped that she would get to find out.

Kori chuckled as she returned to drawing. "Cat got your tongue?"

"More like Kori."

Arching a brow, the artist glanced her way. "I don't think so seeing as how I only feel one tongue in my mouth." A roguish grin danced across her lips. "That is unless you care to change that."

The brunette laughed. "You're a natural flirt, aren't you Kori?"

"Oh, yes. I can't help myself. Especially where a gorgeous woman as yourself is concerned."

Skylar managed a coy smile as she felt the warmth settling into her cheeks. "You're quite the charmer as well."

Kori grinned as her pencil continued to flow around the sketchpad. "Yeah, tell me something I don't know. That's one of the many *many* things all my women compliment me on." She laughed when a perfectly aimed pink fuzzy slipper whacked her squarely on the forehead.

"You must be still Whitney!" After erasing a tiny error, Kori mock glowered at her friend.

Seeing straight through the artificial expression, Skylar stuck her tongue out, something she couldn't recall ever doing unless one of the goofy pictures she and Kori made in the photo booth

counted. "Aye Eaton!" Saluting the small artist, Skylar then put her arm back where it was supposed to be.

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Putting the final touches on her drawing, Kori signed her signature in the bottom right-hand corner before putting her few supplies away and using a baby wipe to clean the residue left on her hands from the charcoal. Keeping the finished drawing attached to her sketchpad, she moved over to her friend who was still resting on her side, though her legs were pressed together now. Wordlessly, she handed her latest work over for inspection. Accepting it, Skylar smiled at the woman before she turned her attention to the sketch.

A loud gasp escaping her, blue eyes swept across the image on the paper. A camera positively could not have captured her this well. It was almost like looking into a lead and charcoal based mirror. Sitting up and facing Kori, the brunette set the sketchpad next to her before gently taking the other woman's ingenious hands in her own and lightly kissing the palm of each one. Looking into the artist's eyes, Skylar shook her head, thoroughly amazed.

"You have such a wondrous talent Kori. A talent that others should be knowledgeable of. I swear that your work will be shown in a gallery by this summer. I'm personally going to see that it happens."

Kori smiled, giving a squeeze to the hands still entangled with her own. "You don't have to do that."

"I know I don't have to, but I *want* to. I want everyone to appreciate just how talented and special you are Kori," after a short pause she added in a whisper, "I need to do that."

Tears forming in her eyes, Kori slipped her hands out of Skylar's before cupping her face and gazing into her eyes as a few silent seconds ticked by. "And I need to do this." Exhibiting just what this was, she tenderly pressed her lips to the brunette's, gladdened when she didn't pull away. Instead, the lips merged with her own increased the contact as long arms wrapped around her naked waist, drawing her closer. Moving to a kneeling position and staying connected with Skylar's mouth all the while, Kori wound her arms around her companion's neck. Her tongue was about to slip its way past soft lips when Skylar pulled back. Kori nearly sighed, thinking that her tongue never quite reached its destination.

"What's the matter?" she asked a little breathlessly.

"I...we can't do this," Skylar replied, trying to ignore the warm tingling sensation in her lips. That kiss was even better than the last one. No doubt about it, being in Kori's presence was proving to be dangerous. She just didn't know if she had enough determination to stop. *Maybe I should*, Skylar internalized. *I know I should but I don't want to.*

"Why?"

"Because I'm getting married in less than twelve hours to the man who is going to be the father of my baby."

"A man that you don't even love. A man who has failed time and again to elicit passion in you."

Skylar shook her head. "Don't start again Kori. It's settled. I'm going through with this wedding no matter what you deem my feelings toward Brad."

Cocking her head to the side, Kori looked at the other woman curiously. "Why are you marrying him? Tell me the truth, please. You agreed to marry him before you became pregnant so it's not because of the baby. What is it? It's obvious that you aren't thrilled about your wedding so *why* go through with it? You have a great job so you don't need the money. Do you just want someone to come home to? Is it your father?"

Skylar heavily sighed. "Kori I am going to marry him," she said in a voice filled with conviction. "Despite your reservations it will happen. I know you're looking out for what you think is my best interest, but I know what I'm doing."

Kori almost said that she doubted that her friend knew what she was doing, but she held her tongue. After a short pause, she slowly nodded and looked at Skylar. "Okay, well if you're determined to marry Brad then I give up on trying to change your mind. However, before you do there is something I want to show you."

"What is it that you want to show me?" She had a strong feeling that Kori shouldn't show her whatever she had in mind.

"True passion."

She was right. "Kori why does it seem that we're going in a continuous loop? I say I shouldn't, you say I should. I say I wouldn't be interested, you say I would. You seem to know a lot more about me and I how I feel or would feel than I do. Why is that?"

"Perhaps I know you better than you know yourself."

Skylar raised a challenging brow. "You think so?"

Grinning, Kori confidently replied, "Damn straight. No pun intended."

Despite her slight annoyance, Skylar chuckled. "Kori...I can't."

"Can't. I just hate that word sometimes. It's so...final." Reaching out, the artist cupped Skylar's cheek, brushing her thumb back and forth across her velvety skin. Unconsciously, the brunette leaned into the touch. "Don't let it be so final in this instance Sky. C'mon, let me show you what passion really is because I think it's conceivable that Brad still won't be able to even after he adds another pricy ring to your finger."

"So he won't ever be able to show me passion but you can? What makes you think that? I told you that I've never been able to respond." Some people just weren't cut out for sex and Skylar deemed herself to be one of them.

Leaning forward, Kori brushed her lips against the corner of the other woman's mouth, hearing a soft gasp in the process. "Because I have what it takes," she fervently whispered.

Skylar attempted to contain a shiver but it was no use. "Umm...and that is?"

"Me of course. I think if you gave me a chance to show you pleasure, you'd be capable of responding to it."

"Kori, this would fall under the category of cheating and I have no inten-"

Before she could finish her statement lips gently assaulted her own and she quickly found herself laying on her back with a petite camouflaged blonde on top of her. Temptation too great to resist, Skylar opened her mouth for the tongue teasing her lips and moaned as it thrust into her mouth seeking out her own. Emotions rising in her that she hadn't ever thought she possessed, Skylar slipped her arms around Kori as her tongue played with the one visiting.

Moving so that her left thigh was pressed against the brunette's center, Kori felt the wetness there seeping onto her skin. While lightly rubbing her thigh against Skylar, she nibbled on the woman's full bottom lip and then drew it into her mouth. Moaning, the dentist squirmed beneath her, her hips meeting the unhurried thrusts of Kori's thigh. No doubt about it, Skylar wasn't having any problems responding now and she ached for more. God, did she want more from this woman!

Raising her head, Kori looked down at Skylar, her lips curving into a faint smile as she ran a hand through dark locks, caressing the covered scalp. Skylar practically hummed due to the feel of those fingers in her hair. Her thigh ceasing its movement, Kori placed a few tiny kisses on parted lips.

"Sky?" She whispered, managing to make the one syllable nickname sound like two.

"Yes?" Skylar returned just as quietly.

"I'm going to make you come," another small kiss, "three," three kisses in rapid succession, "different ways. You don't by chance have a problem with my doing that?" Kori grinned, watching as the blush crept up Skylar's neck and then her face.

"I don't think I can."

"Come?"

Mutely, she nodded.

"Are you willing to let me try to help you?" Removing her hand from Skylar's head, Kori traced her lips with a fingertip.

"Like I have the power to say no to you anymore." Then again, she wasn't sure that she ever had the power to deny Kori in the few hours they had known one another.

"Now that's what I like to hear." Beaming, Kori kissed the lips that her finger had just abandoned. Slipping her tongue inside a delectable mouth, Kori brought her hand down to caress the other woman's side before it slid up to cup a breast. Moaning into the mouth covering her own, Skylar pressed her breast into the small warm hand lightly massaging it. Placing her thumb and forefinger on either side of Skylar's growing nipple, Kori gave it an experimental tug and was swiftly rewarded with a low groan. Finding it rather tasty looking, she left a mouth, which mewled at the lost of contact and moved downward, replacing her hand with her tongue.

As the body beneath her delightedly squirmed, she lightly stroked the nipple and then its twin before wrapping her mouth around the first one, drawing it inside. Purring much like a kitten, Skylar's right hand found purchase on the back of Kori's head as her hips bucked against a motionless thigh. Temporarily deserting her pebbled treats, Kori smiled at the other woman and asked if she would part her legs further. Skylar almost had them widened before the artist could fully get her request out.

Grinning now, Kori settled between her legs, pressing her womanhood against her lover's, their natural essences fusing on immediate contact. Both women moaned simultaneously as their hips began to thrust in rhythm. Kori was pleased when Skylar initiated a kiss and melted into it, her tongue dueling with her friend's. After long legs wrapped around her lower back, Kori's hips picked up a bit of speed. Placing her hands on either side of Skylar's head, she lifted her upper body a couple of inches and regarded sapphire eyes glazed with a desire, which she had orchestrated.

"How does this feel?" Kori softly inquired. "How do you like having your sweetness meshed with mine? I know I love it. You're so hot and slick." While waiting for an answer, she kissed an addictive mouth.

In that moment, it occurred to Skylar that a penis had never felt this incredible, but she wasn't about to admit that aloud. She blushed at just the mere thought. Peering up into the lovely face hovering above her, she tightened her grip on Kori's shoulders and pressed downward until the woman was lying fully on top of her again. Eliciting a moan at the touch of Kori's breasts against her own, Skylar returned the kiss she'd just been offered.

"So do I. Love it I mean." Averting her eyes, the brunette shyly admitted, "I fail to remember ever feeling as wonderful as I do right now with you."

"You're breathtaking, you know that?" Though Skylar shook her head, she easily recognized the sincerity in the smaller woman's eyes. Hers closed as fingers trailed along her cheek and lips along her neck. She shuddered when a tongue traced a lazy pattern on the side of her neck and teeth took gentle nips from the warm flesh. "You are," Kori declared in between nips and licks.

"I adore you Sky."

Her hips moved faster and Skylar matched the pace as the urgency between them mounted. Clutching her lover's shoulders tighter, Skylar thrust her sex repeatedly against Kori's as her limbs began to tense with anticipation. Kori left a path of damp kisses starting from Skylar's neck, to her chin and finally her lips as the woman's legs tightened around her waist. Her mouth swallowed the brunette's moans as briskly as the grinding of her hips created them. Skylar was having the same effect on her.

Short nails digging into the artists' shoulder blade's, Skylar ended their impassioned kissing so that she could attempt to form a coherent sentence. "I...close...or...aaah...gasm..." Evidently, she didn't do too well but luckily the other woman had an idea of what she meant.

A grin flickered across Kori's lips. "You coming baby?"

Having temporarily lost all faith in her speaking abilities, Skylar answered with a brief nod.

Green eyes half-lidded, a drawn-out moan escaped a panting mouth as Kori nodded in return. "Me too. God, me too."

Pumping vigorously, Kori brushed her lips against her lover's as greatly welcomed spasmodic waves rippled simultaneously through their bodies. Crying out, Skylar tightly shut her eyes as she thoroughly enjoyed this ecstatic ride, never wanting it to end. Their bliss filled exclamations sailed through the air as the two women continued rocking against each other until the aftershocks subsided.

"Ooh my God," Kori hoarsely whispered against the other woman's lips before tenderly kissing them. "You were awesome, Sky."

Trying to focus on regulating her breathing it took Skylar a few moments to answer. "Really? Sure you weren't pulling a Meg Ryan?" She briefly grinned. "After that display in the arcade I know you have the ability to and my being sexually naïve, I wouldn't be the wiser."

A smile on her face, Kori tweaked her companion's nose. "Yes, really, no I wasn't pulling a Meg Ryan and though I do I did not with you, and you're not naïve just a little unaware. However, under my tutelage that can and would be changed." As her brows danced up and down, Skylar giggled.

"And how would you go about changing it Ms. Instructor?" Noticing that she still held Kori's body in a vise like grip, Skylar untangled her legs from around the woman's waist.

"I'm *so* glad you asked." Wearing a lecherous grin, Kori planted a very thorough kiss on her 'student's' open mouth. "Time for lesson number two." Slipping a hand between them, she found a succulent breast and tweaked its tip, earning a sharp pleasurable cry from the owner. "That is unless you're not ready..."

Skylar eagerly nodded, already wanting a repeat of what they'd done only minutes before.

"I'm not capable of hearing nods, Sky." Suppressing a grin, Kori lightly pinched the nipple between her fingers again causing Skylar to bite down on her lower lip in an effort to hold in another outcry. "And don't stifle your sounds. I treasure every one of them. Now are you ready?" With a fingertip, she traced the area surrounding her lover's areola.

Skylar took a shuddering breath. Was she ready? Did birds have wings? "Yes," pausing, she then added, "Please."

Softly chuckling, Kori kissed her. "So polite." After bestowing another kiss on Skylar's lips, she asked her to turn over onto her stomach.

Immediately obeying, Skylar switched positions with her lover kneeling between her thighs. She was about to utter something when a soft kiss deposited on the middle of her back stopped her. Folding her arms beneath her chin, her eyes closed in pleasure as a series of strategically placed kisses on her back caused tingles up and down her spine. Her toes curled when a moist tongue joined in, flickering from the base of her back all the way to the nape of her neck where teeth proceeded to delightfully nibble. Skylar failed to contain a shiver when erect nipples grazed along her skin.

"You like that?" Kori hotly whispered against the side of the dentists' neck before sucking a patch of it into her mouth.

Skylar nodded before remembering her earlier statement. "Yes. I like it a...oooh!" The brunette's reply faltered when fingertips as light and delicate as feathers brushed over her backside and toward the backs of taut thighs before returning to the firm globes of flesh. By this time, Skylar was practically shaking with anticipation, wondering what the smaller woman would have in store for her next. She wanted to ask, but her mouth could only work to create moans and purrs.

A talented mouth and pair of hands removing themselves, Skylar heard movement behind her. Slowly turning her head, she glanced over her shoulder to watch Kori in faint puzzlement as she laid next to her on her side, her naked body close enough for Skylar to feel the heat emanating from it. Catching the brunette's gaze, Kori graced her with a grin and crooked a finger at her, looking every bit the seductress.

"C'mere baby," she crooned in a tone that would be difficult to resist. "I wanna hold you from behind."

It was made quite evident that Kori had more on her mind than just holding after the taller woman turned to her side and then scooted over until they were in a spooning position. Slipping an arm around Skylar's waist, she trailed the back of her hand between the valley of the woman's breasts producing a low moan of approval. Wearing a slight grin, Kori continued down her stomach and circled her lover's navel before dipping a finger within it, feeling the shudder that ran along Skylar's body because of the simple action. Bypassing the main attraction, she stroked the length of the brunette's thighs as the aroused woman started gently rocking back into her, her

backside deliberately pushing into Kori's pelvic area.

The artist whimpered.

"Baby, are you trying to tell me something?" Kori inhaled sharply when Skylar's rocking became more insistent causing the dampness between her thighs to increase twofold. Good God, the woman was on the verge of driving her absolutely insane. However, she was far from complaining.

Turning her head, Skylar flashed her a grin. At least, that was what Kori deemed it to be. It disappeared much too quickly. "Maybe."

Deciding that the tables needed to be turned again, she sucked an available earlobe into her mouth, tongue starting to lash back and forth across the pliant tab. Based on the soft moan that fell from her lips, the brunette was in favor of this. Resting her hand against a dark mound of curls, Kori lightly pressed the heel of her hand against it once, eliciting another moan. With one last nibble, she allowed Skylar's lobe to vacate her mouth.

"I think maybe you're trying to tell me that you want me inside of you," she whispered against her lover's dampened ear. "Though feel free to correct me if I'm wrong."

Skylar gave a swift shake of her head. "You're right...couldn't be more right." She moaned as the palm against her began to move ever so slightly, stirring her need and making it greater.

"Thought so." Falling silent, Kori allowed her hand to do the communicating with two digits beginning to stroke the moist length of the other woman's swollen sex, effectively causing tiny shivers to race through her body. When Kori knew that the writhing beauty pressed against her wouldn't be able to take much more teasing she slowly entered her, immediately being enveloped by her throbbing passion.

"Oh, Kori," Skylar softly exclaimed as her hips kept pace with the artist's steady leisurely thrusts. Wanting to give Kori better access, she elevated her right thigh and was rewarded when her lover plunged deeper within. Turning her head, she captured a close mouth delivering a searing kiss as the sensations coursing through her amplified, signaling an imminent explosion.

While tongues explored teeth, lips, and each other, fingers increased the tempo of their thrusting, caressing a velvety canal. Feeling Skylar pulsating around her digits, Kori began using her thumb to manipulate the small rigid button peeking between her lover's outer folds. It had the desired effect when the brunette moaned into her mouth, her lips fairly humming against Kori's. Releasing the artist from the ardent kiss, Skylar could no longer keep her eyes open as her body started to quake, her thighs tightening around the fingers buried within her. A warm mouth descending on her neck, Skylar softly and repeatedly uttered her lover's name while her hips swayed against the talented hand responsible for bringing her to the second climax of her life.

Climaxes. What a stupendous idea! What would **They** come up with next? The dentist would have given thumbs up in the direction of the ceiling but her arms currently felt like rubber.

Skylar smiled, albeit a bit weakly, when a tender kiss fell upon her cheek. The smile broadened when the words, "Two down and one to go," were whispered into her ear.

After Kori removed her hand, Skylar turned toward her and slipped her arms around the smaller woman. A smile on her lips, Kori reciprocated, one arm curving itself around a trim waist. Her fingers proceeded to brush back and forth across her lover's skin.

"I have a confession to make," Skylar quietly stated, looking quite serious.

Kori arched a curious brow, her mind immediately conjuring up what that confession could be. "Okay. Lay it on me." She failed to realize that she was holding her breath.

"I umm..." Leaning forward until their foreheads touched, Skylar whispered, "I like sex now. No, I thoroughly love, can't get enough of, no longer want to live without it for the rest of my days!" She managed to get a kiss in before the other woman starting laughing, falling onto her back. Skylar was pulled toward her as she joined in. Ending up laying halfway on Kori, she recaptured her lips after their chuckles began to fade.

The two new lovers began to communicate through their gentle caresses and kisses, taking advantage of this precious time together. Neither wanted to think about the fact that in a few more hours this would all be over. The rising of the sun would bring the beginning of a brand new day. The day when Skylar would vow to give her heart and soul to a man who would never complete her.

Switching their positions, Kori gazed down at Skylar, watching as her lips tugged into a smile, which she returned. She felt-no she *knew* that she could voluntarily give her heart and soul to the engaged woman, something that she had never been inclined to do in the past with any other. It figured that when she truly began to fall for someone that they were unattainable. Well, they officially would be in a while.

Valentine's Day. Skylar...her Skylar was getting married on one of the most romantic day's of the year.

I'd like to kick stupid Cupid's little ass.

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Skylar was dreaming and it was turning out to be the best dream of her life. Alone with Kori on a tropical island, the temperature felt a perfect seventy-seven degrees, the horizon an unclouded azure blue for as far as the eye could see, white sands smooth and soft like butter, which had been sitting on the counter for hours-well you get the picture. It was utopia.

Both of them sans clothing, Skylar, and Kori were stretched out on the sandy shore sharing tender kisses, their arms wrapped tightly around each other as their bodies moved in unison, creating a fire in each of their bellies. Somewhere deep within, Skylar recognized that this was

only a dream and she vainly hoped that she would never wake up. She wished that it were possible to remain in this tropical paradise with the artist until the end of time. However, soon reality would rear its head. Though until then she would enjoy this.

And enjoying this she was as the other woman kissed her swollen mouth once more before moving downward, trailing her tongue over Skylar's neck, alternately licking and nipping every bit of flesh in her path. Squirming beneath her, Skylar softly called her lover's name when a lithe damp tongue flicked across nipples before a hungry mouth enveloped them, suckling the bits of hardened flesh and tugging on them until the brunette cried out her pleasure into the warm cinnamon (yes cinnamon) sweet breeze.

The thought flitted through Skylar's brain that this all felt extremely real while soft lips continued their journey down her body, stopping to pay homage to her belly and leaving a gift of goosebumps before moving on. When that mouth reached her most sensitive zone, the dentist attempted to gather fistfuls of sand in her hands, but oddly, it felt more like cool fabric. What happened to the buttery sand? Skylar only had a mere second or two to ponder this because nuzzling lips quickly gained her attention.

Her attention became even more engrossed by Kori when the smaller woman dipped her tongue inside her moist cavern. Skylar's hips jerked at the brand new sensation as a moan broke free from her lips. It was incredible feeling that talented tongue plunging into and stroking her intimate regions. Looking toward the sky as Kori explored her depths, Skylar curiously noticed that the cloudless blue was steadily fading away to be replaced with a multitude of dim lights and a high white ceiling. What was that all about?

Another moan was carried into the air as that persistent realistic feeling tongue thrust as deeply as it could. Her hips starting to buck against Kori's mouth, the brunette growled low in her throat when wandering palms covered her breasts, squeezing rhythmically while fingers brushed across their sensitive tips. Raising her head with some difficulty, glazed blue eyes connected with mischievous green ones that winked before a tongue journeyed around and across Skylar's clit, tenderly laving the small delicate bud.

With an explosion, starting in the pit of her stomach and working its way downward to a highly important area, reality finally delivered Skylar into full consciousness where a curly auburn head rested between her legs and a mouth was busy stroking and suckling her into a frenzy. Her head falling backward, Skylar released a long groan while every single inch of her body along with the nerves within prickled with excitement. She currently felt more alive then she had in the last thirty-two years and it was intoxicating.

One more thrust was all it took to cause the last vestiges of her inhibitions to evaporate. Loud moans erupted from Skylar's throat as her hips pumped furiously against a still busy mouth. She felt the wonderful vibrations rocketing through her center as Kori delightedly hummed against her. Hands clutched at her quivering thighs, fingers lightly caressing the smooth dampened skin.

"Oooh, Kori yes...yes. Fuck me sweetheart! Ooh, yes...yes...gods yes!!!" Her body beginning to relax, Skylar's hips ceased their thrashing. Heart beating wildly enough for her to detect, she

ran trembling hands through her hair as she burst into tears of both jubilation and sadness. Jubilation because of what she had just experienced because of Kori. Sadness because she might never get the chance to feel this way again or anything even barely resembling it. Promptly pulled into a warm embrace, Skylar wrapped her arms around Kori as the tears left their telltale stains on reddened cheeks. Several sweet kisses were planted on the top of her head and forehead as the smaller woman rocked her to and fro, offering silent comfort.

Her cheek resting on Kori's shoulder, Skylar took a few deep breaths as the crying subsided and then pressed her lips to a conveniently close neck. When she opened her mouth and gently nipped a bit of flesh with a set of straight white choppers, Kori hissed. The dentist grinned as she pulled back to kiss soft plump lips.

"Sorry about what I said," Skylar sheepishly apologized.

An eyebrow lifting, Kori curiously eyed her. "What did you say?"

Skylar blushed, knowing that she only had herself to blame for this one. "The F word," she whispered. Strangely, she wasn't able to utter the entire word now, yet minutes before she had shouted it in an exuberant voice. "I didn't mean to say that. It just came out."

Snickering, Kori shook her head. "No apology required baby. If I had a dime for every time I've used the 'F' word I would almost be as wealthy as Bill Gates." Grinning, she added, "Plus, I thought it was kinda hot."

Though her blushing increased, Skylar smiled and the other woman returned it. Skylar was about to ask the time when a couple of scents mingling in the air caught her attention. Looking around she quickly spotted where they emanated from. Placed about three feet away were two paper plates along with two Styrofoam cups, one filled with milk and the other coffee. On the plates were two cinnamon buns, which were as large as Skylar's fists combined. So, those were the reasons for the sweet island breeze! Glad that she wasn't having any morning sickness, her stomach grumbled as she eyed the food. Hearing a chuckle, she glanced in Kori's direction.

"What?"

"Hungry are we?" Looking amused, Kori pointed toward Skylar's noise making stomach. She chuckled again when the woman stuck her tongue out at her. "Okay, okay I'll feed ya. But let's get dressed first." Pulling a small pile of neatly folded clothing over, she handed the brunette the clothes she had left in the dressing room the night before. Standing, both women proceeded to get dressed, not bothering to hide their admiration as they glanced at each other's rapidly covered bodies.

Glancing at the watch that she had just affixed to her wrist, Skylar noticed that it was nearly 7 o'clock. She inwardly sighed. The store would be opened soon and then she would have a wedding to get ready for. *Shit*. A part of her felt guilty for not being the least bit excited that the day had finally arrived for her to marry Brad. He loved her like a man should love the woman he intended to marry and the strongest feelings that Skylar could conjure up were that she cared for

him. Quite a bit.

Settled next to the food, Kori handed Skylar her plate along with the cup of milk. The artist explained that she had originally planned on making something more nutritious for breakfast, but then decided that they needed something with sugar to 'pump them up' for the day since they hadn't gotten much sleep. Though twenty-four hours ago she wouldn't have approved of sticky sweet cinnamon buns for breakfast (or for any meal actually) Skylar heartily sank her teeth into the ultra sweet roll, moaning in delight. It was delicious and she knew that it had to be packed with five thousand calories but she didn't care. Picking up her cup, she took a drink of milk while Kori sipped her cream and sugar laden coffee.

Kori indicated her friend's cup with a short nod of her head. "I would have gotten you coffee as well, but I wasn't sure if caffeine was okay for the baby to have so I got you some milk instead. It's good for the body and for little ones whether they be out in the world or still making in the oven." When Skylar offered her a tender smile along with thanks, she leaned over and kissed the woman's glaze covered lips.

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Slipping out of Shopaholics when the employees opened the front exit doors, Kori insisted on walking Skylar to her car. Backpack slung over her shoulder, she watched as the tall woman beeped her Lexus before opening the driver's side door and then turned back to her. Both were on the verge of crying and hoped that they could get through the next few moments without breaking down.

Putting her backpack on the ground, the young artist hugged her friend and one night lover, closing her eyes and enjoying as the other woman hugged her back. She would miss those arms. Heck, she would miss the whole person. Leaning back, she pressed her lips to Skylar's. It started out lightly but then grew passionate as their tongues caressed, saying farewell.

Skylar blinked back tears while Kori attempted to casually wipe at her eyes. Trying out a wobbly smile, the brunette said, "I'll be out of the country for the next couple of weeks but when I get back I'm going to contact some people about your art, okay? We need to get you in a gallery. I have a cousin in the art business who should be able to help us. She loves undiscovered talent."

Kori shook her head. "No, don't do that Sky. Thank you from the bottom of my heart but that's not a good idea."

The dentist cocked her head to the side quizzically. "Why not?"

Reaching up, Kori tenderly caressed her cheek. "Because I can't bear to see you again, talk to you again, knowing that you're taken. My heart's already cracking at the idea of you becoming a married woman in less than four hours. I don't need it to break." Two sneaky tears managed to sneak out and Kori quickly swiped at them. "So, I think it's best if we never come in contact with each other again."

Skylar didn't answer right away, as the thoughts trampled one another in her mind. "This is it?"

"Are you going to marry him?"

Sapphire eyes shined with unshed tears. "I have to Kori."

Kori smiled, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. Reaching down, she grabbed her backpack and then kissed the other woman once more before gently patting her stomach. "Take care of this little one. I hope he or she has your eyes." She averted her eyes when unchecked tears began to fall down Skylar's face. "Goodbye honey." Kori didn't hear Skylar's softly uttered response as she began to walk away.

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After sneaking a bath at the hotel down the street from Shopaholics, Kori had proceeded to work as usual dressed in a maroon T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans. It was turning out to be a busy day already. Evidently, people wanted their cars to shine on Valentine's Day. Perhaps, they aimed to impress their sweeties.

Finished drying her eighth car of the morning, the young woman went on her first ten-minute break. Grabbing a newspaper she found on an unoccupied round plastic table, Kori went to take a seat on the low wall next to the huge vacuum hoses where customers were supposed to pull in on arrival. She decided to read in the hopes that it would distract her from thinking about Skylar and what she was doing at that precise moment.

Opening the disorderly newspaper, emerald eyes immediately fell on the "Upcoming Wedding's" section. And whose was the first wedding listed? Who had the big colored photograph of them smiling along with their groom to be? Skylar Whitney of course. Sighing, Kori memorized the address of the church without bothering to wonder why she was doing so. So much for trying to push Skylar out of her head.

Snapping the newspaper closed, she stood up and then walked over to where she found it, depositing it there before moving in the direction of her Volkswagen bug, a model that was new when she was in grade school. Getting inside, she shut the door and then fingered the ring of keys in her hand while gazing through the windshield thoughtfully. No, she couldn't do it. She *shouldn't* do it. Kori cocked her head to the side while absently jingling the keys. Or should she? Was it just a coincidence that the first thing she saw when opening the newspaper was a picture of Skylar? It had to be a sign. Kori slowly nodded, a smile creeping onto her lips. Yeah, a sign.

Leaning out of her window, she shouted to one of her co-workers that she had to leave and that it was an emergency. Putting her key in the ignition, Kori sped out of the car wash parking lot and down the street in the direction of the church.

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Decked out in her cream colored wedding dress, Skylar gazed at her reflection via the mirror perched on the vanity table. Since she appeared as though she was about to attend a funeral

instead of a wedding-*her* wedding-Skylar smiled. Since it looked about as real as Anna Nicole Smith's boobs she allowed it to disappear. With a sigh, Skylar glanced at a clock hanging on the wall. 10:39 a.m. She sighed again. In twenty-one more minutes, she would become Brad's wife. *Shi-oops*, Skylar glanced around the small dressing room apologetically. *I'm in a church. Must remember that.*

Looking on the table, she spotted the wallet-sized picture, which she had trimmed from the others earlier that morning before leaving her parents estate. Picking it up, a genuine smile slipped onto her face as she observed the photograph that she and Kori had taken together the night before. It was the one where they had their arms around each other and were smiling toward the camera with their mouths closed. After a bit of a debate, Skylar had decided that it was her favorite picture.

"That's what I like to see-a smile on your face. You've been acting peculiar all morning."

Startled at the unexpected voice, Skylar jumped in her seat before looking up and catching sight of her mother prim and proper standing in the doorway in her two grand peach skirt suit. In her late fifties but easy to be mistaken as a decade younger, Sylvia Whitney was the epitome of elegance and conservatism. If Weston ever chose to run for presidency, she would make the perfect first lady.

"Mother. You startled me." Surreptitiously, Skylar slipped the photo underneath her hairbrush.

Sylvia walked into the dressing room. "Perhaps if you had been paying attention to your surroundings instead of daydreaming, I wouldn't have." Sitting next to her daughter, she smiled though it was plainly obvious that she meant what she said.

Skylar nodded. "Perhaps." Falling silent, she gazed toward the vanity only looking up when her mother asked if there was something wrong. Looking into eyes the exact shade of her own, Skylar took a deep breath before answering. "I...how do I know that Brad and I are meant to be?"

"Isn't it a tad late to be asking that question?" Amused, Sylvia shook her head with perfect hair that never moved. "Dear, you're just nervous, which is normal. Rest assured that you are doing what is right. Bradley loves you and you love him now let's not ponder such silly things." Sylvia observed the younger woman's mouth thoughtfully. "You need more lipstick." She was about to reach for a tube when a hand landed on top of hers.

"Do I look happy to you?"

Sylvia cocked her head in a questioning fashion as she disengaged her hand from underneath her daughter's. "Your new life with Bradley will make you happy. The birth of your children will make you happy. Some things such as happiness take time."

"You have been married for over thirty-five years and have three children. Why aren't *you* happy yet?"

For a few moments, the dressing room was completely silent. Both women quietly observed each other before Sylvia again reached for the white tube and handed it to her daughter. "You need more lipstick."

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"PIECE OF FREAKIN' SHIT!" Kori bellowed as she repeatedly slammed open palms on the steering wheel as though by abusing it, the stalled Volkswagen would miraculously start working again. Ever since she braked at the stop sign nearly ten minutes ago, she had been attempting to get the ignition going. However, Kori had a feeling that this time her bug was dead for eternity. There would no longer be any resuscitation from mechanics that charged three times as much as they should.

Muttering obscenities that would make a truck driver and a sailor look sheepish, Kori threw the door open before climbing out and slamming it shut in frustration. Reaching inside the open window, she grabbed her backpack and slung it over her shoulder before she gave the Volkswagen a good swift kick followed by another. Now how was she supposed to get to the church? The artist glanced at her Mickey watch, noting that she didn't have much time left. With a sigh, she was about to start walking when a tow truck pulled up next to her with the words *I'll tow you and your little car too!* painted on the side of it. She looked up, way up to the cab where a concerned looking driver sat with a red cap on his head that sported the same model as his truck.

"Need some help little lady?"

Since this was an emergency, Kori decided to ignore the little lady part of the question. Plus, the guy didn't look as though he'd meant any harm by referring to her as that. Nodding, she shielded her eyes from the sun as she craned her neck to look up at the man.

"I'll be happy to tow your car for ya."

Though she had most of her personal belongings in the Volkswagen, Kori didn't care much about them now. "Actually, could we come back for the car in a little while? I need to get to a church and would really appreciate it if you could give me a ride." She smiled up at the tow truck driver who only looked a few years her senior.

Already bitten by the crush bug, he gave her a smile that looked boyishly adorable. "Sure little lady. But if I may ask what do ya need to go to church on a Friday for?" Leaning across the cab, he opened the passenger door before pushing on a latch that released a small stair with three steps close to the ground.

Waiting until she successfully made it inside the truck, Kori closed the heavy door before answering. "Honestly? I need to stop a wedding."

"Wedding?" The tow truck driver scratched his short beard. "Why the only people in town that I

know are getting married today are Brad Sawyer and Skylar Whitney." He looked at the young woman curiously. "You mean *that* wedding?"

Sawyer? She was going to be Skylar Sawyer in less than half an hour? *Oh, dear. I can't let that happen!* Looking at-ah David (the name was stitched on his work shirt) Kori nodded. "Yes. Listen I understand if you rather not take me there for that reason but I'll gladly pay--"

"Stop right there little lady." David held a hand up in the air. Looking at his passenger, he grinned. Devilishly. "No payment necessary. It would be my pleasure to take you to the church. I know exactly where it's at." Starting the truck, he pulled into the street.

"Um, why are you so eager to help me?"

Shaking his head from side to side, David bit down on his lower lip. From the frown on his face, he was thinking of something not so pleasant. Glancing toward Kori, he clucked his tongue. "First, tell me why you want to stop that wedding."

Deciding that honesty was indeed the best policy Kori gave him a rough draft version of what happened during the time she spent with Skylar at Shopaholics, minus their lovemaking. "So, I want Skylar to be...well be my girl. I've never felt for anyone the way I feel for her. And I know that she and I haven't known each other very long but I truly think that she could be the one."

David gave her the sweetest smile. "That's awesome!" Snickering, he made a right turn. "Man, is that awesome. I was hoping that you wouldn't say that you wanted to stop the wedding because of your feelings for Brad."

Kori swiftly shook her head. "Oh, hell no! I have nothing against the man. I just want to take his bride to be away from him." She laughed and so did the truck driver. "So, you wanna tell me why this thrills you and why you seem overjoyed to take me to the church?"

David increased his grip on the steering wheel. "Because I can't stand that bastard."

The artist raised an eyebrow. "Who? Brad?"

"Yep." The truck driver nodded. "Since we don't have much time I'll give you the short version of what happened between us. We were in medical school together. Best friends, roommates, and even frat buddies. Tight as this." David crossed his middle finger over his index. "It was time to prepare our thesis and I had been working on mine the entire semester, whereas Brad waited until three weeks before the deadline. He was struggling too and I already being finished, tried to help him. Soon, he told me that he was done and we went out with some buddies to celebrate. It wasn't until nearly a week later that I found out he had copied nearly my entire thesis. But check this out. The dean accuses *me* of cheating. Why he thought it was me, to this very day I don't know. Anyway, bottom line I was kicked out of school and Brad graduated with honors with *my* thesis. Asshole." Pausing, David clenched and unclenched his hands around the steering wheel. It would have been dead by now, had it been alive in the first place. "Now I'm a tow truck driver for my dad's company and Bradley," he sneered the name, "is a doctor. Lying, cheating, no-good

punk. I can't stand him!"

"Oh, wow. I'm so sorry David." Placing a hand on his muscled shoulder, she gave it a good squeeze. "I really am. And now I don't feel *too* bad about attempting to be a homewrecker."

His foul mood quickly dissipating, the truck driver laughed at that. "You wreck the home all you want to little lady!"

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It was almost ten minutes passed eleven when David and Kori pulled up to the church. Well, as close as they could get anyway. There were a few journalists, some with video camera's standing outside at the bottom of the church steps. At the top of them were uniformed police officers perched in front of a set of closed double doors, obviously placed there to keep guard. Kori sighed. This was going to be difficult.

"No problem. I'll create a diversion so you can slip inside," David stated as he began to open his door. Glancing back over to his passenger, he added, "Oh and good luck to you little lady. I hope everything works out for ya and Ms. Whitney." Without waiting for a comment, he jumped from the high truck. Paying close attention to the man, Kori watched as he clutched his chest and screamed something that sounded like 'help me' toward the police officers before collapsing to the ground. As if in cue, all of the boys in blue hustled towards the fallen truck driver who was fidgeting and groaning on the ground. Even the journalists wandered over to see if they could possibly get a story out of this.

Scooting over to the driver's side, Kori quietly climbed out of the truck while trying not to think about how high she was from the ground. Somehow, she made it to solid ground without anyone being the wiser. Sneaking around the back of the truck she then slipped onto the sidewalk and walked rather quickly to the church steps. One journalist saw her and pointed in her direction just as she successfully made it through the doors and into the huge packed church where she heard the words "Let them speak now or forever hold their peace." Immediately, most of the eyes in the church switched in her direction, a lot of them wondering who this blue jean clad slip of a girl was and how she managed to get past the big buff police officers. Kori even saw a couple of video cameras point toward her.

Let them speak now... Oh yes! She was supposed to be stopping a wedding and based on that statement delivered by the preacher, she had arrived just in the nick of time. Raising a hand in the air, Kori loudly stated, "I object!" Murmurs erupted around her and cameras flashed in her direction as the young woman started down the aisle finding and keeping contact with bewildered blue eyes. Stopping a few feet away from the platform where Skylar, Brad, and the preacher stood, Kori rubbed suddenly sweaty palms on her jeans while her heart beat a frantic rhythm.

Arching a bushy white brow, the preacher stared at her. During the last forty-five years he had performed marriage ceremonies no one had ever objected before. Therefore, he wasn't quite sure what to say. Closing the small leather bound book in his hands; he nervously licked his lips and

then cleared his throat.

"On what grounds young lady?"

Before Kori could come up with an answer, the church doors opened and two policemen entered. The truck driver having a 'heart attack' had just driven off. They had a feeling that something fishy was going on. When their eyes fell on Kori, it wasn't difficult for them to discern that she didn't belong. One, she was the only person dressed casually, two she looked like she was up to something, and three the journalist who had spotted her sneaking inside had described her outfit. The only thing they'd gotten wrong was the shirt. It wasn't red but more of a dark almost brownish sort of red. No matter though. It was close enough. She was definitely the one they were searching for.

The policemen were about to come collect Kori when the preacher held up his hand for them to stop. Always taught to respect their elders and especially a man of God, the policemen took a few steps toward the back. However, they kept close eyes on the jean clad figure.

Not liking this one bit, the mayor stood up and demanded of Kori why she had chosen to barge in on his daughter's wedding. On a roll, the preacher held up his hand again and asked the other man to sit down.

"I want to know why this woman is here!" The mayor persisted while the veins in his neck bulged.

"And I want you to take your seat. Do it now Weston!" Bushy brows joined as the preacher frowned. He loved all of his brothers and sisters, but sometimes the mayor really got on his last nerves. The preacher was relieved when Weston chose to listen to him the second time. Turning back to the objecting girl, he asked his question again.

"I object on the grounds that umm..." Trailing her eyes to those of Skylar she continued, "I don't think Brad is the one for Skylar. Them marrying each other would be a grave mistake. Especially when I think that Skylar would be so much happier with me."

More murmurs along with gasps could be heard through the church as the video camera's present panned between Kori and the platform where the bride, groom, and preacher stood. Three pairs of eyes widened, as did a trio of mouths.

The journalists outside had no idea what they were missing out on. Poor clueless reporters.

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"Hey Mom, come here! Quick!" Tossing a used tissue into the nearby trash bin, Danny Eaton grabbed a fresh one and loudly blew. His eyes stayed riveted to the television the whole time. Being sick sucked, but it had worked to his advantage for two reasons. One, he got to stay home from school and two he would have missed his sister's fifteen minutes of fame being broadcast on television right that moment.

Rushing into the living room, Melissa sat on the couch as her son indicated for her to do so before he pointed toward the television with his aloe vera laced Scotties tissue. "Look, it's Kori," Danny excitedly stated. "She's trying to stop the wedding of the daughter of Dominoe's mayor."

"What?" Melissa drew out the word as she curiously watched the television. Yes, that was definitely Kori talking to a preacher. He was asking her on what grounds did she object to the wedding. When she told him her answer, mother and son exchanged shocked expressions.

"What about Anna?" Danny and Melissa simultaneously wondered aloud. Grabbing for the phone, Melissa dialed a familiar number.

"Good morning, Claire Clips Salon here. This is Claire. How may I help you?" A voice pleasantly answered.

"Hey Claire it's Melissa. Turn the television on to channel 8. Hurry, you should see this."

"Okie dokie. Just a moment." After securing her customer under the dryer and setting the timer to fifteen minutes, Claire walked over to the television and switched it to the correct channel. She nearly dropped the phone when she saw the only person to ever come from her womb. Turning up the volume, Claire spoke with Melissa for a few seconds before promising to call her back soon. Pressing the off button, Claire pulled a chair over and plopped down as she stared at the screen.

Noticing, the other hair stylists drifted over to Claire looking concerned and quizzical. Their mouths opened wide when they spotted Kori on the television and the words "Unidentified young woman objects to Mayor Weston Whitney's daughter's wedding" scrolled across the screen. All five women and one man tuned in to the screen along with a couple of customers. Others swiveled around in their chairs.

The male stylist shook his head back and forth with his mouth formed into an O. "What is our Koko up to?" Eyes on the television, the others merely shook their heads and shrugged. That question was about to be answered.

Claire tapped her chin with a lone finger as she listened to her daughter speak. So, she wanted to be with Skylar Whitney. What about Anna? *You have a lot of explaining to do little bit!*

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"Skylar," pausing, Kori took a deep soothing breath. At least it was supposed to be. It didn't work much. "Sky, maybe I shouldn't have come here today but I couldn't stay away without telling you how I feel about you." Ignoring the pissed off groom glaring daggers at her, Kori kept her gaze on the woman she was attempting to open up to. "You might not feel the same way about me and perhaps this is horrible timing-well it can't get much worse than interrupting someone's wedding-but it was now or never. And I wouldn't be able to live with never.

"Skylar, I'm going to be honest with you. We haven't known each other long, therefore I won't

say that I'm in love with you because it's too soon but I'm well on my way. In other words, I *am* going to love you and when I fall completely, it will be for the duration of my life. I know that as well as I know my own name. You have touched my life more than any woman ever has or will again. I know that you're the one for me. The One."

Clapping her hands together, Kori exhaled loudly before continuing. "Okay, let's look at the facts here. I have a crummy job, I currently have no residence, and I'm an aspiring artist. That sounds like a recipe for a bad... a *very* bad mate but allow me to assure you that it sounds worse than it is. I'm going to make it. I will. We Eaton's are a determined lot." A grin flashed across Kori's face. "And I would love to make it with you by my side Sky."

"I promise to love you with every fiber of my being and to love you a little more each day. I promise to never take you for granted, to be open and honest and share every aspect of my life with you. After all, you would be a great part of that life. I promise to make you happy and I will consider it my duty that each and every day you wear that terrific smile of yours. Through the best, worst and in between times you needn't doubt where I'll be. When you laugh and smile I'll be with you taking part in the joy. When you cry I'll be with you, my arms around you, holding you for as long as needed."

"I know it wouldn't be perfect, nothing is but I do promise to be as 'unirritating' as possible, which on occasion I admit sometimes I am. I mean, umm sometimes I can be irritating not 'un'." A few chuckles rang through the church and even a smile tugged at the preacher and Skylar's lips. Brad only scowled deeper than before. "We would have our share of dilemma's but together I know we can overcome and grow from them."

"I think that Ms. Shania put it perfectly with the words, 'I just swear that I'll always be there. I'd give anything and everything and I will always care. Through weakness and strength, happiness and sorrow, for better, for worse, I will love you with every beat of my heart'. And I mean every one of them, Sky," pausing, Kori swallowed around the lump in her throat as a few hot tears slid down her face. "Plus, who else is going to help you experience all the neat stuff I can? Hearty food, fun games..." A faint smile on her lips, the artist pointed toward herself. "I'm your woman for that."

Her own face stained with tears, Skylar inhaled a shuddering breath. Temporarily forgetting everything and everyone around her except for the extraordinary person before her, she replied, "You're my woman for everything." Softly chuckling, she added, "And I want another Kori famous burger." Skylar missed the 'have you completely lost your mind' look Brad along with his and her parents graced her with.

Kori chuckled too. "You may have as many as you want."

Knowing where she belonged and what she had to do now, Skylar turned to face a thoroughly confused groom. She was about to say something when he informed her loud enough for the cameras and those sitting in the few rows closest to them that she was pregnant. A fresh wave of murmurs and gasps began as the news quickly spread throughout the church, reaching the ears of those that hadn't heard the declaration straight from Brad.

Skylar sighed. *Oh, how I wish I were in Boston or anywhere else with Kori right now.* "Yes, I'm well aware that I'm pregnant Brad, but that doesn't mean that I have to marry you. This isn't 1950."

The doctor adopted an insulted expression. "Oh, so now marrying me is not a want to but a have to?"

"I have to be honest with you. I never loved you-at least not the way that I should have. It was never a good idea for us to get engaged. I mainly only said yes to placate my father. I'm so sorry Brad. I never had any intention of hurting you, but I can't go through with this."

"You're leaving me for a woman." It sounded more like an astonished statement than a question. "Not only a woman, but a woman who can't give you any security. By the sound of it, she can't even give herself that. You're choosing a deadbeat lesbian over me. How nice."

Blue eyes narrowed slightly as Skylar clenched her fists at her sides. "She gives me plenty of everything." While he pondered just what she meant by that she added, "Brad, I'm leaving now. I will be in contact with you concerning our child."

The doctor nodded. "Yes, you will. Despite you choosing that woman over me I *will* be a father to our baby."

"Of course. I would expect nothing less of you. I truly am sorry. I should have informed you of my reservations before today." Removing the expensive engagement ring on her finger, she handed it over. "Here, this belongs to you."

Accepting the ring, Brad put it in his pocket while wondering how he could get out of here as quickly as possible. "Thanks. You may go now," he quietly replied. He watched as his ex-fiancee exchanged a few words with the preacher who although looked surprised didn't seem upset by this recent event. After they shared a hug, Skylar stepped down from the platform and walked over toward Kori, slipping a hand into one of her own. Giving her a smile, she kissed her cheek.

"I can hardly believe that I'm about to walk out on my wedding. It feels oddly liberating," the brunette whispered.

Chuckling, Kori was going to reply when a perturbed mayor along with his wife, joined them. Weston glared at his daughter while Sylvia looked on with embarrassment as well as shock.

"Skylar your behavior is disgraceful and if you walk out of this church then you walk out on your family for good. Meaning I will only have one daughter." Based on her silence, Sylvia agreed.

Slowly nodding, Skylar glanced between her parents, the people whom she couldn't recall ever even hugging her. "You know, Kori has treated me and felt more like family in the short time that I've known her than either of you have in thirty-two years. Frankly, I don't think I have

anything to lose when I leave through those church doors. You've never given me a reason to stay in this family and I can't fathom why it took me so long to come to my senses in leaving it. So goodbye." Kori's hand securely in her own, Skylar purposefully headed toward the exit.

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"Whooo-hooooooo!" Cheers rang through the Eaton household as Melissa and Danny watched their relative and the woman who was *going* to be the love of her life, leave the church.

Snagging one of her son's tissues, Melissa dabbed at her damp cheeks. "That's so sweet!"

Danny grinned and shook his head. Chicks were so sensitive! "Yeah, I guess it is in a girly mushy sorta way. I've totally gotta have a talk with my big sister 'cause she gets all the hot chicks."

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Meanwhile, at Claire Clips the stylists as well as their customers applauded and joyously hollered for the two women on the television screen. Since they didn't have any champagne, they broke open a two-liter bottle of Pepsi someone found in the back fridge. Their Koko had finally found someone, *the* one to share her life with. Thank God!

Tony, the only male stylist at the salon drank from his plastic cup as he glanced between the screen and his boss. "They make such a cute couple." And speaking of cute, he loved what Koko had done to her hair! *If she's in to dyeing now, perhaps soon she'll be brave enough to let me cut it short.*

Smiling, Claire agreed. "I can't wait to meet this Skylar Whitney. I like her already." She was going to invite them to dinner tonight. And they *would* come. *And then little bit you still have some explaining to do!* Evidently, she and Anna had separated, although she had alluded that everything was fine. So where had she been staying? Mmhmm. All would be revealed this evening.

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As they made it to the bottom of the steps, the journalists there immediately accosted Kori and Skylar. Hearing a blaring horn, their eyes fell on the tow truck parked across the street. A cap sticking out of the window waved in their direction.

"That's my friend David! Let's go!" When they bolted toward the large truck, Kori noticed her broken Volkswagen hooked up to the back. How sweet! He'd gone to apprehend it on his own.

Though the journalists were hot on their trail, the two women managed to get safely inside the truck before they were reached. The tow truck driver pulled out into the street as quickly as was possible. Looking in his side mirror, he laughed at the few dejected looking people standing in the street before turning his attention to the passengers. He smiled.

"Hello ladies! Kori you forgot your backpack, plus I thought you two might need a ride. I heard what you had to say on the radio little lady and you touched me. That was real nice."

Beaming, she slipped her hand into Skylar's again. "Thanks David. I didn't know it was broadcast on the radio as well."

"Yes, indeed. There was a little bit of static here and there but I could clearly understand everything you said. So where can I take you lovely ladies?"

"You wanna meet my mom?" Kori asked...her girl. She smiled at the thought. This was the best Valentine's ever! "I figure if she watched us on the news then she's going to want some answers and pronto."

Smiling, Skylar gave her a brief kiss on the lips. "I'd love to."

"Great!" Looking at David, Kori asked him if he knew where Claire Clips salon was. Replying that he did, he headed in its direction. The trio drove in silence for a few minutes before Kori squeezed Skylar's hand in order to gain her attention. When tender blue eyes switched to her, the artist smiled like a lovesick goofball. She was with Skylar and Skylar was with her. Sweet. So very sweet!

"No regrets? I mean, you're giving up your fam--"

She didn't get to finish her thought due to a couple of fingers covering her mouth. "No regrets at all," Skylar successfully assured her. "And as far as I'm concerned, *you* are my family. I meant what I said to my parents. You've been more family to me than they ever were and I thank you for that." She smiled. "I thank you for you."

Her eyes watering, Kori tenderly kissed the woman pressed next to her. "And I thank you for you too." After a thoughtful pause she added, "And I give thanks to Shopaholics."

Skylar chuckled. "What does the store have to do with it?"

Grinning, Kori replied, "Well if it weren't for that department store then we wouldn't have met. You'd probably be married right now and I'd be at Carmine's shining up some cars."

When Skylar promptly laughed so did Kori. It was so very true, which proved that Shopaholics rocked!

~Finis~