

~ Long Division ~

by Mavis Applewater

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Thanks to my beta reader Sandal Birkenstock

As always this is for Heather.

It was cold the wind cut through Lali like a knife. It was one of those days she wished she could have just stayed home snuggled up in her bed sipping something warm preferably chocolate flavored and hide away from the lingering cold winds of winter. Those days were few and far between. Lali worked two jobs and was finally doing something she vowed she would do years ago. She was finally finishing her degree after dropping out of college because of a lack of money and family matters over a decade earlier. The only stumbling block beside her limited free time and freezing weather was math.

Sadly it was a subject she had always struggled with and now she had to conquer the subject to earn her degree.

"I'm never going to use it," she surmised as she rechecked the address before stepping up onto the porch of the tiny house. "I've been in the real world never once have I needed to know what X is."

She shivered before knocking lightly on the rickety door. The powers that be had determined that she complete a basic algebra course before she graduated. Lali didn't want to simply squeak by with a passing grade her GPA was good and she wanted to graduate with honors. She finally accepted that the only way that was going to happen was if she got help.

There she stood waiting for help to answer the door. Another gust of wind assaulted her body forcing her to knock once again. Arthur Manning her advisor had recommended Dr. Dorinda Dupray as a tutor. He offered to set up an appointment he even let it slip that Dr. Dupray might be willing to offer her services pro bono. Free was most definitely an added bonus. At least she thought it was until she mentioned it to Cliff who was in one of her classes. Lali didn't miss the

odd stammer in the young man's voice when she mentioned Dr. Dupray's name. Still Dr. Dupray was the only tutor whose schedule was conducive with her own plus she agreed not to charge Lali she would just have to deal with whatever quirks the good doctor possessed.

"Like not answering the door in a timely manner," Lali grumbled checking her watch noting that she was on time for her appointment. "Come on," she muttered under her breath her teeth chattering slightly. "I'm freezing and I have to be at work in just over an hour."

Just as she was about to knock one last time the door squeaked open. Not completely open just a half an inch. From the crack Lali could detect a pair of green eyes shimmering from behind an unflattering pair of eyeglasses. She was taken aback for a moment before she remembered just why she was standing out in the cold.

"Dr. Dupray?" She carefully inquired silently praying that perhaps she was at the wrong address. "I'm Lali Lazenby I have a ten o'clock tutoring session."

The pair of eyes studied her carefully for a moment before the door opened just a little bit more. The woman standing on the other side shied away from the doorway mumbling indistinctly.

"Excuse me?" Lali sputtered in confusion.

"I'm sorry," the timid woman whispered. "Come in."

"Okay," Lali agreed her eyes widening with a mixture of fear and curiosity as she stepped into the simple home. Dr. Dupray was about five foot five with dirty blonde hair wrapped tightly in a bun and she was wearing at least two very thick wool sweaters despite the abundance of warmth in the small house.

Lali paused for a moment waiting for her hostess to offer to take her coat. When no such offer came Lali shrugged out of her bulky jacket and looked around for a place to hang it. The small ranch style house was organized very organized. The furniture was a throw back to a different era and Lali held no doubt that every stick was in its rightful place. She stood there with her coat hanging limply in her hand searching for the appropriate place to hang it.

"Uh Dr. Dupray" she began slowly, her hostess seeming to be shrinking deeper inside her sweaters. "Where shall I hang my coat?"

"Closet," the doctor responded as she crooked her finger towards the door located behind Lali.

"Okay," Lali muttered under her breath as she hung up her coat in the appropriate space. Once again she found herself standing there as her tutor stared at the floor. "Dr. Dupray I don't wish to be rude but I only have an hour before I have to go to work. Can you help me with my class?"

"I'm sorry," the shy woman sputtered. "I don't receive many guests."

"No kidding," Lali quipped suddenly amused by the woman's shyness. "Shall we get started?"

"That would be nice," Dr. Dupray quietly agreed before shuffling down the hallway. Lali shouldered her backpack and dutifully followed after the unusual woman. The study was organized reflective of the rest of the household. She couldn't help noticing the array of degrees hanging on the walls most of which bore the name of her quirky tutor.

"Can I ask you something?" Lali politely began as she placed her textbook on the woman's desk.

"Yes," the shy woman encouraged in a tiny voice.

"If I had to guess I would assume that we are about the same age and yet you seem to have earned a boat load of advance degrees," Lali explained in light tone fearful that she might frighten the timid woman. "Did you enter college when you were twelve?"

"Ten years three months," Dr. Dupray responded. "Before that I was home schooled."

"That explains a lot," Lali grumbled as she wondered if the good doctor ever had the chance to climb a tree or ride a bicycle. Lali's dark brown eyes studied her instructor carefully waiting for her to speak.

"Shall we get started?" Dorinda timidly inquired.

"Great," Lali readily agreed as she grabbed a pencil from her backpack. "I have just one question."

"What would you like to know?" Dorinda questioned with a slight gulp.

"You're obviously a very intelligent woman," Lali proceeded carefully. "Just why is it you are tutoring basic math? I don't mean to insult you but shouldn't you be trying to win the noble prize instead of trying to help a bunch of college kids who should have learned this stuff in high school?"

"I almost did," Dorinda whispered.

"Beg your pardon?" Lali stammered.

"Nothing," Dorinda stammered. "I am trying to tutor students because it has been pointed out to me that I lack interpersonal communication skills. I have lost a great many assistants, grants and positions because of this problem."

"You're not a people person," Lali quickly deduced with a smile and a slight shrug.

"I have never really been around them," Dorinda offered in a hushed tone.

"You do know that you are one don't you?" Lali pressed and was taken aback slightly when the doctor blinked with surprise. "Okay," she responded slowly. "A subject for another time, I really

need help."

After her session with Dr. Dupray Lali was confused and had a screaming headache which made her job at the local Wal-Mart seem that much more insufferable. "Hey snookums," Brenda her roommate greeted her when she finally entered the tiny apartment they shared. "How was your day?"

"A living Hell and yours?" Lali quipped as she flopped down onto the sofa.

"Want to talk about it?" Brenda encouraged.

"Work sucked nothing new there," Lali grumbled. "I had my first tutoring session and I'm not going back. Frankly I'd rather have gum surgery."

"What happened?" Brenda pressed. "Was your tutor an asshole?"

"No," Lali sighed heavily. "She was nice I think. It is just that the woman is literally a rocket scientist. I didn't understand anything she said. I'm such a loser."

"No you're not," Brenda chastised her. "You just need to brush up on your math skills. If this Dr. Dupray isn't working find someone else."

"I just feel bad since Arthur recommended her," Lali sighed. "I did get a chance to look at a couple of apartments before my tutoring session."

"Any luck?" Brenda inquired hopefully.

"Only if I kill off the sixty people who applied before me and get a boost in my income," Lali glumly informed her.

"I'm sorry," Brenda sighed.

"What it isn't your fault you graduated ahead of me and the landlord is selling the building," Lali quickly comforted her old friend. "Are you still nervous about relocating to Seattle? The job sounds great."

"I know," Brenda groaned. "Just moving all the way across the country and not knowing anyone is scary. Plus I feel like a rat leaving you behind when you haven't found a new place yet."

"Not your fault and I will find something," Lali vowed. "A new place and a new tutor and before you know it I'll be job hunting myself. Who knows maybe I'll end up in Seattle?"

The following day Lali sat in Arthur's office nervously awaiting his arrival. He was a kindly man who in many ways reminded her of her grandfather. Since her return to college he had taken her under his wing. Now she felt as if she was going to disappoint him.

"Lali this is a nice surprise," he greeted her brightly with a warm smile.

"Morning," she stammered slightly nervously running her fingers through her long curly dark hair.

"How did it go with Dorinda yesterday?" He eagerly inquired.

"Yeah, about that," she slowly began. "Is there someone else you could recommend?"

"Why?" He grimly inquired as he reclined in his overstuffed chair.

"Dr. Dupray is obviously a very brilliant woman," she tried to explain. "I think that is the problem. During our session I just sat there not understanding a single word the woman said to me. That is when I could encourage her to speak."

"I was afraid of that," Arthur frowned. "Dorinda is very bright but sadly even though her work and studies have taken her all over the world she hasn't seen very much of the world. Most of her life has been spent in the classroom or a lab. I was hoping that you might help her while she helped you."

"Arthur I'm not unsympathetic to Dr. Dupray limited social skills," Lali quickly asserted. "But my plate is a little full at the moment between my two albeit crappy jobs, school and the fact that I am about to become homeless I don't have time to take on someone else's problems."

"Pity," Arthur sighed wistfully. "I'm friends with her mother and it is just a shame that once her father realized how gifted she was he had her shipped off locked away in a lab never experiencing life."

"Again she seems like a nice lady but I don't have time for this," Lali quickly cut him off.

"I was hoping," Arthur began. "She has that big old house and I think I could convince her to rent you a room."

"Arthur just what are you up to?" Lali accused him. "Do I look like Julie McCoy to you?"

"She wouldn't understand that reference," Arthur pleaded.

"I noticed the lack of a television in her home," Lali readily agreed. "And even if she did happen

to own one I doubt the Love Boat would have topped her list of viewing choices. Again I feel the need to explain that I just want to do well in my math class not play Professor Higgins. Got it? Another reference I doubt she would understand since I'm English major and she is a rocket scientist. Why would you think we'd have anything in common? Shouldn't she be hanging out with Stephan Hawkins?"

"Dorinda needs," he began to plead.

"A great many things," Lali cut him off. "I'm sorry to sound selfish but I need to pass my math class with a decent grade. If you can't recommend a new tutor I'll go to student services." Lali truly wasn't trying to be selfish but Grad school was finally looming on the horizon and she just couldn't risk not making the grade.

"Lali just give her another chance for me," Arthur pleaded.

Lali's shoulders slumped as she gave into the pleading look in his twinkling blue eyes.

"Fine," she conceded. "I will keep my appointment on Friday but if she still is speaking Greek I'm finding a new tutor."

"Thank you," Arthur blew out with relief.

Friday afternoon arrived and once again Lali found herself standing on Dr. Dupray's doorstep. "Arthur you owe me big time," she groaned as she waited for the timid woman to answer the door. "Hello Ms. Lazenby I'm glad you decided to return," Dr. Dupray shyly greeted her stepping aside allowing the brunette to enter her modest home.

"I see Arthur ratted me out," Lali laughed while pondering just why Dr. Dupray insisted on hiding her body beneath layer upon layer of drab clothing?

"Huh?" Dr. Dupray sputtered in confusion. "Oh yes he mentioned your misgivings. I have to confess that I don't blame you for wanting another tutor."

"It isn't you," Lali quickly apologized. "It is just that I'm having trouble comprehending what you are saying and that isn't going to help me. I really need to do well in this class my GPA is riding on this."

"Understandable," Dr. Dupray frowned. "I just wish I knew how to communicate with people."

"Again you are people," Lali almost laughed. Her heart sank as she noticed the way Dr. Dupray

shrank away. "Wow you really need to get out of this house. Other than work and academics what do you like to do?"

"I Uhm," Dr. Dupray stammered hiding her face like a shy child.

"There must be something," Lali encouraged.

"No one has ever asked," Dr. Dupray sighed ruefully. "Those are the only things I know. I'm afraid that I won't be able to help you if I can't relate the subject matter in terms that you can understand. "I apologize for wasting your time."

"Hold on," Lali grunted checking her watch. "You're right you can't help me with math but I promised Arthur I'd try. Get your coat."

"I beg your pardon?" Dr. Dupray sniffed indignantly.

"We're going to the mall," Lali commanded.

"The mall?" Dr. Dupray inquired curiously.

"Yeah the mall I figure you didn't waste your teen years hanging out at the mall like the rest of us so we can start there," Lali explained. "Hurry up I am working tonight. Do you drive?"

"I don't own a car," Dr. Dupray confessed with a hint of embarrassment as she shrugged on a very large coat.

"Okay we'll figure out how to get you home later," Lali muttered as she questioned her own sanity.

"There are so many people," Dr. Dupray gasped sounding as if she was about to hyperventilate.

"I know I hate it," Lali confessed. "Alas both of my glorious jobs are located here. Tonight I am working at the Pizza Shack. My other job is at Wal-Mart."

"What is Wal-Mart?" Dr. Dupray inquired.

"This is going to be fun," Lali snickered. "Just stick close to me. I figure we can start with a little window shopping."

"You need to buy windows?" Dr. Dupray questioned.

"No," Lali choked grasping the confused woman by the arm and guiding her through the flurry of people. The smaller woman clung tightly to her as they worked their way through the crowd. They passed from one end of the mall to the other without Dr. Dupray saying a word. Lali was beginning to feel hopeless when she noticed that the smaller woman shyly stealing a glance at a window display. Dr. Dupray looked from the chrome mannequins to her own attire. The sad look she was sporting spoke volumes.

"That would look good on you," Lali threw out in a casual manner.

"Where would I wear such a thing?" Dr. Dupray grumbled.

"I admire your practicality but you could try it on," she urged.

"But I'm not going to buy it?" Dr. Dupray argued.

"Who said anything about buying?" Lali smiled brightly. "Just for fun? Fine," Lali conceded when Dr. Dupray returned her suggestion with a blank stare. They continued up to the second level each time they passed a clothing store Dr. Dupray seemed to linger just a bit. *'Okay so she wants to update her wardrobe but won't admit it now what?'* Lali pondered before she came up with an idea. "I need to get some new jeans do you mind if we go in here?" She suggested pleased when Dorinda's eyes lit up.

Dr. Dupray followed Lali very closely she selected a couple of pairs of jeans to try on. "I'm sorry," Dorinda apologized when she bumped into Lali. "I'm not use to being around so many people."

"I know," Lali reassured the shy woman with a gentle pat on the thick sleeve of her coat. "Did you want to try something on? I have to go into the changing room so we would be together."

"I've never shopped for clothes," Dr. Dupray confessed in a hushed whisper. "Just on line or my assistant did it for me. It never really mattered since no one sees me."

"It doesn't matter if anyone sees you," Lali argued. "You should wear what you like. I don't want to insult you but do you like the clothes you wear?"

"Not really," Dr. Dupray sighed. "But this is what my assistant picked out."

"Your assistant should be bitched slapped," Lali muttered under her breath. "Dr. Dupray,"

"Dory," she shyly offered.

"Dory," Lali repeated with a smile. "Pick out whatever you want we have to hurry since I need to get to work."

Dory smiled gleefully as they went from rack to rack. Each time Dory selected something that

interested her she immediately put it back.

"Oh this is getting us nowhere," Lali finally grouched grabbing up a few items Dory had selected and rejected. "You won't know unless you try them on," she firmly instructed the blushing woman.

Before Dory could object Lali was ushering Dory towards the changing rooms. *'I swear I have never met a more insecure person,'* she silently grumbled once she was locked in her own dressing room slipping on the new pair of jeans. *'I don't get it she is brilliant and I know that she is hiding something under all that wool,'* her silent tirade continued as she stepped out of the tiny room to get a better look at how her new jeans looked. She glanced around noticing that Dory was still locked away in her own cubicle. She knocked politely.

"Dory?" She called out. "Do you need help?"

"No," came the stifled response.

"Can I see how the clothes look?" Lali gently encouraged fearing that Dory would simply abandon the idea of trying on anything. She waited the silence driving her insane, she was just about to knock once again when the door creaked open. She opened her mouth to offer something encouraging as the door opened wider.

Her jaw dropped and her dark brown eyes widened as she drank in the sight of the good doctor wearing a pair of black jeans and an emerald turtle neck sweater both of which clung to her body revealing for the first time what an amazing body Dory possessed. An added bonus was that Dory had let her hair down. The sight of her golden hair hanging loosely down to her shoulders was almost Lali's undoing.

"Do I look alright?" Dory nervously inquired.

"Buy them," Lali demanded. "You know what I'll buy them for you."

"I take it I look adequate?" Dory blushed.

"Adequate?" Lali gaped. "Why are you hiding that?" Lali questioned completely flustered by the surge of heat suddenly pulsating through her body. Lali blew out a terse breath before shaking her head in an effort to shake off her errant thoughts. "Do you like them? That is the only thing that matters."

"Yes," Dory mumbled.

"Good," Lali beamed as she waved for the saleswoman to come and assist them. "My friend would like to wear these now, could you ring them up and add them to my order?" She questioned as she ducked into her own cubicle and retrieved her credit card.

"Certainly," the saleswoman readily agreed as she snipped the tags from Dory's new outfit and

removed the security tags. Lali cleared her throat when she noticed the saleswoman's eyes wandering along the curves of Dory's body.

"Lali?" Dory whispered. "I can't let you pay."

"If you promise to wear that now I will gladly pay for it," Lali asserted nudging Dory back into the changing room. "Anything else you like you pay for. We need to hurry I can't be late for my shift."

They hurried out of the store loaded down with packages containing Dory's new clothes. Lali felt positively shameful as she allowed Dory to step in front of her on more than one occasion so she could check out the blonde's new look from behind.

"Who knew?" She blew out wistfully as they hurried through the crowd.

"Why don't you buy dinner here and then we can work out how to get you home?" Lali suggested. "Or you could hang out until my shift is over and I can drive you?"

"You don't mind?" Dory questioned.

"No, I don't mind," Lali reassured her.

"Perhaps if it is slow I could help you with your homework?" Dory suggested.

"I don't get a lot of breaks on a Friday night but I'd love the help," Lali eagerly accepted. "Why don't you sit at the bar? Dan this is my friend Dory she is keeping me company tonight."

"Lali you know the rules," the youngster who was Lali's boss began to argue until he spied Dory sitting at the bar. "No problem," he quickly back peddled his eyes glazing over as he ogled the petite blonde.

"That is what I thought," she smiled smugly. "Dory I have to change I'll be back to take your order in just a few."

"Lali?" Dory whispered pulling her closer. "People are staring at me. I mean I'm use to people giving me odd looks but this is different."

"They are staring because you look nice," Lali tenderly offered. "Very nice. I have to go I'll be right back."

"Can I have your math book before you go?" Dory questioned surprising Lali who quickly retrieved the textbook from her backpack.

"New girlfriend?" Sharon the bartender inquired as Lali rushed past her.

"Math tutor," Lali corrected. "Be nice she is very shy."

"I'm always nice," Sharon barked in response.

"I said to be nice," Lali barked when she emerged from the backroom only to find Sharon leaning dangerously close to Dory. She was squirming in her seat trying to fend off the bartender's barrage of questions.

"I was being nice," Sharon tried to argue.

"No hitting on my friend," Lali scolded the redhead with a fierce glare.

"Thank you," Dory stammered as Lali handed the flustered woman a menu.

"Don't pay any attention to Sharon," Lali tried to reassure the frightened woman. "She can't help it if she is a pig."

"Hey!" Sharon whined.

"You are," Lali laughed as she went about checking on her customers.

Lali hustled between her tables while helping Sharon behind the bar. As she worked she couldn't help noticing Dory scribbling in her textbook with a pencil. Dory's gaze bounced between the book and the constant stream of pizzas being served. She gave Dory another glass of water as she cleared away her dinner dishes.

"Do I want to know what you are doing?" She asked when Dory slid the textbook over. Lali glanced at the page she was pointing to.

"Try solving those," Dory instructed.

"You changed the word problems," Lali muttered noticing that almost every equation had been changed to a pizza order.

"Just try them," Dory encouraged.

"Okay," Lali gulped suddenly feeling stupid.

The night progressed with Lali racing around with food and drink orders while trying to slip in working on her math equations. Dory just sat there playing with her water shying away whenever anyone approached her. Finally Lali handed the textbook back to Dory after she had completed the last equation. Dory seemed to be relieved to have something to focus on.

The night was finally over and Lali wanted to clean up as quickly as possible. She was just about to count out her tips when Dory shocked her by ordering a glass of wine. "I didn't know you drank," Lali confessed.

"Not very often," Dory admitted as Lali poured her a glass of wine and then one for herself.

"I'll join you after I finish counting out," she explained pleased by the small smile Dory offered. She counted quickly feeling exhausted as she sat down next to Dory. "So how badly did I do?" She questioned tapping the textbook.

"Lali all of your answers were correct," Dory explained in a lilting tone.

"What?" Lali choked on her wine. She placed the glass down on the bar and snatched up her textbook. She reviewed the work she hadn't really put much thought into and realized that she had indeed answered the equations.

"You just needed to see it in terms of something you could understand," Dory explained. "Pizza divided into varying degrees is something you can do without thinking about."

"Is it that simple?" Lali bemoaned.

"Yes," Dory smiled boldly before diverting her gaze and sipping her wine. "If you would like we could keep working together I think now you will have a better understanding of the basics."

"I'd like to keep working with you," Lali asserted before closing her book and turning her attention back to her new friend. "So your mother is friends with Arthur?"

"They are dating," Dory quietly responded.

"I don't mean to pry," Lali apologized.

"No," Dory tried to reassure her still Lali could see that Dory was once again retreating back into her own world. "You're the first person to talk to me like a person. I grew up in such a strange world. When I was eight I was in high school and even in the gifted program I was bored. It was the same when I started college. I didn't have any friends because my peers were old enough to be my parents. I had nothing in common with anyone. My mother wanted me to have more of a normal life but I couldn't talk to kids my own age I had no idea what they were talking about. My father wanted me to live up to my potential. It broke up their marriage. It is funny you and I are the same age and I feel like we are from completely different worlds."

"We are," Lali shrugged. "You started school very early and I started very late. My classmates and co-workers are so young. I have no idea what they are talking about most of the time. Speaking of late I should get you home."

"Thank you for today," Dory offered with a slight blush.

"My pleasure and thank you for helping me with my math," Lali graciously offered.

"I see that your math grades are improving," Arthur noted a few weeks later during a quick meeting with Lali.

"Thanks to your girlfriend's daughter," she teased him. "Funny I never thought of you as having a social life Arthur."

"Well I do," he snidely retorted. "Speaking of Dorinda she came over for dinner the other night. What have you done to her? She looked incredible."

"I took her to the mall," Lali dryly responded.

"The mall?" He choked out.

"Yes the mall Arthur you know that really big place with lots of stores and no parking spaces," Lali taunted him.

"I know what a mall is," he countered gruffly. "Are you planning on continuing working with Dorinda?"

"On math or her wardrobe?" Lali suspiciously questioned. "I like her Arthur she is a very nice person granted getting her to speak at times is like pulling teeth but she is really great, and she is helping me understand math which is no small accomplishment."

"Good I'm glad the two of you are hitting it off," he smiled.

"Jesus Arthur what are you doing trying to fix us up?" She laughed the laughter faded when she noticed his eyes avoiding her gaze. Before she could question his motives he changed the subject.

"What?" Lali questioned tapping her pen nervously against Dory's kitchen table. It was a habit they had fallen into during the study sessions. Instead of being locked in Dory's study they would brew a pot of coffee something Lali discovered Dory wasn't very skilled at doing. So she took over the coffee brewing and they would study in the kitchen little by little she learned more about the quiet woman.

"Nothing," Dory mumbled as she scribbled some notes for Lali. "You have a full comprehension of the subject matter. I don't think you need my help anymore."

"Oh?" Lali sighed feeling dejected. "Are you sure?"

"Lali you don't need my help," Dory repeated in a quiet tone. "I'll miss you."

"Well," Lali began with a hard swallow regretting not being able to spend more time with the quirky doctor. "I could still stop by for coffee now and then?" She suggested hopefully.

"Yes," Dory blurted out. She seemed stunned by her outburst quickly retreating inside of herself. "I mean that would be nice."

"Great," Lali smiled already planning to stop by as soon as possible. "Crap I have to go. I have yet another interview for a place to live."

"No luck yet?" Dory stammered.

"Nothing," Lali groaned as she stood. "I keep answering these ads for people looking for roommates and every place I go there is a keg sitting in the living room. Brenda was a great roommate. We both worked crazy hours and studied constantly frankly I think the reason we got along so well is because we never saw one another. I don't know what I am going to do I am running out of time."

"If you wanted to," Dory quietly stuttered. "I mean Arthur suggested now that Dad has passed on and it is just me. Well I've been living here alone for the past couple of years and maybe I could rent out the other bedroom."

It took Lali a moment to decipher Dory's words. At times the doctor's shyness made her a little difficult to understand.

"You want to rent me a room?" She slowly questioned.

"My old bedroom has been empty for years," Dory offered while maintaining her focus on the mug of coffee sitting in front of her.

"Can I see the room?" Lali eagerly requested surprised by the rapid beating of her heart. Dory

simply nodded before she stood. Lali followed her up the staircase once again pleased that Dory had decided to update her wardrobe.

'Maybe this isn't such a good idea,' she silently questioned, as her gaze remained riveted on Dory's backside. Dory showed her the bathroom first, which was nice albeit modest. They passed by Dory's room, which Lali secretly wanted to see but Dory didn't offer. Then they entered the only other room on the top floor.

"It is huge," Lali gasped as she stepped into the large empty bedroom. "And a fireplace? How much and can I have cable installed?"

"Cable?" Dory questioned truly confused by the suggestion.

"For television," Lali chuckled. "How much would the rent be?"

"I don't know," Dory whispered as she shifted nervously. "I think I should be paying you."

"My coffee isn't that good," Lali quipped.

"Yes it is," Dory countered honestly. "I don't know would seventy-five dollars a week be acceptable?"

"Keep going," Lali groaned.

"Fifty?" Dory squeaked.

"I meant higher," Lali corrected. "A big room in a nice house that is walking distance to the college you should get more money than that."

"I don't need the money," Dory tried to explain. "I need to be around people. I mean around other people. See I'm learning."

"Yes you are," Lali laughed.

"Seventy-five and I get to watch television with you once and awhile," Dory suggested. "My father never allowed us to have one. I did watch a little when I lived in France. The only American show I ever got to see was Bay Watch."

"Oh my God you poor thing," Lali gasped. "It is a deal. I have to be out of my old place by the end of the month when would be good for you for me to start moving in?"

"Whenever you want," Dory smiled.

"You should do that more often," Lali said tucking her fingers beneath Dory's chin before she realized what she was doing.

"What?" Dory innocently inquired.

"Smile," Lali shyly explained as she quickly retreated from her touch.

"Hold on," Brenda commanded halting Lali's movements. When Lali arrived home she explained that she had found a place and quickly began to organize her belongings. It wasn't a difficult task since she and Brenda had already begun packing.

"What? I'd thought you would be happy that I've finally found a place?" Lali questioned truly confused by the stern look on her friend's face.

"Oh I am but," Brenda grimaced. "Are you sure that moving in with someone who is dangerously close to becoming an agoraphobic is a wise choice? Granted neither you nor I were social butterflies but the good doctor had never seen a mall before you stepped into her life."

"Dory is coming out of her shell," Lali protested curious as to why Brenda was so concerned. "I like her granted the conversation is a bit one sided some of the time but she is good company."

"I'm just worried that you will spend your time taking care of her and not focusing on your life," Brenda cautioned. "And when did you start calling her by her first name?"

"The mall," Lali confessed with a shy smile. "As for my studies can you think of a better place to live than with a walking/talking encyclopedia? Oh and the rent is dirt cheap and I can walk to campus all I have to do is make the coffee in the morning and let her watch my television."

"Doesn't she own a television?" Brenda laughed.

"No," Lali quickly corrected her friend.

"Huh?" Brenda gasped horrified by the concept.

"Her father wouldn't allow it," Lali tried to explain. "He was an academic himself and a bit of a snob. I swear Dory would have a lot more self assurance if he had simply let her be a normal kid."

"And you're her champion?" Brenda fussed. "Lali what if she gets too attached to you?"

"Attached how?" Lali fumed filled with a sudden sense of anger. "We're going to be housemates."

"No you are going to be her tenant," Brenda sternly corrected. "Is there something going on?"

"With Dory?" Lali sputtered curious as to why her palms were suddenly sweating.

"Lali?" Brenda beamed with snide smirk. "Don't tell me you have the hots for her?"

"Brenda?" Lali bellowed. "She's my new landlady. Granted since she has updated her wardrobe I have noticed that she is attractive but I seriously doubt that Dory thinks about sex. The poor thing probably hasn't ever been on a date."

"My point exactly," Brenda countered. "She's a lost little virgin and,"

"And you read way too many of those stories on line," Lali barked with laughter. "She's my age she couldn't be a virgin, could she? Never mind just help me pack."

"Fine," Brenda gave in. "I don't know why the hurry you still have a couple of weeks."

"Hey I'm not trying to ditch you," Lali said softly. "I just figure if I get organized and start moving some of my stuff in a little at a time it will make the move a lot easier."

"Good point," Brenda seemed to agree but there still something in her voice that set Lali on edge.

During the following week Brenda's concerns kept seeping through and driving Lali insane. She finally decided it might be in everyone's best interest to push up her move to that weekend. She had been dropping off boxes all week and by Sunday she had only her furniture and a few items left. She had really enjoyed living with Brenda for the past couple of years and was shocked by how tense things had become over the past few days.

"Why this weekend?" Brenda bemoaned when Lali announced that since she had so little left to move she would be renting a van on Sunday.

"Everything is almost there," Lali tried to placate her friend. "What gives?" She demanded knowing that a part of her rushed to move her belongings because she was eager to begin her new life.

"I'm sorry," Brenda woefully began. "I'm just nervous and I'm sad that I'm leaving. You're one of my best friends this isn't easy."

"It easy for me either," Lali sighed with relief understanding Brenda's anxiety. "I'm going to miss you too, you big goober. Why don't you help me on Sunday? You'll get to meet Dory."

"Okay," Brenda consented with a dramatic sigh. "Did you find out?"

"Find out what?" Lali questioned frowning her brow as she tried to decipher Brenda's query.

"Is she a virgin?" Brenda taunted.

Lali's jaw hung open as she tried to convince herself that Brenda hadn't just asked what she had asked. "How should I know?" She finally spewed out.

"Sweet," Brenda commented as she looked around Lali's new bedroom after they had lugged the headboard up the stairs. "I can see why you were in such a hurry to move. "Big room and a hot landlady."

"Hey," Lali bristled in response.

"Like you didn't notice," Brenda scoffed at Lali's indignation.

"Fine I noticed," Lali confessed in a hushed tone. "The first time she shed all of those sweaters I noticed. But she is my landlady and you must have noticed when I introduced the two of you how shy she is. Hell I don't even know if she is gay."

"You could ask," Brenda reasoned as Lali scowled. "Or we could just finish moving your stuff in," she quickly retreated.

Once they finished they found Dory in the kitchen trying to make sense of the toaster oven. "How is it that you can understand Einstein and can't work a basic appliance?" Lali teased nudging Dory aside.

"I never had to," Dory quietly confirmed.

"I'll just have to teach you," Lali offered with a reassuring smile as she set about cooking Dory's pop tarts.

"Just don't let her do the laundry," Brenda interjected.

"Oh?" Dory mumbled as scooted closer to the corner of the room. "I was hoping that you knew how to work those machines."

"The two of you are going to end up naked," Brenda laughed her comment catching both Lali

and Dory off guard.

"Brenda," Lali growled.

"Sorry," Brenda snickered. "Clothing issues aside I'm glad to know that my girl is going to be in safe hands."

"Your girl?" Dory stammered.

"Friend we're just really good friends," Lali quickly amended. She sensed that Dory had already figured out her sexuality. *'Then again I never really said anything about it,'* she silently mulled over.

"Speaking of which," Brenda slyly began.

"Brenda," Lali repeated her ire growing more and more with each passing moment. She loved Brenda dearly still her friend had an annoying habit of prying. Fine with most people who could simply tell her to back off but Dory on the other hand looked like a deer caught in the headlights if someone asked her the time of day. "Don't," she cautioned her ever-curious companion. "Dory your pop tarts should be done."

"Thank you," Dory whispered stepping carefully over towards the toaster oven.

Lali's skin prickled as she spied Brenda watching Dory's every movement. "Ouch," Brenda yelped when Lali pinched her.

"Stop it," she hissed under her breath.

"Am I missing something?" Dory questioned as she pushed her glasses up.

"Just ignore Brenda," Lali quickly interjected before Brenda had the chance to speak. "She tends to be a little pushy and very nosy. If I let her speak she'll bombard you with personal questions. Even though I've already explained that you are on the shy side."

"Shy side," Dory laughed lightly. "That is very polite of you Lali. Brenda I'm afraid I don't have a great deal of information to offer regarding interpersonal relationships."

"Interpersonal relationships?" Brenda sputtered.

"No girl talk," Lali translated wiping the sweat from her brow. "Come on Brenda I promised you pizza and beer. Dory would you like to join us?"

"No thank you," Dory declined before ducking out of the room.

"You weren't exaggerating that woman is terminally shy," Brenda blew out.

"Believe it or not she is much more outgoing then when we first met," Lali explained grabbing up her coat.

"You're kidding," Brenda groaned. "Still I don't get the virgin vibe from her."

"The virgin vibe?" Lali choked. "You are truly twisted you know that don't you?"

"But in a really fun way," Brenda laughed as they made their way towards the door.

Lali was exhausted by the time dinner was finished and they returned the van. She tried valiantly to be quiet as she entered her new home. Fearful that Dory was asleep she tried to enter and hurry upstairs as quickly and as quietly as possible.

"It is alright I'm in my office," Dory called out startling Lali.

Lali laughed at her antics and headed towards the office. "You're up late," she commented from the doorway as she watched her new roommate toiling away at the computer.

"I had some work to tend to," Dory explained without looking up from her computer. "Brenda seemed nice," she quietly added. "I'm sorry I wasn't more sociable."

"You were fine," Lali reassured her. "And you lucked out that Brenda didn't get a chance to grill you."

"Girl talk," Dory shyly confirmed as she shut down her computer.

Lali remained in the doorway watching as Dory caressed the keyboard seemingly searching for something to say. Lali was beginning to learn it was best to just let Dory find her words on her own.

"What is a virgin vibe?" She finally blurted out blushing profusely her eyes still locked on the dormant keyboard.

"Oh crap you heard that," Lali grumbled. "Brenda was just curious as to whether or not you ever got out of the lab. I told you she was nosy."

"So that would be girl talk?" Dory questioned in a thoughtful tone. "You never asked?"

"It isn't any of my business," Lali readily supplied though still she was curious.

"But Brenda would?" Dory continued tilting her head to meet Lali's gaze.

"I told you she was pushy," Lali quipped with a bemused smile.

"But women who are friends when they socialize they talk about sex?" Dory innocently inquired.

"Sometimes," Lali squeaked. "Sharing details not graphic; well sometimes graphic details of your love life with your mates are common. This isn't a requirement. Sometimes it is just little things."

"Such as?" Dory pressed as she stood. "I was going to make some hot chocolate would you like to join me?"

"You're going to make hot chocolate?" Lali question skeptically.

"Even I can boil water," Dory laughed guiding them towards the kitchen. "What are some of the little things?" Dory continued as she put the kettle on the stove and reached for a couple of mugs from the cabinet.

"Let me," Lali offered once she noticed the smaller woman was struggling to reach the upper shelf. She silently cursed when she noticed her body tingling when she accidentally brushed against Dory.

"You were saying?" Dory encouraged as she opened the packets of premixed hot chocolate and poured the contents into the mugs. "Girl talk," Dory prompted.

"Right the little things," Lali continued leaning against the kitchen counter silently praying that the water would hurry up and boil so she could escape the conversation. "Ah well the little things are who you are dating; what type of person you are attracted to things like that."

"And Brenda wanted to know these things about me?" Dory pondered the comment carefully. "Why?"

"Again she's nosy," Lali laughed. "And she thought you were attractive."

"Really?" Dory gasped with a slight blush. "I didn't think she was gay."

"She isn't," Lali snorted in amusement. "She is what I like to call straightish. She isn't gay and not really what I'd call bi-sexual but every now and then she is attracted to a woman."

"Straightish interesting term," Dory, responded seemingly fascinated by the terminology. "What about you?"

Lali's mouth went dry thankfully the teakettle began to whistle. "Saved by the bell," Dory noted with some degree of amusement.

"I'm gay," Lali flatly retorted pleased that her new roommate didn't react. Dory simply went about stirring the cocoa in the hot water. "You knew that right?" She pressed just to reassure

herself that Dory wouldn't have a problem.

"Of course," Dory stated simply setting the mugs down on the table waving her hand for Lali to join her.

"When did you figure it out?" Lali pressed encouraged by Dory's openness.

"Right away," Dory blinked with surprise. "It was-what is that term I heard recently? Gaydar. Arthur did say we had one thing in common I just didn't realize that was it until I met you. Would this be girl talk?"

"Yes," Lali choked on her hot chocolate shaking her head violently as she tried to process what Dory had just confessed. "Uhm so you did make it out of the lab?"

"A few times," Dory answered sadly. "Not as often as I would have liked. But father didn't approve when he discovered that I preferred the female form to the male. I honestly think he had hoped that I would be asexual. Strange man my father."

"No kidding," Lali agreed. "So was there someone special?"

"Not really," Dory sighed. "Greta and I were together for almost two years. The truth is I never meant for us to be a couple but she just kind of took over and became my assistant."

"Wait she was the one who dressed you?" Lali fussed.

"You should have seen the way she dressed," Dory grimaced. "I tried terminating our relationships many times. She had just taken over my life and convinced my father to hire her as my new assistant. When he took ill I finally had an excuse to leave Norway and come home. She didn't take it very well. What about you is there someone special?"

"Not for a long time," Lali sighed heavily.

"I don't understand," Dory gasped. "You are very attractive and outgoing."

"Love isn't a formula," Lali snickered. "I guess I just haven't met the right woman yet. Plus I've been very focused on my studies. It took me a long time to get back in college I couldn't blow that."

"Love and academics are incompatible?" Dory challenged.

"I'm sure that they can be it just didn't work out that way for me," Lali smiled amazed at how relaxed Dory seemed.

"I guess it hasn't worked out for either of us," Dory offered in a distant tone.

"Not yet," Lali asserted with a tender smile.

Just over a week later Lali was pulling the late shift at the Pizza Shack and almost fell over when Dory sauntered in. "Hi?" She squeaked with surprise when the blonde sat down at the bar.

"Hello," Dory greeted her politely looking around. "Are you on the bar tonight?"

"Yes," Lali nodded.

"Good that Sharon person made me a little nervous," Dory blew out setting down a pile of packages.

"Not that I'm unhappy to see you," she slowly began still reeling from seeing Dory out in public.

"I wanted to get some new clothes," Dory explained. "Since neither of us can work the washer and dryer I thought shopping for something clean to wear would be a good idea. I took the bus," she added in hushed tone.

"How was it?" Lali questioned with concern setting a glass of wine down in front of Dory.

"Frightening," Dory whimpered. "White you remembered."

"Of course," Lali smiled.

"I'm glad I did it," Dory asserted. "I'm also glad that it is over. If it is okay can I catch I ride home with you?"

"No problem," Lali reassured her. "What made you decide to venture out in public?"

"Well since that visit here I have been going for a walk every day," Dory started. "Not much but a little more every time I went out."

"And now you're at the mall," Lali beamed. "Next thing you know you'll be cruising the bars."

"What?" Dory gasped her face turning ashen.

"Joke," Lali smiled thoroughly enchanted by Dory's actions. "How about after we get home I introduce you to cable? They hooked it up on Friday."

That night Lali realized that television was something she was going to have to ease Dory into. She was just a tad too analytical for most of the shows past and present.

On Monday she returned home from her classes and went into an instant panic when she realized that Dory wasn't home. She tried calming herself for over an hour still she couldn't help worrying about the naïve woman. Relief rushed through her when Dory finally returned.

"Is something wrong?" Dory questioned with concerned.

"I'm not use to finding you gone," Lali explained. "It was silly. Did you go for a walk?"

"Library I had some research to do," Dory smiled. "It feels good going out when I need or want to. I've spent far too much time locked in this house. I picked up a book for the both of us," she exclaimed with excitement as she thrust the small textbook into Lali's hands.

"Home Economics?" Lali curiously read the cover.

"There is a chapter on doing laundry," Dory flatly explained. "I assumed that between the both us we could figure out how to clean our clothes without turning everything pink."

"You do that once and you're branded for life," Lali complained. "Fine you read and I will start dinner."

Over the next few months Lali's grades soared even higher. It was a big help to living with someone who could answer almost every question she posed. They were still struggling with the specifics of handling the laundry but all in all Lali was enjoying her new home. Most nights she studied then watched television. Dory would shyly request to join her quite often falling asleep in Lali's bed. Secretly Lali enjoyed waking up next to Dory. Now Dory wouldn't wait for an invitation she would simply arrive when she knew Lali was done studying for the night.

Lali was troubled when she entered the house that afternoon. That morning when she woke up Dory was there with her. That wasn't a surprise Dory spent most nights sleeping beside her. What was troubling Lali was how much she was enjoying the routine and that her hand had mysteriously slipped under Dory's shirt. She almost bolted off the bed when she discovered that in her slumber she had been caressing Dory's stomach.

The other thing troubling Lali was she was going out tonight and she wanted to invite Dory along. Dory had grown leaps and bounds since their first encounter, venturing off on her own for shopping or what not. Lali was discovering that beneath Dory's shy veneer lurked a quick wit. It had stunned her at first much as she had been surprised by Dory's physical attributes when she first spied them.

She was troubled about inviting Dory one because she really wanted to be with her, secondly the event was bowling something she was quite certain Dory had never experienced and then there was her friends. All woman all-gay most of whom were great and a couple who even though they were her friends she wouldn't let them date her sister. Mona and Cara were the worst the moment they spotted Dory and discovered she was single they would be all over the poor doctor.

"Lali is something wrong?" Dory questioned as she emerged from her study. It still amazed her how quickly Dory could pick up on her moods.

"No," she lied.

"Oh," Dory nodded with disbelief.

"I'm going out tonight," she began. "You know first night of spring break some of my friends wanted to get together."

"Oh," Dory nodded once again.

"The thing is I wanted to know if you wanted to go with me." She quickly blurted out.

"Yes," Dory beamed like a small child.

"The thing is there will be a lot of people there," Lali began thinking it would best to just lay all of her cards on table.

"Okay," Dory responded with a hard swallow. Lali could feel the sense of apprehension seeping off of her.

"And," Lali pushed on. "We are going bowling."

"Bowling?" Dory rolled the word around as if she had never heard it before.

"And," Lali bolstered her courage.

"There's more?" Dory squeaked out fearfully.

"I'm afraid so," Lali smiled. "It is all women. Everyone is gay and single. All of them are really nice but a couple of my friends are well dogs."

"Dogs as in unattractive?" Dory pursued.

"As in they'll hit on you," Lali meekly supplied. "Still interested?"

Dory trembled slightly as she pondered the idea. "Yes but is it alright if I stay close to you?" She stammered.

"Great," Lali beamed.

"Good," Dory blew out with relief. "And could you teach me about this bowling thing?"

"You wear other people's shoes?" Dory questioned when Lali handed her the rented shoes.

"Yes and no," Lali shook her head. "You have to wear special shoes so you don't damage the lanes if you don't have your own bowling shoes you rent shoes. You remember the rules and how to keep score?"

"Ten pins and a big ball. The goal is to use the big ball to knock down as many pins as you can," Dory began to recite as Lali guided her towards the boisterous crowd awaiting their arrival. "A strike is when you knock all ten down on your first try and a spare is when you knock all ten down on the second try. Then you add the score of the next ball of the next frame to the proceeding score."

"You made it," Susan called out waving them over.

"Everyone this is my roommate Dory," Lali began the introductions. "This is Susan, Mary, Fiona, Cara and Mona. If you guys don't mind Dory's never played and I'd like to bowl a couple of frames with her first?"

"No problem," Fiona smiled.

"I'll show her," Mona quickly volunteered.

"Oh great they've been drinking," Lali groaned knowing that the gals were going to be in rare form. "No, I'll show her," she cut off Mona who was already approaching poor Dory.

"No offense," Mona smirked as Dory changed her shoes. Lali was fuming at the way Mona was out and out leering at Dory.

Lali curled her lips in defiance leaning over so only Mona could hear her. "Behave," she hissed in the stout woman's ear.

"Geez Lee just say the girl is with you," Mona grumbled.

Lali hesitated for a moment briefly wondering if she should correct Mona's mistake. *'Then again no one will bother Dory if they think she is my date,'* she gleefully reasoned. "We need to find the right size ball for you," she threw out once she had changed her shoes.

She carefully selected a ball she hoped would be the correct weight for Dory. "Just remember what I told you aim for that center triangle," she instructed Dory who was chewing on her bottom lip. Dory nodded her head and tried to stand and throw the ball the way Lali had instructed her to do. Lali's heart sank when it veered off missing all of the pins.

"That would be a gutter ball wouldn't it?" Dory questioned in a dismal tone.

"It is okay," Lali reassured her with a light pat on Dory's shoulder. Lali shook her head when she felt her finger tingling from touching Dory.

"Try again only this time," she began as she stepped behind Dory running her hands down her arm and helping her adjust her aim.

Lali stifled a groan when Dory's body shifted pressing against her own. Her body was reeling from the delightful sensation if it wasn't for the disappointed sigh Dory released she would have failed to notice that once again Dory had landed the ball in the gutter.

"One more," Lali encouraged hitting the reset button. Once again her senses were reeling as she molded her body against Dory's trying to guide her in the right direction.

"You got one," Lali boasted.

"One," Dory grimly conceded.

"Come on," Lali nudged her. Dory was frowning when she managed to knock down only two more pins. "It is a start."

"Uhm guys," Mary called out. "I hate to interrupt but you were late and we won't have the lane for much longer."

Lali opened her mouth ready to ask for more time when Dory interjected. "No problem," Dory offered. "I'll just watch for the first game."

"Are you sure?" Lali protested.

"I'll be fine," Dory asserted.

For the first game Dory sat and watched. Lali was amazed at how intently Dory watched everyone. She was also unnerved that every time she got up to bowl either Cara or Mona would sit next to Dory. She was also thrown by the way she could feel Dory's eyes watching her.

"You suck tonight," Mona cackled once the score was tallied. "Now that we've warmed up it is for drinks. Dory you're joining us right?"

"I don't know," Lali fumed.

"Fine," Dory shrugged.

"You heard the lady," Mona cackled. "Should be interesting."

"Bite me," Lali hissed while mentally calculating how much money she had in her wallet.

Now that booze was on the line everyone stepped up their game. Lali elected to go next to last and for Dory to bowl after her. She was pleased when she pulled off a strike in the first frame. "Need help?" She asked as Dory stood.

"No," Dory answered with a sweet smile.

Lali held her breath as Dory approached the line. She couldn't help noticing that Dory's stance seemed much better. She also couldn't help noticing how firm Dory's backside was.

"I really need to stop doing that," she whispered as she watched Dory releasing the heavy ball.

Everyone sat there in a stunned silence as eight pins toppled over. The silence grew deafening when Dory somehow managed to take down one more pin with her next ball.

"That was great," Lali gushed.

"Thank you," Dory shyly answered taking her seat next to Lali.

"What is she a ringer?" Susan grouched as she marked down the score.

"First time I swear," Lali laughed proudly.

"Watching helped," Dory whispered in her ear. The feel of Dory's warm breath caressing her skin sent a delightful shiver down Lali's spine.

The next frame Lali almost missed her spare when she caught a glimpse of Mona talking to Dory. Somehow she managed to bury her ire and pull it off raising her score to thirty-nine in the second frame. She glared at Mona who refused to vacate her seat when Dory stood.

"What?" Mona taunted before Lali turned away and watched Dory take down eight pins only to miss with her second ball.

"Seventeen," Lali offered. "Not bad for your first two frames. "Do you want a drink?"

"Spring water," Dory politely requested.

"Is it safe to leave you?" Lali questioned glaring down at Mona.

"I'm fine," Dory laughed. "Watching really does help."

"Huh?"

"She has a lot of bravado," Dory whispered so only Lali could hear her. "And nothing to back it up with."

Lali released a boisterous laugh before reassuring Dory that she would return quickly. She returned with a couple of bottles of water just in time to take her turn. Once again she picked up a spare raising her score to fifty-seven.

"You're really good," Dory complimented her.

"Actually I'm a little off tonight," Lali boasted.

"Speaking of bravado," Dory laughed as she retrieved her ball.

"So what is the deal?" Mona grumbled blocking Lali's view.

"None of your business," she barked her eyes bulging as she heard the crash. She pushed Mona aside just in time to see all of the pins fallings. "Yes," she pumped her fist as the others applaud the strike Dory had just scored. She felt mildly miffed that she couldn't reach Dory because the others were busy hugging her.

"Good job," she congratulated Dory once she was finally freed from the others.

"I did it," Dory squealed knocking the wind out of Lali's lungs when she wrapped her up in a hug.

"Yes you did," Lali boomed allowing the hug to linger a little longer than necessary.

In the next frame Lali once again pulled off a spare, as did Dory. She was leading with seventy-seven while Dory was hanging on with a score of fifty-four. The tides turned in the next two frames each of them earning a strike, which Lali followed with another, spare. Dory on the other hand bowled another strike. Dory's score was now lingering dangerously close to Lali's.

"She is a ringer!" Susan screeched when once again each of them followed up with a pair of

strikes. By the next frame Lali was leading with a score of one hundred thirty seven and Dory was a mere three points behind.

Lali was proud of Dory and slightly miffed when she pulled off a spare and Dory managed yet another strike. Now at one hundred sixty four Dory was eight points ahead of Lali. The next frame Lali once again pulled off a spare and Dory once again topped her. By the ninth frame Lali was lagging behind Dory's score of one hundred ninety four by twenty one points.

The others were trailing but not by much and Lali was well aware that she could still end up having to pick up the tab. Who paid for the drinks was determined by who scored the least winner didn't pay for anything. When Lali began the final frame she was behind Mona she would have to bowl at least a spare to top Mona's score. She had three chances.

She looked over her shoulder and almost toppled over when her eyes were greeted by Dory's gaze. There was something dark and inviting in Dory's eyes that Lali had failed notice before. Just as suddenly Dory looked away. Lali tried to regain her composure missing her mark and only knocking down seven pins. It was the least amount she had scored with her first ball all night. She wiped her brow reset the pins eyeing the remaining three carefully and took her mark.

"Thank you," she blew out when the last three fell. One last ball would determine where she ended up. She watched with pleasure as seven pins fell. Four points behind Dory but ahead of everyone else.

"You've already won," Lali explained with a smile.

"Really?" Dory smiled back. "So what are you saying no need to show off?"

"Feel free," Lali graciously stepped aside.

Lali watched in amazement as Dory bowled three strikes in a row. "Final score two hundred twenty four," Mary grimly supplied. "Crap I have to buy the first three rounds. Are you sure she hasn't played before the last five frames she hit nothing but strikes?"

"What can I say she's amazing," Lali boasted smiling proudly over at Dory who was actually conversing with some of the others.

"So Dory what's your day job?" Cara asked somewhere around the fourth round of drinks in the cocktail lounge.

"She's a rocket scientist," Lali quipped as she played with her drink. She had been careful to pace herself since she was driving. Dory hadn't kept up with the others but Lali could see that Dory was slightly off kilter.

"You keep saying that," Dory laughed. "I am not."

"Well that's only because I don't really understand what you do," Lali confessed. "Your areas are

so wide ranged. There's microbiology, molecular biology and what's that thing you do with plants?"

"Mostly find spores for cosmetic companies," Dory grumbled nudging Lali playfully. "To answer your question Cara at the moment I'm on a hiatus."

"Unemployed?" Mona teased.

"On a break is more like it," Dory sighed happily. "As Lali explained my areas of expertise is wide ranged. Truth is I don't know what I want to do. The University is trying to convince me to join the faculty. I've been thinking about it but I'm not good with talking in front of people."

"Ah that is why you were tutoring me in math," Lali smirked.

"She was your math tutor? I bet you had some fun with equations," Mona snickered as she waved for the waitress.

"Club soda for me," Lali quickly called out. "I'm driving and you my dear friend are a pig."

"Spoil sport," Mona laughed.

"I thought you said she was a dog?" Dory teased.

"Both," Mona boasted. "Not too worry my dear lady I wouldn't dream of stepping on Lali's toes."

Lali sighed deeply she could tell the truth or just leave it be. She glanced over at Dory something about her tender smile told her to just leave it be.

"I heard the science department is trying to woo a couple of names," Mary stated. "I'm a professor in the history department. The biggest name which I doubt they will score is Dupray the other is Maxwell."

"Simon Maxwell is a pompous ass," Dory grunted.

"You know him?" Mary gaped. "He is a huge deal."

"Especially to himself," Dory snickered. "Brilliant but if the University takes him on they will need to expand the doorways to all of the classrooms so he can fit his head through."

"How do you know him?" Mary pried with interest.

"I worked with him in Paris and the Amazon thankfully it was brief," Dory wearily explained.

"From what I've heard the man is a genius," Mary argued.

"No excuse for bad manners," Dory countered before taking a sip of her beer. "I'm sorry it is just

that the field of science is very competitive everyone fighting for grants and scoring accolades so you can get the big grants and contracts. I got stuck working in the pharmaceutical field then later I worked for the cosmetic industry. The pressure to produce is stifling. That is one of the reasons I'm taking a break."

"Oh my God," Mary suddenly spit out.

"What it is just club soda I am driving," Lali, teased already aware that the wheels in Mary's active mind were spinning.

"Forgive me," Mary choked out. "But just what is Dory short for?"

"Oh goodie," Lali grumbled.

"Dorinda," Dory politely informed the small Asian woman.

"As in Dorinda Dupray?" Mary slowly questioned as Susan gasped.

"Yes," Dory shyly responded.

"Holy shit," Susan who was in the math department blurted out.

"What?" Cara demanded.

"Dr. Dupray," Mary repeated in awe. "Ladies we have been bowling and drinking with one of the ten brightest women in the world."

"Well no wonder she kicked our butts," Mona quickly assessed.

Lali's heart sank as she watched Dory rubbing her face in her hands. "Yeah so share the nachos with the woman she hasn't eaten tonight," Lali demanded. "She can't work the toaster oven so fork over the food."

"Gladly," Susan offered.

"Oh man," Lali muttered as she watched Dory retreating. "Hey the lady is on vacation, no shop talk."

"Lali?" Susan pleaded. "Your housemate was on the short list for a noble prize twice."

"Unless you want to talk about bowling, junk food or whose turn it is to buy the next round drop it," Lali commanded.

"Lali is right," Dory piped in. "I haven't spent a lot of time just having fun and as Lali explained I'm on vacation so no questions about Maxwell or the Lycruius theory please."

"Damn it," Susan scowled. "Fine Mona pry your wallet out of your tight ass and pay for the next round."

"Christ I liked it better when you were all gaga over her brilliance," Mona complained.

"I don't," Dory asserted.

"So living with tall dark and moody here must be interesting," Mary finally offered after an awkward silence.

"She's teaching me all about television," Dory boldly. "I must admit it is somewhat confusing."

"Oh you're not going start up on Gilligan's Island again are you?" Lali whined. "I told you before I don't know why the Professor could grow radioactive vegetables but couldn't fix the hole in the boat. It is called escapism just accept it."

"Lali you're introducing her to the medium of television by letting her watch Nick at Nite?" Mary gasped.

"No," Lali argued. "She's watching some of the newer stuff too."

"Such as?" Mary prompted.

"Charmed, the X files, Law & Order and of course Xena," Lali boasted as Susan and Mary rolled their eyes in disgust. "Don't get her started on those shows either she will just go on and on about the historical inaccuracies."

"We're reaching a compromise," Dory interjected. "We have to watch at least one show on the Discovery Channel every night."

"And the Science Channel and she just loves PBS," Lali concluded with a mock scowl.

"You forgot about Murphy Brown," Dory quickly interjected. "I think I like that one because I can relate to her staffing problems. I went through so many research and personal assistants it wasn't uncommon to find a crash test dummy filling in."

"What about Greta?" Lali questioned clenching her jaw as she spoke the woman's name.

"Well Dad hired her and as I've told you before she was persistent," Dory shyly answered.

"At least I stay awake for your shows," Dory teased.

"You could just go up to your bedroom Lali," Mona suggested.

"That is where the television is located," Dory innocently supplied not realizing that she had just confirmed that the two of them were sleeping together. Lali squirmed in her chair as she watched

her friends exchanging sly looks.

"One television and it is in Lali's bedroom?" Cara smirked. "Cozy."

Lali blushed deeply the truth was the situation was cozy very cozy each night Dory would curl up on her bed and fall asleep. Lali felt guilty that many mornings she would awake to find Dory snuggled up against her body. Adding to her ever growing feelings of guilt was the way her hands had begun to wander.

"I had fun tonight," Dory confessed as they entered the house.

"I'm glad," Lali beamed her hand instinctively coming to rest on Dory's shoulder. She inhaled sharply when she realized what she had done. She was torn between how it good it felt to be touching Dory and the thousand and one reasons why she shouldn't be touching Dory.

Internally her mind screamed for her to remove her hand from the warmth of Dory's shoulder. Yet for some unknown reason the appendage remained resting on Dory's shoulder. Lali's fingers were tingling slightly alerting her that the action wasn't the innocent gesture she had hoped it would be. She tilted her head slightly watching as Dory removed her eyeglasses. Now would be the time to remove her hand still it remained.

Dory turned slightly causing Lali's hand to slip slightly. Lali yanked the appendage away as if she had been burned. Dory gave her a curious look.

"It is late," Lali, blurted out in an effort to disguise her strange actions. Dory's brow furrowed as she gazed up at Lali in a curious manner.

"Why didn't you correct Mona and the others tonight?" Dory causally inquired. The question didn't surprise Lali what was making her feel nervous was the mischievous gleam in Dory's eyes.

"About?" Lali feigned innocence.

"The nature of our relationship," Dory explained. "They think we are more than friends. You chose not to correct them why?"

"I didn't want Mona hitting on you," Lali tersely explained.

"The more time I spend with you the more confused I become," Dory responded absently.

"I Uhm," Lali stammered as she tried to conjure up some reasonable explanation. She had said

the truth she didn't want Mona to hit on Dory for a long list of reasons. Suddenly Lali became fearful that she had made a grievous error. "I'm sorry I thought you were fine with it. Next time I won't interfere."

"I didn't object," Dory laughed lightly. "I was just curious as to why you did it. So you were just defending my honor?" She concluded with a hint of disappointment.

"It just seemed easier than explaining things," Lali grumbled. "I never thought my omission would cause you stress. Dory were you interested in Mona?"

"Lord no," Dory barked with laughter. "I was just concerned. What if there was someone you fancied; now they think that you are involved."

"Ha," Lali laughed with relief. "Right now the only thing I fancy is a long hot shower and a little television. Care to join me?"

"I'm assuming that you are referring to television," Dory quipped with a knowing smile.

Lali's breathing seized her dark brown eyes widening. Little by little Dory's quick wit was seeping through often throwing Lali off balance. Dory was coming into her own making jokes and small changes around the house. The house was finally becoming Dory's home and not a monument to her father. It was brighter more comfortable much like the person Dory was becoming. Lali shook her head finally regaining her composure. "Another joke," she finally sputtered. "You are on a roll tonight."

"I think I'll just head up to bed," Dory softly declined. "I really should stop sleeping in your room."

"I don't mind," Lali, offered her breathing becoming slightly labored.

Dory parted her lips as if she was about to say something. Suddenly she pursed her lips her face dimming slightly.

"Good night," Dory concluded in an odd tone before turning and ascending the staircase.

"Why do I feel like I am missing something?" She muttered under her breath.

Over the passing month Lali's feeling of trepidation only grew. She and Dory had fallen into a comfortable routine. Life basically went along as it had prior to spring break with one very notable exception. Dory's late night visits ceased. Not completely Dory would pop in to see if

Lali wished to share a cup of hot chocolate or to inquire if Lali needed help with her studies every now and then.

Lali could only assume that Dory's interest in television had waned. Still she could feel an odd distance brewing between them. In the beginning Lali would invite Dory to join her each time her request was answered with a very polite refusal. Lali tried not to focus on Dory's sudden disinterest still it bothered her. Lali had her studies and work to focus on in the interim and adding to the stress of her life was Brenda whose departure had been suddenly delayed.

Brenda wasn't taking the sudden turn of events well. Each time Lali spent time with the redhead Brenda spent the entire time complaining about how much it screwed up her life and how she and Lali could have remained roommates.

"We still would have had to find a new apartment," Lali pointed out one afternoon.

"Which would have been a lot easier than moving in with my parents," Brenda grouched. "Dory doesn't have another room available by any chance?"

"Sorry," Lali sighed. "It is just the two bedrooms. She has been renovating the house getting rid of her father's furniture and updating the appliances. The place really looks different much warmer more like Dory."

"Still sharing late night television?" Brenda pried with a wicked gleam in her eyes.

"No," Lali grunted. "After the night she went bowling with me and the gang she just stopped. It was so sudden I can't help wondering if I did something to offend her."

"I doubt that," Brenda shrugged off the notion. "Didn't you say she is working on some project for MIT?"

"Yeah," Lali smiled. "She tried to explain what she was doing but I couldn't understand a word she was saying. Frankly I think I'd have an easier time deciphering the Rosetta stone. In fact that could be what she is doing and I still wouldn't know."

"You're just from two different worlds," Brenda reasoned with a hint of sarcasm.

"It isn't her fault," Lali quickly defended Dory. "It was her father. The more I learn about her childhood and even later the more I am convinced that he went out of his way to keep her isolated from the outside world. I suspect he even picked out that wench Greta to keep Dory away from people. He treated her more like a lab rat than his child."

"Greta is the ex-lover right?" Brenda pried.

"Yes," Lali bitterly responded. "She is still trying to get Dory back."

"If I didn't know better I'd think you were jealous," Brenda taunted her.

"No," Lali fumed suddenly wishing that she hadn't started talking about Dory in the first place. "So you're stuck here until the beginning of June?" She threw out in an effort to change the subject.

After completing her first final Lali returned home to discover Dory just finishing wall papering the living room. "Looks great," she complimented Dory's work. The barren dark walls were now covered with a simple pastel, which brightened the entire room.

"Thank you," Dory blushed while trying to wipe a smudge from her cheek. "You're back early how did the exam go?"

"Good, I think," Lali blew out setting her books down before approaching Dory. "Five more and my undergrad career will be complete. Here," she offered picking up a rag. She couldn't help smiling as she erased the smudge from Dory's brow. "There you go," she beamed as she tucked her fingers beneath Dory's chin tilting her face up in order to get a better look. A sudden surge of warmth spread through her as her gaze drifted down becoming locked on Dory's soft pink lips.

"Thank you," Dory's gentle voice broke through she shyly stepped away.

"Uhm," Lali cleared her throat rubbing her brow in an effort to refocus her thoughts. "I have another exam in the morning and I want to go over my final paper for my Victorian lit class one more time. I'll be in my room if you need anything."

She heard Dory wishing her luck as she made a hasty retreat. Hours later she was exhausted and she was no longer able to focus. She knew that she should get some rest yet she was nervous about her math final, which was only a few hours away. Thankfully a timid knock on her door interrupted her studies.

"Come in," she wearily greeted Dory's knock.

"You need to eat and then rest," Dory scolded her as she approached Lali with a plate of food.

"You cooked?" Lali nervously inquired as she accepted the offering.

"No," Dory laughed. "I did what I do best I ordered out. I did need to reheat it since you've been at it all night. I managed to work the microwave without starting a fire," she added proudly. "You're pushing yourself too hard. Between taking your finals the tests and proposals for grad school you never sleep or eat properly."

"I'll be fine," Lali responded before shoveling a forkful of chicken Alfredo into her mouth. "Just a couple of weeks before graduation and then I have the summer off."

"Will your parents be coming to graduation?" Dory innocently inquired unaware that she had just approached a painful subject. "You never talk about your family. I was curious," Dory apologized when Lali set her plate aside and reopened her textbook.

Her heart sank when she heard Dory shuffling towards the doorway. "Wait," she politely called out. She felt terrible Dory had been honest about her upbringing and not once had Lali explained her own humble beginnings.

"Sit down," she offered patting the bed. She blew out a terse breath when Dory complied with her request. "My grandparents emigrated from Cuba before my mother was born," she slowly began. "From what I've heard they were very proud of her when she graduated from high school with honors and was accepted to college. That summer she met an exchange student from England. Peter Lazenby."

"Your father," Dory tenderly supplied.

"My father," Lali confirmed. "They married quickly because apparently I was on the way. Not long after my first birthday my father decided to go back home without us. Mom worked two sometimes three jobs just to keep us going. My grandparents helped as much as they could. By the time I turned twelve we had lost the both of them and it was just Mom and I. She was so proud when I started college. We found out she was sick during my first semester. I tried to keep up my studies but her health deteriorated so quickly. The bills kept piling up and she needed someone to take care of her. It broke her heart when I dropped out of college. She passed away the following spring. I was alone left with a lot of great memories and a boatload of bills."

"That is why it took you so long to go back to school," Dory warmly concluded. "You're very brave."

"I don't think so," Lali laughed in an effort to fight back the tears her memories had invoked.

"I do," Dory offered with a tender smile. "No more studying tonight," Dory commanded as she snatched the textbook from Lali's grasp.

The day of Lali's last final she bounced into the house eager to share the good news with Dory. She tripped when she discovered a stranger looming in the living room. "Hello?" She curiously addressed the older woman.

"It looks amazing," the stranger remarked as she turned to greet Lali. "You must be Lali," the woman warmly greeted her. The familiar emerald eyes instantly informed Lali who her guest

was. "I'm," the woman began offering Lali her hand.

"Dory's mother," Lali beamed as she accepted the woman's hand. "She looks just like you."

"And you are the miracle worker," Mrs. Dupray boasted clasping Lali's hand tightly as Dory entered the room. "I'm Catherine it is a pleasure to finally meet you."

"Mother," Dory nervously squeaked out.

"I've heard so much about you," Catherine prattled on. "I can't thank you enough for helping Dorinda."

"Mother!" Dory repeated her voice growing tense.

"I didn't," Lali began to argue sensing Dory's uneasiness. "I just took her to the mall and introduced her to television. Speaking of which what is that?" She gleefully questioned pointing to the large television that had mysteriously appeared in their living room. "I thought you had lost interest?"

Lali was amused by the way Dory was shifting nervously. "Your last exam was today," Dory suddenly blurted out. "How did it go?"

"Piece of cake," Lali boasted confident that she had aced her last exam.

"I knew you could do it," Dory asserted proudly.

"So Lali tell me about yourself?" Catherine pried.

"Mother," Dory cut her off. "We should be going Arthur will be waiting."

"Lali why don't you join us?" The older woman offered graciously.

Lali was eager to accept until she spied the tentative look in Dory's eyes. "Thank you but I have plans," she lied.

"Damn no cable," Lali complained after wandering about the house for hours. Finally after the boredom won out she decided to test the new large screen television.

"They are coming to hook it up next Thursday," Dory supplied suddenly appearing.

"You're back," Lali yelled startled by her roommate's appearance.

"I just got in," Dory explained as she nervously ran her fingers through her long blonde hair. "I thought you had plans?"

"No," Lali answered honestly. "I just got the feeling that perhaps you didn't want me to join you."

"It wasn't," Dory stammered. "I was worried that my mother would interrogate you. I didn't want you to feel uncomfortable. Mother's sweet enough. Still at times she can be a little like your friend Brenda."

"Fair enough," Lali shrugged curious if Dory was telling the truth. Then again she recalled how her own mother would act around her friends. Despite her mother's best intentions Lali would always end up embarrassed. "Moms can be like that."

"I'm just learning," Dory chuckled. "We weren't close for a long time. Now every time we get together I feel like a child."

"To her you will always be her little girl," Lali tried to explain to her sheltered friend. "It is late I should go to bed I am working a double tomorrow."

"Not until you tell me how your last exam went," Dory insisted taking Lali by the hand and guiding her to the new sofa. They began chatting quickly losing all sense of time. Before either of them realized that so much time had passed it was almost time for Lali to get ready for work.

By the end of her second shift the following night Lali was dead on her feet and deeply troubled. The night before she and Dory had an amazing time just talking. Midway through her day Lali realized that it was like it had been before the night they had gone bowling. The realization that Dory still wanted to spend time with her just not in her bedroom bothered Lali.

She spent the day mulling the thought over in her weary mind. Every conclusion she could conjure up as to why Dory didn't want to spend time in her room led her to feeling completely miserable. The answer in Lali's mind was painfully clear. Dory had picked up on her attraction and wasn't interested.

"Fine then just say so," she muttered under her breath as she dragged her weary body home.

"Long day?" Dory questioned as she stepped out of her bedroom.

"Too long," Lali bristled. "I need to go to bed," she added curtly before brushing past Dory.

During the following week Lali felt like a rat. She was working insane hours and felt rejected by Dory. Truth is she was the one who was distancing herself from her roommate. The hurt look in Dory's eyes spoke volumes and Lali was clueless of how to rectify the situation. Suddenly a solution presented itself. At least Lali hoped it was a solution. It was Saturday night and Brenda's going away party was that night.

"An olive branch," she reasoned as she knocked on Dory's bedroom door. She paused for a moment when Dory opened the door peering up at her with confusion. Lali tried to look pass Dory in an effort to see the one room in the house she had never seen before. It was a futile effort since Dory was blocking her view.

"Lali?" Dory questioned in a shaky tone.

Lali blushed as she realized she was just standing there. "Sorry," she apologized returning her focus on the matter at hand. "Brenda's going away party is tonight. I was wondering if you wanted to join me."

Lali was unsettled by the pleading look Dory offered in response. "I don't know," Dory whispered.

"What is it?" Lali pressed.

"I don't think Brenda likes me," Dory responded in a hushed tone.

"Not true," Lali corrected the timid woman. "She's just jealous."

"Jealous?" Dory gasped stunned by the suggestion.

"She and I use to be close," Lali tried to clarify. "Between my crazy hours and school I haven't been around much. Perhaps she blames my new friendship with you?"

"Interesting," Dory muttered.

"Come to the party?" Lali encouraged with a bright smile.

"Are you sure?" Dory questioned in a pleading tone.

"Yes," Lali quickly asserted silently praying that Brenda wouldn't have a problem.

Two hours later Lali almost toppled over when Dory emerged from her bedroom dressed in another new outfit. "Wow you look great," she blew out as she fought against the tingling sensation coursing throughout her body. Dory's outfit was simple, a tight black sleeveless tee and

faded jeans clung to her body in the most amazing fashion.

"So do you," Dory's shy tone broke through her thoughts.

"Uhm thanks," Lali sputtered finally ceasing her overt leering. She glanced at her black jeans and white blouse thinking she didn't look all that interesting. "We should go."

The party was fun with a few notable exceptions. Susan and Mary cornered Dory the moment they arrived and Brenda was out and out snotty towards the petite woman. "She is fine stop checking on her," Brenda finally scolded Lali when she once again scanned the barroom to see if Dory was all right.

"I brought her," Lali fumed. "I just want to make sure she is enjoying herself."

"Right," Brenda laughed loudly. "The two of you spend all of your time together you don't have to be joined at the hip."

"She isn't my date," Lali growled. "And we don't spend that much time together. You know how I am working crazy hours and studying. I'm giving her space. I'm just worried because of how she is with crowds."

"Giving her space?" Brenda questioned clearly confused.

"Yeah," Lali asserted. "I finally figured out why she stopped hanging out in my room at night. She must have caught on that I have a little bit of an attraction towards her and it made her uncomfortable."

"You are an idiot," Brenda expelled with a bold laugh. "First you are more than a little attracted to her and secondly if you paid attention you might have noticed she feels the same way."

"What?" Lali gaped horrified by the notion she had completely misread the situation. "You're wrong."

"I am going to miss watching you stumble around like a clueless idiot," Brenda sweetly offered.

"And I am going to miss you coming up with these insane theories," Lali smiled shaking her head at how Brenda had once again allowed her mind to run wild coming up with the most ridiculous explanation possible.

"One of these days you are going finally listen to me and just maybe look in the mirror and realize how truly hot you are," Brenda smirked. "Then again Dory is completely clueless about how attractive she is. Maybe I should buy her some shots it might help her lighten up."

"Or you could stop acting like a lunatic and just be nice to the girl?" Lali sternly suggested.

"Shots," Brenda smirked before pushing her way through the crowd.

"No meddling," Lali bellowed as she followed after her misguided friend.

"It is my party," Brenda argued as she gathered up the crowd who had come to wish her well. "One round of shots," she persisted as she snuggled up against Rick.

"Well I know who she set her sights on for a final goodbye," Lali surmised as she watched Brenda groping the young man.

"No kidding," Mary agreed as she took her place beside Lali. "She's ordered a round of woos you might want to warn Dory. Oh and I'm sorry for monopolizing Dory all night she is just so amazing to talk to."

"Yes she is," Lali absently responded her heart skipping a beat when she glanced across the crowd and her eyes locked momentarily with Dory's. She closed her eyes needing to break away from the intense gaze. "Mary," she slowly began. "Dory and I aren't dating."

"Come on," Mary scoffed with a playful nudge. "The way the two of you look at one another do you seriously expect me to believe that there is nothing going on? Speaking of your gorgeous date she has her shot."

Lali accepted her own shot before bolting towards Dory. "Hey," she cautioned Dory just as everyone raised their glasses to toast Brenda. "You should know it tastes like candy but these will hit you hard."

"Thanks for the warning," Dory stated while eyeing her glass carefully. "I'll just sip mine."

"Wise choice," Lali sighed with relief as she nudged Mona away so she could sit next to Dory. She snickered when Mona complained.

They sipped the shots and then for some unknown reason agreed to do another round. "Mona's still miffed you took her seat," Dory noted when someone placed a couple of rum and cokes down before them.

"From Brenda," the person explained.

"I think she is warming up to me," Dory concluded as she toasted the guest of honor with her cocktail.

"I told Mary the truth," Lali threw out before taking a sip of her cocktail. "About us. She didn't believe me."

"I am beginning to learn that people see only what they want to see," Dory wisely supplied.

"Yes they do," Lali nodded in agreement as she pondered Brenda's bizarre theory. She set her drink down when she felt Dory leaning into her body. "Tired?"

"No," Dory answered pleasantly her body nestling against Lali's. "Relaxed."

"Hmm," Lali hummed softly her arm instinctively wrapping around Dory's shoulders. Without thinking about her actions she guided Dory closer feeling completely at ease having her friend resting in her arms. The feeling intensified when she felt Dory's hand resting on her thigh.

Lali relaxed into the feeling mentally noting that to the casual on looker the two of them clearly looked like a couple. "Do you want to finish my drink?" She offered brushing a strand of hair from Dory's brow. "I shouldn't drink anymore since I'm the driver tonight."

"No thank you," Dory politely declined resting her head on Lali's chest. "The few times in my life when I've over indulged I ended up doing something incredibly stupid."

"Oh this I have to hear," Lali gleefully urged her senses reeling from the feel of Dory's hand caressing her thigh.

"I don't think so," Dory laughed giving Lali's thigh a playful squeeze.

"Why not?" Lali chuckled lacing her fingers through Dory's long locks.

"Some things should remain a mystery," Dory toyed with her. "That feels nice."

Lali's hand froze as she realized that she was playing with Dory's hair. Her body tensed her mind screaming for her to continue. *'She did say it felt nice,'* she silently reasoned her fingers still lingering. She felt Dory's body shifting her internal debating raging as she gazed down to discover Dory looking up at her. The sparkle in Dory's eyes mesmerized her. Lali parted her lips to speak but the words failed her. Instead her hand slipped from Dory soft hair to her cheek. She gulped her mouth suddenly feeling parched as Dory leaned into her touch. She leaned closer her body quivering as she felt Dory's breath caressing her face. Lali's heart was racing knowing that she was a mere breath away from tasting Dory's soft supple lips.

Suddenly the room was flooded with a bright light and the bartender's voice calling out that it was closing time. She jerked away from Dory who muttered something under her breath. Lali couldn't understand what Dory had just said but it did sound faintly similar to what Brenda was trying to do with Rick. She was just about to inquire if Dory had actually said *fuck* an expression she was certain wasn't in Dory's vocabulary. Before she had the chance to ask Dory was slipping from her embrace.

"Now I'm really confused," Lali quietly groaned as she stood.

Saying goodbye to the gang and Brenda had taken much longer than Lali wanted. Still Brenda was leaving and she really wanted to wish her well. She just didn't want it to take all night carrying on to the parking lot and dragging out so that almost an hour had passed. Finally Brenda stopped hugging her and turned her attention back towards Rick.

Without a word Lali stepped away and unlocked the car for Dory who was chatting with a few other people. Lali expelled a heavy sigh before starting the car. Neither of them spoke during the short drive home. Lali lingered by the car after they had arrived and Dory had already entered the house.

"I'm not going to get answers by hiding in the driveway," she finally grumbled before racing towards the house. Her palms were sweating as she entered the house. She had so many questions she wanted to ask Dory.

Her knees buckled when she discovered Dory sitting on the staircase. "What were doing out there?" Dory innocently questioned as Lali locked the front door.

"Questioning my sanity," Lali playfully explained as she knelt before Dory. "I have so many questions."

"For me?" Dory responded slightly bewildered.

"Yes," Lali answered as she summoned her courage. "Did you have fun tonight?" She threw the easiest question first.

"Yes," Dory smiled.

"You weren't nervous talking with so many people?" Lali continued her heart fluttering.

"At first," Dory whispered. "But after some time I was fine. Your friends are very nice."

"I think that they are becoming your friends as well," Lali reassured her noticing that Dory had wrapped her fingers tightly together.

Lali studied the way Dory's fists were tightening. "Lali?" Dory meekly questioned. "Is there anything else you wanted to ask me?" Dory added her voice shaking as she posed the question.

"Yes," Lali answered licking her lips as she lifted her gaze. She smiled happy that Dory hadn't worn her glasses that night allowing Lali to gaze into her eyes. "Did you say fuck?"

"Yes," Dory laughed loudly her eyes darkening. "I have said that word before."

"Not around me," Lali corrected bolstering her courage. She reached up brushing Dory's cheek with the tips of her fingers. "Did we almost kiss?"

"Yes," Dory squeaked her body slightly trembling against Lali's touch.

Lali leaned closer cupping Dory's face in her hands. "Do you want to kiss me?" She whispered.

"Oh yes," Dory whimpered.

Lali's eyes fluttered shut as she drew Dory closer. Dory's body brushing against her own as she tenderly claimed her lips. Her heart fluttered as they kissed for the first time. Lali inhaled sharply breaking away from the tender kiss. One simple kiss and Lali was completely flustered.

Lali brought her fingers to her quivering lips. She kept her hand locked in place thrown by the incredible bombardment of emotions coursing through her body.

"Lali," Dory's voice trembled.

Lali laughed as her focus finally cleared. She smiled brightly as she gazed over at her lover staring back at her with her eyes filled with admiration. There was something else lurking in Dory's bright eyes it was fear.

"Talk about hiding your light under a bushel," Lali explained reaching over cupping Dory's sweet face in her hands. "One kiss and I am completely undone. How did you do that?"

"You scared me," Dory blew out leaning into Lali's touch. "When you pulled away I thought that I had done something wrong."

"Oh no you did everything just right," Lali quickly corrected the shy woman. Her fingers caressed Dory's soft features. "Amazing."

"Is that how you really see me?" Dory questioned her eyes sparkling with surprise.

"Yes," Lali confidently asserted. "Don't you?"

"For a long time I felt I simply existed on the cusp of life however lately I feel like I am really living," Dory quietly explained. "The other day I looked in the mirror and for the first time in a long time I liked the person I saw looking back at me. You did that."

"No I didn't," Lali tenderly argued. "The person you've become has always been inside of you. All I did was give you a nudge. I never would have dragged you to the mall if there wasn't something about you calling to me."

"Lali?" Dory questioned coyly. "Enough talking," she asserted taking Lali by the hand as she stood. Lali released a soft moan as she stood allowing her lover to guide her. Her heart was racing as she ascended the staircase. Dory guided Lali to the top of the landing and down the narrow hall until they were standing in front of the door that led to Dory's room.

Lali's heart swelled when Dory turned to her and wrapped her arms around her slender waist.

Lali's dark brown eyes narrowed her body trembled from the feel of Dory's body pressing against her own. Warm breaths caressed her flesh as Dory nuzzled against her chest. Dory's fingers played with the buttons on Lali's blouse as her lips grazed against the small area of exposed flesh.

Sharp gasps escaped her lips as she felt the buttons snapping open and her body being guided into Dory's darkened bedroom. She blew out a terse breath when she felt Dory's touch leaving her body. She stood in the darkness only aware of the faint sounds of Dory moving about the room. A faint click echoed as the room was suddenly illuminated with a soft light. Lali's eyes tracked the source to a small Tiffany style lamp nestled upon a table.

Lali smiled looking at Dory's private world for the first time. In the center of the room was a big four-poster bed that matched the rest of the furniture all possessed a look of a different era. Instinctively she knew that these were Dory's additions and not left over from her father. Her inspection of the room halted when Dory turned to her. The impish smile on her lover's face instantly captivated Lali.

Her body quivered her knees buckling as Dory's eyes raked up and down her body. Their eyes met Lali's body was on fire as she watched Dory crossing the room. Before Dory could reach her Lali reached out clasping Dory by the shoulders drawing her closer. Explaining her desire with a smoldering kiss that left each of them breathless.

"Lali," Dory whimpered helplessly as Lali's hands drifted down the supple curve of her body until she was caressing Dory's waist.

"I can't believe this is really happening," she whispered her spine tingling from the feel of Dory's mouth teasing her neck.

"Believe," Dory murmured in response as her hands continued snapping open the last of the buttons on Lali's blouse. Lali released a feral groan as Dory yanked her blouse from out of her jeans. Soft hands began caressing her skin teasing and taunting her. Lali's body arched giving in to the feel of Dory's mouth exploring the swell of her breasts.

She laced her fingers through Dory's long blonde hair pressing her closer until Dory's face was nestled between her breasts and their bodies were pressed so tightly together that Lali was blissfully unaware of where she ended and Dory began. Still it wasn't enough; she needed more. Her fingers dug into the soft material of Dory's shirt; kneading the dark cotton as she began to tug the garment. She gasped with pleasure as she watched the black shirt slowly lifting exposing creamy white flesh.

Lali was completely focused upon the task of removing Dory's clothing that she was only dimly aware that her blouse and bra were now dangling from her arms. They struggled each caught up in the need to remove the other's clothing. Finally each stumbled gasping for air as they conceded that they weren't going to succeed.

Lali tore her top and bra from her body while her eyes watched Dory lifting her t-shirt up and

over her head. She gulped as she spied Dory's half naked body. Her eyes boring into her lover's body as she eagerly watched Dory's bra falling to the floor. She smiled as Dory blushed from the intensity of her gaze. She watched as Dory lifted a shaking hand to her brow before she nervously brushed a stray lock of hair aside.

Her skin prickled when she noticed Dory's nervousness ebbing her eyes darkening with desire. "Now that is a dangerous look," she squeaked out.

"Is it?" Dory questioned with a quirk of her head as she stepped closer to the trembling Lali.

"Oh yes," Lali asserted with wry grin as she watched Dory's hands playing with the waistband of her jeans.

Her mind was spinning unable to focus as she felt Dory's warm breath teasing her erect nipple and the sound of her zipper being lowered echoed throughout the room. Lali's eyes fluttered shut her body trembled when she felt Dory's tongue flickering against her aching nipple. Once again she laced her fingers in Dory's hair and drew her closer.

Dory suckled her greedily as her hands urgently lowered Lali's jeans down to her hips. Lali's body swayed as Dory's hands slipped her jeans lower until she was caressing Lali's naked bottom. Lali couldn't believe that the woman who when she first met her was afraid of her own shadow was now ravishing her body. *'It feels so good,'* her mind screamed as her body pressed harder against Dory's touch.

Her clit was throbbing screaming for release her breast aching and damp from Dory's mouth feasting upon them. She fought to remain standing as she felt her legs giving way to gravity. She groaned suddenly disappointed that Dory's fiery attention had suddenly ceased.

"Bed," Dory directly informed Lali grasping her by the hand and guiding her to the desired location.

Lali blindly followed after her lover tripping over her pants as she stumbled across the room. She sighed with pleasure as Dory gently guided her down onto the soft bedding.

"Thank God," she murmured with delight as she pulled Dory down on top of her. "I was about to fall."

"I wouldn't let that happen," Dory vowed as she straddled Lali's body. Lali watched as Dory raised her body and hovered above her. She smiled happily when her gaze drifted down to Dory's breasts. "I know what you are thinking," Dory teased as Lali's hands glided up along her body.

"Do you now?" Lali teased cupping Dory's breasts her thumbs grazing lightly against Dory's erect nipples. She guided Dory closer pressing one of the buds against her lips. Her heart and body soar when she heard the soft moan escaping from Dory's lips. Her tongue peeked out flickering gently against the pink bud as her lover's body wriggled against her own.

She suckled her lover harder enjoying the feel of Dory's body rocking wildly against her. Dory's urgent groans echoed loudly as Lali slipped her knee between Dory's thighs. Lali's body screamed for release when Dory mirrored her movement. Lali's hands fumbled trying to undo Dory's pants. The frantic rhythm of their bodies was driving her insane. It had been so long since she had touched another woman longer still since she had been with someone who made her feel such deep desire.

Frustrated by the need to touch all of her lover Lali reluctantly released Dory's breast from her mouth. Dory's body arched above her granting Lali's touch the chance to explore more of her. She almost tore the zipper on Dory's jeans when she ripped it open. "Oh God," Dory whimpered while Lali struggled to lower her pants.

Fiery green eyes held her captive as she continued her struggle. "I need you naked," she gasped her frustration mounting with each passing moment. Relief washed through her body when her lover began to assist her in her quest. She silently cursed the need to wear shoes and other obstacles that were preventing her from achieving her goal.

She paused for a moment in an effort to center herself. "It looks so easy in the movies," she quipped enjoying the feel of Dory fingers brushing against her nipple.

"Is that why you watch so much television?" Dory teased with a light laugh. "Need help?"

"I need," she purred softly slipping her hand between their bodies. "I need," she repeated as her fingers blazed a slow torturous trail down along the front of Dory's body. "This is what I need," she gasped when her fingers brushed against Dory's wetness.

Dory shifted slightly parting her thighs for Lali as she released a needy moan. Dory's nimble fingers captured Lali's nipple teasing it playfully. Lali bit down on her lip slipping her fingers further until she parted her lover. Gasping as Dory's desire greeted her touch.

"Harder," she meekly encouraged Dory who eagerly accepted by pinching the bud harder. Lali rewarded her lover by slowly gliding her fingers along Dory's wetness.

Encouraged by Dory needy whimpers she captured Dory's throbbing clit with her fingers. Stroking her lover slowly she became lost in the feel of their swaying bodies. It was too much she gave in capturing Dory in a searing kiss as she slipped inside of her.

Lips and tongues embraced fighting for control while Dory's body rocked wildly against Lali's touch and neither was capable of yielding their desire as they fought against the restraints of their clothing. *'Too fast, it is happening too fast,'* Lali's mind screamed as she felt her lover's body tensing.

Each of them gasped for air when they were forced to break away from the pleasures of the other's kiss. Lali's mind still screaming for her to slow down her body resisted. Dory thrust harder urging Lali to plunge harder and deeper inside of her. Dory's hot breath tickled her skin as she gasped out pleas for more.

"Wait," Dory pleaded grasping Lali's wrist. Lali blew out a heavy sigh slowing her touch. "Too much."

"Too fast," Lali groaned in agreement slipping her fingers from the warmth of Dory's body.

"Sorry," Dory groaned as she rolled slightly away and lifted her body.

"No," Lali reassured her. "Not what I wanted," she managed to choke out. She tried to calm her body the smoldering gaze in Dory's eyes wasn't helping her cause.

"I've thought about you and me together," Dory shyly began. "I just need to slow things down. I need to make tonight last."

"All night," Lali brightly encouraged.

"All night," Dory echoed in a husky tone that made Lali's body tremble.

"And not just for tonight," Lali added her voice dripping with desire. "I've thought about it too."

"Hmm," Dory moaned as she moved slightly away from Lali. "I didn't know."

"Well that makes two of us," Lali confessed as she watched lover begin to shed the remainder of her clothing. She leaned up on one elbow eager to see all of Dory's body. "God you a gorgeous," she murmured when Dory rolled over completely naked. She sighed with pleasure allowing her eyes to drink in all of Dory's magnificent body.

"Your turn," Dory challenged with a cocky grin as she rested against the pillows and motioned for Lali to join her.

Lali returned the grin with one of her own before she began to free herself from the last remains of clothing.

"You like?" She quipped once she was nestled beside her lover. She laughed when Dory only squeaked in response her emerald orbs darting up and down Lali's naked form. She was amused and pleased when Dory was forced to clear her throat before she could speak.

"I like," Dory sputtered leaning in and kissing Lali's shoulder. Lali leaned back allowing Dory to run her fingers along her exposed flesh.

"Who knew?" She shuddered enjoying the feeling of Dory's fingers exploring her body.

"Who knew what?" Dory encouraged as she continued her exploration.

"That beneath that shy quiet demeanor lurked a top," Lali giggled as she felt her lover's mouth joining her wandering fingers. The mischievous snicker Dory responded with sent a jolt

throughout Lali's body.

"Not always," Dory taunted her as she began to kiss her way down Lali's body.

"Good," Lali moaned with pleasure as she parted her thighs allowing Dory to nestle her body between them. "Very good," she added as Dory guided her to drape her long legs over her shoulders.

Dory smiled up at her with a feral look in her eyes before she began to kiss Lali's hips and stomach. Lali was left speechless by the feel of Dory's hands on her backside and her warm breath caressing her desire. Her body shuddered with anticipation as she watched Dory guide her wetness to her soft lips. She cried out when she felt Dory parting her with her tongue. Lali was lost in the feel of her lover's mouth feasting upon her. Lali's body took control as she gave into the feel of Dory slowly licking and teasing her engorged nub.

With each slow caress Lali fought to keep her body from exploding. "Don't cum until I tell you," Dory murmured into her desire.

"You are a top," Lali groaned playfully her hips refusing to remain idle.

"For the moment," Dory entreated her before gliding her tongue against Lali's clit.

Lali tried to cry out yet her voice failed her instead she thrust her wetness harder against Dory's touch. Her body began to sway giving into Dory's slow delightful pace. "Not yet," Dory cautioned before diving deeper inside of Lali's wetness.

Once again Lali tried to call out and once again her voice failed her. Only her body responded following Dory's lead. Dory's fingers began to tease her keeping the same slow rhythm as she slipped inside of Lali's wetness.

Lali's head fell back as she felt as if she was lingering on the edge of insanity. Dory's touch slowing quickening only to ebb each time Lali felt her body nearing ecstasy. Lali clutched at the bedding her passion dripping from her body still Dory taunted her. She fought against the demanding need to let go. Her mind was spinning her body taut with desire only dimly aware that her body was thrusting wildly.

Dory suckled her harder plunging deeper inside of her. "Now, please," Dory, pleaded driving Lali to the brink. Lali's cries filled the room her body convulsing giving into the feel of Dory pleasuring her.

The waves of ecstasy tore through her body while Dory licked her harder drinking in every last drop of her nectar. Lali could barely breath her body was on fire as she felt Dory climbing on top of her. Their wetness flowed together; Lali's body erupting from the sensations of their clits rubbing together and Dory's fingers claiming her.

When her vision clear and the fog had lifted she realized that Dory was once again kissing her

way down her body.

"Oh no you don't," she croaked out her throat raw from her passionate screams.

"Please?" Dory pleaded innocently.

Lali's jaw hung open as she tried to reconcile that this sweet innocent woman had just made her body feel better than she thought possible. "I want," she stammered still trying to find her voice while guiding Dory's eager hands away from her spent form.

"Tell me?" Dory entreated her allowing Lali to caress her body.

Lali paused briefly as she tried to regain control of her body. "I want to make love to you until you forget your name," she finally boasted while guiding Dory towards one of the large bedposts.

Dory clutched the large oak post as Lali nestled behind her. "Please Baby," Dory huskily accepted her offer.

"You're an amazing woman," Lali confessed as she knelt behind Dory and began caressing her body. Lali took her time exploring every curve of Dory's body. She was pleased by the feel of Dory's skin trembling beneath her touch. She nudged Dory's thighs apart and allowed her touch to drift lower. She bit back a gasp when Dory's wetness greeted her touch.

Her hand slowly caressed the firm flesh of Dory's ass teasing her lover who was already whimpering with desire.

"The first time I saw you shed all of those sweaters I thought I was going to fall over," she absently confessed while slipping her hand between Dory's thighs. She released a soft sigh upon feeling Dory's desire filling her hand. She made slow circles with the heel of her hand against Dory's clit. She enjoyed teasing her lover the feel of Dory's body shivering as her wetness spilled from her body.

"Oh God," Dory choked out her hips swaying against Lali's touch.

Encouraged by the gentle rocking of her lover's body Lali parted her lover's softness. Her touch remained gentle kissing her lover's shoulders while her fingers glided against her sex.

"Do you want me?" She whispered hotly in Dory's ear. She didn't wait for answer as she captured Dory's pulsating clit between her fingers.

"Yes," Dory moaned her body giving into the feel of Lali teasing her aching nub.

"You're so beautiful," Lali whispered repeatedly as she continued to tease her lover.

She pressed her body against Dory's rocking in a steady rhythm with her lover as she slipped

inside of her. Kissing the nape of her lover's neck she plunged deeper inside of Dory's wetness. She began to stroke Dory's clit with her pinkie and her lover's body thrust urgently in response. She began to slip in and out of Dory's passion her body moving in perfect unison with her lover's.

This time she led the dance guiding her lover towards sheer ecstasy only to refrain at the last moment. Finally she could no longer ignore the need to feel Dory's body exploding with pleasure. She rode against Dory's body pressing her wetness inside of her lover. She stroked her harder and harder until she felt Dory's body collapsing in her embrace.

She nestled Dory in her arms guiding her down kissing her tenderly before her mouth began to wander. She licked and tasted her way down Dory's body until she was happily drinking in the musky aroma of her desire. She held Dory tightly as she tasted her for the first time. One taste failed to sate her needs and soon she was feasting upon Dory's wetness.

She drank in every last drop only ceasing when she felt Dory's body climaxing against her. She gave into temptation a few times tickling and teasing her lover while resting her head on Dory's thigh.

Lali was surprised when she awoke the following morning and discovered that she was alone. She looked up noticing that the sun had risen quite sometime ago.

"Hmm," she blew out her body screaming as she tried to stand. "Owe and that felt so good last night." She noted wryly as she gathered up her clothing and shuffled off towards her own bedroom. After a quick shower she threw on a robe and for the first time in over a year called in sick to one of her jobs.

She tightened the knot on her robe and shuffled downstairs to the kitchen. She discovered Dory in similar attire sitting at the kitchen table staring over at the coffee maker.

"You do know it won't work just by glaring at it don't you?" She teased as she mentally prepared herself for the morning after.

"I was hoping," Dory smiled up at her.

'Okay now that is encouraging. This morning is either going to be a complete disaster or one of the best days of my life,' she mentally assessed while gathering her courage. "Uhm graduation is in two days," she tentatively began. "I have some tickets I was going to invite Arthur and you of course."

Dory studied her for a moment before responding. "Could you get three tickets?" She innocently inquired confusing Lali to no end. "If I'm going and Arthur's going Mom will want to come."

"Not a problem," Lali managed to answer turning towards the coffee maker.

"Thank God you're making coffee," Dory moaned happily.

"How long have you been staring at it?" Lali questioned as she went about making a fresh pot.

"Not long," Dory explained the sound of her chair scrapping against the floor alerting Lali that she was moving towards her. "I just got up a short time ago."

"Trouble sleeping?" Lali toyed with her as she turned to face Dory.

"No some pervert ravished me last night," Dory boldly retorted with bright smile.

"Fancy that! The same thing happened to me," Lali gasped with mock indignation.

They stood there for an agonizing moment each seemingly trying to decipher what the other was thinking. "And now it is the morning after," Lali tossed out in an effort to discover how Dory felt.

"Pesky thing," Dory grumbled as she wrapped her arms around Lali's waist. "Not knowing what to expect."

"Hmm," Lali sighed in agreement running her fingers through Dory's hair.

"I guess we can both find out if you answer a simple question," Dory suggested as her hands began caressing Lali's back. "Am I going to your graduation as your landlady, friend, math tutor or your girlfriend?"

"Girlfriend," Lali blurted out with relief. She dipped her head and kissed Dory quickly as an added confirmation. "Most definitely girlfriend."

"Right answer," Dory sighed happily. "What time do you need to be at work today?"

"Called in sick," Lali beamed.

"Another right answer," Dory squealed.

"Why just what do you have in mind Dr. Dupray?" Lali teased.

"A little coffee," Dory smirked. "A shower."

"Together?" Lali retorted playfully.

"The water bill is awfully high, conversation is very important to me," Dory challenged with an evil grin.

"Then what?" Lali encouraged.

"Bed," Dory shyly suggested.

"See I'm not the only one who can come up with the right answer," Lali exclaimed. "Of course we don't have to proceed in that order. We could start with the last one first."

"It would still add up," Dory smirked her hand drifting to the knot on Lali's robe.

"Most definitely," Lali agreed as she allowed her lover to guide her back upstairs.

The End.

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