

# ~ Past Is Present ~

by Zee

Hey all this is the part where I do the disclaimer so hold on tight till I get to the good stuff.

- 1). This is a piece of original/uber fiction.
- 2). This here be a love story (nothing too graphic) featuring two women. If that bothers you don't go wasting your time or mine by reading any farther. However, if you continue to read and it upsets you I don't want to hear about it.
- 3). Violence. Um, yep. There will be some and some references to child abuse. I like to think it all works as part of the story and none of it is over the top.
- 4). Those who are not 18 should not read this. Why? Dunno, probably protecting them from knowing about stuff there already know about.
- 5). To J, Bri, and Ar thank you all without you the story would never have gotten out of my head. You folks are the best.
- 6). Let's see anything else ... in order to ride the ride you must be this tall, have no heart problems and pregnant women should consult a doctor. Please keep your hands and feet inside the ride at all times and enjoy.

Okay this is my first writing endeavor so please, please with a cherry on top, give me feedback. At [zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:zeeamy@gmail.com) Thanks.

Without further ado on with the show -

**Past Is Present  
By Zee  
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## **Part 1**

Amanda stared at herself in the full-length mirror. She guessed she was dressed all right, but then again she wasn't really sure what one wore to a strip club. She sighed as she saw her biology and anatomy books spread out over her full sized bed. She really should be studying, but somehow her so-called friends had finally convinced her to "loosen up" and go out with them. She huffed, feeling annoyed, then turned back to the mirror. Hmmm... she didn't look half-bad. Long legs were encased in snug black jeans, a long sleeved blue silk shirt was unbuttoned enough to tease with a glimpse of full rounded flesh, and her long dark hair was loose, flowing down around her shoulders in inky midnight colored waves.

The doorbell rang, cutting off her self-observation. Opening the door, she found a smirking Heidi and Sarah. She motioned them inside.

"So girlfriend, you ready for your big night out?" asked Heidi as she sat down on the couch. Sarah sat on her lap, giving her a quick kiss.

Amanda rolled her eyes, "Could you guys stop being so cute?"

"Nah," Sarah said kissing Heidi again.

"So, you going to answer me? You ready?" asked Heidi.

"How did I let you guys talk me into this? I have a bio test on Monday. I should be studying."

Heidi shrugged, "So, you'll study tomorrow! My God, girl, you need to get out, date, dare I say it - get laid." Heidi said the last part in a stage whisper.

"Get laid! Who's getting some and why was I not informed sooner?" asked Sammy, walking through the door.

"Your roomy -- that's who! She needs to get some. She hasn't done anything but study, study, and then study some more since Toni dumped her."

"Heidi!" Amanda squeaked out.

"She's got a point A-girl. Toni and you broke up, what six months ago, and all you do is school, school, and school. You need to loosen up," Sammy said.

Amanda glared at her roommate, "You know, you can move out anytime."

Sammy just chuckled, "Save it tall, dark and dorky. Okay girls. All I have to do is change and then we're off to the Shady Lady."

Amanda tried really hard to act pissed off at them, but gave up. She grabbed her coat and sat across from Sarah and Heidi. Heidi was the taller of the two at 5'8" with short spiky blonde hair and blue eyes; she wore blue jeans and a white t-shirt. Sarah was shorter with long curly brown hair and blue eyes; she was wearing a simple flowing blue dress and sandals. It was kind of funny. Sarah might have looked the more feminine of the two, but she really wasn't. She worked as a mechanic at her father's shop, and was often driving Heidi nuts playing miss fix-it around the house. Heidi worked at a florist shop downtown and was one of the gentlest, kindest people Amanda had ever met. Those two had been so good for her. They had been there as she struggled with defining her sexuality, answered all her questions no matter how embarrassed or flustered she got. They had also been there for her through the whole Toni fiasco, and she had met her current roommate, Sammy, through them.

Sammy was a trip; life was not dull with the spitfire around. The girl stood 5' 4" with bright red hair and green eyes. Sammy had energy to burn, and being a poli-sci major with a minor in journalism, the girl was always putting her nose where it didn't belong; nothing was taboo.

Amanda had already gone down and bailed her out of jail twice; once for protesting topless, and another for setting all the animals free from the science labs.

From the back of the house, Sammy's voice yelled out "should I go butch or femme tonight?"

"Butch."

"Femme."

"Femme."

"The femmes have it."

Shaking her head, Amanda turned and looked at Heidi and Sarah, "So tell me about the Shady Lady."

Heidi grinned; "Oh, it's not a bad place. This woman Dee owns it; it's pretty nice as far as exotic dancing clubs go, and since she's a lesbian, it's really gay friendly."

"I feel kind of weird doing this." Amanda said, fidgeting in her seat.

Sarah giggled, "Don't worry hon. We won't let any of the girls play too rough with ya."

"We're just going for a little bit, then we'll head down to the Night Creature to dance." Heidi patted her knee then yelled out at Sammy, "Hey short stuff what's taking so long!"

Sammy emerged wearing a tight black dress. "Hey I have to look good, my bouncer might be working tonight."

Amanda's eyes widened, "My, that certainly highlights your jiggy bits."

Sammy strutted around.

"What bouncer?"

Sammy sighed and mock fanned herself, "My bouncer is the cutest thing! My goodness, the body on that girl and, well, she has a tattoo, and you all know how hot and bothered I get over tattoos."

"It's not the tattoo, Sammy. You have a thing for bad girls." Amanda stated.

"Whatever," Sammy said with a sniff.

"Okay girls, let's go force fun down Amanda's throat." Sarah said, helping Heidi up off the couch.

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Cameron brushed shaggy bangs out of her eyes, then bent down and picked up a keg of light beer that Jason needed from the back. Shoulder and back muscles bulged, coming into sharp relief in the bright light of the backroom. Exiting the room, she settled her weight on her left leg then lifted her right till her heel caught the light switch and flicked it off. Heading back to the bar, she yelled at people to get out of her way.

"Hey hot stuff. Look at you being all butch and shit."

"Shove it Mario." She said with a growl.

"My, your panties are in a twist."

Cameron rolled her eyes. God, he was such a bitchy man. Why women swooned over the dancer surprised her. If they only knew how fruity he was.

Setting the keg down, she looked up to see the olive-skinned man watching her. "Shouldn't you be getting ready or something?"

"You know hot stuff, if you got rid of that nasty attitude of yours, we could find you a girl like that." He snapped his fingers for emphasis.

"Yes, Mario, but you love my attitude." She said with a purr, approaching the stunned man.

Hell, one did not work around dancers and not pick up a thing or two.

Before he knew it, two leather-clad legs were straddling him. Running her hands up and down his chest, she purred "Oh Mario! If you only had the right parts." Then she licked his nose.

The watching employees looked on and laughed.

"All right Cameron, leave the poor boy alone before his package crawls up into his chest," cried out a craggy voice.

"Awww Dee."

"Don't "Dee" me. Women and men pay good money to see that boy's endowments."

Laughing, Cameron scooted off.

"Shit, hot stuff, I can't believe you licked my nose."

She shrugged, "It's Cameron, not hot stuff."

"Not from what I hear from the girls in the back."

"Mario!"

He giggled

"You know, Mario a man as big as you should not giggle."

He shrugged; "Peter likes my giggle, and that is all that matters."

"Go on, go get ready. I'll be back in a few to check on everyone."

Watching the large muscled man prance off, she turned to Jason. The small Japanese-American man looked up from counting bottles; "I'm good, Cam."

Nodding, she moved to see if Dee needed anything. Cameron moved silently, her posture tense and ready to react. It was one of the things that made her such a good bouncer -- that and her size. Standing 5'6", many people underestimated what a powerhouse she could be.

Dee watched Cameron approach; the girl was actually quite pretty, with shaggy short blonde hair and smoky blue eyes. Cameron wore black leather pants, and a tight black top that showed off the muscles of her arms and shoulders, the swell of her breasts; an odd mixture of strength and femininity. The thing that marred it was the broody scowl the girl wore on her face, but on the rare occasion one caught her with a smile, it was breath taking.

Dee smirked, remembering the skinny, starving kid she had found stealing out of her dumpsters late one night four years ago. Taking the girl home and feeding her was one of the best spontaneous acts she'd ever done. Her partner of eight years, Georgia, had thought her nuts, but the girl had never left. Four years later she was like a daughter to both of them.

"Hey, Dee what are you thinking?"

The older woman grinned, "I was thinking about some skinny street hoodlum I took home four years ago."

Cameron blinked, "Oh" a slight blush crept up her cheeks.

Dee laughed, "We about ready to open?"

"Yep, I just need to check on the dancers."

"Good."

"You want me working the door?"

"Nah. I want you floating the floor, but be watching the stage. I've been having problems with frat boys trying to manhandle the girls."

"Sure."

The Shady Lady consisted of three pool tables near the entrance, a horseshoe shaped bar on the left wall, four booths on the right wall and a stage surrounded by tables. Out of sight were the dressing room, manager's office, and back storage area.

Cameron leapt on stage and walked past the velvety red curtain. She spotted Karl and Missy leaning against the black painted back wall. Karl was the back stage bouncer. He made sure nobody got backstage to mess with or harass the dancers. He was a huge man, standing 6'3". Built like a brick wall, the man was a walking square; he had no neck and had muscles layered on his muscles. His blonde hair was cut in a severe crew cut, he had hard brown eyes, and a god awful mustache was growing out of his upper lip. Cameron had frequently asked if he was aware of the small furry animal attached to his lip. Karl would just roll his eyes and tell her she wasn't funny. She suspected that he was ex-military, but never asked.

Missy was the backstage manager. She made sure the dancers ran like clockwork: right costumes, right music, right number, all going on at the right time. She was a tall skinny African-American woman with dark ebony skin and short curly hair. Missy was great, she didn't take shit from nobody, not from prima-donna dancers and not even from a cranky Dee.

They looked up from their conversation as Cameron approached.

"Hey, are the kids ready?"

Karl yawned stretching; "Everything is good to go back here. Where you been, short stuff?"

Cameron rolled her eyes, "Ha, Ha. Everyone's short to you, Jolly Green Giant."

Karl looked unimpressed, "Comments from the woman who cracks the exact same joke about my mustache every time she sees me."

Cameron blew him a raspberry and Missy tried to hide her smile.

"If you must know, oh large man with the rodent attached to his upper lip, I was working a couple of shifts over at the Creature."

"How' s the Creature doing?" Missy asked.

"Not too bad. David finally got rid of that cokehead DJ and a couple of the bouncers that were looking the other way. So I was working over there 'til he got some new people hired."

"Suppose Dee told you about the problems we've been having with the college boys?" Karl

questioned.

Cameron nodded.

"We ejected two last night. I hope that cools their jets, or at least they take it to that dive the Golden Horseshoe."

"Hopefully." Cameron waved, heading back out front.

As she stepped out on to the stage from behind the curtain, she was hit with a spotlight. Wincing, she held up a hand to her forehead to shield her eyes. A voice came out over the loud speakers. "Ladies and gentlemen the Shady Lady is proud to present Cameron 'the lady-killer' Hayes who will now strut her stuff for you." The voice ended, and bad jazz music started up. She laughed as her co-workers yelled at her to take it off, she performed a little spin and did a bump and grind then jumped off the stage, laughing all the time at the wolf whistles.

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The transformation the club made when the house lights went off and the doors opened was amazing. In full light, the club was polished and clean; however, in the inky half-light, the club became a seedy dive. It was like going from a butterfly to a caterpillar

In the darkness, Cameron moved around, watching the patrons. It was a nice mix of men and women, the men slightly outnumbering the women. The club never really got too rowdy, it had its moments but due to several factors, it never really seemed to have the problems other exotic dancing clubs had. Dee used both male and female dancers, which attracted more women and Dee was openly gay friendly. So, if women wanted to come watch women and men the male dancers, Dee didn't care, but if anyone started shouting slurs or harassing the patrons, she had them ejected on their ass. Cameron figured having more women in the club caused the men to act different than if they were at a regular titty bar. Plus, the gay men who sometimes came were a riot; most of the time they added a real mood of outrageous fun to the club.

Cameron shifted her attention to the front of the stage where there were two tables of young men who looked, for the most part, three sheets to the wind. She looked over and caught Chris's eye and then tracked her gaze back to the young rowdies. Chris nodded and moved closer to the two tables. They were between sets right now, but Meagan and Rachel should be starting their number any minute. Looking around, she noticed the lesbians were all in the back at the pool tables, "Figures," she snorted.

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Amanda watched as Heidi racked the balls on the table, Sarah was sitting on a stool smoking, and Sammy was off getting a new round of drinks. Looking up, Heidi asked, "What do you think?"

Amanda bit her lip looking around. "I...um...well, its not what I was expecting at all. I mean, well you know this is nice and I expected ..."

"A shit hole." Sarah replied helpfully.

"Well yes," She paused, "And, there are male dancers," she said with tone of surprise.

Sarah chuckled, slipping off her stool, "Well, Dee's pretty much equal opportunity around here. " Heidi wrapped her long arms around Sarah, nuzzling her neck, breathing in a mixture of her partner and the bar. Heidi grinned; "You want to break, honey?"

"Nah, let Amanda."

"Okay," Heidi responded absently, thrusting the pool stick in Amanda's direction.

Amanda rolled her eyes. She was glad her friends were a happy couple, but sometimes their open displays of affection made her realize how empty her life really was. She grabbed the stick and positioned the cue ball to her liking.

"Hey where is that good-for-nothing roomy of yours with our drinks?" Piped up Heidi.

Amanda shrugged and tried to break again, her hand moving forward just as Sammy emerged squealing, "She's here!"

Amanda's shot skimmed the edge of the triangle of balls, barely moving any of them. Glaring, she looked up.

"Ah. Oops." Sammy said giving a sheepish grin.

"Who's here?" Sarah asked grabbing her beer from Sammy.

"My bouncer, silly. Oh my God, she's wearing these tight leather pants and a tight black top. Oh my god, you can't miss her tattoo."

"Breathe, Sammy girl, breathe." Amanda said with a chuckle.

"Did you get her name?"

"Well no." Sammy looked at Sarah as if she were nuts.

"Oh for crying out loud..." Sarah was cut off by the stage lights coming on, which caused a chain



reaction of whistles and cheers, that were in turn drowned out by the music.

Amanda's eyes jumped out of her head as two women came out and began to dance, occasionally coming together to dance or undress each other.

"Oh, my." was the only thing Amanda could croak out.

Heidi, Sammy, and Sarah were busting up watching Amanda's reaction. Amanda noticed her friends, and turned bright red.

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Cameron was edging closer to the front of the stage. She had been getting a bad feeling as soon as Meagan and Rachel had taken the stage. The young men hadn't calmed down as the set started; instead, they had gotten rowdier. Suddenly, she saw two burly arms reach out grabbing Rachel and yanking the dancer off the stage and onto the table of young men. 'Goddamn!' she thought. Pushing through people, she rushed to the table. Chris was a moment behind and Chuck was coming from the front doors. Cameron jumped into the sea of beer smelling humanity, tossing people out of her way. The stench of alcohol was overwhelming, and idly, she hoped no one lit a match. The air itself might catch on fire.

Yelling out, she told Chris to grab Rachel. The big man reached over her and pulled a stunned Rachel into his arms.

"Goddamn Bitch !" A voice rang out slurred with alcohol.

She easily avoided the punch aimed at her, and shoved her attacker out of the way.

"Hey little girl, why don't you show us your titties,"

All anyone saw was a blur as her hand lashed out, smashing the speaker's nose.

"Fuck, my nose!"

Cameron felt a headache coming on.

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"Oh my god, one of the girls fell off the stage." Sammy gasped.

"No she didn't, some lunkhead grabbed her."

"What's going on?" Asked a shorter Sarah.

"I'm not sure," Amanda replied trying to use her height to see.

They all blinked as the house lights came on. Then bodies started pouring towards the front door. Four men staggered on their own and filed out, followed by three very pissed-off looking figures.

The three bouncers yanked and dragged more young men toward the door then started tossing the men out. One man tried to come back in after the blonde woman threw him out.

"FUCKING DYKE!" He roared out swinging punches.

They watched as she caught both of his failing limbs and then head butted him, sending him back outside to the pavement.

"Get out of here, before I call the cops on your sorry ass!" She yelled shutting the door.

"That's her, that's my bouncer." Sammy whispered.

"Damn, girl," Sarah whispered back, "I could use some of that."

"Hey!" Heidi said indignantly.

Amanda studied the young woman's back, the short shaggy blonde hair that was damp with sweat, the muscles that moved like silk under pale skin and a snug t-shirt that did nothing to hide the woman's curves as it met up with black leather pants. "Whoa," She thought, but something was nibbling at the back of her mind. The young woman seemed familiar for some reason. Shaking her head slightly to clear her thoughts, she sucked in a deep breath of surprise as the woman turned around and she was staring into moody blue-gray eyes.

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Cameron grabbed her head, "Fucking shit!" She hissed out between clenched teeth. No more head butting, my god, that hurt. Rubbing her head, she mused that it always looked so cool on TV but, "Ouch!"

She heard a gasp of breath and looked over into piercing blue eyes. The house lights had gone back down, and the dancers had started back up, and still they stood staring. Finally, Amanda

croaked out, "Cameron...Cameron Hayes?"

Cameron came back to herself thinking, "oh shit!" Slowly she willed her self-control back and focused on being cool and distant.

Amanda saw the emotions rage in those dark eyes, then suddenly it was like a blind being closed, and Cameron's face became a cold smirk as the blonde haired girl walked over to the pool table that Amanda and her friends were standing around. Stopping, Cameron stared at the four women, her eyes finally resting on Amanda. "Well if it isn't the high and mighty Amanda Walker."

Amanda winced at the cold tone, "Look Cameron. I'm not, I'm not like that..."

Cameron cut her off, "Look I don't care. That was a long time ago and I have work to do. Ladies, enjoy your evening." With that, Cameron walked off.

"What happened just now, and how do you know my Bouncer?" Sammy asked confused.

Amanda just sat down and sipped her beer; she didn't feel so good any more. Sarah and Heidi looked at each other, then at the sick looking Amanda and the fuming Sammy.

"Hey, why don't we get out of here and head on over to the Night Creature?" Amanda just nodded numbly and grabbed her coat.

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Cameron sat at the bar nursing a Coke. Moodily, she moved the straw around, swirling the ice. Her head hurt, and surprisingly, so did her heart. She had been fairly certain her heart had stopped working years ago, but damn if it wasn't sitting in her chest, aching. After all these years, Amanda Walker had come back into her life, bringing with her all those things Cameron had tried to forget. She felt Dee slide up to her at the bar and caught the worried look on the older woman's face out of the corner of her eye.

"Hey, kid, you okay?"

She smiled, "Yep, my head hurts though."

"Shouldn't wonder, saw you head butt that guy." The woman barked out with a laugh. "You need an aspirin?"

"That would be great, Dee."

The woman nodded then shouted at Jason to get her an aspirin.

"So, kid, something bothering you?"

Cameron sighed and turned and looked Dee in the eye. Dee saw hurt from old wounds reflected deep in those stormy-sky colored eyes. Never had Dee or her partner, Georgia, asked about Cameron's past. Never once had the girl ever spoken a word about it. Dee slowly reached out a hand, giving Cameron plenty of time to reject the gesture, but the girl never moved. She rested her hand on Cameron's shoulder, giving a comforting squeeze, "Why don't you take off early and go see David at the Creature, and maybe pick up one of those punk rock girls that you're so fond of."

Cameron blushed and squeaked out, "Dee!"

Dee just chuckled. Cameron finished her drink and went in back to get her jacket.

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Much to the irritation of Sammy, Amanda still had yet to speak about how she knew the bouncer from the Shady Lady. 'Cameron. What a lovely name', Sammy sighed, thinking about the bouncer again. Sarah looked over at Amanda as the tall woman nursed her second beer. All around them, the club was packed with life. Techno and House music pounded through speakers, and couples and threesomes were grinding together on the dancer floor, caught up in the hypnotic beat.

"Okay, I want to know what's up with that bouncer chick from the Shady Lady." Heidi blurted out. Amanda just sighed.

"I haven't seen Cameron in around four years, not since I graduated from high school. Well, actually, she didn't show up for graduation. We met when we were sophomores in high school and we hated each other at first sight."

"Really, I find that hard to believe A-girl. You're so sweet everyone loves you." Sammy said, rubbing her friend's arm.

Amanda snorted, "Not then. I was different then. I was an overachiever." She smiled at her friends' muttered comments of, "Not you. An overachiever? Never."

"Alright smartasses, quiet down or I won't finish my tale of woe." Looking around she continued. "As I was saying. I was an overachiever, class president, straight-A student, played on the varsity basketball team, and I was dating a senior. Cameron was a first class slacker. She never showed up for class, smoked dope and was always fighting; she spent more time in detention than anyone. She was so angry at everything. She had a chip the size of Texas on her shoulder." She

paused to sip her beer.

"And!" Sammy nearly screamed.

"Well let's just say through a series of events we got to know each other better."

"Like in the biblical sense?" Sarah broke in.

Heidi gave an, I'm sorry smile, and clamped a hand over Sarah's mouth.

"Um, no. We got to be friends. Then, our senior year, I needed an extra class so I took drama and Cameron was in the same class with me. We actually had a blast 'til Mr. Richardson decided our class should actually do something, he decided our class would do a play: Romeo and Juliet."

"Was she Romeo to your Juliet?" Sammy piped in.

"Nooo. Cam was the lighting tech but I was Juliet. So, anyway, Cam was really cool, coming over and helping me learn my lines and all that, but one day I was freaking out about kissing Justin Faustin on stage in front of everybody."

"Wait. Who's Justin?" Heidi asked.

"Is that really important?" Sarah said glaring at Heidi.

"Justin was Romeo."

"Oh, okay."

"Anyways, she told me to quit being stupid, that it wasn't like I hadn't done it before. That ticked me off and we started yelling and fighting then we just stopped. We couldn't have been more than an inch apart and I could feel her breath washing over my face, hot and moist. Then bam! We were kissing."

"Bam?" Questioned Sammy.

"Bam." Amanda confirmed.

Amanda continued, "It was my first kiss with a woman. It was wild and frantic, yet soft and wonderful, all rolled into one big scary overwhelming feeling, and it terrified me. I pushed her off and asked her what the hell she thought she was doing."

"Oh Amanda, you didn't?" Cringed Sarah.

"Yeah, I did."

"What happened next?" Sammy asked eagerly.

"We started arguing again, shouting and shoving; next thing I know we're kissing again and I had her shoved up against the wall. Then I freaked out again, calling her a dyke, and yelling for her to get out of my house." Amanda paused, wiping tears out of her eyes.

"Shit, A-girl, that's harsh." Commented Sarah.

"All I can say is 'denial: it ain't just a river in Egypt'." Heidi said giving her two-cents worth.

"Well it was high school, what did I know?" she paused again, then stated, "Cameron stormed out and I haven't seen her again till today."

"That's some story." Sarah nodded in agreement patting her lover's hand.

"Well and that's just the cliff notes version." Amanda replied sipping her beer.

"No wonder she was all cold to you." Commented Sammy, idly looking around.

Then she asked "Think you could introduce me?"

Three voices shouted "Sammy!"

Startled she looked back at her friends.

"I was so mean to her." Amanda stated glumly.

"If it helps any, I know she digs chicks. I've seen her making out with one or two here."

Amanda just stared at the red head.

"What, did I just grow another head or something?"

"You don't really think before you speak, do you?" Heidi said with a glare. Softening her glare, she looked over at Amanda. "You know where to find her now. Maybe you can go and apologize."

"I don't know. She didn't seem that happy about seeing me."

The music shifted, slowing down, and couples took to the dancer floor swaying together. Heidi got all giddy, "Honey I love this song, let's go dance." Giving Sarah no time to respond, the taller woman yanked Sarah off her chair and onto the dance floor.

Amanda and Sammy stared at each other "I'm going to go work my charms on the brunette by the pinball machine."

"Have fun." Amanda turned her attention back to her drink, her mind lost in the past.

Amanda was on her forth beer and well on her way to being befuddled. Occasionally, she would look around for her friends. She caught brief glimpses of Heidi and Sarah on the dance floor.

She stared at her beer. Blinking, she realized she had finished it, 'oh man, no more for me'. Seeing the waitress approach, her resolved wavered, 'well, maybe one more'. Not trusting her mouth to work, she nodded her head when the spiky haired waitress asked if she wanted another. As the girl returned, she fumbled in her pocket for money but stopped as a low voice purred out, "I got it. Keep the change."

Amanda didn't look up as a body sat in the chair next to hers. She recognized that purr, she even remembered when it turned her on. Now it just made her skin crawl.

"Hey, sweetheart, you miss me?"

Amanda continued to stare into her drink, " No, Toni, I haven't missed you. Thanks for the beer, now go away"

"Come on now, is that any way to be." The woman said with a chuckle, resting her arm on the back of Amanda's chair.

"I think it's a perfect way to be."

"Come on, Amanda, I just want to talk to you."

"Why? Your new fuck not verbose enough for you."

"Look, I'm sorry about that. I've been doing a lot of thinking, and letting you go was the worst mistake of my life."

She felt Toni grab her chin, trying to push her head up to meet Toni's eyes. Angrily, she glared up, while Toni just smirked.

"Look, Toni, I'm not on the market."

"Yes you are. You don't do anything but work and school."

Amanda felt a shiver of fear race up her spine; Toni was starting to freak her out.

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Cameron came down from David's office and headed for the bar: "Hey Terri, give me a Coke."

The bartender just winked and got her drink. Turning she leaned up against the bar, surveying the club. The bass pounded and the lights flashed, cutting through the fog highlighting the dancing people in reds and yellows. She sipped her drink, then almost spit it out as her eyes fell on the woman who had been fuel for many a fantasy, Amanda Walker. The tall dark haired beauty was in conversation with another woman, 'Guess she is a lesbian. Must have been me', she thought bitterly. Looking at the other woman talking to Amanda, Cameron studied her. She was tall as well, with short light-brown curly hair, broad shoulders and a slim waist, she was wearing blue jeans and white button down shirt with the sleeves rolled back to expose powerful forearms. 'Hmmm... must masturbate a lot to get arms like those,' she thought with an evil chuckle.

As the woman shifted to put her arm on the back of Amanda's chair Cameron caught the woman's face, 'Oh shit Toni.' She recognized Toni from the Shady Lady; she had been barred from the club for harassing a couple of the dancers. Looking again, she noticed Amanda's body language. The woman was tense and angry, blue eyes were narrowed. 'God she's beautiful.' Cameron thought, then, realizing where her mind was going, she mentally pounded her head into the bar for thinking those thoughts.

Suddenly, Toni grabbed Amanda. In response Amanda stood up angrily trying to shake Toni off. Cameron saw Jay start toward the couple, but Cameron caught his eye and shook her head. Setting her drink down she approached the table.

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"Look Amanda I want another chance. Remember how good we were together?"

"No, Toni. Now please go away."

"You don't mean that."

"Yes I do." She started to get up, but Toni's hand snaked out, grabbing her wrist.

"Let me go!"

"No, not till you listen to me."

Amanda was really starting to get scared. She frantically looked around for Heidi, Sarah, or Sammy, but they were nowhere in sight. Startling her, she felt a warm arm wrap around her waist from behind, and a female voice ask, "Hey baby is there a problem here?"

Looking down, she found Cameron snuggled up against her side smiling sexily. Amanda's legs almost gave out when she saw that smile, her brain was starting to short circuit, and she croaked out, "No. No problem, Toni was just leaving."



"The hell I am! Who the fuck are you!"

Amanda grew uneasy as Toni's stance became more hostile, but she relaxed as she looked down and saw how unconcerned Cam was acting.

Ignoring Toni, Cameron shifted, moving around to Amanda's front, her head was now resting under Amanda's chin, her face was turned facing Toni. Amanda's head swam, smelling Cameron's shampoo, 'God she smells good. God she feels good.' She was very aware of Cam's body heat soaking through her clothes into her body.

Lazily, Cameron reached out grabbing Toni's hand where it still held firmly to Amanda's wrist. She dug her thumb and index finger into the fleshy webbing between Toni's own thumb and index finger, hitting the nerve. Toni gasped in pain and released.

"Listen, bitch. I don't know who you are but get lost. My girl and I were having a private conversation." Toni hissed out, rubbing her now throbbing hand.

"Ex-girl, Toni, ex-girl. We broke up," Amanda stated happily. To herself she thought 'Jesus what had I been thinking.'

"Oh, you're Toni." Cameron broke in, not missing a beat, "I know all about you Toni, we've had quite the laugh over you, haven't we baby."

Amanda felt a thrill go through her when Cam called her baby. Looking down, she was trapped in blue-gray eyes. 'Lord what did they put in my drink. This can't be real.' She thought dazedly. She managed to get out, "Uh...Yep, big laugh."

"You two are not dating! Amanda's been a fucking nun since we broke up," Toni stated. Amanda shivered at the intimate reference to her life. She got the eerie feeling Toni had been stalking her.

Cameron slowly rubbed Amanda's lower back, sensing the woman's fear. Through touch, she tried to reassure the woman that it was okay. 'What the hell am I doing?' she thought. Somehow, things had gotten out of hand, and she couldn't just sit back and let things take care of themselves. She had to rush in, play some goddamn knight to the woman who had ripped her heart out so many years ago. Oddly, it felt good to be wrapped around Amanda. She felt safe. Shaking her thoughts away, she focused on the angry woman causing a scene; many of the club patrons were now looking at them.

Feeling cheeky, she looked up at Amanda, "When we get home, honey, remind me to discuss your horrible taste in women."

"Umm, right. When we get home. Got it." Amanda was starting to get a glazed look in her eyes.

Toni was seething and confused. She was certain Amanda wasn't seeing anyone; yet, here this woman was, and they were acting like they knew each other very well.

Amanda was certain she had fallen into a parallel universe. Cameron hated her, right? However, the look on Toni's face was priceless. Figuring whatever was going on was a once in a lifetime opportunity, she wrapped her arms around Cam's waist, and leaned her head down and kissed the blonde woman's temple.

Cameron started, at that and gave Amanda a quick glare. Amanda just ignored the glare, pretending for the moment that her best friend had never left.

Cameron turned from glaring at Amanda to Toni. Giving the angry woman a bored look, she asked, "Are you still here?"

That did it! No small bit of a woman was going to treat her like that! Toni snapped, "You're so dead!"

Cameron twisted out of Amanda's hold like cat and she grabbed Toni's rapidly approaching hand, then, using the attacking woman's own momentum against her, swung her around. Cameron placed her forearm into the shoulder joint. Still holding Toni's hand, she pressed her weight into the joint. Toni had no choice but to move away from the pain and quickly found herself immobile over the table.

"Listen up. You're going to apologize to my girl. Then you're going to walk out and never come within ten feet of Amanda Walker again. Got it?"

When the woman didn't respond she added more pressure to the joint.

"Yessss." Toni hissed out in pain, "I got it."

Cameron released the woman.

Toni got up rubbing her shoulder. Not making eye contact, she mumbled, "I'm sorry," then quickly walked toward the exit.

Amanda looked on, stunned. Cameron went over and picked up the chairs that had fallen over and started to walk away.

"Wait!" Amanda shouted

Cameron stopped but didn't turn around.

Amanda found herself speechless. She had dreamed of this moment, this chance to redeem herself. "Cameron I'm sorry," she started speaking to the woman's back, "what happened between us, I was young and confused. I'm sorry. I was mean, cruel, and hurtful; and I'm sorry for the way I acted."

'Please turn around. Please.' She thought.

Cameron's shoulders slumped, and she slowly turned around. She looked into those blue eyes that haunted her dreams and fantasies. She saw sorrow and pain in those eyes and they reminded her of how her own eyes looked. Sighing, she wondered what could she do really? She had always loved Amanda -- maybe not at first, but later, and it had never gone away. After all these years, it was still there.

"Fine, I forgive you." and she started to turn around again.

"Wait!"

Cameron looked back questioningly.

"Can I buy you a beer?"

"Nope."

Amanda's shoulders slumped in defeat.

"I don't drink, but I'll let you buy me a cola."

"I can do that," she said with a shy grin.

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Heidi looked over at Sarah, "They are too cute."

"Hey, you think she'll introduce me." Sammy broke in.

"Can it, Sammy." Sarah said smacking her up side her red head.

"Ow! Jeez."

"Let's leave them alone for a little bit." Heidi said.

"Fine, you guys can help me get the attention of that brunette at the pinball machine."

"Sammy?"

"Yes."

"You know that's a guy, right?"

"What?!"

- - - - -

They sat there at the table, life revolving around them. Amanda sipped her water and Cameron her cola, neither one saying anything.

"Uh."

"So."

The both started at the same time.

"Now what?" Amanda asked.

"We say goodnight and go our separate ways." Cameron replied wiping her mouth with a napkin. Oddly, she didn't want that to be it but as always, she and Miss Walker revolved in separate circles.

Mustering her courage Amanda said, "No."

"Excuse me?"

"No." Amanda repeated. "I don't want that. I want to see you again."

Cameron felt panic bubble out into her blood stream. "What do you want? You got to say your apologies. Let it go. It was the past. We're not 17 anymore."

"I want to see you again. I want another chance. I want our friendship back."

"You certainly want a lot of things. What if I don't want that?"

"Then why are you sitting here with me?"

"I, uh." Cameron stuttered. She didn't know why, but after a moment of reflection she realized that she did still care, 'Ah fuck me', she thought.

"I think you still care. So I'm going to give you my number. No pressure. When and if you're ready, you'll have my number and you can call me." Shakily she got up to go to the bar to get a pen and something to write on. 'Oh God,' she thought. 'What if she never calls?'

Returning, she handed the napkin with her number on it to a silent bouncer. Cameron took it, her hand slightly shaking and shoved it into her pocket. They stood there for a moment. Finally Amanda said, "Well I guess that's it." There was a sinking feeling in her gut.

As she turned to go, Cameron grabbed her hand, holding it softly, Amanda's eyes shot up, catching Cam's.

"I, you're right, I do still care. I'll call next week."

"You promise."

"I said I would and I will. Go find your friends." With that, she squeezed Amanda's hand and let it go, watching her melt into the crowd.

## **Part 2**

\* Flashback warning

\* Child abuse warning

Day One ... No call from Cam.

Day Two ... No call.

Day Three ... There was a call but it was a long distance service wondering if they wanted to switch providers.

Day Four ... No call.

Day Seven ... Amanda began to over-rationalize why Cam wasn't calling. Maybe the girl had been hit by a truck and was lying in a hospital somewhere.

Day Nine ... Maybe Space Aliens had come down and snatched Cam.

Day Ten ... Sammy started avoiding her.

Day Twelve ... Sammy was taking bets. Either Amanda was PMSing really bad, or the normally sweet girl had been possessed.

Day Thirteen ... Amanda wondered briefly why Cameron's not calling her was affecting her so

badly. It wasn't like they were a couple or anything.

Day Fourteen ...

Heidi and Sarah were in Sammy and Amanda's apartment sitting on a well-worn lime green couch, that looked like a refugee from the 70's. Sammy was lying on the floor, her feet propped up on the matching loveseat. They were watching Amanda streak back and forth tossing cushions, mail, and clothes.

"What's with her?" Sarah whispered loudly to Sammy.

Sammy just shrugged and continued to watch her roomie's frantic actions. "I dunno, she's been like this for two weeks."

"Cameron still hasn't called."

"Got it in one."

"Amanda, I'm sorry Cameron never called. Her loss." Heidi said, trying to comfort Amanda.

Sammy turned over quickly, making silencing motions with her hands. When she realized Heidi wasn't paying attention, she groaned and let her head drop back to the floor.

"Cameron! Who's Cameron? Obviously, I don't know any Cameron because I don't see one here." Amanda responded tersely.

"Whoa. Someone needs to switch to decaf." Sarah said, ruffling Heidi's short blonde hair.

"Has anyone seen my Bio homework?" Amanda yelled out, hands on hips.

Sammy snickered "Did you try your backpack?"

"Oh.... ummm."

Checking her backpack, Amanda found her bio homework stuffed inside her biology book. "See you guys later." She shoved her stuff back inside her pack and tore out the front door.

Sarah looked at Sammy and Heidi.

Sammy shrugged, "Give her a minute, she'll realize it's Saturday."

A moment later, Amanda came back through the front door looking sheepish. "It's, ummm...."

"Saturday. We know."

"Shit A-girl, go talk to her, you know where she works."

"I don't know who you are talking about."

Sammy rolled her eyes turning back to the WNBA game on television. Amanda puttered around the apartment for a while letting out loose, long, heartfelt sighs every five minutes or so.

After repeatedly asking if everything was okay and getting a pitiful, "everything's fine," from Amanda, Sarah was well past her last nerve. Standing up suddenly, she told Heidi to grab Amanda and Sammy to get the car ready.

Sarah and Heidi proceeded to chase a screaming Amanda through the house. Finally they trapped her in the kitchen. With Sarah cursing and threatening to hog-tie Amanda if she didn't cooperate, they wrangled Amanda out of the house. Amanda quickly promised to be good. Sarah watched her partner walk with Amanda towards the door.

"Ummm, honey? Remind me when get home that we should play warlord and peasant girl."

Amanda, slung over Heidi's shoulder, looked up making a face, "Ewwww. Way too much information. Now put me down!"

"Go on honey, take her out to the car. I just need to grab some duct tape."

"Sarah, you wouldn't? Sarah!"

Sarah just grinned evilly.

They put Amanda in the back seat. Sarah sat on one side and Heidi on the other. Sammy sat laughing in the front seat, ignoring her roommate's glare.

"Driver, to the Shady Lady if you don't mind."

"Right-o Guv," Sammy replied in her best cockney accent.

"You guys, no, please. Sammy, stop the car." When nothing happened, she responded, "I hate you guys."

"Zip it, Amanda. Don't make me break out the duct tape." Sarah said with an evil grin, while twirling the tape on her finger.

Amanda made an "Eppp" noise and eyed the tape.

The white Subaru sat in the parking lot with four pairs of eyes staring at the brick front of the Shady Lady.

"Okay A-girl, go ask my bouncer if she's brain damaged."

"Your bouncer?" Heidi reached up and smacked Sammy on the head.

"Owww! Would you people stop smacking me on the head?"

"Only if you stop saying stupid things." Sarah said. "Okay Amanda, go get the girl."

Amanda sat unmoving with her eyes downcast.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Heidi said, wrapping an arm around Amanda's shoulders and giving her a squeeze.

Eyes looked up, two shiny liquid pools of blue that nearly broke Heidi's heart.

"She doesn't want to be got. Or at least not by me." Amanda's voice little more than defeated whispers.

"Come on, stop this feeling sorry for yourself crap. If she doesn't want to see you it's her loss. Come on, lets go see what her lame ass excuse is."

Amanda looked at Sarah, "Really, let's just go home."

Sarah locked her gaze with Heidi's then blurted out, "Grab her."

Heidi pulled Amanda from the car and with Sarah's help pulled the dark-haired woman into the club.

As they entered the club, they squinted, letting their eyes adjust to the new light level.

"We're not open. Come back in three hours." A raspy voice called out.

Standing uncomfortably, the three women shifted from foot to foot.

"Go on." Sarah whispered, nudging Amanda forward.

"I'm looking for Cam, um, Cameron Hayes."

"She ain't here. She has the night off."

"Oh, well in that case." She turned to flee.

"Wait. You Amanda?"

"Err, yes. Yes I am."

"Figured. She said you were a hottie."



Amanda felt a blush rise on her cheeks as the older woman looked her over.

"She said that if I were to see a hot looking woman who was built like an Amazon, with dark hair and blue eyes, named Amanda, I was to either give you her number or send you by the house. She's at the house if you want to run by."

"Great." Heidi said with a grin. She loved it when things worked out.

As they turned to go, the older woman called out.

"Wait."

"Yes?"

"Don't you need the address?"

"Oh, yeah."

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"Okay, Amanda, go up to the door and talk to the girl."

They had been sitting in front of the pale yellow house for almost 20 minutes.

"Okay, I'm going. You guys will wait right here, Right?"

"Yep."

"Okay."

"Amanda, you're not moving."

"All right I'm going."

"Amanda don't make me have Heidi drag your ass up there. Besides, what kind of impression would that make on Cameron?" Sarah threatened.

"Fine. Just so you know, I hate you all."

Sarah just blew a raspberry in response.

As she walked up to the front door, Sammy took off in the car. Her mouth hanging open, she plotted their deaths.

"I was wondering how long you were going to sit out here."

Startled, Amanda turned to find an older woman watching her from behind the screen door. The woman looked to be of Hispanic descent with warm chocolate eyes and tan skin. Her brown hair was beginning to turn gray and she had generous laugh lines around her face.

"Oh, hi." She stated weakly. "I'm Amanda, is Cameron here?"

"Yes she is. Come on in."

She stepped into the house. The warm, comforting smell of cinnamon quickly invaded her nose.

"Hmmm. Don't take this the wrong way, but you don't look like one of the girls Cameron normally has over."

"What kind does she have over?" She asked, her curiosity tweaked.

"Well, I don't see any visible markings or piercings."

"Well, my bellybutton."

The older woman waved her off as if that was a very minor thing to some of the things she had seen.

"Your hair color the one you were born with?"

"Yes."

"And polite. I bet you have goals for life."

"Yes ma'am. I want to go into physical therapy."

"Oh, no need to call me ma'am, the name is Georgia."

They shook hands. Amanda found herself liking Georgia. She seemed the total opposite of Dee. Dee had, quite frankly, terrified her, Sarah, and Heidi. If she could intimidate Sarah, the woman had to have the look of death down.

"Well, Amanda, she lives in the basement. Just go on down those steps."

"Thank you."

Georgia watched the tall woman walk down the stairs thinking that Amanda might be a nice change.

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Cam absently wandered around wondering what she was going to do with her day off. Bleary eyed, she absently scratched her ass. She wondered if your ass itching meant anything. Like, if your palm itched, it meant money; if your nose itched it meant, hmm, probably that you had inhaled a bug; and your ass itching probably meant that you should use a moisturizing soap. She grabbed a granola bar. Her blood sugar was getting low; her brain was going off on weird tangents.

It had been two weeks and no sign of Amanda. It was probably for the best. She was so stupid; she should have put the number right in her wallet. It was one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments and she had blown it. She had no way of finding the woman. She had looked up Walker in the phonebook. There were 40 Walkers, no Amanda's, and of the 9 A. Walkers she had called, none of them had been Amanda. It was okay, she thought. She was a big girl and had been doing fine with Amanda out of her life, so if she never heard from the tall dark-haired beauty again, no big loss. Yet, the thought of never seeing Amanda again gave her a twinge of pain. Needing to distract her brain, she decided some violent, shoot 'em up video games were in order.

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Amanda walked down the worn wooden steps, unsure of what to do. What would she say? How should she act? She worked through some opening lines in her head: 'Cameron, so nice of you to call.' 'Hey, how's it going?' or 'What the hell is the matter with you? When a girl gives you her number she expects a call within a day or two.' Nothing seemed just right.

Her thoughts stopped as she entered the main room. It was a nice size room with small windows near the ceiling, at ground level with the outside world, letting in the afternoon sunlight. The carpet was beige and fake wood paneling covered the walls. There were various posters of rock bands she never heard of: Social Distortion, Fugazi, Sleater-Kinney, and Heavens to Betsy. Facing away from her on an orange flower patterned couch was Cameron. Her blonde hair was sticking up at strange angles and it looked like she was playing a video game on a large television. She grinned at this. Four years later and Cam still like her video games. She wondered

if she was still a Scooby Doo freak.

Amanda stood silently, watching Cameron and remembering that in high school the downtown arcade had been Cam's little hideaway. If life got to be too much, the girl would take a handful of quarters, skip class, and go kill things for the rest of the afternoon.

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*Amanda was stalking down the hallways of the school looking for Cam, her blue eyes flashing in anger. She had been sitting in the library for a half-hour now waiting for Cameron to show up so she could tutor the girl for chemistry. At the rate Cam was going she was going to flunk out. Turning the corner she spied Timothy grabbing books out of his locker. Timothy was a long time friend of Cam's; he would know where the girl was.*

*"Hey Tim."*

*Tim squeaked, dropping his backpack, and whipped his head around, his long hair whipping around his face. Once he saw Amanda he dropped his gaze not looking her in the eyes, and backed away toward his locker.*

*"Amanda, what's going on?"*

*"Tim, have you seen Cam? She's late for our tutoring session."*

*"I saw her earlier, but not recently. If I see her I'll let her know you're looking for her."*

*"When did you last see her?"*

*"I..uhh, well, ummm." He nervously backed away.*

*She stepped forward until she had him practically sitting in his locker. She smelled the acidic, tangy smell of marijuana.*

*"Tim, look at me?"*

*He shook his head, his long stringy blonde hair shielding his face. Tim knew how Amanda felt about drugs. He wasn't stupid.*

*She reached a hand out and tilted his face up to look at her. She felt her blood pressure rise seeing his glazed and blood shot eyes.*

*"You two got stoned during lunch." It wasn't a question.*

*"I, you're, you are jumping to, well, yes." He squeaked out.*

*"She blew me off to get stoned. I'm going to kill her." She turned her full glare on to Tim. He jumped and tried to find room in his locker.*

*"Where is she?"*

*"Amanda, she needs some alone time. She can't, umm, deal."*

*"Where is she?"*

*"The arcade at 10th and State, downtown." The scared boy blurted out as fast as he could.*

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*Amanda entered the brightly lit neon filled building; various machines pinged, blipped, and played crude electronic music at her as she passed them by, scanning the rows for one player in particular.*

*Unaware, Cameron grinned evilly as she lightly tapped her joystick: back, back, and forward/punch sending the nasty harpoon weapon out into her opponent's chest. She followed with a six-punch combo then went for the special finishing move. She chuckled, "Sorry Vince, maybe next time."*

*The lanky youth with hazel eyes scowled, "Cam, I know you cheat. Next time, chica, you're going down."*

*"You and what army, this is my game Vince. "*

*"You spend too much time here. Shouldn't you be in school?"*

*"Look who's talking. You're going to be repeating your junior year again."*

*"I still can't figure out how they let you pass so you could be a senior."*

*She just shrugged. Hell if she knew.*

*"You've bled me dry, Cam, see you around."*

*"See ya. " She said, distracted. She had already moved into the game. She didn't have to think or feel -- just move her character through the opponents.*

*Amanda rounded the corner bumping into a tall dark haired boy. "Sorry." She mumbled out.*

*"Hey, don't worry about it chica, you can bump into me any time."*

*She rolled her eyes. "I don't think my boyfriend would like it if I made a habit of bumping into you."*

*"He's not here." Vince said stepping closer.*

*Amanda backed up bumping into a pinball machine behind her. "I, " she spotted the back of Cam's head, "I've found who I was looking for."*

*Turning his head, he followed her gaze back to Cam, "Oh. Well, if you change your mind, I'm much friendlier than Cam."*

*She gave a weak smile and walked toward Cameron. By the time she reached Cameron she was seething. She had skipped last period, wasted her study hall when she should have been tutoring Cam, and been hit on by some scary Mexican. "Are you purposely trying to fail your senior year?"*

*Startled, Cameron screamed and jumped about three feet in the air. She twisted around bringing her hands up to defend herself.*

*Not noticing her reaction, Amanda started in on Cameron, yelling and gesturing wildly with her hands.*

*Cameron caught the flash of dark hair and blue-eyes, 'Fucking great. Just what I need right now is Amanda getting on my case.' She thought to herself. She turned back to her game, hoping Amanda would just go away.*

*Amanda clenched her jaw, "Are you blowing me off again? You haven't heard a word I said."*

*"Vince isn't Mexican, he's Italian, but I will give you the fact that he's scary." Cam grunted out while trying to do the special move.*

*Amanda sighed, "Cam what is so bad that you went and smoked up with Tim and then blew off our study session for a video arcade? I thought we were friends."*

*Cameron felt warning bells going off in her head; she was entering into a sensitive girl chat area. Being friends with Amanda was so hard sometimes. She was such a girl, and from the nice part of town. The rules she was used to just didn't apply. Like, apparently, personal space as Amanda was resting her chin on Cam's shoulder watching the video game. Cameron felt a warm pull in the center of her stomach as she inhaled, breathing in Amanda's perfume, causing her stomach to flutter. She stilled, momentarily caught off guard, and on the screen her character received a bloody end.*

*"Eww. This is a gross game Cam."*

*"Sorry. I didn't know you'd be joining me today."*

*"Don't think I didn't notice that you failed to answer my question."*

*Cameron's eyes darted around, trying to think of something to change the subject. "Hey, why aren't you in advanced chem.? Did Amanda Walker, the sweetheart of Polk High School, skip class?"*

*"Well, I..." Amanda stumbled out, blushing.*

*"Hey, don't sweat it. I think I'm actually proud of you. You're starting to loosen up a little."*

*"Oh, you." She said, slapping Cameron on the back playfully. "You're just a bad influence."*

*Cameron winced and her eyes filled with tears as pain raced through her when Amanda slapped her on the back. What Amanda couldn't see were the large black and purple bruises covering Cameron's back. "Well, that's my purpose in life. To corrupt you." Cameron croaked out.*

*"Well, you're doing a fine job. Look. I've already started skipping class."*

*Cameron, getting the pain back under control, turned, wiggling her eyebrows at Amanda, "Welcome to my world. Let's introduce you to the wonderful world of the State Street Arcade." She grabbed Amanda's hand and lead her to the skee-ball game.*

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Amanda came back to the present. That had been one of the best days of her life. They had spent hours at the arcade playing games and goofing off. She never had really done that sort of thing before. She remembered that in the back there had been a lovely, old-fashioned carousel with shiny horses, elephants, tigers, and rabbits. She had shyly admitted that she had never ridden on one before. Shocked, Cam insisted that they would go for a ride that very minute. Even though it wasn't operating at the moment, Cam went and talked to the owner. He had come back smiling, saying every child no matter how big should ride on a carousel.

So she had chosen a black stallion standing proudly, and Cam had chosen the snarling tiger next to her. They had giggled and ridden it around and around. She sighed, staring at the back of Cam's head.

Cameron had the strangest sensation that someone was watching her. As she fired, taking out

another zombie, she turned. Looking over her left shoulder, she caught sight of a person standing behind her. Startled, she screamed launching the video game controller into the air. "Holy shit, Amanda! You scared the crap out of me!"

Amanda laughed.

They stared at each other, each one unsure how to start. Cameron frantically searched her brain for something to say. She'd only been up for an hour and now she wished she had showered instead of turning on the Playstation. Well, at least she didn't bring that girl home from bar. She thought that would have really been awkward.

"I, well, Georgia told me to come on down. I hope that was okay?" Amanda asked shyly.

"That's fine, no problem here, I mean, that I'm happy, I mean glad. Yep glad you came on down," Cameron babbled nervously. She wished the couch would swallow her at this moment. "Come have a seat." She patted the couch next to her.

Amanda gulped, moved around the couch and sat down. As she looked at Cam, she laughed. Cameron was wearing a white t-shirt with Velma and the word 'Jinkies!' printed boldly on it. "Still a rabid fan of Scooby, I see."

Cam blushed, "I, I, I" she stammered. Damn, where were the killer couches when you needed them. "I sure am." Trying to settle herself, she breathed in and out focusing her thoughts. Okay, Amanda Walker is sitting in my living room, on my couch not more than a foot away. I can act like a human being. Conversation, words, she could do that. "Umm so how you been?" She cringed. Someone shoot her. God, that sounded lame.

Amanda's brow crinkled and her mouth formed a small frown, "How come you never called? I had to go to your work and have some scary woman tell me how to find you." Amanda watched as Cameron's face went blank and the shorter girl got up off the couch. 'Shit', she thought, 'she's going to tell me to leave.' Amanda felt the panic settle into her stomach and she thought she might get sick. Cameron never said a word, she just disappeared down a hallway and then, a minute later, reappeared holding something in her hand. Amanda was momentarily distracted from her panic attack by all the leg being shown off due to the fact Cam was only wearing bright yellow boxer shorts. "My, those are awfully yellow." She remarked, unthinking.

Cameron heard the statement and looked over at Amanda, then noticed where Amanda was looking. She fought the urge to tense the muscles in her thighs. "Amanda, I would have called but, well, here." She thrust a piece of paper at Amanda.

Amanda recognized the cocktail napkin as the one she wrote her number on for Cameron. However, the number was nothing more than a blue smudge.

Cameron looking sheepish. "I was so nervous, I was sweating so bad that it made the ink bleed everywhere."



Amanda started laughing. She had been a pissy, emotional wreck over something totally innocent. Then she felt a silly smile break out on her face. Cam had been nervous. That was good, right? "So you would have called."

"Of course. You know me, Amanda, when I say I'm going to do something, well, I do it."

Amanda started laughing even harder, "Except show up for my chemistry tutoring sessions."

"You remember that. God I hated chem. Actually, I hated school in general."

"I know. Trust me, I think the whole faculty nearly exploded when it looked like you were going to graduate." Amanda frowned. "Look Cam, if you're not showing up to graduate had something to do with... with."

Cameron cut her off. "Amanda, that was the past. We really don't need to go there."

"I just want to know what happened to you."

Cameron looked over at Amanda, "Short version is that I ran off, lived on the street. That's where Dee found me. She took me home and I've been renting out Dee and Georgia's basement and working at the Shady Lady." Looking over, she saw that Amanda wasn't satisfied with that answer. Sighing, she said, "Look. Maybe someday I'll go into it with you in detail, but not today. Okay?"

Amanda still didn't look happy but she nodded. Cam hated those sad puppy dog eyes Amanda had down so well.

"So, what about us?"

"Us?"

"Cam, I've really missed you, I would like to be friends again. I mean, do you, would you like." She trailed off.

Cameron felt her heart sink a little in her chest. She'd just been given the 'just friends' speech. Mentally, she pounded her head into the foot locker/coffee table. What the hell, she hadn't seen the woman in four years. What did she think was going to happen? They'd go right to having hot, wet, monkey sex? She had to stop thinking about fantasies 5 through 21 for a while.

"I'd like that." There, that wasn't so bad.

Amanda released a breath in relief, "I'd like that too."

"Uh, I have the night off. You want to go grab dinner and see a movie or something?"

Amanda smiled, feeling slightly giddy. "That sounds wonderful. Do you think you could give me

a ride home when we're done? My friends kind of stranded me."

"No problem. Let me go shower and change, then we can go." Looking around, she handed Amanda the remote. "Feel free to use the TV or look around."

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Amanda wandered around the basement apartment. There was the main room, then a small nook off to the side with a washer and dryer. Moving down the hallway, she came to a door that was slightly open. Poking her head inside, she saw an unmade bed, a bookshelf, another shelf with a small stereo and clock and more books. As she entered, she saw clothes scattered everywhere on the floor. Examining the bookshelf, her eye caught sight of two pictures in small sliver frames. One was of her and Cam at the county fair. It had been taken two weeks before Cam had disappeared. The other picture was of a young girl with long blonde hair. She was wearing red shorts, a black tank top, and boxing gloves were hanging from her shoulder. Standing next to the girl was a short, stocky man with blonde hair and green eyes. His eyes were warm and he had had a proud smile on his face. It had to be Cam and her father, she guessed. The girl couldn't be more than ten. Amanda realized that Cam never talked about her father or her family at all, even in high school. Thinking back, she realized that she had never been to Cam's house or heard her talk about brothers or sisters. Shaking her head, she was amazed. Had she really been that self-centered? She made a mental note to try and ask Cam about her family.

Cameron closed her eyes and let the hot spray hit her. She tried to organize her thoughts. Oh God, she was going out on a date with Amanda. No, wait, not a date, um... Whatever it was, she was going to spend time with Amanda. She felt her knees go weak and she slumped back against the cool tile. Crap, she was going to have to make conversation; use those word things. Taking a deep breath, she reached for the soap. She could do this. She could be charming and um, charming. She had been out on dates before. Sure, they never made it off the couch, but she could do this. She leaned her forehead on the tile. Why did this feel so different? Because Amanda is important to you, dumbass, she lightly banged her forehead on the tile. She knew what the other girls had wanted from her, and in the morning they were gone. But with Amanda? She had no idea what Amanda wanted, hell she didn't even know what she wanted. She groaned. Now, if she could just get the 'Amanda sex fantasies 5 through 21' out of her head, all would be good.

Amanda moved down the hallway stopping at the closed door. She heard the shower running and guessed that was the bathroom. The image of Cameron naked and wet flashed into her mind and she groaned, leaning on the door. Considering their past, she knew jumping Cam would be the wrong way to approach whatever tenuous connection they had. Cam had shown little to no interest in her in the sexual sense, in all honesty, in any sense.

She moved on down the hallway to the last room. Looking in, she saw a weight bench and a rack

with some free weights. Hanging near a corner was a punching bag, and on a shelf was a small radio, jump rope and gloves. Great, now she was getting mental images of a sweating Cam. She turned and raced back to the main room hoping the television would distract her now one-track mind.

Cameron emerged from her room clothed in baggy worn blue jeans and loose fitting black t-shirt.

"Hey, you ready?"

"Yep."

Amanda reached over and shut off the TV, "I'm starved."

Cameron's stomach growled in agreement. Looking down, Cameron blushed, "Guess I am too."

They headed up the stairs.

"Georgia!" Cameron shouted.

"Don't yell in the house. I swear, you and Dee have no manners."

Cameron followed Georgia's voice. She found the woman sitting in the living room reading. Amanda hung back, waiting in the kitchen.

"Hey, can I borrow the jeep? Amanda and I are going to grab something to eat then maybe catch a move."

Georgia looked at the girl and then looked around her. Spying Amanda in the kitchen, she looked back to Cameron. She lowered her voice, "Look here Cameron Maria Hayes."

Cameron felt a sinking sensation at the mention of her full name.

"I want that girl to be dropped off to sleep in her own bed tonight. She's too nice to be one of your one-night stands. You understand me, Hayes?"

Cameron gulped and nodded vigorously as she felt the weight of Georgia's stare.

"Good, I'm glad we understand each other." She said as she gave Cameron the keys to the jeep."

Unknown to both of them, Amanda had excellent hearing and had heard the whole conversation. As they got into the Jeep and buckled in, Amanda turned to Cameron with a glint in her eye. "So, how many one-night stands are we talking here? 10, 20, 36?"

Cameron's jaw hit her lap and she almost took out the mailbox. "I, I, I, you heard that."

Amanda nodded and then began to laugh at the embarrassed flush on Cam's face.

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Amanda watched as the Jeep pulled out of the driveway and waved as she entered the apartment. She tried to be quiet since all the lights were out and she wasn't sure if Sammy was asleep or out. As she crept toward the kitchen, the living room light switched on, startling Amanda. Freezing, she turned and looked at the three smirking figures.

"Ah." She started, only to be tackled by over enthused Sammy.

Having the advantage of surprise, Sammy quickly straddled Amanda's hips and pinned her arms to the floor.

"Okay, start spilling A-girl."

"I didn't know you cared."

"Don't get cheeky or I'll tickle you."

Amanda tried to twist out of Sammy's grasp only to be tickled.

Laughing, she begged for Sammy to stop.

"As much as Heidi and I are enjoying the floorshow, we want details Amanda."

Amanda lay on the floor gasping, trying to get her breathing under control.

"So, did you guys have sex?"

"Sammy! Somebody smack her upside the head." Amanda cried out.

Sammy ducked her head. When nothing came, she sat up straight only to have Sarah smack her.

"Owww!"

Getting up, Amanda sat down on the lime-green couch. "We talked, had dinner, and saw a movie. Then she brought me home, end of story."

"What did you talk about?"

"Stuff."

"Where did you eat?"

"This Italian place by the Cineplex.'

"Italian, romantic." Heidi nodded in approval.

"Not romantic, convenient."

"Comedy, romance, tragedy, horror, or action?"

"Romantic comedy.'

"Amanda had a date. Amanda had a date." Sammy sang.

"We're just friends."

"Uh huh. You just keep yourself in denial."

"It was not a date." She said to Sammy's smirking face.

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Cameron walked around the house to the back entrance that led right down to her space. She saw a single light on coming from the living room and knew that Georgia was up waiting for Dee. Cam mused that it must feel good to know someone was waiting for you at home, someone who loved you enough that no matter how strange the hours you worked was waiting for you at the end of the day to connect with you.

After dropping Amanda off she briefly entertained the idea of going out, but decided that it wouldn't kill her to get some sleep. The whole evening with Amanda had been fun. There had been no games, no drama, and no tension about how the night might end.

Amanda had been so cute at dinner. She had been slurping up spaghetti noodles and one had gotten out of control. Snapping up, it had splattered her nose and cheeks with sauce. For a moment Cam, was tempted to slide over and lick the sauce off, and had very nearly done so. It had been touch and go for a few minutes. She had to remind herself that it was not a date, just old friends getting reacquainted. The movie had been near torture. Unthinking, she had put her arm up over Amanda's seat and nearly jumped a foot when the woman leaned into her, resting her head on her shoulder. By that time the words, "this is not a date" had become her mantra for the evening with a few, "she is just a friend's" thrown in for good measure.

Entering her room, she turned on a small standing lamp that dimly lit her room. She kicked off

her shoes, followed by her pants and shirt, letting them lay where they landed. She absently grabbed for her yellow boxer shorts and Velma shirt. She paused while putting the shirt on, her fingers lightly tracing faint scars on her abdomen and ribs. Grimacing in distaste as bad memory flickered through her head, she jerked the shirt over her head. She turned off the light and crawled into bed.

Cameron sighed into the darkness. Trying to get comfortable, she twisted and wiggled until she found a position she liked. Lying on her back, her hands tucked under her head, she closed her eyes and concentrated on her breathing; in and out, in and out. In, a flash of dark hair. Out, blue eyes dark and hooded in passion. In, red lips puffy and swollen from being ravished. Out, tan skin soft as silk spread out flowing into the swell of a breast.

Cameron's bored right hand snuck out from the pillow and crept down and under the shirt, the left, now lonely, went to go see with right was up to. The right was busy punishing a nipple by pinching and squeezing it, the left thought this was a great game and joined in and started to punish the other nipple. Cameron groaned softly, in her mind she hovered over a sweaty, naked Amanda. Slowly, she licked the sweat off of Amanda's neck, following the soft curve of it up so she could nibble on her earlobe.

Cam's right hand, bored now with the nipple (it had given in too easily), slowly slunk down to the waistband of the bright yellow boxers. She groaned out Amanda's name making it eight syllables. Idly, thoughts floated around her brain. Who knew Amanda would become such fuel for her "alone time" fantasies. Considering how they met, it was amazing that they hadn't killed each other. Her mind flashed back to the day they met, and everything stilled. 'Well that was a mood killer,' she thought. Huffing in frustration, Cameron rolled over onto her side, letting her mind go where it willed.

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*Cameron was unsteadily weaving in and out of the human traffic in the school hallway. She was desperately trying to reach the Holy Grail that was the candy machine. Everything was kind of fuzzy around the edges; this thought made her giggle. She had a raging case of the munchies due to the pot she and her friends had smoked three periods ago. It was so worth it to be comfortably numb, even for just a little while the shit in her life didn't matter. The candy machine gleamed in the distance, God she could almost kill for a Snickers.*

*All around her, students milled around moving in a living sea, all swept up in the currents flowing to lockers and classrooms. Cameron zagged when she should have zigged and ran into a blue covered backside. She bounced back a little and looked up, the word 'sorry' freezing in her throat as she had to look up and then up a little more into angry blue eyes. Then she noticed that the tall, angry girl was covered in a dark brown liquid, a crushed fast food cup in hand. The liquid covered the girl's face and shirt, and because of that, two perfectly round breasts were*

*now very much highlighted by the wet shirt. Cam wondered how any girl could have such nice looking boobs in high school. Hers were certainly not as umm...round.*

*"Watch where you're going, freak."*

*Cam rolled her eyes. So what if she dressed in all black and her hair was dyed fire engine red, like she hadn't heard that before. Jesus, didn't anybody pick up a thesaurus anymore?*

*"Yeah, watch where you're going." Another girl, a groupie of some sort, broke in.*

*She could feel them closing in like sharks on the scent of blood. Feeling way too much stimulation in her current situation, she shrugged and tried to take off toward the candy machine. A meaty hand clutched her shoulder as she tried to make a break, slamming her into a locker.*

*"Fuck." She hissed out.*

*Cam looked at the hairy beast trying to pass itself off as a teenage boy; her thoughts drifted away thinking about the scary stories her father had told her about Big Foot when she was little. Her head bouncing off the locker again brought her back to reality.*

*"Owww! Fuck."*

*"I said apologize to my girl."*

*"I don't think she can speak. So far she's only said the same word over and over." Said a whiney, high-pitched voice.*

*"Why can't they ship these freaks off to a special school?" Said someone else.*

*"Why would anybody date Big Foot?" Cameron mused out loud, only to get herself slammed back into the locker.*

*"Oww." Staring up into the girl's cola splattered face and cold blue eyes she mumbled out, "Fuck, I'm sorry."*

*"Listen freak, if I even catch you looking in the general direction of my girl I'll hurt you."*

*Cam rolled her eyes again, "Wow, you spoke a whole sentence." This got her slammed against the locker again.*

*"Hey!" Screeched a high-pitched voice, and Cam caught sight of her friend Tim running up to them.*

*"Get your hands off of her, you bully!"*

*Even Cameron wanted to laugh when Tim said it, because the boy had not an ounce of manliness in him.*

*"Shut up, faggot." Said the large Big Foot boy reaching out a hand and swatting Tim to the ground.*

*Cameron saw red; there was no reason to do that to Tim. Grinning evilly she reached up and grabbed the collar of Big Foot boy's shirt for leverage and brought her knee up in a fast movement to the boy's groin. There was a moment of silence in honor of the boy's crushed manhood as he silently slumped over and passed out on the ground.*

*"Miss Hayes. Causing trouble again I see, hmm? Assaulting a fellow student? This does not look good. Come with me."*

*"Assault! It was pure self-defense Mr. Chambers."*

*"Not the way I saw it."*

*"But."*

*"No buts. To my office, now! We have a phone call to make to your mother."*

*Cameron grumbled, "Yeah, like she'll be sober enough to answer the phone."*

*"Now Miss Hayes."*

*Cameron shrugged past the pack of girls, giving them a blood shot glare, and at the tall dark haired one, she bit out, "Bitch," as she passed.*

*"I hope they kick her out of school. What a freak."*

*"Right."*

*"You okay, Amanda?"*

*Amanda Walker stood, slightly sticky as the cola began to dry, watching the shorter red haired girl stomp away. She didn't feel nearly as angry as she had moments ago. She had been slightly scared by Nathan's display. It seemed way over the top. Her thoughts scattered at the sound of her boyfriend moaning in pain, and she rushed to help him.*

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*Dusk was settling in and, like a make-up artist, it covered over the cracked and broken down buildings, masking the depressed state of the area. In inky pools of shadows were piles of garbage, debris, and in a few, the homeless were trying to find shelter for the night.*

*Cameron slowly walked down the street toward her apartment building. Her shoulders were hunched, and on either side of her walked Tim and Stacey.*

*"So, did Mr. Chambers talk to your mom?" Asked Tim.*

*"Of course he did! Why do you think I've been wasting all this time on the way home?"*

*"Man, Cam, your file must be as thick as our Math book by now."*

*"Hmmm, probably, " Cam said, distracted, as she tried to see if there were any lights on in her apartment. "Looks like she's out or passed out. I'll see you guys on Friday."*

*"Why Friday?"*

*"I got suspended for two days."*

*"Why'd you get suspended? Nathan was the one being the bully."*

*"It's my word against his and Chambers'. The only reason I'm not in Juvi is that Big Foot Boy would have to press charges and that would mean admitting he got beat up by a girl."*

*All three giggled.*

*"All this just because you bumped the high and mighty Amanda Walker."*

*"Yep."*

*"It's been agreed before now that we hated her by pure word of mouth. Now its personal." Tim declared and they all giggled again.*

*She had, of course, disliked Amanda before; her whole group of friends did. She was everything they despised: smart, popular, rich, and an over-achiever of the first class. The girl was in all advanced classes, played on the Varsity basketball team as a sophomore, and was their class President. As a rule, Cameron disliked anybody who put forth any effort in High School. Shit, it was only a moment in one's life. It couldn't last forever... well, at least she hoped High School couldn't last forever.*

*"Well, I'll see you guys later." She said as she took off for the steps to her apartment building.*

*She entered the building, no longer seeing the chipped paint and cracked plaster. She no longer smelled the scent of vomit and garbage that nearly overwhelmed the hallway. The building was a symphony of screams. It was a cacophony of babies hungry or wanting comfort, couples fighting,*

*and children fighting. All sorts of different screams echoed through the building. The weight of despair was almost crushing. The people who lived here had given up. They knew nothing better was coming and that this was it. Cameron did her best to fight it off, but it got harder and harder not to just give in to it and except that this was it her life.*

*When her father had been alive, they had lived in a rented house in a better area of town. It was still lower middle class, but it had been a house with a yard. Her father had built her a tree house there, and in the garage, he had set up his old boxing equipment and taught her and her older brother Josh how to fight and protect themselves. It was odd. Even then, her mother hadn't been a big presence in her life. All that was before, before her father had been killed in the construction accident, before her brother had run off, and before her mother had learned the joys of the bottle and the one-night stand. Each in their own ways her bother and father abandoning her to deal with a mother who didn't care if she had food or clothes that fit, a mother who didn't care if, in a drunken rage, she or her boyfriend for the night slapped her around. Some things couldn't be helped, and Cam felt like she was one of them.*

*Resigned, she stood in front of her door listening for signs of life. Not hearing anything, she placed her key in the lock and went in. There was a single lamp dimly lighting the living room. She failed to see her mother sitting in the shadows at the kitchen table holding an empty whiskey bottle.*

*"You are so much like your father."*

*Confused, Cameron froze, seeking out her mother's form in the dark.*

*"You look just like him, blond hair, short size, and you like to beat up on people. That's what he did, he beat on people." Her mother's voice was getting louder and louder.*

*"He was a boxer, of course he hit people. It's what they do. Unlike you, who just likes to beat on me."*

*"You ungrateful bitch!" Her mother screamed, launching the bottle toward her daughter.*

*In the dark she couldn't see the bottle and it smashed into the wall near her head. The bottle, like their relationship, shattered. Glass shards flew everywhere and Cam felt a sting on her forehead and cheek. Stunned, she stood there.*

*"You ungrateful waste of space, get out!"*

*Unthinking, she ran for the door and bolted down the stairs. Outside, she paused and gulped for breath. Touching her forehead, she felt something warm and sticky coating her face. Looking at her fingers in the harsh florescent streetlight she could see them colored with her blood. Shaking her head angrily, she stomped off to find a safe place to crash for the night. Anger that had no place to go sunk deep into her belly to join the large ball of rage which was already cold and dark sitting inside her.*

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Memories were funny things. Good or bad, the emotions they caused were as sharp and clear as the day that they occurred: joy, anger, bliss, excitement, and fear. Cam lay in the dark and curled around her pillow where no one could see her facade crack and break. Where no one cared if she wasn't quiet, calm and tough, she cried for a pain that was as vivid today as it was over four years ago.

### **Part 3**

There was a horrible electronic chirping noise coming from somewhere. It shrilled throughout the house with its urgent cries until a hand snaked out from under a black comforter. The hand picked up the shrilling object and slammed it repeatedly on the wooden table while a voice huskily whispered out, "its too fucking early." The phone was then gently placed on its cradle. The hand slipped back under the covers.

5 minutes later the phone rang again only to meet with the same violent results.

"Damn it I'm sleeping here." A husky, sleep-roughened voice mumbled out.

Five minutes later, the phone obviously into S and M, rang again. There was a pounding on the wall, "Fuck! Amanda it's your psycho father, pick up the phone."

Grumbling was heard, " I have it Sammy."

"Dad it's," she blinked trying to read the numbers on her clock, "it's really early." The red numbers swam into focus, "DAD, it's 5 o'clock in the morning!"

A gruff, yet very awake voice came over the line. "How's my pumpkin doing? You still one of those queer girls?"

She sighed rubbing the bridge of her nose, "Yes dad I am still queer."

"Good, glad to hear it. I gotta tell you I am so against that 'Don't ask, don't tell policy'. When I go into a fight I like to know who I have on my side and well, damn! Those queer girls sure know their stuff in a scrap."

Amanda banged the back of her head lightly into her headboard, "Dad was there a reason for your call at this ungodly hour or did you just want to debate the virtue of queers in the military?"

"Not queers, honey, queer girls. I'm not fond of those Nancy boys handling weapons."

She wanted to scream. How many parents were proud their only child was gay, revise that, how many retired Army Generals were bursting with joy that their only female child was a lesbian?  
"Dad is there a point to your call?"

"Well of course pumpkin. Bunny is going to be having a Masquerade party here at the house and she wanted me to call and invite you and your friends to come -- oh, and that girlfriend of yours too. Um, Soni was it?"

"It was Toni and dad we broke up six months ago."

"Oh well good, I wasn't really fond of her and her beady little eyes."

"Dad!"

"Well, it's true. She wasn't good enough for my pumpkin. So, do you think you can make it, to Bunny's party?"

"When is it?" She fumbled for a pen and paper to write down the date and time.

"I'll be there. I'm not sure if anyone else will be with me."

"Well fine and why don't you come on Friday and spend the weekend. We never get to see you anymore now that you're at the University."

"I'll see what I can do about spending the weekend."

"Good, Good. So pumpkin anything going on in your life you want to tell your old man about."

Amanda paused. Great all she wanted to do was go back to sleep and try to capture that dream again, but, no. Her father was feeling chatty.

"I ran into an old friend of mine from high school." She blurted out. She blinked in surprise. Where did that come from?

"Oh, really. Anyone I know?"

"Do you remember Cameron Hayes?"

"Oh ya, a real spitfire, that one. She would have made a damn fine soldier except for that whole attitude of hers."

"Well I ran into her the other day and we started hanging out..." She faded out, not sure where she was going with the conversation.

"Well, pumpkin, why don't you invite her up for the party?"

"I'm not sure if it's her sort of thing, but I'll ask."

"Good, and pumpkin be careful. I remember how torn up you were when she took off and disappeared."

"Thanks Daddy, I will."

"Okay, I'll talk to you later."

"Bye."

She hung up the phone and crawled back under the sheets throwing the covers back over her head. A minute later a hand reached out, turning the ringer off.

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Cameron's fist crashed into the heavy bag causing it jerk and dance on the chain that suspended it. Rotating her hips and planting her right foot her left shot up in a smooth motion snapping out in a round house kick that caused the bag to jump back. Air moved in and out of expanding lungs. The beating of her heart was rapidly moving oxygen-rich blood to overworked muscles, and the sweat covered her pale skin was her body's attempt to cool overheated flesh.

In her mind, there was no past and no future, just the here and now. Her pinpoint of narrowed reality was comprised of the unthinking calculation of balance, foot placement, and the location of her center of gravity. There was the contraction and relaxation of the muscles under the skin. Her eyes moved, tracking the bag as it moved in response from her last jab. She sneered, as her eyes followed the bag's movement. She imagined an opponent, an attacker, rushing her. As the bag moved forward, she glided to the side, lashing a foot out in a side-kick to what would have been the ribs if her opponent had been real and not a bag. Her leg, still poised in the air, hooked and then snapped back in another kick to the head, letting her momentum swing her around she followed it up with a back kick. The bag jerked sharply, causing the chain to jangle.

Breathing heavily, she grabbed her water, she took a couple of small sips of liquid into her dehydrated body. She grabbed a towel, running it over her face and arms. Her breathing was starting to return to normal as she leaned on the wall watching the bag slowly swing back and forth, bit by bit coming to a stop.

Idly, her mind shifted gears. Thinking about Amanda she wondered what the woman was doing. Looking at the clock, she decided that Amanda was probably in class. She had four hours till she had to be at the club to help open. Grumbling, she wondered what the hell was she going to do for four hours? It was Tuesday, and she hated Tuesdays. It was fifty-cent draft night at the club, and that meant every low-life alcoholic loser showed up at the club on Tuesdays. Of course, she thought with an evil grin, she normally got to toss a few people around and out on their ass on Tuesdays.

Unwrapping the tape from her hands, she started losing clothing on her way to the shower. Maybe she would go check out the campus on her way to work -- never mind the fact it was out of her way. It would be character building being around all that knowledge and academic bullshit. Plus, college girls were sexy in an intellectual sort of way. Oh yeah, and there was one brainy college girl in particular she wouldn't mind an all night study session with. She groaned as she realized where her thoughts were heading. They were headed down a seedy back alley in her brain toward the catholic schoolgirl fantasy. Stepping into the shower she vowed no more visits to the adult section of the video store.

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Amanda sat on a bench letting, the late morning sun hit her face and absorb into her skin. Fall was beginning to paint the trees in reds, yellows, and oranges, but it was still warm out during the day. She leaned back on her hands stretching her long legs out in front of her. She had three hours until her next class. Maybe she'd wander over to the Sub and grab a cup of coffee and do some homework. She felt the back of her neck itch, like some bug skittering over the surface of the skin. Shifting her weight she brought her hand up to rub her neck. Narrowing her eyes behind her sunglasses she looked around. Was someone watching her? Not seeing anyone, she shrugged it off as just being paranoid.

Brown eyes squinted in the sunlight from the shadow of a building as she watched the woman across the way stretch out in the sun. Eyes narrowed in anger as men and women walked by, and slowed down to check out the dark haired woman who was oblivious to the glances. The bitch was such a tease, but she'd fix that, oh yes indeed.

Amanda was starting to freak herself out. She didn't like the feeling she was having one bit. She grabbed her backpack, intending to walk to the student union building when a hand tapped her shoulder. Eyes going wide she whirled around, ready to scream. Her tense body loosened as she saw Lisa from her biology class.

"Amanda, I'm so glad I caught up with you."

"What's up Lisa?" Amanda became aware that Lisa still hadn't taken her hand from her shoulder.

Amanda glanced over at the hand, and Lisa's eyes followed blushing as she realized that she hadn't moved her hand. Quickly, Lisa moved her hand away.

"I was wondering if we could get together sometime before Monday to study for our Biology test." Lisa said hesitantly, her heart beating a rapid tattoo in her chest.

Amanda looked at Lisa. Was the girl hitting on her? No she had to be imagining things. "Sure Lisa, I'd like that. I could use all the help I can get."

"You? You're brilliant; you'll be doing me the favor," Lisa stuttered out, her heart fluttering at the smile being directed her way by Amanda.

"Hey I was just on my way over to the Sub for a cup a coffee. Want to join me?"

"You want me to, yes. I mean, yes, that sounds good," She said trying to act casual.

Dark eyes cold and hard with rage, followed to two women as they walked off.

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This had to be one of the stupidest ideas that Cam had ever had. She knew absolutely nothing about Amanda's school schedule or even how the college was set up. Yet, here she was hopelessly lost and trying to figure out the large campus map before her. 'You are here', was proclaimed proudly highlighted by a large helpful red arrow. Yeah, but where the hell was here? Plus, if she did find Amanda, what would she say? 'Funny meeting you here, just out for a walk on my way to work. Can I buy you a cup of coffee'. Well, okay maybe that wasn't half-bad. She sighed, running her hands through her short hair, making it stand up in odd angles.

Okay, Amanda was studying some sort of physical therapy stuff, so her classes would be where? The gym? Maybe the science building? She studied the map a finger tracing the lines her eyes darting back to legend trying to decipher the information in front of her. The science building was about two buildings back and to the right. Well she'd go give it a shot. If worse came to worse, she could head over to the Sub. The legend said there was a sandwich shop there.

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Amanda's skin was still crawling and she was fighting the urge to turn around and see if she was being followed. Next to her Lisa chatted on and on about stuff. Amanda tried really hard to follow what the other girl was saying but her instincts for self-survival kept overriding everything else. As they rounded the corner of a building, she craned her head to look behind

her, and she thought she caught the glimpse of someone darting from the shadows of a building entrance. Not paying attention to what was in front of her she ran into someone coming around the same corner. Falling, she heard someone grumble, "Hey watch where the hell you're walking."

Blinking up from the ground, she looked into the scowling face of Cameron Hayes. The scowl melted off the face and into a sheepish sorry look,

"Oh, shit. Amanda I'm sorry. I, I, wasn't paying attention. Jeez, here."

Cameron stooped over, holding out her hand and grasping the taller woman's hand. She pulled harder than necessary, and accidentally pulled Amanda up and into her body.

Amanda felt herself rapidly pulled off the ground, and realizing she was going to crash into Cam, she put a hand up to minimize impact. As they stood a half-inch apart, time seemed to slow down. Nothing seemed more important than this single moment. She had a brief flashback to high school, and as Cam's breath washed over her face, her heart began to pound in her chest and Cam's breath seemed to scorch her skin. Her right hand rested in the valley between Cam's breasts connecting them and holding them apart at the same time. Fingers twitched moving slowly back and forth on the soft cotton shirt. She could feel the heat from Cam's body flowing through the thin fabric burning the tips of her fingers as they moved. Then she felt the pounding tempo of Cam's heartbeat; her fingers stopped moving and she paused to savor the feeling. Cam's heartbeat was fast, racing very much like her own, and the knowledge that she was having an effect on Cam collided in her brain. She was almost giddy as the insight struck her; hope blossomed in her chest.

Cam felt like kicking herself. First she knocks Amanda down, and then she nearly pulls the poor girl's arm out of the socket. Then she felt like the wind had been knocked out of her when she realized how close they were standing. Her eyes widened when she felt where Amanda's hand was resting. She felt the fingers slowly move rubbing the soft cotton against her skin. Her pulse started racing, and she snuck her tongue out to moisten her suddenly very dry lips. The air around them seemed heavy and full with sexual tension. Muscles in her neck rebelled and strained upwards to kiss waiting lips.

A polite cough jerked everything askew, and time started back up. Cam's head jerked back and looking around, she caught the glare from a woman standing slightly behind Amanda. They pulled apart slowly, looking everywhere but at each other. Lisa glared at the two magnetized bodies, but even in her anger laced brain she knew she was no competition for the chemistry these two had. It wasn't fair; the minute she had worked up the courage to talk to the striking girl, her plans were thrown back in her face.

Amanda came back to reality, "Uh, Lisa this is an old friend of mine Cameron. Cameron, this is Lisa; she's in my Biology class." The two girls took each other in, and through narrowed eyes, each began to check her rival over. Amanda, oblivious to the posturing going on, picked her backpack up and slung it over her shoulders.



"Hey Cam, Lisa and I were just on our way over to the Sub for a cup of coffee. Want to join us?"

Taking her eyes off her rival, Cam grinned, "Sounds lovely."

Walking over to the Sub, Lisa was beginning to feel more and more like a third wheel, "Um, Amanda?"

"Yes."

"Hey, look, I forgot I was supposed to meet a friend of mine, I'll call you later and we can set up a study time."

"Oh, okay. I'll talk to you later."

Lisa sighed dejectedly as she crossed through the parking lot toward the parking garage. All that time spent prepping herself in the mirror to talk to Amanda -- only to have it be snatched away. 'Figures,' she pouted. Slowly, she dragged herself up the flight of stairs to where her car was parked. Walking toward the beat-up Toyota, she fished in her pocket for her car keys. Standing by the driver's side door, she caught the warped reflection of a person in the window. Before she could turn around, she found herself rammed into the car with a bone jarring intensity. Keys tumbled from nerveless hands and jangled hollowly on the cement. As she was pulled away from the metal, she sucked air in to her lungs only to have rush out as she slammed into the side of her car again. She whimpered dully as she felt something pop. Then, her right side was engulfed in red-hot pain.

"You stupid slut. Stay away from my girl, you pathetic little whore."

"What, who?" She babbled out.

"You know who, you fucking whore."

The voice was low and dark filling up her ear. She whimpered trying to break away. Her hair was grabbed in an iron grip and her face was smashed into the window of her car over and over again. The glass cracked like a spider's web, and blood crawled down the window to the car door. It dripped slowly on to the black cement. Hands released her as she bonelessly slid down, following the trail of her blood to the cement. She could taste her own blood running down her throat choking her. Everywhere, there was pain poking her with its fiery touch. Thankfully, the blackness was coming for her, washing over her mind in soft waves. The last thing she heard was, "Stay away from Amanda Walker, you spineless bitch."

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"Hey, I'm sorry if I intruded on anything here." Cam spoke up as they walked across the campus.

"What? No, we were just going to hang out and talk about class."

"You sure, I mean well if you two wanted you know, just to hang out alone together." She trailed off awkwardly. She'd been happy at first when the other girl had begged off but then that had changed to guilt, and she had started to doubt her motives. What if Amanda wanted to spend time with the girl? She shouldn't be getting in the way of Amanda's life.

"No you're fine, trust me."

Cam just shrugged; suddenly she was feeling very self-conscious. She felt like a fraud. She wasn't any academic egghead, so what the hell did she think she was doing? She didn't belong here. She was following Amanda like some weird stalker. Maybe Amanda was just being nice, humoring her. Maybe Amanda didn't want to be seen with her some uneducated idiot who never even graduated from high school.

Cam's face began to darken, and formed into a scowl.

"Um, look I'm sure you have more important things than waste time with me. I'll just catch up with you another time."

Confused by the sudden change in direction, "Hey, whoa, time out."

Amanda looked over at Cam noticing the tense body posture, she had an image in her mind of Cam bolting. She wasn't sure what had brought on the mood swing but there was no way in hell Cameron Hayes was running out of her life again.

Amanda pulled them off the sidewalk and on to a wooden bench. Cam seemed agitated her eyes darting around. Finally, unexpectedly, she reached up and removed Amanda's sunglasses. This act seemed to put her more at ease, and Amanda resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

Cam grinned sheepishly, "I, uh, feel better when I can see someone's eyes when I talk to them."

Amanda decided to ignore this statement but filed it away to examine later. She spoke, hoping to put Cam at ease once more, "I'm really glad I ran into you today Cam. I thought I might have to wait whole week till we could hangout together again. So this works out really nice because on Tuesdays and Thursdays I have about a three-hour break after my class gets out at 10:40 and normally I just hang out and do homework. So this is a nice surprise for me, and I don't have to wait until next Saturday before hanging out with my favorite blonde."

Smiling in relief, Cam asked, "Oh, and who's your favorite blonde?"

"You, you dork." Amanda replied, lightly slapping Cam's arm

"You sit around for three hours just doing homework. My god girl did you learn nothing from

me in high school?" Cam said in mock horror.

"Maybe you need to give me a personal one on one refresher course." Amanda said. Then her face turned pink as she realized how sexual that statement had sounded.

Cam looked shocked for a second, then threw her head back and laughed. "I think that can be arranged but first woman you need to feed me, I'm starved. Then, your lessons in how to slack off Cameron style may commence."

They moved off the bench toward the Sub at an easy unhurried pace. "So Cam, what are you doing on campus? Are you a student?"

Cam laughed again, "Me, a student? Oh that's a good one."

"Then, why are you here?"

"I, well, I..." Cam looked sheepish, "Iwaskindoflookingforyou." She spouted out in a hurried breath.

"What? And could you repeat that in English please?" Amanda said with a laugh. Her eyes grew large as her brain translated the words. "You were looking for me?"

"Well you know, I've been here for four years and I've never been to the campus and I thought, what the hell? I have some free time today before work, and then there was the off chance I might run into you."

Amanda barely heard what the other girl was saying; she had a goofy grin on her face. Cam had come to the University looking for her, even though she had no idea where on campus she might be. That was so sweet in an absurd sort of way. Then she realized that since she'd run into Cam, she hadn't felt like someone was watching her. She thought briefly that maybe it had been Cam, but the girl had come from the wrong direction. She shrugged it off.

They sat in the grass outside the Sub. Amanda slowly sipped her coffee while Cam inhaled a large turkey sandwich.

"How can you eat that?"

Cam paused, looking up, her cheeks bulging with food. Amanda had to laugh, "You look like a chipmunk."

Cam scowled and stuck out her tongue.

"Ewww, could you at least have swallowed first?"

"Nope, no fun in that."

"Just finish that disgusting sandwich."

"What is your beef with my sandwich? Are you one of them tree huggin veggies?"

"Yep, a card carrying member."

Cam choked on a bit of turkey, "Well good for you." She coughed out.

"Do you have any idea what they do to those poor animals before..."

Cameron cut Amanda off, "Hush, you. I have no desire to know such things. You just keep those strange veggie ways of yours to yourself or there will be no lessons on how to slack off. Got me missy?"

Amanda snickered but nodded her head, while Cameron made a great show of eating her sandwich.

Sucking a bit of mustard from her thumb she looked over at a smiling Amanda. "What?" She questioned.

"Nothing."

"Nothing my ass." Snorting, she got up and threw her trash away. Coming back, she helped Amanda up. "It's beautiful out. I can't believe you were just going to sit inside and study for three hours. What, are you some sort of a masochist?"

"A what?"

"Nothing."

"Come on, tell me."

"You know what we need on a day like this is a Frisbee."

"What? Are we have a conversation here or are you just talking to yourself?"

Her mind was already distracted by other matters. She watched a group of girls playing football in the quad.

Amanda followed Cam's gaze and eyebrow quirk.

Amanda's eyebrow remained quirked as she asked, "and how pray tell will we get a Frisbee?"

"But lacking a Frisbee we can join them." Cam said pointing at the sweating girls.

The other eyebrow rose to join its twin.

"I'm not sure. I mean, I'm wearing nice clothes." Amanda hedged.

"Are you wearing a T under that shirt?"

"Well yes, but.."

"Come on ya wuss! Weren't you the big old basketball star in high school."

"Fine. What are they doing?"

"Feeling each other up.'

"What?"

"They're playing some sort of football. Basically, it gives a bunch of lesbians an opportunity to grope each other in public."

"Great. How do you know they're lesbians? Just because they are playing football doesn't mean they are lesbians. That is such a stereotype.'

Cam raised an eyebrow of her own. "See the large dykey-looking girl with the short spiky blonde hair?" She said pointing.

"Yes. I mean that is such another stereotype.'

"Hush, she dated one of the strippers at the club, and well, I'm familiar with one or two others out there."

"I probably don't want to ask how well you're familiar do I?"

Cam turned red, rubbing the back of her neck in a nervous gesture. 'Great Hayes just throw it in her face what a big slut you are' she thought.

Amanda wanted to laugh; Cam was so cute when she was all embarrassed.

They walked over to where the eight girls were playing; and stood off to the side until the play came to a stop.

"Hey, Chris." Cam shouted out.

A large meaty girl looked their way. Seeing Cam, a large toothy grin broke out on her face.

"Well, if it isn't my favorite bouncer." The girl trotted over, looking Amanda over and dismissing her. She gave Cam a hearty handshake Amanda thought the smaller woman might get lifted into

the air.

"What's up?"

"Can my friend and I join up?"

"I dunno. It's kind of members only."

"Oh she's a member -- don't worry."

"Really." The girl said surprised, "My gaydar must be broke. She ain't even pinging on it."

"Trust me. She's a card carrying member."

Amanda felt like most the conversation was going over her head.

"I get it, she's your flavor of the week."

Amanda got that. Her eyes flashed dangerously and she stepped into Chris's personal space staring the other woman down.

Chris backed away nervously, making a mental note not to piss off the tall dark haired woman. "Uh, ya. You two can join us. No problem."

"Um, my team will take Cam, " she said not wanting the other woman near her "and you guys get the tall one."

Amanda unbuttoned her oxford exposing the white T-shirt underneath; she folded up the oxford and placed it on top of her backpack. Moving out to the field, she passed Chris whispering, "The name's Amanda and just for your information, Cameron's my flavor of the week." She almost started laughing as the other girl's jaw tumbled open. She heard a slight snicker and turned to catch Cam trying to hide her smile. Huddling up with her team she asked, "So what's the point of this game?"

Four pairs of eyes turned and stared at her.

Cam sucked in a deep breath as she watched Amanda throw her head back, her black hair whipping around over her shoulder. The woman was a goddess. After a rough start, Amanda had gotten into the game. Using her height to its full advantage, the girl was a superb passer. Cam watched as those blue eyes scanned, looking for an opening, a tanned arm tensed moving backwards then forwards to throw the ball.

"Hey Cam, get your mind out of the gutter and into the game. I should have taken the femme girl, I swear."

"Shut up Chris." She retorted back.

She watched as the ball was snapped into the air, headed for a girl who had broken open. Cam darted back. Running along the side, she leapt up snagging the ball out of the air inches from the other girl's hands.

She heard a muttered, "What the fuck?" As she sprinted away laughing and dodging hands and feet.

Amanda was stunned, Cameron had come out of nowhere to steal the ball. The girl was amazing. She was like a contortionist twisting and bending her body to avoid getting caught. As a larger girl flew through the air to tackle Cameron. Amanda's breath caught, but Cam merely laughed and leaped over, tucking her feet up as the girl fell under her. Shaking her head, she realized Cam was coming her direction, and she smiled evilly.

"Bring it on Cam. You aren't getting by me, short stuff."

"You and what army?" Cam taunted back. "And I am not short, I have a perfectly normal height," Cam said faking one way, then spinning around to sprint in the opposite direction. Amanda slid, nearly losing her balance. Then, regaining it, she took off after the blonde.

As Cam could feel Amanda coming up behind her, she spared a brief backwards glance. Damn, girl must be all leg. Amanda was rapidly eating away her lead. She tried zigging, but Amanda was not about to lose her prey, and Cam felt the girl's hands on her hips pressing down, exerting pressure to stop her. She tried slapping the hands away, but they stayed firm.

There was a warm breath in her ear, and Amanda's voice asked, "You wanna do this the easy way or the hard way?"

"Bite me, Amanda! It isn't over till I'm face down on the ground."

"That can be arranged." With a burst of energy Amanda caught up more space and wrapped her arms around Cameron's waist. She hugged the shorter woman into her body and threw them both to the ground; they tumbled over the grass smearing green streaks on Amanda's white shirt. Somewhere in the distance the other girls hooted.

When she came to a stop, Cameron was face down in the grass, the football tucked under her right arm. Her back was covered in a warm weight, and she could feel Amanda's arms still encircling her waist. Panting, she looked up spitting grass out of her mouth, a trickle of panic worming its way out of her gut. The weight on her back was no longer pleasurable.

"Get off." she snapped.

Amanda felt the muscles under her stiffen and she jumped up, thinking she'd hurt Cam. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Came the short reply.

Amanda watched as Cam got up, brushing herself off, her eyes going everywhere but in Amanda's direction. Cam got herself calmed down and turned to see Amanda looking at her worried.

"I'm fine, sorry I snapped at you. I, umm, the football was digging into my side, it wasn't you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yep." She lied. trying to be reassuring, she gave a little grin.

"Awe, Cam why don't you kiss her and make her feel better? Come on you wuss, pick up the ball and lets play." Chris said running up to the two.

Cam picked up the ball and jogged over to Chris. She grinned and pinched Amanda's ass on her way past the girl. Amanda jumped, then laughed at the cocky grin on Cam's face.

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Amanda pushed the front door open and set her backpack down with a heavy thump. Closing and locking the door, she smelled the spicy sent of food wafting from the kitchen.

"Smells good." She called out.

"I'm glad you think so." Sammy replied coming out from the kitchen. "Whoa. What happened to you?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You look like you've been trampled."

"Thanks Sammy."

"Well shit A-girl, you're normally so well put together. I think you have a few hairs out of place."

Amanda shrugged, "Cam talked me into an impromptu football game during my three-hour break."

"Back up a minute. Cam and football, how did this come about? And start from the beginning."

Amanda retold her day to Sammy, following the red head into the kitchen. She grabbed a carrot



out of the fridge and crunched on it as Sammy stirred a red sauce on the stove.

"That's so sweet! She went to the University just to look for you. It must be fate. I mean, what are the odds of her actually finding you? The campus is huge. So you guys kiss yet?" Sammy asked slyly,

"Sammy!" Amanda said shocked almost choking on the bit of carrot she was chewing.

"It's not like that. We're just friends."

"I don't know Amanda. From what I heard, you guys have some serious 'lets go have wild nasty sex in the backseat of the car' vibes."

"Sammy if I wasn't so sore I'd smack you upside the head."

Sammy rolled her eyes, "Go shower or something. Heidi and Sarah will be over in a few for dinner."

"Don't those two have any food at their house?"

"I'm sure they do, but the can't resist my traditional Italian spaghetti."

"Sammy you're Irish."

"Fine. My traditional Irish spaghetti."

Amanda strolled out of the kitchen munching on her carrot, thinking maybe there was more going on between her and Cam than she thought. She paused as Sammy called after her.

"I'm going down to the Creature later for the drag show. You want to join me?"

She thought about it, but she really did need to study. Since she had spent her break goofing off with Cam, she hadn't gotten her normal study time in.

"Nah, I'm going to pass, but thanks though."

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Unknowingly, Cam was whistling a jaunty tune in the back as she pulled beer to stock the front bar. Worried employees of the Shady Lady stared at the open door in an abstract fear. Cam was supposed to be snarly, broody, and dark humored -- not this whistling, smiling and light humored pod person that had come to work in her place. At the bar Jason crossed himself certain that the

Second Coming was upon them. Dee didn't give a rip. Well she did, but she wasn't going to make a fuss about it. That was Georgia's department. Mario sipped his water, trying not to giggle. Miss Tough Stuff and gone and stepped in love.

Exiting the back, she noticed eyes staring at her. The tune she was whistling died on her lips. That's when she realized she'd been whistling. What was even more shocking was the fact that she didn't whistle, and what was even worse was that it had been a Disney song. Her face darkened, and eyebrows drew together in a fierce scowl, "What?" She bellowed out.

The room seemed to breathe a collective sigh of relief at this; all was good in the universe again.

Mario giggled as he watched Cam restock the beer in the fridge in the bar; she was whistling Zip A De Do Da again. "So, tough stuff. Who's the lucky lady?"

"What are you talking about Mario?" Cameron replied, not even looking up.

"The girl who has you so worked up you're whistling a Disney song?"

"I am not whistling." She said with a growl.

"Of course you're not, miss butch thing."

Cameron returned to the task at hand but was startled when a voice began singing out. "My o my what a wonderful day. Plenty of sunshine." Cameron's head snapped up. "Don't you need to go get ready?"

"And miss out on teasing you? I think not."

"Lucky me." She responded and went back to stocking the fridge.

Mario sat studying the young woman, "You don't even realize you're in love do you?" He asked, slowly counting to ten waiting for the explosion.

Cameron tensed at Mario's question, and leaned her head forward to rest on the cool glass. Love, the word rolled around her brain. Love was fists and slaps. Love was drunken rages and empty promises. Love was something she had no stomach for.

"Go away Mario. Before I start whistling 'it's a small world'." She said empty.

"Tough stuff there's nothing wrong with being in love. You won't lose butch points."

"Now, Mario! Get the hell away from me."

Mario started back. There was the eruption he had been expecting.

She got up, reached over the counter, grabbed his shirt and pulled him in close to her face.

"Listen up Mario. I don't give a rip about my butch points, and I have no use for love and all its bullshit and lies."

He gulped. Then she was pushing him away.

He stumbled away, slightly shaken. She hadn't been there. He'd looked into her eyes, and she hadn't been there. He didn't know where her mind had wandered, but he had no desire to follow her to whatever dark memory held her trapped. He shuddered again. Especially if she was going to start whistling "It's a Small World." That was just... he shivered, not finishing the thought.

They were getting ready to open the doors and let in the desperate dried out sponges that masked themselves as people into the bar. Cam grinned. Time to kick some ass. She was mentally putting herself into bouncer mode when Dee yelled out, breaking her thoughts away.

"Cam, get your skinny butt over here."

"What?" She hurried over to where Dee was coming out of her back office.

"I need you to take your bad little bouncer self over to the Night Creature."

"What? Why?"

"A couple of David's guys are out sick and they have a drag show tonight. He needs all the help he can get. I figure you're as good as three or four bouncers, so I'll just send you and call it good."

Cam grinned. Working a drag show was definitely more fun than tossing drunks out on their asses. "I'm all over it," She said grinning.

- - - - -

Sammy stood near the dance floor staring out at the feather-clad figure gyrating to the music being pumped through the speakers. She had been slightly miffed that Amanda, Sarah, and Heidi had all begged off coming with her. Now that she was here at the club, she didn't really mind. She had run into some bar friends and she had sat with them whispering and talking about the other people in the bar swirling around them until the show had started. Then, she had politely slipped away to stand next to the dance floor.

The strange creatures that bounced, flounced, and twirled their way across the floor fascinated Sammy. A part of her realized it was wrong to view them as some alien being under glass, but they were so very much the embodiment of the other. While a select few could be viewed as female, most were an odd combination of the masculine and feminine wrestled into a sequined

gown. Strong jaws, towering heights, broad shoulders, soft curves, bulging cleavage, pouting lips and large hair. It was the reverse of what she appreciated in women. She liked butch women who had an edge of masculine strength screaming out of their feminine softness. Queens of the club had feminine softness oozing from their masculine hardness. She was attracted to the vessels that balanced within them the essence of both sexes.

She was sure that in another city, in another club, there were probably drag queens who could wrap themselves more securely in the shroud of painted on femininity and fool even the most red-blooded of American males. She liked the ones she saw here once a week at the club. The illusion was there, but she couldn't get lost in it, and in truth she, loved how they embodied the male and the female. It was like a guilty secret she was too scared to share with anybody else. That and the fact she got turned on by the sex scenes in *Queer as Folk*. Really! What self-respecting lesbian would admit two men getting it on was hot?

She stood there watching the feathered Amazon prance from the floor sipping her rum and coke. As the next act started up, she noticed her bouncer; she almost ducked her head in anticipation of a smack upside the head. Shaking her head at her actions, she revised her thoughts. She noticed Cameron standing next to the bar chatting with some pierced punk-rock-looking girl. Cam was hot, she admitted. The bouncer was wearing black leather pants and a tight black shirt with the words "Night Creature" in shiny silver letters on the front. Sam felt herself getting angry. Amanda had, had a wonderful day filled with heavy moments of near bursting sexual tension with Cameron, and said girl was here picking up somebody else.

Sammy marched up to the bouncer, an angry glint in her eye; she stopped when she was half a foot away from where Cam leaned against the bar. When she had Cameron's attention, she hissed out, "Have you no shame? You spend most of the day working my roommate into knots of sexual tension that you do nothing to help relieve. Then later that same day, you're hitting on some other poor girl. You make me sick."

Cameron stood there stunned as some small slip of a woman verbally beat her into the ground. The redheaded woman seemed vaguely familiar, but she couldn't quite place her.

"Excuse me. Do I know you?" She said starting to bristle.

"The name is Sammy O'Brien; I'm Amanda's roomy, the one who will be sending you to the doghouse."

Cameron's brain began to click, putting two and two together. "You're Sammy?"

"Yep, all feisty 5'4" of me." She said with a glare.

"It's nice to meet you."

"Don't try playing nice to me. I'm on to you, and your cheating ways."

At that moment, a sandy-haired young man broke through the crowd. Coming up to them, he

swept up the punk rock girl in his arms, giving her a breath-stealing kiss.

With a smirk Cam said, "Sammy this is Monica. I work with her at the club, and this is her boyfriend Brad."

Sammy could feel the blush work its way up her neck, "Oh, you mean... its nice to meet you both. Ah, so, you're a stripper huh?"

Monica laughed, "You're roommate is very lucky to have such a loyal friend looking out for her. Trust me. You need to keep an eye on this one." She said pointing at Cam.

"Hey." Cam said indignantly.

"Brad and I will let you get back to work. See you later, and Sammy, it was refreshing to meet you."

Cam watched her friends depart and turned to stare at Sammy. She was amused and disturbed. This little spitfire had come at her like a mama bear protecting her young, yet it was disturbing to think how easily she could have been guilty of what Sammy accused her of. Shaking her head, she snorted thinking, 'Amanda and I are just friends', but there, out in the open again was the idea that they were on a level above that of friends.

Sammy wished there was a rock handy that she could crawl under. Man she had really stuck her foot in her mouth this time, and she'd probably need a crowbar to get it out. She hoped she hadn't ruined anything for Amanda, but looking at the silent woman in front of her she found it impossible to read her expression.

"Look, I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions, about you. I'm sure you're a very good, um, friend. I so need air." With that, she turned around and made a beeline for the door.

Cam stood stunned again as the slightly smaller woman took off. Twice in ten-minutes that was a first. Briefly she thought about taking off after Sammy but shrugged the idea off and returned her attention to the activities going on inside the club.

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Sammy leaned up against the side of the building, letting the coolness sooth her as it seeped through the back of her shirt. She rubbed her arms. It was getting colder at night. She wished she would have thought to grab her jacket on the way out. It was silent outside the club. Everyone was inside watching the show; she could see the shadowy shape of the bouncer just inside the door, his head nodding in time with the music. She didn't think she had messed anything up between Amanda and Cameron. The blonde bouncer hadn't looked upset with her, but then

again, girl was pretty hard to read. She rubbed her arms to warm them up and moved off the wall to go back into the club.

An odd noise, soft and delicate, floated on the breeze into Sammy's ear. It wasn't a normal downtown near midnight noise that should have been floating around vibrating on the air currents. It was the sound of lungs trying not to exhale oxygen, and it was the noise of muscles in pain; it was a sigh, a gasp, and a whimper all joined as one.

Sammy stood still. Had she imagined it? Was it any of her business? Alone in the night, was it right to go looking in even darker places? Turning she went down the side of the building till it ended and looked down the dark alley behind the club. At first there was nothing. Then, next to the larger looming shadow of the dumpster, she spotted movement.

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Cam ran a hand through her hair yet again re-arranging the already messy spikes she had caused not five minutes earlier. She couldn't stop thinking about her run-in with Amanda's roommate. She should go after the girl make sure that they were cool. She didn't want to cause any problems for Amanda. Briefly she wondered when she started giving a shit, but shrugged it off. She began walking toward the door she had seen Sammy exit a few minutes before. If the girl was gone, oh well, but she should look.

She nodded at TJ as she walked out the front. Looking around, she thought it was quiet. Then she heard shouting coming from the alley, 'Fuck' she thought and pounded on the door to get TJ's attention. Not waiting to see if he followed, she sprinted off into the alley.

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Sammy leaped onto the smaller of the two men attacking the woman. She shouted at him, "You fucker! What gives you the right to beat on people?" All the time she pounded her fists into his head.

"What the hell? Get it off, get it off." The man bellowed out.

She was spun around and was then tossed off into another figure, and they both crashed into the ground. In a daze, Sammy thought that as alleys go this one was fairly clean. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a bloodied face. In front of her two men stood cracking knuckles and grinning wickedly.

"Hey look! We got ourselves a new playmate. Think she's a he or just some dyke in need of a fuck?"

The other just shook his head, stupidly hanging on his buddies every word, "Don't know. Let's find out."

Sammy stood up on wobbly knees but placed herself in front of the woman they had been using as a punching bag till she had shown up and thrown herself into the fray. "You piss poor excuse for the male gender. Why don't you runaway before I really get pissed?"

"How cute. We got ourselves a real raging bull dyke here." The taller one said laughing. "Shut up bitch, and maybe I won't hurt you to bad."

"Well even if you do shut up, I'm still going to leave you broken and bleeding on the ground." Came an angry voice from behind them.

The two men turned, "Oh and what are you going to do, little girl? Sprinkle fairy dust on me?"

Sammy felt instantly better knowing Cam was there, "Nope. She's going to kick your ass."

"Is that right?" Sneered the shorter man.

"Sammy, if I asked you to be quiet, would you?"

"Hey, are you going to save us or what?"

"Well I don't know. You kind of ruined my dramatic entrance."

"Oh, jeez the badass bouncer is pouting. Would you commence with the ass kicking already."

"Well fine, but you don't have to treat me like some pet here to do tricks on command."

The two men stood confused. The taller one spoke up finally, "Would you two bitches shut the fuck up?"

Cameron turned on him, glaring, and before he knew what happened he was bleeding on the ground, his nose a bloody fountain, while Cam's leg retracted from the kick. The shorter one stood, stunned, then charged Cam, side-stepping as she brought her leg up in a hook kick smashing it into his back and increased his forward momentum into the wall. Sammy watched as the taller one got up to grab Cameron from behind. She rushed him, knocking them both down. He pushed her off, landing a hit to her face.

"You're going to get it now, you little bitch."

Sammy raised her arms to protect her head; suddenly a well-manicured hand lashed, out landing

a solid right hook to the man's jaw. His eyes rolled up and he crashed to the ground.

Sammy stared up into the hazel eyes of her savior, grasping the hand as the woman offered it to her.

"Thanks." She offered.

"No problem. Thank you for coming to my rescue. Not many people would."

Sammy felt herself flush, "Well I'm just glad Cam came when she did."

"Yes that's some friend you have there. Oh, my name is Nikki."

Sammy took the hand again shaking it, "I'm Sammy."

Sammy took in the woman. She had a split lip and a black eye, but even with the rapidly swelling eye the woman was beautiful, she had hazel eyes, red lips and was slightly taller than Sammy with broad shoulders and a tapering waist. Warning bells were going off in Sammy's head.

"Oh, oh, you're a drag queen."

Hazel eyes looked hurt, "Is that a problem." The husky voice turned cold.

"No, no, I well... " Sammy really wanted to make the hurt look go away in those eyes, "No Nikki, it's not a problem." The hazel eyes defrosted slightly.

"You kids okay here?" Asked Cam.

"Yeah, I think so?" Sammy turned a questioning glance to Nikki, who nodded in agreement.

"Good, the cops are here they want to take statements and then I'll take you guys to the emergency room to be looked at."

"I'm fine."

"Sammy um, it could be the adrenalin, but in case you haven't noticed you have a black eye, a cut on your forehead and have scratched the hell out of your hands."

"What?" Sammy stared at her hands in wonder. She had no clue she'd been hurt at all. That's when she fainted.

'Shit!' Cam thought as she caught Sammy before she could impact with the ground a third time.

"Quite some hands you have there." Nikki said with a smirk.



"Hush you." Cam said with a brief glance in the other woman's direction.

All the time she was thinking that if anything happened to Sammy, Amanda would never forgive her. Musing out loud. She asked, "Who knew the little spitfire couldn't stand the sight of her own blood?"

[Continued In Part 4.](#)

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ Past Is Present ~

by Zee

Hey all this is the part where I do the disclaimer so hold on tight till I get to the good stuff.

- 1). This is a piece of original/uber fiction.
- 2). This here be a love story (nothing too graphic) featuring two women. If that bothers you don't go wasting your time or mine by reading any farther. However, if you continue to read and it upsets you I don't want to hear about it.
- 3). Violence. Um, yep. There will be some and some references to child abuse. I like to think it all works as part of the story and none of it is over the top.
- 4). Those who are not 18 should not read this. Why? Dunno, probably protecting them from knowing about stuff there already know about.
- 5). To J, Bri, and Ar thank you all without you the story would never have gotten out of my head. You folks are the best.
- 6). Let's see anything else ... in order to ride the ride you must be this tall, have no heart problems and pregnant women should consult a doctor. Please keep your hands and feet inside the ride at all times and enjoy.

Okay this is my first writing endeavor so please, please with a cherry on top, give me feedback. At [zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:zeeamy@gmail.com) Thanks.

Without further ado on with the show -

**Past Is Present  
By Zee  
copyright 2002**

**Part 4**

Cameron stared at the phone as if it had just grown legs. She had been trying to get a hold of Amanda, but when she had called the number, the phone had been picked up and then slammed into something, hard. The booming echo was still throbbing through her head. Wincing, she attempted to dial the number again.

Sammy swam through the fog in her brain, slowly rising into awareness. The smell broke through first. Her nose was assaulted with the chemically over cleaned and sanitized smell of a hospital, and then there was the hum of lighting and other electrical equipment. She slowly fluttered her eyes open to the stark whiteness of the ceiling. She looked to her left then to her right, and finding nothing of interest, she started to get up.

"Hold on there." A voice spoke, startling her.

"Who?"

A head and body came into her view. Hazel eyes stared down at her with concern. "Oh, it's you. Where am I?"

Nikki placed a hand on her shoulder and helped her sit up. "We're at the hospital; we brought you here when you fainted."

"Oh." She said trying to remove the cobwebs from her head. "Who's we?"

"The bouncer, ah, Cameron I think."

"Really?"

"Yes really. That's some friend you have there coming to our rescue and taking on those two meatheads and all."

"She's not my friend; yet, we barely know each other. Other than me lusting after her body." Sammy said with a chuckle.

"Oh, you're a lesbian?" Nikki said with a frown.

"Yep, know the secret handshake and everything." Sammy looked over giggling at Nikki's puzzled expression.

"Lesbian's have a secret handshake."

"Yes don't gay men?" Sammy said trying hard to keep a straight face.

"I don't know."

Giggling, Sammy slapped Nikki's shoulder; "I'm just pulling your leg."

Relief washed over Nikki's face and he started giggling with her.

"Hey slugger. Sounds like you're doing better." Cam said entering the room.

Sammy's eyes went wide as she noticed the bandages on her hands as she was wiping away the tears from her eyes caused by her giggling.

"You scraped them up pretty good, but nothing serious." Cam said getting up and joining the other two on the hospital bed.

"I called Amanda and she's on her way down to pick you up. She said something like 'the hospital that's a new one'. Sounds like you're a troublemaker."

"How'd you get Amanda up? That girl is next to impossible, especially at 2:30 in the morning."

"Well, my ears may never be the same and I may have a terrible ringing noise in my head but I got her up after about 6 calls."

"You brave, brave soul." Sammy said.

"So, Nikki. You okay?" Cam said, looking at the drag queen.

"Yes, nothing too serious. A black eye and some bruised ribs it could have been a lot worse if this little spitfire hadn't jumped in."

Sammy blushed, "Hey, it's nothing."

Cameron snorted, "Well it was silly and dangerous and you could have been seriously hurt. However, you rushed in to help where others would have pretended not to notice anything." Pausing, Cam looked at the girl who was looking at the ground. "You have a good heart there slugger." She said squeezing Sammy's shoulder.

Sammy grabbed the other woman in a fierce hug. Cam went stiff at the unexpected gesture, then relaxed, returning the hug.

"Cam if I didn't say it before, thanks for being there."

"Your welcome slugger, but it is part of my job."

Amanda stood in the doorway disheveled and wearing jeans and a t-shirt that was on backwards. A pang of jealousy ripped through her at the intimate position she found Sammy and Cam in.

"I can't leave you alone for a minute." Amanda said more harshly than she intended.

Sammy jumped and moved away from Cam and three sets of eyes stared at Amanda.

Amanda ignored them, "The nurse said you could go any time I'll just wait out here till you're ready." She moved out the door letting it close.

Cameron quickly got up and followed Amanda's exit out the door.

"What's with her?" Nikki asked.

Sammy flinched, "She thinks I was making a move on Cam."

"We're you? " Nikki said with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"What? No, I mean, maybe earlier before I knew that her and Amanda had a history, but not now." She rambled out.

"It's okay. Sammy I was teasing." Nikki said rubbing the girl's arm in a comforting gesture. Inside Nik felt better knowing that the red head was not dating the bouncer. In fact, it looked like the bouncer was all in knots over the dark haired woman. What a little soap opera he had stumbled into.

Sighing, Sammy looked over at Nikki who had a relieved look on his female face. "You need a ride or anything?"

"No, but thanks. My sister should be here any minute."

"Uh, and Sammy, thanks for having such a good heart." He said kissing her softly on the cheek.

Cam came out of the room looking for Amanda. She spotted the woman down the hall pounding on a coffee machine.

"Fucking piece of shit, refuse to give me my caffeine will you. I'll make you rue the day you were made, you little bastard."

Cam grabbed the hand before it could hit the machine again. "Whoa, there champ." Amanda turned her head and glared at Cam. She tried to free her hand but Cam held it fast. "Let me go."

Cam gave a lop-sided grin, "Make me."

Amanda's eyes narrowed even further and Cameron felt a nibble of fear but she shook it off.

"You, Miss Hayes are treading on dangerous ground. First, you wake me up in the wee hours of the morning, then you get me all worried cause my roomy's in the hospital, and I drive my ass down here and find Sammy wrapped around you, and finally the stupid vending machine won't give me any caffeine." All the time Amanda had been speaking she had been backing Cam into the vending machine and now the woman was trapped between the device and Amanda.

"Poor you. My heart bleeds. Your roomy was very brave in a stupid way tonight. She could have been hurt a lot worse, and you're moaning over the fact the vending machine won't give you a cup of coffee."

They stood there glaring at each other. Both woman were extremely turned on and fighting the urge to kiss the other. Amanda was having a flashback to high school and had just made up her mind to relive history when Cam let go of her hand. Cam then reached behind her hitting a button on the vending machine. The machine began to hum and chug, then spit out a cup of hot coffee. Amanda backed up blinking in confusion.

"It helps to actually push a button not just beat on the thing." Cam said walking away leaving Amanda alone with her coffee.

Entering the waiting room, she spied Nikki and Sammy talking with another woman. She was slightly shorter than Nikki with his hazel eyes and long blonde hair. Nikki and the woman had similar features. She figured it must be his sister.

"Hey there slugger. You ready to go?"

They turned and then Cam noticed that Sammy and Nikki were holding hands. Cam studied the pair. Nope, they were totally unaware of the action, she thought. However, Sammy noticed where Cam was looking. Following the gaze, she blushed and removed her hand from Nikki's. Sammy didn't notice the hurt look on Nikki's face but Cam did, 'oh boy,' Cam thought. 'Straight boy's a drag queen that's unusual. Poor kid was also in love or lust with his savior,'

"Yep, I'm ready to get out of here. Where's Amanda?"

"She's getting coffee; she'll be right along." Cam paused, "Well, if everyone is fine, I'll be on my way."

Not waiting for a reply, she headed out of the building. She needed some air it had been a strange evening. Exiting the doors, she saw Georgia sitting in the Jeep waiting for her. She smiled and climbed in. Georgia patted her on the knee; "David called us and told us what was up, Superwoman."

Cam blushed, "Thanks for coming and getting me."

"Of course silly. You're family." Georgia said quietly. She squeezed Cam's knee and then drove out of the parking lot. The darkness of the early morning shrouded Cam's face, whose eyes had become large and shiny with unshed tears. Family was a scary word with a lot of negative

meaning to Cam. At that moment, she felt the warmth and security that most felt at a very young age. It should be associated with the idea of family, it had been so long since family had meant anything good to her.

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Amanda sat sipping her coffee in the student union building. She was feeling self-conscious; nervously, she tapped her fingers on the edge of the table. On Tuesday, she and Cam had agreed to meet during her break again at the SUB on Thursday, but because of their little encounter at the hospital, she had no idea if Cam was even going to show. She sighed; she had been a jealous jerk. When they had gotten home from the hospital Sammy had told her the story of her evening and when the girl had gotten to the end of her story, she had apologized for giving Amanda the impression that she had been hitting on Cameron and making Amanda jealous. Amanda had sputtered, trying to deny her feelings till Sammy had rounded, on her calling her game.

"Bullshit Amanda! You are so into the bouncer its not even funny, so just stop lying to yourself and deal." With her thoughts verbalized the redhead had gone to bed, leaving Amanda alone to think.

Thursday left her still thinking and wondering. Lost in thought, she jumped in her chair as a hand tapped her shoulder. She caught her coffee before she could send it flying off the table. Turning, she stopped her angry retort when she saw Cam's smiling blue-gray eyes.

"You came?"

"You sound surprised. Of course I came. I said I would. I'm just glad to see you've already had your coffee." Cameron said teasing.

Amanda blushed, her thoughts going back to the scene at the hospital. "About that, I wanted to say thank you for saving Sammy. She told me the story and well, sounded like she bit off more than she could chew."

"Yep, slugger there needs to learn to look before she leaps. But, she's got a good heart."

Amanda felt a faint pang of jealousy at the use of the pet name but shrugged it off, "Yes she does, no matter how many times I have to bail her out of jail. The girl does have only good intentions."

"So, look what I brought." Cam said with a smile, pulling out the Frisbee from behind her back.

"A Frisbee."

"See, I knew you were the smart one!"

"Shut up Cam."

"Fine I'll take my Frisbee and go play with myself."

"Really," Amanda said with a grin and quirking an eyebrow, "Hmmm; I'd pay to watch that."

Cameron looked confused, "What?" Suddenly understanding the dual meaning of her words hit, her mouth opened and a blush worked its way up her face. "I, I, I, didn't mean it like that. Sicko." Getting her composure back, she grinned, "How much?"

"What?"

"How much would you pay to watch?"

It was Amanda's turn to blush. Cameron just laughed. Holding her hand out, she said, "Come on, sicko, let's go teach you the fine art of the round spinning thing."

"How come Sammy gets a good nickname like slugger and I get sicko?"

"Just lucky I guess."

After a half-hour of throwing the Frisbee around Amanda, thought she might be getting better but she was still fairly certain that she sucked at it. So far, she had refused Cam's offer of help. Watching Cam run after her wild throws made her laugh. It was like watching a blonde dog. Cam just grinned from ear to ear and chased down the Frisbee no matter what angle the thing took off at. The girl had energy to burn as she ran, leapt, and dove across the grass. She wore baggy jean shorts and a black t-shirt, and her feet were bare. Amanda swallowed sharply watching the muscles in Cam's legs bunch as she built up kinetic energy.

Pouncing on yet another wayward Frisbee toss, she jogged back over to Amanda, "Amanda, come on let me show you how to toss a Frisbee. You're killing me here."

"I think I'm getting better, really Cam, I can figure out how to throw the stupid thing."

"Well if it makes you feel better to believe that."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, you stink, sicko."

Amanda sighed; "I want a better nickname."

"Hmmm, I'll work on it. Now here." Cam said thrusting the Frisbee into Amanda's hands.

Amanda held the Frisbee, then sucked in a deep breath of air as Cameron molded her body into Amanda's, lightly resting her hand on Amanda's wrist.

"Well the first thing you need to do is relax. Jeez, you're tense."

Amanda willed her body to relax, too late realizing that by relaxing her body, it seemed to come into even more bodily contact with Cam's.

"Okay, the secret to the Frisbee is all in the wrist, kind of like masturbation."

"What did you say?" Amanda said, shocked. Her ears were obviously not working right. Did she just say masturbation?

"Oops, sorry I didn't mean to say that out loud." Cam snickered, watching the blush work its way up Amanda's face.

"Okay for real. It's all about the wrist."

She took Amanda's fingers placing them on the Frisbee. She was amazed at their softness. The skin felt so smooth, and she could smell Amanda's perfume subtly working its way off the skin. CK had never smelled so nice.

"Umm, okay just kind of snap the wrist while releasing."

The Frisbee took a header into the ground. Cam stared at it then pulled away from Amanda to go get it. Amanda felt cold at Cameron's absence, but relieved. Amanda's mind could now function on higher levels of thoughts instead of running a home movie in her head about her baser instincts to throw Cam to the ground and ravish her.

"Okay, let's try this again. Honest, it's not that hard."

"Umm, Cam, I don't know."

"Okay here, you come up behind me and feel how I do it."

"Huh?" Amanda's brain was back on the whole masturbation thing.

"Amanda, you here?"

"What? Oh yeah." She came up behind Cam trying not to really touch the woman's body. Sweet, sweet torture she thought.

In the shadows of the building, a woman stood staring at the two. Absently, she rubbed her right shoulder remembering the pain that had been inflicted to it. Narrowing her eyes, she watched the two women touch each other, oh so innocently, but she knew the truth. That blonde-haired whore would get hers. Then Amanda would get hers, oh yes, she'd teach the dark-haired beauty



manners, she'd teach her respect, and she would teach her who she belonged to. They always did what she wanted. They couldn't live without her. Amanda was hers until she said otherwise. The blonde was trying to take what was hers. The woman grinned, stroking the black handle of a knife, the blade securely tucked away inside. Oh yes, the blonde would have to be taught a lesson about taking other people's property.

- - - - -

They were breathing hard, lying on the grass while Cam was putting on her shoes.

"Hey Cam." She stopped feeling suddenly shy.

"Hey Amanda." Cam joked back.

"I was wondering, my step-mom is having a party, a Masquerade party and I was wondering if you would like to go with me."

"Uh," Cam articulated in her speechlessness, "like a date."

"Well no, maybe. Sammy, Sarah, and Heidi will be going too."

"Oh." Cameron winced. She sounded dejected; Cameron Hayes was never left dejected by anybody. Pause. Okay, fine, the fact Amanda was not asking her out had left her dejected.

"Are you pouting?"

"What?" Cam came out of her thoughts, "Of course not, the big bad bouncer does not pout."

"Really, looks like you're pouting."

"I'm not. You're seeing things."

"Uh huh."

Suddenly Cam squealed as her sides were tickled, "You shouldn't pout around someone who knows where your tickle spots are."

Cameron huffed, trying to catch her breath, "At least I'm not ticklish on the inside of my thighs. Oral sex must be hell."

"Cam! I can't believe you just said that." Amanda said renewing her assault on Cam's sides.

"Well." Cameron wheezed out when the assault had stopped.

"Well what?"

"Is oral sex hell, with those ticklish thighs?" She asked trying to give her best leer.

"Hmm, maybe if you're really nice to me, someday you'll find out." Amanda said with a wink. She walked off leaving a speechless and rumpled Cameron lying on the grass.

Cam got up and followed Amanda into the SUB like a puppy.

She caught up to her at a soda vending machine, "So is the party fancy?"

"What? Oh I guess, you have to be in costume and Bunny always goes all out."

"Bunny? Your step-mom is named Bunny?" Cam choked out trying not to laugh.

"Yes, and it's not funny Miss Hayes."

"Yes it is. Was she a stripper before your Dad married her?" Cam said with a snicker.

"No, she was a masseuse."

"Of course she was."

"Are you implying anything Miss Hayes? I'd be careful. You are quickly getting on my shit list."

"Umm, no. I'm not implying a thing." Cam said trying to look innocent.

Amanda just turned, sipping her newly acquired cola, and stared at Cam.

"Honest, see these honest eyes."

"Right." Amanda said unbelieving.

"So, doing anything over the weekend?"

"Sarah, Heidi, Sammy and I are having a girl's night Saturday; you could come."

"Sorry, I'm working. Dee's taking Georgia up to the cabin for a little alone time, so I'm pretty much in charge for the weekend."

"Oh, that's too bad. Well, not the alone time part. That's really romantic."

"Uh, maybe Sunday we could go grab lunch."

"I'd like that; I'll call you. As you've already learned, you really don't want to wake me up."

"Yeah, my ears are still ringing."

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Amanda trudged through the front door smelling the spicy scent of Thai food. Who knew playing Frisbee could make you so sore? God what did Cam feel like? The girl had been running around like a big puppy.

Sarah's voice called out from the living room, "Put your stuff down and come sit down and watch the game."

She walked in setting her stuff down by the lime-green sofa, her stomach grumbled softly. "Icky, you're watching football. Why are you watching football?"

Heidi grunted, her mouth full of noodles, and pointed at a figure running across the screen.

Puzzled, she looked, "Okay what's with number 33 other than the fact he has the ball and is running away?"

Sammy laughed at Amanda, "Didn't you date a football player in High School?"

Amanda nodded yes, her mouth stuffed with noodles.

"Well, how come you don't know anything about it then."

"I only went to the games cause it was expected of me, not because I find the sport interesting. I spent most of the time gossiping and being seen."

Swallowing, Heidi was able to finally respond, "Number 33 is my brother Seth he plays for the Oregon Ducks, and this is his first year."

"Oh, Wow. Seth, little Seth is in college."

"Yep." Heidi said with a proud grin. Out of Heidi's whole family Seth was the only one who kept in contact. Her parents pretty much disowned her when she and Sarah moved in together. They had finally come to the realization that Heidi was not going through a phase.

Amanda scooped up some noodles on to a plate and plopped down next to Sammy on the couch.

Sammy looked at Amanda, "So Amanda, did you and Cameron make good use of your three-

hour break today."

"Oooh yeah, spill A-girl. What's shaken on the sexy club bouncer front?" Sarah said wiggling her eyebrows.

Amanda sighed, "Don't you people have lives of your own?"

"Well yes, we do but Sarah and I have been together for about three years. That means we're basically in the Lesbian bed death portion of our relationship. So that leaves us you and Sammy to add spice to our sexually limp lives." Heidi said joining in during the commercial break.

"Eww, Heidi way to much info."

"Yeah, what Sammy said." Amanda said, "Besides, aren't you two on a first name basis with just about every employee at the Erotic Room."

"Sure, how do you think we afford all the toys we own? It helps to know the right people"

"Again. Too much information." Sammy said sticking out a tongue.

"So Amanda, what's up with you and the bouncer? Sammy tells us you two are building up loads of sexual tension. You two working it off in any way?" Sarah said trying not to laugh at the embarrassed expression on Amanda's face.

"I have no idea what sordid things Sammy has been planting in your guys' heads but Cam and I are just friends." She paused, smacking Sammy's leg when she gave a snort of disbelief. "She met me at school during my break and we played Frisbee. We had fun. That's what friends do. They hang out and have fun."

"Yeah, but you'd rather be hanging out naked in bed working off some of that frustration." Sammy broke in.

"I, well yes, she's hot and most times I'm near her all I can think about is getting her naked and sweaty. So there. Are you three happy?" Amanda said with a glare as the other three rolled around laughing on the floor.

"I hate you all."

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Sarah rolled off a very sweaty, very tired Heidi. She snuggled into her partner's side, licking the salty skin next to her face, causing Heidi to squirm.

"Honey I love you but you need to stop. I need a breather."

Sarah pouted, nipping the skin one last time then settled back down. Sighing she softly traced patterns on Heidi's flushed skin, not to turn her on but just to feel connected to the woman.

She had met Heidi at a florist shop the woman had worked at, needing to get flowers for her mother's birthday that she had forgotten about, again. She walked in, got caught in a pair of the most radiant blue eyes, lost track of what she was doing, tripped over a stepping stool and crashed into a floral display. Sprawled out in colorful bed of crushed flowers, she had opened her eyes to see an angel crouching down before her.

Heidi had gotten fired for leaving the stool out in the walkway. Sarah approached the tall blonde as she was leaving the store, distraught, and asked to take her out to dinner. Heidi had actually turned her down, but let Sarah walk her home. Okay, Sarah had followed her like a lost puppy and had shown up everyday for nearly three weeks to ask her out to dinner till Heidi had caved. Something along the lines, "If I meet you for a drink this once will you stop showing up on my doorstep?"

With a twinkle in her eye Sarah had said "Maybe."

After three dinners, two movies, one night of dancing followed by a session of marathon sex, Heidi finally agreed to date her.

Sarah could be smug because out of all three siblings she was the only one in a stable relationship, and she didn't have to listen to their mother try to set her up. Her two brothers, Randy and George, were constantly under threat of being set up on blind dates by their mother and their mother's friends.

"So, what do you think of Amanda and Cameron?"

"Huh?" Sarah grunted out, her mind slowly shifted gears.

"Amanda and Cameron, do you think they'll get together?"

"Well if Amanda has her way, they will."

"Its so romantic, that whole unrequited love thing. It's so Romeo and Juliet."

"Um, Honey, everyone dies in that play, that's hardly romantic."

"Fine, just burst my bubble. You can just go sleep on the couch, you unromantic lout."

"Well, if that's what you really want." She said teasing, "but I have the keys to the handcuffs."

"Oh right. Speaking of which, my arms are getting sore. Think you could undo them."

"I could. What's the special phrase?"

"Sarah, I'm not.. fine. Oh, great warlord. I, your humble servant, beg you to release me. Have I not been most pleasing to you this evening?"

"Aye, wench. I have found your services most rewarding."

As soon as Heidi was released, she flipped Sarah onto her back, "Call me a wench, will you? No more pirate movies for you." She began to tickle her lover, till Sarah was begging her to stop. Heidi switched tactics and Sarah was begging her not to stop.

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Cameron stared at her shoes. She couldn't believe it; the stupid alcohol soaked excuse for a human being had puked on her boots. He had puked on her nice, fairly new steel-toed-for-her-safety work boots; ugh! She was so tempted to kick him in the head. She looked over at Peter, who just stared at his boyfriend in horror.

"Mario. Mario! I really think it's a bad idea to puke on Cam. If you need to puke on somebody, you should probably do it to me."

Mario straightened, grinning. He slurred out, "Oh, honey, when we get home, I certainly will do it to you."

"Cool it Romeo. That would probably be a lot more suave if you didn't have puke on your chin." Cameron said with disgust as she tapped her boots on the side of the building. "Why did I let you two talk me into going out with you?" She said rolling her eyes.

"What else are you going to do on a Friday night, Hot Stuff?" Mario giggled out. "Sit at home playing with yourself and whistling Disney songs?"

"I do not whistle Disney songs." She said in a huff.

"Nope, only when you are in love." Mario drew the word love out like a three-year-old.

"Peter, if I killed Mario, would you really miss him?" She questioned.

Peter shrugged, steering his drunken lover back into the Night Creature, "I'm beginning to wonder at the moment. "

Cameron waved at a bouncer as they entered and helped Peter pour Mario into a seat. Peter

adjusted his glasses and looked at Cameron, "So what's this love stuff he keeps going on about?"

Cameron squirmed uncomfortably, and gestured for a waitress to come over. She ordered cola and two waters. As the waitress left, she turned to find Peter still looking at her. "What?"

"Dear Lord, you are in love. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it."

"What?" Cameron wondered if she had subconsciously been whistling that stupid Disney song again. "For the last time, I do not whistle, sing, or chant Disney songs."

"Do too." Mario giggled coming out of his drunken stupor.

"Not that." Peter said waving his hand dismissively. "That waitress was so hitting on you, and you didn't even notice. She was practically shoving her cleavage in your face."

"Oh, that. I'm just not in the mood."

"Cameron 'the Lady-Killer' Hayes is always in the mood." Peter scoffed giving her a weird look.

"Ack. Stop with the weird eye thingy. Come on, I don't have to always be a walking hormone working on my collection of toaster ovens. Okay."

"So who's the girl who has you walking the straight and narrow?"

"Cameron's not straight honey, she's as gay as a, as a, as a, pink triangle." Mario giggled at his joke.

"Peter, I'm going to kill your boyfriend. Just so we're clear about this."

Peter sighed, wishing for the tenth time that Mario hadn't felt the need to drink so much this evening. Mario couldn't keep his mouth shut when he was sober, and drunk, the guy was worse. However, he loved his little Italian stallion no matter how annoying he could be at times. Peter rubbed Mario's arm and tried to get some water into him.

Cam looked at the retreating waitress' ass; she had left her a note saying she got off at one. The girl did have a nice ass. Not as nice as Amanda's, but still, it wasn't bad. She stopped mid thought. She really had it bad. Some little hottie was practically throwing herself at Cameron and she was thinking about the one person she couldn't have. Okay, she probably could have Amanda, but if she went there, she just knew it wouldn't be simple sex and see you around, maybe. In all honesty, she didn't want that with Amanda. However, being with Amanda would open up things in herself she wasn't willing to examine -- places she really didn't want to revisit.

She sighed, picking up her drink; she caught two pairs of eyes looking at her. "What?"

"You were brooding again." Peter said matter of factly.

"She does it cause this whole love thing has her scared." Mario said nursing his water.

"For the last time, I'm not in love. See this is me going to hit on the waitress so I can let her take me home and we can screw like some sort of rabid woodland creatures." She got up and stormed over to the waitress.

Peter glared at Mario, "Mario, could you stop pushing her buttons for a moment? Obviously, Cameron equates love with negative feelings."

"Sorry Mr. I-took-a-couple-of-psyche classes."

"Not as sorry as you're going to be Mr. I'm-sleeping-on-the-couch-and-not-getting-any-for-a-month."

"A month. Awe, come on, that's cruel. I'll, I'll, spend time with your nieces and teach them to ice skate." Mario blurted out desperately.

"Really! The threat of withheld sex will get you to do something with Rachel's kids."

"Yep, anything so my Peter will..."

He was cut off by Cameron's return to the table. She looked visibly shaken.

"Uh, so I go up to deliver my smoothest lines in order to hook-up with someone and instead end up telling them, I'm flattered but can't, that's, uh... a bad thing, right?"

They both just blinked at her, trying to pick up on the new conversation.

"Fine, her name is Amanda Walker. I fell in love with her my senior year of high school, and she ripped my heart out. I ran into her and some of her friends at the Shady Lady about a month ago, and we've been hanging out doing the friend thing. "

Peter and Mario continued to stare. Finally, Peter stated, "Well, I see. This may take awhile and we'll need to start at the beginning."

"I don't want to start at the beginning I don't want to talk about it at all. Okay."

Peter just raised his hand, waving the waitress over, "I'll need a bottle of tequila and two glasses."

Cameron eyeballed the shot glass filled with the nasty smelling liquid. "Peter, I don't think this is alcohol and even if it was, I don't drink. You know that."

"Come on, Hot Stuff." Mario slurred out, "the more you drink the easier it will be for you to spill your guts."



Cameron had to admit that did hold a certain appeal. However, "what if it makes me violent?" She asked worriedly.

"Shit Hot Stuff, you're already violent."

She opened her mouth to argue, then shut it. "What if drinking makes me more violent?"

"Haven't you ever drank before?" Peter asked.

"Well no. I use to smoke dope in high school, but I haven't done that in awhile."

"Well, if we think you're getting out of control, we'll cut you off and call Dee down to deal with you."

She nodded. That sounded reasonable. It was tempting. She worked around it, and was curious about what the appeal was. However, there was also fear. What if she was just like her mother?

She lifted the small clear glass up, "Lick it, slam it, suck it; Right?"

"You go, Hot Stuff." Mario giggled out.

She slammed the shot, sucking on the lime shuddering. Dear God, it was eating a hole in her stomach.

The two men let her convulse for another minute, then filled up her shot glass again.

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Amanda sat at the kitchen table studying, but the formulas just kept swimming out of her head. She was having a really hard time focusing; it had just been a bad week. The weekend had been great -- a girl's night on Saturday with Sammy, Sarah, and Heidi; they had rented cheesy horror flicks and gossiped and painted their nails. Well Sarah hadn't -- too girly or something for the woman. Sunday had been fun. She had spent the afternoon with Cam. They had met at a deli downtown and then walked around window-shopping and people watching.

However, Cameron could be quite frustrating. She couldn't read the girl sometimes. Cam would flirt, then back off. She couldn't tell if Cam's feeling ran deeper, and it was driving her nuts.

The week had been crappy Cam had been unable to hang out on Tuesday and Thursday, although they had talked on the phone. She had forgotten all about Lisa till she had gone to class on Monday and sat down to take the test. Then she remembered that Lisa said she would call so they could get together and study. Looking over, she had found the girl's seat empty. She

approached Dr. Stuart after the examination and asked about Lisa, only to find out that the girl was in the hospital after being brutally attacked on campus. That had brought back the memories of being watched on campus and she had felt jumpy and unsafe all week until she had gotten to the safety of her home.

The doorbell rang, pulling her out of unproductive thoughts, 'who the hell could that be at two in the morning'? She got up, turning on the hallway light Sammy emerged from her bedroom wielding a baseball bat.

"Taking Cam's little pet name a little too seriously are we?"

Sammy just shrugged, "Can't be too careful. That poor girl is in the hospital with a broken jaw and ribs."

Amanda felt a cold shiver race up her spine as she went to peek out. Amanda sighed in relief, "it's just Cam."

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Cameron unsteadily made the trek up to the house from the Cab that she had taken with Mario and Peter. Blinking, she realized that this wasn't where she lived. Foggily, she realized that this was where Amanda lived. The little gay boy bastards had set her up; she knew she shouldn't have attempted to do the whole drinking thing with Peter. She had been so confused and mixed up with her feelings that it had seemed like a good idea. After the first shot it was so much easier to go spilling her guts on the subject that was Amanda.

Dimly she also realized that the cab had driven off. "Bastards," She muttered darkly. Out of options that her tequila-hazed brain could process, she made the long journey to ring the doorbell.

Cameron was waiting patiently for the door to open hoping against hope that Amanda was not as violent to doorbell ringers as she was to early morning wake up calls. She was just about to knock when the door opened throwing her off balance; she stumbled and then looked up shyly. "I, uh, was in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by and say hi." She paused, "Hi."

Yep she was one smooth motherfuc..

"You're drunk."

"Nope, can't be drunk. I don't drink." She slurred out.

"Well you've been drinking tonight."

Cam paused in thought, "Oh, right. Peter and Mario snuck up on me with a bottle of tequila." She said giggling.

"Uh, huh." Amanda said dragging Cameron's ass in and shutting the door.

Sammy giggled and put the bat down; "Looks like your hands are full tonight better put her in your bed with you just so you can make sure she's okay."

"What? No."

"Awe, come on Amanda. Slugger there has a great idea."

"What?"

"See Amanda, Cameron wants to get you into bed."

"No she doesn't."

"Yes I do. We can do the whole bed thing, followed by the naked thing and maybe top it off with snuggles"

"What? Cameron, you're drunk you don't have any idea what you're saying."

"Fine they always did say actions were stronger than words, plus I owe you from High School." Cameron grabbed the collar of Amanda's t-shirt and pulled her down and kissed her. Amanda's senses were overrun by the smell tequila, bar smoke, and something sweet and musky' something that was very much Cam. The kiss was awkward at first, but as both relaxed into it, it became full of urgent promises. Cam lips softly kissed her and soon a warm tongue was sneaking out to lick her bottom lip. Cameron's hands moved up from the collar to stroke her neck and face.

Cameron couldn't believe what she was doing. She was kissing Amanda Walker. It was wonderful feeling; it was exciting and her stomach was all a tremble, and she was going to be sick.

Cameron pulled away from Amanda, "Bathroom." She croaked out urgently.

"Down the hall and to the right."

Cameron sprinted down the hall unsteadily slamming her shoulder into the door jam as she failed to turn correctly, she slammed the door shut.

Amanda slowly opened her eyes, "What just happened?"

"Well, I for one have to say that for all the talk I've heard about Miss Don Juan Hayes, she is very much a disappointment. But if I had to guess, she tried to kiss you."

"Thank You Sammy. Now go to bed and not a word."

"But."

"Not a word. Or I will tell all your other lesbian friends about your crush on the drag queen."

"Kiss, what kiss?" Sammy said, sheepishly sneaking off to her room.

Amanda sighed and walked down to the bathroom. After knocking on the door and receiving a very weak "come in". She entered to find a very pathetic Cameron huddled on the floor next to the toilet.

"Amanda?"

Amanda "hmm'd" while getting a cold washcloth for Cameron's face.

"Remind me in the morning if I'm not dead to kill Peter and Mario,"

"Okay. How many shots did you have?"

"I forget after two."

"And you don't drink." Amanda said helping Cam sit up; she gently washed her face.

"Nope, I wouldn't want to be like her." Cameron's face screwed up into a mask of anger at the mention of her.

"Her?"

"Yes, her that bitch. My.." Cam's voice choked off in a sob.

Amanda stopped. It wasn't a normal 'I've been drinking sob'. No, it was more of a deep seated, in long need of getting out sob, and she gently grabbed Cam into her body, rocking her as Cam struggled to both get closer to the comfort and away from it at the same time. Amanda just held the girl tighter, humming a soft tune into the pink tipped ear until Cameron gave up, too uncoordinated in her present condition to launch a successful escape plan. Cameron gave up control for a brief moment and cried onto Amanda's shoulder, clutching Amanda's body tight into hers, afraid that it would all disappear.

Amanda had no idea how much time had passed. Cameron had cried herself out and was quietly dozing in the safety of Amanda's arms. Amanda's head was full of questions, but at this time, there were no answers. Sighing, she lifted herself and Cameron off the floor and guided them both to bed. Tomorrow would be another strange day.

Setting Cameron on the bed she started to unlace the girl's boots.

"Uh, Amanda, I'd be careful with the left boot. Mario puked on it earlier."

"Gross." Tentatively she unlaced the left boot. She went to her dresser and pulled out a t-shirt and boxers. She looked at Cameron trying to gauge if the girl could dress herself, weighing it against her desire to touch her. Cameron just looked at her confused, blinking her eyes.

"Okay, help me take your shirt off." Amanda said stepping close to Cameron and grabbed the edge of the material.

Two strong hands grabbed hers. "Don't, ugly." Cameron slurred out.

"What?"

"I don't want you to see. I'm ugly."

"Cam you're not ugly, you're beautiful."

"Ugly."

"Fine, but you're not sleeping in my bed wearing those stinky clothes."

"Give me a minute. I can change myself."

Amanda sighed, walking toward the door. "I'll be back in a minute."

Cam nodded, engrossed with unbuttoning her pants."

Amanda walked through the house, checked the door and turned off the lights. She went back to her room. Knocking lightly on the door, she went in. She smiled as she found Cam sprawled out on her bed lightly snoring. She debated whether or not to go sleep on the couch but decided to sleep in her own bed with Cam. The girl was unused to drinking and if she got sick, Amanda wanted to be there. Of course, there were all the other purely selfish reasons she was staying in her own bed, too. She was briefly tempted to lift up Cam's shirt to see what she thought made her ugly. Maybe it was a birthmark or a mole, but in the back of her mind, she was afraid that it wasn't anything so nice. She didn't want to abuse Cam's trust, so she stopped herself.

Cameron whimpered and Amanda brushed the hair out of her eyes and whispered words of nonsense. Cameron settled down and rolled over seeking out the heat and warmth from Amanda's body. Amanda's presences giving Cam shelter from her torn dreamscape.

## Part 5

Morning was creeping out over the land with its promise of a new day and new beginnings. Painting the suburban landscape in its warm colors, the sun started to rise. However, as the light touched the outside world of waking life, the light inside stormy blue-gray eyes was slowly dying.

Arms wrapped around herself for warmth, her breath made visible on the cool wind currents, Cameron staggered down the street, wanting nothing more than to reach her hands inside her skull, into the hidden depth where her mother still ruled and lived in harmony with all her insecurities. Her mother's voice slurred out, a tongue made lazy from drinking and was husking out her inadequacies. "Worthless waste of space." The voice breathed out. "Little piece of nothing. Amanda could never be happy settling for you. You are so beneath Amanda. Thought you were so much better than me. Look at yourself bloodshot eyes, cottonmouth, the smell of alcohol stained into your clothes. Just give yourself a little time. You will be me." That brought Cam to her knees. She raggedly tried to control her breathing as tears welled up. She fought it, her hands trying to dig themselves into the hard surface of the road. She wouldn't cry, she didn't cry. She, Cameron Hayes, didn't cry. She never once did when her mother struck her and she wouldn't allow the satisfaction to a ghostly memory. Shakily she stood up and continued walking home.

Thoughts flickered in her head drowning everything out. The memory of the morning was still so fresh. She could feel Amanda's warmth and smell her sleepy scent again, a moment of false happiness.

Cameron had rolled over, touching something soft and warm. Fuzzily, she opened her eyes. Blinking, she tried to focus as colors saturated and sharpened into focus. She took in the lines of the dark hair spread out before her. She grinned sleepily... oh, she knew this dream. This was fantasy number 9. She reached out. There was no hesitation, no second guessing. This was her fantasy, a bit of unreality in which she could be perfect. Reaching out; she stroked and smoothed the midnight infused strands. She brushed it to the side, finally exposing the warm flesh of the neck. Snuggling closer, she kissed that warmth. It was so real. Her dreams were always shrouded in a haze, but the sounds, tastes and smells were textured so real this time as they pierced her senses. She trailed her tongue along the curves of the neck. Licking and giving small kisses, she made her way up to an earlobe that peaked out wickedly from a mass of tangled hair. She leaned up, brushing more hair aside. Lightly, she nipped the ear. Amanda moaned and she slowly sucked the lobe into her mouth.

Amanda gasped and shuddered, then rolled over, blinking sleepily at her with foggy blue eyes.

Cam smiled. This was the best one, her favorite fantasy. it was a fantasy of warmth and

belonging; this was a dream about couplehood and the promise of many mornings together. Cam kissed a forehead, then Amanda's nose. As she did that, a giggle came bubbling out of Amanda and she smiled again. Finally, Cam kissed waiting lips; heat raced through her body, causing her breath to catch. Beautiful, the moment is the most beautiful thing she had ever experienced, and it was just a dream.

She removed her lips from Amanda's and kissed her chin, her jaw, her neck; then hands were there pulling her away from the taste of Amanda's skin.

Panting, Amanda breathed in question, "Are you sure? Are you positive this is okay?"

Cam's mind stalled. This had never happened before in all the times she'd had this dream, "What?"

"You're not still drunk? This is you, right? Not the tequila?"

The world lurched. Oh shit, this was reality. "Oh God, not a dream. I'm not dreaming." Cameron sputtered. She jerked backwards, away from the warmth and coldness seeped inside. Oh God, she had taken advantage of her friend. Then the night before swam up out of the recesses of her mind and blindsided her. She felt exposed. All her secrets, everything she wanted to leave behind and buried seemed to be too close to the surface. She couldn't let Amanda see inside her. It was too much. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Amanda's hand reach out for her and she jerked away, falling out of the bed. She scrambled to her feet, looking for her clothes

"Cameron? Cameron, is everything okay?"

Spotting her clothes she grabbed them. She needed out of here. She jammed her legs into her pants, pulling them up over the boxers she wore. Her panic and fear were in control, she slipped her shoes on and ran for the door.

"Cameron?" The voice penetrated her haze.

Amanda's face was broken the hurt written on the crinkled forehead and shining blue-eyes. She, Cameron, had created it.

"I can't, I can't." It was almost a sob. She was breaking, her cool outer amour was falling apart. "I'm sorry. I can't be with you." She ran, knowing it was wrong.

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Sammy emerged, yawning, from her room. She slide her arms into a cotton robe, she thought briefly about streaking to the kitchen. It was early enough Amanda wouldn't be up. She grinned

evilily, particularly if she had company, 'Hope A-girl got laid.' She thought briefly, making the trek to the kitchen. Entering the kitchen, Sammy felt the disturbance in the force, 'Ah fuck me.' She smelled the perky morning goodness that was freshly brewed coffee, and saw Amanda's robe covered back as the tall girl sat at the kitchen table, presumably staring out the window. Sammy puzzled over this and her good fortune not to have to make her own coffee as she reached for a mug. She poured and sipped. The whole time, Amanda made no move to acknowledge her presence in the kitchen.

Sammy rubbed her nose. Something wasn't right. Hmmm. "Where's the bouncer of your dreams?"

Nothing. The silence continued to tap dance around the room.

"Okay, what did I do now?"

The silence moved onto a rousing salsa number.

"I know you're alive. I can see you breathing. What, you and the chick magnet have a fight?"

For its finale, silence shot itself out of a canon.

Sammy got a clue, "Ah, ah, ah shit. What happened? Let me go get Sarah. We'll go kick her ass. Nobody uses my friends."

Amanda spoke in a strangled voice that people use when they're trying not to show emotion, "Nothing happened."

"Bullshit." Sammy gave her friend a hug from behind, and at the touch, Amanda began to sob. "I screwed it up again, I messed it up."

"Aw, honey, you did no such thing." Sammy whispered stroking Amanda's hair. Sammy sat down and nudged Amanda's chair till it was turned toward her. She sucked in a breath at Amanda's face. The woman's eyes were red and swollen. "That's it. I'm calling Sarah. We're going to go kick her ass. I knew that girl was dangerous, I knew she was no good." Sammy yelled out.

Amanda gave a slight chuckle; "you knew no such thing Miss O'Brien. You were lusting after her tight little ass."

Sammy paused in her tirade. She really wasn't expecting that reaction. "You're scaring me here A-girl. Why don't you clue me in."

Amanda sighed, her eyes boring into the depths of her coffee cup.



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Cameron was walking down the street arguing with herself. She couldn't do anything right. She wanted Amanda, and she had let the woman slip right through her fingers. She knew though she couldn't be good for the woman she deserved better than Cameron Hayes. She felt queasy in her stomach at the thought of Amanda with somebody else. She raked her hands through her hair in frustration. She let out a small scream of frustration kicking out at a garbage can sitting on the curb next her. The can sailed up, landing with a metallic crunch and vomiting waste on to the driveway.

A voice yelled out from the house, "Hey, what the Hell!"

"Oh shit." Cameron said and sprinted off in a panic.

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Sammy waited for Amanda's story holding her breath.

"I woke up and she was kissing me and touching me and I thought my god, I'm dreaming again, but it was better than a dream. It was real. But then, then I made her stop cause I needed to know it was her and not the alcohol. Then the moment was gone, and she was running for the door. A moment I've been in anticipation of for almost forever and I screwed it up."

Sammy blinked, going through her head for possible words of comfort, or even a funny story, "That certainly sucks." She said weakly.

Amanda just blinked at her.

"Fine." Sammy said throwing up her hands, "Maybe we should call Heidi Sarah has that whole butch issue that sometimes prevents her from acting rationally."

Amanda went back to staring morosely out the window.

"Ah, okay you just sit there I'll go get the phone and call Heidi."

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Cameron was digging around in her pants pocket trying to find her house key. Her brow scrunched up, she pulled out her wallet, the keys to the Shady Lady, and a piece of pocket lint. "Fuck me." She muttered.

"Problems, Cameron?" A voice boomed out next to her ear.

Cameron Hayes, the most feared bouncer of the Shady Lady, screamed and then clutched her head. Her head, already in the throws of a violent mind-bending world-altering hangover, was now taken to the championship level of hangovers.

"Rough night?"

Cameron looked up in to Georgia's brown eyes, which didn't seem to be so warm at the moment. "Ah, you could say that."

Georgia squinted, taking a long look at the girl, "So how's your first hangover treat'n ya? All you expected and more?"

Cameron grimaced, "You could say that, only quieter." Then tried to give a weak smile.

Georgia was not moved. She looked more closely at the hung over deflated shell of Cam, and her eyes narrowed dangerously. "You fucked something up, didn't you." It wasn't a question.

Cameron's eyes widened in shock. She wasn't sure what shocked her more -- the fact Georgia knew she had screwed up or the fact the older lady had used the word fuck.

"It was that Amanda girl, wasn't it?"

Cameron flinched. This was getting weird. Her eyes widened in panic and she was looking around for escape. "I didn't sleep with her. WellmeanIdid, but, notinthewaythatsoundsinthenonsexsense."

"Cameron are you aware of your ability to babble at high speeds."

"Uh, no."

"It's kind of cute."

"Uh."

"Go shower and change. You smell like stale beer. Then come upstairs to the kitchen and have some breakfast with me, and we can talk about what did and did not happen last night."

"Uh."

"Yes?"

"I seem to have lost my key."

"What happened to your key?"

"I think they fell out of my pants when I took them off at Amanda's." Mentally she shouted at herself, "way to go dumbass."

"I see." Georgia walked down the steps and unlocked the door.

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Heidi, Sarah, and Sammy stared at the shut bedroom door.

"So I called you and while I was on the phone, she went all passive-aggressive and shut herself in her room and won't come out." Sammy said with a sigh. "I'm going to go take a shower. Let me know if she comes out."

Heidi stared at the door, then at Sarah, and finally at Sammy's retreating back. "Eh, honey what do you think?"

Sarah examined the door, "I think I need whipped topping and you tied naked to the bed screaming my name out in a very good way."

"Hmm, tempting but that's not going to happen till we sort out what's up with Amanda. After that, we can go have sex anywhere you would like."

Sarah gave an evil grin, "Cool." She returned her attention to the door, "Honey why don't you ask her to come out, while I go look for some tools. If she's not out by the time I get back, I'll take drastic measures."

Heidi shrugged. It sounded good to her; she began to knock, calling out to Amanda.

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Amanda was resting on her bed; she was curled around the pillow Cameron had used the night before. She sniffled, sure it smelled of smoke and beer, but there was the faint scent of Cam there. She was trying to figure out what she had done to make Cameron bolt. She couldn't think of anything. She thought she had been very gentle and hadn't pushed when Cameron had started

crying in the bathroom.

There was a scraping noise coming from her door. Heidi had gone quiet a few minutes ago and Amanda had just assumed she had given up and gone away. There was a faint clicking noise and her door began to slowly open as Heidi and Sarah's heads slowly peaked in. Sarah gave a huge grin, but Amanda just hid her head under her pillow. Didn't people understand she was trying to feel depressed and sorry for herself?

"Look ,Heidi, I told you she was fine. She's just crying." Said Sarah. "Ouch! What did you hit me for?"

"You were being insensitive? Only crying, sheesh."

Heidi left Sarah by the door and walked into the room and knelt down by the bed, "Amanda, we are all really worried here. You need to come up for air and tell me everything that happened last night with Cam."

Sarah shifted from foot to foot, watching Heidi try to talk to Amanda. She really wanted to be there for her friend. She just wasn't sure what to do and when she wasn't sure what to do, she started feeling antsy. She just wanted to make everything better, but she didn't know how.

Heidi noticed Sarah's little dance of unease and she had to smile at her little control freak. Heidi was well versed in the "I have no control over this situation" dance. "Honey, why don't you go make some food while I talk to Amanda."

Sarah nodded happily at her lover, thankful Heidi was giving her a way to help, even if it was a small thing.

Heidi watched her lover scamper off and hoped she wouldn't set the kitchen on fire. "Now, Amanda. Tell me what happened with the big bad bouncer that has you in tears."

- - - - -

Toni shivered from the cold as she stepped into her apartment. She shut the door and set down the baseball bat, leaning it up against the couch. She took off her coat and hung it up; fiercely, she rubbed her hands together. Angrily, she threw herself into her recliner. All night she had trailed that blonde bitch hoping to catch her alone. But no those, fag boys were glued to her side. When they had left the Night Creature in a cab, Toni had rushed off ahead hoping to catch the bouncer when she tried to stumble into her house. The blonde's entrance was perfect around the side with some evergreen bushes right next to the stairs; Toni could wait and never be seen. However, the girl had never come home. Toni had waited in the cold well into the morning hours, her brain stewing. The bitch must have gone to see Amanda. The thought of her touching

Amanda made her see red; Amanda was hers, and nobody else's.

Toni rubbed her temples. She just had to wait. The moment would come and everything would be perfect, just like that moment in the parking garage. Then the would be Romeo would be out of the picture and nobody would get in the way of her and Amanda's happiness. Now she just needed to get rid of the blonde.

She leaned forward, and put a tape into the VCR, and hit play. As the tape played, she could see Amanda. She was inside her house studying at the kitchen table. The blinds were open and she could see the girl hard at work. Toni smiled. Too bad she couldn't get closer maybe get a camera in the house. Her thoughts paused, oh, to be closer, but how? She leaned back to ponder an answer for her problem.

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Cameron shifted nervously in her sock-covered feet. She had showered and changed her clothes, and felt a tad bit more human. She stared at Georgia, unsure if she should begin talking, but Georgia sat reading the paper. Occasionally, she picked up her coffee cup and took a sip.

Cameron opened her mouth to speak and shut it; she scratched her wet head. Dee came striding into the kitchen, disheveled and sleep still very much stuck in her eyes. Dee took one look and turned around and walked out. Poor kid, she felt for Cam, she really did; but the kid was on her own.

Helplessly Cameron watched Dee's back turn a corner and disappear.

"Cameron, have a seat." Georgia said not looking up from her paper.

Cameron did as she was told.

"Cameron, you have been living with us now for what? Four years?" Cameron nodded. "Never in that time have we asked questions about your past, or butted in, even when you bring home those girls who hold nothing more meaningful for you than one-night." She paused looking up to see if Cam was paying attention. The girl had a puzzled look on her face. "However, over these past four years, Dee and I have somewhere along the way come to love you like the daughter we always talked about having, but never did. Cameron, Dee and I love you very much and we want only the best for you." She saw the tears forming in the girl's eyes, even though Cam was doing that whole stoic thing and trying to fight them off. "I have wanted nothing more for you to find somebody who would steal your heart and break through that very thick stonewall you have built around yourself. However, it has come to my attention that before we met you, somebody had already done that."

Cameron sniffed. Fucking tears. She would not cry, she would not cry. It was bad enough she broke down in front of Amanda, but Georgia's words had touched some deep seated longing inside of herself. Inside, she felt like something was trying to break through a barrier and swim up to the surface. It was making her feel very self-conscious. Her attention was suddenly captured by Georgia, "What do you mean somebody already has stolen my heart?"

Georgia smiled, "Your friend, Amanda, she's had your heart all this time hasn't she?" Georgia just smiled as Cameron sputtered. "Now dear, you can either allow her to keep it, or take it back, but first you need to tell me what happened last night."

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"Then I heard the door open and shut this morning and she was gone."

Heidi pondered Amanda's story, while Amanda waited to hear what Heidi thought she should do. "I'd say your friend Cameron has issues."

"That's it? Um, Heidi, just about anybody who has met Cam can tell you that."

"Amanda, the girl is a control freak who constantly polishes her armor looking for cracks in it. From what I can tell, she is never with a girl longer than 24 hours. So my dear Amanda you need to ask yourself are you willing to put up with this bouncer who is likely to bolt when emotions start running high and she is not in control? Because, my dear, she will more than likely do it again. She has a history of it. Didn't she bolt on you in High School?"

Amanda nodded, her feelings sinking further and further into her stomach.

A throat cleared, and they looked up to see Sarah standing there. She was holding a plate with some waffles on it and had a smudge of flour on her nose and chin. "Honey, you just described Piper."

Heidi looked at Sarah, "Honey, I hardly think Cameron was abused as a child look at the woman, she's a bouncer. She kicks people's asses."

"Who is Piper?" Amanda asked.

"A friend of mine growing up. Her father used her as a human punching bag; she grew up in a closet. He'd lock her in 'to keep her away from boys'. Too bad it wouldn't keep him away." Sarah said with a sad expression

"I don't know, Sarah. I have a hard time imagining anybody using Cameron as a punching bag."

While Heidi and Sarah were talking, Amanda's brain was whirling. It kept going back to the night before when Cam had prevented her from removing her shirt, "Don't, ugly." Maybe Sarah wasn't too far off the mark. She came back to the discussion when Heidi asked her a question.

"Amanda, you hung out with her in High School. Did she have mysterious injuries, and what was her home life like?"

"Well, I, uh, don't really know. I mean, she was always sporting some bruise or cut but she spent the most of her time in detention for fighting. As for her home life, I don't really know. I never went over to her house or met her family."

"I thought you two were friends?" Sarah asked perplexed.

"We were. I told you I was different then. I was a self-centered bitch."

"Hmmm, well, Amanda it's your call. Depends on how deep you want to get. You know where she works. Go talk to her."

Sarah looked at her partner like she was nuts. "Honey are you nuts? The last thing Amanda should do is confront her, about anything, that will just freak her out. Amanda, you are basically back at square one. If you go to the Shady Lady, keep it light and pretend that last night never happened. Don't bring it up at all."

"Well, that won't solve anything. If they are going to have any kind of relationship Amanda needs to make Bouncer girl aware that her actions this morning hurt her."

Amanda felt a headache coming on. Where the hell was Sammy? She had called Heidi and Sarah over. "Sammy has a crush on a drag queen."

Silence filled the room to the point of bursting. Then it popped.

"She's what?!" They shouted in unison. They stormed out of the room in search of the redhead.

Sighing in relief, she went to shut her door. Looking at the knob she saw the lock was dented and scraped, "Sarah!" she shouted. The curly haired woman's head appeared from Sammy's room, "you picked the lock! Don't do that again."

Sarah looked guilty and ducked back inside Sammy's room.

Amanda shut her door and decided to crawl back into bed. After a nap, she would try and decide what to do.

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Cameron squirmed as brown eyes bored into her, "So Cameron, are you going to continue this habit of bolting every time life throws you a heavily emotional scene?"

"What?"

"Did you bolt because you made an ass out of yourself, or because you may have revealed layers to yourself that you weren't ready to share with another person?"

"Err, both?" Cameron wasn't so certain she would survive Georgia's grilling.

"Cameron, it's okay to be attracted to people."

"Oh, no problem there. Attraction, lust, and wild monkey sex I've got those down." Cameron cringed. She so shouldn't have deep thought conversations with anybody, let alone Georgia, when she was hung over. Just shoot me now, she thought.

"How about love, commitment, and happily-ever-after?"

Cameron started fidgeting. She didn't want to think about those things in the context of herself. Was it possible to experience love without pain? Could someone be trusted enough to share that with? Most of her life, the person who was supposed to take care of her, mold her, keep her safe and love her unconditionally, hadn't. Love and family values were equated with alcohol, slaps, and kicks.

At the word "alcohol," she felt the night before swim up into her thoughts, and when doubled with the memory of her mother, her stomach rolled, and she bolted for the bathroom.

Georgia watched the struggle in Cam's face. It was almost too open Georgia had never seen this. She almost couldn't watch. Then, without warning, the blonde bolted from the chair. She followed behind and as she heard the sounds of Cam's stomach rebelling she called out asking if she was okay.

Cam didn't answer, and she waited. Suddenly the door opened and Cameron stalked out, not making any eye contact. The blonde rushed off downstairs.

Dee came striding back into the kitchen, looking showered and more alert. "You my dear are one brave woman, and you have in fact gone where no other woman has gone before."

Georgia raised an eyebrow, "and where would that be, love?"

"You, my crazy little honey bun, had an in-depth personal conversation with one Miss Hayes and lived to tell the tale," Dee said, giving Georgia a kiss.

"How can one girl have such warped view of some of the most wonderful things in life?"



"I don't know, but if I ever find out who did it, I'm going to hurt them bad."

"Ah, there's the little butch I fell in love with." Georgia said with a smile, "Honey why don't you take me out to brunch?"

"It would be my pleasure, and then we can come back and..." She didn't finish the sentence. Instead she wiggled her eyebrows.

"Oh, I like those dirty thoughts." Georgia said with a laugh.

-----

Life went on as it annoyingly does. No matter how shitty your life is at the moment, the world keeps turning.

Amanda sat in the SUB, sipping a cup of coffee and staring out the window. Her homework held no appeal for her. It had been a little over a week and she hadn't seen nor heard from Cam. She was no closer to an answer about what to do. Should she try to start over or just let it go? Then there was the whole did she even want to move into a relationship with someone who would bolt when the going got tough? She had already been put through the wringer when she had dated Toni. She lied her head down on her book. Fall had finally arrived and it was too cold to study outside, but inside she found herself missing Cam's company, offbeat humor, and her ability to make the day fun. Maybe she would go see Lisa in the Hospital. Last time she had gone the girl had been asleep. She felt guilty that while she had been having a good time the girl was being brutally attacked -- in the middle of the day, no less.

She raised head up and was startled by a very red rose occupying her vision. Immediately she thought it was Cam. It was Cam come to make apologies. As her line of sight pulled back to take in the person holding the flower instead of the broody countenance of the blonde bouncer, she found the cocky smirk of the dark-haired Toni.

"I was wondering if you were ever going to come up for air. A beautiful woman like yourself shouldn't be upset."

Amanda felt herself tremble slightly, but she gained strength in the fact that they were in a public place, "Toni I really think you should go away."

"That's your problem Amanda. You think too much. If you would just listen to your heart you would quit teasing me and know that we are meant to be together."

"What?" For the first time Amanda thought she saw an unhealthy gleam in Toni's eyes. "I am not

teasing you. I don't like you, The whole time we were together, you cheated on me."

"I see. The blonde little whore is just a tactic to make me jealous."

"What? No. There is no tactic, no teasing. I love Cam and despise you."

"Well, then, where is the whore? This is the day you two hang out. If you two are so in love, where is she?"

"I, I, Toni leave me alone or I will call the campus security."

Before she could react, Toni grabbed her kissing her hard. After a moment, Amanda was able to push her away.

"I'm getting tired of your games, Amanda. Get rid of the blonde and come back to me where you belong before I take care of the blonde." Toni threatened with a sneer.

As Toni walk away, everything felt unreal. She wasn't sure if she should report Toni. Toni was all bark, right? She wiped her mouth with her hand. It came away smeared lightly with liquid red, she sat heavily in her chair. 'If I ignore it, it will go away.' she repeated to herself over and over. Each time she became more angry with Cameron, Toni and herself.

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Cam was on her side lying on the tile floor, a flashlight in her mouth and a screwdriver in her hand. She peered into inky depths that most men would kill for a glimpse at, the Women's shower. The shower in the women's dressing room was backing up, and her mission was to find out why. For the past week Cameron had been avoiding just about everybody -- Peter, Mario, Dee, Georgia, and Amanda especially Amanda. She wasn't very good at the 'I'm sorry I'm such a dumbass' speech. It really hadn't mattered before but she knew in a tiny part of her brain that it mattered this time. A part of her even knew the longer she continued to pretend that it didn't matter that it would be that much worse. Still, she refused to listen. However, the part of her brain that told her that maybe she should seek counseling was starting to get through.

There was a small cough from above her, and she looked up and to see the tenacious redhead who, of all the rotten luck, was Amanda's roommate. Cam froze, trying to think of what to do. Figuring there wasn't much she could do while she was lying on the floor in a shower with a flashlight in her mouth and that she probably deserved the new asshole that Sammy would rip her, she figured it was best just to go with the moment.

"Can I help you?" Cam mumbled out, turning back to the drain.

"My your job does have perks. Too bad no one is using it at the moment."

"How did you get back here?" Cam asked. Sitting up she put the flashlight into her pocket.

"I just walked in told them 'I'm here to smack some sense into the lesbian'. The whole bar cheered, and here I am."

"I see. Well, get started then."

Sammy looked uncomfortable, "Um, actually I needed somebody to talk to and I kind of know you but in an outside circular sort of way. But I know you'll be straight, um, so to speak with me and keep it between us."

Cam sighed, rubbing her head causing the short spikes to lean back and to the right.

"Hey that's kind of cute how your hair does that."

"Sammy... the point."

"Oh, right. Okay. Um, let's say you have this friend and all the time that you've know her, she's been gay, into women, but then one day she tells you 'I've met the love of my life and he's a guy.' What would you do? Would you freak out, get pissed at her, or never speak to her?"

"No."

Sammy stood there stunned for a moment. "That's it?"

"So you're Bi, big whoop, now if you don't mind I've got a drain to unclog."

"Ahhhh, Cameron you say the sweetest things. However, I need you to use your hidden vocabulary talents and expand that 'No' for me."

"Sammy when I was in High School my best friend was a guy named Tim. I swear, everybody, including myself, thought he was a closeted queen. The boy hardly had any testosterone in his body, but as it turns out, he had been in love with this girl Stace for years and last I heard, they were married with two boys."

"Your point."

"My point is several things. Everybody can assume what they want about you, but nobody but you can know who or what you want out of life but you. So what? You shock a few people, but isn't it worth it if that person ends up being the one who completes you? Gender is secondary. My other point is this: attraction is that part of your brain that wants to feel good. It could care less if it's a vagina or a penis. So maybe you should really think about this. Is it lust for the sake of feeling good or love with promise many mornings together? Nik's a sweetheart and you're pretty okay yourself, but there's a big chance of a big hurt. So, you need to make sure this is what you want."

Cam stared at the redhead who was deep in thought; Sammy's green eyes met her blue ones.  
"Hey, thanks Cam. How'd you get so wise?"

"You're joking, right? I work in a strip club, I got nothing but time to work on the deeper meanings of life while I drop kick people out of the bar. Now if you'll excuse me I have a drain to conquer while I reflect on whether the chicken or the egg came first."

Sammy laughed, "Oh, Cam?"

"Yes."

"You hurt my roommate really bad when you left without a word; all she does is mope around. If you care at all, you'll fix it; if you don't care, I don't want to see you within a ten-foot radius of her. You got me?"

Cam looked at the yellowish-white tile. She could see her and Sammy's shadows. "Sammy, I'm scared. I'm scared of letting her in, I'm scared of how she makes me feel, and I'm scared that I won't be good enough."

"Cam, you're a big butch bouncer. I'm sure you're strong enough to at least talk to her about your fears, but if not, remember: ten foot radius."

"Ten-foot radius. I got it"

"Thanks for the talk Cameron. Oh and if they ask? I smacked you down good."

"You betcha Sammy."

Cameron turned back to the drain, her thoughts on the best way to approach a certain brainy dark-haired woman.

## **Part 6**

Cam sat on a stool sipping a coke. Today was her day off, but she was at the bar because she

didn't have anything better to do. It was 6 o'clock on a Thursday evening the bar was virtually dead; the dancers didn't start till nine. With her straw, she blew bubbles into her drink. She was loath to admit it but she was lonely and she missed hanging out with people. By people, she meant Amanda. She really missed Amanda.

She let out a groan that sounded slightly like a mountain goat dying and rested her head on the top of the bar. The polished wood felt cool on her skin.

"Hey Tough Stuff." Came Mario's voice from somewhere behind her.

"Ugh, kill me now." She mumbled.

"You want to come grab a few shots with Peter and me?"

She sat up glaring at him

"Okay by the look that could freeze a lava flow, I will take that as a no."

"What's the matter Cameron? You not feel so good after last time?" Peter piped in.

"Thanks to you two I made an ass out of myself in front of Amanda."

"Right Tough Stuff. Like you need our help for that. You're perfectly capable of making an ass out of yourself all on your own."

Cam slumped down on her stool and went back to blowing bubbles in her drink. Mario looked worriedly over at Peter. Cam's moods had been running from depressed to bitchy.

Dee had cornered Mario in the dressing room and with Karl blocking the entrance and exit, she had proceeded to wring the story of the three's little adventure with alcohol followed by the finale of Peter and Mario dumping a very intoxicated Cam at Amanda's.

Dee had yelled loud and long at the Dancer, and Mario had been left cowering in fear. Dee had left with the ultimatum of Mario either fixing it or getting the hell out of the state because she would make sure that he was out of a job here or anywhere else.

Wincing again as he remembered Dee's words, he sucked up what courage he had left and went up and sat next to the young woman at the bar.

"Cam, I'm going to speak very slowly. I want you to listen."

"Go away Mario."

"You're not listening."

"Fine, I'm listening."

"Cam you miss her.."

"I don't know who you are talking about."

"Listening. We're using our listening ears."

"Fine, I'm listening, again."

"Good. Where was I?"

"Missing the girl, honey." Peter spoke up helpfully.

"Right." He paused, collecting his thoughts. Trying to form his strategy, he finally threw caution to the wind and dug in. "Cam just go spank your inner angst demon or whatever you have to do. Then, when you finish spanking that demon, stick your courage to that Shakespearian sticking place and go apologize."

Both of Cam's eyebrows shot into blonde bangs, "What?"

"I recommend using flowers." Peter added.

"Or chocolate." Came Jason's suggestion from behind the bar.

"A stuffed animal is good." Broke in Monica.

"Maybe a romantic dinner." Came from Chuck.

"Write the girl a poem." Was Dee's suggestion.

The bar went quiet and everybody stopped and stared.

"What?" Came Dee's snarly reaction. "It just so happens Georgia loves it when I write her a poem."

"Did anyone else just go to a scary visual in their heads?" Jason asked.

Hands rose.

"I don't pay you people to sit around and run your mouths." Dee barked out.

Cam put her head back on the bar and covered it with her hands; maybe everybody would just go away. Somebody started tapping on her shoulder. Damn. "What?"

"For the love of something holy, Cam. Go get the girl, even if it means you have to get down on your knees and beg. Fuck your pride; I saw the look in your eye when you talked about Amanda."

Go get the girl."

"Peter, honey. They're lesbians. I'm sure Amanda would be ecstatic if Cam got down on her knees." Mario pointed out to his boyfriend.

Cam growled and gave Mario the evil eye, "Mario shut up."

"Come on Tough Stuff, you know you love her."

Cam's head rose up off the bar her lungs filled with oxygen so she could properly rant on the bullshit that was love when Mario ended it before it began by slapping a hand over her mouth. "No talking. Now is the time for action. Remember, spank the inner angst demons, Tough Stuff; it's time to move on with your life. Now go get the girl. You know you want to." He gave her a light push off the stool. Mario knew she wasn't really upset with him or she would have kicked his ass by now.

Cam stood there for a moment with every eye in the bar focused on her, waiting to see what she would do. She grabbed her jacket and looked Mario in the eye, "You suck. You know that?"

"Yep, but you love me anyways."

Cam looked at him, deep in thought. "You know I think I do."

Mario looked like a stunned fish for a moment, then he gave a sheepish smile, "Good, but there's someone you love even more and I think she needs to know it."

Cam nodded thoughtfully, and started for the door.

"Hey Cameron, aren't you forgetting something?" Dee asked.

"What? No I don't think so."

"The keys to the Jeep."

Cam gave a large smile, took the keys for Dee's Jeep and took off.

Dee walked over to Mario. "You did good, boy. I thought a couple of times you were going to fuck it up, but you did good. "

Beaming with pride Mario said, "Thanks."

"Now take your boyfriend and get out of my bar. You're not working, and I'm still pissed at you for getting her drunk in the first place."

"Yes Dee, right away."

-----

Cam sat in the Jeep, staring out of the window at Amanda's apartment, the smell of coffee twirling around her. All she needed to do was get out of the car and walk to the front door. It was very possible that Amanda wasn't even home. She opened the door, and then shut it.

She opened the door again, and then shut it again.

She opened the door and got out. Then, she got back inside the car and shut the door.

She opened the door got out, stomped around, called herself a chicken; then got back in. But this time, she didn't shut the door.

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Sammy leaned against the table looking out the window, "You think she's finally snapped?"

"Probably." Amanda said looking up from her biology homework.

"Are you going to go get her?" Sammy questioned.

"No." Amanda replied, not looking up. "Let her look like an idiot for awhile, I don't care."

"Yes you do." Sammy said laughing as she watched Cam walk halfway across the street then run back to the Jeep.

"She made me feel like an ass for no reason -- well, no reason that she cared to give me. As far as I know I didn't do anything at all. She just let me feel like I did something wrong when it was all her."

"That doesn't mean you don't care. If you didn't care, her actions would never have hurt you in the first place."

"Quit being so logical."

"You have to watch this, oh, I think she's going to make it across the street this time. Go, go, go, Cameron. Go, Cameron. Awe, she went back to the; wait she's going to try again. Damn, nope she's gone back to the jeep."



Amanda started to laugh at the play by play Sammy was doing.

"Oh, she's pulling a secret weapon out of the Jeep. Looks like someone is getting a gift."

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Cam stood nervously in front of the door. She had done it; she had belly crawled that mountain, swam that ocean, err, okay she had made it across the street and she had even looked both ways all nine times. However, the street had felt as wide as the Pacific Ocean each time. Now, all she had to do was knock.

She lightly tapped on the door, 'way to go dumbass, nobody could have heard that', she thought to herself. The door opened.

"Ah, oh, um. Hi, Sammy." She stammered out.

Sammy just looked really amused

"Is Amanda in?"

"She is, but I've been told to tell you to drop dead."

"UH- Oh! That doesn't sound too good."

"Nope. You, my friend, are very much in the doghouse." Sammy paused, "Come on in, she's in the kitchen."

Cam walked down the hallway. Stopping at the doorway, she saw Amanda's back.

"Good luck." Sammy whispered.

Cam took a big breath then entered the kitchen.

"I thought I gave pretty clear instructions that you were not to be let inside." The dark haired woman said angrily, not turning around.

"Ah" Cam started, then stopped. She didn't know how to respond to that. "Um, I'm sorry."

"Is that a question or a statement of fact?"

"Uh." Oh boy, was Cam out of her depth! "I'm sorry." She said again only with more conviction.

"I, um, brought you a gift. To show the depth of my sorryness."

Amanda turned around, her blue eyes blazing, "Oh, and that makes the way you treated me okay. Just because you bought me a gift."

"Well, they said it couldn't hurt." Cam winced. This wasn't going well at all. She knew she was fucked.

"Well, they are wrong." Amanda stood up and came baring down angrily on Cameron.

To her credit, Cam didn't move but everything was becoming a little surreal for her.

"Flowers and candy won't just erase the crappy way you acted. I thought we had connected, that you trusted me enough, that you were starting to open up. Then you bolt; no note, no phone call. You Bitch!" Amanda had really worked herself up and all the hurt and confusion she had been feeling was channeling and feeding into her anger. Cam just stood there calmly letting Amanda yell at her with only a slight crinkle in her forehead. Then Amanda snapped and slapped Cameron hard across the face.

Cam was having a hard time focusing. Reality and memories kept overlapping. Time kept shifting between the past and the present. Oddly, it seemed that Amanda and her mother were yelling at her at the same time. Maybe it was being in the kitchen. Her mother had yelled and hit her a lot in the kitchen, possibly because that was where all the alcohol was kept.

Cameron saw the slap coming and froze. She couldn't understand; was her mother hitting her or was it Amanda? Was she a teenager trapped in hell with her mother again, or was she an adult trying to prove what an idiot she had been to the woman she loved?

Air molecules compressed and were pushed out of the way as a palm violently connected with the flesh of her cheek, and then the scattered molecules vibrated, creating the sound of flesh striking flesh.

Cameron's head rocked to the side; her balance shifted heavily and then was lost. She crashed into the floor in a daze. Her memories of the past won and she found herself once again a teenager in the kitchen of the shitty apartment she had grown up in with her mother. Her mother was wildly swinging around a belt, too drunk to hit anything accurately, and shouting obscenities. Instinctively, she rolled into a ball, throwing her arms up to protect her head.

"Please stop, please. Whatever I did, I won't do it again. I promise, if you just stop hitting me."

"Cameron." A soft voice said, "Cameron it's okay. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry I slapped you. Please come back, Cameron. Please."

The voice didn't sound like her mother's. It sound like Amanda's. She blinked her eyes and slowly unwound herself from the fetal position on the floor. Then she remembered she was at Amanda's and that she had panicked. She had lost herself somehow. It wasn't the first time

something had triggered a memory. Once, in a store some lady had been wearing the perfume that her mother had worn. Another time, some guy on the bus had been whistling a jingle that one of her mother's creepier boyfriends had been fond of.

Amanda was nearly in tears. She hadn't meant to hit Cameron, but her anger had just built up. Still, she knew there was no excuse for her behavior. Her heart broke to see the way Cameron had reacted. Gone was the cocky self-assured bouncer and in its place was a scared and fragile little girl. On her hands and knees in front of the trembling ball of flesh, Amanda gently touched arms, hands, and stroked Cam's hair. All the time she did this, she whispered, "Cam it's okay. It's okay. I'm so sorry I slapped you. Please come back. I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Slowly, hands and arms unwrapped themselves and blue-gray eyes blinked as if waking up; slowly they focused into the present.

For a moment, Amanda thought that Cam would bolt. So, she did the only thing she could think of. She threw her body onto Cam's and hugged her tight. She tried to convey how sorry she was, how much she cared, and how much she hurt as well in that frantic press of muscle and flesh.

Cam stiffened as Amanda wrapped her taller body around her shorter one and hugged Cameron tight. It was too much for Cam. She felt like there was a battering ram pounding into some barrier inside her. This was not what she had planned. She brought over some fresh Irish cream coffee as a peace offering. Amanda would yell Cam would kiss ass and apologize. They'd make-up and things would be good. Things had not gone as planned.

Cam needed to get out of here. She was crumbling, falling apart. There were deep fractures opening up inside of her, threatening to destroy the walls she had up to keep everyone at bay. Amanda continued to hug her tighter as she weakly tried to escape. Suddenly, barriers inside her broke and deep sobs tumbled out. Tears followed and then came the anger. She cried and yelled; she wanted to bury herself in the comfortable warmth and safety, yet she was unable to believe it was real and being offered. Then there was another warmth holding her and she was wrapped in warmth with two different voices telling her that it was okay, that she was safe and to let it out.

Amanda wasn't sure when Sammy had come into the kitchen, but she was thankful that she had, because for a few moments when Cameron's anger and rage had burned its hottest, she had been afraid. Afraid that she wouldn't be enough, that she wouldn't be able to hold on and Cameron would escape again. Sammy had come in and without a word knelt down and enveloped them both in a hug as wide as her arms could stretch. Together, they had sandwiched Cam and slowly the yelling slowed till the blonde was just crying. Slowly, the crying stopped as well.

Cameron rested her head on Amanda's chest, lacking any real strength in her body. The world felt surreal again in her exhaustion. However, there was no blending of past and present. The present oddly felt hopeful and warm. Finally Cam felt able to move, but she needed space. One doesn't freak out in the middle of somebody else's kitchen and not expect to have to do some explaining. She really wasn't up for the explaining part yet.

"Um, as much as I'm enjoying being sandwiched between two hot women, I need to use the

bathroom."

Amanda was unsure if it was wise to let Cameron go. She looked at Sammy. Sammy just smiled encouragingly and nodded her head. Both women slowly let go, somewhat expecting Cam to bolt, but the blonde didn't. Instead, she slowly wiped her face with the sleeve of the shirt she was wearing, then looked up.

"Ah, could somebody give me a hand up?"

Amanda pulled Cam up. As she did so, Cam wouldn't meet her eyes but gave her hand a light squeeze, then went off to the bathroom. Once inside she slumped against the door.

"You think she's okay?" Questioned Amanda.

"Sure she just needed to go put her armor back on. So what happened?"

Amanda looked down, "Oh, she, I, well, I slapped her."

Sammy just raised an eyebrow in question.

"She was just being Cam and I was still so angry that I slapped her and, she, it was like I broke her. It was the saddest thing, one minute she's all cocky bouncer girl and the next she's a hurt little girl."

"You know, my Dad never talks about when he was a policeman and he was pinned down with his partner during a bank robbery. Once, when I was 12, my brothers and I lit some firecrackers and sent them out on the driveway, what we didn't see was our dad bringing the garbage out from around the side of the house. Basically, we threw them right in front of him. They go off popping and Dad flips he drops everything and curls on the ground sobbing. It was the most disturbing thing we had ever seen."

Amanda had to agree. Mr. O'Brien was a huge mountain of a man.

"All of us were of course grounded for a month for doing that, but I never forgot it. Later, dad and I talked about it, but it's hard for him to admit he has a problem and isn't as strong as he would like to be. Sometimes certain events, smells, or sounds can trigger memories. Particularly painful ones can resurface to be relived."

"So me slapping Cam..."

"More than likely. However, you don't know till you get her to talk about it. But Amanda, it may not be enough, depending on what happened. She should probably see a professional."

Amanda nodded, lost in thought.

Sammy left Amanda to think and walked over and picked up the sack that Cameron had dropped.

"Ooooo. Somebody likes you." Sammy squealed. "She so has your number." The redhead said as she pulled out a smaller sack labeled Irish cream. "She knows your favorite coffee, and chocolate. She's a keeper despite her issues."

Cam splashed cold water on her face, 'come on dumbass get your shit together before she decides you're not worth it'. As pep talks went, it sucked. She looked at herself in the mirror and decided she was as put together as she was going to get.

-----

Toni stared at the apartment. She had watched the blonde go in. She thought she had made herself clear and had put an end to this silliness, but apparently not. The blonde was preventing Amanda and her from being together; the blonde was ruining her happiness. She threw the flowers that she had bought down on the ground and pulled a knife from her pocket. Quickly and angrily, she jabbed the knife forward, sinking it deep into the black flesh of the tire. Again and again, she punctured the tire, all the time wishing it was the pink flesh of the bouncer her knife was piercing.

Denied. Always being denied her happiness. Denied that which belonged to her. She was tired of being ignored, tired of that blonde in her way. She would take care of it. Soon, very soon, all that should be hers would.

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Cam opened the door of the bathroom and walked down the hallway to the living room. In the living room, Sammy sat on an ugly green couch reading a magazine.

"Hey slugger. Don't you look nice."

Sammy put down the magazine she was reading and brushed her hands down her tan slacks wiping invisible wrinkles out. "I have a date."

"A date. With the drag queen?"

"Yes, with Nik." Sammy carefully studied Cam's face to see if she would give her shit about it.

"Is he okay with the fact you like chicks?" She asked.

"Yes, I think. All I know at this point is that I really like him and that's all that matters."

"But do you like him enough to date and, or, spend the rest of your life with?"

"I, I don't know but this is the first step in finding out."

"Well good luck. But you're so calm, you don't need it." Cam said with a smile.

"I do need it. I think I might throw up. I'm not calm at all but this is important and he's worth it."

"Good luck, slugger."

Sammy smiled. Then her smile turned devilish. "Speaking of important my roomy is in the kitchen making some coffee. Excellent call by the way on the coffee. You should go in and try again to say you're sorry, but this time if she tries to slap you, please duck."

Cam looked embarrassed and gave a sheepish smile; "Must seem kind of funny, a tough bouncer like me getting slapped."

"No it's not funny at all, Cam. Sometimes we get lost and tangled up in the weight of things long past. If you really care about Amanda, talk to her."

Cam shifted uncomfortably. Sammy's words struck too close to home.

The doorbell rang and Sammy leapt up. Wide-eyed, she asked Cam, "Do I look okay?"

"You're beautiful Sammy."

Sammy smiled and ran over; giving Cam a hug, she whispered. "Just be honest with her and yourself, but use baby steps." Then Sammy ran to the door and opened it. Nik gave a small wave before Sammy was off, slamming the door and dragging the poor boy away.

Cam looked around the living room. Then, with a sigh she said, "Right. The kitchen."

Cam entered the kitchen and froze as her eyes locked with Amanda's. Cameron felt herself dog paddling in circles; as she was momentarily lost in the blue of Amanda's eyes.

Unnerved by the intensity of the look, Amanda spoke hoping, to discharge the feeling. "I made coffee. Thank you, by the way. Irish cream is my favorite."

"I know." Cam said softly. She walked over to grab a cup.

"You know?"

"I noticed each time we were together that you ordered it."

"You noticed."

"Well, yes. You're important to me. Why wouldn't I notice the things you like?"

"In high school," Amanda started shyly, "I never noticed. I never met your family, never was over to your house, and I never asked; but you were important to me. When you disappeared I realized how much."

Amanda didn't move as Cameron walked over to the coffeepot. Cam had to reach around her to grab one of the two coffee cups.

"Amanda, there was nothing to notice in high school, and I never would have shared it with you anyway." Cameron felt like she was too close to Amanda. They were standing inches apart and she could feel Amanda's body heat jumping the gap, sliding on the air currents to mix with her own heat. It was almost too much. The emotional roller coaster of the day was getting to her. Cameron started to step back to give herself some space. Her momentum was stopped as Amanda's hand gently touched her jaw, sliding over to the slightly red cheek.

"I'm really sorry about this, about slapping you."

Cam shrugged "I think for once I deserved it."

"Maybe," Amanda said with a small smile, "but I'm still sorry." Amanda leaned forward and lightly kissed the abused cheek.

Cam nearly dropped her coffee. The kiss moved from cheek to lips, still soft and light. Cam brought a hand up to stroke Amanda's face and then suddenly Cam pulled away with a stunned look on her face.

Amanda bit her lip. Had she misjudged? However, Cam didn't look upset -- just bewildered.

Cam sighed, "That was nice. Much nicer than the drunk kiss I planted on you."

Amanda smiled. "Did we learn a lesson about drinking?"

"Tequila bad. Beer foamy and both make me pray to the toilet gods."

Amanda laughed, "So, my kiss. It was just nice?"

"Oh yes." Cameron said nodding enthusiastically. "But..."

"But?" Amanda asked worriedly.

"Why? I mean, one minute you're royally pissed, and the next minute you're kissing it better."

"I felt like kissing you."

"Oh." Cam said, still confused.

"And, well after I slapped you, my anger was pretty much all in that slap."

"I'm glad I could help you move past your anger.'

"Cam, don't be a smartass."

"Sorry. No actually I am very sorry, Amanda. I'm sorry for coming over here drunk and causing a scene. I'm sorry I just took off on you the next morning and was too chicken to talk to you about anything." She paused, organizing her thoughts. "Um, but if you give me a chance I'd like to start over, to be friends again."

"Just friends or something more?"

Cam swallowed nervously at the devilish look in Amanda's eyes. They were still standing close together.

"Maybe." Cam choked out.

"Maybe?" Amanda questioned licking red lips.

"I feel something for you stronger than friendship, but can we; I need to take it slow. Is that okay?"

Amanda looked at Cameron's face. Cameron looked so nervous and vulnerable; she looked so young and unsure. Then it hit her that Cameron's well-worn amour was off. The stoic woman was trying to open herself up. Hope spilled out of Amanda's soul at being trusted like this and she hugged Cam tightly.

Cam hurried to get her coffee cup down on to the counter before she spilled it everywhere. Way too much touchy feely stuff going on for her liking... Then Amanda pulled back and the happiness she saw reflected on her face made Cam breathless. She, Cameron Hayes, had put it there. She had... her thoughts cut off as Amanda kissed her senseless.

'So much for slow' she thought. Evil thoughts, bad evil thoughts. She was sober, not in high school, and Amanda Walker was trying to get her shirt off and into her pants at the same time. Life was fantastic.

'Shirt off = visible scars, which leads to uncomfortable conversation.' She thought as her brain kicked in.

Cam removed her tongue from Amanda's mouth so she could speak. "Amanda slow, please remember, slow." At the same time, she was trying to pull her shirt back down and remove Amanda's hands which seemed to have multiplied beyond two when she wasn't paying attention.



"Cam you've got me shoved up against the counter so don't be telling me slow."

"Ah, yes." Cam started to step away, but realized that Amanda had her legs wrapped around her. By stepping away, she would disrupt the wedge she had created with her body and the counter, which held Amanda up. Disrupt the wedge and it would ruin her balance and the temporary symbiosis she had formed with gravity would result in Amanda's body being dumped on to the tile floor, which would be a less-than-romantic and caring gesture.

Cam did the only thing she could do. She stepped immediately back so gravity would not become pissed at her, and as she did so, her hips surged into Amanda's and a low strangled groan emerged from her chest as the seam of her jeans pressed wickedly into her clit. Cam dropped her head onto Amanda's shoulder. Licking her lips she husked out, "Amanda I really need you to unwrap your legs."

Amanda had a glazed look in her eye. She felt so good, and Cam wanted to stop. She surged her hips slowly into Cam's, enjoying the heat pooling and simmering in her crotch.

Cam groaned again, fairly certain that she sounded like a Golden Eagle in heat, "Amanda, this isn't taking it slow."

"Cameron, this is taking it too damn slow if you ask me."

"We agree with Amanda on this one. Come on bouncer girl -- use those hips."

Amanda's eyes flew open and she saw an astonished Heidi and a smug looking Sarah standing just inside the kitchen.

"We knocked and then let ourselves in; we had no idea you were, uh, busy."

At the sounds of the voices behind her Cam jerked away from Amanda, finally pissing off gravity and dumping both her and Amanda on to the floor.

"I take it you two have worked things out?" Heidi asked.

"We're working on it." Amanda said with a glare.

"Isn't make-up sex great." Sarah said with a big grin.

"I wouldn't know. People keeping interrupting." Amanda said picking herself off the floor and smoothing out her clothes.

Cameron just lied there with her hands thrown over her face, wishing the floor would swallow her whole. Where were the killer kitchen tiles when you really needed them?

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The rest of the evening was going fairly decently Cam thought. She had to admit though that she was mildly relieved that Heidi and Sarah had stayed and hung out. The thought of being alone with Amanda was a tad bit overwhelming at the moment. Amanda would catch her eye and the look in them was downright predatory. Oddly, she thought that being looked at like she was a piece of meat wasn't a bad thing. It made her feel desired and wanted and those were two very good feelings to have she decided.

They had ordered a pizza and were now sitting around watching the Extreme Sports competition on ESPN that Sarah and Cam had begged to watch.

Cam relaxed next to Sarah as they watched the street luge competition.

"So would you ever do something like that?" Sarah questioned as they watched a person lose control and slam into a bale of hay.

Her eyes gleaming, Cam nodded, "Oh, yes. Look at that. What a rush! I wouldn't turn down the chance to try it. How about you?"

Sarah nodded as well. "Me too; it looks like a lot of fun. You know, I bet I could scrounge some parts from my Dad's garage and make a couple of those sled things."

"Really?"

"Oh, it couldn't be that hard. I look some specs up and we could sneak into Ridgcrest Golf Course. They have all those paved golf cart trails and it's all hilly there. It would be perfect."

"What would be perfect?" Heidi asked.

"Oh Cam and I are going to do some street luge."

"Oh really."

"Yep. It couldn't be so hard to make one of those glider gizmos."

"Uh-huh, and you've taken into account how dangerous it is and how devastated I'd be if you got hurt or worse?"

"Uh" Sarah said, "Um, no, I hadn't gotten that far in my thinking. Sorry, I hadn't, I mean." Sarah floundered.

Cam watched the couple; Heidi didn't seem really seem upset. Maybe they were doing one of

those couple things.

"Honey, it's okay. As long as it's not illegal, it's fine, but when you think about doing dangerous stuff, I wish I was one of the first things you on your mind. When you do stuff like that, it has a huge impact on me." Heidi said. Then she leaned over and took one of Sarah's hands kissing it.

It was one of those couple things. They were being all cute and stuff.

"You got it Honey; you are the first thing on my mind, always. Um, but I don't think Cam and I will actually do it." Sarah responded.

"Whipped." Cameron muttered under her breath only to have Sarah elbow her in the ribs.

"You won't, so what was illegal about it?" The tall blonde asked, looking over the two smaller women critically.

"We were going to break into Ridgecrest and use their paved golf cart trails."

"What? Cameron!" Amanda blurted out.

"What? What did I do?" She asked Amanda.

"You are going to break into a golf course."

"Well, no. Sarah and I were just talking. It was just talk."

"Okay then. Nothing illegal."

"Wuss." Sarah whispered at Cam.

Cam shrugged. She had already been in the doghouse once with Amanda and she wasn't going there again in a less-than-24-hour period.

Amanda and Heidi began talking as Cam and Sarah focused their attention back on the TV.

"So, you work for your Dad in his garage?"

"Yep, much to the dismay of my mother. I seem to have quite the knack for fixing things mechanical."

Heidi nudged Amanda, "Great. Sarah has found another partner in crime. Another warm body she can take carousing to the strip bars."

"I'm glad they seem to have hit it off. I was worried you guys wouldn't like her. As for the strip clubs, it's a forgone conclusion since she works in one."

Heidi groaned, "I forgot. Great somebody with an, 'in', Sarah will be down at the Shady Lady all the time on the pretext of hanging out with Cam. Doesn't it bother you? I mean, she's around all those half-naked women?"

"It hadn't until you brought it up."

"Sorry."

"I guess it does, but there's nothing I can do about it."

"Um, Amanda, uh. You know we're really sorry we walked in while you two were, busy."

Amanda blushed, "Actually it's probably a good thing. I don't think that either one of us was thinking very clearly. Emotions were a bit out of control and if we had continued on, it probably would have caused more problems."

"So are you two a couple?"

"I don't know. We really didn't get a lot of talking done."

"Well, from what I saw in the kitchen, you two have a lot of chemistry."

Amanda just blushed harder.

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As the evening came to a close Amanda felt herself becoming nervous. After the roller coaster of emotion that she had been through with Cameron nothing had really been discussed and she was afraid of what would happen once they said goodnight.

"Well, we should be going." Heidi spoke up.

"But, Heidi, I want to give Sammy a hard time about her date." Said Sarah.

"You can do that the next time you see her. We've already interrupted Amanda and Cam's night enough."

"What? Oh right, we should be going."

Cam fidgeted nervously. She wasn't sure she wanted to be left alone with Amanda without adult supervision. "I, ah, I should probably be going too. I need to get Dee's jeep back to her."

Amanda almost slumped in defeat; "You'll call me right?" She questioned.

Cam smiled shyly; "yes I'll call. How about we go out and grab lunch and a movie, or something."

Amanda smiled in return. She hugged Cam, whispering in her ear. "I'd like that, but the 'or something' could be a lot of fun."

Cam could feel her face becoming warm, "Play nice."

Amanda laughed and Cam hugged her tighter, not wanting to let go, but knowing she should or she would somehow convince herself that there was no need to take things slow.

Amanda felt Cam stiffen, "Come on, I'll walk you out to your car."

"Okay."

As they pulled apart, Cam kissed her softly on the cheek.

The four of them walked outside. Sarah asked, "So Cam, when are you working at the Shady Lady next? I might pop in and say hi."

Heidi gave Amanda knowing look.

I work Saturday night ..." Cam's voice trailed off as she saw the jeep was riding much lower on the driver's side. "God Damn it!" She huffed and ran over to inspect the tires. Both tires on the driver's side were flat. "Damn it! I've only got the one spare." Cameron muttered.

"Not to worry you." Sarah broke in; she bent to look at the damage on the back tire. "But those were slashed with a knife or something sharp."

Amanda went cold and her eyes darted around. Toni, somehow she felt it was Toni's doing.

"Man, this isn't even mine. Its Dee's jeep. She's going to kill me."

"Well, if you can wait until morning, I bet we have some tires at the shop I can bring them by around 8 o'clock."

"Thanks. That's really great, but how am I going to get home?"

"Sarah and I could drop you off."

"I appreciate that, Heidi."

"Actually, Cam would you mind sleeping over with me tonight."

Cam gulped, "I, ah, I..."

"I'd feel better. I don't know when Sammy will be home, and this really has me freaked."

Cameron looked up and caught the wide-open panic look in Amanda's eyes. She stepped closer to Amanda grabbing her hand so she could squeeze it reassuringly. "No problem, I can bunk on your couch."

Behind them Sarah whispered to Heidi, "Couch, yeah right."

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Cam watched as Amanda came into the living room with some sheets and a blanket.

"Ah are you sure you want to sleep on the couch. I mean you could sleep with me? I mean, it's not like we haven't before."

"Yes but it didn't end so well." Cameron spoke out without thinking, catching the hurt expression on Amanda's face. "Shit, Amanda. I'm sorry." She blew out a breath. "It's not that I don't want to but if I, if we, I really want to take things slow and that might be a problem. Putting ourselves in a smaller space with less clothing on, might um, cause my resolve to explode."

Amanda gave a smile, "It might explode, you say?"

"Uh huh."

Amanda laughed and threw the bedding at Cam, "Here, get the couch made up."

As Cam made up the couch, Amanda went into the kitchen and came back with two glasses of water. She sat on the couch next to Cameron, "So, Ms. Hayes, what's up with us?"

Cam coughed as she choked on some water, "I guess this means it's time to have that talk we keep missing."

"Yes it would be that time."

"So, what do you want to talk about?"

"Are we dating?"

Cam nearly shot water out her nose.

"Because, " Amanda continued, "I really don't want to be fuck buddies."

Cam's face was turning red. Gasping for breath, she was finally able to respond. "Amanda I don't want to, um, be, you know." Cam blew out a breath of air. She was having a hard time using the term 'fuck buddies' in conversation. She sipped some water to get her thoughts in order.

"Amanda, I care very deeply for you and I'd like to work on a relationship with you, but I have a hard time trusting people. I'm sure you've heard people talk about how I sleep around and never really see the same person twice." She winced as Amanda nodded. Was she really so bad? "But I don't want that with you I'm fairly certain I want you in my life forever."

Amanda made a little happy noise and sprung forward hugging Cam.

'Jeez you would think I had proposed or something.' Cam thought and then felt panic oozing into her system. 'Slow, just slow down. You are not proposing you are merely setting the ground rules of dating.'

She tentively hugged Amanda back, she wondered if she should bring up her mom. No, baby steps. Already way too much had happened in one little evening.

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The doorknob rattled and there was the soft click of the lock being turned. Amanda's eyes opened and fear jump-started her system. Her eyes wildly searched the room and she realized that she was still in the living room and that she'd fallen asleep on the couch, with Cam. They were packed tightly together on the couch her body spooning Cam's. She had to snort in amusement. This was way less room than her bed and Cam's resolve seemed to be working fine.

The doorknob turned and the door swung inward and Amanda remembered why she had awoken in the first place. Unconsciously, she gripped Cam tighter; Cam whimpered and snuggled closer to Amanda's body.

As Sammy stepped inside, Amanda let out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

"Hey Sammy." Amanda whispered

Sammy whirled around at the sound of Amanda's voice. "Oh, hey you." She smiled devilishly, "Look at you -- all snuggled with the sexy bouncer on the couch. Are you two dressed under that blanket?"

Amanda blushed, "Yes, we are dressed. For some reason, the sexy bouncer wants to take things slow."

"Poor you. It's been what? A year since you've had sex?"

"No, it's only been 8 months. I refused to be defined by the frequency with which I've had sex."

Amanda threw a nice round shaped lime-green pillow at Sammy's head.

"So, how was your date with the boy, goober?"

"It was fun. We went to the Fun Spot and played games and did the indoor mini-golf they have there. I even won the boy a stuffed animal rabbit."

"Did he win you anything?"

Sammy started laughing, "Hell no! Nik has horrible hand eye coordination."

"Guess this means you're the butch in the relationship."

Sammy just laughed harder.

"What's so funny?" Came a sleepy voice.

"Nothing. Sammy just got back from her date."

"Cool. How'd it go, slugger?"

"It was fun."

"Good." Cam said yawning. Then she closed her eyes and went back to sleep, pulling Amanda's hand down over her stomach and intertwining their fingers.

Amanda got a silly happy look on her face, and Sammy threw the nice round lime-green pillow back at her. Amanda stuck out her hand and batted it into the ground.

"So why are you two sleeping on the couch?"

Amanda blew out a breath. "Somebody slashed a couple of tires on Dee's jeep, and Cam only had the one spare. So Sarah's bringing a couple of tires in the morning. Sammy, I think Toni did it. I didn't say anything, cause, well, there's no proof. But it's just a feeling I have."

"Toni! What makes you think she's involved? Not that I put it past her; she's such a slime ball."

"Well, a couple of times at school, I've felt like I was being watched and then just this past week, she came up to me at school and kind of threatened me."

"What? Did you report her?"



"No."

"Why not?"

"I just wanted to forget about it."

"Amanda."

"I know. I know."

"Amanda, I want you to promise me that if she does something else to you that you'll report her right away."

"I promise."

"And don't tell sexy bouncer chick there, cause she'll probably kill Toni."

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Amanda woke as a faint sliver of early morning light caressed her face. She smiled wickedly to herself. She was still wrapped behind Cameron. Her devilish little hand had crept its way under Cam's shirt in the night and was stroking the soft skin of Cam's stomach. She closed her eyes enjoying the sensation of Cam's skin under her fingertips.

Amanda's smile slowly reversed itself as her fingers hit rough bumps breaking up the landscape of the flesh she was trying to map.

All the time Amanda was doing this, Cameron was awake. She had thought about stopping Amanda, but decided to allow it. Better to know now if Amanda would be repulsed. She held her breath as Amanda's fingers slowed and then stopped. She waited for them to move away. Instead, the fingers spread out and the palm joined them on her skin. Cameron was pulled in tight and she felt Amanda rest her head on her shoulder blade. After a moment, small shudders seemed to roll through Amanda's body and she felt a warm wetness soak into her shirt.

Cameron rolled over, and grabbed Amanda's face and fiercely wiped away the tears. "Don't!" She commanded. "Don't cry for me or about scars on my body."

"Who?" Amanda choked out.

"It happened along time ago; it doesn't matter."

"It matters to me!" Amanda yelled.

Sammy heard arguing coming from the living room and threw a pillow over her head. It was too early in the morning to deal with the children. Let them kill each other, she decided.

Cam stared hard into Amanda's eyes. Finally, she sighed and rolled back over; it was easier to talk about it if she didn't have to look into Amanda's eyes.

"My mom and some of her various boyfriends did it. That's why I ran away, really. I just couldn't take her and her drinking anymore, so I ran. That's why you never came over. Why the hell would I bring the prettiest, most popular, and richest girl in high school to some shitty crack apartment in the worst part of town to meet my abusive alcoholic mother?"

"I'm so sorry, Cameron."

Cameron stiffened, "Don't, just don't. I don't want your sorry's or your pity." Cameron struggled to untangle her body from the blanket and Amanda.

Amanda just grabbed on tighter, "I'm not letting you run away again, we're having a conversation."

"What, and you're going to stop me if I want to get up." Cameron snapped back.

They struggled and Cameron found herself flat on her back on the couch. She decided Amanda was a lot stronger than she looked or acted.

"You cannot just bolt when things get to stressful for you, not if you want to have any kind of romantic type relationship with me."

Cam just stared up at Amanda wide-eyed, "Okay, you're right. I'm sorry." She finally replied.

Amanda smiled and let go of Cameron's arms, "See, that wasn't so bad."

Cam made a face.

Amanda laughed then snuggled down on top of Cameron, "Let me know if I start squishing you."

"Okay." Came a muffled response.

After a little while of enjoying being close Amanda's hands crept back under Cameron's shirt. Cam stiffened a little at first, but then relaxed into the touch. She was just dozing back off when she felt Amanda lift herself up and hem of her shirt hike up. Cameron's blue-gray eyes snapped open, "What are you doing?"

"I want to see."

"Aren't you moving a bit fast here?"

"Cam, I want to see the scars. Is that okay?"

"Oh, those. Why can't you be like every other horny lesbian and want to see my boobies?" Cameron joked nervously.

"I want to see those too, but if I see those we may never get up and that would mean we would totally blow your resolve to go slow."

Cameron looked into Amanda's pleading puppy-dog expression and was lost. "Fine. Have at it."

Nervously, Cam stared at the ceiling trying to pretend it was some cold, clinical, detached, hospital visit. She felt her shirt as it was slowly hitched up stopping below her breasts and she heard Amanda's need to take a sudden breath of oxygen, and she shut her eyes to keep the liquid forming there from escaping.

Amanda looked at what should have been smooth unmarred flesh, only to see the reality of life written on the skin. She touched each raised line; pale pencil thin lines, ghosts of moments that lingered, engraved on the body.

Each time Amanda traced a piece of flesh Cam would get flashes of memory: some small weaselly redheaded guy with a cigarette, her mom pushing her into the corner of the kitchen table, some junky in the stairwell with a broken bottle. Muscles and tissue remembered and held memories of their own.

Amanda traced a circular puckered scar, "tell me?" She asked quietly.

Cameron just shook her head, "Not now, it's too much. Maybe later." She whispered back.

Amanda nodded, her long hair waving back and forth on Cameron's stomach, tickling and causing Cameron's muscles to twitch and Cameron to gasp with sensation. Amanda leaned down as she kissed each raised line, each pale line, soothing the flesh and lulling the memories back to sleep, putting the past away for the moment. She wasn't finished, but it was enough for now. It was more than she had known before. She looked up at Cam's face, wanting to see those stormy eyes but they were closed to her. She raised herself up to kiss them, "You're beautiful." She whispered and continued to kiss Cam's face. Last she kissed red lips and moaned as she felt life return to Cam's body.

Cam tangled her hands into Amanda's hair and pulled her strongly to her mouth. She was alive and she hadn't realized she had been on life support. All she needed was Amanda; her skin, her lips, and her hands all hungered for Amanda. She needed to devour her.

"Don't make me get the hose." Came a gruff, barely awake voice. "Amanda has a perfectly good bed in her room not 15 feet away with a door that shuts preventing other people from seeing things that will give them wet dreams for months."

Cam cracked an eye open hoping with the fierceness of her glare she could kill the redhead.

"Dear Lord, can't you two at least wait until I've had my coffee and I'm awake enough to enjoy the peepshow?"

Amanda gave a growl of frustration. Cam, not quite sure why she wanted to go slow anymore flipped Sammy off and pulled the blanket up over their heads quite intent on finishing what they had started. They were back in a heated lip lock when Sammy threw a large pitcher of cold water on them. Sammy tore off screaming through the house with Amanda hot on her heels. Cam just sat there, with a bemused expression on her face, she was fairly dry since Amanda had been on top. Thinking to herself that she didn't work Sunday evening and nobody would be home, so maybe she would make a romantic dinner for Amanda that night. Maybe, if Amanda wanted to, she would spend the night. They could watch movies or something. She grinned. As Amanda would say, "The 'or something' could be a lot of fun."

She scratched her head and decided what the world needed now was hot, fresh coffee. Somewhere in the house she could hear a shower running and Sammy screaming that it was cold.

## **Part 7 the end**

The heavy bag swayed and wood in the ceiling groaned under the pressure. Cameron's mind wasn't really into her workout. Instead, it was running over a mental list in her head to make sure her romantic dinner plans went off without a hitch. By the end of the evening, if all went well Amanda would be thoroughly romanced. An evil grin sprouted on her face. Cam nearly whooped in delight. Ever since Friday morning, she had been feeling good. No, good really didn't describe it. She felt light and warm, almost bubbly. At work on Saturday she had cut jokes and once she caught herself giggling for no good reason other than that she was happy. Maybe this was love, her brain mused. She froze. Love, oh god, was she was in love! It felt wondrous. How long till it turned sour and black?

Cam started to have a panic attack. She bent over, grasping her knees. 'Please' she thought, 'if there's a higher power of any kind, I need a sign that it's going to be okay.' The bag completed the outer circular orbit of its momentum and started its return course, hitting Cam in the head; she went sprawling onto the floor.

She got up, dazed. She glared at the slowly rotating bag. "Well, if that was my sign, I think it knocked some sense into me," She said with a laugh. Thankful that her panic attack had been cut

short, she grabbed her water and took a swallow.

"Cameron, are you down here?" Georgia's voice came drifting in.

"I'm back here."

Georgia's form appeared in the doorway, "My goodness. I'm always so impressed that a little thing like you can make that big old bag move."

Cam had to laugh, "That's why I'm the bouncer. What's up?"

"I'm off to play poker with the girls. You have the house until 9. When is Amanda coming over?"

"Around seven."

"Well that gives you two hours to set up your web of seduction."

Cameron blushed.

"Just no screwing upstairs. You may eat dinner up there, but if you want to fool around, you bring it downstairs."

"Georgia!"

"Hush, I'm just giving you a hard time. You're so nervous. Relax. Everything will be fine, but I have to say I'm very happy to see you taking your 'thing' with Amanda seriously. Making her a romantic dinner, I didn't even know you could cook something other than mac and cheese."

Cameron laughed, "I don't. The Italian place by the mall is delivering the food in 45 minutes."

"Well good. Now I know I won't be coming home to any dead bodies."

Cameron tried hard to look indignant but couldn't wipe the happy smile off her face.

"Well, I'm going. Please feed Saffy for me."

"Never fear, that fat tabby of yours will not go hungry."

Georgia gave Cam a quick hug, then retreated.

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Toni watched as the older woman pulled out of the garage and drove off down the street. She emerged from the bushes and quickly rolled under the slowly shutting garage door. She smirked coldly. Time to straighten everything out, starting with the blonde.

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Cameron pulled on a pair of tan slacks looking at the shirts piled on the floor; she was trying to decipher if it was a clean pile or a dirty pile. She scratched her belly, freezing as she felt the uneven breaking of her skin. She slowly pushed her feelings of anger and disgust away. They did not bother Amanda and although the scars still bothered her, she would not let the past, not let her mother ruin this evening.

She chose a white T-shirt pulled it over her head and tucked it into her pants. Hmm, maybe an over-shirt, a blue button up. She smiled. It reminded her of Amanda's eyes. Suddenly, there came a horrible crashing noise and the yowl of a frightened cat.

Cam ran up the stairs, "God damn it Saffy! What the hell did you knock over now?" Never in her life had Cam witnessed a less graceful creature. Saffy was a klutz. She slid into the kitchen on sock-covered feet to see the remnants of a white plate and a pitiful black and white furball yowling in the middle of the kitchen.

Cam laughed, "Saffy, did you try and jump up on the counter again? You know you're too fat to make it up there, don't you?" The cat just stared at her with yellowish green eyes and yowled some more.

"You're fine, you big baby." She scratched the cat's chin and it calmed down. Sighing, she bent down to pick up the broken pieces of serving ware.

From behind Cameron, Toni emerged out of the shadows of the unlit hallway. The larger woman grinned, exposing white straight teeth that seemed to glow in the darkness she occupied; in her right hand, she shifted her grip on the black handled knife. The blonde bouncer was crouched over picking something off the floor, leaving her back exposed. Toni could already envision several points of flesh she could ram her knife into. Her grin got larger. She could already smell the iron scent of blood and hear the blonde's screams of pain. In her mind, she had already won. She stepped forward into the light.

Saffy suddenly hissed, standing up on her feet, her fur puffed out. She looked like a cross between a cow and a puffer fish. The cat's hiss turned into a warning growl at the approaching human.

Cam's head jerked, and she looked at the cat, who was displaying behavior she had never witnessed before. Cam realized that Saffy was looking behind her and she idly wondered if

another cat had gotten into the house. She cocked her head so she could see what Saffy was looking at; there was a blur of motion. Instincts honed from years of living with her mother saved her life; she ducked her head and brought her arm and shoulder up.

The knife slashed into her upper arm and shoulder instead of her throat, Cameron didn't even pause to think. She let instinct for survival take over. She threw the broken shards of plate still in her left hand at her attacker's head and kicked her right foot straight back aiming for a knee. The attacking body yelled in pain and went down. Cam lunged for the front door, only to be tripped up by a hand grabbing her foot. She fell hard on her injured shoulder smearing the kitchen tile with her blood. She grunted in pain. Her mind screamed at her to get up.

Cameron scrambled to her feet dodging another wild slash from her attacker she tried again for the door only to be cut off. She slid in her socks and changed her course heading for the stairs to the basement. She fumbled with the knob and wrenched it open, from behind she was grabbed and slammed into the doorframe and twirled around. Cam stared into the face of her attacker, knowing she should recognize her from somewhere, but her brain was scrambled. Cam mumbled out from split and bleeding lips, "Who the fuck are you?"

The face in front of hers twisted in rage. "Who am I?" A voice shouted at her, "I'm the person whose life you stole, you bitch."

"That's a bit over dramatic." Cam said with a sneer. Faking a kick to the woman's knee, she jabbed her hand forward stabbing her index finger into the woman's eye.

The woman howled jerking her head back and Cam tried to twist away only to be slammed back into the doorframe.

"Bitch! I've had it with you; I'm finally going to get what's mine. Amanda belongs to me. You got that."

Cam felt her rage rise, "You fucking psycho. You leave Amanda alone!" They struggled, fighting for control of the knife. Cam twisted away as it was jabbed forward, grabbing the woman's hand she tried to twist it away but her hand was too slick with her own blood. Cam was in a bad position and she knew it. She screamed as pain erupted in side. Everything stopped and Cam looked down to see the knife sticking out of her side.

The woman smiled, "Amanda's mine. Good-bye, Cameron." Toni pushed the smaller woman down the stairs. Cam landed in heap at the bottom. Toni just shut the door, ignoring the bloody handprint. She moved to the freezer to get some ice for her eye. She also didn't notice the bloody hand print she left on the freezer door. She sat with a bloody bag of ice on her face for 5 minutes before she got up, absently washing her face and hands. There was a knock on the door and she went and opened it. A small dark-haired man stood there holding a paper bag.

"Are you Cameron Hayes?"

She nodded absently.

"Here you go. I hope your date goes well." He said with a smile. Walking off, he wondered what was wrong with her eye.

Toni sat down at the table; she had actually killed somebody. She opened the sack, smelling the food. Date? Date? Her face drew into a scowl. That bitch was supposed to have a date with her woman.

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Amanda approached the house trying to calm the feeling of dread ricocheting around in her gut. She smiled as she saw the sign on the door: "Come on in, Amanda."

She entered the house following the arrows to the dining room where a beautiful candle-lit dinner was waiting. Amanda felt her breath catch, and she sat down.

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Downstairs, Cam was fighting to gain consciousness. Pain played tag all over her body. She groaned, trying to get up on her hands and knees. As she put pressure on her right knee, pain billowed out. She scrambled to stay upright, but slipped in her own blood. Cam lied on the floor, willing herself to focus. 'Come on dumbass. That psycho is on the loose and after Amanda. Pull your shit together.'

She flipped over on her back, idly wondering how she was going to get the bloodstain out of the carpet; off to her right, she saw the knife. She should probably get that she might need it later, but she was so tired. Everything became hazy, and she blacked out.

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Amanda jumped as a hand came down and rested on her shoulder from behind. She sucked in a startled breath, "Oh Cam, you scared me I didn't even hear you approach." Cam didn't say anything, merely started to rub her shoulders and neck.



"This is so beautiful. Thank you." Still, Cam didn't say anything. Amanda's brows scrunched up. Something was wrong. Cam's touch on her neck and hair was actually causing a feeling of disgust. Then, it hit her. The hands were too large, and everything was out of proportion. Her body stiffened and she tried to control her reaction so the body behind her wouldn't notice. She lifted up the shiny clean plate in front of her, pretending to study the pattern. "Beautiful place settings, Georgia's doing?" She questioned, angling the plate so she could see the person behind her. A blizzard of fear erupted in her head as she saw Toni's image reflected back at her. She set it back down, trying to stay calm and not give anything away. Oh god where was Cam? What had Toni done to Cameron?

"Cameron, why aren't you saying anything?" She tried to sound innocent when she asked it. Meanwhile, she grabbed the fork in her sweaty palm.

"Sorry Amanda, Cameron won't be joining you this evening or any other." Toni's voice husked out as she nuzzled the silky black hair. "She wouldn't bow out gracefully and acknowledge that you were meant to be with me."

Amanda felt herself gripping the fork harder and harder.

"So, I removed her from the equation."

Amanda screamed slamming the fork back into Toni's thigh, the tongs speared deeply into muscle. Toni staggered back, taken by surprise. Her face, which moments ago had held a blissful happy expression now darkened in rage. "Amanda, you're mine. Why can't you understand that?"

"I'm not yours. I hate you. I loathe you. By killing Cameron, you've destroyed me. Does your warped little mind understand that?"

Toni bellowed, her mind snapping and rejecting all grasp of reality. She charged Amanda, slamming her back against the table. Her hands dug into the soft flesh of the graceful neck and began squeezing.

Amanda's eyes grew huge, and she weakly struggled to get loose. Frantically, her hands searched for anything to end this nightmare. Her right hand triumphantly grasped a brass candlestick holder; spots dancing a jig in her vision were starting to polka as she brought it forward into the side of Toni's face. For a moment Toni's eyes went wide and Amanda saw that one eye was bright red as if covered in a film of blood. Then the eyes closed, and the body, without anybody to drive it, gave into the demands of gravity and crashed to the floor.

Amanda didn't stop to think she needed to find Cameron. She couldn't be dead, she couldn't be. She ran to the kitchen, her eyes taking in the shattered pieces of a plate, the bloody handprint on the freezer door. Wildly, her eyes darted around, "Cam! Cameron!" She yelled.

She ran to the stairs that lead to Cameron's space. After a few frantic steps, she slipped on the tile; oh god, more blood. She had slipped in blood. It streaked the palm of her hand, but she tried not to think. Bile rose to her throat. 'Hurry.' Her mind screamed at her.

She got up and ran for the stairs. Opening the door, she screamed as she saw the unmoving body lying on the floor at the bottom of the stairs. Quickly, she ran down the stairs, crouching at Cam's side. Tears streaked down her face. "Please Cam. Oh God, don't be dead, please." She clutched Cam's hand, bringing it to her chest.

Cam struggled to break out of the blackness that held her. It was so soothing, but there was something tugging at the edges, pulling her away from the nothingness. Words flowed into the blackness; they held no meaning, they were just the senseless contortions of air vibrating against vocal chords. The sounds chanted, breaking up the blackness as it rolled around her and a thought was formed in her mind: 'Amanda'. "What was an Amanda?" she thought. A picture formed to give the Amanda meaning. Blue eyes. A woman. 'Amanda!' She shouted throwing herself back into her body, back to the pain.

Amanda almost screamed again as Cameron's hand clutched hers. "Amanda?" Cam's voice croaked out.

Amanda nearly fainted, "Oh thank you, thank you, thank God."

Cameron's blue-gray eyes fluttered open. "Amanda. Toni. You need to get out of here get the police."

"Shhhh. It's okay." Amanda said soothingly. "Toni's unconscious upstairs I hit her with a candlestick." She stroked Cam's hair.

Cam smiled, "That's my girl."

Amanda frowned, "We need to get out of here. She could wake up any moment. Can you walk?"

Cam wanted to laugh. "Amanda I can't even stay conscious."

"Come on then; let me help you up." Amanda slowly helped Cameron up and wrapped a hand around the smaller woman's waist to keep her upright. "You still with me, Cam?"

"Uh huh. I, shit, I got you all bloody. I'm sorry."

Amanda didn't say anything knowing that Cam wasn't very grounded in reality. There was a disturbing amount of blood. She was so distracted by examining Cameron that she failed to hear her question the first time. "What?"

"I asked if you had a cell phone?"

"What? Ah, yes. Why?"

"I think you should call 911."

"Oh my god! Why didn't I think of that? Shit, it's upstairs in my coat. Can you lean against the wall for a second while I run up and..."

"Amanda you are not going upstairs where that psycho is, we will just go to the neighbors."

Amanda just nodded in agreement.

From upstairs, a horrible yelling came and the name "Amanda" was screamed in rage and hate. Chills ran up both their bodies.

Cam looked sadly at Amanda.

"What?"

"Go."

"Not without you."

"I'll slow you down and I couldn't live with myself if she hurt you. Now run! Go to the neighbors and call the police."

"Not without you." Amanda choked, crying.

"I'll be fine. I survived my mother for years. This bitch ain't got nothing I haven't seen. Now go the quicker you go, the quicker you can save me."

Amanda nodded her head and kissed Cameron gently, trying to ignore the sounds coming from upstairs, she took off. Cam leaned against the wall then slowly slid down to the floor. She was so weak.

She heard the door open and Amanda run out just as the basement door was thrown open and Toni bellowed, "Amanda!" Then footsteps pounded on the stairs, coming closer and closer to her.

Cameron stared up at the enraged woman; she smiled sweetly, "Looks like she got you good. Maybe you should go see a doctor. You might have a concussion?"

"Shut up! Where is she?"

"Who?"

Toni stepped forward placing her foot right on top of Cam's knee. "Where is she?"

"Who?" Cameron responded again.

Toni slowly put pressure on Cam's knee grinding it under her foot.

Cam screamed in pain, "She left. She ran to the neighbors to call the cops on your ass."

"No she wouldn't." Toni ran into the other room staring at the open door, "No!" She screamed. "This is your doing." She said returning to Cam's body. "You twisted her mind against me." Toni began to scream nonsense as she pummeled Cam's body with her fist.

Cam just laughed, enraging the woman more.

"Leave her alone." Amanda's voice screamed. Both women turned to see Amanda bearing down on Toni with one of Cam's 10-pound weights clutched in her hands.

"Amanda?" Toni blinked. Amanda had come back.

Amanda swung both arms and brought the metal weight crashing into the back of Toni's skull with a sickening crunch. The woman's eyes rolled up into her head and blood dribbled from an ear. She fell over, and hit the floor bonelessly, not moving.

Amanda just stared in horror, "Oh my, I think I killed. I..." She trailed off, sinking to the floor.

Cam just stared into nothing. Her body hurt, feeling so far away from everything. She wanted to tell Amanda that it was okay but her mouth wouldn't work. Little by little she was being sucked back into the darkness. It was soothing and it promised no pain.

Amanda snapped out of her shock, "Cam?" She crawled over to Cam's abused body. "It's okay."

Cam tried to get her lips to move, but the muscles were heavy. Lips moves sloppily slurring syllables. "No its not. I think, I think, I can't feel anything. Everything is so far away, like a dream you can't touch."

"Shhh. It's going to be okay."

"I love you, Amanda. I loved you in High School. I love you so much.."

"I love you too, Cameron Hayes." She whispered, holding the hurt woman.

Cam's eyes closed. She was so tired and the blackness was calling.

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\*Beep\*

\*Beep\*

"God, that's annoying." Said a sleepy voice.

\*Beep\*

\*Beep\*

"I'm sleeping. Make it stop." The same voice mumbled out.

The mattress moved subtly shifting right and then left.

\*Beep\*

\*Beep\*

"I'll give you a cookie if you make it stop." The sleepy voice begged

"Hmm?" Warm breath was exhaled across the back of a neck causing the skin to shiver and the body to scrunch up into itself.

"What if I don't want a cookie?" Amanda asked.

\*Beep\*

\*Beep\*

"Anything you want. It's yours. Just make it stop." Cameron whined.

"Okay." The declaration of acceptance was followed by a husky evil chuckle.

As Cam started to drift back into the embrace of sleep, she heard the slap of flesh on plastic.

"There. All stopped." Amanda said, quite pleased with herself.

"Good, thanks." Cameron mumbled as sleep claimed her.

Blue-eyes looked down on the sleeping blonde. The bruises were for the most part gone and the stitches had been removed. The only injury that remained was Cam's knee and it was slowly healing. Surgery had repaired most of the damage. All that was needed now was time. Both of them were healing on an external and internal basis. In essence, Amanda had her first physical therapy patient -- a very cranky, foul-mouthed one. She had to admit some of the techniques she used on Cam were personal and private, and they would not be used on anybody else.

Amanda tenderly stroked the blonde bangs out of Cam's slumbering face, and she enjoyed the silky kiss of the hair on her fingers.

When Cam had been released from the hospital, Amanda and Sammy had insisted that Cameron stay with them until she healed. Cameron had, in her opinion, been a stubborn butthead refusing to see she needed anybody's help. Finally, Dee had told the bouncer she should stay with Amanda and Sammy because she and Georgia were redoing the basement to get rid of the bad vibes. There was no way in hell that she was putting up with Cam until she healed.

Cam had pouted and said fine, then asked, "Where am I going to sleep?"

Amanda had laughed at Cam's pout. Then she gently cupped Cam's face in her hands, "Silly, you're going to sleep with me in my bed -- naked." Then she very thoroughly kissed Cam to get her point across.

"Are we finished, or do you want to object some more?"

"We're done. No more objections." Cam said and then pulled Amanda down for more kisses until the Doctor had come in.

"AH, Ladies. Um, yes. Let's try and keep Ms. Hayes from getting too excited until she's had more time to recover. Okay?" The doctor had stammered out in embarrassment.

Amanda had to laugh; at the rate things were going, she needed to invest in locks, if she was ever going to get any alone time with Ms. Hayes.

She smiled then leaned over and planted soft kisses on Cam's face. "Okay, sexy bouncer girl, I want my reward for making the evil alarm stop."

"Okay, cookies are in the kitchen." Cam mumbled out and then rolled over onto her back throwing an arm over her face.

Amanda, hummed. "I don't want a cookie." She purred into an ear then sucked the lobe into her mouth nibbling it. While her mouth was occupied a hand was creeping up a thigh.

Cam's eyes shot open, "Can I help you?"

"Nope, this is self-serve." Replied Amanda with a chuckle.

"Oh, really?"

"Yep."

The phone started to ring.

Amanda sighed, switching trains of thought and she reached over Cameron to answer the phone. The blonde beat her to it, slamming a hand down, "Ignore it. We," she said with an evil grin, "are indisposed at the moment."

"I don't know Ms. Hayes. I don't feel very indisposed." Amanda responded with her own grin.

"Really?"

"Yep."

"Prepare to be indisposed." Cam said ducking under the covers.

"Cam, be careful of your knee."

A muffled, "Knee's fine." Was heard from the depths of the covers.

Amanda's eyes went wide and she scrambled to hold on to something. She reached up, clutching the headboard.

Suddenly, Sammy yelled through the wall: "Amanda it's your dad."

"Fuck, Fuck, Fuck. Tell him I'm busy."

She groaned, trying to get her mind back to that happy place. Then she heard Sammy say, "I'm sorry General Walker, Amanda's busy getting laid. She'll get back to you when they finish."

"Sammy!" Amanda screamed. She lunged for the phone; Cam went sprawling on to her back as Amanda flipped her over on her quest for the phone.

"Dad!" She yelled into the phone. "Lies, all lies. She's deranged."

"What, who? Pumpkin, what's going on?" Her father questioned.

"Sammy's just fooling with you Dad. No sex going on here. I'm a nun, yep, a nun."

Cam snickered.

"Pumpkin, what are you talking about? Sammy put me on hold while she got you."

"What?" She bonelessly collapsed on the bed; she could hear Sammy howling in laughter on the other side of the wall.

"Sorry to hear about your empty love life there, pumpkin. I'll be sure and ask Bunny to invite some of her single gay friends to the party. You never know. Maybe you'll, um, hook-up."

Dear Lord. Her father was a pimp. "Dad." She attempted to move away from Cam. Cam's mouth had developed an interest in her nipples, one she would be willing to encourage if she wasn't on the phone with her father. She moved her knee and banged it into Cam's, causing Cam to go stiff in mind-bending agony. Then a wail of pain bubbled out of her mouth. Instantly, she dropped the

phone. "Cam, honey. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. Don't move. I'll be right back with a pain pill."

As Amanda rushed off, Cameron was prone spread-eagle on the bed, her flaming passion squished under a boot heel of pain, and she wondered. She wondered why it was so damn hard to get a moment alone with Amanda.

"Hello, hello? Amanda, are you there?"

Grimacing Cam reached over and picked up the phone, "Hello?"

"Hello, who is this? Where's Amanda?"

"Hey, Amanda's Dad."

"Cameron."

"Uh, yes how'd.."

"You're the only one who ever called me 'Amanda's Dad'."

"Oh."

"How are you Cameron?"

"I'm good Sir. Well, you know."

"Good. Look, I want to thank you for saving my little Pumpkins life."

Cam had to laugh, "Sir, she saved my life."

"Of course she did. She's a Walker, but I heard you were willing to sacrifice yourself for her and that is a beautiful thing."

"Thank you sir."

"You're welcome. Now, why are you in my daughter's bed?"

"Uh."

"Are you sleeping with her?"

"Uh." Her brain was screaming at her, 'don't answer that dumbass, he owns several guns and maybe even a tank'.

"No sir."



"Why not?"

"Ah, I'm still recovering, sir."

"Oh. Understandable. Cameron, you treat her right and no more running away."

"No need to worry sir. I love her very much; I'd probably wither and blow away if I had to be separated from her."

"Glad to hear it and ditto." Said a very feminine voice in her other ear. Cam cocked her head and smiled at Amanda.

"Here's your daughter sir."

"Hey dad, sorry about dropping you."

"No problem. I'll make this short since you seem to have company."

Amanda blushed.

"Bunny wanted me to call and make sure you girls were coming up tonight."

"Yes, Dad. You know you guys didn't have to push back the date of your party."

"Honey with everything that has happened, how could we not."

"Thanks, Dad. I love you."

"Love you too, Pumpkin. Now quit jabbering with me and go make your woman feel better."

Amanda turned bright red and screamed at her father. He just laughed and hung up on her.

Cam smiled and licked her lips, "I believe the General gave you an order Ms. Walker."

"That he did soldier, that he did. Now shut up about my father before you ruin the mood."

- - - - -

Sarah and Heidi stood in front of the Walker house. Sarah whistled, it was a freakn mansion. Heidi nodded in agreement with Sarah's whistle; she looked over at Amanda who was stooped over Cameron who was sound asleep in the passenger seat of the Subaru. "Hey Amanda, what do your folks do again?"

Amanda looked up from her task of waking sleeping beauty, over to Sarah, "My Dad's a retired Military General. He still does some consulting work, I'm not sure what Bunny does, and my mom is off in Europe trying to find herself or something." She shrugged going back to Cam. "Cam. Cam honey, we're here. Cam!" Cam snorted then drooled some more.

Sammy grinned leaning over the back seat, "That is so cute. Now I see what you see in her, she produces so much natural lubricant."

Amanda just looked up and glared.

"Fine. Here let me wake her up." Sammy said. She rolled up the Playboy she had been reading and thumped Cameron over the head with it. Nothing happened.

Amanda looked at Sammy wide-eyed; "I can't believe you just did that."

Sammy snorted and cocked her arm back for another swing. As she swung forward again, her arm was grabbed in a fierce grip, and a blue-gray eye glared up at her.

"Do that again, slugger and you'll have to share my pain pills for the rest of the trip." Cam growled and released Sammy's arm.

"Oh, good. You're up." Sammy said sheepishly. "I'll just go help with the luggage." The redhead leapt out of the car.

Cameron rubbed her eyes sleepily with her hands and smiled over at Amanda, "So, we're here I take it?"

"Yep, just waiting on you." Amanda reached out a hand helping Cam out of the car.

Cam balanced on her good leg then tentatively put weight slowly on the other. She gave the house a quick glance; "The Walker Casa hasn't changed much, I see."

Amanda gave a smile, "Wait till you see the hot tub and pool Dad put in."

"MMMM, we'll have to try out the hot tub tonight. Uh, your dad doesn't happen to own a tank or any semi-automatic rifles?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"No reason." Cam went back to the hot tub fantasy now that it was safe. A wicked grin crossing her face.

Sammy elbowed Amanda, "Looks like Cam has gone to a very happy place. I'd be careful. Looks like she might have plans for you."

Amanda blushed.

The front door opened and larger bear of a man with gray hair and a smaller woman with stylish short brown hair emerged.

"Honey, you made it!" Bellowed the large man who easily picked up Amanda and swung her around.

"Dad, missed you too." Amanda giggled out.

He put her down looking over her friends, "Excellent. You brought a bunch of queer girls... well, and Sammy. I understand your straddling the fence these days."

"No sir. No fence straddling, I'm only straddling a very nice Drag Queen, who in his off days a is very cute boy who works in bookstore.

"Well, if you breed I wanna be the godfather."

Sarah and Heidi, never having had the pleasure of meeting the General, gaped open-mouthed. The smaller woman giggled, "He can be a bit overwhelming at first but he grows on you. Hi. I'm Bunny, and it's very nice to meet some of Amanda's friends."

Heidi recovered first, "Ah, yes. I'm Heidi and this is my partner Sarah."

"Very nice to meet you. If I can disengage the General, we can get your things and I can show you to your rooms.

Sammy, having met the General on several different occasions, took him to be a kindred spirit. She hugged him fiercely, whispering, "I wouldn't have it any other way." He laughed and hugged her back, then swung her up into the air.

Cameron whispered to Amanda, "If he tries that with me, no offense Amanda, but I'm going to knee your Dad in the groin."

Amanda laughed, "I think he probably put on a cup considering you've done that to him before. He loves the fact you're the only person to have dropped him in like, 25 years."

"Your father is a strange man. You know this, right?"

"Yes, it took a few years, but I've come to terms with it."

The General, finished with Sammy, looked over at his daughter and Cameron. "Cameron," He bellowed.

Cameron braced herself. Instead, she found her hand grabbed in his massive paw and shook. "Nice to see you again. Glad to see you haven't run."

"Dad."

Cameron laughed, "No sir. Remember we already discussed this. I love your daughter very much, so no running. Plus I'm fairly sure you have a tank around here somewhere that you would shove up my ass so fast if I did anything to hurt your daughter."

"Damn straight, or gay in your case, I guess."

"Lance, if you are done with the girls, I'd like to get them settled."

The General's face became like a spanked puppy's; "I'm sorry Bunny. I just got so excited to see my Pumpkin and her new little love muffin."

"I know." The smaller woman gave the man a hug, "Now you and all the butch ones can get the luggage. Well, except for Cam who is hurt."

Cam followed Bunny and Heidi into the house.

The General stared at Sarah, "So you wear the pants in the couple? Never would have guessed it." He said with a shrug and went to get the luggage.

Sarah thought that Amanda's father might cause her head to implode.

Amanda watched as everyone moved into the house. Bunny was hovering around Cam, making sure that the blonde haired woman navigated the steps okay. She couldn't help but smile a big toothy grin as she picked up her duffle bag.

Sammy nudged her, "Thinking naughty thoughts about the sexy bouncer girl again."

"No, but I might have naughty thoughts about Cameron later. We are on a first name basis. Better than that maybe there will be hands-on activities."

"You lucky girl, you. So, then what were you thinking?"

"I was thinking about how happy I am at this moment. I mean, yeah that's what I mean. I got the girl, and I'm fairly certain she's not a stalking psycho. Life is good."

"Well A-girl enjoy the moment, you never know when sexy bouncer girl's past is going to cause her to act all irrationally."

"That's alright, because I'm up for the task." Amanda said self-confidently.

"You think this is forever between you two?"

Amanda sighed and bit her lip thinking, "Who knows? I wanna say yes, but all I can really say is

I'm willing to find out."

"What are you two whispering about? " The General asked. "Come on I'm not moving all this stuff into the house on my own. For dykes, you girls sure do pack a lot." He grumbled picking up bags and lumbering into the house.

Amanda laughed and picked up Cam's backpack. 'Just enjoy the moment Amanda. Almost five years ago, that blonde ran away and now she's back, laughing and walking through that door. Don't think about it too much. Just go with what you're feeling and go with the moment.' She thought to herself.

She laughed again as she saw Cam's head appear in the doorway and stick her tongue out at her.

"Is that a promise, blondie?" She yelled out.

"Only if you can catch me, Sicko!" Cameron shouted back.

Amanda whooped and ran into the house.

the end for now

send feed back to [zeeamy@gmail.com](mailto:zeeamy@gmail.com)

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