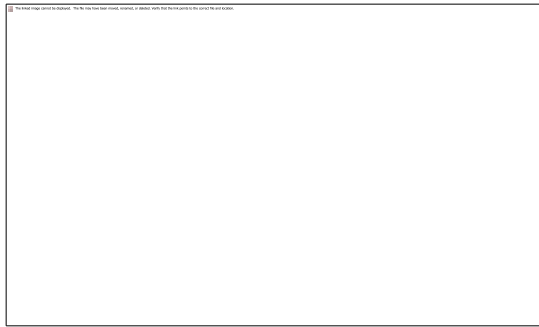


# ~ Loose Ends ~

by Greek Warrior (Joan)



Disclaimer: They may look like two characters that don't belong to me, but they're not them. These are mine.

Sex: Yes, between two women. Yes, it will get explicit.

Abuse: Yes, it's in the form of verbal and whippings and not overly graphic except in one case.

All persons mentioned in this story, are fictitious, as are the towns, except for San Diego. But I'm sure you

could figure that out on your own.

Thanks to Wendy for beta reading and to Sarah for her suggestions.

Comments welcome: [XWPScribe@aol.com](mailto:XWPScribe@aol.com)

## Chapter One

The tall woman stood at the curb, staring at the two-story red brick house. Even though the window blinds had been opened, letting in bright sunshine that filled the house, it still had that empty aura surrounding it. If any inanimate object could have feelings, this unoccupied house certainly did. A sense of abandonment and sadness surrounded it. Or maybe she was sensing those feeling from herself.

With a deep sigh, Cody made her way up the front walk; pulling the key the lawyer had given her from her pocket, she unlocked the front door and entered the house she hadn't set foot in, in almost twenty years.

Her parents, well her mother and the man she had married when Cody was ten years old, had died in a car wreck a month ago. Cody had been working out of the country at the time and had only been notified last week. Not that it made any difference to her; she wouldn't have come to their funerals anyway.

When their lawyer, Mr. Adamson, finally contacted her, she was surprised to learn that the will had never been changed and that she was still her mother's beneficiary. 'That ought to have the old bastard turning over in his grave.' She had smiled at the thought when Mr. Adamson had informed her of her modest inheritance, which consisted of the house and a small amount of money left over from the dual life insurance policy after the funeral expenses and taxes.

Cody walked into the living room, her eyes slowly making their way around the room; trying to shrug off the demons from the past. But images and voices assaulted her. She wrapped her arms around herself and shivered.

"Damn, I really think I must be losing it." Cody rubbed her temples and tried to calm down. She removed the sheet that covered the sofa and sat down. "First things first. I need to call a realtor and get this house on the market. The sooner I do that, the sooner I can get outta here and go

home."

Checking the list of realtors that Mr. Adamson's secretary had compiled for her, she read over her choices. Not surprisingly only four were listed. The town had grown some since she was last here, but not much. Picking the one whose name made her smile, she used her cell phone to call.

"Rainbow Reality, Mabel speaking. How may I assist you?"

"Hello, Mabel. I would like to speak with someone about selling a house."

"I'd be glad to help you. Let me ask you a few preliminary questions over the phone, then would you be able to meet my partner and myself at the property?"

"Sure, I'm actually here now, so it wouldn't be a problem."

"Great. Let's start with your name."

"Sorry, I should've given you that before. It's Cody Lawson."

"Okay, Ms Lawson. Are you the sole owner of the residence?"

"Yes, by way of inheritance. I have the deed, a copy of the will and a letter from the lawyer."

"Okay, give me the address and my partner and I will head over."

"It's 37 Woodland Forest. It's the sub-division located behind..."

"The Devout Baptist Church." Mabel finished for her, smiling at the idea of being able to handle a property in the mostly zealous neighborhood. She wondered if Ms Lawson had purposely call Rainbow Reality or if she was totally clueless. "I guess we'll find out."

"Excuse me?" Cody couldn't quite make out what the woman said.

"We'll be there in an hour, Ms Lawson." Mabel ended the call. She couldn't wait to tell Mildred that they might be handling the Jordan property.

Cody used the time to run to the little family owned store that was about a mile from the house. She'd decided to stay at the house, at least for the night and needed a few essentials.

She could remember walking to the store as a small child each week with her dad, when she got her allowance. She would walk slowly through the candy section, carefully debating on which treat was worthy of spending her hard earned money to buy. Then when she was a few years older and had discovered books, she would stop by the book store on her way to the library, checking to see if the book she was saving up for was still there.

She parked her bike by the entrance and removed her helmet, shaking out her long dark hair.

'Looks like the Bundy's still own the place.' She grabbed a cart and headed down the first aisle; two pairs of eyes burning a hole in her back the entire time.

Fifteen minutes later, she was placing her groceries on the belt. "Not from around here are you?" Mr. Bundy asked, as he started to ring up her purchases.

"No." Came the one word answer. Cody was going to make him work to satisfy his curiosity. She remembered her dad saying the man was a worse gossip than the old women in the neighborhood.

A few more key punches on the ancient manual cash register. "You look a little familiar." Mrs. Bundy continued to bag the groceries, staring into blue eyes that she was sure she had seen before.

Cody knew the last time Mrs. Bundy had seen her; she had been a tall and very skinny teenager, whose hair was cut very short and who wore glasses.

"I'll need to see an ID, young lady, for that there beer." Mr. Bundy said.

Cody smiled. "Why Mr. Bundy, if you wanted to know my name, all you had to do was ask."

Mr. Bundy frowned at being found out and Cody reached for her wallet. He looked at her driver's license with his wife peeking over his shoulder. "Cody Lawson." He handed her license back, "Heard you went off to some fancy school."

"Yes. What do I owe you?"

"Totals \$17.36." He took the twenty and gave her the change. "Sorry about your parents." He handed her the two sacks of groceries. "You weren't able to make it back for the funeral?" His tone was judgmental. He knew from whispered comments about the Jordan's, Cody never took her stepfather's name, that she had never been back home after she left for school. His holier-than-thou attitude faded as ice-blue eyes stared into him.

Cody bit back the acid response that was on the tip of her tongue. "No, I was out of the country at the time." She ignored his statement of sympathy. She could have used sympathy twenty years ago, but not now.

She could still feel their eyes as she placed her groceries in the hard-sided saddlebags on the Harley. With her helmet in place, she started the bike and welcomed the rumble and feel of power from the big machine, as it put her at ease.

Sitting on the front porch, drinking a beer, she sorted through the pile of mail that had been left at the house by Mr. Adamson; she came across a letter addressed to her and her eyebrows shot up in surprise. Before she had time to open it, she saw a car pull up in front of the house. Two gray haired women exited the vehicle and made their way towards the porch.

"You must be Ms Lawson. I'm Mabel and this is my partner Mildred."

Mabel was of average height, with Mildred being several inches taller. Where Mabel's hair was solid gray, Mildred's gray was sprinkled with a few strands of black. Mabel was what some people would call pleasing plump, while Mildred was fairly trim.

"Call me Cody, please." She descended the steps and held her hand out.

One look at Cody and both women knew that the younger woman had purposely called Rainbow Reality.

Cody knew these two were family. It wasn't just the firm handshake or the way they were dressed in kakis, tennis shoes, Mildred in a denim button-down shirt and Mabel in a t-shirt advertising the reality company. It was more the way their eyes moved over her, assessing her, then as if confirming that she was one of them, their lips curved into a sincere smile. Goddess knows, if she had to rely on her non-existent gaydar, she'd be in trouble, again.

"Pleased to meet you, Cody." Mildred said. "So, how did you know the old bigo...boy?" Mabel's elbow in her ribs changed her in mid-word.

Cody grinned. "The old bigot, though I prefer bastard, was my step-father. You two obviously knew him, and I'm guessing didn't get along."

"Yep, and had more than a few run-ins with him over the years." Mildred stated. "Though your mother was always a pleasant person."

"I had thought earlier that with me here again, he must be turning over in his grave. And now with the three of us here, I figure he must be on spin-cycle about now." Cody chuckled and the other two grinned.

"And as much as it would please me to handle this property, in all honesty you might find that one of the other agencies would have an easier time selling this place for you. Using us might limit the number of interested parties that would find this neighborhood to their liking." Mabel admitted. "It will also limit the number of... others... that would feel comfortable using our company."

"Why don't we go in and talk? I personally believe this neighborhood could do with a little shaking up." Cody led them inside to the living room where she'd earlier taken off all the dustcovers, then excused herself to make coffee.

After the papers had been signed, an appointment made for the appraiser to stop by and the 'For Sale' sign staked in the front yard, Cody returned to the mail and to the envelope addressed to her.

Cody opened the short blade on her Swiss Army knife and slit the envelope. Taking out the two sheets of paper she began to read.

*Dear Fellow Graduate of Prattville High School,*

*You are cordially invited to join with your fellow classmates, class of 1983, at your 20-year reunion. Yes that's right, it's been 20 years since we put on that maroon cap and gown to parade across the stage to shake our beloved principal, Mr. Christopher's hand and get our diploma. I know we'd all like to see each other again. Now I know some of us have changed a little but there's no need to be embarrassed by it. Age can do that to some of us. Of course, I haven't changed one little bit.*

*So, come on and join the fun, especially those of you who have moved away. If you don't, you know your ears will be burning, because we'll be taking about you. Ha-ha, just a little joke.*

*Sincerely,*

*Bridget (Huggins) Clark*

*President of the 'Class of 83' reunion committee*

On the second sheet of paper was the schedule and dates for the reunion, not that she had any intention of going.

"Goddess, she's still a bitch," Cody remembered Bridget, the head cheerleader their senior year; she had been one of the 'in crowd' at the small school and one of Cody's tormentors. "So, she married that dipwad Fenton Clark." He had been the star running back on the football team. "They most certainly deserve each other." He had been another that made her high school experience less than stellar.

Cody remembered her junior year and how Bridget and her friends humiliated her. She was walking from the shower after gym class, with a towel wrapped around her. Before she made it to her locker, five giggling girls surrounded her. Bridget started the taunting, "Hey, Cody. How do we know you're not really a boy?"

"Yeah." Candy continued. "You're so tall and you don't have any boobs." More giggles.

Bridget again, "You've even got a boy's hair cut."

"Leave me alone." Cody tried to push past, but was grabbed pushed back and forth between them. On one of the shoves, Bridget grabbed Cody's towel and pulled it off her body.

"Well, look at that, she is a girl. Kinda." Bridget threw the towel on the floor and the giggling girls left Cody in tears.

They had made her life miserable during high school. Maybe she would go to the reunion to see how they turned out and let them see how she had turned out, since they had voted her 'most likely to never find anybody stupid enough to marry her and die an old maid'. Cody was sure Bridget had been the one to make-up those ridiculous insults.

"I'll call Tracy tonight and see what she thinks. Maybe I should invite her to go with me." Cody laughed. Tracy would certainly spice up the reunion; she was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed knockout who happened to star in adult movies. Her friend's normal hair color was light brown and her eyes were brown with golden flecks. Cody knew that Tracy used the disguise of dyed hair and colored contacts so when she quit making the films, she could return to normal and not be recognized.

## Chapter Two

Cody waited until early evening to call her friend and still got her voice mail. "Hi Trace, it's Cody. Give me a call when you can, I'll be..."

"Cody, I'm here. What's up?"

"Screening calls again?"

"Nuh uh, I fell asleep with the damn thing in my lap and it was set to vibrate. No wonder I was dreaming my vibrator had come to life and was doing all sorts of pleasant things to me." She laughed.

"You have sex just about every day, now you're dreaming about it, too? I think you need to seek professional help." Cody teased her.

"I can't help that work has been more like...well work than fun lately. We had two almost fights today, Lolitta complained that Mr. Stiff Shaft has been more like Mr. Wet Noodle..."

"Stop." Cody interrupted, although she had always gotten a kick out of some of the names the adult movie stars invented. "You know I don't want to hear anything about the guys. On the other hand, if you want to discuss the women, especially that new blonde girl."

"Yeah, yeah, enough about work. How you doing? Everything going okay?"

"Yeah, so far. You'll never believe it, but I found two dykes to be my real estate agents. And, this is the best thing; I found a letter address to me with the mail the lawyer saved. It was for my high school reunion that happens to be going on next week."

"Are you...um...really thinking about going?" Tracy sat up, giving her friend her complete attention.

"At first I had no intention of going and started to toss the letter. Then I decided to talk to you and see what you thought." Cody downed the rest of her beer and stretched out on the couch. "I thought it might actually be a kind of closure, tie up a few loose ends. You know, face them as an adult. Back then I always felt like I was a kid and they were the adults, granted they were immature adults, but you know what I mean. I was barely a teenager and they were in their late teens."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. And I think you're right about facing most of them. But what about facing Amanda?" Tracy winced, expecting an explosion.

Silence. "Cody?"

"I'm here." Another silence. "She may not even live here anymore."

"Maybe not, but that doesn't mean she won't come back for it. Why don't you see if her parents still live there and call them, see if she plans on going?"

"They do, I checked in the phone book, but didn't have enough guts to call." Cody confessed.

"Oh honey, I hate that you're having such a hard time. I wish I could help."

"You know, I thought about asking you to go with me, but then I remember the sole reason for going would be to show them that I turned out okay, but if you went, nobody would bother to pay any attention to me." Cody laughed.

"You know that's not true." Tracy knew her friend's habit of putting herself down was just a survival mechanism, but she hated to hear Cody doing it. "I can't believe I'm going to confess this to you, but I believe you could use an ego pick-me-up. I call you 3B's behind your back."

Cody pulled the phone away from her ear and gave it a strange look. "3B's? It makes me sound like I've got three boobs or something. What the hell does it mean?"

Tracy laughed. "It stands for beauty, brains and brawn. Although after the three boobs comment, I might have to rethink the brains part."

"Every funny." Cody laughed, then became serious. "Do you really think of me like that?"

Tracy could hear the young insecure girl that was sometimes still part of Cody come through, which was another thing that was left over after her troubled early teens. "Yes my friend, I really do." 'Maybe I will attend this reunion, just to kick a few assholes.' Tracy thought. She hadn't heard this much insecurity from her friend in many years.

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The long, mentally and physically exhausting day finally caught up with Cody and she fell asleep on the couch.

Cody was sitting in the back row of class slumped down in her desk, trying to avoid Mrs. Hall calling on her. It wasn't that she didn't know the answer, she did, but being smart was one of the reasons she was picked on. Another was the fact that she was taller than most everyone else and terribly skinny, plus she wore glasses. She'd heard all the names, beanpole, scarecrow, four eyes and the others that adolescents used to torment their peers with. It also didn't help that she was a senior in high school at 14, not that she told the others her age; they would've just picked on her

for that, too. She just kept telling herself this was the last year she had to put up with them.

Cody watched as a small blonde girl entered with Principal Christopher. She held her books clutched against her chest and stared down at her feet.

"Class," Mrs. Hall said after the principal had left, "this is Amanda Norris and she's a new student here. Let's all say hello and make sure we help her until she gets settled in." Most of the class murmured hellos on cue. "Amanda, you can take the empty seat next to Cody on the back row."

"Um, hi." Amanda slyly said as she slid into the chair.

Cody pushed her glasses back up her nose with her finger and looked toward the small girl. "Hello, A...Amanda." Cody stuttered as stared into eyes the color of grass after a spring rain.

Later that day, Cody was sitting in the cafeteria eating lunch alone, as usual, when Amanda shyly asked to join her. She couldn't believe the cute girl wanted to spend her lunch period with her. Cody smiled and nodded her head.

Over the next week, the two girls spent most of their free time together. Cody helped Amanda with her schoolwork and Amanda would tell Cody about the places she had lived before moving back to her mother's hometown.

Cody felt happier than she had been in a long time. The others in school still picked on her, but it didn't seem to bother her as much as it did before Amanda.

"Guess what?" Amanda ran up to her new friend after school. "Even though the sign-up deadline has past, they're gonna let me tryout for cheerleader. Isn't that great?"

Cody's smile turned to a frown. "Uh...yeah, I guess." She hung her head and started walking away.

"Hey, Cody, wait up. What's wrong? I thought you'd be happy for me." Amanda caught-up with her friend.

Cody stared at the ground and shrugged her shoulders. "Nothing."

"Come on, tell me." She put her hand on Cody's arm to get her attention. "Please."

Cody knew her friend didn't understand. "I just...you..." She started and stopped. "All those...people are the ones that hate me and make fun of me. And now you're gonna be one of them and won't be my friend anymore."

"You'll still be my friend and we'll still do stuff together, only now they'll also be my friends. This way they'll get to know you better and be your friends, too. Cody, you said yourself that your parents wouldn't let you go to the movies or the mall with me and I really miss having



someone that I can do that with." Amanda explained. "It'll work out, Cody, you'll see."

"Amanda." Cody jerked awake and sat up. "Damn, haven't had a dream about her in years. I guess its being back here that started them again." She rubbed her face and checked the time on her watch, three o'clock. "Blah, I refuse to get up this early." Cody grabbed a pillow and a light blanket out of the linen closet, removed her boots, jeans and bra, then settled back on the couch to see if she could sleep at least a few more hours. Within minutes, she was asleep again, this time without dreams.

### Chapter Three

Cody was just starting to stir when the doorbell rang and rang and rang. "Keep your shirt on, I'm coming." She hopped around trying to put her pants on and get to the door at the same time.

She unlocked the deadbolt and yanked the door open. "What is your problem?" She growled at the woman standing on the porch.

"That is my problem." The woman was pointing over her shoulder in the general direction of the 'For Sale' sign. "I won't stand for it." She stamped her pink tennis shoed foot, along with her designer-clad pink jogging suited leg.

"Won't stand for what? The house being sold, a sign in the front yard, or maybe you're referring to the weeds that are starting to grow from the cracks in the sidewalk? You gotta help me out here, its way too early in the morning to play guessing games, especially since I have had my coffee yet." Cody now remembered her as Mrs. Eldon, the snooty next-door neighbor.

"That...that company is what I'm talking about. They're not good God-fearing, church-going people and they shouldn't be allowed in this town, much less this neighborhood."

"In the first place, this is my house to sell, not yours, so I'll get whomever I want to sell it. In the second place, I'm not one of 'your' type of God-fearing church-going people either, so I don't give a rats-ass. The Goddess and I get along just fine. So go home and mind your own business." Cody slammed the door in her face.

That afternoon, Mabel called to let Cody know that the listing would be in the next day's paper and that they had, surprisingly, had two inquires about the house from people that had seen the sign. Cody agreed to make herself scarce tomorrow around lunchtime, so they could show the place. She also let Mabel know that her appraiser had been by late that morning and said he would stop by the office early tomorrow.

The day was overcast and a cool breeze blew. Cody was again sitting on the porch, this time in the swing that she remembered her real dad putting up when she was five or six.

Hearing footsteps coming up the walk, she stopped her momentum and watched a young couple mount the steps and knock on the door. "If you've come to complain like Mrs. Eldon, don't waste your breath."

Slightly startled, the man and woman looked to their left, towards the sound of the voice. "No." The man said. "I mean no, we've not come to cause trouble. Just the opposite actually."

The woman picked up. "My husband, Isaac," she glanced at the man beside her, "saw Mrs. Eldon over here this morning when he was leaving for work and thought she might be giving you a hard time. We just wanted you to know that not everybody feels that way about Mabel and Mildred."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions." She stood and moved towards the couple.

"It's alright." Isaac said. "Nine times out of ten, you would've been right."

"I'm Cody Lawson." She shook Isaac's hand.

"Cody? Is it really you?" The young woman hugged a surprised Cody. "It's me, Beth Levy, well Beth Ingram last time you saw me. I'm sorry it took a sad occasion for us to meet again." Beth knew Cody and her parents were estranged and she wasn't sure how to offer her sympathy or even if Cody wanted it.

Cody did remember Beth, who as a little girl, followed an older Cody around when she could. The Ingram's had lived across the street. "Yeah, me too. Got rid of your pigtails I see." Cody grinned. Remembering that she said Isaac had seen Mrs. Eldon that morning, she asked, "Are you living around here?"

"We bought my folks place when they decided to move into a garden home and not have to worry about yard work." Beth explained. "I know they'd love to see you again."

"I don't know how long I'm going to be here. If you'd say hello to them for me, I'd appreciate it. Would you like to come in for awhile?"

"Actually we can't." Isaac said. "We're meeting my sister and her husband for dinner tonight. We just wanted you to know that the old lady doesn't speak for the entire neighborhood."

"Thanks for stopping by and letting me know." Cody said.

"Hey, Cody." Beth stopped at the bottom of the porch steps. "I just wanted you to know that growing up...well you were my hero." She smiled at the flabbergasted look on the older woman's face. "You showed me that it was okay to be smart and to want to read books. I now teach literature at the junior college and I love it. So, I just wanted to say thanks."

To say that Cody had been speechless was an understatement. She had been sitting and staring into space for the past hour. She hadn't even remembered coming in from outside, yet she found herself sitting in the living room.

'Goddess.' She thought. 'What would knowing that done for me twenty years ago?' She ran

different scenarios through her head. 'Probably better for Beth that I didn't know. I more-than-likely would've told her she was crazy for wanting to be like me.' She thought some more, as she absently watched the shadows growing on the wall in front of her, from the setting sun. 'It's really not about me at all, is it? It's about Beth. So get your head outta your ass, Cody.' She replaced the negative thoughts with positive ones. 'It's about Beth having someone who she thought of as a good example that maybe helped her become something she loves.' "I was a hero." Cody stated aloud and smiled. "Me; not a TV character or a sports figure. Me; a tall skinny kid that read books." Her smile grew bigger. "Damn that makes me feel good."

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Cody decided to sleep in the guest room, which at one time had been her room, instead of on the couch. She finished making the bed and crawled in between the sheets. Having not slept well the night before, she was quickly asleep.

Cody was eleven and she'd just skipped another grade in school. Her mother and the man she had married the year before were arguing.

"I don't know why you let them move her to a higher grade." Floyd complained.

"They said Cody would just get bored if she wasn't challenged, and wouldn't learn anything." Her mother answered.

"She doesn't need to learn too much. No man will have her if she's smarter than him. And what's she gonna do after high school? She'll be too young to marry when she graduates."

"You know she wants to go to college, Floyd."

"Waste of money. No need to get a degree if she's gonna be quitting her job once she gets pregnant." Her stepfather argued. "She needs to be around normal kids, get outside, ride bikes. The boys will never notice her if she keeps her nose stuck in a book."

"I know she needs to make friends." Her mother conceded. "I'll just have to encourage her. Maybe a few activities that the church is sponsoring would help." Brenda suggested.

"Maybe. But this studying and reading all the time has to stop. She should do more around the house." Floyd added.

It started the next morning when Floyd grabbed the book Cody was reading from her hands as she walked by him. He slammed the book closed and whacked her on the butt with it. "Get in there and help your mother make breakfast. It's past time you learned some women's work."

After several months of trying her best around the house and especially in the kitchen, Cody finally realized nothing she did would be acceptable, so she stopped trying. If her stepfather thought her scrambled eggs were too runny, she'd show him what runny really looked like.

Her mother had left early that Saturday morning to help collect donations for the church auction and Cody was in charge of meals when she wasn't there. Hearing her stepfather come in the kitchen and sit down at the table reading the newspaper while waiting on his breakfast, Cody took two eggs, broke them over the skillet, sloshed them around for a few seconds, then poured them onto Floyd's plate.

It took maybe two seconds for Cody to realize she'd probably made a major mistake. Floyd turned almost purple with anger. He grabbed her arm, spun her around and whipped her hard enough to leave handprints. She spent the rest of the day hiding in her room.

What had hurt Cody the most, was not the fact that it was her first spanking ever, it was that her mother took Floyd's side, even though she had known how hard Cody had tried and that nothing would ever be good enough for him, and that he had used every opportunity to degrade her.

The only thing that saved Cody over the next two years was that Floyd was gone for longer and longer periods of time. He worked as a salesman for a big fertilizer and pesticide company, and when the company cut back on staff, he had more territory to cover.

Even when he'd be gone a week at a time, things between Cody and her mother were never the same again. Over the two year period the spankings had gotten more frequent and sometimes more severe. And each time her mother had taken his side. Cody gradually withdrew more and more.

It became harder and harder to hide the evidence of her whippings. Even when Cody's gym teacher questioned her about the marks on her butt and a couple on her back where the belt had landed a few times, Cody at first deigned there was a problem. Even when Cody had finally broken down and told her about her stepfather's whippings and the teacher had confronted the man, it hadn't done any good. The teacher had then taken it to the principle and school board, but was told to mind her own business, that the parents in Prattville could spank their kids as they saw fit. Not like in other places where the little heathens could run crying to the authorities.

Cody woke up and sat up in bed. She wasn't quiet as startled as yesterday morning and at least the sun was starting to come up. She got up and threw on a t-shirt and pair of shorts, then headed for the kitchen. She planned her morning, a cup of coffee, a run down by the lake and more coffee. Yep, Tracy was right, she was definitely a coffee junkie.

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Cody decided that she might as well take a look around town since she had to vacate the house. The town had grown, probably doubled since she was last here. "Well hot damn." Cody exclaimed as she turned the corner, heading toward the junior college. "There's a Starbucks here." 'Maybe later.' She thought when her stomach sloshed and reminded her of all the coffee she'd drunk earlier.

After riding around a while longer, she turned her bike in the direction of the mall, thinking she'd buy a paper and get some lunch.

After placing her order at the generic hot dog and burger place, she sat down at one of the plastic tables, intending to see what Mable and Mildred had to say about the house. Before her eyes found the ad, they found a hauntingly familiar profile. She watched the blonde as she talked to a woman Cody recognized as Mrs. Norris. Then, as if sensing Cody's stare, the blonde head started to turn in her direction. Cody was thankful that enough of her brain cells were still functioning to enable her hide behind the newspaper before Amanda could see her.

'Well, she's either here for the reunion or...' There was another possibility she hadn't wanted to think about. 'Or she's married, which is why I couldn't find her in the phonebook.' Cody peeked out from her hiding place to find the two women gone. She knew why the fact that Amanda might be married bothered her so, but she refused to voice it, even to herself.

Cody ate her burger in silent contemplation. 'Did Amanda sense her staring, or did she just happen to turn her head this way? And if she did feel my eyes on her, was it me she felt or would she have felt anyone's stare? And I'm a grown woman, why in the hell did I hide from her?' Not having the answers to any of her questions, Cody headed for the house to call Tracy, her voice of reason when she was confused and uncertain.

"So, that's what happened." Cody heard traffic noises in the background. "Where are you?"

"Outside the studio. We were having our unwrap party."

Cody had shrugged at the logic when Tracy had explained to her that instead of wrap parties at the end of filming, they had unwrap parties since by the end of filming, nobody in the cast had on a stitch of clothes. "Shit, sorry."

"Don't worry about it. Why'd you hide from her?"

"I don't know? I was hoping you'd tell me." Silence from her friend, which meant she was waiting for Cody to think it out. A deep sigh from Cody, "Maybe it caught me off guard. I wasn't prepared to see her."

"So if she knocked on the door now, you'd be okay?"

"Yes, no, hell, I don't know." Cody stopped pacing and collapsed onto the couch.

"Cody, for god sakes, you're 34 years old, you graduated from MIT and Vanderbilt University. You've been interviewed for TV, and you've got three college degrees..."

"Four." Cody interrupted.

"What?"

"Four, I've got four degrees. So what's your point?"

"My point is, you're an accomplished woman whose opinion and expertise has been sought by heads of corporations and governments and you're letting a few people from Bumfuck High School scare you."

Cody laughed. "I can always count on you to put things in prospective. I really should be mad at her about today. I was so out of sorts about seeing her again, I completely forgot about stopping at Starbucks on the way back to the house."

"Ohmygod, you forgot Starbucks? Does this mean you're gonna have to turn in your coffee addicts membership card?"

"Keep it up, funny girl, and I'll tell all your co-stars that you're really an accountant." They both laughed at one another. "I'll let you get back to your party. Thanks, Tracy."

"Anytime. Oh, a certain blonde was asking me if tall, dark and butch was coming. I told her, only if you were using your hand. Bye."

Cody shook her head and grinned. She'd get her back for that later.

Cody used the time before dinner to go through some of the stuff at the house, to see if anything of hers remained. She'd found an invitation for dinner from Beth, shoved under the door earlier and had accepted.

She headed out to the garage where she had seen several boxes labeled in her mother's handwriting. Most of them just had dates. She opened the one, labeled 1984-86. What she found confused her, to say the least. She pulled out copies of her course work from MIT and an article the college paper did on Cody being one of the youngest students to attend the university. There was even a photo taken during her graduation. She opened the box labeled 1987-89 next. It contained the same type of things, except it was from Vanderbilt University. There was even a candid shot of her and Tracy sitting together on the edge of the quad.

Cody remembered her first year at the university. She had just turned 18, had finally filled out, let her hair grow and had been able to lose the glasses after having laser surgery. It had also been the first year she had acted on her feelings for girls. She and Tracy had been lovers until they found out they made better friends. "It was a wonder I got any studying done." She grinned.

Cody opened the next box labeled 1990-; there was no ending date. This box contained articles from mostly scientific and technical publications about her or her work. It also contained a couple of VHS tapes of programs Cody had been interviewed for. "Oh mom, why didn't you let me know I meant something to you?" She repacked the boxes, she'd ship them home before she left. But now she needed to get ready for dinner with Beth and Isaac.

Later that night, Cody made the decision to attend the reunion. She would face the people from her past, not to show them anything, but to show herself that she had left the past behind and that her memories couldn't hurt her anymore. This time when she left this town, everything bad that had happened to her would stay here, where it belonged. She wasn't going to carry it around with

her anymore.

And one of those people she would have to face would be Amanda.

Heading to bed, she knew she'd be dreaming again, she had been every night since returning to the house. She began to think of them as her sub-conscious cleaning house, and wondered what it would be tonight.

## Chapter Four

Cody's senior year seem to pass rather quickly, Floyd being gone more than being home had helped, so had spending time with Amanda. Her friend had made cheerleader and first the football and then basketball season took a lot of the blonde's time. Cody rarely turned down the chance to spend time with her friend, even if it meant spending time with Amanda's other friends.

Granted the others were bothering her less after Amanda started including Cody in some of their after school activities. But Cody still didn't like them, especially Bridget and her boyfriend Fenton.

Cody cherished the time she and Amanda spent together, although she had become increasingly nervous around the blonde. Just the other day when Amanda had put her hand on Cody's arm, her heart rate increased and goosebumps ran up and down her arm. Then when Amanda smiled at her, Cody blushed. And Cody wasn't a blusher. She could count on one hand the number of times she had blushed in her 14 years. Now it seems like all the girl had to do, was walk into Cody's line of sight and she could feel herself turn red. Sometimes all she had to do was think about the blonde to cause it.

Cody was walking home from school when a car pulled up beside her. "You want a ride?"

"Sure." Cody didn't mind walking; in fact, she preferred it. But she liked being with Amanda even more.

"So, has anybody asked you to the prom?" The blonde glanced in her passenger's direction as she pulled up to the four-way stop.

"Nope. Are you going with anyone?" Cody knew Amanda had dated off and on, but never anybody for very long.

"Hank asked me, but I haven't said yes. And its two weeks away, there's still time for somebody to ask you."

"Doesn't matter, I wouldn't go anyway."

"Why not? It'll be fun. A little music, a little dancing...spiked punch. The bets on who'll loose their virginity that night." Amanda laughed. "Although I don't think virginity is a word that

applies to very many people at school."

There were several things Cody wanted to say. 'I'd go if you'd go with me.' Was her first thought. Second was, 'Have you done it?' Though she wasn't sure why, but she didn't really want the answer to that question. What she said was, "I can't dance."

"Is that all?" Amanda pulled into Cody's driveway. "Don't worry about it, I'll teach you." She patted Cody's leg. "Tomorrows Saturday, I'll pick you up after lunch and we'll go back to my house. I've got plenty of old records we can use."

That night her mother and Floyd got into another disagreement over Cody. "I don't think she should be allowed to go to the prom, Floyd. She's only 14. I don't think it's proper for her to be alone with a 17 or 18 year old boy."

"Brenda, she won't be alone. And besides, I plan on putting the fear of God into her and whoever her date is. Neither one of them will be thinking about any kind of hanky-panky. I guarantee it."

"Well, I guess so then. You know Reverend Booth's son is a junior this year; he's only 16. I wonder if he has a girlfriend."

Fortunately for Cody, Floyd left the next morning. She was so nervous about dancing with Amanda that she couldn't do anything right.

"Cody, what's gotten into you today? That's the second time you've let the potato's boil over." Her mother pulled the pan off the eye. "I feel sorry for Amanda, the way you're paying attention today, you'll probably step on her toes and break them."

'Ugh, did she have to say that? She probably just jinxed me.' Cody thought. 'What if I do? Maybe I can convince her to let me watch today. But then I wouldn't be able to be close to her. But if I do dance with her I'll probably make a complete and total fool of myself.'

"Cody?" Her mother called. "Amanda's here. Didn't you hear her honk?"

"No, I...I'll be back later." She yelled as she ran out of the house.

The lessons continued through the week with Cody not making much progress. During the slow dances, Cody was still stumbling over her own feet and occasionally over her partners too.

"I think I should just give up." Cody said. It was Saturday, one week since they had started.

"You're here now. Let's try again today, then if you don't do any better and still want to quit, I won't force you to continue. Okay?" The dance instructor coaxed.

"I don't know, Amanda. I mean I look like a deranged puppet when I dance to the fast stuff."

"That's silly, you do not look like a deranged puppet. A limp noodle maybe, but not a deranged



puppet." Amanda laughed, but quickly stopped when she saw the sad expression. "Cody, I'm sorry, I was just kidding."

"No, I'm sorry. I'm a little sensitive sometimes." Cody explained. 'I'm sensitive around Amanda. I don't want her to think of me as a stupid little kid.' She realized that was why she had never told Amanda her age or about Floyd's spankings.

"Let's try a slow song, okay?" Amanda started the music and held out her hand.

"Are you sure your toes are up for it?" Cody grinned.

"Yes, I'm sure." Amanda led Cody to the center of the family room. "You remember what we talked about, how to know which way to go and stuff?" Cody nodded. "Okay, here we go."

Cody wasn't sure what made this time different from all the rest, but she didn't stumble or trip or step on Amanda's toes once. She was able to dance the entire song like she had been doing it for years.

"You did it." Amanda squealed the second the music faded away. She threw her arms around Cody's neck and jumped up and down. "I'm so proud of you."

Cody was so excited; she couldn't believe she'd done it. She wrapped her arms tightly around her friend and held her close. It was then that she noticed another kind of excitement. She felt a tingling sensation running through her body each time Amanda's body brushed against hers.

The next few minutes were a total blur for Cody. One minute she was standing there happier than she ever remembered being; the next she found her lips covering Amanda's.

"Cody, stop." Amanda pushed her away. "I don't...we can't."

Even though Cody backed away, her hand reached out to Amanda. "I..." She saw Amanda's arms and hands held out between them, to keep her away; to keep her from getting too close. "I'm sorry." Cody turned and ran up the stairs and out of the house.

The next day Cody hid in her room, crying and hating herself for ruining her friendship with Amanda. Monday at school, Cody avoided Amanda, too embarrassed to face her and too afraid of what the blonde might say to her.

If she could make it through this week, Cody thought she'd be okay. Friday night was the prom, she told her mother she wasn't going. That she couldn't learn to dance and she wasn't going to go and just sit there like an idiot with everyone making fun of her. Next week was finals, which meant partial days. It also meant everybody would be concentrating on his or her own problems and too busy to worry about her, she hoped.

Two more weeks and she'd never have to see Amanda again. But every time she thought of never seeing the blonde again, she'd get a lump in her throat and tears in her eyes. Amanda had been

her first real friend since she had started skipping grades. Before then, she had just felt out of place with the older kids.

Wednesday was the day her world as she knew it, started to crumble. She was sitting by herself at lunch, something she hadn't had to do very much of lately, when she overheard the talk at the next table where Fenton and a few of his buddies sat.

"So, Red, you gonna finally pop Rita's cherry Friday night?" There was laughter from everyone but Red.

"What about you, Fenton, you gonna get any?" Red wanted the attention on someone else. He had always lied to make his friends think he and Rita had 'done it', but they never believed him.

"Oh yeah, I got us a motel room down at the Stardust. No more screwing in the back seat or on the ground." He replied.

"So who else is gonna give it up?" Hank wondered.

"Don't know. But I know who want be, at least not to a guy." Fenton smirked.

"What? Man, what are talking about?" Bobby asked.

Fenton enjoyed knowing something his buddies didn't. "I know for a fact that Cody...tried to take advantage of Amanda. If you know what I mean."

"Huh?" Bobby had never been accused of being overly smart.

"How?" Red asked.

"It seems Amanda was trying to teach her how to dance, like anybody would actually ask her to the prom."

Fenton was interrupted by Bobby, "Hey Amanda's cute, I'd go with her."

"Not Amanda, you dumbass." Fenton slapped him upside the head. "Cody."

"Ow." Bobby rubbed the back of his head.

"Like I was saying, they were dancing and suddenly Cody kisses her flat on the mouth and then..." Fenton paused.

"Then what?" Red questioned.

"Yeah, what happened next?" Hank eagerly asked.

"Then...she tried to cop a feel." Fenton finished dramatically.

"Jesus, what'd Amanda do?" Bobby questioned.

"I bet she slapped her. Rita slapped me once." Red mumbled.

"Nah, she was so disgusted she did know what to do, so she just pushed her away." Fenton stated. "Hey, watch this." He walked over to the table where Cody was.

She couldn't believe Amanda had not only told about the kiss but also lied about her trying to touch her. Cody was so humiliated, she wanted to run away but she didn't want to draw their attention to herself, so she sat frozen in place, wishing the floor would swallow her. When Fenton sat down next to her, she stiffened even more.

"So Cody, I hear you like girls."

She could hear the snickers from the next table.

"Why don't we all go out behind the bleachers and we'll show you what you're missing." He grabbed her hand forced it into his crotch. "I bet the four of us could change your mind." He moved her hand over his cock.

Cody felt it growing harder, she felt nauseated and scared, which propelled her to her feet and out of the cafeteria. She heard Fenton's parting comment; "She must really want it, if she's in that much of a hurry." Then the other's laughing.

She didn't go to the rest of her classes that day, but hid at the library. It was the first time all year that she had missed school, but she didn't care. Cody had no intention of setting foot anywhere near the school building the rest of the week. Amanda had betrayed her and she wasn't sure how she would ever face anybody again. She knew the story would be all over school by the end of the day.

She had to take her finals next week; her 5.0 grade average was at stake. She intended to go to college and planned on being offered full scholarships to some of the best schools in the country. The high schools college coordinator had the applications ready except for her senior grade point average. She was determined that no one would take this chance away from her. She was going to get away from this town, these people and her stepfather.

Cody spent Thursday and Friday back at the library, telling the librarian Miss Whitaker that she was doing special research for finals, so she wouldn't call the school or Cody's mother.

She walked home Friday afternoon, relieved that she could use the excuse of studying for finals to spend the weekend locked in her room. Two houses away, she saw Floyd's car in the driveway. He was supposed to have already left. "He's just running late, he'll be leaving before long." She told herself as she nervously chewed on her bottom lip.

Walking into the house, she was grabbed and forcefully dragged into the living room. "Where

were you today?" He still held her by her upper arm.

"Sc...school."

"Don't lie to me, little girl. The school called earlier wondering if you were sick since you missed yesterday and today. Your mothers out now, trying to find you." He held both her arms now and shook her.

Even though Cody was almost as tall as he was, the man outweighed her by well over a hundred pounds, and she had never seen him this mad. "I'm not...lying. It must be a mix up." At least he had stopped shaking her.

He ignored her explanation. "I ran into Coach Clark today."

That was Fenton's father, who coached at the high school. 'Oh shit, that meant he had heard the talk going around.' Cody was really scared now.

"He told me he was sorry that my stepdaughter turned out to be one of those queers."

The slap was sudden and unexpected. He had never done that before. Cody fell back on the couch and tasted blood from her split lip.

"You will not be one of those perverts, I'll beat it outta you first." He started towards her. "You'll not set foot out of this house until you learn how to be a wife. Then I'll find someone for you to marry. So you can just forget about going to college, little girl."

As he started to unbuckle his belt, Cody ran. She wasn't sure if it was another beating she was running from or the thought of him trying to take away her dreams.

Heading for the stairs, she intended to barricade herself in her room until her mother got home. Hoping just this once, she would take Cody's side.

She knew he had been caught off guard by her running, but she only had a couple of steps on him, and she could sense him behind her.

Halfway up the stairs, she tripped and before she could regain her footing, felt his fingers close around her ankle. "Don't you run from me."

Cody kicked back with her other foot and heard a grunt when it made contact. Feeling his grip loosen, she half crawled, half ran the rest of the way into her room.

She slammed and locked the door, but she knew the flimsy bolt wouldn't keep him out. She wildly looked for something she could barricade the door with. She lunged for her wooden desk chair, it wasn't on rollers and she could wedge it under the knob.

Just before she got the chair in position, the door flew open, hitting Cody, knocking her

backwards and to the floor.

He stood over her, screaming at her. She was worthless. She had ruined her mother's life and his with her perverted actions. The town would pity them because of her. Pulling his belt from his pants, he straddled her legs. "It must be the devil that's in you, girl, and I intend to beat it outta you."

Cody barely got her arms up in front of her face before the blows started. For some reason Cody remember overhearing a girl at school talking about kneeling a boy 'down there' and that it made him stop whatever he had been doing. She didn't have much leverage, but she kicked up with her foot. It produced the desired results; he dropped the belt and bent over grabbing himself.

She scrambled away from him and stood up on her wobbly legs. Holding her injured arms close to her chest, she decided that getting out of the house was probably a good idea.

Cody had barely made it through her room doorway when he grabbed the back of her shirt. "No, let me go." She cried and tried to pull away, but didn't have the strength. When he jerked her back towards him, she felt her head connect with his face. Dizzily she stumbled forward, his hand no longer holding her back.

She had made it to the stairs when she heard him behind her once again. "You're gonna pay for that." She turned at his voice and saw a small trickle of blood running from his nose before he wiped it away.

Cody's mind yelled at her to run, and she yelled in pain when he grabbed her injured arms. A tug of war ensued until the slamming of the kitchen door caused a momentary lull.

They both knew her mother had returned. Cody used all her remaining strength to pull away from him. But when he released her, Cody was too dizzy to stand on her own. Off balance, she toppled over and down the stairs. She didn't hear her mother's scream; the blackness had already surrounded her.

Cody's memories faded away slowly. She had survived and maybe she had become a stronger person because of what she had gone through. It had taught her that she needed more than mental smarts to get through life. And thanks to her guardian at MIT and her maturing body, Cody had learned to defend herself.

## Chapter Five

Contrary to Mabel's prediction, one of the first couples to see the house had made an offer and the loan approved. Cody accepted. The next week was spent sorting through the house's contents. Some things like clothes and linens would be given away. Some of the furnishings she had sold to the used furniture store and the rest she had promised to the young couple.

Cody kept some of the old pictures of her mother. She hadn't taken any when she'd left town for college; she hadn't wanted any. It had been almost twenty years since she had seen her mother's

face, other than in her memories.

She sat staring at one now and made the decision to go by the cemetery before she left town. She felt like it would close another chapter in her life that had been left painfully open.

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It was the day of the reunion and she felt herself chickening out. "I'd like to use the phone a friend lifeline, Regis." Cody picked up her phone and called Tracy.

"Cluck...cluck-cluck." Tracy had been expecting her friend's call.

"Okay, so I'm a chicken." Cody admitted. "Help."

"Get your butt out that door and on that bike, missy. You are going to that reunion with your head held high. You're going to look at those putrid little pip-squeaks and laugh at them and their pathetic little lives."

"Whoa, what's got you so wound up?" Cody managed to get in when Tracy paused to take a breath.

"That was a little over the top, wasn't it."

"Yeah, just a bit. But I got the message."

"Oh good. Glad to know those acting classes finally paid off. Heaven knows I never need them for the films."

"Thanks, Trace. I don't know what I'd do without you." Cody said sincerely.

"Yeah, well, you've done the same for me, bud. Now go kick some butt."

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The afternoon get-together was being held by the lake, no doubt it was due to the fact beer was a no-no on school grounds.

Cody parked her bike at the far end of the graveled area. She weaved her way through the cars, towards the incoherent ramblings that only a multitude of disjointed conversations could produce, Cody's entrance into the area wasn't immediately noticed and she used the time to observe.

She spotted Fenton and his group of friends; they were the same ones he had in school. She recognized, Red and Bobby, she didn't see Hank. Fenton and Bobby looked their age and all but Red had beer guts in various stages of development. Next, she spotted Bridget, 'Boy, she must be really sweating under all that make-up.' She was surrounded by what Cody thought must be her

old cheerleading squad. 'But where is...there she is standing behind Bridget and just out of the group.'

Seeing a few heads start to turn her way, Cody decided it was time to make her entrance. She walked past Fenton and his group, hearing their not so whispered comments.

"Who is that?"

"It couldn't be anyone we went to school with, I'd remember a knock-out like her."

"Has to be somebody's wife."

They followed behind her and as she made her way past Bridget and her friends, they stopped to join the women. "Fenton, honey, do you know who that is?"

"It's Cody." Amanda stated. Cody was surprised that she would recognize her.

"Cody? You can't mean that tall skinny beanpole." Bridget stated.

"You're crazy, no one can change that much." Rita said and there were mumbles of agreement.

Cody had selected a soda and turned towards the group. Walking slowly up to them, she stopped in front of Bridget and smiled. "Hello, Bridget. My you sure haven't aged...well." The smile that had started to appear on the ex-cheerleaders face turned into a frown. 'Oh bad Cody, bad, bad Cody, that was so petty. But it was so much fun.' Cody smiled. "Still think I look like a boy?" She walked away without waiting for an answer. 'Maybe a little revenge wasn't so bad.'

Cody spent a little while talking to some of her old teachers. One, Ms McIntyre, the gym teacher that had tried to help her, told her she had left Prattville the year after Cody and had only come back hoping to see Cody at the reunion.

Since there had been no final in gym class, the teacher had been unaware of Cody's absence and her injuries until the police had talked to her. The teacher had seen Cody once in the hospital, but had never been told where Cody had gone once she left.

"I spent the first several years away from here, trying to forget this place existed." Cody admitted.

"That's understandable." She stopped walking and turned to face her former student. "I've seen you several times on TLC and a few other stations. I just wanted you to know how proud I am of you and to have been one of your teachers, even though it was just gym class."

"I never did thank you for trying to help me. You were the only one that tried to intervene. It wasn't until later I found out you went out on a limb and talked to the police. Is that why you left town? Did they give you a hard time after that?"

"I didn't stick around long enough to find out. I wasn't about to stay in a school or town that thought it was okay to beat children."

"Thank you, for everything." Cody smiled.

Ms McIntyre squeezed Cody's arm. "I think there's someone waiting to speak with you. We'll talk again." She promised as she walked away.

"Cody?"

Cody felt her throat go dry and tried to swallow. This was the hardest part. If she could get through this, she was home free.

"Please...can we talk?"

"What could you possibly have to say to me, Amanda?" Cody turned around to face her and fell into the green eyes just as she had on the first day they had met. But her anger was paramount.

"I didn't betray you, Cody, I know it seemed like it, but I didn't. I am guilty of bad judgment though. I told Bridget what happened and she blabbed it, after she embellished it of course. I should have trusted your feelings about her, but I thought she was my friend."

"You mean you didn't...all those years I thought..." 'All those years of hurt and anger...could she just let them go? But if Amanda didn't betray her...all that wasted time.'

"What else could you think?" Amanda interrupted Cody's thoughts. "It took me awhile to admit to myself that I really liked that kiss. Then when you didn't come back to school for the finals, I went by your house trying to find you. Nobody would tell me anything and I gave up thinking you didn't want to see me. I had been in college a couple of years when my mom finally heard what happened and told me."

They walked in silence for a few minutes. "Nobody would tell me where you were. You were underage and being protected by child services. Which is how I found out you had been only 14 at the time." Amanda gave her a reproachful look.

Cody knew it would take her awhile to sort out all her emotions. But to find out that Amanda hadn't betrayed her was like a weight being lifted from her shoulders. "So you liked my kiss?"

Amanda smiled. She had been afraid Cody wouldn't forgive her. "Yeah, of course that was a long time ago. I might be giving it more credit than it's due."

"That sounded an awful lot like a challenge to me." Cody smiled also. She felt her heart had awoken from its slumber and the weight of the world had been lifted from her shoulders.

They had made a circle of the small lake and were now, back in the crowd of people. Which both women felt was a good thing, since the conversation was getting a little bit too intimate for two



people who hadn't seen one another for so long, and who had parted the way they had.

"Would you like to go to the dinner with me tonight?" Amanda asked as they walked towards to parked cars. Both women deciding to leave since both had accomplished what they had set out to do.

"It's at the VFW club, right?" A nodding conformation. "Is it formal? If it is I have anything to wear."

"Not formal, but something other than jeans or kakis."

"I brought one pants suit with me, so that have to do." Cody said. "Are you planning on wearing a dress?"

Amanda looked at her oddly. "Um...I have a skirt that I was going to wear."

They stopped beside a car. "This is mine, or it's borrowed from my parents actually. Can I give you a ride?"

"I have one. Well, I will when those two stop drooling over it." She inclined her head towards Fenton and Hank who where standing two cars over.

"Damn, Hank, would you look at this beauty. I wonder who it belongs to."

"I'd stay away from that, Fenton. That's a custom Harley and that thing costs more than your house did. Although that's not saying much since I've seen your house." Hank laughed.

Amanda nodded in understanding. "So I should pick you up?"

"Yes, unless you want to give the town an intimate view of your ass...sets."

Amanda grinned. "Not on your life. Pick you up at seven, at your old address?"

"Sounds good to me, now if you'll excuse me, I need to go rescue my baby from their grubby paws."

Cody made her way to stand behind the two men. "Pardon me." They parted and she moved past them to the bike.

"Oh now don't tell me that's yours." Fenton whined.

Cody laughed while she put on her helmet, started the bike and rode away.

Amanda waited until Cody left, hoping the two men wouldn't be any trouble. She laughed when she saw Fenton's reaction. He had his hands shoved in his pockets and his bottom lip poked out.

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"Are you sure she's telling the truth?" Tracy asked.

"Why would she lie about it? She doesn't have anything to gain." Cody countered.

Tracy sighed. "You're probably right. Just be careful, I don't want to see you hurt again."

"I know, and I promise to watch my step."

"Okay." Tracy changed the topic. "I wish I could've seen that bitch's face when you told her she hadn't aged well."

"I couldn't believe I said it, it was so petty."

"What can I say; you learned from the master of pettiness." Tracy buffed her nails on her shirt.

"That I did. Look, I need to take a shower and get ready. I'll call tomorrow and give you an update. Love ya, Trace."

"Love you, too."

Continued in part two

## **Greek Warrior's Scrolls Main Page**

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### **~ Loose Ends ~** by Greek Warrior (Joan)

Disclaimer: See Part 1

Comments welcome: [XWPSScribe@aol.com](mailto:XWPSScribe@aol.com)

Part Two  
Chapter Six

"My parents said to tell you hello and to please stop by before you leave." Amanda announced as Cody got in the car.

"I think I can manage that."

Amanda hadn't put the car in gear yet. "Cody, about your mom...I don't know what to say." She

admitted.

"Most people keep saying, 'Sorry to hear of your loss', but what they don't seem to realize is my loss was twenty years ago, not last month."

"So you never kept in touch with her?" Cody shook her head. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Three years of talking about it to a psychologist, while she attended MIT, came to mind. The once a week, hour long sessions had been traumatic in themselves and it had taken awhile before she felt safe enough to talk about what she had been through. "Not now, maybe later."

"Okay." Putting the car in reverse, she backed down the drive. After several blocks in silence Amanda asked, "Where are you living now?"

"San Diego. How about you?"

"I've been staying here, with mom and dad, for the past six weeks. I'd been living in Japan for a couple of years before that and hadn't gotten to see them very often."

Cody debated. 'Was it a job or a...wife, husband, boy or girlfriend that kept her there?' "So, do you have a...significant other?"

Amanda took a quick glance at her passenger, puzzled by the hesitation in her voice. "No, I don't. Do you?"

"Me? No. It's kinda hard to have a relationship when my work takes me all over the place." She wasn't about to bring up the many casual affairs she'd had. Cody cleared her throat. "Was that why you were in Japan? Your work I mean."

"Yes. I'm a producer for animated movies and comic books. Well, I was, right now I'm between jobs." She saw the grin. "It's okay to laugh, most people do."

"Why, I'm a Disney fan. I think Robin Hood was my favorite, loved Sir Hiss. I also have a soft spot for Scooby and Taz and a few other cartoon characters." She admitted. "So you're just taking a vacation right now?"

Amanda smiled. "Kinda. There are four of us that got together to start our own company. We want to market a gay and lesbian series of movies and comics aimed at teenagers. We also have discussed a more erotic line for adults."

"That sounds interesting. Does that mean you're, um...a lesbian?" Cody blushed. "Damn it, I'm 34 years old and I'm still blushing around you." She hung her head. "I said that out loud, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did. And I still think it's adorable." Amanda laughed as she turned into the VFW's parking lot. "And yes, I'm gay. Can't you tell?" She parked the car and switched the motor off.

"Ah...no. I think my gaydar is busted, that's if I ever had it to begin with."

"Sounds like there might be a story or two in there somewhere."

"Maybe. I might even tell you one or two, if you're really, really good." She winked. "Now who's blushing?" Cody asked as she got out of the car, while Amanda put her hand on her cheek and felt the heat from her blush.

They entered through the side doors that opened directly into the large room where the reunion's buffet dinner and dance was in full swing. The buffet and bar was set up at one end of the elongated room, while at the opposite end, the DJ was setup on a small stage in a corner of the room with the dance floor beside it.

"You want to see what they've got to eat?" Amanda asked.

"Sure." Cody placed her hand on the small of Amanda's back as they headed towards the buffet, and noticed the overt stares a few people gave them.

They fixed their plates, retrieved two glasses of surprising passable wine and sat down at an unoccupied table. They kept the conversation light while they ate, being interrupted by a few people that stopped to say hello, mostly to Amanda.

"Where is home going to be after you leave here?" Cody was hoping she and Amanda could continue their friendship and maybe see if something more could develop.

"Um, good question. New York is a possibility of course, with several publishing houses being there. LA, because of the studios and talent base. Sabrina, is the artist and computer graphics expert, she's from Albuquerque. She was also working in Japan and is currently homeless, like me. Lawrence is the director; he's from a small town in Wisconsin, but now living in LA. And Steve is the writer; he's from New York and is currently living there."

The way Amanda had rushed over the artists name, made Cody frown. 'Wonder if there's a history between Sabrina and Amanda?' "Well, I for one, think Los Angeles would be place to be. There's a lot more opportunity there."

'And not far from San Diego, or is that the opportunity you're talking about?' Yes, I think I might be lobbying for LA."

"Amanda," Fenton interrupted, "why don't you join us? The old gang has a table over by the dance floor. Of course you're invited too, Cody, it's been awhile since all of us had a chance to talk to you."

"Yes, it has, hasn't it?" Cody agreed. "If I remember correctly, our last conversation involved something about the bleachers by the football field."

Fenton turned beet red. Amanda stared quizzically at Cody. "Uh yeah, well whenever you want, we'll be there...at the table over there, I mean, not at the... um...bleachers." He walked away quickly.

"What was that all about?"

"That's a story better told some place private."

"Okay, but I'm gonna hold you to it." Amanda warned. "We don't have to go over there."

Cody smiled. "Actually, I think it might prove amusing if we do." She stood. "Shall we?"

"Sure, I'm game."

The table was a large round one. Fenton and Bridget sat side-by-side with Hank on her left. His wife Tina sat next to him. Red was next, he had come alone tonight, he was wifeless, divorced from Penny not his old flame Rita. She had actually married Bobby. They sat next to Fenton. Cody and Amanda sat down with the blonde next to Rita. That left an empty chair between Cody and Red.

"It's been so long since we saw either of you," Rita commented, "why don't we go around the table and state the basics. You know, married, divorced," she smirked at Red, "or single, number of kids, job, stuff like that."

Hank shrugged. "I'll start. I work at the county jail in Buhl, I'm a deputy sheriff. Tina and I are married."

Tina smiled. "We don't have any kids. And I'm an office manager for a doctor here in town."

"I married Bobby the year after we graduated." Rita supplied. "We've got two boys, Jeff's 13 and Bobby, Jr. is 16. And I work for Fenton down at the Wal-Mart. You next honey." She looked at Bobby.

"You just told them, Rita."

"Not where you work, dear." Her smile was more a grimace.

"Oh."

Cody noticed that time had not helped Bobby in the smarts department.

"I work maintenance down at the junior college." He supplied.

"That's the only way they'd let him in the front door." Red laughed.

"Yeah, well I don't see no college diploma hanging from your wall either, smartass." Bobby

countered.

"You two knock it off." Fenton punctuated his statement with a slap to the back of Bobby's head.

"Ow."

'These people haven't changed in twenty years.' Cody thought.

"Let's see." Fenton started. "We got married right after high school." He put his arm along the back of Bridget's chair. "Four kids, Cherry just turned twenty; we think she was conceived on our honeymoon." He laughed. "We sure did it enough to make a baby or two."

'Or at the Stardust Motel.' Cody barely kept that thought to herself. 'Four kids and Fenton, no wonder she hasn't aged well.'

"Cherry took after her mama." Bridget said. "She was head cheerleader in high school, too."

"Fenton, Jr. is..." Fenton stopped and thought.

"Eighteen." Bridget supplied, then finished. "Ned is 16 and Clarice just turned 15." She looked tired just remembering them. "I've always been a homemaker, but since the kids are pretty much grown, I've been thinking about maybe getting a job."

"I'd hire you in a second, if I could, baby. But you know they don't allow family to work together. I'm the night manager over at the Wal-Mart, like Rita said." He explained for Cody and Amanda.

Amanda noticed Rita avoided looking at Fenton, who was avoiding looking at Rita. 'I'd bet anything they're having an affair.'

"I'm not married." Red started after everyone glared at him. "Me and Penny got divorced last year. Two kids, they live with her. I'm a plumber. Me and my daddy are in business together."

Everyone looked at Cody. "I'm single, no kids and I'm an engineer."

"You mean their letting women drive trains nowadays?" Bobby asked.

Cody managed to keep a straight face. "You just never know where we'll turn up next." She wasn't surprised he made a woo-woo sound for the whistle.

Amanda, who had been biting her lip to keep from laughing, cleared her throat, "I'm single, don't have kids and I produce animated films." Before anyone had time to pose a question to her, Amanda turned to Cody. "Would you like to dance?"

"How do you know I ever learned how?"

"Call it a hunch."

"Your hunch is right and I'd love to dance with you, but only if I can lead." She stood and held out her hand to Amanda.

"You turned out to be very good." Amanda raised her head from Cody's shoulder.

"I had a very patience first teacher."

"When I think back on that, I think I offered just to be close to you. Amanda admitted.  
"Although I didn't realize it at the time."

"I know that's why I accepted your offer. I was never planning on going to the prom."

They danced in silence through the rest of the song then headed back to the table. "But it was very confusing time for me, to say the least." Cody picked up their conversation.

"That's understandable; you were only 14 at the time." Amanda stated as they sat.

"We were all 14 once." Rita said longingly. "A long, long time ago." The others laughed and agreed with the sentiment.

The music stopped and was replaced by a humming and feedback from a microphone. "Okay folks, if I can have everyone's attention, I think this may prove to be a most interesting part of the evening. Bridget, you want to join me up here?"

"Duty calls." Bridget jumped up and joined Mr. Christopher on the small stage.

"I assume everybody remembers this." The principle held up the school year book for 1983. A loud groan assured him they did. "Yes, I see you do." He laughed. "I just want you to know, I had nothing to do with this; it was all her idea." He pointed to Bridget.

"Chicken." She took the microphone from him. "We're gonna do a little reminiscing.

"That is not proper English. You received an A from me, Bridget, don't tell me you've forgotten everything." Mrs. Filbert, the English teacher yelled, which was followed by laughter.

"Take a day off, Mrs. Filbert." Bridget retorted, followed by more laughter.

"Okay, does anyone remember that the year book committee voted that certain people would do or become specific things?" A few nodded their heads, others shouted yeah. "Well we're gonna see how well they did."

Bridget walked over to stand beside a table that held a projector. "First up is...Milton Hampton." She turned on the machine and Milton's senior picture was projected onto the screen behind the stage. Several groans, followed by laughter, were heard throughout the room.

"Let's see, his senior year, Milton was president of the chess club and was voted, 'Most likely to become president of something even stuffier'." Bridget added a current photo.

"Hey, Milton," someone shouted and pointed to his senior year photo that showed his close-cropped crew cut. "I think you had more hair then, than you do now."

"Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up." Milton patted his premature bald spot, which made everyone laugh harder.

"Okay, settle down or we'll be here all night." Bridget threatened. "The year book staff hit the nail on the head, as most of us know Milton is president of The Prattville First National Bank."

"Moving right along," Rita's pictures replaced Milton's. "Rita Hoffelmyer was voted, 'Most likely to dump Red and join a convent'. They only get half a point on this one. She did dump Red, but she married Bobby Wiggins. Of course knowing what she knows now, she probably wishes she had joined a convent."

Amanda leaned over and whispered in Cody's ear. "Is she trying to piss everyone off or is she just joking around?"

"I think she's trying to make everyone's life sound more miserable than her own. But both Red and Bobby look pretty upset. Cody answered and they turned their attention back to Bridget.

"Next up is Hank Charmers. And as you can see, he's anything but. Notice his long hair and the rebellious look on his face. You can see why he was voted, 'Most likely to end up in jail'. And this is his mug shot." His current photo was added. "So the committee gets another point."

"Hey," some who wasn't a current town resident called out. "He's not in jail, I saw him tonight."

"Out on probation," Bridget responded.

"Come on, Bridget," another voice from the audience. "If you're gonna do this, do it right."

"You're taking all the fun outta this." She complained. "Okay fine, he's not in jail he's a sheriff's deputy that works at the county jail. Happy now?" She consulted the paper in her hand.

Cody and Amanda looked at Hank, who wasn't too pleased, but Tina was furious. They wouldn't have been surprised if smoke suddenly started coming out her ears.

"I'll do Fenton's and mine together since they're intertwined, just like us." She smiled, which ended up being a sickeningly sweet gesture. "Fenton was voted, 'Mostly likely to get a scholarship and be a star college football player' and I was voted, 'Most likely to go to the same school and become head cheerleader', then we were voted, 'Mostly likely to marry'. The committee gets a point for us marrying, but as you know, my little snookems couldn't play anymore cause he hurt his knee his senior year in school."



"Yeah, but we all know he didn't get his knee injury from playing football. He got it jumping out your bedroom window the night your daddy almost caught you two humpin like bunny rabbits." Red yelled out and rampant laughter followed, including Fenton's.

"That's not a very funny joke, Red. I don't recall you being worthy of being voted most likely to do anything." She ignored the remaining chuckles and consulted her paper. Bridget skipped several names on her list to get to the one that she planed on having the most fun with.

"Next on my list is Cody Lawson, who was voted, 'Most likely to never marry and die an old maid'. Just looking at the school picture kinda explains that one." Bridget laughed, but most of the crowd mumbled under their breaths. Making jokes was one thing, but Bridget was being down right cruel now.

"Since Cody moved away right after graduation, I didn't have anything prepared. But she's here tonight and she's still single. And in my book, being unmarried in your thirties, equals being an old maid, so the committee gets another point."

"You ought to go up there." Amanda whispered. "You know she doesn't have a 'now' photo." Hank and Tina agreed. It seems they were a little more than fed up with their big mouth classmate. But Cody shook her head.

"By the way," Bridget continued. "She said she became an engineer. Hey, Cody, do you get to blow the whistle and wear that cute little conductor hat?"

"Cody," Amanda said, "you should explain what you've accomplished; at least it would wipe that smirk off her face."

"You mean you're not a conductor." Bobby asked.

"Wait. I thought you looked familiar. I've seen you on TV, haven't I?" Tina stated excitedly.

"What, you mean you're some kinda TV star?" Fenton wondered how he could have missed seeing a beautiful actress like her.

"No." Tina answered. "She's like super smart." She grinned and stood up. "Hey, Bridget, you've got it all wrong about Cody."

"What do you mean wrong? She said she was single." She glared at Tina. "Sit down. I've got a few more people to do."

"Hang on, Bridget; we want to know about Cody." Someone yelled out.

Another agreed. "Yeah, she just kinda disappeared back then and some of us wondered where she went. Besides, Bridget's just trying to make everyone look bad."

"Come on, Cody, tell us." Someone else yelled.

Cody looked rather like a deer caught in headlights.

"Come on, Amanda," Tina said. "You get one arm and I'll take the other." They half carried the tall woman up to the small stage and Tina stole the microphone from Bridget.

"This will have to be the 'now' photo." Tina said, indicating the slightly nervous woman.

"She sure has changed. I didn't believe it yesterday when someone said that was Cody." A man at a table near the stage said.

"Yeah, how could someone change that much? The only things that are the same are the black hair and the height." Someone else called out.

"No," a shout from the back, "she's taller than Cody was."

Amanda took the microphone. "I'll explain if you'll settle down. I'm Amanda Norris for those you who don't remember me."

"She's the one Cody tried to seduce." Bridget helpfully supplied.

Amanda glared at her. "People change, sometimes a great deal, from their early teen years to their adult years."

"Well sure, but not...what do you mean, early teens?" Came the reply.

"Cody was only fourteen when she graduated." Amanda informed them.

"I told you she was super smart." Tina grinned at the whispers and mummers.

"Hey, Cody, what'd you do after you graduated?" Someone sincerely asked. It seemed most people were fed up with Bridget.

Amanda looked back at her friend to see the nervous look almost gone. She smiled, nodded her head encouragingly and handed the microphone to the tall woman.

Cody stepped forward to stand beside the blonde and took the microphone. She placed her hand on Amanda's back so she would remain by her side. "You really want to know?" She asked her classmates.

"Yeah... Sure we do... Come on, tell us." Were some to the comments that were yelled.

"It's nothing spectacular." She warned, but they egged her on. "Um...okay, well Bridget was kinda right; I am an engineer, just not that kind. I went to college when I left here and spent three years at MIT and then three years at Vanderbilt studying engineering."

"What's the matter," Bridget interrupted. "Did ya keep getting thrown out?" She wasn't happy, Cody had insulted her yesterday in front of everyone and now she was stealing her limelight.

"No she didn't." Ms McIntyre stood and walked onto the stage. She remembered Bridget from the two years she taught at the school and knew how she humiliated Cody and some of the other students. She would apologize to Cody later for using her to put a stop to Bridget's vindictiveness.

"Cody was just fifteen when she started at MIT and graduated in just three years with two masters' degrees in engineering which is almost unheard of." She winked at an embarrassed Cody. "But she didn't stop there either. She then spent three more years at Vanderbilt University, graduating with another masters and a doctorate degree in engineering."

"Wow! We went to school with a real Einstein."

"Yeah, who knew?"

"Hey, Cody, looks like you should have been voted, 'Most likely to succeed'."

"Oh, and this one over there," Ms McIntyre gestured to Amanda, "Is no academic slouch either. She graduated from UCLA in just three years and is about to form a production company." She had learned Amanda's story yesterday.

Bridget stomped off the stage and back to the table. "Fenton, I'm ready to go home now."

"Well, I'm not, so sit down." Fenton watched the tall woman as several people came up to talk to her. 'Man, I wish I'd hitched onto her bumper after school, instead of getting stuck with a whinny wife and kids. Hell, maybe it's not too late. She's still single and didn't come with anyone but Amanda. And I know she can't be one of them lesbos, she's too good looking.' He grinned. 'Although I surely wouldn't complain if she wanted to hook up with another woman now and again, long as I can watch that is.'

Bridget stormed off, unnoticed, during Fenton's musings and Rita sat down beside him. "Hey, Fenton, Bobby's over at the 'Cody appreciation club', lets me and you find an empty room. I'm in need of a little appreciation myself."

'Why not.' Fenton thought. He wouldn't be able to get near the tall woman for awhile anyway.

Amanda watched the two, walk off together. "I don't think they're fooling anybody but Bobby and Bridget." Tina said as she stood next to the blonde.

"This place is a real soap opera." Amanda mused. "Of course any self-respecting soap would have Bobby and Bridget having an affair."

Tina laughed. "Not quite but almost right."

Hank joined his wife and Amanda. "Bobby is screwing around with Bridget and Fenton's oldest daughter."

"How do you know that?"

Tina explained. "I was taking a computer class at the junior college earlier this year, Cherry goes there, and I saw them in an empty classroom. They were doing it on the desk. Damn near walked in on them."

"He's old enough to be...well her father." Amanda needlessly stated.

"Yep, but she's legal age and unfortunately there's no law against stupidity." Hank said.

They watched Fenton and Rita re-enter the room. "That was quick." Amanda commented.

"What was?" Cody asked as she walked to her friend's side.

"Tell you later." Amanda whispered as the group headed for the table. "So, how was it being the center of attention?"

"Unlike the past, this time it was good. Some of the people that use to pick on me actually apologized and have been very nice."

"I'm another one that needs to make up for being a real shit in school." Fenton said to her. "I'm sorry I was so mean to you, Cody. I did some pretty stupid things back then."

'Looks like you still do, Fenton.' Amanda thought.

"Accepted." Cody said as the DJ started the music back. "Want to dance?" She looked at Amanda, who smiled and stood up.

"Looks to me like they could find someone besides each other to dance with." Bobby grumbled.

"I don't see nobody else asking 'em." Red stated.

'I'd be if my wife wasn't here.' Bobby thought. "They're both lookers."

"Maybe I'll ask." Red mentioned. "That Amanda is still real pretty." He glanced at Rita. 'Bet that would piss her off.' He stood, hitched up his pants and headed for the dance floor, ignoring the amused chuckles from some of his tablemates.

"Uh oh." Cody whispered. "Red looks like he's headed straight for us. I think he's gonna ask you to dance."

"What makes you say that?"

"He's been staring at you on and off all night." Cody explained. "Do you want me to tell him to get lost?"

Amanda sighed. "No, I'll dance once with him, if it's okay with you. I actually feel kinda sorry for him. I think he might still have some feelings for Rita."

Fenton was so surprised, just as the others were, that Amanda was actually dancing with Red, that he almost didn't take advantage of the fact that Cody was now without a partner. He jumped up to intercept her before she could leave the dance floor.

"Oh boy, if Bridget comes back now, I know someone whose gonna be sleeping on the couch." Bobby said as they watched Fenton and Cody dancing, or at least trying too. Fenton had never been known for his ability to trip the light fantastic.

"Fenton, why don't you let me lead? I'm use to it." Cody suggested.

"Okay, sure. It's been awhile since I took Bridget dancin. Never did like it much anyway."

"Hey look," Tina pointed. "They're doing better."

"That's because Cody's leading." Hank and the rest laughed.

"So, Amanda, you moving back to town?" Red asked.

"No, just visiting my parents." Amanda answered. 'He's not a bad dancer.' She thought. 'If you ignore the fact that he's waltzing to an upbeat country song.'

"So, you need a ride home or anything?" Red tried.

"No thanks, I drove and Cody came with me."

"Oh...well, how 'bout dinner tomorrow night? My treat." He tried again.

"Thanks, Red, but Cody and I have plans." She said and added to herself, 'I hope.'

The song ended before he could ask her about Sunday night. And she quickly headed for the ladies room, with Cody not far behind.

"Red's been asking me for a date." Amanda said after making sure they were alone. "I think he's trying to make Rita jealous. He must be one of the few that don't know about Rita and Fenton."

"What about them?" Cody asked.

"That's right I haven't told you. They're having an affair. Tina and Hank said they thought that Bobby and Bridget were the only oblivious ones."

Cody rolled her eyes.

"And that's not all, Bobby the little cradle robber, is...you know...with Cherry."

"Goddess, we need to get out of this town. I hope none of this stuff is catching."

"I don't know." Amanda moved closer to Cody and slowly ran her finger down the front of her friend's shirt. "I wouldn't mind a certain two people catching a little of this hanky-panky spirit."

They quickly jumped apart when the door opened.

## Chapter Seven

After their second try in as many attempts at dancing, was again interrupted, the pair snuck outside.

They were standing in the shadows at the edge of the building, in each other's arms, swaying to the music that they could just barely hear. "This may sound crazy, but it's like we've never been apart." Amanda sighed in contentment.

"Not crazy, I feel that way, too." Cody admitted. "I was so angry at you when I left here all those years ago, when I thought you had betrayed me. Then it gave way to hurt."

"I'm so sorry, Cody."

"But you know what? I finally realized that it wouldn't have hurt so much if I hadn't felt like I did about you. I can't say, at 14, that I was in love with you, I don't think any fourteen year old knows what love is, but I most certainly had a major crush on you." She leaned back to look into green eyes. "And now, seeing you again and knowing you didn't betray me, I realize I still have feelings for you."

Amanda smiled. "Do you think we can give this...us a try? I know it'll be hard if the company decides on the east coast, but I really want to see if there can be an us."

"I do too." Cody lowered her head and covered Amanda's lips with her own.

"There they are." Fenton started towards the swaying couple.

"Wait." Red grabbed his arm and pulled him to a stop. "Look, they're kissing."

"Damn." Fenton said. "That ain't right."

"Why? Just cause they're women?" Red asked.

"Well yeah. You can't tell me you think it's alright."

"Sure I do. I know what it feels like to love someone and not be allowed to show it. I loved Rita with all my heart but I couldn't do anything about it, cause she didn't love me. But what if she had, and people said it was wrong?" Red explained. "If they love each other, especially if they love each other, nobody should deny them being together."

Fenton was shocked. And he wasn't sure if it was because Red had been so insightful or because of what he said about Rita. "You really in love with her?"

"Yeah, well I was." Red stuck his hands in his pockets. "Now I don't know, I think maybe it's more of a habit to try and make her jealous than anything else."

"Jesus, man, I thought all these years you were just mad at her cause she wouldn't let you boink her on prom night."

They started back towards the door, leaving the two women in peace. "Well, there is that, too." Red admitted with a sly grin.

"Let me tell you, Red my buddy, you deserve a lot better than Rita. You're much too smart for her anyway."

"How do you know that?" Red wondered.

"Cause boinking her boss is the only way she can keep her job." Fenton explained.

"But you're..."

"Yep."

"Oh."

>~<>~<

"Mm, that was lot's better than I remembered it." Amanda grinned.

"Me, too. I guess it's true, that some things improve with age."

"You have any plans for tomorrow?" They wrapped an arm around each other's waist and started for the car.

I thought I'd go by the cemetery. I found a bunch of stuff in the garage, looks like mom was keeping track of me for some reason. Makes me wonder if I should've gotten in touch with her." Cody mused.

"I've often wondered if I should've gotten in touch with you before now. After I saw the documentary that interviewed you, I did an Internet search and tracked you down."

"Why didn't you?"

Amanda unlocked the doors and Cody held the blondes for her. Then she went around the car and settled in the passenger seat waiting for Amanda to answer.

"I was scared you'd turn me away. So I kept making up excuses not to." She started the car, but made no move to leave.

"So why now?" Cody asked.

"It was time. I was still nervous, but I had to know if what I was feeling was wishful thinking or if it was real." She explained and Cody reached over and gently squeezed her hand. "And I owed you an apology."

"Would you come with me tomorrow? We could get lunch afterwards. And I'd like to stop by and see Reverend Billingsley. Your parents go to his church, don't they?"

"Yes, they do. I didn't realize you knew him." Amanda said as she put the car in reverse and pulled out. "And yes, I'd like to go with you."

"He came by the hospital to see me after my...after I was hurt. We had several conversations. He helped me a lot." Cody explained.

"I remember when we first moved back here, listening to his sermons and thinking he was ahead of his time."

"Mm...yes he was. I remember him telling me that God was a faith not a religion. And it didn't matter if your God was male, female or however you perceived them. I even told him I thought I was gay and he said it was okay. He said that love was love no matter what."

"Wow, you were only fourteen when you admitted you were gay? It took me until my second year in college to finally come out to myself and another two years until I told my parents."

"But you said you liked my kiss."

"Yeah, I did." Amanda turned off the crowded boulevard and headed into the quieter residential section of town. "But I'd convinced myself that it was only because it was you and if any other girl kissed me, I would have run for the hills."

"Sounds like there's a story there."

"Kinda; how about I tell it inside?" Amanda pulled into Cody's driveway.

"That'll work." They got out of the car and headed for the front door. "I can offer beer, milk, juice, coffee or soda." Cody stated and flipped on the kitchen light.



"Coffee sounds good. I have to admit, I'm addicted to the stuff. I couldn't believe it when I saw the Starbucks over by the junior college. I think I almost caused a wreck when I slammed on my breaks to turn in." Amanda laughed.

"I found it after I'd been here a few days. Tracy always said if I ever cut myself, I'd bleed coffee. She couldn't believe it when I told her I'd forgotten to go by there on my way home the other day." Cody grinned at the memory.

"What would make you forget, and who's Tracy?"

"You did." Cody answered as the coffeemaker beeped. "How do you like your coffee?"

"Sweetener, if you've got it and a little milk." She answered distractedly. "How on earth did I make you forget? I didn't even know you were in town until yesterday."

Cody handed Amanda her mug and got the milk out of the fridge. "I had gone to the mall to kill some time and to get lunch. And I, um...saw someone that I wasn't prepared to see and it threw me a little."

"It was you behind the paper, in the food court." It was a statement, but Cody nodded in confirmation. "I felt like someone had been staring at me. But it had been a familiar feeling instead of a creepy one like you get when a stranger stares at you."

"I was being a coward, I know. I'd looked in the phonebook and couldn't find you. I didn't know if you had moved or if you might be married. When all the sudden there you are, and I knew I wasn't ready to see you."

"I'm glad you decided you were ready yesterday." They took their coffee and moved into the living room. "Now, who's Tracy?"

They sat down on the couch and turned to face one another. "She's my best friend. We met at Vanderbilt my first year and have been friends, ever since. She also lives in San Diego. Now finish your story."

Amanda took a few minutes to gather her thoughts. "That summer after high school, I fluctuated between being mad at you for not asking me what happened, to feeling miserable for trusting Bridget. So, I didn't spend too much time wondering about my sexuality. My first year at UCLA, I fell back on what was routine, dating boys. But I'd break it off with before the relationship could get serious. Or they would when I wouldn't sleep with them."

Amanda paused to swallow some coffee. "After I found out what happened to you...what your stepfather had done, I spent a long time being angry; then saddened when no one knew or would admit where you disappeared to. It's dumb, but after I knew the whole story, every time I saw a tall dark headed woman I'd chase her down to make sure it wasn't you." Amanda laughed. "I know this one girl thought I was crazy; I must've chased her down three or four different times."

"It's not crazy." Cody said. "I thought about you everyday and there were a few times that I'd see a short blonde head and my heart would stop. Then of course I'd kick myself for hoping it was you."

Amanda had tears in her eyes, but blinked them away. She reached for Cody's hand and laced their fingers together. "My roommate my junior year, had a close friend who was gay. And we became good friends. I was able to talk with her about my feelings and what happen between you and me."

"Did you...fall in love with her? Is that how you knew you where gay?" Cody didn't want to think about Amanda being in love with someone else and she considered taking the question back.

"No, she was my first sexual experience and she was tall with dark brown hair, but she wasn't you." Amanda tentatively admitted.

'Is she trying to say she loved me even then?' Cody stared at a spot just above Amanda's shoulder. But the blank beige living room wall couldn't give her an answer.

'That might have been admitting a little too much, too soon.' Amanda changed the subject. "Cody, please tell me what happened that day. I wasn't there for you then, but I'd like to be here for you now, if you'd let me."

Cody's eyes refocused on green ones. There was no need to clarify 'that day'. She decided that if she and Amanda were going to have a chance, she needed to get everything out in the open. All the old anger and pain that she had pushed deep inside her, needed to be released. She told about the times Floyd had whipped her and degraded her. And about the times he had used a belt on her when he thought his hand wasn't getting the message across.

Cody paused long enough to refill their cups before she told about the day of her 'accident', which it had officially been called. "When I woke up in the hospital, mom wasn't there, but he was. He threatened me. Told me I'd never come home again or see mom again, if I told anybody what happened. I became hysterical and the nurses made him leave."

"But what about the bruises on your arms? The belt marks?"

"It came down to my word against his. He claimed all along that he was in my parent's bedroom when I fell and mom couldn't say for sure, she came into the hallway after I had started to fall."

Cody continued after a deep breath. "Ms McIntyre speaking up about the time earlier that year, and me becoming hysterical each time he was near me, was enough to pull me from the house. Especially since I was headed to college in the fall. The county agency spoke with a professor at MIT and social services in Boston and arranged for the professor to be my guardian while I was there."

"How badly did he hurt you?" Amanda whispered, almost as if she was afraid to know.

Cody smiled. She wished Amanda had been with her at the hospital. It would have been one more person on her side. "Broken arm and collarbone, cracked ribs and a bruised and twisted knee. But what hurt more than those things, was that mom didn't believe me. I told her what happened and she knew he... punished me with a belt." She said bitterly. "But she kept saying that he wouldn't have done anything to hurt me. She had always maintained that the 'punishment' hurt Floyd just as much as it hurt me."

Tears were falling down both women's faces and Amanda pulled Cody into an embrace. 'Bastard', she thought as she silently rocked the tall woman in her arms and let the tears come. Thinking of them as a cleansing, Amanda saw no need to try to stop them.

After several minutes, Cody's tears stopped. "I should have known. I should have been there for you." Amanda reached for the box of tissues on the end table, handing some to Cody and also taking several for herself.

"You would have, if I hadn't screwed up and kissed you that day."

"You didn't screw up. And if you want to talk about 'ifs', there's if I had stopped you from running away that day. If I had had more courage and admitted I was gay. If I hadn't trusted and told Bridget."

"Hindsight's twenty-twenty, huh?" Cody said.

The evening continued with small talk, their serious discussing having drained both women, until Amanda stood and stretched. "About time I headed home, I think. What time do you want me to pick you up tomorrow, or can I talk you into giving me a ride on that monster of yours?"

"My baby is not a monster." Cody firmly stated. "And you better be nice to me or I'll tell her you said that."

"So it's a 'her', huh?"

"Yes, I sure as hell am not gonna allow a 'him' between my legs." Cody grinned when she saw the blush. "Ooh, that's another one for me."

Amanda laughed and held her friend's hand as she was walked to her car. "I didn't know we had a contest going. And I plan on being very nice to you." She leaned up and kissed Cody. She intended on a chaise kiss, but her mouth had other ideas.

After several heated minutes, Cody pulled back. "That was definitely 'very' nice." She had to stick her hands in her pockets to keep them from wandering over the blonde's body.

"Mm, yes it was." Amanda's breathing was slightly elevated. "Why don't you pick me up

tomorrow about 10 and you can introduce me to your baby. I'll be on my best behavior, I promise."

Cody watched her drive away before going back inside and heading to bed. 'I know what my dreams will be about tonight.' She licked her lips again, still tasting Amanda's.

## Chapter Eight

Cody pulled into Amanda's parents drive at five minutes before ten. She had been unable to keep the grin off her face all morning. She had definitely had good dreams...nice vivid exotic dreams to be exact, all starring a certain blonde.

Cody managed to keep her eyes off Amanda's ass while she spent several minutes talking with the blonde's parents. While she had enjoyed the dreams, they had done nothing to satisfy her libido. Especially, now that Amanda was wrapped around her on the bike.

Cody pulled into the church parking lot. "I wanted to talk to Reverend Billingsley first. I thought he might know when and why my mother started keeping track of me." She explained as she held Amanda's hand to steady her as she swung her leg over the bike.

They walked into the reception area for the church office and addressed a smiling young man. "Hi, we'd like to see the Reverend if he's available." Cody requested.

"Sure. What's your name, honey?"

She didn't need any gaydar to know this guy was gay. "Cody Lawson."

It didn't take long, after she was announced, for a skinny older man with salt and pepper hair, beard and mustache to come through one of the office doors and exuberantly embrace Cody. "My word look how you've grown up. Your photo's don't do you justice."

"Reverend, this is Amanda Norris." She introduced.

"Amanda." He shook her hand. "I spoke to your parents for a few minutes this past Sunday. They said you were in town for a visit." He looked back to Cody. "Both of you come into my office. Tim, could we please have some coffee and then hold my calls?" He requested.

"Since you're here, I'll assume Mr. Adamson tracked you down." He said after Tim brought coffee and left. "We disagreed on which one of us should contact you with the news."

She nodded her head. "He finally had to leave a message and I contacted him." She stared down at her coffee mug. "I found some stuff that mother had collected," she looked back up, "and I wondered if you knew anything about it?"

"Yes." He now regretted his promise to Brenda, not to say anything to her daughter. "She found out that I had seen you in the hospital and came to see me. It was about a year and a half after

you left town." He leaned back in his chair. "At first I was reluctant to tell her anything, but she explained that she now knew the truth and that she had hired a private detective to find you, I admitted that I heard from you once in awhile."

"Why didn't she contact me?" Cody seemed more bewildered than upset, but Amanda reached over and placed her hand on top of Cody's. She gently squeezed, then brushed her thumb across the young woman's knuckles.

"She didn't think she had any right to." He answered and sighed deeply. "I think she was punishing herself. I do know she was very proud of you, of what you had become and of what you had accomplished."

Cody leaned back in her chair. She wanted to believe that her mother had finally seen Floyd for what he really was, but she was still apprehensive. "How did she find out the truth?"

"Believe it or not, he confessed." He was both sets of eyes widen in surprise and chuckled. "Yeah, it amazed me too. Floyd started drinking," he explained. "And as abusive and self-righteous as he could be sober, he turned out to be a scared and paranoid drunk. It took awhile, but she finally pieced together his mostly incoherent mumblings; then confronted him when he sobered up."

"But she stayed with him...why?" Amanda blurted; then looked apologetically at Cody for butting in.

"Yes, she did, but it wasn't out of love. I believe it was more of a punishment for him, than being sent to jail ever could have been." The Reverend finished his coffee and leaned forward, resting his forearms on his desk.

Cody wrinkled her brow in confusion. "How was that a punishment?"

"Because she knew his secret and could expose him at any time." He explained. "He was a bully who beat a young girl. But he saw himself as less of a man because through it all he never gained control over you, then hiding behind your mother's skirt, so to speak, because she stood up for him. Punishing a child is one thing, but losing control the way he did and beating them, is totally different. Even in the eyes of his friends and colleges. If the truth had gotten out, he would have been humiliated for not being 'the man of the house'. And not able to face his peers and losing his image, at least to him, was a lot worse punishment than serving jail time. He lived in fear each day of Brenda exposing him."

"That's true. He was so scared that it would get out that I was queer and he wouldn't be able to face anybody." Cody remembered the last confrontation with him.

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Later at the cemetery, Amanda gave Cody time alone at her mother's grave. The fact that she had chosen to be buried beside Cody's father and not Floyd, seemed to convince Cody even more

than what Reverend Billingsley had said, that her mother regretted what had happened.

"You seem more...at peace; I believe is the right way to describe it." Amanda stated. "Are you?" They were sitting in an Italian restaurant eating lunch.

Cody smiled. "Yes I am. I regret not being in touch with mother, but I'm not sure I would have listened to her if she had tried to contact me. And even if I had, I'm not sure I would've completely forgiven her." She paused when the waitress cleared the empty plates from the table. And there was still that one other thing about her mother, she buried deep inside herself.

"Would either of you like desert?"

Cody looked to Amanda, who shook her head. "No thanks, just the check." The dark haired woman said.

The waitress slipped the check into a black binder and placed it on the table. "I'll be your cashier when you're ready." She stated before leaving.

Cody continued with their previous conversation as she pulled several bills from her wallet. "I think I'd have been too angry and too hurt to listen if she'd contacted me earlier and if she had waited until recently, I'd probably have told her it was too little too late. The part of me that's still the hurt teenager would have wanted to hurt her as much as I had been hurt. I believe it was a no win situation anyway you look at it."

"I think you are being too hard on yourself." Amanda said as they left the restaurant. "Eventually you would have listened."

"Maybe." Cody shrugged, not totally convinced.

They had lingered over lunch and it was now mid-afternoon. "What are you doing tomorrow?" Amanda asked.

Cody was silent, staring off into the distance, then said, "I need to start back home tomorrow. I have a meeting Tuesday afternoon that can't be postponed."

"Oh." Amanda knew that they both had lives to get back to; professional lives anyway. "Could I come over and fix you dinner tonight? I'd like to spend as much time with you as I can."

"Yes, but you don't have to cook. We can order something." Cody smiled. She wanted to spend more time with Amanda too.

"I'd like to cook, that is if you have any left to cook with."

"Yes, I still have kitchen junk. That's some of the stuff that I promised to leave there, so the new owners could go through it."

Cody dropped Amanda back at her parent's house. Amanda promised to be there in a couple of hours after stopping by the store.

After arriving at the house, Cody called Tracy and filled her in on the day's revelations. "Go on." Cody said when she finished. "I know you're dying to say it."

"Cody, honey, I'd never say I told you so. But maybe from now on you'll listen when Dr. Tracy gives you advice." She laughed, picturing blue eyes rolling. "I've got news of my own."

"What?" Cody checked the time; she still wanted to shower before Amanda got there.

"I'm gonna take a few weeks off, then do one more movie. And if it still feels more like work than fun, I'm gonna retire and concentrate on my business." Tracy had taken most of the money she'd made in the first several years of making films and started her own accounting firm.

"Really?" Cody grinned. "Trace, I think that's great. It's about time you used that degree of yours."

"So do mom and dad. I think they were actually dancing in the streets when I told them." She admitted. "Go take your shower before your date arrives. We can celebrate when you get back."

"You're on and it's my treat. I'll take you anywhere you want to go. Cody stated. "So start thinking."

"I will. Tootles."

"Bye, Trace." Cody hung up and raced up stairs to the bathroom, the grin never leaving her face.

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Cody was sitting at the small kitchen table watching Amanda as she fixed dinner. The blonde said without turning around, "You still owe me a bleacher story."

"Oh that." And she proceeded to explain.

After Cody finished, Amanda turned around, the knife she had been chopping onions with, held in a white-knuckled death-grip. "That worthless...sorry...son of a bitch."

"Amanda." Cody stood up and looked alarming at the knife. She carefully pried it out of her friend's hand. "Hey, it was a long time ago. And I really don't think they would have done anything. He was just trying to embarrass me and look macho in front of his friends."

"Damn it, Cody. You were only 14."

"They didn't know that, sweetheart. They only found that out the other night, remember?" Cody held the older woman's face in her hands, rubbing her thumbs over soft cheeks, soothingly.

"I forgot, I..." She smiled. "You called me sweetheart."

"I take it, that's okay." She returned the smile.

"Oh yeah, more than okay." She laid her head against Cody's shoulder and hugged her. "I don't want you to leave tomorrow." Amanda quietly admitted.

"I don't want to leave you either." She sighed. "I don't suppose...you would...could, come with me. I mean for a visit or something." Cody stumbled through her words. "What I'm trying to say and not doing a very good job, is that I know you've got a business to start and partners to consider, but I'd really like it if we could spend more time together."

"I'd like that, too. But I think I'm gonna be rather busy this coming week." Amanda leaned back and looked up at the taller woman.

"Oh...well its okay...I understand." Cody tried to pull away but Amanda wouldn't let her go.

"I'm going to be busy convincing three people that San Diego would be the perfect place for a new production company to locate." Amanda grinned at the surprised expression on her friends face.

"Really?"

"Yes, really. And if they don't agree I'll just explain to them that's where I'm gonna be. It is the electronic age after all. We don't always have to be in the same city."

Dinner was a somewhat subdued affair with the impending separation hanging over their heads.

After cleaning the kitchen, they spent time just sitting together on the couch, holding each other. Amanda leaned up and kissed the dark haired woman. Cody moaned, as the blonde's tongue slipped between her lips and explored her mouth.

The seductive sound sent shivers through Amanda. She pushed Cody down and covered the longer body with her own.

"Wait, Amanda...baby, listen please."

The blonde paused. "Huh?" Her concentration was definitely on Cody, just not on what she was saying.

"I want you, I really do; but not here in this house...in this town. I want us to be somewhere with no bad memories. A place where we can start fresh." She explained while trying to catch her breath.

Amanda looked down into sincere blue eyes and gave a frustrated sigh. "I got carried away." She



admitted. "I understand what you're saying and I do agree. But it's hard to wait."

"I know, believe me, any other place and I probably would've initiated this. But I think one thing I've learned by coming back here is that patience is a virtue." They returned to their original positions of sitting beside each other.

"Well that explains it then." Amanda stated.

"Explains what?" Cody was confused.

Amanda grinned. "I have no virtues; therefore you can't expect me to have any patience." She laid her head back against the couch, both women chuckling.

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Cody paced back and forth, waiting non-too patiently, just short of the security checkpoint. Amanda's plane had landed and taxied to its gate. It had been two weeks since Cody had seen her and she realized she was nervous. They had been in contact everyday by phone and e-mail. She remembered Amanda's squeal of delight two days ago when Cody answered the phone and the blonde had informed her that she had finally convinced the others that San Diego was indeed the perfect place to located their new company.

Cody stopped pacing when a sea of humanity began to flow towards the concourse exit. She caught a familiar blonde head popping up every few steps and smiled. Then sparkling green eyes were gazing up at her.

"Hi."

"Hi, yourself. This is for you." Cody held out a single red rose.

"Thank you." Amanda leaned up and kissed the taller woman on the cheek.

"Do you have any bags?"

"Just this." She shouldered her carry-on. "I shipped everything else. It's still okay if I stay with you a few days, right?"

"Of course." They made their way towards the airport exit.

"It shouldn't take me too long to find a place. I've also been given the chore of finding office space or a small building to lease." Amanda commented as Cody steered them along the streets towards her house.

"I'll help. I've cleared my calendar this week so I'm all yours." Realizing what she'd said, the tall woman blushed. Cody was glad Amanda was watching the passing scenery and didn't notice. 'Goddess, I've got to get this under control.'

Cody's house was located on the beach in La Jolla. It was a single-level, three bedroom, two-bath stucco house. The best room, as Amanda discovered, was located along the back and ran the length of the house. The room had a wall of windows that overlooked the ocean and the twenty-yards of beach that separated the house from the water.

"I bet this is where you are every day at sunset." Amanda gazed out at the blue sky and waves gently caressing the sand.

"I try to be. It's an amazing sight." Cody wrapped her arms around the shorter woman from behind. "What would you like to do tonight? If you're tired, we can stay here."

Amanda leaned back into the solid warm body. "I'm not tired, but I'd like to be here, in this room with you when the sun starts to set. And as those magnificent colors weave their way across the sky, leaving an imprint of wonder and amazement, I want us to be making love and leaving our own imprint on each other."

Amanda turned in Cody's arms to find a breathtakingly beautiful smile on the dark haired woman's face. "That was the most incredible thing anybody's ever said to me. I would like that too."

They spent a long time sitting together in the sand and walking along the water's edge. It was calm even though the tide was coming in. Just before dusk, they made their way back to the house, fixing sandwiches and opening a bag of potato chips for a quick dinner.

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The setting sun found the women in each other's arms, staring through the windows at the explosion of colors painting the sky. "You're right, it is an amazing sight." Amanda marveled.

The kiss was heartfelt and passionate, as Cody lowered Amanda onto the blanket that had been their dinner table and now served as their bed. Both women were surprised by the tenderness in which they touched one another, considering the hunger that coursed through their bodies.

Clothes were slowly removed until heated flesh came together.

Amanda moaned Cody's name as the tall woman's mouth left her neck and found an erect nipple to suckle; her hand lightly caressing her skin, moving down her side, her hip and her thigh, leaving a trail of stimulation in its wake.

Cody had never been able to orgasm from just touching someone, but she was close now. The feel and taste of the blonde woman's skin was very exciting to her and when Amanda's legs spread in invitation, she felt her need pulsing between her legs.

"Please Cody...touch me before I go crazy." She opened herself, hoping for the contact that she craved.

Cody lifted her head, looking at the inflamed expression on her lover's face. "Goddess, you're beautiful." Her hand moved to stroke Amanda's heat and desire.

Amanda felt fingertips stroke her passion into a burning flame. "I need to feel you...your weight...your body touching mine." Amanda guided Cody down to her. And their bodies began an erotic dance, melding together as skin caressed skin; desire slid together and then withdrew. Over and over again until the crescendo built to dizzying heights and they crested, riding the wave of their release, together.

Continued in part three

### **Greek Warrior's Scrolls Main Page**

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## **~ Loose Ends ~** by Greek Warrior (Joan)

Disclaimer: See Part 1

Comments welcome: [XWPSScribe@aol.com](mailto:XWPSScribe@aol.com)

Part Three  
Chapter Nine

ONE YEAR LATER

"Hey, you're late." The dark haired woman stated as her friend slid into the booth across from her.

"I know, my last client was held up in traffic and the meeting ran late. Have you ordered?" Tracy asked as she glanced through the menu. The ex-adult movie star decided to retire last year and finally use her MBA degree. While making movies, she had saved money and started her own accounting firm. After retiring she let her hair return to its original color of light brown and quit wearing the blue contacts, restoring her eyes to the brown, flecked with gold that Cody was used to.

Cody shook her head. "I'm not real hungry. I think I'll just have a salad."

Tracy was starting to worry about her best friend. Cody hadn't gone through mood swings like she had been having the past few months, since they had met at the university.

It had taken awhile for Cody to open up; they had become friends, then lovers and then best

friends, before Tracy had learned of her troubled past. "You haven't had an appetite for awhile, what's up?" She asked after they placed their orders.

Cody slumped in the booth. "I'm not sure." She absentmindedly played with her eating utensils. "Amanda and I can't seem to have a conversation without getting into a disagreement these days."

Tracy dug into her cheeseburger. Another advantage to retiring was being able to eat what she wanted without having to worry about gaining a few pounds here and there. "Maybe you two are PMSing at the same time." She voiced between bites. Though she knew her friend's personality rarely changed during her cycle.

Cody shrugged her shoulders as she picked through her salad. "Beats me," she answered before taking a bite. "Our first six months together was like a dream come true, even though she was busy with starting the production company, I don't think we could've been any happier." She put her fork down and gave up pretending to eat. "Now though...she doesn't seem happy."

"You've asked her?" Cody nodded in answer. "What does she say?"

"That I'm never home," she paused when the waiter stopped at their table.

"Could I get you something else?" He gestured toward her uneaten salad.

"No, thank you. I'm not very hungry."

"Anything else for you, ma'am?" He asked Tracy.

"No thanks." She answered, then when he left with their dishes she said, "You have been gone a lot these past few months."

"I know, but she's been busy too. That's why I had to call you to pick me up last week."

"What happened with that? I haven't had a chance to ask." Tracy finished her tea and motioned the waiter for more.

"She said she got hung up at work and forgot. Thing is, I called her cell phone when I landed and it went directly to voice mail. I left a message thinking she was on a call, but when she didn't return my call, I phoned her office and she didn't answer there or at the house. Half hour later I called you to come get me, and while I waited for you, she finally called me back." Cody explained.

"What'd she say?"

"That she wasn't in her office and that her cell phone had been acting up."

Tracy watched her friend fidget. "You don't believe her." It wasn't a question. "You don't think

she's having an affair, do you?" She saw Cody's jaw clench and hated bring it up, but knew it was something her friend had probably already considered.

"She and Sabrina have been spending a lot of time together since I've been working so much lately. And Amanda did tell me that they were off and on lovers when they worked together in Japan." She looked away, but not before Tracy saw the confusion in the blue eyes. "But I just can't believe she'd do that."

Tracy wondered if Cody could see the similarities. "Honey, we spend a lot of time together too, and we're ex-lovers. I know Amanda loves you, I really don't think she would cheat on you either." She reassured her. 'At least she better not.' She added to herself.

"I do think Sabrina wants her back. Would you talk to her?" Cody pleaded.

Tracy sighed. "I can try, but she doesn't particularly like me. She's jealous of the time we spend together, just like you are of Sabrina." She explained to the confused woman.

"But...why? I've always tried to include her when we do things. It was Amanda that said she thought we should spend time together. And I'm not jealous of Sabrina, just leery of her."

"Ah." Tracy said knowingly. "And you believed her."

"Well yeah." She thought, then wrinkled her brow. "Why wouldn't I?"

"She probably wanted you to say you'd rather spend time with her." She educated the clueless woman.

"Why would she say one thing and mean another? Was she testing me? It sounds like she doesn't trust me." Cody didn't understand and was starting to get defensive. It sounded more and more to her, like she was being set up to fail.

"No, I don't believe so. I just think that the more time you spent with me, the more she started to resent it." Tracy paused. "I should have noticed what was happening, now that I think about it."

"I don't understand." Cody rubbed her temples, hoping to massage away her growing headache.

"I know, babe. I'll talk to Amanda if you want. I can try to reassure her, but if I'm right about all this, it might do more harm than good."

Cody took a deep breath. "No, you're right. I need to do this myself. Maybe we could get away for a quiet weekend, just the two of us. And I could show her how much I love her."

Tracy smiled. "Good idea. That ought to get you two back on track."

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"You're home early." Cody said as she bent down and kissed Amanda on top of her head.

"Yeah, I had a stomachache. I can go in this weekend and catch up." She explained.

"Oh...I um, thought maybe we could go away this weekend. Spend some time together, just the two of us. I know its short notice, but we haven't had a lot of time together lately." She sat down next to Amanda, but was an arm length away since the blonde's legs were tucked up beside her on the couch.

"I'd say it's short notice, its Thursday. Where have you been? I thought you were working from here today."

"I met Tracy for lunch." She saw the green eyes grow distant.

"I see." Amanda stood and moved in front of the windows. "I can't just drop every thing because you decided to be here this weekend." She said coolly.

"Well I'm glad you 'see' because I don't." Cody also stood and threw her hands out sideways, then dropped them to her sides. "I wish you'd explain it to me. I want to understand what's happened. I love you, Amanda, and I thought you loved me. Maybe I was wrong."

The blonde turned around quickly. "Don't you make this my fault. I'm not the one that spends all her spare time with her ex-lover."

"I tired to include you when we made plans. But you wouldn't even attempt to get to know her. And you spend everyday with your ex-lover." Cody countered.

"That's work, it's different."

"So it was work every night last week? I know you were with her, I could hear her." Cody's voice wavered, not sure if she wanted the answer to that question.

"Of course it was. We were together because she has been keeping her niece Rosie and I was helping watch her." All true, she just left out the fact that they had invented work to do so Amanda could spend time with the child. "And I don't like Tracy." She added defensively.

"She was right, you are jealous." Cody stated.

"You talked to her about us?" She was angry, but also a little guilty since she had done the same with Sabrina. "I bet she had a good laugh."

"That's not fair, she actually understood how you felt."

"Great, that's all I need...sympathy from a porn star." She said sarcastically as she turned to face the window again.

"I never thought of you as a snob. Guess I was wrong about that too." A thinly veiled reference to the fact that Amanda had never corrected Cody's 'I thought you loved me' statement.

Amanda leaned her forehead against the window. She hadn't meant to argue with Cody, but she was very insecure about the close relationship between the two women and felt like a third wheel the few times she had done things with them. She raised her head and sought out her lover's reflection, but she was alone in the room. "Damn."

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Halfway through the next week, the lovers were still leery of each other's moods. They both wanted to make up and try to resolve their problems, but were wary of starting another argument.

"I promised I would help Sabrina with Rosie tonight." Amanda dreaded bring up her business partner. "Why don't you come with us? We're going to grab dinner and go to a movie."

"I think I'll pass. I'm not comfortable around kids." Cody answered.

"What? You're great with kids." She leaned back against the sink she had put her breakfast dishes in. "The kids you taught last year at that job fair thought you were fantastic."

"Yeah, but I was talking about engineering then, so it was something I was confident with doing." She remembered the fair that she had been conned into doing. A room full of fifth and sixth graders was not her first of how to spend a Saturday morning. "And I was very uncomfortable."

Amanda smiled. "You just need one of your own. You'll be a natural."

"I don't think so." Cody said as she added her dishes to the sink.

"What if I do?" Amanda asked, not smiling now.

"What if you do what?" Cody filled her empty mug.

"Want one of my own." She answered. "Being around Rosie has made me realize that I want to be a mother."

"I don't suppose I could interest you in a puppy? They're cute and cuddly and need taking care of." Cody grinned, but Amanda didn't. "You're really serious about this, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am." She folded her arms across her chest.

"Oh boy." Cody ran her hands through her hair. "I'm not cut out to be a parent, Amanda."

"You don't know that. You're just scared, like any sane person would be." She started pacing in front of the tall woman. "Cody, I know your childhood wasn't the greatest, but that doesn't mean

you wouldn't make a good parent."

"It's not only that, Amanda, you said yourself that I've been gone more than here lately."

"So, change it. Take fewer jobs or take more jobs around here. You don't have to stay gone so much." Amanda reasoned. "You were offered a job with the Department of Transportation that would keep you close to home."

"I like the jobs I've been doing, they're challenging. I worked hard to get where I am and I like to think that some of the work I do, makes a difference, makes life better for people without making things worse for the environment. I don't want to change what I do." Cody started getting defensive.

Amanda glared. "Are you telling me I can't have a baby?"

"No, I just...I can't be a parent."

Amanda stormed out of the kitchen. "You're going to make me choose between you and a baby." She yelled, not realizing Cody was following.

"We've been together a year and you've never mentioned wanting children, why now?" She questioned.

"I've just now realized it." Amanda stated as she grabbed her briefcase and started looking for her keys.

"What if next year you realize you don't want one? It's not like you can change your mind." Cody was following her around the house on her search. "They're on the end table."

"Thank you. And I'm not going to change my mind." She headed for the garage.

"I just think we need to discuss this in more detail."

"I don't think we have anything more to talk about, you seem to have made up your mind already. I've got to go, I'm gonna be late as it is."

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"Are we still on for tonight?"

Amanda looked up to find the dark-brown, curly haired woman standing in her doorway. "We're definitely still on; I'm looking forward to it."

"You've seemed pre-occupied today. Is there something wrong?" Sabrina came into the office and sat down in one of the chairs in front of Amanda's desk. "Is there anything you want to talk about? You know I'm a good listener."



"I know." Amanda smiled at her friend. "Cody and I had an argument...well, more of a disagreement really, about wanting children. I do, she doesn't." She explained the gist of their morning discussion.

"It sounds to me like she's making you choose." Sabrina said sympathetically.

"Maybe she's right about making sure. Its not something I could change my mind about once I get pregnant." Amanda reluctantly admitted.

"I know it's none of my business, but if you wait much longer, you might not be able to have a baby. Rachel, my oldest sister, put off having a family until she turned forty and then tried and tried but could never get pregnant."

Sabrina smiled inwardly at the look of panic on Amanda's face. "I'll be back later to see if when you'll be ready to go."

## Chapter Ten

"Lawson." Cody broke out of her daze and answered her phone before it went to voice mail.

"Hiya, babe. How's it hanging?"

"Tracy, on god, I'm in so much trouble."

"What's wrong? Are you okay?" Tracy stood and started for her office door.

"No. Amanda wants to have a baby. She sprung it on me this morning. What do I do?"

"Calm down." Tracy returned to her desk chair. "Did you tell her how you felt?" She could hear the panic in her friend's voice and was concerned. In the first few years after they graduated and moved to Southern California, Cody had a few, not quite full fledged panic attacks, but when something in her personal life had gone beyond her control, she had become frightened and disappeared for several days at a time. It was one of the things along with the recurring nightmares that sent her back to a psychologist.

"Yeah, she thinks I'm trying to make her choose between me and a baby." Cody as her nervous energy made her pace.

Tracy paused. "Are you?" She winced, waiting for the reaction and counted to ten in the silence.

"Of course not. How could you ask me that?"

Cody's voice was strained and Tracy knew her friend had at least wondered at the possibility. "Cody, it sounds like she's made her mind up. That just leaves three outcomes; one, you give in, two, she gives in, and three, you break up." She hated to be so blunt, but knew that was what

Cody expected from her. "What are you going to do when she says, 'I'm having a baby with or without you'?"

"I..." Cody sat down, trying to imagine herself as a parent. "I honestly don't know. This came up so suddenly that I was hoping it was just a phase or something."

"It's something you're gonna have to prepare yourself for if she's serious. It's a tough one, babe, I wish I could help you make a decision, but I'm afraid you're on your own with this one. But you do need to explain to her the main reason why you don't want any children."

"Yeah, I know." Cody closed her eyes and wished she could turn back time to when they were happy with each other. "So, what's up with you?" She changed the subject. "You still seeing Wren?"

"Yeah, we uh, are gonna try cohabitating for awhile and see if it works out."

Cody smiled; glad something was going right for someone. "Bout time someone made an honest woman outta you."

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"Steve." Amanda called out when she saw the tall man go past her doorway.

"What's up?" He backtracked and stuck his head around the doorframe.

"If you've got a minute, I'd like to talk to you about something."

"Sure." He entered her office. "Shoot."

"Shut the door and have a seat, this is personal." She told him. 'I can't believe I'm gonna do this behind her back.' She had argued with herself all morning, going through the mental list of pros and cons over and over again. But what Sabrina had told her about her sister and feeling sure that Cody was just panicking and would really want a baby once she got use to the idea, spurred her on.

Steve was like Cody in many ways; he was intelligent, tall with blue eyes and had some of the same personality traits. He could be quiet at times, preferring his own company, or fun and outgoing with a group of close friends. He could be the best friend you'd ever want or the worst enemy you could ever have. The only problem was his blonde hair.

"I have something very personal to ask you and want you to know up front, that it's okay to decline." He nodded. "Also I don't want this to leave this office, not even to Sabrina or Lawrence."

"Of course. You know I'm not one for contributing to the office rumor mill."

"How do you feel about donating sperm? And about a lesbian couple having children?"

If he was surprised, he didn't show it. Steve was the only one of the four partners that was heterosexual. "I have nothing against two descent people raising kids, no matter what gender they are. As for the other, I've never really had an occasion to think about it. Are you asking me to be a donor?"

"Yes, I'd like you to think about it. I know some men can father children and not be bothered about being in their lives, but I also know that some can't stand the thought of having a child without being a parent to them." She explained.

"I never could see myself as a parent...you know, being responsible for raising a child. But I don't think I could just abandon one either. Of course, this wouldn't be the same as abandoning it. As for the donation part," he blushed, "it's not like every teenage boy on the face of the earth hasn't masturbated...several times ...a week." They both laughed, relieving the seriousness of the conversation. "It's just the thought of everyone knowing exactly what I'd be doing in that little room that's the uncomfortable part of it." Steve was quite for several seconds. "Let me think about it for a couple of days and let you know."

Amanda smiled. "Fair enough."

"So, you and Cody want kids?"

"I want kids...Cody's a little nervous about it." Amanda hedged. "That's something else the two of you have in common." She thought.

'Oh boy and they say men go through mid-life crises.' He mused. 'At least mine only resulted in a too expensive sports car.'

"Can I ask you why you don't want kids...if it's not too personal." Amanda sat up and leaned her arms on her desktop. She was very interested in his answer.

"Well...I can't claim a bad childhood; mine was great, even if I had all sisters and no brothers." He paused to gather his thoughts. "I guess if I had to give one or two reasons, I'd say that I'm very reluctant to bring a child into the hell that the world has become and that I'm just very selfish in that I can do basically what I want, when I want. I know that sounds bad and you might think less of me, but there are some people that were not meant to be parents and I know I'm one of them."

Amanda didn't argue that fact, she did believe certain people shouldn't have children, but firmly believed that Cody didn't fit into that group, she was too loving and caring to be one of them. "No, I don't think less of you. It's not my place to judge you. Thanks for telling me."

Steve shut her door as he left and Amanda turned to gaze out her window. 'Am I judging Cody? Would I think less of her if she really doesn't want kids?' She rubbed her face. 'No, I know she's just a little scared, it's understandable with the things her stepfather put her through. She'll come

around.' She pushed the nagging voice to the back of her mind and phoned her doctor for an appointment.

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Cody knew something was up with Amanda, over the past two weeks she had been on top of the world one day and the next looked like she had lost her best friend. Cody had tried once, to bring up the topic of children, thinking she should try again to better explain her fears to her partner, but Amanda had refused to discuss it. Cody was relieved to think she had changed her mind and had not pursued it.

Amanda, having gotten a clean bill of health from her doctor and Steve's agreement to help, put her plan into motion. She was rather impatient when something really mattered to her, and more than a little determined to put her plan in motion, so she vetoed the doctor's months of charting her cycle and scheduled the first appointment for the insemination.

Steve had met her at the doctor's office and had been too embarrassed to face her after his part had been accomplished. It had taken him a few days after the fact to be comfortable enough to have things back to normal at the office.

Amanda had been on cloud nine after the appointment, believing she would become pregnant; then would come a let down when she would worry if she were doing the right thing. Which would lead to a period of anger at Cody when she convinced herself it was her partners fault for making her feel guilty.

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Cody grabbed the ringing phone from her belt. "Lawson."

"Cody Lawson?" A male voice asked.

"Yes it is."

"Hi, my name is Nathan Hargrove and I work for Cottenwood Oil. You were recommended to us by Tomas Warden."

"What can I do for you Mr. Hargrove?" Cody knew this was a small oil company that had a couple of oilrigs in the Gulf of Mexico. And knew they had a good track record for protecting the environment.

"We're having a problem with one of our rigs and would like you to take a look at it for us."

"When and where?" She was relieved to have a reason to get out of Amanda's line of fire for a while.

"Great. You don't get seasick I hope. It's one of our platforms about 100 miles off the Texas

coast." He informed her.

She chuckled. "No, Mr. Hargrove, I love the ocean or in this case the gulf. How do I get there?"

"I'll have my secretary make the arrangements and call you back, if that's okay?"

"I'll be waiting."

"For what?" Amanda had just gotten home and was leaning against the doorframe of Cody's office.

Cody wondered how she would react to the news. She knew her being gone so much was one of their problems, but she had trouble lately reading Amanda and wondered if she might welcome the separation. "Travel instructions."

"Oh...where?" 'This is good timing.' Amanda thought. Having to be less than truthful with her partner about doctor's visits, and worrying that they might call the house phone instead of her cell phone, had been getting to her.

'She's not upset. I wonder if that's good or bad.' "To an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico."

"Well, at least it's not in the middle of the North Sea. How long will you be gone?"

"I hope not to long, but I don't know what the problems is."

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"Okay, what else do I need to add to the list?" Cody browsed the contents of the refrigerator. "Milk...already on the list...ah, need juice."

"You going to the store today?" Amanda asked as she entered the kitchen, threading her belt through the loops on her slacks.

"Yep, what kind of coffee? It's your turn to pick."

Amanda patted herself on the back for thinking ahead. "You pick, the doctor told me to cut way back on the caffeine. She believes that's what was causing my stomach problems a couple of weeks ago."

Cody closed the cabinet door and turned around. "Why didn't you tell me you went to the doctor?"

"Um..." Amanda looked down at her briefcase, pretending to search for something. "It was no big deal. She said it was probably acid reflux and if this didn't work, she'd give me something for it." She knew she looked guilty and kept her eyes focused downward.

"Makes sense." Cody said. "But I wish you would have told me. I would have gone with you. I know you hate going to the doctor's office almost as much as I do."

"Oh, I'll be late tonight." Amanda changed the subject. "Lawrence threw together a small celebration for our one year anniversary."

"Oh, okay." She noticed Amanda was fidgeting with her clothes, something she did when she was nervous. "It's just for the employees, I take it."

"Um...yes, I believe so." She kissed Cody on the cheek. "See you tonight."

Cody crossed her arms over her chest and leaned back against the counter. "I get the distinct impression you're lying and don't want me there tonight." She said to the empty room. "Or am I just being paranoid?"

Later that afternoon, Cody was putting the groceries away when the house phone rang.

"Hi Cody, its Lawrence. How are you?"

"I'm good, keeping busy. Congrats on the anniversary."

"Thanks, actually that's why I'm calling. We're having a little get-together after work tonight and Amanda said she didn't think you'd be able to make it. And I wanted to see if I could talk you into being here. You see, I feel that without our families support, we wouldn't have made it this far, so I feel strongly that our families be celebrating with us. So if there's anyway you could make it..."

So, she wasn't being paranoid, Amanda didn't want her there. Did that mean she was having an affair with Sabrina? They had spent a lot of time together. Her heart refused to believe it, but her mind was urging self-preservation. But she couldn't help thinking back to how good they had been together.

Almost perfect, is how she would describe it to anyone that asked. They laughed and joked with one another, liked a lot of the same activities. And their love making...Cody had never felt the powerful emotions that she felt when she and Amanda made love.

She remembered one time, many months ago. They had been out most of the day, nothing special, lunch a little shopping and then home. She didn't even remember which of them initiated it, but suddenly they were locked in a seductive kiss, with hands quickly removing cloth barriers.

Amanda pushed Cody back onto the bed, breaking their kiss. Crawling on her hands and knees to straddle the prone woman, letting her nipples graze along Cody's thighs and stomach.

Cody pushed herself back towards the headboard and moaned as Amanda crawled up her body. "Oh Goddess." Her breathing became rapid as taut nipples moved along her body, leaving a trail of goosebumps in their wake. Her breathing became labored when Amanda straddled her hips;

spread herself open and ground against the dark haired mound below.

Amanda's head fell back and her eyes closed when Cody palmed her breasts and long fingers began to knead the supple flesh. "Um, that feels so good." Her hips began to move faster, as Cody's lips closed over her breast.

As Cody's tongue started to tease Amanda's nipple, she slid her hand between their bodies, moving her fingers over the blonde's clit.

"Oh God, baby. Inside please...I need to feel you inside." Amanda begged, as she rose up just enough for her dark haired lover to slip two fingers inside. "Yes ...oh yes." She moaned, as she rode Cody's hand.

Cody felt Amanda was close to coming, and captured her nipple between her teeth, flicking her tongue over it, as she used her thumb to rub the blonde's erect nub.

Amanda's head fell forward and she held Cody's head tight to her chest, as her body convulsed with her release.

"Easy, love, I've got you." Cody lay back and held her close, while Amanda recovered her equilibrium. "I love you." She said, as she kissed the top of the blonde head she cradled.

"Love you, too." Amanda responded. "And now I'm gonna show you just how much." She grinned, as she reversed her path down the long body she was on top of.

Cody ran her fingers through the blonde hair, as Amanda suckled her nipple. Her breasts had never been one of her erogenous zones until Amanda had loved them. Now she could almost climax from that alone. She spread her legs more to accommodate the body steadily moving down her.

"Mm, you smell good." Amanda settled between the long legs. She breathed in Cody's earthy scent, as she ran her tongue along quivering thighs.

"Don't tease me, love. I'm dying here." Cody said, and raised her hips in an invitation for her lover's touch.

Amanda relented and ran her tongue through the slick folds, lightly grazing the throbbing bundle of nerves.

"Goddess...yes." Cody pinched her own nipples. "Please...I need..."

Amanda drove her fingers inside before Cody could finish her request. It had been like that from almost the beginning of their lovemaking. Both knowing what the other wanted before the request could be voiced. She thrust her fingers steadily into Cody and sucked her clit into her mouth, running her tongue over it quickly, as she felt Cody stiffen and cry out, as her body shook from its intensity.

"Cody?"

"Oh, sorry, Lawrence. Yeah, I think I'll be able to make it after all." She answered. It was time to find out what was going on, once and for all.

"Great, I'll let Amanda know."

"No." Cody quickly said. "I think I want to surprise her."

"Yeah, that'll be fun. She said that you were leaving on another job and I know she really misses you when you're gone. She was really upset today." He had assumed the reason Cody was not going to make the party was that she would be gone.

"Yeah." She played along with his assumption. "But it turns out that I'm not leaving until Sunday now." She wondered what her lover had been upset about today since she knew it wasn't because she was leaving.

"We're gonna get the party started about six, so any time around then would be good. See ya then, Cody."

"Bye Lawrence." Cody disconnected the call and sat down on the couch. She still refused to believe her partner could be cheating on her. They had made love two nights ago and she knew in her heart that Amanda couldn't have touched her or responded to Cody's touch the way she had and be doing the same with someone else.

Cody started to call Tracy, but remembered Amanda's reaction when she found out she had been discussing their troubles with her best friend once before and decided against it.

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Several times that afternoon, Cody had almost backed out of coming, and again during the short elevator ride to the third floor, she had wondered if she was doing the right thing. "Too late now," she mumbled as the doors slid open and she stepped out into the reception area.

'Wow, Lawrence wasn't kidding about families being part of this.' She thought there must be about 30 or 40 people there. The company employed seven other people excluding the four partners.

Cody spied Amanda on the other side of the floor, holding Rosie in her lap and saw Sabrina sitting beside her. She headed in their direction but was stopped by Steve before she got very far.

"Hey Cody, glad you could make it."

"Steve, good to see you again, it's been awhile."



"It has. In fact, I was surprised I didn't run into you at the doctor's office." His comment generating a blush.

Cody remained silent, confused as to why Steve had accompanied Amanda to the visit.

"I know you must have been upset to miss something that important." He continued, oblivious to her confusion. "What are you hoping for? I know most people say it doesn't matter, but I bet everybody has a preference."

The smile on her face prompted him to continue his rambling.

"If it was me, I think I'd want a little girl. You might have a fair shot at a girl, since I'm the only boy and I have four sisters." He didn't notice the shell-shocked expression on Cody's face, since his attention was focused on Amanda. "I think maybe your partner might want one too. She's been spending all her free time with Rosie and Sabrina."

'Oh my god...she's gone ahead with this without telling me, and knowing how I feel about it.' Cody wasn't sure if she was more hurt or angry.

"Cody, are you okay? You look a little pale." Steve had turned his attention back to her. "Let me go get Amanda."

"No...no, I'm okay. Don't bother her; she's having a good time, I'm sure. I'll be okay." She hoped she was convincing.

"Okay...why don't you go sit down for awhile, until you feel better?" He suggested.

"I will." She told him and managed to sneak away and make it back to her bike before her legs buckled.

## Chapter Eleven

"Have you seen Cody?" Lawrence asked Steve.

"Yeah, I talked to her about an hour ago. She didn't look too good though and come to think of it, I haven't seen her since."

"Who?" Amanda joined them, munching on a meatball covered in white cheese sauce.

"Cody." Steve answered.

"Cody was here?" She suddenly regretted everything she had eaten that night as her stomach tied itself into a knot.

"Yeah, I called her this afternoon after you said she couldn't make it, I wanted to try and change her mind. She said she'd be able to make it after all." Lawrence explained.

"Amanda, now you look pale." Steve wondered if there was something going around and made a mental note to stop by the drug store and pick up more vitamin C.

'Oh shit. I bet she thinks I didn't want her here. And now she knows I lied on top of everything else.' "I need to go...and check on her. I'll see you both Monday." She grabbed her purse and quickly headed for her car.

When Amanda entered the house, she could tell it was empty. Cody's bike was in the garage, so that meant her partner was somewhere on the beach. She made her way through the dark house and stepped out on the deck, and located the missing woman sitting in the sand, close to the incoming waves.

Amanda was unsure of what to do. Usually when Cody was upset, she let the tall woman have her solitude until she was ready to talk, but she was aware she needed to explain her reasons to her partner.

Cody took the decision out of her hands by returning. "When did you get here?"

"Just now." Amanda had prepared herself for Cody's anger and the look of utter defeat shocked her. "I owe you an explanation."

Cody held her hand up, stopping Amanda. "I think I understand. I just don't know what I should do."

The response puzzled her. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but I just...tonight was important and I know you don't really like Sabrina. I just thought it would be easier if you didn't come."

Cody realized they were talking about different things. Obviously Steve hadn't known he had spilled the beans. "It's nice to know that you're more concerned with Sabrina's feeling than my own."

"I didn't think of it like that. I just thought there might be some tension between the two of you. That's what I was trying to avoid."

"I'm glad you have so much confidence in me to act like an adult at something that's so important to you." She replied sarcastically and Amanda winced.

"It wasn't my intention to hurt you and I'm sorry I lied to you." She sighed heavily, suddenly very tired.

Cody moved to the railing and looked out over the moonlit ocean. With her back to Amanda, she asked, "Are you pregnant?"

There were seemingly several minutes of silence. Another reason she'd had for not wanting Cody there. It eliminated the awkwardness of telling Steve her partner didn't know what was going on.

"You talked to Steve...obviously."

"Imagine how surprised I was when he asked me what I was hoping for, a girl or a boy?" She turned to face Amanda. "Answer my question."

"I...I don't know yet, it's too early to tell."

"How could you go behind my back and do this?" The tone of her voice was fluctuating between pain and anger.

"I didn't. I told you I wanted to have a baby." Amanda defended herself.

"And I told you I didn't." Cody walked into the house with Amanda following. "Goddess, I can't believe you've been lying to me the entire time." She paced away from the blonde then back towards her.

"Damn it, Cody, if you'd quit protesting so much and give yourself time to think about it, I know the idea of a baby would grow on you."

"Look at me, Amanda." Cody grabbed her by the shoulders and bent down until they were eye to eye. "The thought of having a child terrifies me. I'd be my mother all over again."

"Your mother really did love you, Cody. She may not have been the perfect parent, but nobody is. And our situation is different from hers."

"It really isn't," she let go and straightened up. "You see, she never wanted me."

"What do you mean?"

"Not long after my dad died, I overheard her talking to her minister; she asked him what she was supposed to do with a child she never wanted. Seems my dad wanted children and she didn't want to disappoint him."

"I'm sorry, Cody. I never knew." Amanda wasn't sure what she could say to someone who went through life knowing she wasn't wanted.

"No, not many people do." Cody's phone rang, interrupting them. Checking the caller ID she flipped open the phone. "Hey, Tracy."

"You are still alive. You thought about calling your best bud and letting her know what's going on. I've been on pins and needles."

"Sorry. Can I call you tomorrow? This isn't a real good time."

"Sure. Um...you okay, you sound a little funny."

"Tomorrow, okay." She closed the phone, ending the call.

Amanda had automatically become defensive at the mention of Tracy's name. "Well, I guess this makes your decision easier." She had never gotten over the jealousy she had felt the first time she had met the woman who was her partner's ex-lover.

"What do you mean?" Cody said tiredly.

"This is a perfect wedge to put between us, so you can be with her again." She accused.

"Amanda, that's crazy. I don't love Tracy anymore, at least not in that way."

"You might not be in love with her, but a person would have to be dead not to want her. And you obviously wanted her in the past. The two of you spend enough time together, it makes me wonder."

"The key words being 'the past' and you've always been invited to join us. And speaking of spending time with ex-lovers, you and Sabrina are together a lot more than Tracy and I are."

"I've told you, that's work."

"All I have to do is watch her, watching you to figure out she wants you back." Cody raised her voice.

"That's bullshit." Amanda's voice matched Cody's.

"This whole thing is bullshit." Cody grabbed her jacket and keys.

"Where are you going?"

"For a ride. I need some space." Was said before the door slammed.

"Space...right. Probably take all of 15 minutes to end up at her 'best friends' house." She felt herself on the verge of tears. "Shit, shit and more shit."

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Two in the morning came and went and Amanda, now worried, paced through the empty house. By half past, she couldn't stand it anymore; she called Tracy, hoping Cody was there. At least she would know she was safe.

"This better be good." A very sleepy voice answered the phone.

"Tracy?"

"Yeah...Amanda? What's wrong?" She was suddenly more awake and thinking of all the

horrible reasons for getting a phone call in the middle of the night.

"Uh, by that question, I take it Cody's not there."

"No she's not. So what's going on?" Amanda heard mumbling in the background, then, "Shh Wren, go back to sleep." Then a door closed and Tracy was back. "Well?"

Amanda hated to admit anything to Tracy, but she was more worried than ever, now that she didn't know where Cody was. "We had an argument and she's been gone since about eight."

Tracy could hear the concern, even through the phone line and debated on whether or not to reveal Cody's private retreat. "There's a place she used to go when she was really upset."

'Great.' Amanda thought. 'Something else she knows about my partner that I don't.'

"She'd go up to Point Conception, sit out on the rocks and watch the ocean."

"Where's that?"

"About 50 miles or so past Santa Barbara."

"What? That's got to be over 250 miles...that's crazy, she's got the ocean right here."

"I'm not sure she went there, I'm just guessing since she's done it before, but not in a long time."

"Thanks for the information...sorry I bothered you."

"It's okay, I know you're worried." Tracy quickly debated with herself. "Look, Amanda, I know it's none of my business, but Cody really loves you."

She bit back her first thought of 'You're right, it isn't your business'. After all, Tracy could have told her to stick it or lied and told her Cody was there, but she didn't. Instead, she simply replied, "I know."

"Please have her call me? I want to make sure she's okay."

"I will."

Tracy headed back to bed mumbling about fools that were too blind to see what a good thing they had.

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It was daylight before Amanda fell asleep and noon when she woke up. When she passed the sunroom, she saw that Cody had fallen asleep on the couch. With the relief that came with the knowledge that her lover was okay, also came the anger that Cody had left her to worry all night.

She stormed into the kitchen, slamming cabinets and grumbling. Turning, she saw the tall woman in the doorway. "Call your best friend."

"Why?" She moved past the shorter woman and started coffee.

"Because I called her at 2:30 this morning, thinking you were there and 'she's' worried about you." She headed to the deck with her juice.

Cody followed. "Did you tell her why I wasn't here?"

"I told her we had an argument. Why?"

"Because you got mad when you found out I had talked to her about us. I don't know what I'm allowed to tell her." She threw up her hands in irritated resignation.

"I don't care anymore; you can tell her whatever you want." Amanda turned her back on her partner.

"Fine." Cody forced through gritted teeth.

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After a day spent avoiding each other, Amanda went to bed regretting her inability to make to first move towards reconciliation. Cody, also regretting wasting her last day before leaving, debated sleeping in the guestroom, but decided against it, knowing that once they crossed that line, there would probably be no going back. And she wasn't going to make that kind of decision when she was still angry.

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Cody was up, packed and showered the next morning before the blonde had crawled out of bed. By the time Amanda made it from the bathroom to the kitchen, Cody had finished the paper and her second cup of coffee.

Amanda knowing she shouldn't have the coffee if she was pregnant; sniffed the half full pot of dark liquid, hoping to transfer its ability to jostle her body into wakefulness through osmosis. "Where are you gonna be, exactly?"

Cody was grateful for the direction of the conversation. She didn't want another argument right before she left. "About 100 miles southeast of Galveston on Cottonwood Platform..." she pulled a folder out of her briefcase, "Athena #113. Probably won't get there before dinnertime, though. I fly from here to Houston; then take a commuter plane to Galveston, then a helicopter out to the rig."

Amanda looked over to see her partner just standing in front of the coffee maker with a lost

expression on her face. "What's wrong?"

"I...guess I wasn't thinking. I made you coffee." Cody turned it off and emptied the pot. "Do you want to take me to the airport or should I call a cab?" She hurried on before Amanda could respond about the coffee.

"No, I'll take you." She knew Cody wanted to avoid any unpleasanties this morning. "Are you ready?"

"Yeah, my stuff's by the door."

The drive was silent until the exit for the airport. "Cody, I don't want to get into an argument, but we do need to make some decisions. I was thinking maybe it would make a difference if you talked to a psychologist. I mean even if I managed to get pregnant this time, you would have nine months to get used to the idea."

Cody continued to stare out the side window. 'She said 'this time'. I guess that means she plans to try again, knowing how I feel.' "I have seen a psychologist, when I was at MIT and then again after I moved here."

"You talked about having children then?"

"Not specifically, but it did come up several times."

"Oh." Amanda sounded disappointed. "Do you want me to park and wait with you?"

"Just drop me off. I'll go ahead and go through security. No need for you to wait."

"Okay." Amanda leaned over and kissed her on the lips. "Call me when you get to the rig tonight. I love you."

"I love you, too." Cody exited the car and watched it drive away. "That's the problem; I love you and don't want to lose you. But then I think I'm being selfish if I don't let you go so you can find someone who wants the same things you do."

She was brought out of her thoughts when a skycap asked if she needed help with her bag. "No thanks." She turned and entered the airport.

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"You left in a hurry Friday night. Everything okay?" Sabrina asked as she and Amanda rode the elevator together Monday morning.

"Huh? Oh, yeah...fine, every things fine."

"How 'bout lunch today? My treat."

"Rain check, I've got a prospective distributor I'm meeting for lunch today."

"Sure." They stopped in front of Amanda's office door. "Could I interest you in dinner instead? I've got Rosie for another day." Sabrina coaxed.

"I thought your sister was back this past weekend."

"Supposed to have been, but ended up working through. She's gonna be back late tonight or tomorrow."

"Okay. It sounds like it's my last chance to spoil her. You pick her up and we'll meet at the house. That way I can change out of this monkey suit I had to wear today."

"Sure. We can decide where to go then." Sabrina grinned at the chance to be almost alone with Amanda for a little while.

"Or we could just stay at the house and I could cook. I know Rosie loves the beach."

"That'd be great; if you're sure you don't mind."

"Positive. Say six o'clock? Will that give you enough time to pick her up and get out there?"

Sabrina agreed and smiled all the way to her office, thinking about the perfect opportunity to show Amanda how well the two of them looked in a family setting.

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"As you can see," Clint, the rig's manager, said. "The numbers don't match up. We should be pumping this much," he pointed to a column on the printout. "But this is what's going into the storage tanks." He pointed to a different column on the same printout.

"And you're sure it's not a computer error?" Cody asked as she reviewed the numbers. "This is a 16% difference."

"We've had hardware techs and programmers out here, both say the system is fine. And we've had the divers down, so we know it's not a leak." He explained.

"If you were leaking this much, you'd have a slick from here to the coast. I guess we start at the beginning and go back over everything, every pipe, valve, gage, coupling and fitting until we find it." Cody folded the printout and stuck it under her arm to study later. "I'd also like to go down and check the gages, the drums and the pressure flow into the storage tanks, instead of just running the diagnostics from the computer system."

Clint scratched his chin. "I figured as much. We might as well get lunch before we get started."



That afternoon, Cody and the rigs two divers, went over everything. As the basket pulled them back to the platform, she shook her head at Clint. "Looks good down there." She said as she took off the hood of the short wetsuit and shook her hair out.

"Who is that?" A tall blonde muscular man asked his companion.

Chico looked over his shoulder. "She is the engineer the company brought to find out our pumping problem."

"Wow, beauty and brains. I think I'll give her a thrill and introduce myself."

Chico laughed. "Bobby, she is way above your station."

"Bullshit, Chico. Don't you know by now, women fall all over themselves to get a piece of me." He bragged as he flexed his muscles. "Later." He watched her go through the door that led to the dive gear and changing room. "I'll give you a play-by-play tonight."

One of the female rig hands was walking by and noticed him shaking his head. "What's the matter, Chico?"

"Bobby, the tonto, is about to, how you say, 'make a play' for the new senorita. I don't very much think she will like that."

"You mean the engineer?"

"Sè."

"I think you're right, Chico." Eddy ran for the dive room, yelling for Clint to follow her. She had worked the winch on the basket that brought the two divers up and had hung around admiring the tall woman until she had gone inside to change. Eddy didn't think Bobby would be stupid enough to force himself on the engineer, but he could be hardheaded at times.

Cody placed two of the tanks she had used by the compressor to be refilled. Opening the locker where her clothes and the coverall she had been wearing were hanging, she started to unzip the wetsuit when she heard the outer room door open and close. Walking out of the small changing room, she saw a tall blonde haired man leaning back against the door. "Can I help you?" She asked with a slightly suspicious voice.

"I do believe we can 'help' each other, sweetheart." He pushed off the door and walked towards her.

Cody's eyebrows shot up her forehead in surprise. "Rather sure of yourself, aren't you cowboy?"

"Yep, I've never had any complaints." He stopped in front of her and ran the tip of his finger down the path of the zipper on the front of the wetsuit.

Cody wanted to back away and put a little distance between them, but stood her ground. "I doubt I'll be complaining either," she noticed his smirk, "because you're gonna get your fucking hands off me and leave." She saw surprise in his face before he turned cocky again.

"Now, sweetheart, no need to play hard to get. You've already got my 'full attention'," he looked down at his pants straining against his growing excitement, "if you know what I mean."

"Can't say I didn't warn ya." She kneed him in the crotch and quickly stepped back as he squealed and dropped to his knees.

"So much for running to the rescue." Eddy mumbled. She and Clint had come into the room in time to see Bobby drop. "Looks like you have things under control." She looked up from the heap on the floor to Cody and noticed her shaking slightly. "Maybe not. Here, sit down." She guided the engineer to a chair and pushed her into it.

"Thanks." She looked up into concerned brown eyes. "Sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me. I've had to physically persuade one or two men that I wasn't interested, I usually don't react this way."

"It's okay. I'm sure the dive took a lot outta you. Why don't you get changed and we'll get some food into you." She looked over to Clint who was halfway helping, halfway dragging Bobby out of the room. "And I'm sure Clint will give you the rest of the night off to rest."

Clint turned back and grinned. "I think that's a great idea, considering that I am surely not gonna be arguing with the lady any time soon, Edith."

"If you'll remember, Clinton, the last person that called me that found himself hanging by his ankles off the helipad." She winked at the dark haired woman. "Everybody calls me Eddy."

"Cody, and thanks." She had no trouble believing the compact woman before her could do just that. She had muscles that would put Arnold to shame. Half a foot shorter than Cody, with short brown hair and kind brown eyes.

"I didn't do anything, but you're welcome. I'll wait here while you change." Eddy made sure the outer door was shut and leaned against the wall to wait. "Man, she's got the bluest eyes I've ever seen."

Cody had eaten an early dinner with Eddy and Clint; then returned to her small room. She had wanted to call Amanda after the incident with Bobby but waited until she had calmed down, she didn't want her to worry unnecessarily. Picking up her cell phone, she called Amanda. On the third ring, the phone was answered by an unfamiliar voice. "Who is this?" Cody knew she hadn't misdialed; the number was programmed in.

"Who are you calling?" Sabrina countered.

"Amanda."

"Cody?" Sabrina asked, even though she now recognized the voice.

"Yes." She answered through gritted teeth.

"This is Sabrina...Amanda's still in the shower."

"Shower? Where are you?"

Arguing with herself about whether she should tell the complete truth, alleviating the doubt, she could hear in Cody's voice, or the partial truth, intentionally aggravating the woman's fear. "At home." The little bitty devil on her shoulder smiled and its counter part, the angel on her opposite shoulder frowned and disappeared in a puff of smoke, having lost this round. "Your place, I mean. Amanda kindly offered to cook me dinner." She neglected to explain that the blonde offered because of Rosie's love of the beach.

There was a long pause. "Cody, you still there?"

"Yes." She said around a clinched jaw. "Please have her call me when she gets out, I need to talk to her."

"I'll tell her as soon as she gets out." Sabrina said good-bye and smiled as she turned the phone off; anybody that called would now get voice mail and placed it back in Amanda's briefcase, out of sight.

'I'm not causing problems. They're already having troubles.' She tried to convince herself. 'I didn't realize how much I cared for her until I lost her.' She stared out at the waves wondering why she felt so bad. 'She wouldn't be with Cody in the first place if I had realized that I loved her before we separated.'

Concluded in part four

### **Greek Warrior's Scrolls Main Page**

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## **~ Loose Ends ~** by Greek Warrior (Joan)

Disclaimer: See Part 1

Comments welcome: [XWPScribe@aol.com](mailto:XWPScribe@aol.com)

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Part Four  
Chapter Twelve

When a half hour had passed, Cody tried to call Amanda back, getting her voice mail. "Damn it." She knew it would do no good to call the house phone; they always left the ringer off and just checked the answering machine. "She purposely didn't tell her."

Cody paced in her small room. 'But why is she cooking Sabrina dinner?' The question nagged at her. She knew she needed to get back home so they could talk. "One more day." She spoke to the empty room. "If I can't find the problem tomorrow, I'm outta here anyway."

She was too restless to stay in the small space, so she clipped her phone to the waistband of her jeans and headed outside to the helipad, the only open space on the rig. At the top of the stairs, she recognized the lone figure sitting cross-legged at the far edge. "Can I join you?"

Eddy looked back over her shoulder and smiled. "Be my guest." She waited for Cody to sit down. "I thought you were going to get some rest."

"Couldn't sleep." She watched the flashes of lightening in the distance. "It's beautiful isn't it? As long as you're not in the middle of it, that is."

"Yes. There's nothing quiet like a storm at sea." Eddy leaned back on her elbows. "The latest report said that it might strengthen into a category one hurricane before it makes landfall, but it should stay well to the south of us."

"Would you have to evacuate if it was closer?"

"For a tropical storm, no. For a hurricane, yes." Her eyes lingered on the profile of the woman beside her. "I rotate off in a couple of days and if you happen to be around Corpus Christi anytime after that, I'd love to buy you dinner. Doesn't have to be a date," she smiled, "unless you're single and want it to be."

Cody was quiet for several seconds, then looked at the woman sitting next to her. "Thanks. I do have a partner though." She bent one leg, wrapped her arms around it and rested her chin on her knee. Staring back out at the storm, she whispered, "At least I think I do."

Eddy wasn't surprised the beautiful woman was taken, but the whispered statement confused her. "I've been told I'm a good listener." She quickly offered.

Cody wasn't sure why, maybe it was knowing that Eddy had been willing to come to her rescue earlier or maybe it was just the shitty day she'd had, but she decided to tell her the whole story. "You might regret saying that by the time I'm through."

Cody started her story with her early teen years and finished with her phone call home a little over an hour ago. Eddy had been silent throughout the account.

"That's a tough one, deciding for or against kids; especially when one feels strongly for and one strongly against."

"The voice of experience?" Cody had detected a hint of sadness in the statement.

"Yes. My last steady girlfriend wanted kids." Eddy answered.

"You didn't?"

"Someday I'd love to have a couple of kids, but not now. The way I work, three weeks on the rig and then two weeks off, isn't a good way to be a parent. At least I don't think it is. I had a part-time dad growing up; he was a trucker and was gone a lot." She explained.

"How long were the two of you together?"

"Eight months. We had started talking about moving in together and she asked about kids. I told her I wanted to wait and she didn't. So we went our separate ways."

"Do you regret it?" Cody turned her head to look at her companion.

"Ah, you do ask the tough questions, don't you." Eddy was thoughtful for several minutes. "Right now I can honestly say no, I don't. But who knows, five years down the road I might." She met the thoughtful gaze of the blue eyes. "Not much help, am I?"

"Actually just listening is a help." Cody turned her stare back towards the storm. "You know, Eddy, I think your ex might be the one that regrets her decision not to wait."

Eddy looked puzzled. "Why?"

"Because she let one of the good ones get away." Cody grinned when Eddy blushed.

The two women sat in companionable silence, content to watch Mother Nature's awesome display of beautiful destruction, until Cody's phone rang.

"Lawson," she answered out of habit, even though she knew it was Amanda.

"Sorry I didn't call earlier. Sabrina forgot to tell me you called."

"And I'm sure she turned your phone off, so I couldn't call back, by accident."

"Cody, it was an honest mistake. She didn't know how my cell worked." Amanda stated; frustration in her voice. "Did you need something or did you just want to talk?"

Cody bit her tongue to stop another sarcastic response about Sabrina. "To talk. I just wanted to hear your voice after the lousy day I've had."

"What happened?"

Cody didn't feel like re-hashing the incident with Bobby now. "It was nothing important. Look, it's late and I'm tired, and I wouldn't want to keep you from your guest."

"Sabrina and Rosie just left. Are you sure you don't want to talk about it, I can tell something's wrong."

"I'm sure."

Eddy had moved away to give Cody privacy during the call. When she saw the phone being returned to its holder, she moved back over to Cody and saw the tense expression. "I'd offer to buy you a drink, but they don't allow liquor on the rig, for obvious reasons. How about I offer a cup of hot chocolate instead? It's guaranteed to sooth what ails ya."

Cody managed a small grin. "Yeah, that sounds good." She stood up and placed her hand on the shorter woman's shoulder. "Thanks, Eddy."

"Ah sucks, ma'am. T'weren't nothin."

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"She wasn't mad when you called her, was she?" Sabrina asked when she and Amanda sat down at their table.

"Oh, no." Amanda lied. "But we didn't talk long, she was tired by the time I called." She ordered tea before heading for the buffet tables.

Amanda had beaten Sabrina back to the table and had started eating by the time she returned. "Good, I'd hate to be the cause of another problem between you two."

Last night while they sat on the beach, watching Rosie play in the sand, Amanda had told her friend about trying to get pregnant and Cody's opposition to it. It wasn't until later, after Sabrina had left, Amanda had wondered how Sabrina had listened to her talk about Cody all night, but forgotten to tell her about Cody's call. But now, hearing the concern in her friend's voice, she knew it had been just one of those things.

"Would you like company tonight when you do the pregnancy test? I mean since Cody's not here, I'd be glad to come by so you don't have to be alone."

Amanda hesitated, but then thought, 'Why not? There's no reason I should have to be by myself tonight.' "Yeah, that'd be great."

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After working like a demon all morning, Cody had found Clint's problem. She had run back-to-

back reports and found different figures for the readings on the storage tanks. They did have a glitch in their computer program, which meant that she didn't need to stick around and wait for it to be resolved.

By one o'clock she had packed, said good-bye to Eddy and Clint, exchanged phone numbers and promises to stay in touch with Eddy and was waiting on the chopper to land. With any luck she'd make it home not long after Amanda did. As long as she made her connection in Houston, that is.

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Amanda pulled into the garage, parked her car and ducked under the door as it was closing, to meet Sabrina, who had pulled into the driveway behind her. Unlocking the front door, she entered with the brown haired woman following. "If you want something to drink, you know where the kitchen is." She headed back towards the bedroom. "I'm gonna go change before I try to work up enough courage to use this." She held up the small sack from the drug store.

"Okay. You want me to pour you some juice or something?"

"Please." Came the muffled response.

Sabrina walked into the living room to put her briefcase next to Amanda's and noticed the blinking red light on the answering machine. "She forgot to check." She turned to leave, but stopped. "I wonder." She knew Cody hated to call Amanda at work unless it was an emergency. Looking at the machine, she bit her bottom lip. "If I listen to them I'll have to erase them, otherwise she'll know."

She glanced around the corner and heard a door close. "Probably bathroom." She hurried back and pressed the new message button.

"Hello...hello..." Click.

"Um, telemarketer." The machine beeped and the second message started.

"Hey Amanda. Found the problem and I'm headed home, I hope. I just landed in Houston. Its five after three and I've got ten minutes to make my connection, so I should be okay since it's the next concourse over and I don't have to go back through security. Don't worry about picking me up; I'll take a shuttle. See you, I hope, about seven or so. Love you." Click.

"End of final message." The machine replied and Sabrina pressed the erase button. "Press erase again, to erase all messages." It helpfully supplied and she pressed the button once more. "No messages." She hurried into the kitchen to pour two glasses of juice and tried to shake off the nagging guilt.

Amanda changed into a pair of lightweight cotton pants and shirt, then joined Sabrina. Leaning back against the counter, she accepted the glass handed to her and took a sip. "Amy's back I take it."

"Yeah. She called this morning. Said she was going to sleep all day and she'd pick up Rosie this afternoon." Sabrina drained her glass. "I'm gonna miss the little rugrat."

"You okay? You seem nervous."

Sabrina stuck her hands in her pockets, trying to will them to stop shaking. "I'm just anxious for you. Have you done it yet?" 'I will not feel guilty. Amanda wouldn't be with Cody if I hadn't let her go.' She kept telling herself.

"No. I keep telling myself if I don't do the test, I can continue to imagine myself pregnant."

"How long has it been since your period was due?"

Amanda smiled. "Only a week." She was embarrassed by her eagerness. "I know it could be the stress making me late and I know I should wait awhile, but I think I'll go crazy if I don't know."

"That's true. I know Amy missed two months before she went to the doctor and found out she was pregnant."

"Oh god, I'd be climbing the walls if I had to wait that long."

"Go on and try. Maybe you'll be an overachiever." Sabrina suggested as she glanced at the clock. '6:30...I still have time to comfort her if she's not or celebrate with her if she is.'

Amanda came back and joined her friend. "I'll know in a couple of minutes."

"We'll know." Sabrina corrected.

Amanda smiled. "It's nice to have someone to share this with, who's just as excited as I am."

"Come on." She took Amanda's hand and led the way to the blonde's favorite room. "Let's go sit down."

Amanda sat on the couch and stared at the little plastic stick.

"Is it time yet?"

"Yeah." She picked it up and took a deep breath. Sliding the two pieces apart, she looked at the inanimate object that could possibly change her life.

"Well?" Sabrina had imagined disappointment or exhilaration, but Amanda was just sitting there.

"It's negative." She said turning to face Sabrina, who had leaned over to look at the reading.

Sabrina hesitated a second before she leaned forward and closed the slight distance between



them, joining their lips together. Feeling no resistance, she deepened the kiss.

Cody stood in the doorway, stunned. "Well, I guess you didn't get my message." She said loudly when her surprise quickly turned to anger and hurt.

The two women broke apart. "Cody..." Amanda jumped up starring wide-eyed at her partner. "Um...there wasn't any message" was the only thing she could think to say, "I checked."

Cody looked at the guilty expression on Sabrina's face. "Did you erase it before or after you listened to it?" Sabrina looked at the floor, refusing to meet the cold blue eyes.

Amanda looked between the two women. She was extremely confused. The kiss had stunned her and now Cody and Sabrina seemed to know something she didn't.

"You know," Cody let out a self-deprecating laugh, "Tracy asked me if I thought the two of you were having an affair. 'Of course not, Tracy, Amanda wouldn't cheat on me,' I said. Shit, I feel like such a fool."

"An affair...we're not having an affair." Amanda stated. "Cody, it was one kiss...it just happened. It didn't mean anything. Please, you gotta believe me."

Cody remained silent and turned to leave.

"Wait...Sabrina, tell her." Amanda pleaded.

"Christ, Amanda, of course it meant something." Sabrina stated.

"What? What are you saying?" Amanda turned her attention to the person she thought was her friend and didn't see Cody walk away.

Jesus H. Christ...you were right." She said to Cody, without turning around she had no way of knowing that she was speaking to an empty doorway. "She tried to tell me all along, that's what you wanted and I didn't believe her." She looked sadly at the brown haired woman. "Sabrina, there was never an 'us', we were friends who slept together occasionally, that's all."

"Cody." She yelled when she heard the motorcycle start and ran for the garage but was too late. She yelled for her lover once more only to watch her disappear after she turned the corner at the far end of the street. Tears ran down her face and she collapsed onto the driveway when her legs refused to hold her.

Sabrina watched as the blonde sat crying. "Shit...what have I done?" She asked as her conscience kicked in. "Come on, Amanda. Let me help you back inside."

"Leave me alone." The tears continued to run down her cheeks as she ineffectively tried to wipe them away.

"No. Amanda, I'm sorry. I'll help you explain everything to Cody. I'll tell her all of it was my fault. I'm sorry, so sorry...I didn't think... Please...let's go back inside." Sabrina reached down to help her up.

Amanda knocked her hands away, angrily. "Don't touch me." She walked back through the garage and into the kitchen, where she spun around to face the woman trailing her. "Why don't you start by explaining things to me?"

## Chapter Thirteen

Cody was just south of Los Angeles on US 1 when she pulled over. Taking out her phone, she pressed one of her preprogrammed numbers, listened to the ringing and waited until she heard a familiar voice answer. "Hey."

"Hiya stranger, you still in the middle of the gulf or are you home?"

Home to Cody had never necessarily been where she lived; it was more a place where she felt comfortable and happy, where she felt at peace with herself and her life. That place had been the beach house, first because of the ocean she loved and then because Amanda had been there. Now she wasn't sure if it would ever be home again. "I'm back."

Tracy furrowed her brow. "What's wrong?"

"Can I come over or do you and Wren have plans?"

"No plans, come on over."

"It'll take me awhile to get there, I'm just south of LA. I...um, I just don't want to be alone."

"Okay, we'll be waiting, just be careful." She ended the call.

"What's going on?" Wren asked as she marked her place in her book and closed it.

"Something really bad from the sound of her voice." She laid her head down in her lover's lap and wrapped her arms around Wren's leg. "I love you, baby. I don't tell you that enough."

Wren ran her hands through the silky hair. "I love you, too." She smiled down at the head in her lap.

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"Let me get this straight...you purposely didn't tell me she called last night until you were leaving and you not only listened to a personal message, but also erased it." Amanda ran her hand through her hair and paced. "Did you wait until she walked in to kiss me, was that planned too?"

"No." Sabrina said. "I never planned to kiss you. I wanted you to know that I would be here waiting. I figured the two of you would break-up over having children and I thought that meant you didn't belong together." She looked at the angry and very sad woman. "You really love her, don't you?" Sabrina asked sadly.

"Yes, I do. And I've got to find her and explain everything, if she'll let me."

"How? She could be anywhere."

"I can make a pretty good guess at where she might have gone. I need to hurry it'll take me awhile to get there, though."

"I'm coming with you." Sabrina stood up.

"Absolutely not." One look stopped the impending protest. "No and that's final. You've caused enough trouble. I'm almost as angry with you as I am with myself. You need to go home and let me handle this."

She hung her head and started for the door. "Will I see you tomorrow?"

"No. Tell Lawrence and Steve I'm taking a personal day and I'll explain later." Amanda refused to look at Sabrina as she left and busied herself collecting her wallet, keys and phone.

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"You want a beer?" Tracy asked her friend as she watched her slump down onto the couch.

Wren came into the room and handed over two bottles without being asked. "I'm gonna head to bed and read for awhile so you two can talk." She placed a quick kiss on her partner's lips.

"Thanks, love."

"I'm sorry about this, Wren." Cody stated.

"Don't worry about it. I'll see you in the morning if you decide to stay. Goodnight all."

Tracy handed over one of the dark bottles and sat down on the other end of the couch, and waited.

Several minutes passed before Cody took a breath to speak. "When I got home tonight...I walked in on her and Sabrina."

'Bitch.' Tracy inwardly seethed. "You walked in on them..."

"Kissing." Cody explained.

"Ah honey, I'm sorry." She turned to face her friend and squeezed her shoulder. "What are you gonna do?"

"I don't know...that's the problem. I can't decide if I'm more angry or hurt."

Tracy sat silently, giving her best friend a chance to continue.

"She said it was just a kiss and it didn't mean anything. But if it didn't mean anything, why'd she kiss her in the first place?" Cody looked sadly at Tracy. "I don't understand how someone that says they love you, could cheat on that person and then expect them to forgive."

"I don't have an answer, I'm sorry." 'But I do have questions.' She said to herself. 'Like, what was Sabrina doing there in the first place? Have they been continuing their relationship all this time?'

"Maybe I should tell you everything that's been going on." Cody broke into Tracy's thoughts. "Starting from the last time we had lunch."

It took awhile, but Cody finally finished. "Shit on a shingle." Tracy reverted to one of her father's favorite expressions. "I...I don't know what to say."

"Me either." Cody drained her second beer. "But it's a shame there's not a lesbian soap opera on TV, I'm sure I could sell this to them." Cody wasn't a drinker and two beers on top of being exhausted and not having eaten since breakfast, she had a fairly large buzz going.

"Come on." Tracy smiled in spite of everything. "You're sleeping in the guestroom." She left Cody in the room to get ready for bed while she headed to the kitchen for a bottle of water.

Cody changed into a sleep shirt she had left at her friend's house many years ago when they use to go out for a night on the town every once in awhile.

"Here, you might want this in the middle of the night." She handed over the water.

"Thanks...for everything." Cody slid into bed and pulled the sheet up.

Tracy smiled. "No need. This is what friends do."

"I know." Cody yawned. The day was finally catching up with her. "But thanks just the same."

"Goodnight, Cody. Try and get some sleep. We'll talk more tomorrow." Tracy closed the door and headed for her bedroom and Wren.

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"Hell." Amanda said, dejectedly. "What possessed me to think I could find her up here? Especially in the dark." It was now after one in the morning and she was tired, frustrated and very worried that Cody wouldn't listen whenever she did manage to find her.

Giving up for the night, she backtracked to find a motel. She decided she'd call Tracy in the morning to see if she might have heard from the missing woman.

## Chapter Fourteen

"Morning." Cody headed for the mugs and coffee pot.

Wren smiled. "Morning. That's about an hour old, I can make fresh if you can wait a few minutes."

"This is fine. Tracy go to work?" She blew on the hot liquid and took a sip.

"Yes. She said there were a couple of things she couldn't put off, but she'd be done and home before lunch."

"I don't want her to take off work just to babysit me." Cody sat down at the kitchen table across from the dark brown haired woman. "She tell you what happen?"

Wren hesitated for a second, wondering if it would sit well with Cody if she knew something so personal. "Um, yeah, she did."

"Good." She saw surprise in the grey eyes. "I don't want to be responsible for any insecurity between the two of you." She explained. "I know Tracy cares very much for you, and you're good for her. I don't think I've ever seen her this happy."

Cody's cell phone rang, interrupting any further conversation. Checking the number, it wasn't Amanda, and she wasn't sure if she was disappointed or relieved. The one message the blonde had left on her voice mail last night, Cody had erased without listening to. She hadn't been ready to listen to the excuses.

"Lawson."

"Cody, its Rochelle, are you available?"

"Yeah, I am." Cody thought this might be what she needed to distance herself from her problems for a while. "Where and when?"

"Not far from you actually, that's why I called you first. Mexico, the Guadalajara area was just hit with a 5.2 earthquake. And with the hurricane hitting the east coast, most of their emergency personnel is there, so they gave us a call requesting a bit of assistance."

The 'us' Rochelle was referring to was an organization established back in the 60's that was made up of all kinds of trained rescue personnel, engineers and medical people that offered their time and expertise in all types of disasters all over the world.

"You need to get up to Miramar and they'll fly you to the Military Air Base northwest of Guadalajara, where everybody will meet a Dr. Mendoza who will be coordinating the operation and know where you'll be needed."

"Okay, give me a couple of hours to get some gear together and get up there." Cody was already walking back to the guestroom to get dressed.

"Sounds good, you'll probably be one of the first ones there since you're so close."

"What's going on?" Wren asked when Cody came back into the kitchen. "That's adding insult to injury, what with the hurricane that just hit them." She said.

"Yeah, it is. Will you explain to Tracy? Tell her I'll try to call tonight, but not to count on it."

"Why don't you call her while I get dressed, then I'll give you a ride up to the Air Station."

"I need to stop by the house and get a shower and some cloths and stuff."

"It's okay; I'm off today so I don't have to be anywhere."

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Amanda woke up disoriented. Finally remembering where she was and why, she felt like crying again. Looking at her watch, she wasn't surprised to see it was just past 10 am, since it had been daybreak by the time she had fallen asleep.

She hurriedly splashed water on her face and got dressed. She was determined to find and talk to Cody today, even if it meant camping out on Tracy's front porch. She decided last night, not to call first and give Cody a warning in case she still didn't want to talk to her. Not returning her message was a dead giveaway that she was avoiding her.

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Wren headed back to her girlfriend's house, not looking forward to explaining Cody's absence. The tall woman had not been able to get past her best friend's bulldog of a secretary. Tracy was in a meeting and left instructions not to be disturbed.

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It was after lunch when Tracy pulled into her driveway. She got out of her car and glared at the blonde that also got out of the car that had been parked in front of the house.

"I need to talk to her...please." Amanda added when she saw the stony expression that greeted her. There was no need to ask if Tracy knew what was going on, Cody's bike was in the garage and her expression told Amanda the answer. "I rang the bell, but no one answered."

"Maybe she doesn't want to talk to you?" Tracy assumed that to be the case since she had expected Cody and Wren to be there.

"She probably doesn't right now, but I have to know if she's safe and I have to let her know that I never cheated on her and never would. Please, Tracy, I know her bike's here."

"She came over last night." She supplied, to let Amanda know that Cody hadn't been out alone. "I'll see if she wants to talk to you, but if she doesn't, you need to leave and give her more time."

Amanda thought about pressing the issue, but knew Tracy could have refused her outright. "Okay."

Tracy entered by way of the front door and called out to both women. She was greeted by silence and quickly searched the house. Puzzled by finding neither woman, she opened the door to tell Amanda when Wren's car pulled into the drive.

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Cody grabbed her duffle bag and headed towards a distinguished looking 50 something man. "Dr. Mendoza?"

"Yes. Dr. Lawson?"

"I answer to Cody a lot quicker than Dr. Lawson." She shook his hand.

"Very well, Cody. And it's Hugo. Under the circumstances, I too feel casual is better." He guided her to a small non-descript building.

Cody dumped her bag inside the door and followed him to a large table that was covered with survey maps. "I would be out inspecting myself, if I weren't still recovering from knee surgery." He hooked his cane on the edge of the table. "I'm embarrassed to say it is my own fault too; trying to play football...soccer, with men half my age." He got comfortable and Cody sat across from him. "Well now, seeing as how the quake wasn't a major one, thank God, we don't believe there will be any damage to the area dams, but better safe than sorry."

Cody leaned over the table looking at the maps. "Where are the dams in relation to the epicenter?"

"Here, here," he pointed to dams on the Lerma River and then to the epicenter, "and a reservoir here. We are of course, most concerned with the dams. The bridges and most buildings can be closed and can wait inspection. But we don't want dams collapsing and causing flooding on top of everything else. One local team has already headed to the river and I'd like you to inspect the reservoir with one of your colleagues as soon as he gets here."

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"Where is she?" was asked by the two women, almost in unison.

"By now," Wren looked at her watch, "in Mexico. Hold up." She raised her hands to stop the barrage of questions before they started. "Let's go inside and I'll explain."

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"Hi, I'm Cody." She introduced herself to the two other people that were waiting, like herself, for the rest of their party.

"I'm Tripp and this is my daughter Alison, who decided to come along in case she could help.

Cody shook hands with Tripp who was also an engineer and with Alison who looked to be in her early twenties.

Two other men joined them, Gil an older man that worked maintenance on the area dams and Tito, a young engineering student in Mexico City who had volunteered to help.

It took them, with all the detours, about an hour to reach the reservoir. "Should we break apart?" Gil asked as they stood atop the dam.

The three Americans looked at each other until it dawned on Cody what was being asked. "Split up the inspection, yes, I think that's a good idea, Gil."

"Shall we start at the bottom and work our way up?" Tripp looked to Cody for any objections.

She nodded. "I'll start inside, if you'll take the outside."

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"But isn't that dangerous?" Amanda asked worriedly after Wren had explained Cody's absence.

"I'm sure it can be, but she's done this twice before and she's always very careful." Tracy answered as she turned on the TV and searched to see if there was any news coverage of the quake.

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Tito was leading the way with Cody and Alison bringing up the rear. The young woman had slipped away before Tripp noticed and followed down the steep stairway.

"Are you studying to be an engineer like your dad?" Cody asked as they made their way through a small dank passageway, made smaller by several large pipes running along the wall.

"No." Alison followed behind the tall woman. "I'm about to start my second year of nursing school. Um, should we be worried about the water in here?" They had been walking through



about an inch of water on the floor.

Cody looked back and grinned. "Wishing you had followed your dad?"

"Only if you're about to tell me this thing is coming down on my head." She grinned back.

"Believe me, if it was, I'd be running really fast way before now. The water seems to be coming from a pipe joint back there that's ruptured. I haven't found any structural damage yet. Have you found anything, Tito?"

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"Here's something." Tracy turned the sound up.

"The 5.2 earthquake that hit at 7:02 this morning has caused minimal damage and so far only minor injuries have been reported. Several aftershocks have been recorded, but none have been severe." The news announcer switched to a sports reporter for an update of the afternoon baseball scores.

"That doesn't sound too bad." Wren said and the three women seemed to relax at once.

"Tonight, when she calls," Amanda looked at Tracy, "please tell her I'll be at home and I desperately need to talk to her."

"No."

"N...no? But..."

Tracy interrupted. "You and I have a lot of talking to do, so you can plan on being here when she calls."

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"No, I have found nothing either." Tito said. "Should we fix the leak or shut off the water flow?"

"Let's get Gil down here and see what he thinks." Cody suggested as they turned to make their way back to the stairs.

Nobody was certain if they felt or heard the rumble first, but Cody closed the small distance between her and a frozen Alison, pushing her into a niche in the wall that was safer than standing in the passageway.

The violent upheaval lasted under 30 seconds, but for the three people trapped inside a concrete and steel structure that separated them from millions of gallons of water, it seemed like an eternity before the floor stopped shifting and the pieces of concrete quit raining down upon them.

Alison was scared to open her eyes, she was afraid she'd see a wall of water crashing down on her. The realization that several seconds had past and she was still dry, reassured her, but she was grateful she had gone to the bathroom before they had left the base. She took a deep breath and opened her eyes. She had dropped her flashlight in her panic, but the afternoon sun was bright as it shone down through the stairwell.

"God." Alison shivered as she looked at the heap of twisted rubble that was once the metal stairs and sent a silent thank you heavenward that they had not been climbing them when it hit.

"Cody? Tito?" Somewhere in the debris were two people she needed to find. Hearing a faint voice call her name, she responded, "Cody, is that you?"

"Yes." Came the answer in a stronger voice.

"Hang on and let me see if I can find the flashlight." She blocked the sun with her body when she tried to make her way back to Cody. She knelt down searching through the rubble. There wasn't as much where she was, as there was back the way they had come. Alison saw the flashing red locator light and moved several small chunks of concrete. Hoping that the thing still worked, she pressed the button and was rewarded with a wide strong beam of light. "Cody, where are you?"

"Over here." She raised her left arm, which wasn't trapped, and waved.

"Oh shit." Alison whispered. Cody had been knocked back down the passage and partially buried under chunks of concrete.

"I'm okay...I think." She let the young woman move the smaller pieces away. "You need to find Tito, he was behind me when it started."

"Okay, I'll be right back to get the rest of this stuff moved."

"Be careful, there'll be aftershocks, probably a lot stronger than we've had." Cody warned.

"Um...yeah, I was afraid of that." She stood and cautiously picked her way down the passage, calling Tito.

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"What do we have to talk about?" Amanda was curious as to what Tracy would admit to about her ex-lover with her current lover sitting in the room.

"I'm not going to pussyfoot around because right now, I don't give a rip about your feelings." She was standing in front of the slightly shorter woman with her hands on her hips and a frustrated expression gracing her face. "You are being a complete and total fool. And if you don't wise up, you're gonna lose Cody."

"To you, you mean." Amanda stood her ground, refusing to be intimidated and no longer caring

that Wren was there.

Tracy gave a sad laugh. "I told her not long ago that you were jealous. She had absolutely no idea that you felt that way. Or why you even would." Tracy sighed. "Cody is very naive in a lot of ways, Amanda. She feels that if she loves someone, cheating isn't a possibility, wouldn't even consider it and expects the person that loves her to act the same way."

Amanda was embarrassed at being laughed at and that her feeling had been so obvious to the woman she saw as a rival. "What about you?" She looked at Wren. "Are you okay with them being together so much? Or are you jealous too?"

"At first I was. Cody is an attractive and intelligent woman." She smiled at her lover. "And in spending time with them, it's easy to see the love they have for each other. But their not in love, and will probably never be lovers again, even if we weren't in the picture."

"How can you be so sure?" Amanda was now more confused than angry.

Wren thought, then said, "Their like my brothers are with their friends. Their pals, buddies...they watch the game, or go out drinking together, or go out 'cruising girls' as they call it. My brothers that is, not Tracy and Cody; although they've probably done that a time or two." She smiled at the blush on her lovers face. "I know if you had spent time with us, you would think the same way."

Amanda sat down on the couch and buried her face in her hands. "What am I gonna do?" The question came out muffled.

"First of all..." Tracy was interrupted by Wren's hand on her arm.

"Wait, turn the sound up." She saw the 'Special Bulletin' message on the TV screen. Tracy grabbed the remote from the chair cushion where she had tossed it earlier and quickly hit the mute button.

"This is KXRT with a special report. We just received information that a very strong aftershock has been recorded in the Guadalajara area and we're going live to our reporter Benjamin Cash who has been on the scene since mid-day. Benjamin, can you tell us what's happening?"

The scene switched over to a tight shot of a blonde haired reporter. "Well Martin, I'm not sure if this was an aftershock or maybe another earthquake, but it was a good bit stronger than the original, I've been told."

"Yes Benjamin, it was a 6.6 on the Richter Scale." Martin the co-anchor interrupted with the information that had just been relayed to him through his earpiece.

"You can see from these shots," the reporter motioned the cameraman to pull back and pan around the downtown area, "that the damage was certainly more pronounced."

The camera picked up broken windows, crumbled building facades, people sitting injured and people wandering around seemingly in shock. An emergency siren could be heard in the background slowly moving closer.

"We're going to try to find someone in charge that will have more of an idea as to the damage and injuries from this latest development. Back to you Martin."

Wren took the remote from Tracy's slack hand and muted the TV, which had gone to a commercial.

"How do we find out if she's okay? Who can we call?" Amanda broke the silence.

"She is okay, she has to be." Tracy stated firmly.

Wren's voice broke the silence that had descended. "Call her."

"Who?" Amanda asked.

"Cody, call her cell phone, see if you can get through." Wren responded. "It's worth a shot."

## Chapter Fifteen

Alison found Tito; he was covered in debris and unconscious. She made her way back to Cody. "Let me see if I can get the rest of this off you."

"You can't lift it, it's too heavy." She caught and held the young woman's hand. "It's reinforced concrete and it's got steel rods running through it." She explained. "All these chunks are probably connected together."

The larger pieces had Cody's legs and right side pinned down. The only visible injury was a small cut above and below her right eye.

"Alison...can you hear me, honey?" A voice shouted from above.

"I'm here, dad." She answered as she moved to what was once the base of the stairs. "I'm okay, but Cody and Tito are pinned under the concrete that fell."

"Are they hurt?" Tripp asked, then in a quieter voice, "That was probably a stupid question."

"Tito's unconscious and has a bad laceration on the back of his head. I can't get him to respond to me. And I was just about to ask Cody if she could tell if she was injured."

"My leg and my side, but I can't tell if anything's broken or not." Cody said. "But it's really starting to hurt." She grimaced.

Alison relayed the info. "Dad, there could be internal damage; we need to get them to a hospital,

quickly."

"I was able to contact Mendoza, he's sending help. Gil's tied off a safety line, I'm gonna come down, honey."

Tripp released the line from his harness. "I want you out of here. Gil's got this line hooked to a winch and can pull you up."

"No, dad. I'm not leaving them. I might be able to help. Besides, Cody saved me, she's the only reason I'm not hurt...or worse. And I won't leave her down here in danger while I run to safety."

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"I'm still getting the 'trying to locate customer' message." Tracy pressed the end button and tossed her phone onto the couch in disgust.

"Try the land line. Everybody's probably trying to use their cell phones at the same time." Amanda suggested as she paced.

"Good idea." Tracy grudgingly admitted. She dialed Cody's number and held her breath waiting while the other two stared intently at her. She gave them a thumbs up sign. "It's ringing."

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"It's a phone ringing." Alison headed towards the sound.

"My cell phone." Cody said. "I'm surprised it's still working."

"Found it." Alison said as she flipped it open. "Hello."

"Cody? It's Tracy." She didn't think it was her friend's voice but the connection was bad and she had the speakerphone on so Amanda and Wren could hear.

"Um no, my name's Alison. Cody's here, she's...hang on, she wants the phone. It's someone named Tracy." She explained.

"Hey." Cody said.

"Oh thank God." Tracy said when she heard the familiar voice. "Amanda and Wren are here too."

"We've been worried sick." Amanda added. "What was that?"

"That was an aftershock and what was left of the metal stairway collapsing."

"Where the hell are you?" Tracy asked worriedly.

"This is Alison again." She had taken the phone from Cody.

"What's going on? Where's Cody?" Amanda's voice revealed her nervousness.

"She was inspecting a dam when the second quake hit and she's pinned under some concrete and stuff."

"God...is she hurt?" Amanda asked.

"Why aren't you getting her out?" Tracy yelled. Both questions came almost at the same time.

"Help is on the way. We can't tell about her injuries, but her leg and side are hurting her. And she's in a little more pain now; the last tremor shifted the rubble." Alison explained, hoping to calm the upset women.

"I'm coming down there." Tracy stated.

"We're coming down there." Amanda corrected.

"Um, I don't know if you can get here. Hold on a minute, my dad wants to talk to you." She passed the phone over and moved to take his place beside the hurting woman.

"You should head for Mexico City, that's probably about as close as you can get." He explained after introducing himself. "I don't know if they'll take her to a hospital here or not. Some of the injured might even be headed there. Give me a number where I can reach you and I'll call when I know more. Hang on. Honey, get me something to write on outta my pack."

"Dad, I hear a helicopter." Alison handed him a small notebook and pen.

"The cavalry's here. Give me your number." He paused and copied down both women's cell phone numbers. "It might take you a while to get a flight, if they haven't cancelled them all."

"I know a pilot that can get us there. We'll expect a call from you later."

The woman's voice left on doubt in his mind that she would track him down if she didn't hear from him. And he was sure it wouldn't be pleasant.

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"Thanks, Frazer, I really appreciate this."

"No problem. My dad knows one of the high mucky-mucks in Mexico City, so he's gonna radio me once he gets the okay for us to land." He taxied toward the runway awaiting clearance to takeoff. "You know someone down there hit by the quake?"

"Cody's down there." Tracy stated. She was sitting up front next to Frazer.

"Cody...is she okay?"

"We...hope so." Tracy said quietly and glanced back at Amanda who was sitting in the seat behind Frazer, staring out the small window. She was beginning to worry about her; she'd hardly said anything after hearing that Cody was hurt.

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Tracy had tried to persuade Amanda to eat something once they had checked into a hotel, but she didn't have much of an appetite either and couldn't see forcing her to eat when Tracy herself, only picked at the food on her plate.

The room service tray had long since been placed in the hallway, outside their door. Tracy paced while Amanda stood and stared out the window at the sinking sun.

"Did you mean what you said?" The blonde refocused her eyes on the reflection in the glass when Tracy's voice broke the long silence. "That you'd never cheat on her."

"Yes." Amanda held the questioning eyes.

"Then what was that kiss? You don't consider kissing you ex-lover cheating on your current lover?" Tracy crossed her arms over her chest and glared at the back of the blonde head.

"I didn't kiss Sabrina." Amanda slowly turned around, doing a little glaring of her own. "She kissed me. And," she hurried on, stopping whatever Tracy had taken a breath to say, "no, that doesn't make it okay." Her jealousy and distrust of the woman in front of her faded and her shoulders sagged. "She caught me by surprise. I swear I had absolutely no idea that she thought she loved me. It would be funny if it wasn't so serious."

"You know you're guilty of doing exactly what you've been afraid Cody was going to do. Or at least to her, it looks like you have."

"What do you mean?" Amanda was puzzled.

"Gone back to you ex-lover." Tracy explained and saw the realization dawn in the green eyes.

"But...I haven't. I wouldn't. I love her, Tracy, you have to believe me." She said desperately.

Tracy stared at the distraught woman for a short time. "For some reason, I do believe you. And..." The phone ringing interrupted.

"Okay, we're heading there now." She hung up. "She's being air lifted to one of the hospitals here."

"It's about damn time. How is she?" Amanda asked. She had turned back to the darkness beyond the window during the call.

"He didn't elaborate on her injuries, but said she never lost consciousness and according to the medics, her blood pressure is good and her pulse is strong." She grabbed her purse. "Let's go. It'll probably take awhile to get a taxi and get through this madhouse."

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Alison had been separated from Cody when the helicopter landed and the medical staff had taken over. She was shown the surgical waiting area, one of the staff assuring her that was where the patient would be headed after being evaluated.

A young dark haired woman was sitting alone among the groups of family and friends. She resembled the description Tito had given of his girlfriend, when they had talked on the way to the dam. Taking a chance, Alison made her way over to her, asking if she was here for Tito. He had been taken out first and she learned that he was already in surgery.

"Yes." The woman answered and turned dark puzzled eyes to the American woman.

"I'm Alison, I was with Tito and the engineer when the second quake hit." She sat down beside the woman. "How's he doing?"

"I am Belinda. I do not know: I am still waiting to hear."

Alison learned that his family, being in southern Mexico, had not been able to get there yet.

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Amanda and Tracy fought through the chaos that was the emergency area of the hospital to locate an information desk, which informed them of Cody's whereabouts but not her condition.

Finding the waiting room located on the surgical floor, both women stopped at the entrance to the room and surveyed the groups of people. Locking eyes with the only other obviously American in the room, they went through the 'I think you're probably the person I was told to look for, but I'm not completely sure' ritual.

Alison stood up and went to the two women. "Are you here for Cody?"

"Yes, I'm Tracy and this is Amanda. Do you know anything yet?"

"No. All I was told was, she was taken into surgery about a half hour ago and that it could be an hour or more depending on what else they found."

"Why surgery?" Amanda asked after they sat down and were introduced to Belinda and told about Tito.



"You know those steel rod thingy's that run through concrete?" Both women nodded. "Well, when they were moving the debris that fell on her they found that two of them had gone through her leg and one had pierced her side, so they have to remove those and fix whatever damage they did." Alison watched them both turn pale. "She was still conscious when we landed and said to tell you not to worry."

The voices in the waiting room quieted when a doctor, still in scrubs, appeared in the doorway. "Anyone here for Tito Garcia?"

"I am." Belinda responded and the doctor walked over. The voices started again, but the tone and volume were subdued. He spoke to her in Spanish and Amanda, Tracy and Alison only recognizing a word here or there.

Belinda translated after the doctor left. "They believe he is going to be fine. The brain has some swelling, but the bone was not..." she paused, searching for the correct translation, "fractured."

"That's good news." Alison said.

"They are going to move him into the critical care unit and allow me to see him, then I must try to contact his familia." She stood.

"We wish him well." Tracy said.

"We'll pray for him." Amanda added.

"Gracias and I will for your friend also." Belinda said as she left.

A little while later, a man stood in the doorway and Alison sat up in her chair and waved him over. "Dad, you made good time."

He sat down beside his daughter and introduced himself. "I'm Tripp and you must be Tracy and Amanda."

"I'm Tracy." She shook his hand.

"That means you must be Amanda." He extended his hand to her also before he sat next to his daughter. "No news yet?"

"Not about Cody yet." Alison relayed the good news about Tito.

Time past slowly as they watched the same scene play out many times. A doctor would appear, ask for family/friends, speak with them and depart; leaving the people they talked with feeling relief or sorrow.

It was over an hour later when a tall woman appeared asking if someone was here for Cody

Lawson.

"Here." Amanda said, nervously wiping her hands on her thighs, as the doctor made her way over.

"I'm Dr. Aznar. Cody came through surgery fine. She had no internal injuries, just some bruising. She was lucky; the puncture wound in her side did no major damage. The leg injury was by far the most severe, with a break to the femur on which we inserted two pins and repaired the tears to the muscles. It's going to take awhile before she'll be able to get around without help, but she's going to be okay. Any questions?"

"When can we see her?" Tracy asked. The relief she felt was mirrored by Amanda's expression.

"She'll be in recovery for awhile, so you might want to wait until we get her to ICU. She might even be awake for a few minutes at that point. ICU is just a precaution," the doctor explained, "she'll more than likely be in a standard room in 24 to 48 hours."

## Chapter Sixteen

Cody was semi-conscious and not very coherent, as Alison and Tripp snuck in with Tracy and Amanda. Father and daughter left after a few minutes of get-well wishes, leaving the two women with the patient. Cody fell back asleep fairly quickly and not long after, one of the nurses made them leave, explaining to the complaining women that the patient would most likely sleep through the night.

It was late when they finally made it back to their hotel. "I don't know about you, but my stomach thinks my throat's been cut. Do you want a sandwich or something?" Tracy asked. Hunger pains had kicked in not long after learning that Cody was okay.

"Yeah, I guess I'd better eat something so my stomach doesn't keep you awake. Thanks." Amanda sat down on one of the chairs and waited for Tracy to finish with the order. "I should also thank you for making this easier on me than you probably want to. I know you don't like me very much."

Tracy turned around to face the bowed blonde head that seemed to find something very interesting to study on the floor. "I don't dislike you, Amanda. Hell, I don't know you; you've never given me a chance to. What I don't like is the way you've hurt my best friend. You did make her happy though, in the beginning. Happier than she's been in a long time."

"I just pray I can make it right again." Amanda looked into the hazel eyes staring at her.

"What about children? You know now that Cody was serious about not becoming a parent. If you still want to have a baby, it might be best if you walk away now."

"I've done a lot of thinking in the past day and a half. I've come to the conclusion that I'd convinced myself that a baby would keep us together, and that's why I was so set on starting a

family."

"So, you're saying now you don't want children."

"I'm saying that Cody means more to me than anything. And if that means no children, then that's okay with me."

Tracy tilted her head and studied the woman sitting before her. Throughout most of the day, she had looked broken and defeated, now Tracy could see the honesty in her eyes and expression. "I believe you." A simple statement, but one she believed in her heart, was true.

Amanda released the breath she had been holding, it had become very important what this woman, whom she had thought of as her rival not so long ago, thought of her. "Thank you."

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Over the next several days, Tracy and Amanda had talked more and started to become the friends that Cody had wanted them to be. Their days and early evening were spent at the hospital with Cody in Mexico City.

When Cody had been transferred back home to San Diego, Amanda had found it difficult to find time alone with her. She knew they both were putting off the inevitable, but there were hard feelings that needed to be aired out and explained.

It was a couple of days before the doctor had promised to release Cody when Amanda walked into the hospital room to find the patient alone. "Hi, how are you feeling?"

Cody was sitting up in the hospital bed with an untouched dinner tray in front of her. "Okay...past ready to get out of here."

"Hmm, I bet you are. I went ahead and brought you a pair of sweatpants and t-shirt to wear home." Amanda nervously fiddled with the bag. "I know we need to talk...I need to explain some things..."

"Look, Amanda, you've been really great about being here for me, but I'd rather not drag this out...I mean if you want to be with Sabrina."

"No." Amanda looked into blue eyes and said forcefully, "I don't want to be with her, I never did. She completely surprised me when she kissed me. Maybe I should have seen it coming; she does have a habit of going after unavailable women. I think that's why she all of a sudden convinced herself she'd fallen in love with me." Green eyes starred intently into blue.

Cody studied Amanda much like Tracy had in the room in Mexico City. "I believe you."

"Thank God." Amanda breathed a sigh of relief and sank into the chair.

"But there's still the problem of children and," she held up her hand to stop the interruption, "I have a problem with being able to trust you."

"But...you said you believed me."

"Not about the kiss. If I'd thought you had cheated on me, you'd have been out the door in a heartbeat. I knew she had been after you, but deep down my heart was pretty sure you wouldn't have an affair. I just had to think about it for awhile." Cody looked into the fearful eyes of the person she loved and spared a minute to wonder which one of them was more scared of losing the other. "You went behind my back after I'd told you how I felt about kids. That doesn't set a great foundation for trust."

"I know." Amanda had tears in her eyes that as yet, hadn't started to fall. "I'll earn it again, if you'll give me a chance."

"What about six months or a year from now? What if you change your mind again and decide you do want a family? What if you grow to hate me when you look at a woman with a baby and realize I'm responsible for making you give up something you wanted?"

"You're the only family I need or want. Not knowing if I had lost you when you were hurt, taught me that. I let my jealousy take over and convinced myself a child would bind us together." Amanda explained.

Cody looked down at her hands that were nervously working the sheet that covered her, and asked the one question she had been scared to ask. "Are you pregnant?"

"I...I don't know. The home test was negative." She hurriedly said, then reluctantly admitted, "But I really didn't wait long enough before doing it." She looked away from the intense gaze that stared at her. "I've been a little...scared to go to the doctor to be tested."

"I guess we should've had enough sense to talk about all this before."

"We hadn't planned on me moving in with you either; I was only going to stay until I found a place. But you know the old joke, 'What do lesbians bring on the second date'. I just had everything shipped instead of using a U-Haul."

Cody leaned her head back against the pillow and starred at the ceiling. "Did we move too fast?"

"Wha...what are you saying?" Amanda asked; her eyes wide and face pale.

"Maybe we should have taken more time to get to know the people we've become, before we jumped into living together." Cody's eyes watered and she blinked rapidly.

"Are you saying you don't love me?" The tears that had been threatening to fall now did.

"No...I love you, Amanda. That's why this hurts so much." Cody sniffed.

"You want me to leave, don't you? Because I might be pregnant..."

"No." Cody interrupted. "I'd never make you go through that alone."

"For the first nine months you mean. But for the next 18 years, I'd be on my own."

"I'm sorry." The tears continued down Cody's cheeks. "I...I just can't."

"I know...I'm sorry too." Amanda placed her hand over Cody's. "You tried to tell me and I didn't listen. I was just scared that I was going to lose you and so sure that this would be the way to keep that from happening."

Cody took the tissue Amanda held out for her. "I should have told you everything to start with."

"And I should have taken you at your word and not assumed I knew best. My mom always told me I was headstrong." Her tears now flowed freely. "Maybe we don't really know each other."

The stark reality of the statement sank in and scared them both.

## Epilogue

Tracy found Cody in her favorite room, staring out at the sun starting to set over the vast ocean. A lot had happened to her friend in the six weeks since the earthquake. They discovered Amanda wasn't pregnant; she found an apartment and moved out.

"I thought I'd find you here." She pushed off the doorframe she had been leaning against studying the grumpy woman.

Cody turned in her direction and managed a small smile. "Hey."

"Still haven't heard from her?" Tracy asked as she plopped down at the other end of the couch and turned sideways to face Cody.

"Not since she called to tell me she was settled in." That had been two weeks ago and Cody had picked up the phone at least a dozen times, but hung up before she had completed the number.

"Explain to me again, why you don't call her. Cause I gotta tell you, it doesn't make a whole helluva lot of sense."

Cody rubbed her injured leg and sighed deeply. Instead of answering, she quoted a poem.

Take this kiss upon the brow!  
And, in parting from you now,  
Thus much lit me avow-  
You are not wrong, who deem

That my days have been a dream;  
Yet if Hope has flown away  
In a night, or in a day,  
In a vision, or in none,  
Is it therefore the less gone?  
All that we see or seem  
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar  
Of a surf-tormented shore,  
And I hold within my hand  
Grains of golden sand-  
How few! Yet how they creep  
Through my fingers to the deep,  
While I weep-while I weep!  
O God! Can I not grasp  
Them with a tighter clasp?  
O God! Can I not save  
One from the pitiless wave?

Cody finished and fell silent.

Tracy glared at the brooding woman. She wasn't about to let it go that easily and badgered her again. "Explain to me again why she moved out."

Cody glared. "You know we agreed that we need time to really get to know each other as adults. We both jumped into this with feelings that we had for each other fifteen years ago." She stood up and limped over the windows. "Now I'm wondering just why we thought this was a good idea."

"Call her." Tracy simply stated. She had said the same thing to another brooding woman not 30 minutes ago, when she had barged in on Amanda who had been moping around, much like her best friend was doing now.

"Yeah, I've thought of that. But what if...she's changed her mind."

'Same damn argument Amanda had used.' "What if she hasn't?" The ringing of Cody's cell phone interrupted any answer Cody might have.

"Lawson."

"Hello, Cody Lawson, my name is Amanda Norris. You may not remember but we went to high school together. I now live in San Diego and was wondering if you wanted to have dinner with me and maybe we could get to know one another."

A huge smile spread across Cody's face. "Of course I remember you Ms Norris. What brings you

to San Diego?"

Tracy grinned as she shut the front door behind her and leaned back against it. "Mission accomplished." She said to the bird that was sitting in its nest in a bush by the porch, turning its head regarding her, as its mate joined it. "I do believe they're going to be okay, if they work at it." She grinned as she made her way down the steps, to her car and home.

The End

Note: My apologies to Mexico and her people. I wouldn't wish these catastrophes on anyone.

**Greek Warrior's Scrolls**  
**Main Page**

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