

Kelly

(Inspired by Mike C, based on characters in his novel: “**James**”
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Chapter 16

Kelly woke, completely and instantly, totally unlike her usual return from the land of Nod.

She lay quietly for a while, reveling in her lovers’ touch. She *knew* that Todd’s hand was on her ass, that she held Laura’s panty clad cheek. She could feel how their legs tangled, and Laura’s warm breath on her breast. Feeling mischievous, she slid a finger under the elastic and stretched it out...

“Do that and I’ll bite!” said a quiet voice from under her chin, and sharp teeth closed around her nipple, sending goose bumps down her spine. She teasingly stretched the waistband and felt the teeth bite harder, so quickly slipped her hand under the panties to caress the warm flesh. Instantly the bite became a kiss, then a suckle. It felt good, so fulfilling to have her lover at her breast, and she nuzzled her lips in the soft hair.

Laura pulled away with a pop and tilted her face up for a kiss.

“Mmmm, good morning, honey.”

When they broke the kiss, Kelly looked at Todd over Laura’s head, seeing him totally relaxed, a little drool at the side of his mouth. “God, I love you,” she thought.

She looked down at Laura. “Love you, Babe. But I have to go.”

It took a while to untangle themselves without waking Todd, but eventually both had extracted themselves and pulled on T’s so as not to embarrass their houseguests.

As they headed for the kitchen, they heard the TV with its sound turned low in the living room.

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Cara woke shortly after 8:00, feeling Ami wrapped snugly around her. The feeling was comforting, intimate, then she felt Ami tense.

“Oh! I’m sorry Cara, I’m so sorry!” Ami tried to push away, but Cara held her close.

“It’s OK, it’s no big deal! If I hadn’t been here, you would have been wrapped around a pillow!”

But the truth was...

Ami liked it. She liked waking with Cara in her arms.

The girls didn't know what time Kelly, Laura and Todd would be getting up and had decided, based on Laura's comments about breakfast, that they would check out the TV. Grabbing a couple of bottles of Evian, they sat in front of the barely audible TV. Just in case the threesome in the other bedroom weren't early risers, they didn't want to disturb them. And following Kelly's comments from the night before, they hadn't bothered dressing but sat in their own nightshirts watching Women's Volleyball on TSN when Kelly and Laura popped in.

"Good morning, ladies," said Kelly, "I trust you slept well?"

Laura said "Hi," and continued to the kitchen.

"Very well, thank you," said Ami.

"It's a real comfortable bed," said Cara wishing she was still in it feeling the warmth of Ami's body.

"So are you girls ready to start a modified diet?" Kelly asked. "Since you won't be working out as often or as intensely, now is a critical time not to let 'fab' turn to flab."

"I suppose," sighed Ami.

"Don't you girls worry. I know it's going to take a bit of time to adjust, so let's just start slowly. Have more meals, but less carbs, and after breakfast, we'll go out bike shopping. That will help through the transition period."

"Cool!" said Cara, turning off the TV.

Laura was laying out the vitamins and bottles of go-juice when Kelly, Cara, and Ami walked in.

"And for breakfast we have," said Laura smiling, "grapefruit slices, fresh orange juice, celery and carrots."

"And don't forget," added Kelly with a laugh, "it's an all-you-can-eat buffet!"

Both Cara and Ami groaned.

"What? Not satisfied with the 'Continental Breakfast' supplied by this fine establishment?" asked Todd, smiling as he entered the kitchen.

Todd had woken up shortly after Kelly and Laura had left the bed. He had dressed and relieved his bladder and stood in the hallway smiling as he heard the discussion in the kitchen.

"Good morning, Sweetheart," said Kelly giving him a kiss.

Laura came around the table to plant a kiss of her own as she greeted her other lover.

Todd sat down, swallowed his vitamins, and downed his go-juice. As he chewed on a celery stalk, he looked at Kelly and sniffed the air. "Not smoking this morning?"

Kelly shook her head. "I think I'm going to cut down," she replied. "G suggested that I shouldn't smoke as much. She wouldn't tell me why, but you know she wouldn't have said it without a reason, so this morning I decided "No more smoking in the house!"

"Jesus. I wonder what brought that about?" said Todd. "It's not like you smoke a lot to begin with. What? Maybe 10 on a bad day?"

"On a really bad day," nodded Kelly in agreement.

"And didn't you tell me that smoking is a part of your... uhm... lifestyle that you can't change?" asked Laura. She had nearly mentioned Kelly's obsessive-compulsive disorder before remembering that the two gymnasts knew nothing about Kelly's personal demons.

"It's not a big deal," Kelly said. "So, I'll just take the few extra steps when I really want one, and maybe I'll decide I don't really want it that bad."

Laura found herself thinking of the *Obi-Man* – what else did he tell Gloria? What else hasn't she told Kelly?

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Todd grabbed the cordless phone and called the studio. Vanetta answered on the first ring.

"Hiya, boss lady," he said jokingly. "Anything going on that I should be aware of?"

"Uh huh. Okay," said Todd in response to what Vanetta was telling him. "I'll give him a call from here. I meant to do it yesterday, but I was too tired to bother. And can you call CrossTrain Sports for me and ask them to ship down a big box of chalk, priority?"

He listened for a moment and then turned to Cara and Ami. "Is there a special kind or size you need? Or anything else that we don't have that you need for your work on the equipment?"

Cara looked to Ami. From what they had seen, Todd had it all. "Nope, all we need is the chalk, just say a case of 24, and they'll understand."

"Did you hear that, Vanetta? A case of 24, yeah that's right. Okay, I'll probably be in later this afternoon. We're going out for a while this morning."

Kelly took over the phone from Todd. "Vanetta, did you get Laura's new cell number added to the speed dial? Good. That way you'll always find two of us anyway," she laughed. "If I don't see you later, you have a good day."

Kelly disconnected and sat down to have another grapefruit, while Todd punched in a number he had pulled out of his wallet. As he waited for his call to get patched

through, he explained that Peter had called and left a message asking him to call when he came in. He paused for a moment as he was transferred to Peter's private secretary. "Since I won't be going in until later this afternoon, I figured I might as well give him a call now."

"Hello, Peter! I hear you're looking for me."

Todd listened to the VP of InterCoastal explain why he had called.

"Yeah, someone pointed them out to me, so we grabbed a copy of the Journal on Tuesday." Todd said. "It looks like they were impressed with the wing. Nice story too. What's that?" Todd laughed. "No, we haven't looked at the price other than what the Journal said. Really? Well, I'm glad we could help you out, Peter. Yeah, okay... I'll talk to you later. Hang on." Todd handed the phone to Kelly. "Peter says he has to talk to you."

"Hi, Peter," said Kelly.

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Peter apologized for not having called sooner but with the coverage the press had given the Cuddy's new speed record and the innovative design of the wing, he had been deluged with calls. Dealers from all over were clamoring for copies of the pictures that had shown up in the major papers and other papers had picked up on the story and wanted regional slants.

"The board was very impressed," Peter said. "The results of what JamPC designed and the speed record they set has everybody talking, but with Todd's picture to visually show how and why, well it's just got the whole boating industry talking."

"That's great, Peter. We're really happy for you," Kelly said.

"But the reason I had to call was that I told the Board on Wednesday about our little agreement. After I showed them what kind of pictures the news people had taken and the extra effort TKO gave to really push the story, they said to name the time and how long you want to go for and IC will set you up in the best boat available, fully staffed!"

Kelly looked at her lovers before answering. "How about the last two weeks of September, Peter? Three weekends. Leave on Friday and return on Monday after the two weeks. That will make it 17 days."

"Leave it to me, Kelly. I'll get back to you on the details and specifics."

"Thanks, Peter. Talk to you soon."

Kelly walked over and wrapped her arms around her lovers. "My darlings, clear your calendars for the last two weeks in September... We are going on a sea cruise to Jamaica! A real vacation!"

Todd looked up. "Really?"

"Absolutely, Sweetheart. No work. Just relaxation."

"Oh my God!" said Laura. "An ocean voyage, out of the country, to Jamaica!" She squealed with delight.

"And now I think I will go for a cigarette," said Kelly grabbing a bottle of mineral water. Things were going so well. For the first time in a long time she felt that everything was perfect and it all felt right. Her professional life and her personal life were all in order and she had never been happier.

As Kelly sat back in the lounge, before she lit up, she remembered her first real kiss from James, and the night with Brenda. That had been the start of this new life, a life with not one, but two lovers. She smiled as she remembered the first time she met Laura. Nude, on her butt on the darkroom floor, cum on her face. A lifetime ago, so much had changed.

She lit her Cameo and took a deep drag. It was hard to remember how life had been before the happiness she enjoyed now.

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Cara and Ami joined her in the back yard.

Ami spoke up. "We were wondering, Kelly, if you guys wanted to work out with us while we do our exercises. It will do wonders for toning your body."

Kelly cocked her head. A good exercise routine might be a smart idea. "I'm game," she said, "but I can't speak for the other two."

"Oh, we've already convinced them," said Cara.

Kelly laughed. "I can see that you two will fit in very nicely!"

"The only problem is space. We don't want Todd to move your living room furniture every day, so if you don't mind, before we go out to do the other things we have to do, Todd said we could do it right in the studio," said Ami.

"That won't be a problem," said Kelly. "We're not on any timetable, and besides the dressing room there's a shower in the studio itself. And ... lots of clothes to change into when we're done!"

They headed into the house to get dressed for the day.

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Kelly, with Cara and Ami in her car, followed Todd's Tracker and Laura's Accord in a cute little parade to the end of her street and then Todd and Laura turned right, heading for the studio, while Kelly made a quick detour to the outdoor fruit stand.

As she got back into the car with a large bag of fresh fruits and vegetables, she said, "I hope you girls like beets."

Ami just made a face. Cara laughed.

"Don't worry," said Kelly, "you won't even taste it once it's been juiced."

As Kelly pulled into the studio, she noticed that Laura had parked her Accord around the back. It made good sense. With the three of them spending nearly every night together, there was no need to have three vehicles running around.

"I didn't think I'd see you today," said Vanetta as Kelly entered the studio.

"Well, it seems that Cara and Ami have decided we should participate in their morning workouts," said Kelly.

"Oh, this I have got to see," said Vanetta laughing. "You're not usually awake at this hour much less exercising!"

"Well," said Kelly grinning, "sometimes things change."

Vanetta took the bag from Kelly and said she would prepare the fruits and vegetables while they worked out.

Todd ran upstairs to change into a set of sweats. Laura and Kelly had decided to wear their Star Fleet issue underwear for the work out, and had brought clothes with them to change into afterwards.

The five of them lined up on the tumbling mat after Cara had clearly made the point that no shoes or socks were allowed on the mat. Ami was on one end and Cara at the other with Todd in the middle sandwiched by Kelly and Laura. Before starting, Ami had asked if it would be okay to turn on some music and when no one objected, Vanetta showed her the CD collection and how to adjust the stereo.

Ami selected a compilation CD of timeless Rock and Roll tunes. As she explained to the group, this was a low impact workout to promote tone and limber up muscles, then on a count from Cara, the two started their regular routine showing the other three how and what to do. Most of it was stretching and reaching, reminding Kelly of the Yoga classes she had taken.

"Remember," shouted Ami, "if you feel a muscle going tight, don't push it any further. Just try to hold it at the tight point for a minute. You'll get farther every day we do this."

By the time 20 minutes had passed, Cara and Ami were into full splits on the mat. Kelly eventually made it all the way down as well, and Laura was just a few inches off,

but Todd, as flexible as his Tae Bo exercises had made him, was having trouble spreading his legs that far. Thankfully the next move allowed him to drop on his butt as they all pulled their feet in to their groins trying to keep their knees flat on the floor. This was of course no problem for Cara and Ami who quickly slid into place and proceeded to bob their heads and shoulders down to the mat. Surprisingly, Todd could get his feet into his groin and keep his knees on the floor but it was an area where Kelly and Laura were having difficulty. Ami told them to rest their elbows on their knees and then as they bobbed up and down with their upper torsos, the elbows would stretch the leg muscles. Another 15 minutes passed and Todd was flat on his back, wiped out. Laura soon joined him, simply rolling from her position to flat on her stomach. Kelly managed another five minutes and then gave it up as well. Cara and Ami kept at it but with more intensity for another 20 minutes. Jumping up, Ami said, "That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"You guys are in better shape than we thought," added Cara.

Todd just groaned.

Ami clapped her hands. "Time to hit the showers, kids."

As Todd crawled up the stairs, followed by Laura, Vanetta laughed and turned on the juicer. Kelly showed the girls where the shower was along with the towels before she headed upstairs as well to join her lovers in a warm shower.

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Ami was soaping up Cara's breasts as the water from the shower beat down on her back. "If camp had been like this," she said, "I might have enjoyed it a lot more."

Cara sighed and pulled Ami against her, letting her well lathered boobs squish into Ami's.

"Cara," Ami whispered in her ear, "you realize this is a step farther than just showering together."

"Mmm hmm."

Taking that as an affirmative, Ami wrapped her arms around Cara and hugged back, gently nibbling on Cara's ear.

"God, I'm so hot," said Cara.

"I can fix that," said Ami turning and changing the temperature of the water to icy cold.

"Argh," screamed Cara. "That's not how I thought you were going to fix it!"

Ami rinsed off and stepped out of the shower. "Remember what I said last night about being careful what you wish for?"

Cara nodded.

“Well, I... I really need you to think about this, Cara. The next step ... it really takes us to the point of no return...” Ami caught Cara’s eyes.

“I know what I want, I’ve wanted it for a real long time, but if you’re only playing, well...” She looked down at her hands, “I don’t want to lose you as a friend – but I don’t want to get hurt, either...”

Cara dropped her towel and hugged Ami. “I couldn’t hurt you, Ami. You’re my best friend.”

Ami’s eyes got wet and she felt tears running down her cheek. “But will you still be my friend if we go farther and you decide you don’t like it?”

“Oh, Ami. I can’t believe that I won’t like it. I feel so close to you. But no matter what, I will always be your friend.”

“Then let’s wait a bit, Cara. When the time is right, we’ll know it.”

The girls reluctantly broke their embrace and got dressed.

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Vanetta finished whipping up a large pitcher of juice and poured out six large glasses over crushed ice. She was clapping as Kelly, Todd, and Laura came down the stairs. “I never thought I would see the day,” she said.

“What day?” asked Todd.

“The day that you conked out from exercising for one, and Kelly moving so much so early in the morning!”

“But they did good,” said Ami as they entered the kitchenette. “I didn’t expect any of you to make it past the first ten minutes.”

Kelly raised her eyebrows.

“It’s because they’re special exercises for gymnasts,” explained Cara. “It’s easy to see that Todd works out, but not for doing back flips, and while it’s easy to see that you and Laura are in good shape, there’s a reason why there are so few gymnasts over 20. That was our regular routine we went through, and you guys managed to keep up for most of it!”

“All of a sudden I’m feeling old,” sighed Kelly.

“I’ll never get those splits down to the ground,” said Todd.

“Ah, that’s a defeatist attitude I hear,” said Ami. “I bet if you keep doing this with us every morning you’ll be doing splits like you’ve been doing them all your life.”

“I kind of liked it,” said Laura. “It made me feel alive. My legs are still warm from the tension, but I could feel myself getting just a bit further when I held my



position.” She looked at Todd, “just think what fun we could have, Honey, if I can sit in that position!”

“I swear, Laura, I think you were born horny,” said Vanetta.

“Nothing wrong with that,” said Kelly.

“Ha!” said Laura, looking at Vanetta. “I didn’t see Robert complaining when you had your arm around him yesterday!”

“Who’s Robert?” asked Todd.

Laura blushed suddenly remembering that Robert had said he had never met Todd.

“He’s a friend I met at school,” said Vanetta. “We’ve been dating for a while.”

“Oh,” said Todd. “I didn’t know.”

“You’ll meet him at the company party,” Vanetta added. “He’s looking forward to meeting you.”

Kelly decided it was time to change the direction of the conversation. She knew that Vanetta was concerned about the race issue.

“So, Ami ... You think you want to be a photographer?” Kelly asked.

“Yeah, but there aren’t many schools that offer photography as a full time program any more.”

“What got you interested in photography to begin with?” asked Todd.

“A couple of years ago, we were competing in Europe and an American journalist was covering the event. He was sitting just behind our bench and had this fancy camera, but he didn’t know when to shoot. I saw the article afterwards and realized that he couldn’t anticipate what was going to happen next. Then I started looking through the sports magazines, and except for ‘macho’ sports, most pictures of female athletes were really pathetic. I think there’s a good opportunity for someone who has been in sports, and especially women’s!”

“You realize it’s more than just taking pictures,” said Todd.

“Oh yeah, for sure! After I saw what had happened, I got a few books on photography and even took a few courses, but it cost too much money to get further than a pinhole camera, so I had to let it slide. It might look good when we win medals, but most people don’t realize how much money our parents put out for us to stay on the team if we even qualify.”

“You made a pinhole camera?” Todd asked somewhat surprised.

“Yeah, it was easy,” said Ami.

“How did you develop the film?” Todd asked, now really interested.

“Well, there wasn’t much to develop,” Ami said. “The idea was that it was supposed to be a one shot deal, but I figured out a way to tape down a roll of film in the

box I made and pull the film out a section at a time. I weaved the start of the film on a thin needle that I glued a button to. It was too thin though so I only managed to move the film forward six times before it jammed on me. After that, I went to the local newspaper and someone in the film department helped me take the box apart and develop it.”

“What did the end result look like?” Todd asked.

“Ah, you know. You have to figure out how long to expose the film and you’ve got to do it by pulling back the tape over the pinhole. I took pictures of my mom’s flowers, and you could see that they were flowers. Two of the negatives were too dark from over exposure and the last two, well I guess that a pin hole is only good for one pull on the tape cause they got really fuzzy when the hole got ragged edges around it, but I got one that was pretty clear.”

“And you liked it? Taking all that time just to get one picture?”

“It was great! I’d probably have taken on a summer job so I could buy a real camera, but for the last year it’s been practice, practice and more of the same.”

“Want to see my darkroom?” Todd asked.

“That’d be cool!”

As Todd and Ami headed for the darkroom, Vanetta said she was going to get back to her schoolwork. Kelly headed over to her own desk to check on the mail and file the reports from New York. Cara helped Laura clean up the kitchen.

“Laura, do you mind if I ask you something personal?”

“No, go right ahead, Cara,” Laura laughed. “If it’s something I don’t want to answer, I won’t, but you should always feel free to ask.”

Cara shyly said, “Okay, I was just wondering, you know, how you knew that you liked girls.”

Laura paused and turned to face Cara, leaning back against the counter. She looked at the ceiling as she thought of how to answer the younger girl. Finally she said, “I didn’t know. If somebody had told me six months ago that I was going to be turned on by another woman, I would have laughed at them. But you have to realize, we’re not talking about another girl here, we’re talking about Kelly.”

“What difference does that make?” Cara asked.

“I fell in love with Kelly the first time I saw a picture of her, and when I met her the next day, I felt all warm inside.”

“Did you fall for Kelly after a bad relationship with a guy?”

Laura laughed. “I did have a really bad experience with a guy before I met Kelly, but before I met her, I was already making it with Todd, and believe me, that was no bad experience!”

“So, are you now bisexual?”

“I’m not sure, Cara. I think about that occasionally. I guess technically I am, but I’m also monogamous, sort of. I have a male lover and a female lover, and I wouldn’t cheat on either of them.”

“So... If I have this right, you’re in love with two people. And the gender really doesn’t have anything to do with it.”

“Yeah! I guess that would be as good an explanation as any,” said Laura. “I mean, I can look at other people and appreciate their beauty, and now, I look at both men and women.”

“Are you ever afraid that Todd and Kelly might want to fool around with somebody else?”

“No. If it should happen, then it happens. All I ask for is that they continue to love me the way I love them. Jealousy is a dangerous game.”

“So it all boils down to love?” Cara asked.

Laura thought about that for a minute and then said, “Yeah, I think that my love for them allows me to be free with them and to enjoy both of them as friends and as lovers.”

“I think I understand,” said Cara.

“Is this about Ami?” Laura asked softly.

“Is it that obvious?”

“It is to those of us who have been down that road,” said Laura.

“She’s gay, or at least she says she is, though she’s never had a relationship with a girl. Is that possible?”

“Very,” said Laura. “We’re born with our desires. When they show themselves is just a matter of timing.”

“I love her, you know,” said Cara. “She and Erin have been my best friends through all the years we’ve been training, but I don’t have the same feelings for Erin as I do for Ami. There’s something about her that really makes me want to love her.”

“So what’s stopping you?”

“She is,” said Cara dejectedly. “She says that when the time is right, we’ll know it.”

“Well, I have to agree with her on that,” said Laura. “You don’t want to rush into a relationship. The worst thing you could do is pressure her into doing something that she’s not ready for, and the best thing that you can do is be supportive and understanding and remain her friend.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

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Ami was overwhelmed by Todd's darkroom. "Wow, this is even bigger than the one at the newspaper!"

Todd laughed. "That's probably because the newspaper doesn't have to worry about the fancy stuff."

Ami took her time looking around, checking out all the various chemicals and equipment, when she spotted the posters of Kelly and Laura. "Wow," she said. "They really look hot! I hope my body turns out as well."

"You've got a lot going for you already," said Todd. "Now if you watch your diet and stick to the vitamins that Kelly put you on, you'll just continue on to grow more beautiful."

Ami looked at Todd. "You know I'm gay, don't you?"

"Does that mean something special?" Todd asked.

"Well, I just meant ... I mean ... I wanted you to know right off the bat."

"Okay. I pretty well knew it, but I don't see what difference that makes."

"It means that I will never have a male lover," Ami said. "And I guess that what I'm also saying is that if you're thinking of having a group of girls like James does..." she looked at the floor blushing, "I won't be one of them."

Todd realized how difficult that had been for Ami to say. "Not to worry, Ami. James is a nice guy, I like him, and he does have a few more girlfriends than most guys have in a lifetime, but I'm not looking to be like him. I'm very happy and satisfied with Kelly and Laura."

Ami sighed with relief.

"But does your sexual preference exclude having male friends?" Todd asked.

"No ... I suppose not. I never really thought about it that way. I guess I figured that being a lesbian meant I would only hang around with girls."

"It seems to me that you're limiting yourself, then. There are lots of guys who you could be friends with and they wouldn't expect anything more from you."

"You think so?"

"Sure, why not? You have a pleasant personality and you're easy to talk to. I bet there's lots of guys that would love to be friends with you."

"Why?"

"Because in a lot of ways, you're a safe friend of the opposite sex. Once the issue of sex is out of the way, they can let their hair down and talk openly and honestly without worrying that you're measuring them up. Friendship is more important than a sexual relationship because good friends stick around when life gets rough."

“Is that why you get along so good with both Kelly and Laura? Cause you guys were friends first?”

“Well, Laura is fairly new in my life, but I knew from the first day I met her that she was a girl I could really enjoy as a friend, and Kelly I’ve known as a friend for years. We just became lovers this summer.”

“Wow. How long have you and Kelly been friends?”

“Since 1995 when we met on a shoot in Jamaica.”

“And it took all this time before you guys got it on?”

Todd laughed. “Yeah, and it was Laura who convinced us that our friendship wouldn’t be damaged if we did.”

“You guys are something else. We heard you laughing in the shower last night and I was thinking how much I would like to have a relationship like that. You know... laughing and joking and still be intimate.”

“Is this about Cara?” Todd asked.

Ami blushed again. “Yeah, I guess. We’ve been friends for years and she’s suggesting that we go farther, but I’m afraid that if we do, that the friendship will suffer and I don’t have a lot of friends to start with, so I can’t afford to lose one.”

Todd sat down. “I know what you mean, Ami. That’s why I wasn’t willing to risk Kelly’s friendship over sex, but now, I have it both ways.”

“The best of both worlds. I wonder if I’ll be that lucky.”

“And sometimes that’s a risk you’ve got to take,” said Todd. “Only you know if taking the next step will change things. Take your time and figure it out. Your heart will know when the time is right.”

Ami gave Todd a hug. “Thanks, Todd.”

“Any time, Ami. Now we better get back out before they send a search party after us.”

“Are you afraid that Kelly or Laura might think we’re up to something in here?”

“No ... they both have a good idea which way you lean, but they wouldn’t question it one way or another. There’s no jealousy in our relationship.”

“Does that mean you would consider having another lover?” Ami asked.

“No, not really. I love both of them and I intend to marry both of them. I’ve had my share of lovers, and none have ever made me as happy as the two I have now, so I’m not looking any more.”

Ami shook her head. “I hope I can be as happy as you guys are one day.”

“You’re a nice person, Ami. I’m sure you’ll find that happiness with somebody.”

Kelly was on the phone to Mistress Helga. The club didn't allow girls under the age of 18, something that Kelly already knew, but since both girls needed some special care, she had called asking for a reference for a good, discreet place where they could get the bikini wax and some special attention to their nails and calluses.

Mistress Helga gave her a number and said to give her name as a reference. Kelly made that her next call and set up an appointment for the girls later that afternoon.

Todd decided to stay behind and clean his cameras and reload his film magazines. He had shot a lot of film over the weekend, and with the rush to develop it on Monday and the exhaustion after the rush of preparing the studio, he was glad to let the girls go off on their own to do their shopping and whatever else they planned. Besides, he wanted to order more film and he had other things planned for the day.

Kelly and Laura kissed Todd goodbye and arranged to meet back at Kelly's for supper at 6:00.

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"Well, girls, I've made an appointment for you today to get waxed," Kelly said. "I know that it can be a bit embarrassing having somebody else between your legs, but the woman who did Laura's first waxing recommended a very professional yet quiet place. I hope you don't mind. It's just that it will be quicker and less painful than trying to do it yourselves even with our help."

"We can deal with it," said Ami. "Right, Cara?"

"Yeah, I suppose. It's not like we'll be meeting these people for lunch afterwards, right Kelly?" she asked hopefully.

Kelly laughed. "I know what you mean, Cara. It's like going to lunch with your gynecologist... you'd feel a bit awkward knowing how much of you she really knows!"

All of the girls laughed at the thought of what you would discuss over lunch with a gynecologist. "See any good pussy today?" quipped Laura.

"Oh god! Could you imagine!" said Ami. "It would be like asking for referrals!"

Kelly burst out laughing. "Yeah, I'm in the market for something new! Anybody you'd care to recommend!"

They were still laughing when they pulled up to a popular sports store. An hour later, they had purchased three bikes and three sets of roller blades along with helmets and all the protective gear with delivery promised to the studio that afternoon.

“Safety first,” said Kelly when they were being fitted. “And this way, while we wait for the shooting to start, we can take some nice leisurely rides or blast around the industrial park on the blades. It’s too nice to sit inside all the time.”

After the sports store, they headed to Victoria’s Secret to pick up a couple of pairs of thong underwear for Cara and Ami. “I don’t recommend these for full time wear,” said Kelly, “but if you wear them this afternoon, you won’t have to expose all of yourself to get waxed.”

“It’s funny,” said Ami, “I wouldn’t have a problem dropping my drawers at your place, but to have somebody work on me down there, it just feels so clinical.”

“No kidding!” said Cara. “It’s like the difference between showering with the girls at camp and visiting the doctor. Somehow, even with the gown and all, I still feel more exposed with the doctor.”

“I could even see myself posing for Todd like you and Laura did,” said Ami, “cause that’s art!”

“Oh, that’s right,” said Kelly, “you were in the darkroom.”

“Pose how?” asked Cara.

“In the buff!” said Ami grinning. “You ought to see the way these two look through Todd’s eyes and camera! I hope one day I can be that good. He really made them look sensual!”

Kelly and Laura laughed.

“Yep, in those pictures he made us look sensual, but he can also make us look like something raunchy!” said Kelly. “You should see the pictures he took of us at Brookhaven!”

“That’s the first thing I’m going to buy with the money I make,” said Ami. “A good camera! Then I can take those kind of pictures of Cara!”

“You wish!” said Cara, but her blush betrayed her. Ami wanted to photograph her nude!

“All in due time,” said Kelly. “Now, how about some lunch? There’s a great deli where Laura and I ate on Tuesday. They have a hot Pastrami on rye that is piled high with real meat!”

“Yeah!” said Ami. “I could go for that!”

“Me too,” said Cara. “Not knocking your healthy breakfast, but I would love to shove my face into some hot steamy meat right about now!”

The double meaning was not lost on anyone in the car, and they giggled all the way to the deli.

Five minutes later they were seated in a booth at the deli on Euclid with big sandwiches piled high as Kelly had promised. Tall ice-cold glasses of watermelon juice

topped off the meal. Kelly looked at her watch. "After lunch, we can browse around for a while if you girls like. Your appointment isn't till 2:30."

After a very satisfying lunch filled with laughter, they hit the street. For the next hour, after making sure there was time on the parking meter, the foursome browsed the nearby stores, mostly window-shopping. Cara and Ami picked up a pile of postcards which they intended to send home to their parents and friends, and then it was time to go.

Kelly had gotten directions when she made the appointment, and with ten minutes to spare pulled into the nearly empty parking lot. It was a combo salon for hair, sun-tanning beds, manicures, and of course hair removal. Cara and Ami used a tanning room to change into their thong underwear. A private screened booth occupied one corner of the shop. It contained little more than a reclined stylist's chair, modified with the stirrups you would see on a gynecologist's bed. With the referral having come from Mistress Helga, Joanne, the owner, took on the task of the waxing herself.

It was a small confined area and all four girls could not fit in it at once. Cara asked Laura to stay with her, and Kelly said she would go with Ami. Cara went first as the result of a coin toss. It was clear that both girls were nervous. Kelly and Ami waited in the hair salon proper as Cara and Laura went in.

"I don't get it," said Cara, her eyes moist. "I've broken bones and sprained muscles that would have most people howling in pain but I'm afraid of this!"

Laura held her hand softly. "It's okay, Cara. The first time I went, Kelly took me and they did my vulva, my legs, and even my underarms! I think they could hear the scream down in Florida!"

"Did it hurt that bad?" asked Cara.

"No, that was the funny part. It barely stung, but the shock is what caused me to scream. I promise that all you'll feel is a quick tug, a small rip and you might walk a bit gently right afterwards, but it's just hair."

"I'm glad you're with me, Laura. I didn't want to show Ami I was afraid."

Laura smiled gently at the young girl and patted her hand. "I know, sweetheart. It's like sex. The thought of doing it the first time is scary."

"My first time was awful!" said Cara. "He just wanted bragging rights for his friends."

Laura gave a wry smile. "Maybe that's why we hit it off so well. My first time was lousy and his attempts afterwards got even worse. He just wanted someone to do his homework for him."

"And you weren't afraid to try it again?"

"Hell no! What he couldn't do for me, I did for myself thinking that he was just inexperienced and it would get better, but he just didn't care. Then I met Todd, and he



cared. Then I knew how wonderful it could really be, and I haven't regretted a single day since!"

Just before Cara could ask about how Laura had gotten involved with Kelly, Joanne came in, checked the temperature of the pre-treat and the wax and asked if Cara was ready.

With a sigh of surrender, Cara said she was and the beautician pulled a small round stainless steel stool up between Cara's spread legs. Laura helped adjust the thong to preserve Cara's modesty, and then Joanne spread a topical ointment on Cara's tender skin, waited as it was quickly absorbed and then applied the warm wax with multiple strips of precut gauze. Cara kept her eyes focused on the ceiling but her grip on Laura's hand intensified. It was a long three minutes while the wax cooled and adhered to the hair and the gauze and then with a quick yank it was gone. Cara hadn't made a sound, but her grip on Laura's hand had tightened to the point where Laura was sure she would have bruises. A tear ran down Cara's cheek, but not from pain. It had been an emotionally charged few minutes and after the quick snap that removed excess hair, Cara could release her pent-up emotions. Joanne then applied a liberal lathering of a soothing balm to the red area and Cara finally released Laura's hand.

"I'll give you a few minutes to settle down," said Joanne, "then you can get dressed and I'll do your friend."

Cara laughed suddenly. "If there was nobody else in the shop, I'd let out a blood curdling scream," she said. "Then try to convince Ami that it doesn't hurt!"

Joanne smiled a wicked smile. "You know, we don't advertise it, but we also do body piercing here for those who are into that kind of thing, and that usually gets a scream, so... If you want, I've only got a few clients in right now, and they're all regulars, so..."

"Oh, Laura, can I?"

Laura couldn't hide her own smile. She knew that Kelly would wonder, but she liked a good joke. She shrugged. "She's your friend, if you want, go for it."

Cara warned them to plug their ears and took a deep breath before letting loose with the loudest, most piercing, glass-shattering scream she could manage.

Joanne and Laura had to cover their mouths to stop from laughing. They waited another five minutes before Laura stepped out followed by Cara who walked out of the booth bow legged and with tears in her eyes. They were tears of laughter, but combined with the way she walked and the scream, she could see the fear in Ami's eyes.

Kelly came rushing over, hugged Cara, and asked Laura, "What the hell happened?"

Laura winked at Kelly out of Ami's sight as Ami was now also trying to comfort Cara.

"No ... Really, Ami," said Cara between snuffles. "It doesn't hurt." More snuffles and a few cautious steps. "You'll be okay, Ami, really."

Kelly was biting the inside of her cheek as she led Ami into the booth, trying her best not to smile. "Cara should have been an actress!" she thought to herself.

Minutes passed slowly, then a voice called out: "Cara, god damn it... you had me scared shitless!"

No one could hold in the laughter any longer. Even Ami, realizing she'd been had, was soon laughing as well. Cara hugged her as she emerged from the booth. "I'm sorry, Ami, it was just too good to pass up. Maybe if I hadn't been treated to a cold shower this morning I might not have thought of it!"

Ami gave Cara a soft kiss. "I'm sorry Cara, it was the only thing I could think of at the time. Things have been happening so fast."

"I understand, Ami."

"Okay girls," said Kelly. "Joanne has agreed to fit both of you in for haircuts as well. So let's save the smooching till later and get the full treatment, shall we?"

Joanne knew well who Kelly and TKO were, and would love to have some of Kelly's business. Charlotte might be a big city, 25<sup>th</sup> largest in the US, with over half a million people who call it home, but the privately owned business community was still small enough that they knew each other well, or knew of each other.

Joanne spent an inordinate amount of time on the two girls sculpting their hair in such a way that with their respective styles, it would still easily fall into place without a lot of work. During the time she worked on their hair, a manicurist worked on the girls' finger and toe nails, cutting, trimming and buffing them until they shone while a second girl wore half a pumice stone away removing the thick calluses from their feet. Joanne suggested a solution for their hands to soften up the calluses there, or as she explained to Kelly, at least remove the discoloration.

It was 5:30 by the time the foursome drove away from the salon. Kelly made a quick stop at the health store for enough "Dead Sea Mud" to do two facials and they headed home.

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Todd had finished cleaning his cameras and had his magazines loaded with fresh film long before the girls had even reached the salon. Vanetta went home at 3:00 leaving Todd to check his lighting equipment. He was amazed by the silence. Prior to Laura's

entering his life he had been much of a loner, keeping company with just Kelly. Although he had never lacked for female company when he wanted it, none had ever shared his life or heart as Kelly and Laura now did.

Now a strange feeling overcame him. He felt lonely.

Wandering around the studio, he tried to pinpoint when this change had occurred in his life. He liked solitude and really didn't care for social events, but he did enjoy having Kelly and Laura around, and not just for the sex, although it was the best he had ever had! He felt emotions building up inside him totally unfamiliar. Fear. Fear that he might lose this good thing he had. Finally, realizing that he had no say in what may lie ahead for the three of them other than his actions, he decided he would do whatever was in his power to keep both of them happy. Whistling a little tune, he went through his equipment storage closet until he found what he was looking for. Checking through the bag to make sure everything was where it should be, he put the bag by the door.

Todd knew he was going to be spending more nights at Kelly's while the gymnasts were staying there. While switching days between the studio and her house was possible if it was just the three of them, he knew that currently, it wasn't feasible nor fair. He knew how Laura and Kelly felt about each other, and he couldn't even think of not sleeping with both of them now. So Todd filled a gym bag with some scrubs, underwear and more T's, and placed it by the door as well. Just one phone call to make to his film supplier and Todd was set to leave.

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The ringing of the phone stopped him at the door. For a minute he contemplated just letting it ring, but some instinctual, primal feeling told him to answer the phone.

Reaching over Vanetta's desk, not even bothering to check the caller ID, he answered: "TKO, Todd speaking."

"Hello, Todd," said a deep, smooth aged voice on the other end.

"Hi, Chuck! How are you doing?"

Chuck laughed. "Just fine, Todd, how are you and Kelly?"

"We're fine. Actually, Chuck, we've never been better!"

"I'm glad to hear that. I called to apologize."

"Apologize?" Todd asked. "What in the world for?"

"For not calling sooner with my deepest most sincere thank you."

Todd was wondering why. "But you already did that, Chuck, when we were out at your place last week."

Chuck laughed again. "Been a busy week for you has it? I saw the pictures for IC with your name on them. Nice job! I have a small interest in seeing them do well, but I was calling about a package I received from you on Tuesday. I was out in the afternoon and my secretary signed for it and Wednesday was a mite hectic so I didn't see it until this morning."

"Ah," said Todd. "Yeah, it's been a week all right. I even forgot about it."

Chuck's voice turned very sober. "Todd, you are an artist. That picture of Anna ... I look at it and see three faces looking back." Chuck stopped for a minute, and Todd could feel the other man's emotion and remembered his reaction when he had seen his granddaughter after Kelly had done her makeup for the open-air portrait.

"I see Anna, her mother, and her grandmother all in those eyes."

Chuck paused again.

"I'm glad you like it," said Todd. "She's a beautiful girl. And hey, what did you think of the shot of yourself?"

Chuck laughed again. "That, my young friend, was very sneaky," he said sounding pleased. "Brenda suggested that I use it with the brochure, you know, to show who Regan Boats really is, and then Anna and Brenda started to rearrange my living room trying to make me the center of the wall. And so all we've done all afternoon is move pictures around until I told them they had to stop so I could order frames."

"I'm glad you like them, Chuck. I really enjoyed taking them."

"Well, the other reason I'm calling is to see if I can get a reprint of the one of Anna. I'd like to get a 16 x 20 of that one; I already have the perfect frame for it. Just bill me whatever you want. I can't put a price on art."

It was Todd's turn to laugh. "Well, Chuck, as tempting as that sounds, and I don't come cheap, but when I do pictures for my friends, they're always free. I'll get it out to you the beginning of next week."

"I'm not going to argue with you, son. Just promise me that you and Kelly and your other friend will come visit us soon for a weekend. We'll sit on the dock, drink beer, and ruminate on life. No work, just friends sharing some quality time."

It was Todd's turn to choke up and his eyes got moist. "We'd like that very much, Chuck. We're tied up for the next six weeks, but real soon after, okay? I'll tell Kelly and Laura to keep their schedules open. Then in a few weeks we'll call and see what's good for all of us."

"Thanks again, Todd. I'll wait to hear from you and hope to see you soon."

"Thank you, Chuck. You take care of yourself and say hi to the girls for me."

As Todd hung up the phone he wondered why his own parents had never appreciated him. He shook his head rapidly to clear the thoughts. He didn't want to think about them. Refused to let even the thought of them intrude on his happiness. Taking a deep breath, Todd was nearly set to go out the door again when he remembered that Delton had left a package for him. Vanetta had said she had put it in the crisper in his fridge upstairs. Taking the stairs two at a time, Todd opened the drawer and carefully placed the foil package on the table. Opening it he saw a kilo of pure bud, vacuum-sealed in 12 individual bags. Todd laughed. This was nearly two and a half ounces per month for the next year! (Life could be good!) It was way more than he and Kelly would use, but since Delton grew it only once a year, it was better to have a bit too much than not enough, and this was good shit! No stems or seeds ever.

Todd resealed the foil and stuck the package back in the crisper minus the bag he had taken out to leave at Kelly's.

It was 4:30 when Todd finally pulled out of the studio parking lot. A quick stop at a local smoke shop where he bought a pouch of tobacco and five packs of rolling papers. He would toss the tobacco out later, but it was a lot less suspicious buying papers when you bought something to roll. Another stop at the drug store Kelly frequented where he bought ten rolls of Kodak Gold 200, a four pack of AA batteries, and then drove straight to Kelly's.

His clothes were already put away and Todd was sitting with a beer watching one of the movie channels when he heard the door open.

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"Hi Sweetheart," Kelly said as she kissed him hello.

"Hey Babe," said Laura with her own kiss for him.

"Ladies," Todd said rising and greeting Cara and Ami as he hugged and kissed both Kelly and Laura.

"Did you get everything done that you wanted to?" Kelly asked.

"All done and even more," he said.

"Are you hungry?"

"Definitely getting that way," he said. "What are we having tonight?"

"I thought I might make up some Nasi Goring," Kelly said.

Todd smiled. It was one thing from his Dutch past that he didn't mind revisiting any time. Kelly had seen Todd order it once, and watched in awe as he devoured two enormous helpings of the Indonesian rice dish.

Wanting to surprise him, she had called the restaurant before they left town and gotten a recipe from them that would be relatively easy for her to make at home. Using a Conimex dried spice pack that she bought by the dozen from the international grocery store downtown, all she had to do was boil the rice and add the meat.

“So can you hold out for another hour?” Kelly asked with a smile.

“I sure can!” Todd said. “Besides, I’ve got something to show Ami, so if you don’t need her, I’ll take her out back.”

“No,” said Kelly with a smile at Laura. “We can manage without her.”

Todd picked up the camera bag he had sitting on the floor and led Ami outside.

When Todd and Ami were safely out of hearing distance, Kelly said to Laura, “I knew the minute she started talking about that pinhole camera that he would do this. He likes passion.”

Cara looked puzzled.

“Don’t worry, Cara,” said Kelly sympathetically, “Todd’s not going to try and make a move on her. He knows she doesn’t swing that way. She just won’t have to wait to buy a camera. He’s going to let her use one of his to see if she really likes it, and if she has the eye for it.”

Cara sighed in relief. “Well, then I’m happy for her. I’m sure that she has the talent.”

“You really love her don’t you?” Kelly asked.

“That obvious is it?” asked Cara with a blush.

“Maybe just to us,” said Laura.

Kelly put the spice mix into a saucepan to re-hydrate the mixture of vegetable slivers, and in another pot put 8 cups of wild rice. She pulled four quick fry pork cutlets and a pound of liver out of the freezer. Laura volunteered to fry the meat. She was curious what this would taste like.

Cara asked if she could help with anything. After being told that there really was nothing to do until the meat was cooked, she parked herself on a chair. “Can I ask you guys a personal question?”

Laura smiled, remembering the conversation from earlier that morning.

“Sure,” said Kelly, “fire away.”

“Well... see, I’ve loved Ami for a long time. We’ve been friends since we were four. Her and Erin and me, we were the Three Musketeers. We’ve been training together for as far back as I can remember, and while I love Erin, it’s more like a sister. With Ami, it’s something else. I get all soft inside and...” she blushed a bright crimson. “Ami really turns me on.”

“Sounds like sexual attraction to me,” said Kelly, watching the rice.

“Yeah, I know it is, but last summer I did something stupid with a guy cause I didn’t want to... couldn’t deal with the idea that I might be gay. Now Ami thinks I’m just curious, and she’s afraid that if she goes beyond just friendship with me that she’ll get hurt.”

Kelly turned to look at Cara. Saw the pain in her eyes.

“That’s understandable, Cara. That’s why you can’t rush into these things.”

“I think that Cara is looking for help in seducing Ami,” said Laura.

“Oh,” said Kelly. “I’m not sure that I have an answer for that.”

“That’s why I wanted to ask you guys how you got to the point you’re at.”

Kelly looked at Laura who nodded.

“Laura and I were attracted to each other,” Kelly said, “but except for a very brief weekend fling, I had never been with another woman. However, that weekend showed me a lot more about love than I had ever learned on my own. It didn’t happen overnight with Laura and me, we kind of built up to it. I think the first time we showed any sign of being turned on around another woman was the night we masturbated together while watching a movie.”

Laura smiled at the memory and picked up the story. “The next time, we masturbated each other, and from there things just picked up until we got to where we are now.”

Cara’s eyes were big as saucers. “You guys masturbated in front of each other?”

“Well,” said Kelly, “it wasn’t quite that blatant. We had towels over our laps.”

“It was a sign of beginning to trust each other,” said Laura.

“Well, we sort of masturbated together last night, only Ami didn’t know that I was awake and I did it after she fell asleep.”

Kelly laughed. “Are you sure she was asleep?”

Cara blushed again at the thought.

“The only thing that you can do if you’re serious about wanting to pursue a relationship with Ami is to be loving towards her and let her set the pace,” said Kelly. “You can show more affection, but if she backs off, then don’t push yourself on her. Give her time and space when she needs it.”

“And talk to her,” said Laura, “not just about your desires but what you like about her and things you have in common.”

“Thanks, guys,” said Cara.

“Okay,” said Laura. “The meat is ready, what do you want done with it, Kell?”

“If you could cut it into real small cubes that would be great,” said Kelly, who had turned the heat off the rice and had a towel over the top to keep the moisture in.

As Cara and Laura cut up the meat, Kelly added the spices to the rice and then transferred the entire batch to a wok where she started to lightly fry it up. When Cara and Laura had the meat cut, she added it to the mix and took a jar of super hot dried red pepper paste out of the fridge. She added a tablespoon to the mix and with chopsticks stirred it all around mixing it all in.

Laura and Cara set the table, and Kelly suggested beer to go with the meal. “It enhances the flavor,” she said with a smile. “Then we can call the shutterbugs in and we can eat.”

Cara got five beers out of the fridge and Laura got the vitamins as Kelly quickly fried up five eggs, one to go on top of each plate. The smell in the kitchen was delicious.

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Todd and Ami sat down facing each other in the yard. Opening the bag he said to Ami, “this is the camera that paid for my university education. It’s a Pentax K1000, considered to be the workhorse of the professional photo journalist.”

“Wow,” said Ami. “You paid your entire university tuition with this camera?”

“Not just tuition,” said Todd, “but also my living expenses and money to put into the bank.”

“God, I’d have it gold plated or something and put on a mantel!”

Todd laughed. “It wouldn’t be a working camera any more if I did that. Besides, it’s just a camera. It’s just a tool. It’s your eye that decides if you have what it takes to be a photographer. That’s why I’m going to let you use it. Let’s see if you have what it takes.”

“Oh my God!” Ami squealed with delight, “You don’t mind? I mean, what if I screw it up or something?”

“Then it would be a broken tool. No more, no less.”

Ami hugged Todd and kissed him on the cheek. “Thanks, Todd. I’ll take really good care of it, I promise.”

Todd laughed again. He loved seeing the joy in her eyes. “Okay, there’s two zoom lenses with the camera. The one that’s on it now is good for distance. It’s a 70 - 210mm with a macro on it as well. The other is a 28 - 85mm which is good for indoors and close ups, and it also has a macro on it.”

“What’s a macro?”

“It’s like a close up setting. Like if you wanted to take a picture of a penny, and you didn’t want a lot of background, just the penny. You switch to macro and it lets you do super close ups. It’s a bit tricky, but you’ll get used to it.”



Ami was peering through the viewfinder. It seemed like she was born to hold a camera as her right hand cradled the body with her finger over the shutter release and her left hand twisted the lens to focus and zoom at the same time.

“Wow! This is so cool,” she said. “There’s a squirrel on that branch over there and he’s all I see through the lens. Is that what would come out in the print?”

Todd smiled. “Yep, what you see is exactly what you’ll get. Notice the little bracket in the middle on the right? It has a little bar above or below it. That’s the light meter. You need to get that bar inside the bracket all the time if you want the correct exposure. Otherwise your pictures will either be too dark or too light.”

“I see it,” said Ami. “It’s just below the bottom of the bracket now. How do I adjust that?”

She was looking intently at Todd, eager to devour the knowledge.

Todd went on to explain about shutter speed and aperture, focus, and then the basic mechanics of loading and unloading film. He took her through the basics of ‘depth-of field,’ and a little about how to compose a picture.

The entire time he was talking and showing her, Ami had blocked out the rest of the world. She absorbed all he was saying like a sponge. Todd looked up, saw her rapt attention and said, “You’ll probably forget 90 percent of what I’ve said before you go to bed.” But he was smiling as he said it. “There’s more to this than I could explain in a day, but I sometimes teach basic photography at UNC, and a couple of years ago I even wrote a small book on the basics of using a manual camera for my students. I’m sure that Kelly has one around here and if you read it, and practice, I’m sure that you’ll get the hang of it in no time.”

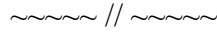
Ami was speechless.

Todd pulled out a flash from the bag and showed her how to mount it on the hot shoe. He helped her put the batteries into the flash and walked her through the most basic settings for flash photography. Then he talked her through loading her first roll of film.

“Well, Kiddo, you’re now a lethal weapon. You’re loaded for bear!” Todd said handing her the bag. “Read and study, but more importantly shoot. That’s how you learn. There’s ten rolls of film here to get you started, and you’ll develop your own film in my darkroom.”

Ami hugged the camera close to her body slipping the neck-strap over her head. She had no intention of taking it off!

Todd sat back and finished his beer as he watched Ami go from one point to another, quickly adjusting the aperture before focusing in on her target until Laura called them in for supper.



Kelly saw Ami waltz in with the camera around her neck and with mock dismay said, “Oh no, even in my own house there will be no escaping the dreaded lens!”

Ami quickly raised the camera, focused and fired, capturing Kelly in a burst of white light, spatula in hand lifting an egg onto a plate of steaming spiced Nasi.

“I think you created a monster, Sweetheart,” Laura said to Todd.

As they sat down to eat, Kelly asked Ami if she was going to take the camera off.

“Oh,” said Ami. “I’ve turned it off and put the lens cap back on. I just want to get familiar with it around my neck.”

Todd tried hard not to smile as he broke the yolk on his egg and mixed it in with the rice. After the fifth mouthful he looked at Kelly and smiled, expressing his appreciation for his favorite meal.

Cara panted. “Whew... that’s spicy!” and picked up her bottle of beer and took a long drink from it.

FLASH!

“Gotcha!” said Ami with a self-satisfied smirk.

“I don’t think it’s going to be safe around here for a while,” said Laura.

“Okay, okay. See? I’m putting the cap on and turning the flash off,” said Ami with a pout as phony as a three dollar bill.

As she put the camera down in her lap, Todd could hear the flash charging again. The little minx had already figured out where the controls were without looking, and he would bet the cap was off again as well.

During a delightful dinner, interrupted only three more times by unexpected flashes, Todd told Kelly and Laura about the phone call from Chuck.

“That’s nice of him,” said Kelly. “I like him, and he seemed really taken with you, Todd. It’s a pity about his daughter, but who knows? Maybe he’s already started to look for her.”

“I hope so,” said Todd, “for both his and Anna’s sake.”

“Do you think they’ll be at the opening of Mueller’s Wheel?” Kelly asked.

“Damn, I had forgotten about that with all the rush stuff. Guess we better do some real office work tomorrow, Kell. Get us rooms and all that stuff and we still have to do a quote for Al for his new brochure.”

“Okay,” said Kelly, “then why don’t you make the print for him tomorrow and we can give it to him on the weekend.”

“Good thinking, Batman,” said Todd. “Cara and Ami can check the equipment out proper tomorrow, and I can discuss some ideas with them for the poses. What about you, Laura?”

“I’ll be around if you need something, otherwise I’ll just be doing my course online,” said Laura.

“Okay, then,” said Todd. “A leisurely evening, a day of work and then off to see the ‘James Gang’ on the weekend.”

“What are we going to do on the weekend if you guys are gone?” Cara asked.

Kelly laughed, “You’re coming with us, of course. I’m sure that Erin will be there as well.”

“Road Trip!” yelled Ami and Cara.

Todd rolled his eyes. “Where do these kids get their energy from?”

“Suppressed sexuality,” said Ami, straight-faced.

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Cara and Ami had volunteered to clean up, so Kelly, Todd, and Laura found themselves in the back yard again clutching ice-cold bottles of Evian.

“Do you know what Ami told me this morning?” Todd said. “We were in the darkroom and she wanted to make sure that I knew she was gay. Said that she didn’t want me to entertain any thoughts of adding her to my bed.”

Kelly laughed softly. “She’s a sweet kid, Todd. I like her straightforward approach to life.”

“Can you imagine how little social life these girls have had?” asked Laura. “To hear them talk about training and practice... it must have taken up most of their lives.”

“I’ve seen it before, Laura,” said Todd. “It’s a lot like what models go through except gymnasts start earlier in life. In every city, thousands try, maybe a hundred will last through the first year. From those, who give it their all, and stick to it, they might find a dozen good enough to compete and then they have to compete hard against gymnasts from other cities and other states, and in the end, every four years, we might get to send eight to the Olympics. It’s a real bitch if you have a bad day at a regional competition and you get disqualified or cut from the team. Or you’re born just one year too late and by the time the next Olympics rolls around, you’ve gone through what Cara did. A growth spurt and all of a sudden, nothing works the same any more. And injuries... athletes are more prone to injuries that can destroy years of practice and dedication in one misstep. At least these two can say they made it to the Nationals, and

have some medals to show for it. Now they've got to learn to adjust in the 'normal' world. In a way I think it's unfair to do that to kids."

"Don't they want to do it?" Laura asked.

Todd laughed. "Hell, by the time they're old enough to realize what kind of life they're into, they believe it's what they want. Look at Tiger. His dad started him off with a putter before he was three. You think he became the most famous golfer of our time because one day he woke up in his crib and decided that golf was going to be his life?"

"Wow. I never realized. But what about models, Kelly? You started when you were 12. I know you were forced into it, but couldn't you have gotten out of it altogether, Kell, at the time you gained your freedom?"

"I suppose I could have," said Kelly lighting a cigarette, "but by the time I really knew that I had a choice, I had been doing it for two years and had no real money to show for it. I couldn't go back home, so, since the work was there, I decided I would make as much as I could. I had well over a million in the bank before I was 17, and no living expenses since I was always on some location. I had no idea what an average annual income was. Then when I got it all figured out, I just kept on getting more for my time and I hoarded it. Made some smart investments with the help of friends and pulled it all out again when I decided to take Todd's advice. Since then, I've never looked back."

"You guys must really find me naïve," said Laura. "I mean... I'm so dull. The most exciting times in my life have been with you."

"No, Honey," said Kelly. "You're not dull. You're exciting. With your looks and your brains, you would have ended up doing something special with your life. But you know... I'm glad that we found you first. You're our rock!"

"My thoughts exactly," said Todd.

Laura blushed. "If I'm anything it's because of the two of you. I love you both so much."

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Ami was devouring the book Kelly had found for her. "Todd Ayres: Introduction to Photography."

She was hunched over the book with the camera in one hand, flipping pages with the other. Cara sat across from her, content to read the latest John Sandford novel, and every few minutes looking at her friend.

That's how Kelly and Laura found them. Todd had mentioned bringing over the goodie bag courtesy of Delton, but Kelly had suggested that with Ami's newfound passion for taking candid shots, it might be better if they saved it for the bedroom.

"Are you girls ready for a mud bath?" Kelly asked.

"A mud bath?" Ami had asked. "I thought we were only getting facials."

"You are, dear, but you'll probably want a bath afterwards and we have a nice big Jacuzzi if you haven't noticed."

The girls were led to Kelly's bedroom where not so long ago, Laura had applied the same treatment to Kelly.

Ami insisted Cara go first, and Kelly and Laura applied a thick coat of "Dead Sea Mud" to her face. On Laura's advice they had changed into t-shirts since they would be easier to wash afterwards.

They had just finished putting the mud on Cara when Kelly noticed Ami had left the room. She realized what was coming next and motioned for Laura to step back.

FLASH!

"What was that?" Cara asked, her eyes closed due to the mud.

"What was what?" Kelly asked suppressing the urge to laugh.

"I thought I heard a snap. That better not be Ami with that damn camera again!"

"I didn't hear anything," Laura said, "and Ami's sitting right here while getting her own mask put on. Now try not to talk because the mud has to set. You'll be a half hour with a face that will feel tighter by the minute."

"Okay," grumbled Cara.

Then Kelly and Laura seriously put a layer on Ami.

When both girls were covered, Kelly said she was stepping out for a smoke and by the time she came back they would start to melt off the dried mud.

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"How's it going?" Todd asked.

"They're both covered in it now," said Kelly as she lit up. "They look kind of cute with their hair pulled back and sitting there with green faces and their tiny white T's."

"By now, they shouldn't even be able to talk," said Laura. "But Ami managed to get a shot of Cara looking like the creature from the black lagoon."

"Maybe you should turn some music on," said Todd with a mischievous grin.

"To hide the sound of you snapping some pictures of your own?" Kelly asked.

"You bet!"

Kelly turned on the stereo and Todd entered the bedroom after retrieving the Pentax. The bedroom was well lit, so they wouldn't notice the flash, and if he cocked the camera away from the girls, he could easily sneak in a few photos.

Three shots later, he put the camera back where he had found it. "Turn about is fair play," he said as he came back outside.

At 9:15, Kelly and Laura came back in with a basin of warm water and two face cloths. Gently they wet down the dried mud and as it dissolved, two red faces appeared from beneath the green coating.

As careful as Kelly and Laura were, there had still been some dripping and both girls were sitting in rather wet T's, their nipples clearly visible through the now transparent material.

"I would suggest you head right into the tub now," said Kelly. "I'll show you how to adjust the water and the jets. You might as well take a nice leisurely soak while you're at it."

Laura headed out to join Todd while Kelly helped the girls pick up fresh clothes and then showed them how to operate the Jacuzzi. Both girls peeled off their wet T's and panties while Kelly was in the bathroom with them. Kelly took a minute to inspect the areas where they had been waxed. "It looks like you're still a little red," said Kelly. "I'll add some good moisturizing bath salts to the water and aside from the bubbles and the delicious smell, it will help with the slight swelling."

Neither Cara nor Ami were the least bit embarrassed by Kelly's almost clinical inspection and prognosis.

Making sure that the girls were comfortable, Kelly returned a minute later with two fresh bottles of ice cold Evian for them and told them to enjoy themselves.

Outside again with Todd, she said, "If you're still in the mood to light up, Cara and Ami will be pretty occupied for at least an hour."

Todd smiled and produced a fat spliff he had rolled earlier. "Just one," he said as he lit it, "to help us relax."

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Cara and Ami sat in the tub facing each other, their breasts bobbing in and out of the bubbles as the jets churned the water.

"Ami," Cara ventured. "If I said the sight of you like this turned me on, would you be upset if I masturbated in front of you?"

Ami nearly choked on her Evian. "You want to masturbate? In the tub? With me watching you?"

“Yeah,” said Cara. “I didn’t think of that part, but yeah, I guess if you wanted to, you could watch. It’s just that seeing you naked, and feeling your legs brushing up against mine... Hell, Ami, you know you turn me on, but I don’t want to push you into anything.”

“Yeah, sure... why not. If it makes you feel better, but I don’t think I’ll watch.”

Cara slid a hand down her legs, spreading them even wider. Her middle finger found her aroused clit instantly and she started to flick it as her other hand grasped her own breast. Her eyes were locked on Ami who was very carefully reading the label on the bottled water, trying very hard not to sneak glances at Cara.

Cara could see Ami watching, and smiled. She was so close now. She slipped her middle finger into her slippery vagina, and then added her index finger, thrusting them in and out as her thumb strummed a beat against her rock hard clit. Her breath was becoming ragged and her body started to lurch. A last look at Ami before her eyes closed in bliss showed that Ami’s nipples had puckered and that Ami now had a hand in the water as well.

Cara cried out in joy as her climax rode over her. She had always been silent when approaching orgasm, but knowing that the object of her desire was watching her, she just let loose with a groan and then a scream. As she crested a second time, her legs clamped shut and she squirmed and slid in the bath, her head going under the water, from the bath oil Kelly had added.

As she came up for air sputtering she was surprised to see Ami’s head back as her elbow showed clearly what her hand was doing under the bubbles.

Ami had only been able to take it for so long, watching Cara masturbate and knowing she was the reason for her friend’s horniness. Her own cunt cried out for attention and she had slowly drifted her hand down to her own pleasure patch. She had toyed for a bit, just feeling her clit and sliding a finger over her labia lips feeling the lubricant she was secreting. She wasn’t even aware that her fingers had started to work their magic in earnest, and no longer cared if Cara could see her watching or not.

Hearing Cara’s breath come in shorter and shorter gasps and seeing her friend’s face color with the onset of her climax nearly drove Ami over the edge herself when she felt Cara’s legs clamp shut on her own, driving her finger inside! Even as Cara went under water, Ami beat a steady rhythm on her clit and seconds later was rewarded with the rush that overtook her.

When Ami came down from her self-induced high, she looked at Cara only to see her friend smiling back at her.

“Was it good?” Cara asked.

Ami blushed. “I got so hot looking at you that I got carried away.”

Cara took a long gulp from the bottle before replying. “Ami, I know that you don’t want to get hurt, and I sure as hell don’t want to be the one to hurt you. I don’t know where I’m going in life. I’m too young to make life long commitments, but I do love you and I want to make love to you. I won’t rush you or push you into anything you’re not ready for, but you do turn me on so much...”

Ami slid forward in the tub, silencing any more from Cara with her finger on her lips. With one hand she cupped Cara’s breast as the other pulled Cara in close for a kiss. It was a tender kiss, long and lingering. Their lips parted and Ami ran her tongue over Cara’s teeth and the inside of her lips. Cara for her part allowed Ami to take the lead, but as the kiss became more urgent, she reached out and drew Ami closer to her, cupping Ami’s butt cheeks and easily lifting her on to her lap. The kissing intensified and four hands explored two bodies.

“God, Cara. I love how you kiss,” said Ami as they broke for air. Cara nibbled softly at the nape of Ami’s neck.

“Maybe it’s the way Kelly and Laura share so much love with Todd that I don’t feel so ‘absolute’ in monogamy any more.”

“Well,” said Cara, “look at Erin’s brother. He can’t satisfy all those girls every night and they came right out and said they share love with each other. I think we’ve been duped by the movies and books into thinking everyone has just one perfect partner.”

“Maybe it’s a society thing to prevent people from expressing love with those they really care about,” said Ami. “I just know that this feels good, it feels right, and right now, I’m not concerned about who you might be with next week or next month or next year. As long as you really love me when you make love with me.”

Cara softly kissed Ami’s eyelids and her cheeks and ears before moving back to her lips. Between kisses she softly whispered, “When I say I love you, Ami, I really mean it. When I make love to you, you will know that I am loving you with every fiber of my being.”

Ami’s eyes welled up with tears that Cara tried to kiss away. “Then love me, Cara, love me now, love me tonight.”

That finished their bath and they rinsed off in the shower, washing their fresh cut tresses. Drying off turned out to be a contact sport as each used hands and lips on the other until they just gave up, running for the bedroom holding their towels in front of them.

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Kelly, Todd, and Laura heard some of the screams of pleasure coming from the guest room.

“Sounds like the girls are having a good time,” said Laura.

Todd was feeling very mellow from the joint the three of them had shared. “It does sound that way doesn’t it? You think we’re a bad influence on them?”

“No,” said Kelly shaking her head. “They’ve been in love for a long time. Now they’re just acting on it.”

“Cool,” said Todd.

“It’s getting me hot just hearing them,” said Laura.

“Then what are you waiting for?” asked Kelly. “Let’s get our man hard and ready.”

“But Kelly, I still have my period,” said Laura.

“So what,” said Todd. “It’s dark out here and we’ll need to take a shower before we go to bed anyway.”

“Out here?” Laura asked.

“Why not?” said Kelly moving closer to Todd, “I don’t think either Cara or Ami will be finished for quite some time.”

Todd allowed Kelly to slide his pants off exposing his rapidly inflating cock. Sitting on the end of the lounge Kelly bent forward to suck it into her mouth bringing it up to full attention.

“I’m not sure,” said Laura. “What about the neighbors?”

“They can’t see over the shrubbery,” said Kelly as she pulled off her t-shirt and shorts and panties. “Besides, I’ll only share Todd with you. They’ll have to find their own stud!”

Laura finally shrugged and peeled off her own clothes. She stepped into the house for a minute to grab a box of tissues and removed her tampon before stepping outside again.

Todd had pulled the cushion out of the lounge and laid it on the grass. Kelly was kneeling over his head as his tongue worked wonders on her clit. “Come on, Sweetheart,” Kelly said to Laura. “You’ve gone too long without that hard cock inside you. Climb on and ride this cowboy.”

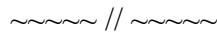
Laura stood astride Todd and slowly sank down with her hands on Kelly’s shoulders, trapping his shaft between her vulva and his belly. Kelly cupped her full ripe breasts, teasing her nipples into full erection under her thumbs and drew her into a wet openmouthed kiss.

“Oh God, that feels good,” she breathed as her puffy labia spread over Todd’s thick dick and rubbed her clit as she made tiny movements with her hips that oozed her copious lubrication over his shaft.

“Up a little, Honey,” said Kelly as she reached down to grasp the rod under Laura, mixed Laura’s natural slipperiness with his pre-cum and wiped it over his plum-sized helmet. She held the solid shaft upright, then Laura’s hot cunt engulfed it in one smooth stroke. As she did, Kelly pulled out her hand and flicked Laura’s engorged clit causing her to jump a little from the sensation, and then Laura took him in to the hilt.

Laura savored the feeling of Todd’s stiff cock filling her, then rose till she felt the head just penetrating her hot wet hole then engulfed him in her once more, faster. Todd lifted his hips to meet her down stroke and their loins slapped together. “Oh, Honey,” she wailed, and pulled her lover into a crushing kiss with one hand behind her head, the other twisting Kelly’s erect nipple.

With Laura doing most of the work, Todd could direct his attention to the cunt covering his mouth, licking, sucking, and drinking down his lover’s copious juices as she writhed above him. His hands held her cheeks apart giving him free access from her trimmed bush to her hot brown star, and he used every bit of it to tease her toward her peak. He felt her stiffen as she hit a crest, avoiding her clit as she cruised the wave for a minute, then set about urging her toward the next.



Cara raised her head up from between Ami’s legs. Between them, the girls had tried every position they could think of so far and accumulated nearly a dozen climaxes. Cara was just proving her love for Ami again, with every fiber of her being. When they had hit the bedroom on the run, they had fallen into bed kissing and hugging and stroking each other, but their lust soon turned into humping against each other, bringing them both off. After that, they had switched to a sixty-nine position allowing them to lick each other for the first time at the same time while still allowing their hands to stroke and caress the other’s body, showing both girls how satisfying physical love could be when both partners were doing it out of love.

After the first few climaxes, Ami had pushed Cara onto her back and with her hands on Cara’s stomach finally had a close look at her friend as she licked and sucked her to two more orgasms. Her face wet with Cara’s juices, she had crawled up beside her friend and the two had rested in each other’s arms, hugging, kissing, and caressing each other.

Cara had just finished returning the same kind of love and had used her fingers inside Ami's hotbox searching for and finding her "G" spot bringing forth a copious amount of love juice and leaving Ami squirming on the bed. It was as Ami was coming down from her latest orgasm that she had first heard the sound. She had gently patted Cara on the top of her head just as Cara was about to try to bring Ami off again.

"Listen," said Ami softly.

Cara listened with Ami and they could hear someone groaning outside.

Carefully and quietly they had slipped off the bed and turning off the one light they had left on for their lovemaking, they carefully and slowly opened the curtains. Right there not ten feet away was a naked Kelly riding Todd's face while an equally naked Laura was humping up and down on his cock, and the two girls were kissing each other as well as groping each other.

"Wow!" said Ami softly.

"Double wow!" said Cara.

They watched for nearly ten minutes hugging each other and softly stroking each other until Kelly finally collapsed and rolled off onto the grass, arms and legs splayed.

Laura continued to ride Todd until they saw him start to buck back in earnest and the look on his face was clearly one of pleasure. They could hear him mumble something and then Laura fell forward kissing the lips that had so recently been latched onto Kelly's cunt. Then Laura finally rolled off as well, giving Cara and Ami a clear view of Todd's cock.

"I wonder why they did it outside?" Cara asked.

"Hmm... You know, if we could hear them, maybe they heard us, and didn't want to interrupt us," said Ami.

"Maybe the sound of us having so much fun turned them on," said Cara.

"We can always go out and ask them," snickered Ami.

The girls continued to watch as Laura cleaned Todd and then herself with tissues and then both pulled pants on leaving only Kelly in the buff. They then put the cushions back on the chairs and sat down relaxing with their drinks.

"C'mon, get your panties on and we'll go outside," said Ami.

"Are you serious?" Cara asked.

"Why not? Kelly said that most of the time she and Laura are nude around the house anyway. And you, my dear, have nothing to be ashamed of!"

Cara blushed. "Neither do you, Ami."

"Okay," Ami said. "We'll just visit for a short time and then come back and maybe we can pick up where we left off."

"I'd like that," said Cara.

“Besides,” said Ami, “I want to get a picture of you just the way you are.”

“As long as you don’t show it to anybody,” said Cara.

“Well, Todd will probably see it, but if you’re willing to go out in just panties, it won’t shock him, besides, you’ve got to see the pictures of Kelly and Laura he has in the darkroom!”

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“Everybody decent?” came Ami’s voice from the kitchen.

“We’re always decent,” said Kelly, “though not always dressed. Come out at your own risk,” she added with a laugh.

The laugh however caught in her throat as Cara and Ami came out into the yard wearing only the thong underwear Kelly had bought for them earlier in the day.

“And here I was worried about me,” said Laura looking at the girls with an admiring glance.

“Yeah, well, after last night and what Kelly said about the casual attire around here, we thought we would just join you for a bit before we hit the hay.”

Todd, still riding the high from Delton’s good weed, and the great sex, had his back to the girls but upon hearing the direction of the conversation turned in his chair and looked at the two half naked girls. “Hi,” he said as he turned back around.

“Hi yourself,” said Ami, blushing slightly.

Todd turned around once more. Looked up and down at Ami and said, “Yeah, I guess I am.”

Kelly giggled, Laura said, “Dean Friedman, circa 1976.”

“Huh?” said Cara.

“Never mind Laura,” said Kelly, “she’s a music trivia buff. I’m guessing Todd said something from a song she knows.”

“Right you are, Sweetheart,” said Laura giving her a kiss. “And the song was ‘Ariel,’ quite a strong techno and synthesized song for its time. Now, who wants fresh water?”

Todd raised his hand. Kelly nodded and Cara and Ami walked into the house to give Laura a hand carrying them out.

“Thanks girls, they can be quite hard on the boobies if I carry more than three at a time!”

Ami laughed. “Bet that puckers the old nipples quick!”

“Is Todd, like, really stoned?” asked Cara.

“Nah, not really,” said Laura. “He’s just really mellow now.”

Laura stopped and turned on the stereo, setting the speakers to low, and from her previous inspection found and retrieved a golden compilation of hits of the 70's.

As the three headed back to the yard, Ami said, "I thought he might just be sexed out."

Laura blushed. "Did you...?"

"Yep," said Cara proudly. "But we missed the beginning of the show."

"Oh my god!" said Laura blushing.

"Don't worry, Laura, we won't tell Todd we saw you riding him," giggled Ami.

"Or Kelly filling his face!" added Cara.

Laura narrowed her eyes in mock sternness. "Who would have thought we had a couple of peeping toms in the house!"

"It wasn't our fault that you guys were making such weird noises outside of our bedroom window," said Ami.

"Well, maybe if you had heard the noise coming from your bedroom, you'd understand what got us all worked up," said Laura with a smirk.

"The time was right," said Ami.

"And it was perfect," said Cara.

"And I'm happy for both of you," said Laura.

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The five of them sat outside watching the stars come out until the heavens were filled with pinpricks of light.

Finishing off the icy water, Cara and Ami announced they were going in for the night, thanking Kelly and Laura for a great day, and Ami giving Todd a special hug thanking him again for the use of his camera.

Back in their bedroom, true to her word, Ami had Cara posed on the bed, her pert breasts showing nicely, nipples nicely extended thanks to Ami's willing mouth, and she shot off one frame after another doing both close ups and long body shots. For the sake of modesty, Cara kept her legs crossed gently allowing just a slight sight of pubic hair in the pictures. Finally, the erotic nature of what they were doing got the best of them and after putting the camera away and turning off the lights, the two girls dove into bed to continue what they had been doing earlier.

During a break in their lovemaking, Cara asked Ami how she had felt sitting outside with Kelly, Todd, and Laura nearly in the nude.

“Actually, Kelly was completely nude,” reminded Ami, “and Todd was wearing pants, so he had everything important hidden. But other than that, I felt quite comfortable. Natural, if you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I do know,” said Cara. “That’s why I asked you. I noticed the conversation was a lot more insightful and honest. Maybe without clothes to hide behind you can open up more.”

“Well, dear, you can certainly help me out right now by opening up more,” said Ami.



Nobody had bothered setting an alarm, and Kelly was the first to wake up to the smell of Blue Mountain coffee. That meant only one thing. Gloria was here.

Looking at the clock Kelly was shocked to see it was past 10. Gently shaking Laura, she explained the situation and slipped a t-shirt on before slipping out of the bedroom. Knocking softly on the door of the guest room got no response so Kelly quietly opened the door to find Cara and Ami, nude, asleep in a lover’s embrace. She smiled gently and then tapped the girls on the most convenient spots available. Both girls slowly came awake and with shy smiles pulled the covers up.

“I just wanted to let you know that Vanetta’s mother is here. She watches my house for me when I’m out of town and helps me to keep it orderly. I just thought you might want to slip on a T before coming out this morning. I wasn’t expecting her, so she’s probably got something on her mind that she feels I should know about.”

“Okay, Kelly,” mumbled the girls.

Kelly’s next stop was the bathroom where she emptied her very full bladder.

“Good morning, G” said Kelly as she entered the kitchen.

“Mornin’, chil” said Gloria. “Me must talk to you.”

“I was wondering what brought you over this morning,” said Kelly as she sat down.

“Good morning, Gloria,” said Laura as she entered the kitchen.

“Mornin’ Laura,” said G looking at the two happy faces in front of her.

“Hiya Gloria,” said Todd, stepping into the kitchen. “Is this girl talk or can I get a drink of something?”

Gloria smiled a big smile. “Good mornin’ mister Todd. You wan fer me to make you a cup of the good coffee?”

“No thanks, Gloria,” Todd said. “I’ll put on a pot of tea. If I’m in the way just let me know.”

“Jus as well all tree of you is here. Miss Kelly needs go see the doctor. Sooner the better.”

Kelly's head snapped up with a start. “See a doctor? I was just in for a physical four months ago, G. I'm in perfect health.”

“You jus listen to old Gloria. You ring up today - go see the doctor.”

The look on Gloria's face was determined and Kelly knew better than to argue with her when she had her mind made up.

Sighing, she reached for the cordless phone and dialed her personal physician, Dr. MaryAnn Myers.

The phone at the doctor's office rang only three times before the receptionist picked it up. Kelly said who was calling and asked to be patched through to the doctor.

She was on hold for five minutes before Dr. Myers picked up the phone. “Hi, Kelly. Jen said it sounded important. What can I do for you?”

“Hi, MaryAnn. I know this might sound silly, but somebody is insisting that I need to see you as soon as possible.”

MaryAnn Myers had been Kelly's personal GP since she had moved to Charlotte. A pleasant woman in her early forties, she was friendly and practical.

“Well,” said MaryAnn, “sometimes other people see things in you that you can't see yourself. I take it this advice came from somebody whose opinion you trust?”

“Yes, very much so,” said Kelly.

“Well then, the sooner the better. I was looking for an excuse to get out of an insurance seminar this afternoon anyway, so I'm free starting at two if you can make it in by then.”

“Great. Thanks, MaryAnn, I'll see you at two then.”

After she got off the phone, she raised an eyebrow at Gloria. “Satisfied now, mother?”

Gloria just smiled. “Good!” and went back to sipping on her coffee.

Cara and Ami came into the kitchen about that time, still stretching and yawning. It was Laura who made the introductions, and Gloria treated them both to a big smile.

“Is good to see happy faces in dis house,” Gloria said. “Much too lonely, much too long.”

Finishing her coffee, G announced that she would talk to Kelly later, said goodbye to everyone and was on her way.

Kelly was so stunned she forgot to go outside to have her cigarette and lit one up out of habit. “Now I wonder what the hell that was all about?” she said to no one in particular.

Laura shrugged and proceeded to put breakfast out along with the requisite vitamins.

Todd poured Kelly, Laura, and himself a cup of tea. Cara and Ami declined his offer sticking instead to orange juice.

After breakfast, the group got dressed and headed to the studio.

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An hour after they arrived, and having gone through the exercise routine again, and a fresh shower, they were gathered around the studio kitchen drinking fresh juice. Kelly explained to Vanetta her mother's unusual visit of the morning.

"Well, you know Mom," said Vanetta. "She tells it like it is."

"Yes," sighed Kelly reluctantly, "and her intuition hasn't been wrong yet." But deep down inside, Kelly couldn't help but feel a certain anxiety. Life was going so well now for her. She had never been so happy but now an overwhelming sense of dread crept over her. What if something was seriously wrong? She blinked back her incipient tears and pushing herself away from the table said she had to check on the New York office and do the quote for Al.

Laura could sense the pain Kelly was feeling, and while Todd and the gymnasts tried some of the equipment out, she went and put a comforting arm around Kelly.

"I'm sure it's nothing serious," said Laura. "I would have felt that from Gloria. It's probably just a little thing. Don't worry, just see the doctor."

Kelly held Laura in her arms and sobbed. "Not now, Laura. I love you and Todd so much, I can't bear the thought of being sick."

Laura stroked her head for a long time trying to comfort her.

Finally Kelly shook her head. "You're right, Laura, there's no use in worrying until I hear what Dr. Myers has to say. But will you go with me, Honey? I might need you afterwards."

"Sure I will, Sweetheart. Now why don't you do the things you do best to keep your mind off of it until this afternoon?" Kelly wiped her eyes and gave Laura a gentle kiss. "Thanks, Laura, for being so strong for me."

"I'll always be here for you, Kell, you know that!"

Kelly turned to her monitor just as the truck from the sporting goods store pulled up. She let Todd take care of the delivery and oversee the custom fitting of the expensive bikes. After the bikes were assembled, Laura and Cara decided to go for a test ride while Ami and Todd went into the darkroom to develop Ami's first roll of film.



Kelly immersed herself in the quote for the Brookhaven project and willed her mind to focus strictly on that. Time would tell what had caused Gloria to become so concerned about her health.

She had just finished off the quote for Brookhaven and had it printed and ready for mailing when the FedEx truck arrived with a box of chalk and a parcel for TKO from Ray, the T-shirt and souvenir shop owner from Brookhaven. Vanetta accepted and signed for both parcels as Kelly sat back with another cigarette. It was nearing the one o'clock mark.

Todd and Ami had come out of the darkroom, both of them laughing and poring over the prints Ami had made. Ami was a bit upset that Todd had caught her unawares under the mud pack but as Todd explained it, it would help give her a better understanding of how people felt being caught off guard and not at their best.

Ami had gotten a great candid shot of Kelly with the spatula and he was also quite impressed with the nudes she had taken of Cara. They were well composed and she had obviously read his book cover to cover as she had set the depth of field to a mere two feet, blurring the entire foreground and the background.

Kelly could hear him saying she was a natural with a camera and encouraged her to take many more pictures practicing her technique. Ami promised that the next time she developed her own film there would be at least five rolls to do.

Kelly had managed to say all the right things, but both Todd and Ami could see that her mind was elsewhere. They returned to the darkroom so Todd could do the large print of Anna that Chuck had requested.

"I feel bad letting her just sit like that," Ami said to Todd.

"I know, Ami, but it's heavy on her mind and to talk about it will only make her worry. We have to act normally or she'll really work herself into a wreck."

Laura and Cara returned after a leisurely cruise around the industrial complex, locked up their bikes and Laura went to freshen up so she would be ready to accompany Kelly.

At two o'clock Kelly walked into the medical center, prepared to hear the worst news of her life.

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Kelly and Laura had been gone for about an hour when the phone call came in. Vanetta answered and called Todd out of the darkroom.

Todd had been working on the large print of Anna and having the large trays out had decided to do some enlargements of the best shot of the Cuddy, the one where Sara had taken the boat into a sideways skid.

He had shown Ami how to work the chemicals over paper to ensure even coverage and saturation, and the two of them had gone on to make a few larger prints of the ones of Kelly and Laura in the bathtub in Brookhaven. They were on the raunchiest of the prints when Vanetta had let him know there was an important call. Todd saw he could leave Ami to finish off the print they were working on and stepped out to take the call.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Todd, it’s Johan. It took me a bit longer than I expected, but I have completed the design. I drew this one up myself.”

“That’s great, Johan, can you send it to me? I’m dying to see it.”

“Of course, Todd. Can I send it to you email?”

“That would be great. You’ve got the office address, right?”

“Yes, I have. I haven’t sent it in case you weren’t alone. Is it acceptable to send now?”

“Send it, Johan, Kelly and Laura are both out of the office right now.”

“Very well, it’s sent. Shall I wait until you have a look at it?”

“Yeah, that way I can tell you right now,” said Todd. “Vanetta,” he said holding his hand over the mouthpiece, “I’m expecting an email. Would you check for it please?”

Vanetta switched the screen to Outlook Express and clicked ‘send and receive.’ She told Todd a big file was coming in.

“So, Johan, it won’t look too gaudy on their fingers will it?” asked Todd.

“No my friend, I think you will like it. I made a few changes before I was satisfied with the design. I can’t have Kelly wearing something from my company that looks garish.”

“OH MY GOD!” said Vanetta, clapping her hand to her mouth. She didn’t say anything else, just swiveled the screen so Todd could look at the picture on it.

“Yes!” said Todd. “I like it very much! It’s hard to tell that’s three rings, and that heart in the middle... I guess that says I love you.”

“I’m glad you like it,” said Johan. “But I’ve also been thinking that I would prefer to make them to size. If you want these, will it be possible for you to get the ladies’ sizes?”

“I definitely want them,” said Todd. “Give me till Tuesday. I’ll have the sizes for you by then.”

“Very well, Todd. You want to hear the price now?” Johan laughed.

“Not that it makes any difference to me,” said Todd, “but I’ll call the bank and have them transfer the funds to you.”

“This is what I have in mind, Todd,” said Johan. “This was your idea. If I may market the finished design, I shall discount your price by 30 percent.”

“Think you’ll sell a lot of them?” Todd asked.

“I do not think so, but you know what customers can be like. They will test-drive the expensive Cadillac, and then they will buy the family sedan. A perception of quality still counts for a great deal.”

Todd laughed. “Yeah, I know what you mean.”

“And,” added Johan, “if you take a picture of it on Kelly’s hand, you know the way I like to display my rings...”

“Yes, a face, a hand and the ring in full focus...” said Todd.

“Then I will take another 20 percent off.”

“That’s very generous, Johan, but I won’t use Kelly or Laura for that. I won’t commercialize my promise of never ending love for them.”

“I understand. You know, Todd, you are one of the last real romantics. Very well. I shall make one in cubic zirconium if you will take the picture yourself on one of your specialty hand models. One of the girls you used in the last catalog.”

“That I can do for you, Johan. So, what’s the final price?” Todd said laughing. “I’ll bet you’ve got the figures right in front of you!”

It was Johan’s turn to laugh. “Imagine! Two Dutchmen working out a price. No wonder you always get Kelly to do the figures! That will make it 48 thousand dollars.”

“Good deal, Johan! I’ll call the bank now and get the money sent to you and I’ll have the sizes by Tuesday.”

“Good luck, Todd, and let me know the wedding date.”

“I’ll do that, Johan. Talk to you soon.”

Todd disconnected and was about to dial the bank when he saw the look on Vanetta’s face. She had turned the monitor back so she could look at the ring sets again.

“Earth calling Vanetta.”

Vanetta was just shaking her head, her mouth still open.

“Vanetta, dust is gathering on your tongue,” said Todd.

“Oh my...” said Vanetta. “And you designed this?”

Todd laughed. “Just the rough idea. Now I need your help to come up with an idea on how I can get Kelly and Laura’s ring sizes.”

“That’s easy,” said Vanetta, “take them shopping at the mall. I’m sure that Cara and Ami will be up for it. Girls like to shop. Then when you pass a good jewelry store, tell them you want to buy them ‘promise rings’ and then get them sized perfectly. They

can't do that while you wait, so you go back by yourself and pick up the rings and you have the sizes!"

"That's a great idea! I'm so glad I've got you around to help me figure these things out, Vanetta. Does Robert know how lucky he is to have a girlfriend like you?"

Vanetta thought Todd might have forgotten about Laura's comment yesterday, but she should have known better. Todd might see the world mostly through the camera lens, but that didn't mean he missed much, either. "I never said he was my boyfriend," said Vanetta defensively.

"I saw how you reacted yesterday. You didn't have to say it, and you're doing it again now."

"Oh, all right," She sighed, "You win. I hope he feels lucky, 'cause I know I feel *real* lucky."

"I'm happy for you, Vanetta. And if he doesn't know it, I'll be glad to tell him for you!"

"Don't you dare!" she said laughing.

"Just watch me!" he said with a mischievous wink.

Todd called Debbie at the bank to authorize the transfer from his personal account. He hated dealing with life's little details, which was why he liked Debbie, giving her just the amount and Johan's name knowing she would take care of the rest. Neither Debbie nor the bank minded, as the total of his business would finance a lot of homes for them.

Todd got off the desk. "Now I better see how my little apprentice is doing. I'll bet she's printed off the rest of the roll while I was out here on the phone."

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MaryAnn Meyers was just unlocking her office door when she saw Kelly.

"My god, Kelly, you look like a wreck," said the doctor. "Are you feeling that bad or are your nerves getting to you?"

"She was looking fine this morning," said Laura, "I think she's worked herself into this condition."

"I'm sorry," said MaryAnn, "and you are?"

"I'm Laura Williams," said Laura, stretching a hand out in greeting. "I, ah, sort of live with Kelly."

"Oh. I see," said MaryAnn, though the expression on her face said she really didn't.

"She's my lover," said Kelly, absently.

“Oh! I mean, now I understand. Er, what happened to Mark?”

“I broke it off with him nearly two months ago,” said Kelly. “I changed, he didn’t.”

“Well, yes... I see that,” said MaryAnn. “How about we go into an exam room and we’ll have a good look at you.”

“I want Laura to come with me,” said Kelly.

“Dr. Myers probably wants to see you alone, Kell,” said Laura.

“No, that’s okay,” said MaryAnn quickly recovering. “If Kelly feels more comfortable with you close by, then by all means please come in, Laura.”

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Cara was writing postcards to her friends back home when Todd and Ami finished up in the darkroom. Vanetta poured four glasses of orange juice as they examined an 8 x 10 glossy of Cara in all her naked glory.

“This isn’t fair,” said Cara. “Who’s going to take a picture of Ami like that for me?”

“I think I can manage that,” said Todd, “as long as Ami is willing.”

“Maybe you can take one of the two of us as well,” said Ami. “Like the ones of Kelly and Laura?”

Todd laughed. “Yeah, I suppose I can do that as well. We’ll do that at Kelly’s one night.” Then his voice got serious. “I wonder how Kelly is making out.”

“Don’t worry about her, Todd,” said Vanetta. “Mom would never say anything in front of anybody if she thought there was anything *really* wrong. I don’t know why mom said anything at all. Kelly’s the healthiest person I know.”

“Yeah, I thought so too, but still...” and he sighed. He was seriously worried, and couldn’t keep up the façade much longer. He hadn’t prayed in a long time, but under his breath he was seriously asking for divine intervention on behalf of the woman he had known and loved for so long when the phone rang.

Vanetta got up to answer it.

“Todd...” she said, “It’s Kelly.”

Todd picked up the phone, his hand trembling. “Kelly?”

As Vanetta watched, the blood drained from his face. “TODD! What’s wrong?!”

He collapsed into the chair and looked at her, white-faced.

To be continued...