**The Wanderings of Amy**

by EC

**Chapter 1 - Robert's Apartment**

Chicago attorney Robert Johnson sat down at his office desk at 8:00 as usual. Behind him was a plate glass window that overlooked Lake Michigan, but he was in no mood to enjoy the view. Today is December 10, he reflected, exactly six months since Amy, the daughter of his law partner and friend John Debbs, had disappeared. It had been exactly four months since he lost his wife Tricia when she was hit by a drunk driver. It had been exactly two months since John himself had died, leaving Robert with the unenviable task of tracking down Amy, if at all possible. He had a feeling that something else would happen today on this 10th, another loss. It seemed that the 10th of the month had become an unlucky day for him.

As his desk phone started to ring, Robert checked his ID machine before picking up. "Police Precinct # 14" read the display window. "What now?" he groaned as he picked up the phone.

"Mr. Robert Johnson?" asked a tired cynical male voice on the other end. Typical cop voice. When he answered yes the voice continued. "We have a young female in custody, Amy Debbs. She claims that when she tried to call her father, John Debbs, from the station, the call was forwarded to your number."

Robert sat up in his chair. Amy! So she had finally re-surfaced after six months! Thank God!

"Ms. Debbs was picked up last night for shoplifting." the voice continued "She's here if you want to talk to her."

Robert's initial reaction of happiness was replaced with a mixture of annoyance and worry. The 10th! It figures! "Put her on."

A terrified sob came over the other end. "Robert? Where's my father?! Please! I'm so sorry! I need to talk to him!" Robert was shocked at the change in Amy's voice. She had always had a sarcastic in-your-face way of speaking to her father, or to anyone older than her, for that matter. He had known her since she was a child, but during the last couple of years, whenever he or any of the other partners in the office talked to her, she had been thoroughly rude to them. Amy, who in high school knew everything, now sobbing and saying she was sorry. Her voice reflected that that she was truly scared and that her spirit had been totally broken. He wondered what had happened to Amy during those six months. He would find out soon enough...

"I'll be over in a few minutes to get you out. Put the cop back on... " Robert's annoyance had not gone away, but the first priority was to retrieve John's daughter, now the only living member of the Debbs family. He was pleased to find out that he could have her out of jail as soon as he posted bail. He was less pleased when he found out how much it would cost him.

The first stop was the bank. Robert's bank account shank when he withdrew what he would need to post bail. It seemed ridiculous that such a large amount of money would be needed to post bail for a shoplifting charge. His annoyance increased when he examined the pre-bail and post-bail balances on his draft statement.

Robert then entered the police station, shook hands with the officer who was handling Amy's case, and followed him to his desk where she was sitting. As they walked to the back of the station the officer explained the circumstances of Amy's arrest. She had entered a Fast-Mart at about 10:30 last night and started stuffing food items into her pants and pockets. There was a store videotape showing this. The three clerks in the store at the time grabbed her and pulled the food out of her clothes, then held her until a squad car arrived to pick her up. The clerks did not speak much English and there was not much to go on other than the videotape.

In her post-arrest statement Amy Debbs claimed to have arrived alone from Detroit, where her best friend had died from a heroin overdose. She claimed not to have had anything to eat since being kicked out of a women's shelter, three days ago.

Amy's change of appearance was even more shocking to Robert than the change in her voice. The first thing he noticed was her hair. She had permed it about three months before, and it could not have looked worse. About three inches of her natural brown color grew next to her scalp, but beyond that her hair was a tangle of dried matted curls, dyed blond and green, crackling from the chemicals she had put in it and full of oil and dirt. She was much thinner than she had been the last time Robert saw her, her face pale and with bags under her eyes. The only clothes she had were a pair of filthy jeans, a jean jacket that seemed to have been dropped in motor oil, a stained sweatshirt, and wet hiking boots. Her hands were cracked and the cracks filled with black dirt. Worst of all, the girl smelled as bad as she looked.

Amy, in fact, had almost ended up being badly beaten in the holding cell because of her smell. Three female gang members stood over her taunting her while she cowered on the bench with her arms around her knees. She knew that the slightest response from her would provoke a beating from the gang members. The insults, and later threats, went on for hours. Finally, when it seemed that the gang members had grown bored with insulting her and were going to beat her up anyway, Amy was pulled out to call Robert. The cop processing her case had realized what was about to happen in the holding cell, and knowing that Robert was on his way, kept her at his desk until he arrived.

Robert thumbed through the case folder, ignoring the terrified girl momentarily. There were no words of hello. Finally he turned to confront her. Still smarting from the money he needed to post bail, he stood over Amy glaring at her, as she cringed in her chair. Robert was not tall, only about 5 feet and 7 inches. However he compensated for his lack of height with a muscular build from working out and a sharp critical eye.

"Amy, I am mad at you. The shoplifting is only part of it. How in the hell could you let yourself look like this?!"

Amy stared at his shoes. "I... I didn't really want to call you. The police made me because they said the jail was too full and they wanted me out. My father isn't picking up and the line was forwarded to yours. I'm sorry I put you out like this. I'll go away as soon as we leave."

"Oh no you won't! Remember the bail money? You are going to get your charges cleared up. I can't get the bail back until you do! You are going to pull yourself together! You are NOT taking off again!"

"But what about my father? Why didn't he come to get me?"

Robert paused. Now was not the time to tell Amy that her father was dead and that he had been left in charge of her affairs. Amy had enough to deal with right now and there would be plenty of time later to tell her what happened to John. Finally he said, telling part of the truth, "John wanted me to take care of this. I'll explain later, when we have some time."

Robert called his office to tell them he would be out the rest of the day. He motioned Amy to follow him to his car. As she sat down in the passenger seat she realized that he seethed with anger at her. It wasn't the bail money he explained. Not really. He was disgusted that she had let herself become so degraded, that the once pretty girl that he knew only six months ago was now this pathetic shell of her former self. She had allowed herself to be broken, to be weak. And it was all due to her own actions. In spite of the cold outside he had to roll down his window to reduce the stench in the car from the filthy young woman.

After a trip across the city they finally arrived at Robert's apartment building. The apartment reflected his personality, a practical demand for physical comfort and disdain for ornamentation. It was very large, with four bedrooms, an enormous living room, a large kitchen and two bathrooms. It occupied half of the top floor of his building. One entire wall of the living room was covered with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves containing thousands of books. All of the furniture had been chosen because it was practical or comfortable, not for any concession to fashion. The colors were all neutral. Numerous pictures hung on the walls, but none of them had been chosen by him. They were vintage pictures from his mother's house, inherited after she had died a few years ago. Were it not for his mother's death and the inheritance of the pictures Robert would have had none at all. The apartment's living room had a spectacular view of Chicago and the lake beyond, a view that would captivate Amy over the next several weeks.

Robert's bedroom reflected the environment of a recently widowed man. Amy realized with a shock that Robert's wife Trisha was no longer at the apartment, and shocked again when Robert told her that she was dead. She had not known Robert's wife that well, but Amy felt that Tricia had been the only adult with whom she could get along in high school. For some odd reason Amy felt that Tricia would be the one person who could understand her, and had hoped to talk to her upon getting to Robert's apartment.

Robert was struggling with the issue about what to tell Amy about John Debbs. She had to know, but there were other issues to contend with that needed more immediate attention. Courtney was dead, according to the police. He would need to find out the details and see if there was anything from that end that he needed to do. Amy needed to pull herself together, and Robert was not sure that knowing about her father at this moment would in any way help her. Above anything else, the girl needed to take off her fetid clothing and take a bath.

"Stand there. Don't touch anything." Robert snapped at Amy.

He started to fill up the Jacuzzi-style bathtub in the large bathroom, and ordered her to take off her clothes, put them in the washing machine, then get into the shower and shampoo her hair before getting into the bathtub. Amy hesitated about stripping in front of him.

"Right now you're not much to look at. Just do it." But he turned away while she stripped and walked to the bathroom.

As Amy settled into the bathtub, for her first bath in several weeks, Robert came in with a glass of orange juice and a bagel. It wasn't much, but if she had not eaten in three days she might get sick if she ate too much too quickly. Amy was too hungry to worry about the fact that Robert could see the tops of her breasts in the water. She emptied the glass and devoured the bagel. When she looked up at him, obviously hoping for more to eat, he responded, "You can have something else to eat after you get out. But don't get out for a while. You need to soak." He hung up a thick white terry-cloth robe on the door and left the bathroom.

Amy had forgotten how comfortable a bath could be. To feel weightless in the water, especially after spending night after night on hard shelter beds, benches, and doorways, was like being in paradise. Robert did not need to tell her to stay in the tub. She had no desire to get out for a long time. Finally the pangs of hunger and the promise of more food forced her out.

Amy looked at herself in the full-length mirror of the bathroom. No wonder her father's partner had said that she was not much to look at. She was very thin. She was pale and had sores on her feet. Even washed, her hair was hideous. She noticed how tired her face looked. Depressed by her appearance, she put on her robe and went to the dining room.

Robert gave his guest the first of a series of small meals that she would have during the rest of the day. When she finished eating, she sat on one of the living room armchairs while he knelt in front of her to put disinfectant on her feet. It was then that he decided to ask about Courtney.

Robert remembered that his partner had always disliked Courtney, and that he considered her a bad influence on his daughter. The two girls ran wild in school, going through numerous boyfriends, partying, and bad-mouthing everyone. John even considered moving to get Amy away from Courtney. Robert had only seen Courtney once, when she and Amy came to the office to see John, and was shocked by how rude Courtney had been to the secretary. Amy may have had a sneering in-your-face way of talking to her father, but it seemed that Courtney was that way with everyone. However, to everyone's surprise, the two girls managed to have a grade-point average last spring just high enough to let them graduate. Robert wondered if the school simply wanted to get rid of Courtney and Amy, but said nothing to John. Then, ten days after graduation, the two girls disappeared, taking nothing with them except backpacks and a large amount of cash that Courtney stole from her mother. They did not tell anyone where they were going, when they would be back, or how to get in touch with them. There was not much the police could do because the two girls were 18. Both Amy's father and Courtney's mother were devastated as the days without news from their daughters dragged out into weeks, and then into months.

Amy, in her subdued way of talking that was still a shock to Robert, told the rest of the story. At first the road trip was fun. Living on Courtney's money, the two teenagers spent the whole summer going to beach parties. They hit all the major party spots: Daytona Beach, South Padre Island, Virginia Beach, New Orleans. But towards the end of the summer Amy noticed a change in Courtney. Her friend had started using heroin, was partying less and becoming obsessed with money. She started charging for sex, sometimes 5 times per night. She became ill-tempered and took no interest in anything other than getting money, always more money.

Amy at first was curious to see what heroin would be like once she saw Courtney using it. Instead what she got was a cold, dead look from her friend that scared her. "Look, you don't want to go there." There was both fear and resignation in Courtney's voice. Amy quickly learned she was right.

In September they drifted towards Buffalo, where one of Courtney's ex-boyfriends lived. They stayed at his place for three weeks, while Courtney stole his credit card numbers and cleaned him out. They took off and then their lives became ugly. In spite of Courtney's looting of her ex-boyfriend's accounts, the two girls were broke. One day Courtney snapped at Amy. "You need to bring in some money. I am doing all the work for both of us." Amy lost her temper and grabbed her friend's arm, jerking up her sleeve. The inside of her arm was a mass of sores and needle tracks.

Amy was not about to do anything just to support Courtney's drug habit, but she was afraid to leave her. The two girls drifted around the Great Lakes area until they landed in Detroit. By this time they had the appearance typical of homeless teens. They learned to sleep under bridges, find shelters, beg money. The weather got cold.

Amy spent Thanksgiving huddled behind a dumpster, waiting for Courtney to come back. Finally Courtney re-appeared. She stumbled. Her lip was swollen and she had several bruises on her face. Her eyes were glazed over. Amy wondered how well her friend could see.

Courtney held out a hamburger and $20. "I'm sorry" Then she lay down. Amy ate the hamburger and looked at her friend, too numb to think about what was happening to her. She got up and walked around to ease the cold. She returned to the dumpster and noticed Courtney in the same position as when she left. She tried to roll her over, but she did not budge. Amy tugged harder. Courtney rolled over, stiff. Her face was gray and her eyes half open.

There are certain moments in a person's life in which his or her character is tested. Amy was tested at that moment and her character failed her. She panicked. The only thing she could think of was to get away, anywhere. She grabbed her backpack and ran to the bus station, only a few blocks away. She laid all her money on the counter, and found out it would be enough to get her as far as Chicago. It was only by shear luck that Amy picked Chicago; in her confused state of mind she could have gone anywhere. However, the Chicago bus was leaving immediately and that was what she wanted. It was only later that the memory of Courtney's body in that cold ally would come back to haunt her.

Chicago welcomed Amy with the loss of her backpack. She set it down for a moment to look at a phone book for a shelter, and it disappeared in a flash. She managed to stay at a women's shelter for a few days, but then was kicked out for lack of room. She spent the next three days sitting over an air vent for warmth, wondering where she would get something to eat. Finally she decided to slip some food out of a Fast-Mart. The Fast-Mart was aptly named, the clerks jumped on her immediately and reached into her clothes, her underwear, her bra, searching for stolen items. One twisted her arm behind her back and had his arm around her throat while they waited for the police to arrive.

Robert handed Amy another glass of juice when she finished her story. As disgusted as he was by the fact that she had simply abandoned her friend's corpse, he was relieved with the rough manner that she was detained by the Fast-Mart clerks. He pondered how he could use their treatment of her to have the case thrown out.

Robert began the process of making phone calls to set everything as straight as possible. While Amy ate another small meal, he started out by calling the Detroit Coroner's Office. He asked if they had a Jane Doe that matched Courtney's description who had died about 10 days ago from a heroin overdose. Sure enough, they had a young white female who matched. That was relief, at least Courtney could be returned to her mother for a proper burial. Another withdrawal from his bank account assured Courtney's transfer to a funeral home. Robert was not looking forward to having to face Courtney's mother to return the body, but obviously Amy was not up to it. He then went to work phoning friends to resolve his guest's legal problems and the charges.

That night Robert laid out the rules of the apartment. He expected Amy to stay with him until her case was resolved and he got his bail money back. She was not to leave the building unless she had his permission. She was free to eat what she wanted, use his computer, exercise equipment, library, and the living room TV. Furthermore, the apartment had an indoor swimming pool that Robert had exclusive use from 9:30 to 11:00 three days a week. Amy could lock the door during those hours and would not need a swimsuit.

To Amy, who had spent the last three nights huddled over an air vent, the amenities that her father's partner offered her seemed like something out of a dream. She was looking forward to living in comfort for a few weeks, even if her host's cold presence made her nervous. At any other time she would have rebelled against the order to not leave the apartment without permission. However, she was in no mood to do so now, certainly not after her terrifying experience in the holding cell.

Amy brushed and flossed her teeth for the first time in weeks and crawled into the bed of the guest bedroom. For some reason Robert's cold words "You are not much to look at" burned in her mind.

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Amy spent the next four weeks enjoying simple things: good food, a clean bed, Robert's books, the Jacuzzi bathtub, the exercise room, the swimming pool. He seemed to be gone most of the time, only coming back late at night and leaving early in the mornings. Amy's street clothes, now clean, lay un-moved on her dresser during the entire time. She had no desire to put them on, preferring the white terry-cloth robe, or nothing at all when he was not present. She had spent the last three months without taking her clothes off, and felt determined to make up for it now.

Amy never missed a chance to enjoy the pool. Usually she just floated on her back, naked, her hair floating out in all directions. Often she lost all track of time in the pool and only got out when she heard the angry buzzing of the doorbell from the neighbor who had the 11:00 to 12:30 time slot.

There was the exercise equipment in Robert's spare room. Slowly at first, Amy started working out. She was dismayed at how weak she had become, but within days pleased as her strength returned. Her body, with rest, exercise, and good food, quickly snapped back into health.

There were Robert's books, thousands of them, fiction and non-fiction, on almost any topic imaginable. Amy read a novel or more per day, escaping from her own depressing situation. However, the books slowly made her realize that the world was much more than what she and Courtney had made it out to be, full of opportunities that the two friends themselves had chosen to shut out. It was the books, the silence of the apartment, and the time that Amy had to reflect that created the beginnings of change in her soul and her outlook on life.

Amy was glad not to have to face Robert and his cold demeanor during the days. Still, he was a mystery to her. He still seemed to seethe with anger, and made no secret of his disgust that she had abandoned Courtney's body. Still, it was obvious that he was doing everything in his power to help her. The detail that most stuck out was when he knelt on the floor to put disinfectant on her feet. But there were other details. He spent all of the first day and the second constantly preparing small meals for her, and had been right about that. She had consumed a large number of calories and did not get sick. At the end of the first week at Robert's place Amy threw off her robe to look at herself in the bathroom and noticed that her figure already was beginning to fill out and look more normal.

Amy shuddered to think how much getting Courtney was going to cost him. He seemed to not give that a second thought, as though paying her funeral expenses was as normal as breathing.

By the end of the first week Amy had recovered enough to grieve for Courtney. The last three months completely canceled out the memories of six years of fun and friendship that had preceded. Once Courtney got hooked on heroin there was not much that Amy could have done for her. But she had saved Amy's life by adamantly refusing to let her try the drug. Amy later was grateful for that refusal as she watched heroin slowly destroy and kill her friend. As a result of that experience she would never touch drugs again. She was grateful that Courtney's body would not end up in an unmarked grave or in a medical school dissection room, but that was thanks to Robert, no thanks to her. She was not proud of her behavior.

Amy was not sure what to do about her father. At first she had wanted to see him, but now she was so ashamed of herself and her actions she did not see how she would be able to face him. For the first two weeks she was relieved that Robert did not bring up her father again. She would have to face him eventually, but was not ready now.

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Amy's wanderings in the empty apartment took her into Robert's room. He had not included anything in his room among the items his guest could use, so she felt like a trespasser whenever she went in. Tricia's presence was still there. There were pictures of her and of her with Robert everywhere, her jewelry boxes were still on the dresser, her clothes still hung in the closet. There was something else that Amy noticed hanging on the wall near the dresser that Tricia had used, a leather strap.

Amy looked at the strap in amazement. It was a cruel-looking item, made from thick black leather, about two inches wide and about 16 inches long past the polished wooden handle. The handle, made of some fine hardwood that Amy did not recognize, added an additional five inches or so to the implement. She took the strap off its hook and examined it. She felt the thick leather between her fingers and flexed it in her hands. She held the handle and tried swinging it lightly. It was obvious that any hit with this strap would hurt. Amy felt a sudden urge to try it out. She could not get the strap to make good contact with her bottom, so she tried the fronts of her upper thighs. Even a light blow stung.

Amy wondered if Robert had used the strap on Tricia. He must have, since it was hanging next to her dresser. She suddenly visualized Tricia, slacks and underwear around her ankles, bent over her dresser, tears running down her face. Had it been that way?

Amy's imagination exchanged herself with Tricia. Now it was Amy who was the one bent over the dresser, except that she was naked, having thrown her robe on the floor. Robert was behind her with the strap in his hand. How many times would he hit her? She was crying and begging for mercy, but at the same time not really wanting any mercy.

The strap took hold of Amy's imagination. She carried it to a full-length mirror. She caressed her breasts and thighs with the implement. She turned around and touched it to her bottom. Her bottom seemed to tingle from the anticipation.

Amy carried to strap to her own room. She threw herself on her bed and continued to caress herself with the leather. Suddenly she let go of the strap and ran her hands over her body. She rubbed the sensitive areas between her legs, finally making contact with her clitoris. Over and over her mind re-ran the image of herself bent over, her bottom stretched and ready for its torture to begin. She wondered how badly the strap would mark her bottom cheeks. Her sexuality returned in a flash; suddenly she was incredibly wet. She had her first orgasm in over three months.

When she finally calmed down, Amy got up and looked at herself in the mirror. She could not understand what had just happened. She had climaxed thinking about being beaten. Why on earth would that excite her? She returned the strap to its hook in Robert's room and shut his door.

She went to the bookshelves to look at the section Robert had on sexuality. She noticed several books about spanking, and pulled them out. A couple of the books were illustrated. The pictures totally fascinated Amy. Her excitement mounted again as she turned the pages and carefully studied the drawings and photos. She wanted to be the girl in each of the pictures. Her imagination placed herself in each image; her bottom tormented by a wide range of implements. A few of the pictures had straps similar to the one hanging in Robert's room. Those were the images that excited her the most.

Over the next several days, Amy's mind devoured the information in Robert's spanking books. There was some spanking fiction in the collection. She loved the descriptions of the punishments; they seemed to give coherence to the imagined scenes of her own punishment. She found the whole idea of being bent over, her bare bottom waiting for the pain, incredibly erotic. Her sexual fantasies became filled with images of marked bottoms. The fantasy that scared her the most was her hope that someday Robert might strap her...

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Christmas came and Robert cooked a turkey. Amy, dressed in the terry-cloth robe, ate a quiet, uncomfortable dinner with him. Finally she insisted on knowing why her father had not contacted her yet. He glared at the young woman.

"Fine. You will know. Your father is dead. He died October 10th. He died from diabetes."

Robert abruptly got up, pulled a folder out of the room that he used as an office, and handed it to her. It was full of items related to her father's death; obituary notices, funeral notices, medical reports, a copy of his will, and miscellaneous papers from the funeral home. Suddenly his anger at the pain that she had inflicted on his friend and partner by taking off and becoming a street bum, came out.

"You weren't there for him, were you? He was only 46 years old. You're not supposed to die from diabetes at age 46. Not nowadays. I was the one who was with him in the hospital. I was the one who watched him die. I was the one who buried him. I was the one who spent days trying to find you, so that you could have his things. And where were you; where were you when he died?"

Amy thumbed through the papers, but was too shocked to really look at them. She realized from Robert's face that he was on the verge of telling her more, all of which she was terribly afraid to hear. He said nothing else, but she could feel his temper directed at her as he stood over her. Amy realized with horror the real reason for Robert's anger: he blamed her for John's death.

The next day Robert took Amy to her father's grave. She was in her street clothes, now clean, and wearing one of Tricia's coats that he had lent her. She dropped a rose in front of John's tombstone. She still was too shocked to feel anything. She had gone through too much and for now this was simply another piece of bad news. The feeling would come later.

Robert looked at Amy as she stood quietly staring at the rose lying in the snow. Whatever anger he felt at her, he realized that he needed to overcome it. Amy needed his help. There is no way that she would get back on her feet without him.

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New Year's Eve Robert and Amy spent another evening together. She remembered with infinite sadness last New Year's spent getting drunk with Courtney and about 50 other classmates. Robert remembered celebrating with Tricia and a group of her office friends.

Amy noticed a change in Robert. He was more talkative than she had seen him since she came into his apartment, and was actually being nice to her.

Just before midnight he pulled out a bottle of champagne and poured a glass for Amy. Lightheartedly he said "Sure at 18 it's illegal, but I'm sure you had plenty of worse things last year."

Amy smiled and nodded. They raised their glasses.

"We both hit bottom last year. Here's to a better one."

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A week later Amy's outward transformation began. She put on her street clothes and stepped outside for only the second time in nearly a month to accompany Robert shopping. The first stop was a trip to the dentist, complete with three fillings.

Then came the hairdresser. The hairdresser lifted a strand of Amy's ruined hair with disdain and declared "I can't do anything with this. It's going to have to come off". Amy exited the salon with a tomboy style cut. She did not really like it, but it was professional-looking and improved her appearance dramatically. She no longer looked like a freak with crisp, multi-colored hair.

Finally came clothing and shoes. At the mall Robert noticed Amy looking longingly at an outlet of trendy teen clothing. "Don't even think about it." He motioned her to keep moving.

He pointed at a store that specialized in women's business outfits. "You're getting your clothes from there." Amy groaned, but she was not the one paying.

Robert bought her two outfits. She wore one of the outfits out of the store and stuffed her street clothes in a bag.

As they passed by a large mirror on their way out Robert stopped Amy and pointed to her reflection. "Take a good look at yourself. Forget about what you looked like when we came in here. This is who you are now."

She was surprised, pleasantly, with how good she looked in her business outfit and short haircut.

**Chapter 2 - Robert's Strap**

After a day of shopping it was a new Amy that sat next to Robert on the way back to his apartment. With new clothes, her hair cut short but neatly, her fingernails cleaned and polished, no one would have recognized the girl beside Robert as the same one who left with him in the morning. Amy felt grateful to her father's partner, and shuddered to think what would have happened to her had he not been there to pick her up from the police station. It was wonderful to ride in a car again as a simple passenger, to sit where it was warm and watch the grime of the street from the safety of her seat.

As they rolled down the streets, Amy's thoughts wandered, finally focusing on Robert's strap. She had spent too many nights thinking about how the implement would feel on her, too many nights with her hands between her legs fantasizing about it. She had to know. Finally she blurted out: "Robert, how come there's a strap hanging in your room?"

Robert glanced over. "I used it on Tricia while we were still married. We both felt that Tricia's getting the strap every so often did her some good."

"You actually punished her with it? For what?"

"Tricia was a lot like you. She had a wild side that when let out of control, would wreck her life. In Tricia's case, it was drinking. I don't think you're old enough to remember, but Tricia was an alcoholic. It got so bad, I was thinking about divorcing her. But then one day we made a deal. Every time she drank alcohol, I strapped her. She knew that would be the price of a drink. If she had more than one drink, she got more than one strapping. After a while, Tricia quit drinking."

"And you punished her on the bare bottom?"

"Of course I punished her on the bare bottom. How else would I punish her?"

Amy was quiet for a few minutes, then softly said "I keep having this fantasy, that I was Tricia. I... I wanted you to strap me like you did her. I can't stop thinking about it."

Amy's heart jumped into her throat. That just came out! She had not meant to say it! Oh my God! What would Robert think of her?

The tension in the car mounted as Amy sat in mortified silence. Finally Robert looked over at her and commented, "That's something for us to discuss when we get home. I suppose some punishment might do you good, given the crap that you've pulled and everything that's happened."

Amy felt whirlwind of emotion. She was terribly afraid, but at the same time was intensely aroused. She became wet, and hoped that Robert would not notice. Was he serious? Was he actually thinking about strapping her? True, Amy had fantasized about it endlessly, but now that it might actually happen...

Another side of Amy told her that the whole thing was impossible. Of course he would not strap her. How could he? That thought, of nothing happening after all, filled Amy with as much anxiety as the thought of being punished.

Robert and Amy arrived back at his apartment and he parked the car in the underground garage. Upon entering the apartment Robert said "Amy, put your stuff away and then we can talk."

Amy simply took all of the boxes out the bags and stacked them neatly in the closet. She folded the bags and brought them to the kitchen and then went to the living room were Robert was going over some of his business papers. He looked up at her with a very irritated expression.

"A couple of things. First, I want to know what you were doing in my bedroom. I never said you could go in there."

"I'm sorry... I was just curious. But I swear I didn't touch anything except the strap."

"You touched the strap. Amy, didn't it occur to you that maybe that was something private between Tricia and myself, that maybe you had no right to be in my room, and maybe you had no business touching Tricia's things? Don't you have any respect for anyone? For anything at all?"

Amy said nothing, but her face went pale and she looked like she was about to cry. Robert sighed loudly. He wanted to berate her over the violation of privacy, but held his tongue. She had meant no harm, and it was clear she felt guilty enough about it already. He pushed ahead with the second, and much more important question... why.

"All right, enough said about that. Now, what's this about you wanting to be punished?"

"I really don't know. I guess I did some bad things... It just sort of came out I guess."

"You did some bad things. Yeah, I guess you did, didn't you? And you think that somehow a sore butt will fix everything?"

"I... don't know. I don't know why I'm thinking these things."

"'Thinking these things'... what things?" Robert stood up and walked over to her. "Amy, would you for once, try to help me figure you out? What is it that you want? What is it that you're after? I mean... are you really serious about this business of wanting to be punished?"

Amy swallowed hard. This was it, the moment she needed to decide whether to fulfill her fantasy or not. She was terrified of the choice in front of her. She knew that if Robert didn't punish her at that moment, she always would wonder what would have happened if he had. Yet, to be punished! By her father's business partner! How could she want that?

Amy shook from the stress of her dilemma. However, she knew what choice she had to make. She forced herself to nod slightly.

Robert paused, his own emotions in turmoil at that moment. He was aroused by the thought of punishing this pretty girl, but concerned about those same feelings of arousal. The last thing he wanted was any hint of sex between himself and his dead friend's daughter.

What was obvious, however, was that Amy badly wanted to be punished. He wondered if perhaps there was something to her thought about "a sore butt fixing everything". He knew that John Debbs had never punished Amy when she was little. By the time she was older it was too late to discipline her, or so John had thought. Maybe it hadn't been too late. Maybe, in her most secret thoughts, she had wanted to be disciplined all along. Maybe that was her problem. Perhaps... a few sessions with the strap in high school would have kept Amy and Courtney at home, and prevented the entire road trip disaster.

Robert was well aware that punishing her now would be a huge gamble and the experience easily could go very wrong. However, it seemed that Amy did truly want to be punished, if for no other reason to find an excuse to change her behavior. He pushed his doubts aside and spoke to her in the most authoritative voice he could muster:

"Alright... fine. You'll get your punishment. First, I want you to go to your room and take off all your clothes. I mean everything, including your earrings and watch. Once you've done that you'll go in my room and get the strap. I want you to bring it to me. Once you're back out here I'll tell you what to do next."

Amy's heart jumped into her throat. Saying nothing, she turned to go to her room to follow Robert's order to get undressed.

The strapping! It was actually going to happen! As her shaking hands struggled with the buttons and zippers of her clothes, Amy realized that she was no longer excited. She was just plain scared. At the same time she also was determined. She had fantasized endlessly about this moment. The fantasy had a grip on her that she couldn't even begin to understand. She felt herself being pulled forward, as though she had little control over her own actions.

Robert cleared an oblong table that was up against a wall, and pulled the table into the center of the living room. The table was perfect for a punishment. It was about two feet wide and four feet long, and very strongly built. When he was satisfied that he would have plenty of room to swing, Robert left the table in place and faced the hallway to the bedrooms.

Her heart still pounding, Amy, now naked, walked into Robert's room to get the strap. Suddenly she felt very self-conscious and tried to cover herself with her hands as she walked out of Robert's room. To make matters worse, Amy had decided to shave her pubic hair that very morning, which would expose her even more. As she approached with her hand over her crotch Robert gave Amy a look of impatience. "What the hell are you doing?"

Amy stared at Robert's feet and shyly held the strap out to Robert. "I guess I am just a bit scared."

"Amy, keep in mind you're doing this because you want to. You have every right to go back in your room, get dressed, and drop the whole thing. But if you want to go through with this, you'll do it my way. Now, either you drop your hands and forget about this modesty crap, or you'll go back to your room and get dressed. Which is it?"

With every bit of her willpower Amy slowly dropped her hands. Suddenly she straightened up and felt a strange resolve in herself. She would have no secrets. With her hands at her sides, Amy stood straight, waiting for Robert's next order.

Robert took a moment to enjoy the view of her attractive body. He began to sweat as arousal hit him full-force. Until this moment he had not truly realized how pretty Amy really was. Finally, he forced himself to stop admiring her.

"So, are you ready?"

Amy nodded. Robert walked over to the table and placed his hand on it. "Good. Now I want you to bend over the end of this table."

Amy walked over and did as she was told. "Now grab hold of the edge in front with your hands, and put your feet on the outside of the table legs in the back."

When Amy complied, she felt the cool air of the apartment caress her most intimate areas. She was aware of how exposed she was between her bottom cheeks. With her legs spread and her bottom turned up, her body certainly hid no secrets from Robert now.

The sight confronting Robert was one that would have severely tested any man. The girl's lovely bottom was on full display. Her legs were wide apart and her entire backside was turned up. Her anus and vagina were in clear view, beckoning him to unzip his pants and enter her. Robert checked himself, however. He needed to focus. Amy was bent over for discipline, not sex. He forced himself to step over to her left side and begin the strapping on her waiting bottom.

Amy heard Robert's faint steps as he positioned himself. He gently tapped the end of the strap on her left bottom cheek, drew it back, and with a loud CRACK laid on the first swat. Instantly a rectangle across the center of Amy's bottom left cheek turned from white to bright pink. Amy jerked and bit her lip. Tears formed in her eyes. She was shocked at how much it hurt.

Robert was determined to punish Amy at a very leisurely pace. He wanted to maximize the effect of the swats by spacing them apart every 30 seconds. Waiting between blows allowed Amy to feel each swat separately and appreciate it before receiving the next. The slow pace also gave him the opportunity to enjoy the sight of her slowly reddening bottom.

Robert studied the first pink rectangle marking the left side of the girl's bottom. He then walked over to her right side, tapped the strap on her right bottom cheek, and marked it with a sharp back-handed blow. This time Amy let out a noise that was part sob, part grunt.

For the third blow, Robert again took up position on Amy's left side. This time he tapped the base of her bottom with the strap, right above her thighs. Oh God, thought Amy. CRACK! This time Amy let out a much louder sob. Robert noticed tears on her face and she had started to cry, but she stayed in position for him.

CRACK! Another swat on the left bottom cheek, above the first. Another rectangle turned from white to pink on Amy's left bottom cheek. Amy sobbed again. CRACK! Another back-handed swing on the right bottom cheek. Robert played tennis, and had a vicious backhand, as Amy was learning the hard way.

Again Robert moved over to Amy's left side for the next swat across both bottom cheeks. A light tap of the strap, and CRACK! right across the center of Amy's bottom. Amy grabbed the table edge with all her strength and sobbed.

With the sixth swat of the strap Robert had established his pattern on Amy: left cheek, right cheek, then a swat across both cheeks. Amy had completely forgotten her earlier embarrassment of being so fully exposed to Robert. Her world became the pain being inflicted on her bottom, pain that intensified with each swat. However, she was determined to see this through. She had promised herself that she would take whatever punishment he chose to give her.

CRACK! The seventh swat was harder than any of the others, and caught the tender skin at the inner part of Amy's left cheek. Amy screamed for the first time as she kicked out her left leg and turned slightly.

"Stay in position!" Amy quickly straightened herself and returned her foot back to the outside of the table leg.

Robert walked over to Amy's right side. He waited for the girl to calm down before giving her the eighth swat. CRACK! A vicious back-hand blow caught the inside of her right bottom-cheek. Amy, instead of screaming again, started sobbing loudly. Her whole body shook with her sobs. This time Robert did not wait, but quickly slashed the strap across both cheeks right in the middle. The young woman continued to sob.

Robert stopped to examine his work. Amy's bottom was now almost completely a deep pink, with only a few small areas of white left. Robert decided that he wanted another scream from his subject. She had asked for this and he was not going to let her off.

"OK, stick your butt out as much as you can for the next one." Amy managed to spread herself a little more. Amy's efforts to comply gave Robert a complete view of her labia and bottom-hole, framed by thick pink stripes. Robert now sported a furious hard-on under his pants. To see this lovely girl, exposed like this...

Robert tapped the strap at the spot where Amy's left bottom check met her thigh. He drew it back. CRACK! Amy screamed and let go of the table. She looked back at Robert through her tears, biting her lip. That was the worst! She could not believe how much it hurt!

"Amy! What did I tell you!? Get back down!" She struggled to get back down and find the table edge with her hands.

"Prepare yourself. You are getting the same on the other side!." This time there was no warning pat, just a CRACK! and then the pain. Amy screamed again, but managed to stay down.

The next swat landed squarely across the upper part of both cheeks. Robert had been concentrating on the lower part of Amy's bottom, but the twelfth swat quickly added color to the upper part of her backside.

CRACK!... CRACK!... CRACK!... CRACK!... CRACK!... CRACK! Robert concentrated the next six strokes right at the middle of Amy's bottom cheeks. By now all of her bottom was a dark pink, and was starting to swell. In spite of her best efforts, Amy was shaking violently from crying, and her knees were quivering.

It took Robert every bit of his willpower to keep himself from taking Amy right then. But he couldn't, he knew that it would wreck her trust in him. Subconsciously he took out his internal conflict in the next three strokes, all delivered to the upper part of Amy's bottom... CRACK!... CRACK!... CRACK! The final stroke was so hard that Amy shot up. Instinctively her hands reached behind as she sought ease the pain. In an instant she realized what she had done, but could not let go of her bottom. Amy looked at Robert with pleading in her eyes. "Robert... " she sobbed.

"So you think that you had enough?" Robert asked. Amy's eyes filled with tears again, but suddenly she violently shook her head no. Robert watched with amazement as the girl again stretched herself over the table. Slowly she spread her legs and placed her feet on the outside of the table legs, and then she returned her hands to the table edge in front. Amy cried quietly as she waited for the rest of her punishment.

Robert's heart went out to the poor girl at that moment. Amy made it clear that she would do her best to take any punishment he wanted to give her. She was totally submissive to him, willing to accept his judgment of what he thought was best for her. He suddenly felt even more responsibility for Amy. His earlier arousal was gone now, replaced with something far deeper and far more intense.

This punishment would have to continue. Amy had committed both of them to further swats by lying back down on the table. Still, Robert knew by looking at her bottom that the strapping could not go on much longer. Welts were already forming and a too many more swats would risk breaking her skin. Robert decided to give Amy six additional swats and then end her punishment. He took up position behind her left side and tapped her bottom again.

CRACK! Amy immediately started sobbing again as the strap hit the already dark area at the base of her left bottom-cheek. CRACK! Another backhanded swat to the lower part of Amy's right bottom cheek resulted in a scream. CRACK! The next swat went across the lower part of both bottom cheeks, precisely over the spot where Robert had laid the first three hits of the punishment. Amy's hands again shot back over her bottom, but she managed to get them back on the table legs before Robert could say anything. CRACK!... CRACK! Two more swats caught the tops of Amy's thighs. CRACK! The final swat went across the middle part of Amy's bottom.

"Alright, you can take your hands off the table edge and relax your legs. But I want you to stay bent over the table." Amy buried her face in her hands and after a few minutes managed to quiet her crying.

Robert set the strap on the table next to Amy, and examined her bottom. He had done a thorough job on her. Purplish welts punctuated the deep pink color, and there were several blood blisters on both cheeks. However, as Robert looked over the welts and blisters, he was satisfied that he had not broken the skin anywhere her bottom.

Robert sat down in the easy chair behind Amy. The sight of the girl still bent over excited him again, and he decided to take a few minutes to enjoy looking at her. Once satisfied, he finally decided to end Amy's punishment. He took her hand to help her stand up. She bit her lip as she rubbed her bottom.

Robert left the living room and came back with a glass of water. He put his arm around her bare shoulder and pressed the glass to her lips. She took it with a trembling hand and emptied it immediately. Robert then helped Amy to her feet. She immediately threw her arms around him and started sobbing into his shoulder. Robert said nothing for a few minutes, satisfied to comfort her. She needed to be held, comforted, forgiven.

As Amy held on to Robert and her tears began to soak his shirt, he reflected that her healing process could not begin until she was ready to forgive herself. He was satisfied that would indeed happen; she had convinced him when she laid back down on the table for the six final swats. Even now, Robert suspected that Amy's crying was only partly due to the pain in her bottom. He suspected, and hoped, that some of her guilt was being purged as well, through all those tears.

Finally Amy's crying subsided. Robert put his arm around her shoulder and walked her back to her room. He pulled back the covers and she lay down on her stomach. With that he covered her up. Amy closed her eyes and Robert saw a look of peace on her face that he had not seen on her before. He noticed a change in her breathing, indicating that she had gone to sleep.

Robert turned out Amy's light and left her room. As he put the living room back in order, he reflected that the experience could not have gone better for her. It was obvious that she had the internal strength to overcome her high school behavior and the road-trip disaster. A successful court date, enrollment in college, and some oversight to get her through the first semester were all that she needed.

**Chapter 3 - Spring Semester**

Amy woke up in the middle of the night. The apartment was dark, and at first she was confused as to where she even was. Then she remembered. And the punishment. Had she dreamt that? As she rolled on her back her bottom started throbbing - no, that was no dream.

Amy got up and quietly walked towards into the living room. At first she thought about putting on her robe, but then thought no, why bother? She felt a little daring walking out in the living room in the nude with Robert asleep in the next room, but she realized that was silly. He had a thorough look at her during the strapping. Amy had nothing to hide from him now. Besides, he was a deep sleeper, she had noticed. Once he was asleep he rarely woke up until his alarm clock went off, so he was unlikely to come out anyway.

Robert kept the apartment temperature slightly lower than Amy did when he was away. The cooler air made her all that much more aware of her nakedness. She opened the living room curtains and took in the night view of the city that had fascinated her since she first started staying here. It gave the young woman time to reflect.

Amy's bottom no longer hurt much unless she sat down or pressed up against something. But the sensation was still there, which made her all too aware of the strapping she had received just a few hours ago. Sitting down was a different matter. Amy knew from having rolled on her back in bed that sitting down would be down-right painful. She figured that it would be at least another day before she could sit down normally.

The details of her punishment came back to her. She re-ran the entire punishment through her mind. The part that most stuck out the most was how Robert had treated her at the end. He seemed to instinctively know what Amy needed; the glass of water, having his arm around her shoulder, holding her and giving her time to cry without saying anything, staying with her and comforting her when she was in bed. He knew how to be both cruel and kind. That was no contradiction. The kindness that Robert showed Amy after her punishment would have had no meaning had it not been preceded by the intense pain and humiliation of the strapping itself.

Even through her pain and crying Amy noticed a total change in Robert's attitude towards her. The coldness that he felt towards her had gone. Although she knew that he had blamed her for her father's death, perhaps now he had forgiven her.

Amy felt a strange sexual arousal from the experience she had just endured. She wanted Robert to hold her again. She wanted to be naked in his arms: helpless, submissive, but comforted. She wanted to feel his warmth. Strangest of all, she wanted to know that he would punish her again if her behavior displeased him. She did not specifically want another strapping, but she wanted to know that the possibility of another strapping would always be a part of her relationship with Robert.

Amy went to the bathroom and turned on the light. She looked at herself in the mirror from the front at first, studying herself from the front. The sight of her own body aroused Amy even more. She turned around and looked at the reflection of her bottom. It was swollen. Her bottom was no longer a deep pink, but more reddish, punctuated with purple marks. She turned in different directions to look at her bottom from different angles. She bent over and looked at her refection between her legs, in spite of the pain caused by stretching her bottom. She wished that she could be photographed like this.

The girl's hands gently caressed the welts on her bottom. She traced the outlines of them with her fingers. Her hands moved to her front, first to her thighs, then to her breasts and stomach. She ran her hands between her legs and lightly touched her clitoris. She leaned back and rested her bottom on the sink counter. Her bottom immediately protested with pain, but Amy wanted to feel that pain. She continued rubbing herself. She was incredibly wet. Her eyes narrowed and her voice squeaked as the orgasm came.

Amy was not done. She went back to the living room and pulled a large table book off the coffee table. She returned to her room, and without shutting the door, threw the book on the bed. She wanted the hard surface of the book to press her bottom while she climaxed. She lay on her back; her bottom pressed to the book's hard surface as her fingers worked the insides of her thighs and clitoris over and over. The pain was intense. Amy's sexual arousal was intense. Each orgasm was stronger than the previous one. Amy's labia and clitoris became sore and rubbed raw from so much attention from her hands, but she could not stop. She groaned and squeaked. She lost all track of time.

Finally, Amy passed out from sheer exhaustion, just as it was starting to get light outside. She lay on her back, her legs spread, her swollen labia on full display. One of her hands draped across her inner thigh. That is how Robert saw her when he got up, noticed her door open, and peeked in to see if she was all right. He stood dumbfounded at the sight of her, especially her labia and clitoris, which had been rubbed raw. It was not hard for Robert to figure out what she had been doing. To see her spread on the bed...

Robert was sweating as he closed the door. Finally he regained his composure. The girl was fine, no doubt about that. Robert pondered the fact that Amy had a large picture book on the bed with her. Surely the pictures had not been what excited her. Then Robert guessed the truth, that Amy had used the book to lie on to intensify the pain on her bottom while she climaxed. Judging by the state of her labia and the surrounding area, that must have been one hell of an orgasm. So, the young woman got off on her strapping... interesting.

Robert felt the pull of being drawn into a sexual relationship with John's daughter, but had to resist that temptation. He knew that Amy would submit to having sex with him in a heartbeat, but he also knew that such a relationship would destroy her, and possibly him as well. He needed to maintain a role as Amy's mentor. Sex was out.

Robert cleaned up and started breakfast. As he started putting plates on the table for himself and Amy, he heard her soft footsteps on the carpeting. She was in her usual terrycloth robe. What seemed new was the look in her eyes. They seemed to shine with a new radiance, with an intensity that he had not seen before. Still, there was a shyness about her. Amy was not sure how her host would treat her, now that it was daytime; whether he would go back to his cold, business-like manner with her or whether he would treat her like he did the previous night.

Robert did not let on that he had seen Amy on her bed. He simply asked, "How are you doing this morning?"

"I'm fine. A bit sore still, but fine." They gave each other a look that indicated that everything was forgiven between them. Amy smiled warmly at Robert. He asked her what she wanted on her eggs, and motioned her to come in the kitchen to see the wide variety of possible omelet ingredients she could choose from. Once Amy made her choice, she took the coffee and cream to the table and took a chair. Amy winced as she sat down.

Robert wondered if she really was all right. "Amy, I want to check you to make sure you are OK, if you could drop your robe. I am afraid that I might have overdone it last night."

Amy immediately stood up, took off her robe and put it on an empty chair. She turned away from Robert and placed her hands on the dining room table. Robert studied his guest's bottom. The welts had turned darker, but she seemed all right. She turned to face him again, one hand on the table behind her, the other at her side. She seemed unaware of the redness remaining between her legs. No modesty now. No... she was making it clear that if he wanted to take her, right there... over the breakfast table... she would gladly give herself over to him. Robert took a deep breath.

"That's fine. Sit down."

Amy struggled to put the robe back on. The disappointment showed in her face as she slowly sat down again.

Robert set Amy's plate in front of her and joined her for breakfast. They ate quietly, struggling to resist their desires and control their fears.

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Two days later, in her navy-blue business outfit, Amy accompanied her host and one of his remaining law partners to the city courthouse for a preliminary hearing. The attorney was female, sharp featured and sharp-tongued, almost scary. She has as much warmth as a butcher knife. Amy was glad that she was on her side and not with the DA's office. It was clear the two lawyers knew how to handle the case and what they planned to say to the judge.

Robert certainly did have connections in this city, Amy thought, as they breezed past benches full of defendants, family members, and defense attorneys. Towards the back of one of the chambers Amy noticed one of the gang members who had threatened her in the holding cell, and felt a pang of fear. The defendant did not realize that she looked so different now that her one-time nemesis didn't even recognize her.

The storeowner dropped the charges. He was glad to retreat from the courthouse when it was over. Waving a copy of the store surveillance videotape in her hand while another copy played, Robert's partner pointed out that Amy was groped when she was restrained, and oh, by the way, did the clerks have green cards? No? So, let me get this straight - you hired illegal immigrants who groped a female detainee who was not resisting? Is this the policy of your company? No? Obviously we are dealing with a case of sexual battery and we would like to file a complaint... Your honor, my client...

Amy thanked Robert's partner when it was over, but the only response she received was "Stay out of trouble. Next time you won't be so lucky." And with that Amy Debbs' career as a criminal came to an end.

"She's never lost a case as long as I have worked with her," said Robert, as they walked back to his car. "In fact, as far as I can remember, she's only had four cases that even went to trial." Amy could believe that.

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That night Robert treated Amy to a dinner at one of his favorite restaurants. Their table was next to a plate glass window with a nice view of the city, and Lake Michigan off to the right. The city lights shimmered in the cold night air. In the street far below Amy noticed what looked like a bundle of clothes stagger behind a market basket. That could be me, she thought with a shudder. Again her heart welled up with gratitude for Robert. She wanted so badly to repay him...

"That is what we are here to discuss. You can repay me all right. Your father left you his money with me in charge, in case you were ever found. I enrolled you in college and you will need to start next week... Don't look so surprised."

Robert stared intently at Amy across the table. He laid out his case. "You certainly can't stay with me. You're more than welcome to come over whenever you want for dinner or to talk, but you need to live somewhere else. You can't earn much of a living on your current education. Your father's house is sold and all your stuff and his is in storage, so what are you going to do... ?

"You owe it to me to make a success out of yourself. The only way you are going to do that is to study. I don't care what, as long as you are successful. You owe me that. You owe it to your father as well."

Amy nodded. She felt worried and relieved at the same time. At least her future was no longer in doubt. She wondered if she could adjust to college so quickly. However, as she shifted in her chair, the soreness in her bottom reminded her that she had been through much worse. She would have to adapt; or else she would feel Robert's strap again.

Robert took out a class schedule and handed it to Amy, explaining what she needed to do to fill out her preferences. "Give it some thought and get this back to me tomorrow. Everything else is taken care of."

When they got back to Robert's apartment he continued laying out Amy's future, which was to begin next Monday. The young woman stayed dressed in her navy blue suit. In her suit, she was ravishing, Robert thought. She had her hands full of papers and at that moment looked every part the professional woman of the type that he was attracted to. With difficulty he continued.

"I set you up in an apartment with the daughter of one of my partners. Her name is Suzanne Foster. Ed (my partner) says that Suzanne is a bit strange, but I talked to her and she seems OK to me. Besides, Ed is strange himself. I had to do all this quickly to get you set up. You will have your own room and the apartment is nice. If you don't get along with Suzanne I can change you later."

Amy protested "But, I'd still rather stay with you. Really"

"I know you do. We just can't. Later you'll understand why."

Worried by Amy's sad expression Robert added "If you can accept this arrangement I will give you a key to my place, and you will be welcome to come over when you want. You just need to have your bed and stuff at your own place."

It was with a heavy heart that Amy took off her suit and hung it up. She had fallen in love with Robert and evidently he deeply cared for her, but even now she was beginning to realize that he was right. Still, she wanted to be a part of his life and have him be a part of hers. She wanted to have the feeling that he was guiding and protecting her more than anything else. She was re-assured by his insistence that she was welcome to come over and visit whenever she wanted. At least she could spend time with him.

Amy, now in her white robe, the usual state of attire while in Robert's apartment, found him sitting in the living room, lost in thought. She joined him on the sofa and snuggled up to him. He put his arm around her shoulder and she placed her head on his chest. She settled down to enjoy the protective embrace of Robert's arm, and the warmth of his chest against her body. Within a few minutes she fell asleep. Robert slipped out from under Amy and moved her to a lying position. Then he retrieved the blankets and pillow from Amy's bed and covered her up. He looked into her face for a few minutes before finally getting up to go to bed himself.

He thought about how much he would miss having her at his place. His desire for her was as strong as ever.

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Sunday, the day before Amy needed to start classes and endure the hassle of buying books, Robert took her over to Suzanne's apartment near the university. He asked his passenger to read out directions as they circled about looking for a place to park. Finally they entered a series of condominium-style units and found the one that matched the address on Amy's paper. The area looked nice.

Amy was nervous about having to circulate with people her own age again, having spent almost all of the last month by herself or with Robert. Left to herself she would have stayed under his protection indefinitely, which would have done neither of them any good. She knew that he was right about getting her in college and forcing her to move ahead with her life. Still it would be difficult.

At Suzanne's door they were greeted by a young woman in a simple warm ankle-length skirt and jacket. She was dressed warmly because she expected to have to go outside to help Amy with her suitcases, but Amy did not have much. Her things were still in storage and it would be next week before Robert could have them delivered.

Suzanne, in spite of her modern clothing, had a look about her that made her seem from another era. Her long hair was done up around her head, making her look like one of the women in a Victorian painting that Robert had at his place. Amy's new roommate had a determined look about her, the expression of a person who knows what she wants from life. She had a voice that was soft, but which Amy would quickly learn, had a commanding quality to it. Her dark eyes had a sad intensity about them. Even under her skirt, Amy could tell that Suzanne's figure was not what would be considered ideal by late 20th Century standards; she had small breasts and wide hips. However, there was a sexiness about her that Robert picked up on immediately and that even Amy could perceive.

Suzanne's apartment was neat to a fault. She had expensive furniture, which gave her living room a rich warm feel to it. There were large photographs on the walls everywhere, all taken by Suzanne. Each picture was a landscape, portrait, or a figure study. Each picture made a powerful statement of its subject. The thought of living with the creator of the pictures excited Amy. Photography had always fascinated her, and it was clear that her new roommate knew how to take a good picture. She was intimidated by the neatness of Suzanne's apartment however, not having had much discipline in her past with having to keep her room neat.

Robert drove Amy and Suzanne around in his car, touring the campus area for the benefit of Amy. Suzanne revealed a lot about herself in the course of the conversation and her description of different places that Amy would need to know about to function in school. She was a double major in photography and physical therapy. She was realistic about her chances of ever being able to earn an adequate living off photography, so it was from physical therapy that she would receive her paycheck. She enjoyed giving massages, had a massage table in the apartment, and already had some customers.

The love of her life was photography, however. There was nothing more that she enjoyed more than doing a figure study, drawing the subject's personality out through the portrayal of the body in her photos. In spite of her lack of confidence in being able to earn a living off taking pictures, Suzanne's work had been featured in several art shows and she had several on-going contracts with galleries. Her name was just beginning to spread among people who wanted quality pictures.

What struck Amy and Robert was Suzanne's self confidence in what she wanted from life. Amy, who had been adrift ever since she had been in middle-school, never worried about anything except partying and dating, was impressed by Suzanne. She was only a few years older than Amy, but she had laid out a personal dream, a realistic road map to achieve that dream, and most importantly, a realistic back-up plan should her dream fail her. It was not the dream that her father approved of, which had led him to tell Robert that Suzanne was strange, but it was better by far than that of most people seriously interested in the arts.

When they returned to the apartment, Suzanne showed Amy and Robert the three bedrooms. There was the room that Amy would have, the room that Suzanne slept in, which was the smallest of the three, and the largest bedroom, which had the massage table and some studio and darkroom equipment in it. It was clear from the arrangement where Suzanne's priorities were.

After forcing his partner's daughter to assure him that she did not need anything else, Robert left. It was time for him to drive back across the city to his own place, his job, and his memories of Tricia. Amy now had started with her new life.

Amy had learned a lot about Suzanne, but had not revealed much about herself so far. That changed when Amy and Suzanne went into the kitchen for Suzanne to show where all the kitchen supplies were kept.

They sat down in the kitchen. Amy saw in Suzanne a person her own age she could trust. In great detail Amy told Suzanne about her high school years with Courtney, the road trip, and how Robert picked her up from jail. She told Suzanne about the beach parties, raves, ecstasy trips, nights of drunken casual sex, and Courtney's decline. She told Suzanne about her burden of guilt over the results of the trip, Courtney's death behind the dumpster, and her own flight to Chicago. She described being arrested, the clerk's arm around her neck, the strange impression that the smell of sweat and strong cologne from the clerks left on her as they reached under her clothing. She described Robert's efforts to retrieve her from the abyss. She described her father's death, the visit to the cemetery, and the pre-trial hearing.

Suzanne listened intently, studying Amy's face. The girl's past showed in her eyes. Her eyes had a haunting expression in them, if as a photographer, one knew how to look for it.

Suzanne asked Amy if she wanted to see her studio and portfolio. As she leafed through Suzanne's portraits she realized that the ones on the walls were not any better than the ones in the folders. Suzanne consistently took powerful pictures.

Amy was curious to see what she would look like from behind Suzanne's lens. "Could you take a picture of me? I haven't had my picture taken since graduation."

Suzanne's photographer's eye scanned Amy's figure. She was pleased that her new roommate was so attractive. Amy had an innocent adolescent look about her that would make her an excellent photo subject.

Suzanne pulled out one of her cameras. She checked the film and lighting. She gently adjusted the lens. She took several face shots, then asked Amy to turn around. "Now turn part way and look back at me." Amy did as directed. Her sad eyes looked into Suzanne's camera. That's the shot, thought Suzanne. It was Amy's first portrait by Suzanne.

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Amy found that university life was not as hard as she feared. For the most part the freshman-level classes were fairly easy, as long as she attended class every day. That was not hard to do with Suzanne looking over her shoulder. Suzanne imposed self-discipline on Amy. She quickly learned not to leave dishes in the kitchen, not to leave her clothes on the floor, not to leave toothpaste in the bathroom sink, to put everything away as soon as she was done with it. Amy was free to use anything that belonged to Suzanne, but God forbid that she not put it back when she was finished. Suzanne knew Amy's schedule and made sure she was out the door on time to make her classes. There was no sleeping in.

Amy avoided the party circuit. She had experienced enough raves, beer bongs, concerts and one night encounters last summer to satisfy herself for a while. That part of her life was behind her. Instead she tagged along with Suzanne on photo shoots, helping her with the photo equipment and learning how to use it. Suzanne took her all over Chicago and nearby cities. Amy learned to appreciate the beauty of winter life: snow fields under the full moon, cold winter sunrises, a haunting pre-dawn skyline, forests covered with ice crystals.

Amy was fascinated by the haunting over-the-shoulder portrait that Suzanne had taken of her. Suzanne had captured her personality in that picture. Amy remembered from her anthropology class her professor mentioning the belief held by some cultures that photography could capture a person's soul. Looking at her own portrait, Amy could believe it.

Amy soon became Suzanne's main figure model. Amy had started to wonder what she could do for spending money when Suzanne offered her a job as her model. Knowing that Amy could use the money, Suzanne offered to split the proceeds from her photos 50-50. Amy spent endless hours in front of Suzanne's cameras, inside, outside, clothed, nude. She began to see herself in some of Chicago's better photo galleries. The money from the pictures was erratic, but slightly more than she could earn working at a bookstore or restaurant.

The agreement had a side condition for Amy. She had to get in better shape. As the winter dragged into spring, Amy spent increasing hours at the gym, toning her body. Before each photo shoot Suzanne massaged her on her table to relax her. Physically Amy felt better than she had ever felt in her life.

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At the end of February Amy decided to stay with Robert over the weekend. After making sure that Suzanne had no photo shoots planned for the next couple of days, Amy asked her roommate to drive her over to Robert's apartment. Suzanne, in her typical take-charge manner, forced Amy to fill her backpack with textbooks before leaving. "If you're going over there for the whole weekend, you'll need to study."

Amy felt the rush of anticipation. Amy knew that Robert liked women in business outfits and was wearing one of her most recent purchases when she entered his place. At that point in her life she still had a crush on him.

Robert decided to take Amy out to dinner first and find out about her latest adventures in college. Robert was not too sure that he liked the idea of Amy being a model, but at least she was not trying to be a fashion model or a pin-up. Suzanne took serious pictures. Amy gave a folder of large prints to Robert, including a copy of the over-the-shoulder portrait. He was impressed. "This one I want to frame. Maybe there's something to Suzanne's photography after all."

Robert was very pleased by the influence Suzanne was having on Amy's outlook on life. The girl seemed more focused. Her travels with the photographer had become an important part of her education. Amy seemed more knowledgeable about life in general. She had the ability to appreciate beauty, in nature and in herself. Robert was pleased that Suzanne prodded Amy whenever she got lazy about her studies.

When they got back, Robert was surprised to see Amy carefully hang up her coat and outfit after taking them off. Dressed in her usual white robe, she carefully dropped the rest of her clothing in Robert's washer. Two months of being snapped at by Suzanne had conditioned her about taking care of her clothes.

The next morning Robert got up and had a surprise. Amy, still in her robe, was sitting at the dining room table, taking notes from one of her course textbooks. She already had made coffee and had partially prepared breakfast for both of them.

Amy had indeed changed in the short time since that fateful morning in the police station.

**Chapter 4 - Modeling for Suzanne**

Spring Break came and went.

The week leading up to Spring Break was particularly hard for Amy. The mention of the party spots that Amy and Courtney had been to last year forced Amy to remember the "better" half of her road trip. As the memories of the different party spots popped up in her mind, she began to realize that even at the beginning there were indications that the whole adventure with Courtney was going to end in disaster.

The sight of drunken "college chicks" on the video channels touting Spring Break forced Amy to avoid the Student Center restaurants. While drinking coffee between classes the Monday before Spring Break, she happened to see one video clip showing a group of girls on the shoulders of some fraternity guys in Daytona Beach, swinging their bikini tops. The girls were censored with that electronic fuzz over their chests, of course. The clip included a girl who looked identical to Courtney. In fact, it probably was Courtney, since Amy thought she recognized some of the guys.

She started having flashbacks. Suddenly she was behind the dumpster, looking into Courtney's face for the last time. Amy could not go to her next class. She ran all the way home; no small feat given that it was nearly a mile from the university. She burst into the apartment, where Suzanne was just about to go out. She rushed passed her astonished roommate and threw up in the kitchen sink. Suzanne ran to the kitchen to comfort her. For the first time in two years Suzanne missed a class, as she spent hours cradling her roommate in her arms.

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Amy spent Spring Break with Suzanne. They traveled south to an isolated forest location that Suzanne previously had used for photo shoots. Amy felt the thrill of spending hours outdoors in the nude, as Suzanne shot over 40 rolls of both color and black & white film in four days. Amy walked in the shade, walked in the sun, sat with her feet in a cold stream, smiled, looked serious. Sometimes Suzanne clearly told her subject what she wanted her to do. Sometimes she let Amy wander around with no direction at all, letting her do what she wanted and taking pictures spontaneously. Sometimes Suzanne backed away to shoot her with a telephoto lens, allowing Amy to forget the immediate presence of the camera. On the last day Suzanne left her model alone for two hours to shoot her with the telephoto lens. It was a strange sensation, spending a full two hours walking down a forest path in the nude by herself, completely cut off from her clothing and every other trapping of civilization. The feel of the sun and breeze on her body thrilled her. Amy completely forgot about the camera, which was what the photographer wanted.

Upon returning to their apartment Suzanne taught Amy how to develop pictures. They spent the next three days in the apartment's darkroom. Developed pictures from the forest session started to stack up. Amy thought that over half of the pictures were great, but Suzanne's critical eye picked out the final 30 prints that she would try to sell. An additional handful were separated to put in her portfolio. She tried to explain the difference between a truly great picture and a mediocre one, in technical terms that Amy only half understood.

Over the next several weeks it became evident that Suzanne knew what she was doing in selecting the pictures. She found herself digging through the rejected photos for others to offer clients after the first batch sold. The income from the sales was better than either the photographer or her model expected. Amy suddenly found that she had enough money to pay her tuition and rent through the summer, allowing her to tell Robert to leave her father's money in the trust. Several of the pictures from the Spring Break photo shoot later appeared in a national photo magazine. By the summer it was clear to both roommates that the forest photos were a turning point in Suzanne's career.

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At the end of April Suzanne landed a contract with a publisher who was putting out a series exercise books, featuring people working out in the nude. There were going to be a total of 10 books altogether, each focusing on a different photographer and a different model. Suzanne was responsible for taking all the pictures for one book out of the series.

As Suzanne discussed the contract with the publisher, it became evident that the he was hoping for the same model that she had used in the forest pictures. That's easy enough, replied Suzanne, she's my roommate.

After showing the contracts to Robert to make sure she understood them, Suzanne presented the job to Amy. She was excited. The photographer drove home the point the session would be a major undertaking. "We're not talking about you just strolling around in the woods. This is going to take real effort on your part. You might hate me by the time we finish."

Suzanne was genuinely worried. She had to do a good job. She had to have a model who understood what was needed, who would work day after day and patiently allow over a thousand pictures to be taken only to have about 100 or so end up in the book. If Amy was not up to the task, it would wreck their friendship and possibly Suzanne's future as a photographer.

The university gym had reduced hours as soon as finals ended, opening up the opportunity for Suzanne to use it as a setting for the photo shoot. The art department chairman arranged for Suzanne to have after-hours access to the workout rooms, squash courts, and indoor pool until the end of June. He handed his student a master key. Suzanne thanked her chairman and immediately headed over to the gym to check the lighting.

That night Suzanne and her model went over to the gym for the first time. Amy left her clothes in the locker room. Suzanne stayed dressed because she needed to carry her photography supplies around in her pockets. Suzanne explained that Amy would actually be working out. "You're not just posing. Your actual daily workouts will be during our after-hours sessions."

The experience of entering the empty gym left a strange impression on Amy, being alone in a place usually full of people, being nude in a place she normally would have to be dressed. Since Amy already had worked out that day, Suzanne had to content herself with some shots of her model in the pool and the sauna. She did take some experimental shots of Amy in the workout rooms, just to check the lighting. Suzanne was not satisfied with the lighting at all. She would have to bring some of her own, which would complicate each night's session. Amy picked up on her roommate's anxiety.

Each night Amy and Suzanne entered the empty gym. Amy stripped and went through her routine in the nude. On Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays she did upper body, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays she did lower body. She finished in the pool. The pool was her favorite part. It was wonderful to be able to swim in the nude again. Suzanne's camera clicked continuously as Amy sweat on the machines and weights. Her camera clicked as Amy splashed in the pool. Her camera clicked on the racquetball court and the gymnastics room.

Trouble erupted between Amy and Suzanne during the third week of shooting. After a while it seemed to Amy that Suzanne was taking the same pictures over and over. She did not see the point of taking any more and became irritated with Suzanne's constant tinkering with the lighting. She wanted to spend the hot summer evenings outside, not working out.

Suzanne was becoming increasingly convinced that Amy was not putting all of her effort into the workouts. It showed in the pictures. Her muscles were not tensed. Her face looked too relaxed. She was not sweating enough. Suzanne shook her head in frustration as she slapped the latest batch of developed prints on her desk. These weren't going to work.

The fight came Thursday night, when a group of classmates from one of Amy's summer classes decided to see a movie. She left a message on the answering machine telling Suzanne that she would skip tonight's workout to go out with the others. The tone of the message made clear to Suzanne that Amy's enthusiasm was gone. As soon as Amy came through the door Suzanne confronted her. It was not the movie, she explained, it was her over-all attitude.

Amy rolled her eyes: "Look, you've taken the same stupid pictures of me over and over. How many shots of me doing leg presses do you need? Select your fucking photos already and send them in!"

Suzanne tried to explain what she needed and that Amy was not giving it to her. Amy rolled her eyes a second time.

"Then get a different model! I'm sick of this shit!"

Panic swept though Suzanne. It was too late to get another model.

Amy needed to be motivated. Suzanne remembered the story of the strapping that Robert had given her. It seemed that they both agreed that it helped her pull herself together. Suzanne decided to try discipline to motivate her model.

The next morning Suzanne surprised her step-mother by dropping over at her father's house. The photographer explained that she needed the paddle that her father had used on her when she was still in middle-school.

"I'll see if I can find it." Suzanne watched while her step-mother rummaged through the drawers of the den. Finally she found it at the bottom of a drawer in a cabinet. She passed it over. "What do you need it for anyway?"

Suzanne explained about Amy and the photo shoot. Then she studied at the paddle in her hands. It brought back a lot of unpleasant memories.

She had not seen it since she was about 14. The implement was 18 inches long, about 4 inches wide, and about a quarter of an inch thick. It was strange to hold the paddle as an adult that had tormented her so much as a young teenager. Suzanne remembered that it had a vicious sting to it, but did not bruise the skin very much. She remembered that the marks from the paddle never lasted more than a day or two.

Suzanne remembered the evenings bent over her father's desk, her jeans around her knees, punished for almost anything that displeased him. She pushed her past out of her thoughts and lightly slapped the palm of her hand.

Amy, you're gonna get it, thought Suzanne to herself.

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That night in the gym Suzanne had the paddle packed in her photo bag. She planned not to use it if her model's attitude changed. However, that was not likely, given the unpleasantness from the previous evening.

Suzanne was right. Amy was sullen and uncooperative from the beginning. She continuously rolled her eyes when Suzanne told her to do anything. Finally the photographer picked up her camera bag and a small workout bench. "Amy, I need you to come with me."

Suzanne had nothing to say to Amy. She had explained everything last night. Amy had not listened. Suzanne's patience was exhausted.

Amy followed Suzanne into a small spare workout room that currently was empty. Suzanne locked the door and set the bench in the middle of the floor. She set the camera bag in a corner, unzipped it, and pulled out the paddle. She turned to face her roommate.

Seeing Suzanne with the paddle in her hand shocked Amy so much that for a moment she could not speak. Suzanne was pleased to see her friend's frightened expression.

"Amy, last night I explained to you how important this photo shoot is to me." Suzanne began quietly. "I explained that what I needed from you was what you promised from the beginning, 100% effort on your part, to make the photos convincing. You wanted to do this, even after I explained to you what it would entail. You told me that it would thrill you to be the model of the shoot that would launch my career."

This time Amy said nothing. Suzanne had told her all this last night, but she did not have a paddle in her hand while saying it. Suzanne continued with a calm cold voice that frightened her roommate.

"I am giving you two choices tonight. Either you can get dressed and walk out of here, or you can bend over that bench. If you walk out of here I expect you to have your things out of the apartment by this time tomorrow night. You can take the pictures that we have done so far out of my work-room. I will have no use for them. I won't come back until you and your things are gone. I'll send a check for the rest of your rent for this month to Robert's address. I might or might not be able to get another model and try to re-do the shoot in time. However, that won't be your problem."

"If you bend over that bench, we'll start the shooting all over, from the very beginning, on Monday. We only have four weeks left, which isn't much time. The paddle will stay in my camera bag until we're done."

Amy opened her mouth to try to convince Suzanne she would try harder, that she was sorry. Suzanne's cold voice interrupted her before she could speak.

"Amy, don't bother to say anything. Either go to the door or go to the bench. Those are your choices."

Amy stood silent. She now realized that she was to blame for this. She had placed Suzanne into a desperate situation by not giving her what she needed for the photo shoot. This, her first book, was Suzanne's big chance. A book of lackluster photos would ruin her prospects for future contracts. Amy knew that Suzanne was such a perfectionist that she would risk a breach of contract suit before turning in mediocre photos. Amy just wished that she had taken her friend more seriously the previous night.

Amy walked over to the bench. With sad eyes she looked over her shoulder, waiting for her next instructions.

"Put your hands on the bench, and put your feet about shoulder-width apart... Now, arch your back a bit so your butt sticks out."

Once in position, Amy bit her lip. She was nervous about the impending punishment, but more than anything else, sad and ashamed that she had let Suzanne down. She would not object to being punished; she had brought this upon herself.

Suzanne studied the paddle in her hand. She glanced at Amy's waiting bottom. She remembered this paddle's role in her own life, slightly less than 10 years before. She remembered the nights bent over her father's desk. She remembered her father's long lectures while she waited with her pants down. She remembered her step-brother standing in the door of the den, smirking at her, whenever her stepmother did not chase him upstairs. She remembered the sharp sting. She remembered her step-mother, of all people, trying to comfort her afterwards in the kitchen.

Suzanne felt bad about having to punish Amy. There was something about her roommate that invited a feeling of wanting to protect her. Inwardly Suzanne was grateful that Amy had not taken off. Still, she had to go through with this. Amy had assured her that she would put all of her effort into the pictures. Instead she had wasted three weeks out of the seven that Suzanne would have access to the gym. Her attitude, especially during the last two nights, threatened to wreck the entire project. Amy seemed not to realize that there was a lot at stake for her as well; Suzanne had offered her 50% of her net income from the book.

Suzanne placed the paddle against both cheeks of Amy's bottom. She tapped her quivering target gently and pulled the paddle back. POP! Amy's bottom jiggled. Both cheeks turned a light pink. POP! The pink darkened slightly. POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... Amy's bottom turned slightly darker with each swat.

Amy stayed quiet at the beginning. The paddle had a sharp sting to it, somewhat lighter than Robert's strap. However, Amy's eyes quickly filled with tears, more from the humiliation of being paddled by her friend than from the actual pain.

Suzanne was not counting the swats. She was not as experienced with discipline as was Robert. All she had to go on was the memory of her own punishments. Suzanne suddenly realized that she needed to time the swats and spread them out. She decided to hit Amy on alternate cheeks. POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... Amy's bottom was now a deep pink. Suddenly Amy began to cry quietly.

After about 20 additional swats it became harder for Suzanne to continue. She hated doing this to her friend. She decided to give Amy 10 final swats and then stop.

POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... Amy started to cry louder. The pain in her bottom started to make it harder to stay in position. She struggled to keep her bottom out. Her knees began to shake.

Suzanne decided to lay the final four swats across both bottom cheeks. POP!... Amy sobbed loudly. POP!... Suddenly she twisted out of position, but before Suzanne could say anything, struggled to get her hands back on the bench and her feet spread. POP!... POP!... Amy squealed loudly at each of the last two swats.

Suzanne stopped. Amy's bottom was a deep pink. Her bottom cheeks were swollen, with faint traces of purple. The punishment had not been all that severe, however; her bottom would be fully recovered by Monday. The effect of the paddling was more psychological than physical.

"You can get up. I'm done." Suzanne had tears in her own eyes. She had not realized how tough this would be on herself.

Amy stood up. Even through her tears she noticed Suzanne's sad expression. She hugged Suzanne and cried into her shoulder. The coldness had gone out of her soul. She hugged her crying roommate hard.

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Amy's physical fitness improved dramatically over the next four weeks. Motivated by the shock of having been paddled by Suzanne, and by the knowledge that the paddle remained in the camera bag, Amy pushed herself hard during her workouts. Her strength increased as a result of the training, her muscles became more toned. Sweat poured down her body as Amy did her routine. By the end of June Amy could do 10 pull-ups. She could bench press her own weight. She could do sit-ups almost non-stop. By the end of the seven weeks Amy actually regretted the impending end of the photo shoot and of the opportunity to work out in the nude.

Suzanne was pleased as she examined the pictures from the final week of shooting. Amy's muscles were visible in all the pictures, her nude body glistening with sweat, her face set with a grim, determined expression. The last picture of the last day taken of Amy was a portrait in the sauna. The only thing Amy was wearing was a wet headband. She was exhausted and sweat poured down her face and chest. Amy's eyes, staring straight at the camera, had the same haunting expression as Suzanne's first portrait of Amy back in January. Amy and Suzanne both realized the quality of the picture as soon as they pulled it out of the darkroom. The shot turned out to be even more successful than either could have imagined; the publisher chose it as the theme portrait for the entire series.

**Chapter 5 - The First Summer**

Amy's time throughout the rest of the summer was divided between her classes and Suzanne' photo sessions. Suzanne took Amy all over the Mid-west for photo shoots on weekends and whenever she had a break in her schedule during the week. They hit all of the Great Lakes, and traveled as far as Minnesota to the west and Pennsylvania to the east. Amy saw a huge variety of natural locations during the trips and was amazed at Suzanne's knowledge of the region. There were always side trips to historical locations, and of course, to art museums and galleries. The summer trips opened the world up to Amy in a way she could never have imagined the year before.

It was during the trips in July and August that Amy began to realize how good a friend Suzanne really was. For the first time in her life Amy had found a person she could trust. Unlike Courtney, it would never cross Suzanne's mind to have Amy do something that would risk injury or embarrassment. She would never do anything to exploit Amy for her own pleasure or entertainment. She found it a relief to have a friend who would never dare her to do something just for fun.

Amy knew that Suzanne was genuinely concerned about her well-being. In many ways Suzanne was strict with Amy, but always in ways that benefited her. Amy did well in her classes because of Suzanne. She was in excellent physical shape because of Suzanne. Her finances were in order because of Suzanne. She was neat and well organized because of Suzanne. Amy's character was changing. No longer did she feel that she was out of control and one step away from being back on the street.

Suzanne only turned tyrant during a photo shoot. Even as Suzanne's harsh voice snapped at her from behind her camera, Amy realized it was only because her friend knew what was needed for the photos to be successful. Modeling for Suzanne had become Amy's job, and Suzanne expected top performance. However, as soon as the camera went back into its bag, the Suzanne that Amy loved and trusted was always there for her.

Amy usually enjoyed her time with Suzanne during the modeling sessions. Increasingly she enjoyed the thrill of the air and sun on her body when outdoors, the cool breeze blowing between her legs and on her bottom. It thrilled her to be naked, taking orders, and submitting to her friend's commands. Amy loved the feel of Suzanne's self-assuredness during the shoots. Afterwards it thrilled Amy to see herself in galleries and photo magazines.

Towards the end of the summer Suzanne took a picture of Amy kneeling on a white surface in a studio, wearing a gardening hat and holding a huge bouquet of flowers in front of her. From the angle of the picture it was hard to tell whether Amy was naked or not. This picture became the theme image for a fall gardening festival and appeared in newspapers all over Chicago. So was the pretty model behind the bouquet naked? Only Amy and Suzanne knew for sure.

After several months Amy became as proficient in working with Suzanne's lab equipment as Suzanne herself. Amy's help freed Suzanne from many of the more mundane tasks of her profession. Amy became confident in the darkroom. By the end of the summer she easily could have taken a job at a photo lab. When Amy was not modeling for Suzanne, for example when Suzanne was taking landscape pictures, Amy was there with the cameras, cleaning them, changing lenses and film, taking them out of their cases and putting them away as needed. Suzanne came to rely on Amy as her assistant. Amy felt a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that she had become an important help in Suzanne's life and career, and that her friend relied on her.

Suzanne was as interested in traveling and showing things to Amy as much as she was in taking pictures of her. After a while Amy suspected that Suzanne partly was using the summer photo shoots as an excuse to take trips with a close traveling companion. It dawned on Amy that in reality Suzanne was rather lonely, especially following her last break-up during the sports book photo shoot. Amy did not complain. She did not want to sit at home during the summer. Nor was there any way that Amy was ready to take on another relationship with a boyfriend at that point in her life. She needed to find direction own life first, to determine her own needs before having to worry about meeting someone else's.

Suzanne and Amy never lacked for topics to discuss during their trips, given that their life experiences had been so different up until the time they started living together. Each came from a world so remote to the other that under any other circumstances they would never have become friends. Just a year ago Amy would have dismissed Suzanne as an art nerd, and Suzanne would have seen nothing but a shallow party girl in Amy. However, they had entered each other's lives in such a way that they could take an interest in each other. Whenever one of them talked about herself and her past, the other always learned something new, not about just her friend, but about life in general.

During their travels it was inevitable that Suzanne and Amy would talk about their relationships with guys. Neither had much experience with stable relationships, but for totally different reasons.

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Suzanne's reasons for not having had a stable relationship differed now than they did when she was in high school. In high school she had largely kept to herself due to problems she was having at home. She hinted to Amy that she had serious problems with her father while in school, but did not tell her what those problems had been. She did tell Amy that the few times she dated in high school she had gone to great lengths to not let her father know about it.

Suzanne had another problem in high school that kept her alone. Her personality was too serious for most of her classmates to be interested in her. At an early age she became interested in photography. As Amy was well aware from her numerous trips with her friend and the countless hours spent in the photo lab, pointing the camera was only a small part of being a photographer. Suzanne took her work as the high school year photographer way too seriously. The commitment that Suzanne's photos demanded prevented her from doing much else during her free time. The result of Suzanne's dedication was a yearbook that received commendations for three years. However, the other result was that everyone thought of Suzanne as "the school photographer" instead of thinking of Suzanne as a human being with emotional needs and a desire for companionship.

Suzanne's solitude fed upon itself. Her pursuits were quiet ones. She listened to instrumental music and became hooked on New Age and classical. She could not stand the rap and heavy metal that her classmates enjoyed. Sports, cheerleading, and other school activities did not interest her, unless there was an opportunity to take pictures. She retreated into her studies, invariably doing well in all her classes and being liked by her teachers. She never caused any problems in school, never raised her voice, never drank or smoked. The only movies she was interested in were foreign ones. She turned her nose up at the Hollywood pop culture that so captivated everyone else her age.

In high school Suzanne only had one serious boyfriend, during the second half of her junior year. He was a member of the marching band, and shared Suzanne's interest in music. He did not find it strange that Suzanne did not want her father to know about him, because he did not get along with his parents either. For the first time in her life Suzanne was able to open up to another person.

Suzanne's brief interlude of happiness only lasted about 5 months. Her boyfriend was a senior. He graduated, and not knowing what to do with his life, went in the Army. He chose a specialty that required a lengthy stint of hard training in Ft Benning, Georgia, following completion of basic training. After six months of training his unit was mobilized, and he departed immediately overseas. Suzanne did not see him after that. Suzanne spent her entire senior year writing him and waiting for him to come back. He never did. Right after Suzanne graduated from high school, she learned that he had been killed overseas in a training accident. In spite of the loss, Suzanne moved on in her life. She already had endured many unpleasant experiences and her boyfriend's death was just one more.

Suzanne's time in college was not much happier as far as personal relationships were concerned. She entered the university thinking that, being with other art majors, she would have an easy time finding someone who shared her interests. Most certainly she did, mixing with other students who also, for the most part, had not fit in their high schools. What Suzanne had not anticipated was how self-centered most of her art classmates were. Suzanne quickly became sick of her peers who thought they were the next Van Gogh or the next Mapplethorpe, when it was obvious their talent was mediocre at best. If there was one thing Suzanne could not stand, it was a person on an ego trip.

Suzanne's first boyfriend in college gave her a rude shock. A few weeks after they started going out he started asking her for loans. Suzanne had no money herself and her boyfriend knew that. Still, he insisted and finally she gave him what little she had to live on that week. Within days he started demanding more.

Suzanne had nothing more to give him. She was wondering herself where she would get enough to pay her food for the rest of the week. She lost her temper and broke off the relationship. For several months afterwards her ex-boyfriend stalked her, until finally she obtained a restraining order.

Unlike Amy, Suzanne was the sort of person who quickly learned from her mistakes. She learned to quickly size up potential partners, looking for signs of financial dependency, unrealistic expectations from life, and abusive personalities. She learned, the hard way, that finding a reliable partner in the art department would be much more difficult than she had anticipated upon entering college.

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Amy's reason for never having a stable relationship came down to a single word, Courtney.

At this point in her life Amy still adamantly defended Courtney. However, Suzanne picked up enough hints in her conversations with Amy to indicate that Amy was starting to recognize some of Courtney's faults. Suzanne did not like Courtney from Amy's description of her. However, Suzanne said nothing to Amy about her opinions about Courtney, wanting to give Amy time to question her past at her own pace. Amy was just beginning to realize that perhaps Courtney had not been such a great influence in her life. She was not ready to admit that out loud, not to Suzanne or to anyone else.

Deep down inside Amy realized that Courtney had bullied her mercilessly in school through peer pressure and by convincing Amy that only what Courtney approved of could be considered "cool". Amy began to realize that there had been many lost opportunities during her high school years due to Courtney's influence over her. This was especially true when it came to boyfriends. It was true with everything else in Amy's life as well, her classes, her relationship with her father, even her health.

Amy met Courtney in middle school the year that her mother died from cancer. Amy needed someone to look up to at the time and saw that in her classmate. Courtney seemed so self-confident, so arrogant to the guys, so sure that she knew how to be cool. Courtney had a comeback for anything anyone said to her. Amy loved the fact that no one could insult Courtney without receiving a sarcastic response that made everyone listening squirm. Some of Amy's teachers seemed almost afraid of her new friend. Amy stuck with Courtney, first out of insecurity, then out of not knowing anything else. Amy learned to talk with the same sarcastic in-your-face manner as Courtney, learned to use the same come-backs whenever anyone tried to insult her, learned to dress to draw guys' attention to her adolescent body.

Courtney loved living on the edge. She was what some people would call an adrenaline junkie, long before she became a junkie of much more dangerous substances. Courtney drank heavily. Later in high school she loved drag-racing. She tried anything at parties being passed around. Any new substance she immediately pressed on Amy, which was part of the reason why at first Amy was so surprised that Courtney would not let her try heroin.

Throughout high school the last thing Courtney wanted was calm in her life. She was impatient and became bored very easily. She was repelled by safe, stable guys. She gravitated towards the ones who led to trouble and saw to it that Amy did the same.

As her 18th birthday approached, Courtney realized that the final restraint on her having fun as she defined it was about to come to an end. Upon turning 18 she could take off and do whatever she wanted. All she needed was money, and during her final month in high school she plotted how to finance her upcoming road-trip from her mother's bank account. By the time they left, Amy was so conditioned to doing anything Courtney described as "fun" or "cool" that the idea of not taking off with her friend never crossed her mind.

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Amy and Suzanne had dinner with Robert several times over the summer. Suzanne seemed to trust Robert for legal advice and always showed him any contract she needed to sign. Robert spent hours with Suzanne and gave her hundreds of dollars worth of legal advice for free. Amy reflected that it seemed strange that Suzanne went to Robert for advice when Suzanne's own father was a lawyer and just as competent at reviewing contracts.

It was clear that Robert liked Suzanne. He seemed to enjoy talking to her. At first most of their conversation concentrated on how to study contracts to tell the difference between a good contract and a bad one. Suzanne had to tell Robert about her work to give Robert an idea about her legal needs. Robert increasingly seemed to take interest in Suzanne's photography and her life in general as the summer ended and the fall semester started.

Every so often Amy noticed Robert looking at Suzanne with a longing in his expression. It was true that Suzanne had a sexiness about her, that she was mature for her age, and had a quiet, dignified manner of carrying herself. It was true that Robert had now gone a year alone since Tricia had died. However it was also true that Robert and Suzanne had absolutely nothing in common. Amy realized that nothing could ever come of Robert's thoughts about Suzanne, whatever they happened to be. Even so, Amy was jealous that Robert was looking at Suzanne instead of at her.

Robert was pleased about the influence that Suzanne had on Amy's life. He was hugely relieved at the thought of no longer having to act as a surrogate parent to a girl who had a crush on him. Being Amy's roommate, Suzanne had taken over that role.

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Amy felt much more relaxed as she started the fall semester. She no longer felt so tense about doing well in her classes. She started relaxing more and more. Although Suzanne was every bit as adamant about forcing Amy out of the apartment in time to make her classes as she had been during the spring, she could not stand over Amy and force her to keep track of her assignments. As the fall semester progressed Amy started to let her guard down. By the end of October Amy's attitude would land her into serious trouble with one of her professors.