**The Wanderings of Amy**

by EC

**Chapter 26 - Europe**

Towards the end of the semester Burnside told Amy to be ready to grade the final exams in a two day period at the beginning of finals week. The professor explained that she was leaving for Europe immediately after the finals were returned to the students, in order to meet with colleagues at several economics institutes in Great Britain and the Continent.

"I hate to do this to you, but for the 48 hours after I give the finals, you and I will be spending non-stop quality time in my office. I have to get to Europe as fast as I can after we get the finals turned back to my classes. If you have any conflicts let me know and I will talk to your professors so you can re-schedule your other tests."

Amy had mixed feelings about Burnside's rush to get the finals graded and turned back to the students. On the one hand she was glad that after two days she would be free of the stress of having to grade all those finals. However, before that break, she would spend a solid 48 hours with Burnside in her office, with no sleep and existing almost as Burnside's prisoner. Amy secretly resented Burnside's assumption that she should go two days without sleep and drop everything else just for her. Furthermore, Burnside let Amy know that because she would be in Europe, Amy would have to spend the rest of finals week sitting in Burnside's office, listening to irate students complain about their final grades.

However, Amy said nothing, realizing that Burnside had legitimate reasons to push her so hard. The professor needed to get to Europe to attend meetings that week, and in fact would miss several meetings to give and grade finals at home. In spite of the importance of the meetings for Burnside and the department, there was no thought of giving finals early. Burnside was determined that her surviving students get their money's worth out of their classes. The last class of the semester had a lesson plan every bit as full as one in the middle of the semester. Burnside would have resigned sooner than skip a class, even the very last one of the semester.

Amy also knew that Burnside would work non-stop until her portion of the grading was done. Burnside had that strange ability to work up to 72 hours without sleep. With 6 hours of sleep she was as good as new, ready for anything. Burnside's unstoppable drive still impressed Amy, even after two years of knowing her.

Burnside relied on Amy extensively during the final weeks of the semester, even more so than she had during the fall. As nervous students poured into Burnside's office to fret about term papers or finals, it was Amy who had to screen them to see which ones had legitimate concerns to pass along to the professor, and which students simply needed to study harder. Amy learned to be both harsh and understanding, as the situation warranted. Like her mentor, Amy had little sympathy for the students who were in trouble because they had partied too much. However, Amy went out of her way to help the classmates who had tried hard, but still did not understand parts of the material. Without realizing it, by explaining the course material in many different ways to many different students, Amy herself became an expert in the subjects Burnside was teaching.

Burnside made no secret of the fact that she needed Amy's help and relied on her. As harsh as she was with Amy, Burnside made it very clear that she was grateful for the fact that Amy was there for her.

Amy was well aware of Burnside's involvement in academic exchanges and overseas scholarships. However, at the time Amy did not suspect that Burnside's trip would have any direct impact on her life, other than to promise her two days of no sleep while she and her professor read and graded essays.

Burnside gave four finals on the first Monday of finals week. There were a total of 170 tests altogether, 170 bluebooks filled with the panicky scrawled handwriting of the test takers. Amy sighed as she followed Burnside back to her office carrying two out of the four boxes full of tests. Burnside turned on her coffee maker and handed Amy a box of red pens and her formula for grading the exams for each class. Amy sat down at her desk to get started. She looked over at Burnside. The professor, with her red pen scrawling furiously, already was halfway through her second bluebook.

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Amy was both surprised and pleased to know that Wendy would go to Europe with Burnside. Amy also was somewhat jealous, wishing that she could have the opportunity to see the places that Wendy would be seeing.

Burnside seemed sure that she knew exactly what Wendy needed. This trip would be an important step for Wendy to take control of her own life. For the first time since December, Wendy would be on her own for extended periods of time. Burnside believed that it was important for Wendy to make this transition in an environment different from any familiar to her. Wendy had to start her transition away from the old landmarks in her life and the life patterns which had allowed her to get into her gambling mess in the first place. She would regain her independence while seeing new and exciting things, and hopefully the question of gambling would not enter her mind.

Dr. Halsey drove them to the airport. Wendy boarded the plane to Europe with Burnside and flew to London, the first stop on a two week trip that would take them to Great Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany.

When she traveled, Burnside indulged herself in the finest food and accommodations. Burnside's indulgence on herself was extended to Wendy. Wendy's role in Burnside's life changed from the role she held when she was living at the professor's house. Burnside considered Wendy her guest during the trip and looked after her comfort and entertainment. In the London hotel Wendy had her own room.

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Wendy's sexual relationship with Burnside changed dramatically once they arrived in Europe. Now that Wendy no longer wore Burnside's collar, she was free to make her own decisions sexually as part of her transition back to normal life. Burnside and Wendy continued their sexual relationship, but Wendy now was free to decide how she would spend her time with the professor. Partly because of the intensity of her experience as Burnside's servant for four months, Wendy secretly felt very passionate about her former mistress. The second night they were in London she had a huge surprise for Burnside.

Wendy decided to go to Burnside's room after they had finished dinner and were done for the evening. She knocked on the door, Burnside answered with just a towel wrapped around her, since she already had taken her clothes off to go to bed. Wendy stepped inside, without saying anything. She took Burnside's hand, kissed her, and pulled the towel off. Suddenly their roles were reversed. Burnside was nude, with a nervous expression on her face, while Wendy was fully dressed staring into her eyes with an intensity that made the professor nervous. Wendy grabbed Burnside's other hand and pressed her back against a dresser. She kissed Burnside passionately, first on the mouth, then on her breasts and neck. Burnside's body responded immediately. She grabbed Wendy's hand and pressed it to her pubis. Wendy ran her fingers over Burnside's clitoris and vagina. Burnside groaned. Wendy then grabbed Burnside's hands and led her to the bed, motioning her to lie face down. Burnside complied, as Wendy kissed her bottom and thighs. Burnside was becoming more and more aroused. Wendy stood up to pull off her own clothes and then buried her face in Burnside's bottom, kissing and licking her bottom cheeks. Suddenly Burnside rolled on her back and pulled Wendy over her. Wendy grabbed Burnside's hands and pushed them to the mattress over her head. She buried her mouth into Burnside's mouth.

Wendy's intensity both shocked and aroused Burnside tremendously. There was a desperation about Wendy's passion, the knowledge that she had only a few more nights to spend with the professor before having to return to her own life. Burnside could feel that desperation in Wendy's kisses. Burnside was determined that she would go all-out with Wendy tonight. She would do everything in her power to give Wendy as much pleasure as possible, to make up for the tremendous suffering Wendy had endured in her house.

Burnside moved her face between Wendy's legs. She kissed and licked Wendy until she was wild with excitement. This time Burnside did not want to torment Wendy, but instead give her as much pleasure as possible. Wendy, from having submitted to four months of sexual torment and passion, knew how to hold an orgasm to maximize it when it finally came. She held back, and finally climaxed.

Wendy suddenly wanted to taste Burnside. She moved her head between Burnside's legs and passionately tormented Burnside with her tongue, her lips and her teeth. Burnside climaxed, groaning loudly. Wendy moved over Burnside again and buried her mouth into Burnside's mouth. Burnside tasted herself on Wendy's mouth as she kissed her. She dug her fingers into Wendy's back. Burnside then motioned Wendy to lie on her stomach. She kissed Wendy's bottom, the same bottom she had so cruelly marked during the spring. After having gone nearly a month since her last punishment, Wendy's bottom was completely healed and her skin was responsive to Burnside's kisses and caresses. Burnside buried her face between Wendy's bottom cheeks, she moved her tongue around the sensitive area, doing something for Wendy that she had never done for anyone else, not even her lover Halsey. Wendy groaned with excitement and thrust her bottom up, enjoying the feel of Burnside's lips and tongue in the most private area of her body. This was a totally new experience for Wendy. She was almost insane with the sensation.

Burnside knew how to give intense pleasure. She spent nearly two hours with Wendy, giving her orgasm after orgasm, teasing her and arousing her to her limits. Finally, exhausted and drenched in sweat Burnside fell asleep, her head resting on Wendy's chest. Wendy gently ran her fingers through Burnside's hair before falling asleep herself.

The next morning Wendy woke up first. She looked at Burnside, still asleep. She pulled back the covers to look at the professor completely. The sight of her former mistress asleep, uncovered, and helpless had a strange effect on Wendy. The professor's face looked peaceful and somewhat younger in her sleep. It was very weird to see this dominating, powerful person quiet like this, even more so since Burnside rarely slept more than a few hours per night. However, she was exhausted after 48 hours of grading tests, then the flight, and then a long series of meetings over the past two days.

Wendy knew at that moment her servitude had ended for sure. Seeing Burnside asleep took away much of the mystique about her. For the first time Wendy saw her simply as another human being.

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Burnside usually included Wendy in her evening activities during their time in Europe. Wendy went with Burnside to the homes of several high-level education officials in the various countries. She had the chance to meet several influential European economists and see some of the most elegant settings Europe had to offer. On the nights there were no official invitations Wendy invariably could look forward to fancy hotel dinners with Burnside.

During the trip Wendy went with Burnside to only a few of her daytime meetings, the ones that Burnside thought would be useful for her. Burnside gave a several guest lectures about the crisis in the telecommunications industry in the US in each of the cities they visited, which Wendy always attended. Burnside was genuinely angry about investors' unnecessary losses in the US stock market. She spoke passionately about the analysts who, through misrepresentation of the facts, exhorted the public to buy bad stocks. She was angry at a system which no longer emphasized production and optimal use of resources, but instead accounting scams and insider trading. Burnside was irate over the tremendous injustice done to average investors.

In the same way that she saw Burnside in a different light when she was asleep, Wendy also saw a different side of Burnside when she gave speeches about the US stock market and small investors. Burnside was an idealist, and had a clear vision for the way things ought to be. She was an ardent defender of capitalism, but not of the way the system recently had developed in the US. She was able to express herself and her ideals with conviction and passion, winning over her cynical European audiences. Her voice was full of emotion and power. At the end of her lectures she was loudly applauded by her listeners, Wendy included.

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The trip was an important part of Wendy's overall transition back to normal life. For the first time since December Wendy faced the prospect of having a large amount of free time. While Burnside was in daytime meetings Wendy usually was on her own, free to do what she wanted. She spent most of her time in Europe sight-seeing, since the majority of the meetings were oriented around university and department concerns and were of no use to Wendy.

Burnside knew better than to just turn Wendy loose with no guidance. Familiar with London and the other capitols, the professor went over city maps in great detail, explaining to Wendy how to get around and what was most worth seeing. Every morning Wendy left the hotel with an itinerary of places she expected to see that day, carrying a cell phone in case she had any problems. Each morning Burnside handed Wendy the exact sum of money needed for the day's expected expenditures. Wendy was accountable for each Euro or Pound she spent. Burnside demanded to see receipts for everything at the end of each day, and tallied them up to make sure Wendy had spent her money on sight-seeing and eating instead of gambling. Burnside and Wendy both understood the importance of the professor's watch over Wendy's handling of money. In spite of her major in accounting, Wendy had to re-learn budgeting and spending what was in her pocket from scratch, as though she were a young teenager. Burnside gave the following advice, words that Wendy would remember for many years...

"Look at your time and the money I give you in terms of opportunity costs. To see one place you will give up the opportunity to see something else. Spend your money on one activity, and that money is forfeited for anything else. Appreciate the time, the money, and the opportunities you have. Your time, your opportunities, and your life come, they go, and once they're gone they aren't coming back."

Even with Burnside's careful monitoring of her expenditures, Wendy felt real freedom as she walked the streets of Europe. For the first time in over a year, she was able to move around with cash in her pockets and spend it on worthwhile things. She toured entire cities, saw museums, palaces, and local tourist spots. She saw Buckingham Palace, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Eiffel Tower. She toured ancient churches and strolled down old streets. She developed an appreciation for Europe and the history that gave rise to her own country, the United States.

Wherever she went, Wendy had the opportunity to gamble. Slot machines, lottery tickets, and video gaming were everywhere. Yet Wendy did not feel the urge to put her money in the machines. It was not just the threat of having unaccounted expenses to have to explain to Burnside. She genuinely did not feel the urge. She had regained control of her own life. For the first time in over a year she could truly enjoy herself and appreciate being alive. She appreciated being able to see new and exciting things. A deep happiness grew in her soul during the time she spent as a tourist in Europe. Wendy felt the world open up to her during those two weeks.

Burnside took a deep interest in Wendy's thoughts on her experiences as a tourist. At the end of each day they sat together at tea as Wendy opened up about her day's travels and the effect the sightseeing was having on her. Many of the places Wendy visited were places Burnside had not seen for many years. Some of the places had changed and Burnside was curious to hear Wendy's updates.

When they were in Berlin they went to a couple of nightclubs Burnside was familiar with. Burnside had brought a couple of her fetish outfits with her in anticipation of clubbing and lent one to Wendy. Burnside was slightly taller and more filled out than Wendy, but she could make do with one of Burnside's outfits that adjusted. The clubs were a lot like Burnside's parties, the difference being that Burnside could relax more now that she did not have to worry about 100 guests in her house.

Wendy had a great time, in spite of her strange situation. By the time they left Berlin Burnside no longer was bothering to book a separate room for Wendy, since Wendy was spending her nights in Burnside's room.

Berlin left special memories for Burnside and Wendy, but it was the final phase of their time together. Their relationship was drawing to a close. As soon as they returned from Europe, Wendy would either move back in with Amy or with her parents and would continue with her studies. Their impending separation heightened the feelings they had for each other at the moment.

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Wendy and Burnside knew that there had to be a final act of closure in their relationship, a final acknowledgement from both of them that their relationship truly had become one of two equal partners. On the last full day of their trip the two women toured Berlin together. It was a cool, overcast day, which suited Burnside. The professor never felt at ease in casual clothing, and the cooler weather allowed her to stay dressed in one of her business outfits. Wendy was dressed much more casually, but in her usual expensive stylish clothing.

After a day of sight-seeing Burnside and Wendy returned to their room. As soon as the door was shut, Wendy, with her recently discovered self-assurance, took Burnside's hands and looked the professor in the face.

"Dr. Burnside, before we left Chicago you told me that I was no longer your servant."

"Yes, Wendy, that's what I told you."

"... and that I would have as much say in our sex as you."

"Yes, Wendy. You don't feel that's true, that things are different?"

"No... I mean yes, things are different. But there's one thing you haven't done for me, and I... I think it's important."

"Yes. You're right. It's important. If you look in the side panel of my brown suitcase, you'll find what you need to punish me. Until you are finished, I'll submit to whatever you want me to do."

With that Burnside sank to her knees. Wendy's heart pounded as she dug through the suitcase. In the side panel there were several discipline items, including Burnside's infamous leather switch, a thick leather paddle, and bondage cuffs. Wendy picked up the switch, slashed it though the air, but then set it down, opting for the paddle instead. She left the cuffs alone. Burnside would have to exercise self-discipline during her punishment and would not be restrained. Carrying the paddle, Wendy returned to where Burnside was kneeling.

"Dr. Burnside, stand up, with your hands at your sides. Close your eyes."

Wendy undressed Burnside, throwing her clothes on the floor.

"Dr. Burnside, pick up your clothes, fold them, and kneel in front of me."

Burnside complied, perfectly docile, her demeanor totally different from any other time Wendy had ever known her.

As Burnside knelt in front of Wendy, naked and completely quiet, Wendy felt that her relationship with the professor, and her own life, had come full circle. She felt empowered, capable of doing anything, and capable of facing anything. She had changed. Punishing Burnside would be the final act, the final recognition by both of them that the Wendy leaving Burnside's house would not be the same Wendy who had entered in December. Even so, Burnside still had one more surprise in store for her former servant.

Wendy ran her fingers through Burnside's hair and caressed her face. Then she noticed that Burnside's eyes shined with arousal and anticipation.

"Dr. Burnside, stand up and put your hands on that table. Spread your feet shoulder-width apart and turn your feet in. Arch your back and make sure your bottom is spread and sticking out as far as you can get it."

Once Burnside was in position, Wendy slowly caressed her body, concentrating on her bottom. She ran her fingers under Burnside's breasts and stomach, and slipped her hand between her legs. Burnside was totally wet. Wendy slowly ran her fingers over Burnside's vagina. She then held her hand to Burnside's mouth.

"Dr. Burnside, I don't want this on my hand. Lick it off." Burnside slowly licked her own arousal off Wendy's hand.

With that Wendy patted Burnside's bottom with the paddle, and then struck Burnside lightly with it. She started lightly, slowly, sensuously, gradually increasing the severity of the swats. After every 10 swats or so, Wendy slowly passed her hand over Burnside's gradually reddening bottom. Burnside groaned and gasped with anticipation.

POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... POP!... The swats grew louder and more severe. Burnside groaned and moved her bottom out slightly, begging Wendy for ever-more severe swats. By the 50th swat Burnside's bottom was quite red and swollen. Wendy stopped for a moment to run her hand over the professor's bottom, enjoying the feel of the hot, swollen skin and the scent of Burnside's extreme arousal. Wendy moved forward to run her hand through Burnside's hair. Burnside threw her head back and gasped, her voice cracking. Burnside's expression was totally different from anything on her face Wendy had ever seen before. Wendy had seen her former mistress aroused many times, but never like this. Burnside's face reflected an arousal that went to the very depth of her soul.

Wendy kissed Burnside and resumed her position behind her former professor. She struck her target hard, over and over. Burnside's bottom became a deep red, punctuated with purple welts. Burnside gasped from the pain and pleasure of Wendy's paddle swats. Sweat poured down her back and tears began to roll down her face.

Finally Wendy stopped. She tore off her own clothes and grabbed Burnside's hand to lead her to the hotel bed. She forced Burnside's head between her legs and experienced the most intense orgasm of her life. She then forced the professor on her back and thrust her hand over her vagina, rubbing her thighs and teasing her clitoris. Burnside groaned and cried.

"Wendy! Wendy!"

Burnside rolled on top of Wendy and kissed her hard, grinding her pelvis into Wendy's. She thrust her hand between Wendy's legs, giving her the second orgasm out of several she would experience that night.

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Much later, Wendy lay on her back in the bed, with her head propped up on the pillow. Burnside lay cuddled next to her, gently tracing one of Wendy's nipples with her fingertips.

"You now know something about me that only one other person knows."

Wendy looked over to the professor, waiting for her to continue.

"I love to be punished. That's why I'm so tough on everyone else. It's really what I want for myself. The waiting, surrendering myself to someone I care for, then the pain, and the release. Only Dr. Halsey knows that about me. Now, you know it too."

Wendy drew Burnside's hand to her face and kissed it. Both Wendy and Burnside were infinitely sad at that moment. They had only a few more minutes left before they had to get up and get ready to leave for the US. Both knew it was the last time they would ever be in bed together.

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Halsey picked Burnside and Wendy up from the airport. Burnside was so glad to see him that she momentarily forgot about Wendy. It was painful for Wendy to see Burnside's face brighten so much when she saw her old lover. However, it had to be this way. Wendy knew full well that no matter who else she was with, it was Halsey who held Burnside's heart. They had been seeing each other for 20 years. Their relationship worked.

Wendy knew that there was no way that Burnside's affections would focus only on her. She would not be able to bear seeing Burnside with other people. With Halsey likely to spend the night and herself no longer in the role of being Burnside's servant, Wendy knew that it was time to leave Burnside's house. She had a life to return to. Finally, after all she had been through and suffered, Wendy was ready to go home.

On the way back Burnside realized that Wendy was struggling with how to handle her future. As soon as they returned to her house, she disposed of Halsey by asking him to help her start dinner, then walked out into her back yard with Wendy. Wendy stopped in front of Maynard's grave. When she saw the small stone with the name etched in it she turned to look at her professor.

"Maynard was my dog. I had him for 17 years. I don't think you ever saw him, but he died about a week after last Halloween."

"Do you think you might get another one?"

"I suppose... I don't know. Maybe next time around I'll try a cat. I don't know if I'm ready for another dog." Burnside paused, then turned to the real reason she and Wendy were out in the yard by themselves.

"When we were in Europe, there was gambling stuff everywhere. As far as I am aware you never touched it. Wendy, am I right about that?"

"I never wanted to gamble, Dr. Burnside. Not during the trip. I... I felt different. Like I was free or something."

"Well, that was why you came to me in November. So, do you think that you got what you wanted from staying with me?"

"I don't want to kill myself anymore. I don't feel out of control. I... think I'll be OK."

"The important thing is that you get back on your feet. I think my part is done. Now you need to learn to live on your own terms, and that will be hard. You can start as early as today. Spend some time with Amy. Have that photographer take some pictures of you. Get your drawings published. Study and graduate. You said it yourself, 'you'll be OK'."

Burnside looked at Maynard's stone, then back at Wendy. "I e-mailed Amy from Berlin, just before we left. She promised that she would keep her cell phone with her so that she could pick up when you called. She can pick you up whenever you are ready."

"Dr. Burnside, you know, there's something I didn't expect. I didn't think I'd miss you."

"Well, I'm afraid all things come to an end. It's just the way life is. I know that even with Dr. Halsey at some point there will be a last time." The professor sighed, and continued. "I didn't think I'd miss you, either."

With that Wendy went back to her room and dialed Amy. All of her clothes were still packed in her suitcase. All she had to clean out were her latest batch of pictures, her drawing materials, and her textbooks. Burnside gave her a box for the books. As soon as the books were in the box they heard Amy pull up in the driveway in Suzanne's minivan. Burnside carried Wendy's books while Wendy struggled with her suitcase. Once the things were loaded in the back, Burnside and Wendy shocked Amy by hugging each other hard before Wendy finally got into the minivan.

**Chapter 27 - The Final Summer**

At the end of May Burnside was in a rare upbeat mood when she returned from Europe with Wendy. She had met with the directors of several economics institutes and obtained what she wanted, scholarship slots for several of her students to study in different locations in France, Belgium, and Great Britain. Burnside already had picked the students. Now they were on their way to Europe, for stints ranging from six months to a year.

Burnside's way of operating was to make the scholarship arrangements first, then tell the student in question. There was always a backup student in her mind in case her first pick could not, or did not want to, go. Burnside hated making promises and raising people's hopes unless she was absolutely sure that she could deliver. The only thing that Burnside hated more than a person who made undelivered promises was one who cheated. Burnside was a good judge of character as far as picking promising students for the overseas scholarships program. Only once in her career did her first pick turn down one of Burnside's scholarship arrangements.

Two weeks after Burnside returned from Europe she sent an e-mail to Amy. The wording was typical.

See me in my office at 9:00 am tomorrow. Confirm receipt of this message. - Burnside -

Amy showed up at Burnside's office the next day. Typically, she did not know what to expect. Typically, Burnside got right to the point. She asked Amy to sit down, a good sign.

"Amy, you know that this department has student exchange programs with the EU. I was in Europe making arrangements for students from here to represent our economics department at institutes in Brussels, Paris, London, and Edinburgh. You are the pick for London. You're going to London for the next academic year."

Amy stared at Burnside in shock. She had known Burnside for almost two years, and yet the professor never seemed to run out of ways to confound her student. London. A year in London.

Burnside continued. "Sorry about not giving you prior warning, but I don't like promising things to students and then have them fall through. Anyhow here is your packet." Burnside handed several thick envelopes to Amy. "Do you have a passport?"

Amy shook her head.

"Well, you'll need to get one. Here's a passport application"

Amy still did not know how to respond. She never would have guessed that she was a candidate in the department's Europe exchange program. Burnside, looking at her stunned student, prodded her to speak.

"Well, Amy, do you have any thoughts about this?"

"I... I... don't know what to say. I'm... honored. I never guessed that... you wanted me."

"Well, I have my reasons. You'll make a good representative of this university and of the US in Europe. I can guarantee you will have a tough time over there. Over there they hate Americans and they think we are a bunch of idiots. The bad thing about it is that the Europeans are right. We are a bunch of idiots. We're a nation of fluff. You'll need to convince the people you come across otherwise."

"But why me?"

"Real simple. You can handle Europe. People there won't like you because of where you're from, and you will be able to overcome it. You'll acquire knowledge over there that you can bring back with you. Your work is excellent and you will be able to make a contribution here when you get home."

Burnside's sharp eyes scanned her student. She continued.

"Amy, you're smart. You have character. You proved to me that you can learn under any circumstances. You're tough. What I like about you is that you don't look tough, which makes people underestimate you. But you are. You survived the streets. You screwed up twice under me and got past it. You can make mistakes and recover from them. I'd rather have that than a student who never made a mistake and then falls flat on her face when hit with a real crisis for the first time. I've seen that and I can tell you it isn't pretty to watch."

"Get that passport application turned in ASAP. Read over your papers and write down your questions. Some of this stuff is complicated so it will fill up some time. Be back here tomorrow with everything filled out. You can e-mail me if you need any help with the paperwork."

With that Amy was dismissed.

At first Amy was elated. London! She was going to London!

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It was not until Amy saw Paul later that morning that she began to realize the huge sacrifices that she would have to make to go to Europe. They previously had agreed to meet for late morning breakfast and then spend the rest of the day together. Amy's mood suddenly went from elation to an overwhelming feeling of impending loss. She realized that she would go a year without seeing Paul. She would not see Suzanne, or Wendy, or Robert. She would be on her own, in a somewhat hostile environment. Suddenly she no longer wanted to go. The personal sacrifices would simply be too much.

Amy still had her oversized folders in her backpack. She sat down with Paul. He had no trouble figuring out that something was wrong with Amy; it was all over her face. He did not say anything until they had their breakfast ordered. The server left them with their coffee, giving them a few minutes before their meal would be ready.

"Amy, you might as well tell me what's up."

Amy sighed. She could not say anything. She simply pulled out the cover letter from her packet and handed it to Paul. At once she saw, in his face, his happiness at her upcoming opportunity, and then his concern that she would be gone over the next year.

"Well, congratulations. I'm jealous. Do you know how hard it is to get one of these scholarships?"

"They're competitive, I know that. I never guessed that I was a candidate. Burnside hit me with this when I went to her office this morning."

"So when do you leave?"

Amy thumbed through her papers. Finally she found one that described an orientation that started August 15.

"According to this I have to be there by the middle of August. I guess that has me leaving here sometime during the first or second week of August."

Paul studied Amy's face. She did not look happy at all.

Paul asked to see the folders. He thumbed through the ones that were open and was impressed by the range of material that Amy would be studying in just a year. There was no question this would be a rough year for her. She was not going to Europe for a vacation. As he reviewed the projects he suspected that she would be kept busy even between terms with reports, seminars, and extra coursework. There were seminars on the Continent she would be going to as well as ones around Great Britain.

Paul was excited for her. Upon getting back Amy would be able to get into any graduate program in the US, or even go back to Europe if she wanted. He looked up from the papers into her face. He did not like her expression.

"Amy, why the sad look? Don't you realize how lucky you are?"

"I don't know, Paul. I don't know if I want to go."

"What are you talking about? This is your big chance. Remember what I told you about Burnside last fall when she made you her student aide? That she had something in mind for you? This must have been it. She must have been thinking about sending you to Europe since last summer."

"I don't get it. Why me?"

"You'll never understand Burnside. She has her own logic. But I'm telling you that I had her figured out last fall. Now I'm sure she wanted to get you ready to send to Europe. Did she tell you why she picked you?"

"She said that she liked me because she thought I was tough. She said that I always got past my mistakes. She told me that I could handle Europe and the anti-American feelings over there."

"Well, she's right about the anti-American bit. You don't live in France as an American for a year without dealing with it on a daily basis. I've heard the Brits are almost as bad. I also think she's right about you being able to handle it and to get something out of this program."

The breakfast came and the conversation was interrupted while they ate. Amy thought about her future. Suddenly she realized her future was not in Europe. Her future was in Chicago with the people she loved. She had spent too much time alone. She needed Paul. She needed Suzanne, Robert, and Wendy. She needed to start her family and her life.

"Paul, this is not my big chance. This is nothing but a chance to spend a miserable year, by myself, 4,000 miles from here. My big chance is you. I'm not going anywhere. I'll turn the papers back to Burnside tomorrow. She can send someone else."

Paul was not surprised by Amy's announcement, but he opposed her decision. He knew Amy well enough to know that if he argued with her, she only would be more determined to stay. As painful as it would be for him, he had to force her to go.

"Amy, promise me you will think about this some more before saying anything to Burnside."

"I made my decision, Paul. I'm not going. I'm staying with you."

"Amy, just don't say anything to Burnside till tomorrow. Promise?"

"Alright, I won't say anything to her till tomorrow. I'll give it some more thought, but my decision is made."

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Paul made an excuse to break away from Amy. He had to think quickly to force her to change her mind. Paul was forced into making the most painful decision he would ever have to make, but ultimately his most important one.

Amy had to go to Europe. Paul realized that if she did not go, they would enjoy each other's company over the fall and into the winter. Amy would finish her BA and they would enjoy Christmas together. She would enter graduate school, probably in Chicago. They would have a lovely year with each other.

Paul realized that if Amy's life followed that route, she would be happy, for a while. They would be happy together, for a while. Then, over time, Amy would start to wonder, "What if?" What if she had gone to London? What if she had come back after spending her year abroad? What lost opportunities would there have been for her? Then, very slowly, the question of "What if?" would begin to poison her relationship with Paul. Paul saw that happen with his parents. He saw it happen with his sister and her boyfriend.

There was no point in talking to Amy now. She had made up her mind and only later would she regret her decision, when it was too late. Paul realized that there was only one way he could force Amy to change her mind. He would have to change his own life, to make himself unavailable to Amy over the next year. He would be gone, and that would force Amy to leave as well. Paul knew what he had to do.

He drove to a military recruiting office. He talked to both an Air Force Reserve recruiter and an Army Reserve recruiter. Paul decided to go with the Army Reserves. He signed a contract for a military intelligence position and training as a linguist. He would be in training over the next 11 months, starting in August. He negotiated payment of his college expenses through the GI bill. That resolved one problem in Paul's life, his increasing debt. The recruiter asked Paul if he wanted any time to think over his contract. Paul said no. He took a series of tests, then went downtown with the recruiter to have the contract finalized, swore in, and worked with the recruiter past closing time to set up his training dates. The recruiter was surprised. Paul was a quality recruit, and there was no doubt in his mind that he wanted this, and wanted it fast. By 7:00 p.m. Paul was locked into a commitment with the US Army for the next 6 years as an active reservist, 2 years as an inactive reservist. With a copy of his contract in his hand Paul went to see Amy at her apartment.

Amy's folders were on the dining room table, with several unopened envelopes full of forms. She planned to turn them back over to Burnside first thing tomorrow morning. The only reason that she had not given them back to Burnside in the afternoon was because she had promised Paul to think about it until tomorrow. Some other lucky student could go to London, not her.

As soon as she saw Paul at her door, Amy could tell that he had made a difficult decision. It was all over his face. She saw a folder in his hand. Immediately she knew that whatever was in that folder was what he needed to talk to her about. They threw their arms around each other in the doorway.

"Amy, let's sit down."

They sat together on Suzanne's living room sofa. Amy increasingly worried about the papers in Paul's hand. Obviously they were significant.

"Amy, I'm... not going to be here next year. I'm going to be in Missouri in the fall for Basic Training, then I'll be in California over the winter and spring. I'll be back in July, about the time you get back."

Paul handed Amy the folder. Amy gasped when she opened it and saw his military contract. Paul sighed, and continued.

"I'd been thinking about this anyway, because I'm worried about my student loans. It makes sense that I'll be in California... while you're in London." Paul could not look at Amy for a few moments. His eyes were moist and his hands shook.

Amy had to absorb the shock. She had been trying to get a hold of Paul all afternoon. So this is where he had been, getting his Army contract set up. She started to cry. She grabbed hold of him and he put his arms around her.

"Paul, no! Please!"

"It's done. I'm going to California. You're going to London. My contract is signed. I swore in today. I insisted on getting it done today so you couldn't talk me out of it. Now you have to go as well. Even if you don't... I won't be here. I'll be gone."

Tears ran down Paul's cheeks. Amy cried into his shoulder. He put his hand on her head and pressed his face into her hair. Amy was devastated. How could she be separated from him for a year? For a long time they sat on the sofa, crying and not saying anything.

Finally Paul managed to speak again.

"Amy, if you don't go to London, later you'll always wish you had. I can't have that hanging over my head. I can't be the reason you didn't reach your full potential. I'd rather you not see me again than for you to wreck your career because you love me. This is your big chance. You can't blow it because of me. And it's not like I'm making such a big sacrifice in my own career to get out of Chicago for a year. I need to get some money from somewhere or I'll have the collection agencies down my throat."

Slowly Amy began to realize that Paul was right. He was looking out for himself as well as for her. She had been somewhat aware of his financial problems. By now she easily had the money necessary to pay his college expenses, but she also knew that there was no way he would accept an offer from her to help him financially. Now he had found his own way to solve his financial situation. Amy respected him for that. Whatever else might happen in their futures, Amy had the assurance that Paul would never try to live off her.

For a long time Paul and Amy sat quietly, holding on to each other. Finally they calmed down enough to deal with their immediate problem, filling out Amy's scholarship packet. Paul got a butter knife out of the kitchen, held it to the flap of one of Amy's envelopes with paperwork, and cut it open. He passed the open envelope to Amy and cut open the others. With the envelopes opened Amy now was committed. She was going to London, no matter what. Paul felt a huge sense of relief, mixed with huge sadness, as he watched Amy pull the papers out of the first envelope he had cut open for her. He passed her a pen.

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The next day Amy was in Burnside's office. For some reason she felt the urge to confide her doubts with her professor, even though the paperwork was filled out and back in Burnside's file cabinet. Amy told Burnside about her doubts, the fact she initially decided not to go, and the fact that Paul had forced her to change her mind by joining the Army Reserves. Burnside looked at Amy intently and listened with interest, but not with her usual fierce expression. She had suspected that Amy would have a hard time accepting the offer because of Paul.

Burnside thought about Amy's boyfriend. He loved Amy enough to worry about what was good for her. He loved her enough to sacrifice a year from his own life to assure that Amy could reach her full potential. Burnside already had a favorable opinion of Paul prior to this morning. For a political science student he was respectable, even if he was committed to majoring in a field of fluff. Now Burnside saw Paul's true inner strength. He really would do anything for Amy, including let her go. Burnside hoped that the relationship between Paul and Amy could weather this year of separation. If Paul and Amy could get back together after a year of separate experiences, their relationship would something special indeed.

Burnside was relieved that it was Paul, not Amy, who settled the situation. Amy would be forced to complete her year in Britain, because until next July, she would not have Paul to go back to. More importantly, Amy had faced and overcome her doubts here, instead of confronting them in London. Amy truly was ready to go.

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Wendy spent June and July repairing the relationship with her parents. At first her father seemed more willing to treat her normally than her mother. Wendy's mother still was convinced that the best thing for Wendy would be for her to return to Taipei and find a husband through her uncle. To the surprise of both Wendy and her mother, Wendy's father disagreed. Her father insisted that Wendy needed to begin training to take over the family business immediately. Wendy was shocked when, within a week of her return from Europe, her father asked her to accompany him to work. He opened his books to her, tried to figure out what Wendy already had picked up in her classes, and began to explain the day-to-day operations of his business transactions.

Wendy spent 14-hour days with her father throughout the first half of the summer. They worked together seven days per week as Wendy's knowledge of business quickly surpassed anything she could have picked up in her classes. There was urgency in her father's behavior as her pushed her to learn what she would need to know to take over. There was no hint of his reluctance to have a woman run his business, no comments about women's incompetence about money. There was no mention of Wendy's foray into gambling the previous year.

What Wendy did not know was that her father had visited her great grandmother's fortune teller while she was in Europe. The fortune teller told Wendy's father that an unnamed disaster was about to strike down the family.

Wendy finally broke away from her father on the last day of June to spend an afternoon with Amy. Wendy's first task was to turn in the final set of her comic strip drawings to Suzanne for publication. After having lunch with Suzanne and Robert they went to Robert's office to get Wendy's jewelry back. With her pendent around her neck and her ring and earrings back on, Wendy knew that her crisis had passed. Amy was happy to sign the paperwork ending her power of attorney arrangement over Wendy's finances. Wendy looked with surprise at her balance when Amy handed her checkbook back. Amy had done an excellent job in managing the paychecks from Wendy's book and her art. "I need to talk to my father to see what he thinks I should do with this." There was no indication that Wendy would squander her latest income. She truly had recovered from her gambling addiction enough that she could now control her urges.

After lunch, Amy and Wendy went for a walk along the lakeshore downtown . Amy noticed how much Wendy had changed from last year as they walked next to the shore, enjoying the breeze from the water. Wendy seemed happy, but also driven and determined. She had changed, and with Amy headed to Europe, they would be going their separate ways. Both Wendy and Amy felt a sense of regret that the paths of their lives would soon separate them, but each held a special place in her heart and her memories for the other. They stopped on the sidewalk in a spot where they had a rail to lean on, and for a long time looked out over the lake and the boats clustered along the shore. Wendy finally spoke, her voice full of emotion.

"I want to thank you for everything you've done for me. I suppose I've been a difficult friend to you. I haven't done anything to make your life easier, I'm afraid."

"You're forgetting about all the help you gave me with my math. I couldn't have gotten as far as I did without you helping me. You were there for me more than you realize." Amy paused, searching for the right words to express her feelings towards Wendy. Finally she added, "Maybe you didn't make my life any easier, but you've made my life much fuller, and that's what matters."

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Two weeks later Wendy took another break from her father and his business tutoring to spend a day with Amy and Suzanne for their final photo shoot together. Suzanne had three cameras with her. Suzanne knew of a small isolated beach in southern Wisconsin to do a photo shoot next to Lake Michigan. Amy and Wendy undressed and ran though the shallow water together. They laughed and splashed at each other like small children. They hugged each other while standing on a rock. A short distance away there was an abandoned dock, and the two models spent a long time walking up and down the dock and sitting together, dipping their toes in the water. After nearly three hours of shooting in the warm sunlight, they went back to the isolated cove for lunch. Suzanne had brought a blanket and a picnic basket. Neither Amy nor Wendy had a desire to get dressed; they were enjoying the feel of the warm sun on their bodies too much. However, Wendy was not ready to eat. She had a surprise for Suzanne.

"Suzanne, I want you to take off your clothes."

"What?"

"I want your clothes off and I want you to put film in your cameras for me. It's your turn to pose."

Suzanne got undressed. She was not modest about her body, but she never spent time undressed outside. Her skin was white, contrasting with Amy's deep tan and Wendy's natural brown color. Suzanne loaded film in her cameras, handed them to Wendy, and stepped towards the water. She stood at the water-line, quietly contemplating the lake and the boats way off in the distance. Wendy handed two of the cameras to Amy, and started photographing Suzanne with the camera she still had in her hands. Amy realized that Wendy had a clear idea of what she wanted from the photos.

"Suzanne, kneel."

Surprised at the commanding tone in Wendy's voice, Suzanne sank to her knees on the sand. Wendy got on one knee to bring the camera even with Suzanne's face. Suddenly Amy put one of the cameras in her hand to her own face and started taking pictures of Wendy photographing Suzanne. The contrast between Wendy's dark skin and Suzanne's white skin would make the picture special, Amy thought. Wendy spoke again.

"OK, Suzanne, lie flat on your stomach. I want you to look out at the water, then back to me."

Suzanne complied, still a bit disoriented at the sudden role-reversal between herself and Wendy. Wendy captured the uncertainty in Suzanne's eyes. Suzanne then walked into the water to rinse off the sand, and Wendy photographed her as she came out. Wendy passed the camera back to Amy to reload while Suzanne dried off. Wendy then asked Suzanne to walk out to the dock. Suzanne complied as Wendy took several pictures standing on the end looking over the water.

They ate a quiet, peaceful lunch. None of them had any desire to get dressed. Suzanne stood up and took a picture of Amy and Wendy on the blanket, then Amy asked for the camera and took one of Suzanne and Wendy. It was with huge sadness that the three women folded up the blanket, for they realized this was it, the final photo shoot.

Before they got dressed and left, Suzanne asked her models to pose one last time on the beach. Their eyes were full of emotion and sadness. Amy and Wendy threw their arms around each other and Suzanne snapped the picture. Then Amy and Wendy, holding hands, separated a little and turned to face Suzanne. All of their emotion came out in their expressions. They were not crying, but the deep sadness of their impending separation was clearly visible in their faces. Suzanne snapped three more pictures and ran out of film. That was the end. Amy and Wendy had finished posing for Suzanne for the last time.

The week before Amy was due to leave for London, Wendy's family was hit with the crisis foreseen by her father's fortune teller, a crisis that took her to Taiwan and out of Amy's life for good. Wendy's oldest cousin had bought a new sports car and started racing it along the coast south of Taipei. While driving with Wendy's other cousin he miscalculated a curve and smashed straight into a truck. Wendy was now the only member of her family's younger generation still alive to take over both the Taiwan and US parts of the business. Her uncle and father discussed what to do with Wendy and their operations. Finally Wendy herself decided to go to Taiwan and take over from her uncle. After talking to him and her father, she realized that her uncle was so distraught over the loss of his sons he seemed not to be able to think straight. Wendy ended up going back to Taiwan as her mother wanted, but on her own terms. There was no arranged marriage waiting for her. She immediately took over from her uncle until he could recover from the loss of her cousins. She worked 16 hours per day, seven days per week, as she learned what she needed to do to handle the Asian portion of her family's operations. Her drawing came to an abrupt stop; she no longer had time to do anything other than work and sleep.

Wendy never finished her degree. It would be many years before she would be able to return to the US. She never saw Amy or Suzanne again.

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Amy's impending departure and the loss of Wendy as her model forced Suzanne to reconsider her own life. It no longer made any sense for her to keep an apartment near the university. She was having to commute to both her studio and her publishing house and was getting tired of dealing with Chicago traffic. The apartment had too many memories anyway and Suzanne had no desire to stay in it after Amy left. She would miss Amy tremendously and could not bear the thought of looking at her empty room.

Suzanne decided that it was time for Robert and her to get married. She wanted to do it so that Amy could be her maid-of-honor, which meant the wedding would have to take place sometime before the second week of August. Just after the final photo-shoot with Wendy and Amy, Suzanne, with her heart pounding, slipped Robert's old wedding ring out of his jewelry box to measure his ring size for a new one. She took it to a jeweler and had a new one made, a simple gold band, and a matching one for herself. That night she slipped the old wedding ring back in its box. She nerved herself for the next task in her life, proposing to Robert.

Two nights later, on a hot summer's evening, Suzanne and Robert walked along the shore close to his office. Suzanne was wearing a short skirt due to the heat. The change made her look strange to Robert, who was used to seeing his girlfriend in her loose ankle-length skirts. It was too hot, however, for Suzanne's usual attire. With this heat even Suzanne was forced to dress for the weather.

She was trying to figure out how to begin. Finally she said. "Robert, I have something to tell you. A couple of days ago I borrowed your old wedding ring to get your ring measurements for a new one. I put it back without you knowing. But I have a set of wedding rings in my pocket."

Robert paused. Wedding rings. In Suzanne's pocket. He looked at Suzanne. That was the strangest proposal he had ever heard, but he could tell that Suzanne was very nervous. He took her hands and looked into her eyes. He had wanted to propose to her for a while. She beat him to it.

"Suzanne, I would be very happy to put my ring on... and to see yours on your finger as well."

Suzanne looked at Robert happily but with a lot of anxiety. Her hands shook as she dug into her skirt pocket to get the rings out. She put Robert's ring on him, then he took hers and put it on her finger. They threw their arms around each other, on a busy sidewalk in plain view of one of the busiest city streets in the US.

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They were married only four days before Amy had to leave for London. Neither Robert nor Suzanne had the sort of personality to tolerate a large elaborate wedding, even though they had the money for it. In the end only the people closest to Robert and Suzanne were invited, a total of about 40. The staff from Robert's office were there, as were Suzanne's closest friends from the art department and a couple of physical therapists. Her editor was present. Suzanne's stepmother also was there. Paul took the pictures. The only important person from Suzanne's life missing from her wedding was Wendy; she already had left for Taiwan. Suzanne gladly gave up her maiden name. She did not even want it as part of her name at all after she married. She wanted nothing to associate her with her father. For the rest of her life she would be Suzanne Johnson.

Amy was Suzanne's maid of honor. They married in the same church that Amy's parents were married in, many years ago when Robert, still in law school, had been best man for Amy's father. The ceremony was simple, to the point, and full of emotion. Robert's law partner, the one who had defended Amy in court over two years ago, caught the bouquet.

The wedding party was small enough that the entire group could fit in Robert's apartment for the reception. The only thing Robert did spend money on was top quality food and drinks for his guests. The mix of law firm employees and art students was a strange one, but made for an interesting evening. Amy saw one thing that evening that shocked her. A hippyish male art professor of Suzanne spent the entire evening talking to Robert's law partner, the sharp-witted female attorney. They seemed to be attracted to each other, something confirmed to Amy when they slipped out together without saying goodbye to anyone other than Robert. Amy shook her head. I guess opposites do attract, she thought to herself.

The wedding did earn a footnote in the Chicago celebrity pages. Suzanne was just famous enough that the art press was interested in the fact that she had married, to the point that she provided reporters with a couple of Paul's pictures of the wedding for publication. The art critics speculated about Suzanne's future, now that she was the wife of a lawyer. Suzanne's editor assured the press that her work continued and discussed a couple of her recently finished projects.

Robert would continue to have his law practice and be successful in his own field, but as his wife's career took off, over time he had to get used to being known as, and being referred to as, "Suzanne's husband".

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The day after the wedding the movers came to take Suzanne's furniture to Robert's apartment and Amy's things back into storage with her father's furniture. Their apartment was emptied in a few hours. Amy went back to Robert's apartment with Suzanne to oversee the delivery of her furniture. Robert had given Suzanne to go-ahead to re-arrange the apartment as she saw fit, asking only that she not touch his books or anything in the room he used as an office. Suzanne moved her furniture in and banished some of Robert's pieces to the storage facility where Amy had her things and her father's furniture. Amy agreed that the apartment looked considerably nicer with Suzanne's furniture. She had good taste in both furniture and decorating. Robert had no taste at all, good or bad, so he simply deferred to what Suzanne wanted.

Suzanne did not touch Tricia's things, but Robert had packed up her clothes and most of her memorabilia before the wedding, leaving only a couple of pictures in his office. He finally was over her. Tricia's infamous strap and cuffs went into one of the boxes with her other belongings. There was no way that strap would ever be used on Suzanne's bottom while she was married to Robert.

Paul and Amy then went back to her empty apartment to clean up and collect the few things overlooked by the movers. Amy walked through the rooms one last time, closed the door to each one, and sadly walked out the front door. She was scared about not being able to live with Suzanne upon coming back from London.

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Paul and Amy stayed the next two nights with Robert and Suzanne. Amy and Paul slept in the guest bedroom, the same room Amy had slept when she first stayed with Robert nearly three years ago. Amy was glad that in this room at least, Suzanne had not objected to the furniture and had left everything in place. The memories were still there, the memories of the month she spent in this room pulling herself out of the abyss she had fallen into with Courtney. As they lay in her bed Amy tried to explain to Paul her time at Robert's apartment and what it meant to just live in peace for a few weeks after the turmoil she had just endured.

The day before her departure Amy asked Paul to take her back to her father's grave. Paul left her alone for a while as Amy contemplated what had happened between herself and her father. She could not undo what she had done. She could not bring him back. She could not cancel out the pain that she had caused him during the final months of his life. She could, however, live her life to the fullest, and be what every parent should want for their child, a happy, successful person. Amy finally was ready to forgive herself for her father's death. If she could make a success out of herself, he would live on through her.

**Chapter 28 - Epilogue**

Ruth Burnside did not return to her classes in the fall. Being one of the first voices against the abuses being committed in the stock market, several Illinois state legislators decided to nominate her to lead a commission studying the effects of the recent corporate scandals on state pension and school funds. Burnside, in her new role, was vicious to anyone who tried to avoid telling her the truth. CEO's were afraid of the former professor and her ability to remember their words and twist confessions out of them. Burnside was noticed in Washington, and before long started testifying before Congress. The Illinois congressional delegation asked her to lead several national-level investigations. Finally, her position became permanent and she answered directly to Congress. In London, Amy felt real pride when she read the following article:

Illinois securities investigator to head SEC probes.

Controversial Illinois securities investigator, Dr. Ruth Burnside, will lead a series of probes into alleged insider trading at the national level. The former Chicago economics professor was appointed to her current position over the objections of several major corporations. Dr. Burnside, nicknamed 'Ruthless' Burnside, is credited with the recovery of $ 65 million for Illinois pension funds from several current and former CEO's. She has been widely praised for her meticulous investigations and knowledge of the Internet. However, she also has drawn criticism for her confrontational tactics. 'Yes, I confront' said the former professor in a recent interview. 'I go for the throat. I don't have time to deal with people's bull\*\*\*\* and lies. I want the truth, and I want it now. And if they can't remember, well, I make them remember. That's the point of investigating first and doing your homework.' Several Illinois representatives expressed their hope that the Dr. Burnside can accomplish the same results at the national level that she accomplished in Illinois...

Burnside's enemies researched her past, which turned out to be quite scandalous. They allowed rumors about her to circulate on the Hill, hoping to turn her into an embarrassment for the congressmen who had nominated her and voted for her. Finally a couple of House members, on behalf of their corporate backers, raised the issue of Burnside's moral character in committee. There were dark stories of parties in Chicago and multiple lovers, men and women. Burnside, in front of 30 House members and several reporters, momentarily shocked Washington by doing something unheard of, telling the truth. Glaring at her critics with her typical cold stare she said...

"You are asking me about my morality, and you mean my sexual morality to be specific. If you believe my sex life is relevant to the investigations I am conducting, Mr. Representative, then I will be happy to answer. Let's get the issue on the table, consider it, and move on."

Burnside then surprised the committee by pulling out her stack of underground magazines. She passed them to a congressional staff member who turned them over to the committee.

"I'm giving you some of my writings on my sexual preferences. There's a couple of stories, and the other pieces are opinion columns. I tabbed the articles for you. It doesn't seem to me that your quote, investigation, unquote, turned these up, even though they're publications. I believe that some of your questions will be answered in these articles. It'll save me from having to talk so much."

The committee clearly was caught off-guard. They had expected to slowly pick Burnside apart, to listen to her denials and then refute them with overwhelming evidence. Instead, Burnside had taken the offensive. She smiled internally as she contemplated the stacks of folders her critics had in front of them, all evidence against her, so it seemed. Burnside's next statement rendered most of that material useless.

"If I may continue, I have three issues in my life which have been the source of the rumors about me. First, I love sex. I have had many lovers, including women. I don't deny that. Second, I am into fetish. I wear leather outfits at costume parties and beat people's asses. I don't deny that. Third, I bore an illegitimate child, and gave her up for adoption. It is because of my love of sex and a moment of personal irresponsibility that I became pregnant, while on active duty in the Navy. I do not know who my child's father was, because I had three lovers at the time. I paid for my mistake by having a daughter I could not keep. I don't deny that. I accepted responsibility for my actions, and did what I felt was best for myself and the child at the time."

"Now, Mr. Representative, if you wish to explore my sexual life further, I would ask you to first explain how what I do with my sexual partners influences economic policy. If I understand how my personal life relates to the corporate abuses I am investigating, I will be glad to answer any questions you chose to ask."

With that Burnside's eyes bore into her critic. The cameras flashed at both her and the panel.

"Ms. Burnside! I am asking the questions here, not you!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Representative. I have a doctorate. I would appreciate it if you'd refer to me by my proper title. Again I ask you to explain to me, and to the public please, why you need this information on my personal life, and then I will answer... " she concluded with a cold, sarcastic smile "... in all the detail you want."

The Representative suddenly began to sweat. "Uh... well, Dr. Burnside, I am trying to determine whether you have the moral character to question others. I think that is as good a reason as any... "

"I have the moral character to have tried to tell people the truth about what was happening with the IPO's. I was right, and had anyone listened, a lot of investors would still have their money. I had the moral character not to care about my popularity when I saw what was going to happen to telecommunications. People did not like me because I told the truth as I saw it, but subsequent events proved me right. That is how I got here in the first place. As for my personal life, I have the moral character to not be ashamed of anything I have done. Most of it's there in those magazines. Read it, and then tell me if I've done anything other than exercise my freedom as an American citizen."

Burnside's answers made headlines for a day. There was no further point in dredging up the sorted details of her life. She exposed them herself and was somewhat "in your face" about her presumed moral shortcomings. She was perfectly willing to answer any question posed to her, as long as the questioner could explain why her sex life was relevant. The problem for Burnside's critics was that her sexual life was not relevant to anything, and the public knew it. Had she attempted to hide anything, her critics could have taken her down in a heartbeat. However, there was no point investigating facts that Burnside herself was quite open about. She could not be intimidated or blackmailed.

Burnside kept her job in Washington, although from that point forward cartoonists usually portrayed her in black, wielding a whip. She became a rogue hero for thousands of investors who had lost their money in the recent stock crashes. She also became a convenient political lighting rod and lurched from fight to fight and controversy to controversy, loving every minute of it.

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A year went by. Amy and Paul had rough lives for different reasons.

Paul 's time in the Army started with nine very unpleasant weeks in the late summer heat of central Missouri, being shouted at by drill sergeants who had barely finished high school. In Basic Training Paul had a rude shock. He had to accept the fact that no matter how smart he was in college and in his outside world, in the Army he was no better than anyone else. He had to learn to march, to shoot, to crawl, and to polish floors from scratch. His college education was of no use to him, other than getting him a higher rank and thus more visibility with the drill sergeants, something he did not want at that point in his life.

After Basic Training Paul studied communications and then went to Monterey, California, to study Spanish. He enjoyed Monterey. Paul had expected that his entire year would be difficult, but once Basic Training was out of the way, his day-to-day existence became quite pleasant. On his free weekends he occasionally rented a car and drove along the California Coast, enjoying the spectacular scenery and rocky beaches.

Amy studied continuously in London. She had to give up exercising and put on 15 pounds during her year there. She continuously had to prove herself to her European classmates and professors. Because they looked down upon her for being an American, Amy was forced to be the best and the most diligent in her classes to earn the respect of the others. In the end she managed to impress everyone she came across. She acquired a long list of contacts and references, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the European economic situation. Her knowledge gave her the topics and much of the research she later used to write both her Master's thesis and dissertation in the years to come. She saw very little of Europe, other than the places she went to attend seminars. Burnside had been right in telling her this would not be a fun trip.

It would have been nice to say that Amy and Paul were loyal to their relationship during their time apart, but that was not true for either of them. They were two young, lonely people with healthy bodies that rebelled against their isolation.

In London Amy had two brief relationships. In the end, however, she was not attracted to British men because they all smoked. When in high school Amy herself had smoked, but was forced to quit when she and Courtney ran out of money in Detroit. Like many ex-smokers, she was sensitive to cigarette smoke and it made her sick. Kissing someone with cigarette smoke on his breath disgusted Amy. She could not handle the smell of tobacco on her lovers, and was alone when her time in London ended.

Paul's infidelity was more serious. He did not expect to be tempted while in the Army. However, in Monterey there was a short, attractive Hispanic private with the last name Padilla, from the nearby town of Salinas. Padilla was just out of high school and had enlisted in the Regular Army. She had her pick of the guys in Monterey, but she liked Paul because he was different from the others. Paul was attracted to her immediately. They went out into Monterey and to Padilla's home in Salinas, where Paul met her family and ate Mexican food. Padilla's long black hair and dark body fascinated him. For a long time he forgot all about Amy, except to answer her letters. About three months before his time in Monterey ended, he came very close to writing Amy to tell her that their relationship had ended. He decided to wait, and ultimately was very glad he did.

Padilla finished her language studies and was attached to a unit in Germany. Now Paul had two long-distance relationships he was trying to maintain. However, with both Amy and Padilla at a distance, Paul could look at them clearly and realized that it was Amy who was in his future, not Padilla. Amy was just about to come back, whereas Padilla had just left. Paul's second thoughts about Padilla were confirmed only a month after she left for Germany, when she wrote him a "Dear John" letter. The letter did not upset Paul at all. It was a huge relief to him that the issue of Amy and Padilla was settled.

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Paul made it back to Pennsylvania only a day before Amy got back to Chicago. He drove overnight to be at O'Hare in time to see her get off the plane, not even having time to change out of his uniform. He met up with Robert and a very-pregnant Suzanne at the airport.

When Amy got off the plane she was not looking her best. She was out of shape from not having worked out, pale from having spent most of the past year indoors, and tired from the flight. Paul on the other hand, looked great in his uniform and from having been on active duty for a year. They embraced, but Paul's surprise at Amy's appearance and Amy's disorientation at seeing Paul in a uniform indicated that there were difficult times ahead for them. They realized that they had become strangers.

Amy temporarily stayed with Robert and Suzanne, but ultimately had to find a place closer to the university, as did Paul. It would have seemed logical that Amy and Paul would live together, but they decided not to. They had to start their relationship from scratch and get to know each other all over again. Paul finally moved in with another Reservist from his unit and Amy rented her own apartment with some of her modeling money.

Paul and Amy did not realize how difficult getting back together would be. At the beginning they felt very awkward around each other. They had spent a year apart, experiencing totally different things in life. Their lives had changed. The old landmarks in their lives were gone and they had to establish new ones. They even decided to put off having sex, until they could re-establish the other parts of their relationship.

Over time Paul and Amy spent more and more time with each other and gradually the old feelings came back. It was a slow process, but they were determined to put the past year behind them and make their relationship work, if at all possible. They began by returning to the university gym. Amy was in horrible physical shape in comparison with how she had been a year ago. Like her relationship with Paul, she had to restore her workout routine from scratch. She felt intimidated by Paul's fitness and her own flabbiness. However, Paul was patient with her in the gym and gradually Amy began to tone her body again. They went out to different campus activities and foreign movies. Amy was able to get Paul caught up on events in Europe.

Amy's feelings towards Paul finally recovered when she went through reverse culture shock about two months after getting back. Paul's experience in France came in handy to help him understand what Amy was going through. When Amy wanted to talk about Britain, he was there to listen, and could make comparisons with his time in France. Paul was the only person who understood Amy at that point in her life, since neither Robert nor Suzanne had lived abroad.

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Amy and Paul spent Thanksgiving apart, mostly because Amy needed to spend time with Suzanne. Amy went to Robert and Suzanne's apartment for Thanksgiving dinner while Paul went back to Pennsylvania. When dinner was over Robert had to take off to his office and meet up with his two partners. The appeal for his huge liability case was looming, a case which had captured national attention and had turned into a major class-action litigation battle.

Robert's absence gave Amy and Suzanne the chance to spend some badly needed time together. It was the first chance that Amy had to talk at length to her since coming back. Suzanne took a couple of portraits of Amy and they talked about Amy modeling again once she finished getting back into shape. Suzanne then excused herself to dig out the collections of pictures she had taken with new models over the past year to show Amy. Momentarily alone, Amy looked out the dining room window.

Suddenly Suzanne's baby began to protest having been put down in his crib. Amy picked up the newest member of the Johnson family and walked back to the window. As she looked into the child's face she thought about her life's strange journey, and how different she was from whom she had been the first day she stood at this window, now almost four years ago.

Suzanne came back out with a couple of portfolios. She saw Amy holding her son, and joined her friend at the window. For a long time they stood together in silence, neither wanting to be the first to speak. They looked at the baby asleep in Amy's arms, content to share this quiet moment with each other.

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By Christmas vacation Amy and Paul finally had re-established the love and passion they had felt for each other before Amy went to London and Paul went in the Army. The final step was for each of them to come clean about the relationships they had the year they were apart. Somehow each was comforted that the other had been unfaithful, since they both had been struggling with guilt over their outside relationships. Amy and Paul each had faults and weaknesses, but now they could admit that about themselves and concentrate on what was really important. What mattered was that they could put their pasts behind them and look forward to the future with each other.

The fall semester ended. Only one more to go, and then they would graduate, both of them in May.

Amy went to Paul's house for Christmas. She had not seen his family for a year and a half. There were changes in the household, all of which she was glad to see. The most important change Amy noticed was in Paul's sister Julie. She now was over half-way through the degree she needed to get a teaching certificate. Besides her studies, Julie had a part-time job at a day-care center. Amy had changed Julie's life, first by motivating her to study, then by forcing Paul to help her that one critical semester with the money from the clothing shoot. At her young age Amy had the satisfaction of having influenced at least one person's life in a very positive way.

After Christmas dinner Julie wanted Amy to pose for a picture with Paul's nephew, who now was almost six. Then Paul took a picture of Amy and Julie together. Amy realized that she no longer was alone in the world. She had lost her family, but eventually would become part of another. She had a future with Paul and would enjoy the companionship of likable in-laws. Amy knew that eventually she and Paul would have children of their own, although that would not be for a while. Graduate school lay ahead for both of them, as did the beginnings of their careers and spending a lot of time doing fun things together.

Later in the afternoon Paul and Amy walked through his desolate town, holding hands. It was a bleak overcast day in a bleak empty town, yet her surroundings did not depress Amy in the least. She was immensely happy. She knew that a pleasant, fulfilling life lay ahead of her. Amy felt a deep satisfaction that her wanderings were far from over, and that she alone would determine where those wanderings would take her.