

Spring, 1987

Amy and Bria Meet

The competitive season had ended and Amy wanted to party, and not to ski right away again for a while. Her first year everyone had reassured her didn't matter, it was simply a matter of adjusting. But she hadn't fared well, certainly not to her standards. She'd crashed in almost a third of her starts, and her best finish was twenty-third. She was disappointed to say the least.

Poppy got tickets to see some Grateful Dead concerts and offered Amy some for the Worcester shows. The only catch was catching up with her on the road. They devised a plan whereby Amy would take a train to New York, then another out to Hoboken, New Jersey, where they would pick her up on their way from Philadelphia to Worcester.

On April Fool's Day she took the ferry from Burlington to Plattsburgh, New York, then a taxi to the train. She settled into her seat and read a random fashion magazine that she bought at the station. By the time she reached Albany, she'd read most of it.

A young woman sat down across from her. Amy envied her instantly. She had a refined face with just a touch of tastefully applied makeup, perfectly smooth brunette hair, tied back into a pony tail that fell together into a slight outward swoop. She wore a cream colored sweater over a dark red blouse, with a black skirt that fell to just above the knee. Later, Amy accidentally noticed she was wearing thigh high stockings on her shapely legs that ended in a pair of shoes that cost as much as Amy's ski boots. *But she can't be much older than me*, she thought. *She's like a model: Perfect face, perfect body, perfect hair,*

*perfect makeup and perfect clothes. I'll never be that pretty.*

Bria saw a young woman with long blond hair pouring from beneath a funky hat made of dark brown corduroy, shaped like something a break dancer from the seventies would wear, lopsided, with a small visor and pom-pom. As Bria sat down, she noticed that the girl wore a jeans jacket over a simple yellow Asian cotton top and a practical bra, light brown corduroy pants and those suede jester boots with laces. Bria envied her instantly. *One of those girls who's athletic and is pretty without taking any time to be pretty. Gets out of bed looking as good as she did when she got in. Super cutie outdoor hippie chick. It doesn't matter what she wears, Bria thought, men want her because she's pretty and low maintenance. I'll never be that pretty.*

“Hi.”

“Hi.”

“Going all the way into the city?”

“Yeah. Then a PATH train out to New Jersey.”

“What's there?”

“My friends are picking me up, and then we're driving to Massachusetts to see some shows.”

*Shows?* Bria thought. “The Dead?” she asked.

“How did you guess?” Amy was amazed.

“Well, you said show instead of concert, and you used the plural. Nobody except Deadheads go to multiple concerts, er, shows.”

“Yeah, I guess that's right. I've only seen them twice, but it did happen to be two nights in a row. But how did you know that, like, in general? You don't exactly strike me as a Deadhead. Actually I thought

you were like a model or something.”

“My ex-boyfriend is a Deadhead.”

Amy knew better than to go there. “So you’re going into New York?”

“Yes. I’m meeting a friend, a woman who was actually my teacher a couple semesters back, to hang out in the city for a couple nights. Then I’ll have Sunday dinner with my parents in Connecticut, then go back to Northampton.”

“Smith?”

“Yeah, how did you know that?”

“Are there any other schools in Northampton?”

“Well, no, I guess not, but there are a lot in the area.”

“Yeah, zoo-Mass, Hampshire, I know, I looked at those some, too.”

“Where are you now?”

“Groovy – UV.”

“And is it groovy?”

Amy laughed. “Very groovy.”

There was a brief silence. Bria thought about how ungroovy her life was. Not that she wanted to get on the tour bus, she just wanted to have friends and do fun stuff. She blamed Eric for being too convenient and herself for not having kept a greater distance earlier.

Amy again marveled at how sophisticated Bria looked. Amy looked her over again and while she felt she was prying, she couldn’t resist blurting out the question: “How old are you?”

Bria recoiled slightly. She didn’t mind the question, but the

abrupt delivery put her off. “Uh,” she shook her head slightly, “I’m twenty-one.”

“I just turned twenty last month.” She paused, feeling envy again. “I’m sorry, I was just thinking about not just how beautiful you are, but also how put together you seem and just how much more mature you look, y’know, compared to me. Where did you grow up?”

“Greenwich, Connecticut.”

Amy had heard of it. People from Greenwich owned second homes in Vail. Many Vail residents couldn’t afford to buy a first home there. “Private school?”

“Kent.”

“Uh-huh.” Amy had heard of that too. “Wow, you’re like a real live preppy!” She didn’t mean anything mean by it, but it irritated Bria a little. But Bria let it go because the compliment she had already been paid far outweighed anything negative that Amy could have meant.

“Where’d you grow up?”

“Vail.”

“The ski town?”

“Yeah. I’m a ski racer.”

“You race?”

“Yeah, I like the speed events, y’know, downhill and super-g.”

“How fast do you go?”

“The average course we go over fifty. A few have sections where we go around eighty. That’s pretty fun.”

Now Bria was blown away. “Over eighty? Miles per hour?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure I’ve gone close to a hundred a few times,

but not on a race course, on a training course. They make those fast to make races seem slower, y’know?”

Bria’s mind comprehended this information: *This girl is maybe five foot five, a cute petite blonde, a hundred pounds, no, make that one-ten with those hips but still a size two or maybe four, and she goes a hundred fucking miles per hour with boards strapped to her feet!* “And it doesn’t scare you?”

“Of course it does,” Amy said with a laugh, “you’d be insane for it not to scare you! But that’s what’s fun about it, too. Getting past your fears.”

Bria noticed a strange gleam in Amy’s eyes. She responded hesitatingly, “I’ve skied a fair amount, but the speed is what scares me from doing it more . . .”

“Yeah, but conquering that fear makes you stronger. Just to know that you can conquer it.”

Bria thought about how men concerned themselves with conquering fear, and how most women didn’t even admit to having fear, because they weren’t supposed to put themselves in places where fear is even an issue. She felt that she had always been steered away from the challenging parts of skiing- for her it was bunny hill and hot chocolate. *This girl probably skies the expert trails and leaves most of the boys in her dust.* Bria was jealous again. “I’ve seen the Dead once.” Bria didn’t know if there was a connection, she just didn’t want to be out-cooled.

“Where?”

“Saratoga. Just north of Albany. Summer before last, no, the one before that. With that ex-boyfriend.”

“Did you have fun?”

“Uh, well, yeah, I guess it was fun. I guess I don’t like crowds much.”

“But you like the city?”

“Yeah . . .” Bria got her point.

Amy continued, “I mean, the city scares me, I have to admit. But I’m not really a country girl, either, Vail is like a crossroads, but it’s just . . . safer?” The statement ended as a question. She paused, then asked, “Listen, if you’re not in a hurry, would you help me get on the right train to Hoboken? I’ve got to get from Penn over like a block . . .”

“I know exactly where it is, and I’d be happy to walk over there with you.”

“Thank you so much!”

Bria laughed, “I haven’t done it yet!”

They talked about school for a while, then Bria described how she had gotten the position at the Osborne Agency.

“Wait a minute. Didn’t you say you’re majoring in art history?”

“Yeah?”

“So what’s that got to do with advertising?”

“Taste.”

“Like Charlie the tuna!”

They both laughed at the reference. “It’s also about ideas without words- symbols.”

“Ah.” Amy got it. “I’m an undeclared liberal arts major.”

“And what do you want to do, career-wise?”

“Well, I’d like to stand on an Olympic podium within the next

eight years. But I didn't do very well this year, going from junior circuit to the college. My last season in Vail I won six races and never placed below ninth. This year my best finish was twenty-third."

"You've got time, then, I guess. You sound pretty hard on yourself."

Amy gave Bria a look of gratitude; she appreciated the sympathy. "I dunno. I just want to win."

Bria thought about Eric. *Where was his competitive spirit? This girl has the desire to win. I thought all Deadheads were burnt-out pacifist wimps.*

It was Bria's turn to pry. "What do your parents do?"

"My dad's an accountant for the ski hill. My mom owns a sportswear boutique."

"Together?"

"Divorced, both in the same small town. What about yours?"

"Dad was a stockbroker. Just retired. My mom never worked. She did stuff like League of Women Voters, Greenwich Historical Society."

"Brothers or sisters?"

Bria hesitated. "I had an older sister, but she died."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"You didn't know. You?" *As long as she doesn't ask how, no problem*, she thought.

"None. Only child. What about hobbies?"

"Uh, I read, like music. See some movies. But I don't, like, collect stamps or anything. I guess what I like to do best for fun is get

dressed up, go out dancing, do some coke and get laid.” Again, Bria didn’t want to be completely outdone in the cool department, or seem too boring.

“Coke? I haven’t tried that. I like to drink, smoke some weed, sometimes I eat some mushrooms. I took acid at one of the Dead shows I went to but haven’t since.”

“I took, like, a little bit of acid, twice. Once was at that Dead show. It was OK. I like Ecstasy much, much better. And I’d rather have sex than pretty much anything. Think you’ll take anything this time?”

“Maybe. Probably.” Amy paused to think about what Bria had said and continued, “I like sex, but then again, I guess who doesn’t, right? But I’ve only had good sex with one guy so far, my first boyfriend. This year, I just got drunk, stumbled home and passed out. But, uh,” -she felt some shame, and more inadequacy- “nobody ever really asked me out on a date. Guys hit on me, but last semester I was like ‘go away,’ but then this winter, y’know, I wasn’t getting any bites. So I went home with a few guys this spring, but what can I say, we were drunk and it felt good but not great.” Amy felt like crying.

“God, like the first thing I thought when I saw you is how much I bet guys fall all over themselves for a girl like you! Truth, though, I haven’t been asked out in a year. I want to be, but just nobody has. Drunk guys will hit on you, though. Really makes me want to go to bars.” She sneered to accent her sarcasm.

“You got that right. I guess they’re just shy or something. But then, one drink too many and they’re jerks.”

“All they want to do is fuck.”

“Yeah . . .?”

Bria got it and started laughing. “Yeah, you’re right, that’s all I want to do, too.”

They chatted some more and all of a sudden they were in a tunnel, then Penn Station. As they got out onto the street, Amy looked up and spun around. “Is that the Empire State Building?”

“Yeah. Wanna go up it? You said you have about two hours, right?”

“Can we?”

“Sure, let’s just go, it’ll only take a little while.” Bria grabbed Amy’s hand and they were off. At the top, Bria showed Amy some points of interest while the sun set. A short while later, Amy was on the train out to Hoboken. She felt weird, they hadn’t exchanged phone numbers or anything. It was just like they were friends for the time that they had available, and now they would go their separate ways.

Poppy was already at the station. They drove to Poppy’s father’s house, spent the night and continued on to Worcester the next day.