

"I am so glad we're doing this, you guys," proclaimed Rachel giddily as they were shown to a table. The other patrons noticeably eyed the trio. She knew privately it had more to do with the other two than her. Joanna had always been a stunner. We'd met on the high school dance team, and ours was the sort of school where the cute girls did dance and the meh girls did the cheerleading.

(Not to be mean! Some of my bestest friends were high school cheerleaders! Not now, that is. That would be crazy. Plus, all of my bestest friend slots were firmly spoken for by the friendiest friendo I'd ever Friend Zoned, Knox.)

Anyway, yeah, Joanna looked good even on a casual day. Which I'd told her this was. Who doesn't love Galentine's Day?! Just us girls, no pressure, no one to put pressure on, just support and kindness and positive womanly energy. I wasn't a feminist – Knox teased me that I was when I was deep-throating him and grumped it was hard to do it as loud and drooly as he said he wanted, but he was such a kidder. But yeah, I guess I had just a smidge of feminist in me, because this was a Hooters, and Joanna was showing *way* more skin than the staff.

(Knox had actually let me wear civilian casuals today without insisting on one of his friendly makeovers, which I thought was mature of him, even if I missed an opportunity for some more one-on-one time with my dude.)

Then there was our third. Kammi was my third best friend. Lower than you'd think for a version of yourself from an alternate dimension, but as Knox liked to remind me, she was a perfect me, and I was just the cock-jockey around the corner here in the good old Prime Material. Still, I adored her, and what a golden opportunity to better myself, right? She was so creative, and sweet, and oh my GAWRSH such a jokester. Hooters had been her idea. She never got tired of finding ways to take even the most casual activity and turn it into something creepy. It never failed to crack her up. I didn't really like breasaurants myself (and no, not because I'm jealous of the bustier gals, no matter what Knox says!), but I knew it'd be a more comfortable fit than Joanna. Knox had been really busy almost the whole last week, so she'd been forced to settle for making herself *cough* (orgasm) *cough*. (Sorry to get vulgar there for a sec.) But her own affections were nothing compared to what Knox did to her. I'd seen her black out from having him breathe too sexily on her clitty.

"Do you think that prick Knox would like how I looked in one of those uniforms?" Joanna asked, staring what was probs a little too intently at one of the servers.

"I think Knox thinks you're beautiful exactly the way you are," I told her, giving her hand a squeeze. Womanly support!

"You know, I bet if you asked for an application, they'd hire you on the spot. You could walk out of here with one of those things, ask him yourself. Then just no-call no-show and let them bill you when you don't return it."

"Knox doesn't like having to waste money on clothes for me," she mumbled. Joanna was unemployed, because she was too horny for Knox and too platonically in love with me to hold down a job, and he insisted the webcams at my house that paid *my*

salary were mine alone, even though I bet a ton of guys were only subbed to perv on Joanna. We took extra good care of her, though. "Asshole wants to dress me like a hooker, but acts like I already had a closet full of hooker clothes."

"Sure, but you've done a great job hitting up the thrift stores. I love the guy – I do – like so much! – but I think he's too hard on you. You've done an awful lot with very little."

Kammie gave a little tug on Joanna's shirt, where the hem of it was starting to ride up and bare a little too much underboob. "To be fair, that's mostly because she's shopping in the children's section."

"The *tween* section, thank you very much," she huffed.

"So... who likes surprises...?!" I drummed my hands on the table.

"Did you get us present?" Kammie asked, sipping a martini that had appeared out of nowhere. For me, she'd summoned a thing of beer in a giant glass boot the size of a for-real boot; for Joanna something fruity-looking with a little umbrella.

She took a sip and frowned. "Is this... a mocktail?"

"You know it, my Queenly Tweenie." She winked and dissipated the drink into vaporous nothingness as Joanna made to splash her with it.

"It's presents!" I exclaimed, sliding my beer-boot aside.

"Ya. I know. I helped you carry them in, remember?" She saw Joanna's glare darken from annoyed to defensive-of-her-Rachel, and held up her hands. "No, right, surprise, totally, you're a ninja, awesome."

Our server showed up, a little dye-job blonde who did not fill out her uniform as well as they paid her to. She seemed surprised we already had drinks – though Kammie ordered "a fresh virgin mojito for my niece" with a perfectly timed wink at the idea anyone that looked as slutty as Jo could have anything to do anything virginal.

We put in our orders, and I admit I got a little testy at the interruption. As soon as she was gone, I pounced on my bags and swiftly delivered not one, but TWO packages to each of them!

There was also one for me. I explained, "One from me to each of the two best most beautiful wonderful gal pals a girl could ask for!" Joanna, teary-eyed, launched herself into a hug, and Kammie nestled right in with us. (She copped a super blatant feel up Jo's top, but that was just her sense of humor.) "And one from Knox to each of us, and for the same reason."

My oldest friend – oldest *remaining* friend; most of my friends had stopped hanging out with me after word got out that Jo and I were semi-employed cam whores sleeping with the same guy – arched an eyebrow at that. "Knox said we were his best beautiful pals...?"

"It's what he meant." (*Give that whiny twat and the psycho these for me, would you, darling?* was what he'd actually said.)

(I'd asked him once why he liked calling me degrading nicknames once, not to be a b-word or anything but just curious what makes a guy like him tick, right? But he said

he felt bad, and said he'd switch to nicer terms and I could just know when he called me "sweetie" he meant "subpar tit slut.")

After some discussion, we decided to start with my presents, and then go around and see what Knox's as-ever-no-doubt-incredibly-joyful contribution to our chick's day ot would be. Joanna went first.

"A... what is this? A gift card, to... Sorry, that font is..." She squinted. Knox had stepped on her contacts this morning because she accidentally knocked over some magicky candle-thing while she was hand-feeding him his breakfast.

"It's for a tattoo! We always said we should get tattoos, and Knox said he would support us as long as he got final say, so I went ahead and prepaid for them! So if you don't want to, you don't have to, and I can just get two. One I pick, and one from Knox. I can't *wait* to see what he picks."

"If it isn't something that's going to make your next encounter with your parents awkward, I'll hitchhike home in a tutu," Kammie speculated. A really good point. My parents would *hate* who Knox helped me turn into if I ever told them. Pretty much everyone would, which is why pretty much everyone could go to h-e-double-hockeysticks. Knox says he likes me more and more every every time I blow him, which means pretty much every single day. That's the kind of pure wholesome love a husband or child or parent could never give.

"Your turn, your turn!" I motioned for Kammie to hurry up, and after a moment of feigning apathy, she tore into the wrapping paper with glee. I watched with joy as her smile brightened when she saw the contents. She knew what it was for immediately.

"\$200 for Iron Mike's Metallurgist." She fanned her face with her hand, eyes misting. Her hand moved kind of creepily fast, but it's not her fault she could do everything better than us. "You remembered."

"Uh... what did she remember? Metallurgist? You into horseshoes or something...?"

I took one of each of their hands in mine. "Kammie can't get a tattoo. Her flawless skin can't be blemished by conventional mortal instruments--"

"You sound like Knox," Joanna complained, twisting one of her nipples fiercely under her joke of a shirt.

"So, see, she can't get a tattoo. We tried. Do you remember when we took that road after New Year's? We actually went to get her inked. But the needles kept melting and then all the ink awakened and turned into a little monster thingy and broke the tattoo guy's fish tank and it was a whole ordeal."

"Gremlin. Sometimes the imperfections khamulan bodies reject reform as gremlins," Kammie said, still grinning at the card.

"So she was really disappointed, and if she's hurting then you know I'm dying--"

"You shouldn't joke about that. You would literally die if you tried any of a dozen things I do every day."

"-- so we brainstormed, and I figured out an alternative!"

I let Kammie do the reveal. Indeed, with a flourish, she announced, "I'm getting branded!"

Joanna spat out a mouthful of child-friendly mint beverage. "You're *what?!?*"

"Custom brand. I figured, you two could get matching tattoos, and then I'll talk to my metal guy and I'll get a matching brand!"

"I thought you melted the needle."

"It'll be cold iron, obviously," Kammie answered with a roll of her eyes. She was so smart. I'd completely forgotten to consider that.

Jo raised her glass to her, and then our food arrived. We all sort of pushed our food into the middle of the table though. I wasn't big on wings, and I knew Jo wouldn't eat hers anyway. It would put her way over Knox's calorie limit. Not that he stopped her from overeating! He would never. But if she went over it, she had to talk about herself in the third person for the rest of the night as "Jojo with the Fat Tits." Kammie, I knew, was looking forward to her plate, but it was just as well she didn't dig in. She didn't chew, swallow, or regurgitate the bones, so we had to remind her not to terrify our fellow humans.

"Jo, I can see you're dying to open yours and also that you're desperate to get it over with, so..."

"Because it's going to be something humiliating. It's not cool to gaslight."

"I'm not gaslighting. You just take his jokes too personally. You need to lighten up."

"Yeah, Jo, how is it gaslighting to tell you to buck up when the man buys you a custom crop top that says 'Village' and would clearly go on to say 'Bicycle' if it wasn't cut so short that you flash the world your nipples if there's even a moderate breeze?" Kammie nodded seriously.

"Be nice!" I laughed, poking her/my/ScarJo's tummy. "It's Galentine's Day. Girls supporting girls, remember?"

"I'm not a girl. I'm a shapeshifting paragonical monster trapped in human female form because this was the one that would stop a warlock from destroying me and my power to change it again was revoked in a cosmic bargain."

"Friends supporting friends then." I poked her again, and turned grinning to Jo. Sulkily, she opened the package, a tiny little felt-covered box. Not ring tiny – as if Knox would propose to a girl he had so little respect for! and via proxy, at that – but tiny enough that it only just contained a tightly coiled strip of black leather.

She held it up, and it tumbled to a length of a foot or so, a few silver adornments adding some contrast. It was glossy leather, too, really eye-catching.

"It's a choker," she breathed. Then, after a moment's study, "With a padlock."

Kammie studied it admiringly. "I'll see if my metal guy knows a lock guy. Besides, if you ask me, you have way too easy a time breathing. It's bad for your posture."

"Put it on!" I squealed, clapping my hands. It took some convincing, but once she had Kammie and I chanting "CHO-KER! CHO-KER!" she caved pretty quickly.

Everybody was staring, though maybe just because they thought we were chanting "choke her."

Kammie helped her with the lock; she explained that there was a mystical trigger that needed a special touch. Also, she had shorter fingernails. It clasped on, and we gave it a test. No way she was getting out of that without a scalpel or the key.

"I'm... a sex slave," she said, shuddering. Oh, gross, she came on her stool! Can't take her anywhere, I swear.

"You're loved," I corrected her. She shuddered again, though this time I don't think she made another puddle. Going out in that teensy skirt with absent panties and a pussy that drippy... unhygienic.

"Now you, Kammie," I said, turning to my superior-in-every-way-but-in-Knox's-heart counterpart. (We'd agreed long ago it was a tie, though she had a tendency to let us mortals win. I thought it was adorable, but Jo said she just liked calling us mortals and treating us with pity.)

Her gift required a little more unwrapping. It was a couple boxes of clothing. I had a good guess about what it was. Tight black leather outfit? It could only be—

"It's a Parallaxigon!" she squeaked, hand rushing to her mouth. She was crying in seconds as she stared, enrapt.

Our annoying judgy-eyed waitress returned and seemed concerned we hadn't eaten, but I was too busy discerning whether this Parallelogram was inducing happy cries or sad cries. (Pretty sure it had something to do with the Pythagorean Theorem, though I didn't actually know what that was either.)

Joanna distracted her by asking for that job application, and was quickly led to speak to the manager. I half-heard her say that he'd seen Jo come in and joked about how he wished she worked here. Slut-shaming, on Galentine's Day. Some women. Anyway, once she was gone, I finally managed to coax words out of Kammie.

She beamed ear to ear as she explained. "A Parallaxigon is a rare artifact worn on the body like clothes that bestows limited shapeshifting. Kind of. It's illusory, not physical transmogrification, and it restricts the wearer to the narrow range of bipedal humanoid, so no more transforming into the toilet and saying 'WULL HULLO THERE' in a goofy deep voice when Knox goes to take his morning pee," she said breathlessly.

I followed only that last part. "You did that? That's gross."

"He's the one who peed anyway. You calling your best friend 'gross?'"

She must have deserved it. I refocused on the Panaramico. "So, this will let you change forms again? So you can be... whoever you want?"

"That's right. Here, he must have traced the activation glyph here somewhere..." She looked through the boxes and soon found a card in the tissue paper. She read it. And frowned. And frowned deeper. And set it down. Not wanting to make her immediately reread it, I slid it to myself and read. It was a brief note, in Knox's spidery handwriting.

Kammie—

Glyph's on the back. I couldn't figure out the Phasmorphic Frequency quite, so it's sort of a budget Parallaxigon. Narrower range, but still not bad. Come home in something hot for once.

-K

"I don't get it. So it makes you... skinnier? Does it mean you can still turn into other people again?"

"It means I can turn into other roles played by celebrated actress and humanitarian Scarlett Johansson." She flicked it with thumb and forefinger. "Defaults to the classic."

"Oh. Well that's still... better than before...?"

"I dyed my hair black so I wouldn't look like her."

"I've seen her with black hair I think."

"She's a redhead."

Jo swaggered back up to the table with an application in hand. "She's a blonde, actually. And I have to fill this out before I leave. Guy said he'd hire me, but it's an HR thing." She looked down. "Said he'd have a uniform ready."

"Good for you!" I high-fived her. "Good for *both* of you."

"All right, your turn, Rach," said Kammie. "Go on, see what Mr. OnlyFriend got you."

I held up the box. As big as it was, it was extremely light. Something rattled in there, but I wasn't sure what. "I don't know. He got you two such awesome and supportive gal gifts. I'm nervous. What if he saved all the good stuff for you?"

Joanna touched the black band sinking into her throat. "You take his gifts too personally. You need to lighten up," she teased, then quickly apologized. It seemed like it almost physically hurt her sometimes to risk upsetting me. Such a sweetheart.

After a deep breath, I peeled off the wrapping paper and cut through the tape on the box with my butter knife. Inside was...

"It's a card."

That was it. A box he could have fit a new microwave in, and he'd put in a card...? God, what was wrong with me? That I could strictly platonically love the guy from the bottom of my friend-heart and do such a terrible job of showing it that he only got me... a card...?

"Open it," said Kammie encouragingly. Her smile said she hadn't lost faith in the bond between me and Knox.

With trembling hands, I lifted the card out, and opened it.

It was Snoopy and that little yellow bird friend. *Friends are worth sharing a doghouse with*, it said. Was that a veiled reference to how he used to call me his Butt Bitch? He likes to fuck my butt a lot, or just play with my cheekies in general. Nowadays he says "honeypie" means Butt Bitch, and if a Bitch is a female dog... Men were so confusing.

I opened the card, hoping for clarity. Indeed, he'd written something. Quite a bit. I read.

My Honeypie,

(SQUEE! There it was! Anyway, I read.)

I know it's Valentine's Day, and I know we're not a couple, but since you went out to celebrate friendship with twat and psycho, I figured I'd get you something, since I'm your best friend and all. I got you...

Nothing. Nothing at all. Because I created your love for me out of nothing, and nothing can ever take you away from me. You were nothing but a hot neighbor to me, and I made you nothing but Knox's Best Friend. There's nothing left of your life but me. Which means there's just more me, and nothing else.

So here's for all the beautiful nothing you bring to my life. Love you.

- Knox

P.S. Tell Joanna after she puts her choker on that I disintegrated the only key.

Joanna wept with joy to see me weeping with joy, and Kammie was as ever a contagious crier. We laughed and held each other and talked about what kind of skanky tattoo/brand Knox would make us get. I ate a wing. I was still chewing when Kammie preempted my reminder and swallowed the entire plate, plate and all. Joanna ate all of hers like a normal person, touching her collar and her pussy and sighing about how good Jojo with the Fat Tits was going to look in her faux whore uniform. She changed into it in the bathroom before we left, then helped Kammie into her Pikachukyo. She came out of the bathroom as Scarlett Johansson from *Lost In Translation*, translucent panties and not much more, chiding the staring diners that she was only 17 at this point in her career and they were now all sex criminals. I apologized and told everyone she was kidding as she strutted out into the parking lot.

"Kammie!" I laughingly nagged.

"Sex crime best crime if it's done from the right place," she stated firmly. Jo shrugged and crawled into her kennel in the trunk. I always had to drive more carefully with her in there, but this Galentine's Day, I admit I took a few sharp corners. I couldn't wait to see my friend and tell him I platonically loved him, too.