

Sandy and Amy  
By Kate Simon

Sandy packed up his tools into his truck and checked his clothes. He had an appointment with a woman who wanted some extensive remodeling. It would be a good job if he got the bid. He'd gotten a call from Elaine Ward, a woman he'd done work for in the past. Elaine was a computer executive who had recommended her to an associate. It was always nice when he got a recommendation. He prided himself on good work. He had some subcontractors but he usually worked alone. He liked working on his own.

He had enough jobs to keep him busy. He could do better if he took on some full time help but he was fine. His house was big enough. Too big. He'd been thinking of selling but he couldn't bring himself to do it. He and Janie had picked it out together. They'd been so excited. It was where they were going to raise their kids. It was where they were going to grow old. That was until a drunk decided to drive himself home. He walked away without a scratch. Janie was killed instantly. Sandy thought when the guy was arrested he'd go away for life. He got three years and was out in eighteen months for good behavior. Good behavior. That still ate at him. Sandy had been alone for ten years now, but Janie's killer was still walking the streets.

He looked around the house and he knew nothing had changed in the ten years since Janie died. If anyone had the ability to make changes, he could. When his family failed to convince him to sell they tried to get him to remodel, make the home more bachelor friendly, but he didn't. He still considered himself married.

Sandy pulled up to his appointment. He looked around at the large, two story suburban home. There had to be at least four bedrooms. He knocked on the door and he heard footsteps. He could hear someone coming to the door but they waited a longer than normal before they opened the door. When it finally opened, a short woman with dark hair and brown eyes was standing there.

“Mr. McIntyre, please come in.”

Sandy glanced down and noticed the phone in her hand. He could see his contractor license picture. She locked the door with two locks before she invited him. She finally extended her hand.

“I’m Amy Taylor. Let’s have a seat in the kitchen. Would you like some coffee?”

“Yes, thank you.” Sandy took a seat at the large table. She made two mugs of coffee with a pod machine and set one in front of him. He added some sugar and took a sip. “Elaine told me you had some special renovations in mind.”

“Yes. I want all the doors and windows replaced. Steel doors front and back, safety windows and I want them all alarmed. Once you wire the system in place I can take care of the electronics.” Sandy stared at her for a moment. “Is that a problem? Elaine said you do excellent work.”

“No, it’s not a problem. I can do the work. I’m curious as to why you want it done.”

“Do you need to know to accomplish the job?”

“Yes. I need to know the end goal of any project.”

She looked at her coffee. Sandy barely heard her when she said, “I need to be safe.”

“Are you not safe now?”

“No?”

“Why?” Sandy felt bad when he saw how nervous she was.

“There was a break in up the street.” She took a sip of her coffee. “I live here alone.”

Sandy nodded. “Okay. I’ll make this place Ft. Knox.” Amy managed a small smile. It occurred to him it was nice to see.

“Why such a big house for one person?”

“It was my family home. I can’t see living anywhere else.”

Sandy smiled. “ I understand that. Okay, I’ll put together the bid and...”

“No.”

“No?”

“Just start placing the orders and send me the bills. You have my information.”

“Amy, you realize what you’re looking for will cost a minimum five figures, probably high five figures.”

“That’s what I assumed. I work from home. I’m paid well. I can afford you. Elaine gave you an excellent recommendation. I trust her, therefore I trust you.”

He’d never had a client like this. He was used to clients picking over every detail. “I can come by tomorrow with samples.”

“That won’t be necessary.” She handed him a business card. You can email me pictures and I’ll reply with the ones I choose.” She realized he was staring at her. “What?”

“I’m not used to clients being so...decisive.”

“I’m not most people. Once I send you my choices I would appreciate you starting as soon as possible. She pulled a check out of her pocket. “I assume this will be enough to get started.

Sandy tried not to gasp at the check for twenty thousand dollars. The job will be at least twice that amount but he wasn’t used to client’s being so ready with a big deposit. “This will do fine, Ms. Taylor. I will get right on it and send you an email.”

Sandy sat in truck and stared at the house. He’d made a count of the windows, took measurements and examined the front and back doors. It would take longer doing it by himself but he had a feeling she didn’t want a lot of contractors roaming about. She was making things easy for him. It was the least he could do for her.

Amy sat at her terminal working on the latest code project. Her FaceTime program buzzed. Her boss, Elaine Ward, appeared on the screen. She'd worked for various bosses at the same company for years but Elaine was the only one she enjoyed.

"Hey Elaine, what's up?"

"Did you have the meeting with Sandy?"

"Yes."

"Yes? That's it? What did you think?"

"I hired him."

"That's it?"

"What did you expect? You said he did excellent work. I looked into his references before the meeting."

Elaine looked frustrated. "Of course you did."

"What? He promised to email me selections as soon as possible and get started right away."

"He's single, a widower."

"Oh good Lord, Elaine. Are you trying to set me up? You know I don't do that."

"You don't do anything. Sweetheart, you're a genius programmer but you're moldering away in that house."

"I'm fine," said Amy. "Now can I get back to work before your boss starts wondering why the project is not done yet?"

"Fine." Elaine hung up and Amy stared at the screen. She didn't date. She worked. That's it. She hired a good contractor so she could feel safe after the break in down the street. She noticed she'd received an email from the contractor. She opened the email and saw several choices for doors and windows. He indicated his recommendations based safety and consumer ratings. She approved all his recommendations and asked him to begin immediately. He quickly replied he would notify her when the supplies would be delivered.

She thought about the contractor sitting in her kitchen. Alexander McIntyre. Excellent references. Impressive work. Beautiful blue eyes. She shook her head and tried to focus. This would not be happening. He would do the work and leave. He would leave. Everyone leaves.

Sandy was looking forward to getting started on the Taylor project. Ms. Taylor was the easiest client he'd worked with. She took all his suggestions, didn't balk at prices and just wanted the job done. He had to admit he was a bit curious about his client. She was quite pretty. Petite, dark hair, slender if a bit too fair. He could understand that if she didn't go out much. Well, there was nothing to be gained by thinking about that. He had work to do. He was going to meet the supplier at the Taylor house so he could inspect the products and store every thing in the garage while he worked.

He touched the contact number for Amy and she picked up on the second ring.

"Yes, Mr. McIntyre?"

"I'm in your driveway with the truck carrying your windows and doors. If you can open your garage we will offload them. It's locked." He waited for a moment, expecting her to come outside with a key. Instead the door opened on it's own. He was not surprised there was no car. "Okay, once we get these offloaded do you want to inspect them?"

"You do that before you install them, yes?"

"Yes."

"Construction is not my specialty. I'm sure you can see if there is an issue. So long as they match the pictures you sent me, we're fine."

"I'd like to get started right away. Where would you like me to start?"

"Why don't you start in the back. Let me know when you are ready to begin."

"Yes Ma'am."

"That makes me sound old. You might as well call me Amy."

Sandy smiled. "Then you must call me Sandy."

"Very well. Call back when you're ready to begin." She hung up the phone.

He smiled and put the phone back in his pocket. He noticed the driver, Tom, was staring at him. He'd been supplying Sandy's company with windows and doors for years.

"What?"

"It's about time."

"What are you talking about?"

"You haven't smiled at a woman in ten years."

"I was on the phone."

"You were smiling."

“I was not.”

“Yeah, yeah. Let’s get this stuff off my truck so I can get back to work.”

As they finished unloading Tom looked at him. “Where’s the crew?”

“No crew on this one. Just me.”

Tom smiled. “Yeah, okay.”

“She doesn’t want a lot of people around and I’m perfectly capable of doing this myself.”

“Uh, huh,” Tom said, suppressing a grin. “Call me if there are any problems with materials.”

“There never is.” He watched as Tom pull away as he unpacked his tools. He carried his tool case and a couple of work horses to the back of the house. He called Amy and again she picked up on the second ring.

“Yes Sandy?”

“I’m at the back door. I thought I’d start with that.”

“That’s fine. I’ll be there in a moment.”

It took a few moments for Amy to come downstairs. She opened the door and Sandy smiled. She was wearing a pair of faded jeans and a Terminator T-shirt and her feet were bare. She looked at him and saw he was staring. “What?”

“You realize that movie is at least twenty five years old.”

“Twenty six, and the shirt’s not that old. I bought it for the twenty fifth anniversary.”

“Don’t most people like Arnold?”

“Yeah, well, I like the other guy. Are you ready to get started?”

“Yes. I’m going to take out this door first. I may need to shim it or trim it out so that’s why the saw. I’ll need to plug in somewhere. There’s an external plug under the kitchen window. Can you save the locks on the old doors?”

“Actually, no. It would take too much to install them in a steel door. The new door comes with a solid lock. Between that and the new security system, once you lock the doors and set the alarm, no one’s getting in here without your permission.

Amy looked at him and nodded. “It sounds like you have everything under control. I’m going back to work. The door to my office locks but I would appreciate you not leaving the work area before it’s secure.”

“Of course.”

Sandy watched as she turned and walked through the kitchen and disappeared around the corner. He shook his head and turned to the new door. He began to unwrap the new door. He looked back at the house and wondered why he couldn't stop thinking about a barefoot woman who liked the other guy.



Amy tried to focus on the code in front of her until she finally gave up. She opened the box of the security system she'd ordered. It was a top of the line wifi system. The electronics were not going to be a problem. All she needed was Sandy to install the hardware. She wondered if she should interrupt him. She didn't hear the saw or any hammering so she thought it would be okay. She opened her door and walked downstairs to the kitchen. Sandy was finishing up the door when she walked into the kitchen. He saw her and smiled and she didn't know why that made her happy.

"Perfect timing. I just finished the door. What do you think?"

She rubbed her hand over the door and felt the cold steel, despite the fact that it looked like wood. "It's nice. Just what I expected from the picture." She set the security box on the kitchen table. "These are what I need installed in door and window jams. It's wireless so once it's installed I can make it active."

Sandy looked at some of the pieces and nodded. "Yeah, no problem. Speaking of which I want to show you something. It's outside on my bench."

He walked outside and saw her hesitation. Instead of looking at her like she had two heads, he smiled. "It's okay," he said softly. "I promise." He held out his hand and despite her instincts, she took it. She followed him outside into her backyard. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been outside other than taking the trash to the curb. She had no need. She had someone to cut the lawn and shovel the snow. She looked at a box sitting on Stacey's work bench.

"This is a motion sensor spotlight." He pointed to the top of the house directly above the kitchen door. "I can install this right there. If anyone were to come up to your back door the light would go on. I couldn't put one up front because it would go on every time a car went by."

"That's a good idea. Just add it to the bill."

"No, there was enough room in the budget for it."

"Thank you, Sandy. That's very...thorough."

"I promised you Ft. Knox and I don't break my promises."

Sandy looked at Amy and was surprised when she smiled at him. He didn't know what caused her to never leave her home but for some reason he wanted to understand. She had a beautiful smile. He wanted to see it more.

"Amy, I was about to break for lunch. Would you like a turkey sandwich? I brought two."

"Oh, I..."

He had opened a cooler and pulled out a can of soda. He handed to her. "Please join me. I don't like eating alone."

"Don't you eat alone when you work?"

He set out both sandwiches, not waiting for her to say no. "Most jobs I have a crew."

"Why don't you have one now?"

"Elaine mentioned you would prefer a minimum of people on your property and I can manage this job myself." Sandy sat under a tree and indicated she should join him. Much to his great surprise, she joined him.

She took the sandwich from him and unwrapped it. "What if I'd said no?"

"I like turkey. I would have kept it for tomorrow."

She laughed. "Very logical." She took a bite and smiled. "It's very good."

"Thanks."

"Elaine was very pleased with the work you did."

"She was good to work for."

"I think so. She lets me do my thing and only bothers me when we get to a deadline. She's always afraid I'll miss it."

"You never do."

Amy smiled again. "No, I don't"

"Amy you do realize the job is going to take longer because it's just me."

"Yes, I understand. That's fine. Elaine mentioned you're a widower."

Sandy stopped mid sip, shocked at her sudden change of direction. "Yes I am, ten years now."

"I'm sorry. That was nosy. I'm out of practice with small talk."

"It's okay."

“What happened?”

“Car accident.”

“Oh. I really am sorry. It’s must be hard when you don’t see it coming.”

“It was difficult, but I manage. Can I ask why you don’t go out?”

“It didn’t happen all at once. I didn’t live here for a while. I had my own place after college. Elaine recruited me out of school, so she’s the only job I’ve had. Then my mother had a stroke. She needed round the clock care so I moved back in.”

“Did you have other family help?”

“No. My sister moved to the West Coast so it was just me. The home health care worker came a couple of times a week but that was only a for a few hours. I couldn’t leave her alone. That’s when I started ordering everything we needed.”

Sandy touched her hand. “You were a good daughter.”

“I tried to be. She was a very good mother. I was always different, a geek. She could see my talents would never be traditional but she backed me up. She sent me to a good school. She understood when I wanted to study computers.” She smiled a sad smile. “She was so proud when I got the job with Elaine. I was making more money than if I’d followed a traditional course.”

“How long was she sick?”

“Ten years. She died five years ago.”

“I’m sorry,” said Sandy.

“It’s okay. I don’t have any regrets.”

“But you stopped going out.”

“I was never a social creature to begin with. The longer I stayed in, the harder it was to go out. I finally stopped altogether.”

“I’m not much of a social creature either,” he said. “My friends are always trying to get me to go out, but I rarely do.” He took a bite of his sandwich. He realized she was staring at him. “What? Do I have lettuce in my teeth.”

“No. You didn’t look at me like I was crazy.”

Sandy shrugged. “You don’t seem crazy.” He smiled at her and winked. “You aren’t are you?”

Amy laughed. "I don't think so." They finished their lunch and Sandy gathered up the debris. "Here, I'll take that." She took the papers and put it them the trash can. "I'll let you get back to work."

"I'm going to do the kitchen window next."

"Okay," she said.

"Thanks for joining me," said Sandy.

"Thanks for the sandwich," said Amy. She smiled and walked back into the house. Sandy watched her walk away and wondered what he should bring for lunch tomorrow.

Amy finished the last of the latest project and forwarded it to Elaine. The FaceTime icon pinged and she opened it. Elaine appeared.

“Well done, Amy as usual.”

“Thanks.”

“Is that hammering I hear?”

“Yes, Sandy is working on the window below my office.”

“Sandy, is it?”

“That’s his name.”

“You seem to have gotten friendly with him.”

“Well...I...”

“Amy, I’ve known you fifteen years. Don’t try and pretend.”

“It was just lunch. He brought an extra sandwich and offered it to me.” Amy paused for a minute. “We sat under the tree and talked. It was nice.”

She could see Elaine’s eyes were tearing. “You ate outside.”

“Yes. He doesn’t talk to me like I’m crazy.”

“Of course you’re not crazy.” Elaine looked like she was trying to compose herself. “Okay, the next project won’t start for a few days so you have the rest of the week to yourself.”

Amy smiled and nodded. She knew Elaine could find work for her if she wanted to but she didn’t mind. She would have time to work on her own projects. “Okay. Call me if you need me.”

Elaine smiled and pointed at the screen. “You too.”

Amy closed up her computer and walked downstairs. The new window was installed in the kitchen but she couldn’t see Sandy. She touched the contact on her phone for Sandy.

“Hi Amy.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m around front putting the debris in my truck.”

“Oh. I’m downstairs and I didn’t know where you were.”

His head popped into the kitchen window and he smiled. “I wouldn’t leave without telling you. Can I come in?”

“Of course,” she said as she hung up and opened the back door. She was impressed with how smoothly it moved. Sandy came in and looked at his handiwork.

“What do you think?”

“I think they look great. I’m surprised you don’t have to paint around them.”

“No, the vinyl trim makes that unnecessary.” He handed her a key. “This is for the back door. I know the security system isn’t in place yet but nobody is getting through that door.”

“What about the window?”

“Safety glass. It would take a hell of a lot more than a rock or a crow bar to break it.”

“That’s great.”

“It’s getting dark so I’m going to pack it in for the day.”

“Of course. Thank you for lunch.”

Sandy smiled. “Thank you for the company.”

“I will see you tomorrow.”

Sandy extended his hand. “Tomorrow.”

Amy held his hand a bit longer than she should but she couldn’t seem to break her focus from his eyes. They were so blue. She finally pulled away and held the door for him.

“Ham or Turkey?” he asked.

“Excuse me?”

“Lunch tomorrow. Ham or Turkey?”

Amy smiled. “Ham. I’ll supply the chips.”

Sandy smiled as he checked his lunch just like he checked his tools. He liked talking with Amy. He didn't feel the pressure he did talking to other women. As soon as they find out he's single he feels like a rabbit with hawks circling. He wished he could wear his wedding ring but he couldn't because of his work. Catch a ring on a tool or during a fall and you can rip your finger off.

He could get several windows done today but he'd concentrate on the first floor. Second floor meant working from a ladder so he would have to have a small tractor with a basket on it delivered to Amy's. It would enable him to put a ladder in the basket and work from there on the second floor.

Sandy pulled into the driveway and called Amy. "I'm here."

"I noticed," she said rapping on a top floor window. "I'll come to the front."

He walked to the front door and she was just the same as she was yesterday, except today she was wearing a t-shirt with a Star Trek emblem. He held up his hand and split his fingers into a V. "Live long and prosper."

Amy laughed. "Hah. Come on in. Coffee?"

"Yes, thanks."

She put a pod in machine and stuck a mug under the spot. "So Original or NextGen?" she asked as she handed him the mug.

He put some sugar in his coffee and smiled. "That's a trick question. Original had groundbreaking concepts but NextGen had a much better Captain."

"You're a Trekker!"

"Well I will admit I do enjoy Trek but I prefer Firefly. Fourteen episodes of perfection. I still can't get over they cancelled it."

"What about the follow up movie?"

"They lost me when they killed Shepard and Wash. I mean Wash? Come on." He noticed her wide smile. "What?"

"I agree completely."

They finished their coffee and talked Kaylee vs Inara. When he told her she reminded him of Kaylee because she was mechanical genius and had a cute smile he was surprised to see her blush. "Thank you," she whispered.

“Ahh, I should get to it. I should be able to do most of the downstairs today.” He stood and handed her his coffee mug.

“Shiny” she said.

Sandy laughed at the Firefly reference to something good. “I’ll let you get back to work.”

“Actually, I’ve finished all my work projects for a while. Maybe I’ll dig out my Firefly DVDs.”

“Aww. You’re killing me.”

“I tell you what. I’ll hold off until lunch. We can eat in the den.”

“Sounds great.”

Sandy kept a close eye on the clock as he worked on the windows. He occasionally caught a glimpse of Amy as she walked through the house. He couldn’t understand why she peaked his interest. No woman since Janie had interested him. She quietly indulged his interest in sci fi shows and conventions. Amy is someone who would have gone with him. He shook his head and focused on the window he was working on. He finished the window he was working on. He picked up the old window and his hand slipped. He caught it on the edge of the metal sliced it open.

“Son of a bitch.” He grabbed a rag and wrapped it around his hand. He knocked on her door. Amy opened the door and paled.

“Oh my God, Sandy what happened?” she asked as she led him to the kitchen. She put his hand under cold running water.

“It was stupid. I caught it on a piece of metal. It looks worse than it is.”

“No it’s not. Now stay here.” She left the room and he could hear her run upstairs. She came back a few minutes later with a first aid kit. She turned off the water and patted his hand with a clean gauze and applied some antibacterial cream. She pulled some butterfly stitches from the kit and closed the wound.

“You’re very good at that.”

“I took a course when my mother got sick so I could handle minor incidents.” She wrapped his hand with a fresh gauze and taped it up. “Okay, you’re done with work for today.”



“It’s almost lunch time. Why don’t I get the sandwiches.”

Amy pulled an icepack from her freezer. “You sit down and keep your hand elevated. Tell me where the sandwiches are.”

“The cooler is in the back seat of my truck.” Sandy sat down at the kitchen table with his hand resting on the ice pack. Amy returned with his cooler and pulled the sandwiches out.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine.”

She took a bottle of ibuprofen from the cabinet and gave him two tablets. She opened the soda for him and set it in front of him. He took her hand.

“Amy, I’m okay.”

“I’m sorry. It’s force of habit. I’m used to taking care.”

“You do a great job. My hand is going to be fine and you saved me a trip to the ER. Thank you,” he smiled.

“You’re welcome.” She set up lunch and brought out the chips as promised.

“Fritos! I haven’t had those in ages. I love them.”

“Me too.”

Sandy managed to open the sandwiches and set them on the dishes with one hand. Amy sat next to him at the small table and passed him the bag of chips. “You should delay any work until a doctor says it’s okay to work,” she said.

“I should be fine. Really, Amy.”

“Please, I wouldn’t want you to be hurt because of me.”

He reached for her with his good hand. “This wasn’t your fault. It was an accident. But I promise to have it check out tomorrow.”

“Thank you,” she smiled.

They finished their lunch and Sandy helped clean up, one handed. “I do believe I was promised some Firefly.”

“I am a woman of my word. It’s loaded up on my system in the den.”

They got comfortable on the couch and Amy made sure he kept his hand elevated. She checked the bandage and it showed no evidence of further bleeding. He took her hand. “Thank you for looking after me.”

“You’re welcome,” she said with a smile and a blush. She hit the play button on the player and they got in a world, five hundred years in the future. They finished the first episode and decided to watch the next one. Before they knew it they’d finished the first disc and it was getting dark. “If you’d like I could make some dinner.”

“That sounds great, so long as you let me help.”

“Your hand...”

“Feels fine.”

“Okay,” she smile

Amy heated up some chili and served it with fresh rolls. “I make things that I can heat up a second night. It’s just me here, but you know that,” she smiled nervously.

Sandy stood and took her by the hands. “Amy if you’re nervous being here at night, it’s okay. I can go. I won’t be offended.”

“No it’s not that. Well, maybe a little. But I think anyone who quote Capitan Mal can be trusted.”

Sandy gave her a broad smile. “Thank you, Amy. That may be the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

They finished their meal and watched the second disc of Firefly. They applauded at the credits and Sandy stood to leave. “Amy, I had a great time today.”

“Despite slicing your hand open.”

“That was just an accident. Spending all day with you, watching Firefly, that was fun. I’ll check with the doctor first thing and then let you know what he says.”

“Good. I want to make sure you’re okay.”

Sandy leaned closer and kissed her cheek. “Thank you,” he whispered. “Good night.”

“Good night,” she said as she closed the door. Amy locked the door behind him and watched him pull away. She was actually looking forward to see someone, a man, for the first time in fifteen years.

Sandy sat in the exam room waiting for his doctor to check his hand. He was hoping he would get one more day so he could sit with Amy. He liked Charlie and had been going to him for years. If he needed something for a sinus infection or a bad muscle pull he would just call something in. But he'd promised Amy he'd see the doctor so here he sat.

Charlie walked into the exam room and smiled. "Hey dude. It's been ages. How are you?"

Sandy held up his hand. "I cut my hand on the metal edge of a window."

Charlie unwrapped his hand and whistled. "Damn dude." He examined his hand and checked to see if there was infection. "Did you go to urgent care?"

"No, my client did it."

"Huh. Well he did a great job."

"She."

Charlie looked up at him and smiled. "She?"

"She's a client, Charlie."

"Uh huh. Is she a nurse?"

"No. She was the primary care for her home bound mother. She said she took a course."

"Well she was right to insist you come see me. I'm going to give you an injection."

"She put anti-bacterial cream on it."

"It's good she did, which is probably why it's not swollen today. But if you want to stay that way I'm giving you a shot and a week of antibiotics. I don't want you to use this hand for a week."

"What?"

"You were damn lucky, Sandy. You could have severed your tendons and then you'd be looking at surgery and weeks of rehab. As it is, because it was treated on site, you don't have a nasty infection."

"Fine." Sandy held back the slew of profanities he was thinking when Charlie gave a shot. "Damn, Charlie. Were you absent the day they taught how to give shots?"

"Oh, stop whining," he said as he rewrapped his hand. "Now go thank that woman being so effective in taking care of your hand."

Sandy pulled up to Amy's with sandwiches and flowers. He rang her phone. "Hi Amy. I'm in the driveway."

"I'll be right down."

Amy opened the door and smiled seeing him holding an arm full of flowers. "Oh my," she whispered.

He put the flowers in her arms. "Thank you for taking such good care of me yesterday. The doctor was very impressed with your work."

"Oh, thank you. Please come in."

"Unfortunately, the doctor says I'm not allowed to use my hand for the rest of the week." He was pleased when she looked disappointed.

"Oh. Well I'm sure you have other things you need to do."

"Actually, until I'm healed, I don't. I was hoping we could finish our Firefly marathon."

"That sounds great."

"I brought roast beef sandwiches."

"Sounds good and I have a supply of Fritos."

"You know it's a nice day. Why don't we eat outside?"

Amy looked a little nervous but smiled. "Okay."

"Let me get the food out of the truck and I'll meet you around back." He grabbed the cooler in his good hand and slung a plaid blanket over his other arm. He hoped he wasn't pushing but he'd love Amy to feel more comfortable outside. Maybe they could have an actual date. He walked around the side of the house and saw Amy standing there in her jeans and a plain tank top for a change. She looked at him and smiled and his heart skipped. "I brought a blanket" He spread it out on the ground and she sat down under the tree. Sandy spread out the food and Amy opened a soda for him.

"I'm okay, Amy. I can manage," he said.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Force of habit."

He rested his one good hand on her leg for a moment. "I'm not upset with you. As a matter of fact the doctor was very impressed with how you treated my hand."

"Really?" she said with a smile.

“Really. He said you’re the reason I don’t have a raging infection today. But he gave me a shot and a prescription for antibiotics anyway.” He took a sip of his soda. Actually, when Charlie said I couldn’t work for a week I was hoping it would give us time to spend together.”

“You did?” she blushed.

“Yes, I did. I like you Amy. I like spending time with you.”

“I like spending time with you too.” She set down her drink and sighed. “Sandy, I feel like a teenager. I’m forty years old. I should be able to talk to you.”

“Amy, you’re doing just fine. I feel like a nervous teenager too. I haven’t dated since my wife died. In fact Janie was my high school sweetheart so I’m really bad at this.” He took her hand in his. “I have an idea. Let’s start with the basics.” He took her hand and shook it. “Hello my name is Sandy McIntyre. Sandy is short for Alexander. I was an only child. My parents have both passed.” He took a breath. I’ve had my own construction for twenty years. Oh, and I’m forty three.”

“What happened to your wife?”

“She was killed by a drunk driver ten years ago.”

Amy rubbed her hand on his shoulder. “I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you.” He squared his shoulders and smiled. “Okay, your turn.”

“I feel silly.”

“Oh no. I did it. Now it’s your turn.”

“Okay,” she held out her hand. “Hello I’m Amy Louise Taylor. I have one sister, Alice, and she lives in California. My parents had a thing for names beginning with A. My father died when I was six, heart attack. My mom worked as a secretary until she had her stroke.”

“Amy, that’s all about everyone else. Tell me about before your mom had the stroke.”

“Okay, um, after high school I went to Drexel for Computer Science.”

“Wow, Drexel. I’m impressed.”

“It is a good school. I was really happy there. I learned so much.”

“Your mom must have been so proud.”

Amy smiled. “She was. Especially when I got the scholarship.”

“Scholarship?”

“Well, it was the only school I wanted to go to so I worked hard and got good grades. When I applied I got a full scholarship”

Sandy gasped. “A full boat? All four years?”

Amy toyed with the edge of the blanket. “I was the daughter of a widow. She didn’t make a lot so I fit the criteria.”

“I doubt that.”

“What? Why?”

“Elaine told me you were one of the most brilliant programmers she’s ever worked with. She read your college papers and knew she wanted to snap you up for her company. That’s why she recruited you.”

“Elaine said all that?”

“Yes, she did. My guess is Drexel doesn’t drop that kind of money on just anyone. You’re special, Amy. Brilliant. What you have you earned. No one handed it to you.”

“Thank you, Sandy.”

“Amy, I want you to think about something. There is a convention in Ft. Washington in a couple of weeks. It’s an anniversary special for Firefly.”

“Oh, I don’t...”

“Nathan Fillion and Jewel Staite will be there at the panel.”

“Really?”

“Really. I thought we could go in costume. I’d go as Captain Mal, of course.”

Amy smiled. “Oh I think you’d make a cute Kaylee.”

Sandy laughed. “I’ll get the tickets and the costumes. No one will recognize us and we’ll be in a convention center full of people just like us.”

“Sandy...I...”

“I’ll get the tickets and costumes. I’ll bring them over. If you agree to go we’ll stay as long as you want. If you get uncomfortable we’ll leave.”

“Those things are expensive.”

“Amy, I do just fine with my business. It’s nothing I can’t afford.”

“But if I get nervous...”

He took her hand in his. “Then we’ll leave. Just promise me you’ll think about it.”

She nodded. "Okay, I think about it." She smiled. "Sandy, would this be a date?"

He grinned. "I'd like it to be. What would you like?"

Amy smiled. "I'll think about that too."

Sandy and Amy continued to see each other, talking over lunches and dinners as he finished the work on her house. She even helped him, holding ladders and asking questions about what he was doing. She was fascinated by the tools and he even helped her install a window herself. Sandy enjoyed teaching her and she was a very quick study.

“You know, if you ever get tired of computers I’d have a place for you on my crew.”

“You’re just being nice.”

“Nope. You’re really good and you learn so fast.” They packed up the tools for the day in his truck. “There is a diner down the road.”

“Ed’s?”

“That’s the one. How about we get some dinner?” Amy bit her lower lip. “We don’t have to. We can order take out.”

Amy squared her shoulders. “No. Let’s go. Let me go get cleaned up.”

Amy stared at herself in the bathroom mirror. “Get a grip,” she whispered. She’d changed into clean jeans and a plain oxford shirt. She didn’t own any makeup. All she could do was run a brush through her hair and hope for the best. She walked downstairs and couldn’t help but return Sandy’s smile. He always seemed so happy to see her.

He took her hand. “If you feel at all uncomfortable we can leave.” They got into Sandy’s truck and buckled up.

Amy stopped him from turning on the engine. “Can I ask you something?”

“Anything.”

“Why do you hang out with me? Everyone thinks I’m crazy.”

“You’re not crazy.”

“You’re not getting anything out of this.”

Sandy looked surprised. “I’m getting friendship, a friendship I find very enjoyable.”

Amy shrugged. “Why? I don’t understand. Most men would want more.”

“Okay first of all I’m not most men.”

She smiled. “I agree.”

“The truth is my friends think I’m a little crazy.”

“For seeing me?”



“No, no. Ever since Janie died all I did was work. I’d go out and have a beer, maybe go bowling but that’s all. They were always trying to fix me up, sometimes they’d do it without telling me. I felt like chum in the water. It was nothing I wanted.”

“So why me?”

“You mean other than the fact that you’re so cute?”

Amy could feel her blush. “Yes.”

“Because you don’t have any expectations of me. We’re friends, I hope. We’re getting to know each other.”

She pulled back and smiled. “Yes, I think we’re friends. Now let’s go get some dinner.”

Amy hadn’t been to Ed’s since college but nothing had changed. It was one of the few diners that still had juke boxes at each booth. Sandy ordered a hot roast beef dinner and Amy ordered fried chicken. It had always been her favorite.

“Oh, I didn’t tell you, I got the costumes,” said Sandy. “I’ll bring them over tomorrow and we can try them on.”

“Sounds good but I still think you’d make a good Kaylee.”

They were both laughing when she saw a woman walking towards her. She paled and could feel herself trembling.

“Amy, what is it?”

“Well, look who it is, Amy Taylor. I never thought you’d show your face in this town again after the way you treated your mother.”

“Who the hell are you?” Sandy demanded.

“I’m Doris Reynolds and I was Helen Taylor’s best friend. I can’t believe you couldn’t have bothered with a funeral for your own mother. God knows what she endured at your hands.”

“How dare you,” Sandy started to stand. Amy put her hand out to his and shook her head. He took his seat.

“You’re right Doris, you were my mother’s best friend ever since we moved to the neighborhood.” The woman crossed her arms and nodded. A woman Amy’s age came up from behind her.

“Mom, no,” she whispered.

“Hello Jenny. It’s been a long time. We were all the best of friends for twenty years, that was until the stroke. You came to see her once. You saw the wheelchair and the hospital bed and how she slurred her words and it freaked you out. You never came back. Not once in ten years. Mom pretended like it didn’t hurt her that her best friend had abandoned her, but it did. You know Doris, she never said a bad word about you. That’s just how she was.

Jenny tugged at her mother’s shoulder. “Mom, let’s go.”

“And for your information, there was a service. You weren’t invited.”

Doris gasped and Jenny succeeded in pulling her mother back down the aisle and out the door. Amy leaned back against the booth as Sandy reached for her hand.

“I’m so proud of you,” he said.

“Could we go?”

“Of course.”

Sandy paid the bill and they rode back to Amy’s place in silence. She opened her new front door and put her keys on the sideboard. He walked her over to the living room couch and had her sit. “I’ll be right back.” He came back to the living room with a glass of water and sat next to her. “I don’t know why I think you need a glass of water but it’s all I could think to do.”

“You’re here. That enough.” She took another sip of water and set it down on the coffee table. “It wasn’t much of a service.”

He put his arm around her shoulder. “Tell me about it.”

“It was a priest at the graveside. Just me and the only other person who came to visit her, Elaine. She would tell her how successful I was and Mom would smile. We would have little tea parties. When she was feeling up to it we would have it the dining room. Tea and shortbread. It made her so happy. When she died I called my sister. She said she was dead now, so there wasn’t any point. I think she knew that mom left everything, such as it is, to me. So it was just the two of us. I went home and went back to work on my computer like nothing had changed.” Tears had started running down her face. “No one cared.” Amy buried her face in Sandy’s chest and started sobbing. It occurred to him

in fifteen years, she'd never been able to mourn. There was no one to share it with. Elaine was a friend but she was her boss. There was no one there just for her, until now. He wrapped his arms tight around her and let her weep. He didn't know one person could hold that many tears.

Amy stirred and realized she wasn't in bed. She was curled up on the couch and Sandy's arms were wrapped around her. He felt her stir and he opened his eyes. "Hi," he whispered.

"Hi. I guess I fell asleep."

"Yeah, you did."

"What time is it?"

He glanced at his watch. "About midnight."

She bolted straight up and immediately regretted it. She had a massive headache. She put her hand to her head. "Ow."

"What's wrong?"

"Headache." She touched her face and realized her eyes were swollen. "Oh God," she got up and ran to the powder room. "Oh God," she whispered. She looked like she'd been on the losing end of a prize fight. Her face was red and blotchy and her eyes were swollen. Sandy came up from behind her. She tried to hide her face.

"You don't need to hide from me. Not ever." He turned her to face him. "Come with me." He took her by the hand and led her upstairs to her bedroom. "You get comfortable and I'm going to find you something for your headache."

"Bathroom closet," she said as she slipped out of her clothes and into an old t-shirt and shorts.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

"I'm decent." He handed her a glass of water and two tablets. "I can't believe you stayed."

"Of course I stayed."

"Nobody stays," she whispered.

He slipped his finger under her chin and made her look at him. "I stay." He leaned in and kissed her forehead. "Now I'm going to get a warm cloth for your eyes." He came back with the cloth and fluffed up her pillows. He placed the cloth over her eyes and she sighed.

"That feels good."

"I don't know what happened, Sandy. I've never done that before."

"Well then, you were due."

“It’s so late, you must be exhausted and your arms are probably numb.”

“Amy just stop. Let’s get one thing clear. I don’t do things I don’t want to do.” He took her hand. “You needed me and I was glad I could be here for you.”

“I look horrible.”

He lifted the cloth off her eyes for a moment. “Don’t you know by now? I think you’re beautiful.” He set the cloth back over her eyes. “How does that feel?”

“Better, thanks.” She was glad the cloth would cover the shock in her eyes.

“I’m going to go bunk on the couch. I don’t want you to be alone.”

She took his hand and pull off the cloth. “The couch isn’t that comfortable. You could stay here. The bed’s big enough, if that’s okay?”

Sandy gave her a lopsided smile. “Of course it’s okay.” He pulled on his shirt. “Do you mind if I?”

Amy put the cloth back over her eyes. “I won’t peek.” She smiled at Sandy’s laugh. He made her smile a lot. She felt him climb into the bed next to her. She pulled the cloth off her eyes and set it on top of a magazine on the nightstand. Sandy wearing an undershirt and boxers. “Okay I peeked.” Sandy laughed and pulled her close.

“Try and get some rest,” he whispered.

She put his hand on his chest. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For everything, for holding me, for taking care of me.” She gave him a small kiss. He returned her kiss and it quickly became heated. That is until he pulled away.

“Amy, sweetheart. I want this, I want you, don’t think for a second I don’t. But I want it to be right for both of us. You’ve had an emotional night and I don’t want this to get tied up in it.” He gave her a soft kiss. “We have time.”

Sandy made the coffee as Amy made the pancakes. She looked at him and smiled and he couldn't have been happier. Well, he could have been but it wasn't the time. Holding her in bed last night felt right. She curled up against him and she could feel every muscle in her body relax. His muscles on the other hand, well, not so much. Amy was a beautiful woman and the more he got to know her the more he wanted her. He came up from behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. "How are you feeling?"

She looked back at him and smiled. "Lighter. Does that make any sense?"

"It makes perfect sense."

"You ready?" asked Amy

"Huh?"

She held up the spatula. "For your pancakes."

"Oh, yeah." He put the mugs on the table and Amy set the plates down. She grabbed the syrup out of the cupboard and they sat down to eat. His phone buzzed and he looked at the screen. "Damn."

"What is it."

"It's my friend Sam. He's a good guy but he can be a pain always trying to set me up."

She smiled. "Well he doesn't have to any more. Answer it."

He hit the button. "Hey Sam."

"Where have you been, buddy?"

"What do you mean? I've been working. I've been busy."

"Have you forgotten it's Friday night? Are we going to see you at the alley?"

"Hold on for a minute." He put the phone on mute. "I'm supposed to go bowling tonight."

"So go. You should see your friends."

He unmuted the call. "Yes, I'll be there but no set ups."

"Sandy, Charlie's sister is really cute."

"I don't care if Charlie has a cute sister. I'm seeing someone."

"Since when?"

"Since it doesn't matter when."

Amy smiled and held out her hand for the phone. He was shocked but let her have it. "Hi, Sam. This is Amy, Sandy's girlfriend." She laughed. "Sam, are you there?"

"Yeah sorry," he muttered. "Why don't you come with Sandy tonight?"

"Come with him?" Amy looked at him.

"It's up to you," Sandy whispered.

"Well, Sam, I don't bowl, but I'd be happy to be Sandy's cheerleader."

"Great. We'll see you tonight."

"Until tonight. And Sam,"

"Yeah?"

"Leave Charlie's sister at home."

Sam laughed. "You got it."

Amy handed back the phone and took a bite of her pancakes. Sandy just stared at her. "What?" she asked with a big smile.

"You just displayed some jealousy."

"Damn straight. I'm new at this girlfriend thing. I don't need the competition."

He leaned over and gave her a kiss. "You have no competition."

Sandy pulled up to Amy's and turned off the engine. He was nervous for tonight. The last time they went out it didn't go well for her. Now she was going to meet a rowdy bunch of guys who will assume they're sleeping together. When she opened the front door to him he had to smile. She must have gone shopping but she didn't have a car.

"Ah, sweetheart, did you go shopping?"

"Yes, what do you think?" She turned around and showed off perfectly cut jeans matched with a dark blue V-neck sweater. She was even wearing a little mascara and some lip gloss.

"You look terrific but how did you go shopping? You don't have a car."

"Uber."

He gave her a kiss on the cheek. "You look terrific, but you didn't need to fuss."

"I'm meeting your friends. I wanted to make a good impression."

He put his hands on her hips and looked her up and down. "Sweetheart, you're a beautiful woman and you don't need to change for anyone." He kissed her cheek. "We should get going."

They got in his truck and he started it up. "If you feel uncomfortable at all you let me know."

She placed her hand on his leg. "I think I'll be fine. You'll be there to protect me and I'll be there to protect you."

"Protect me?" he laughed.

"You won't be chum in the water tonight."

"I may have exaggerated."

She waved her hand dismissively. "No you didn't. You're gorgeous and you have the bluest eyes since Paul Newman. What woman could resist?" She gasped when she realized what she said.

He smiled, took her hand and kissed it. "Thank you, sweetheart."

They pulled into the parking lot and Sandy leaned close. "Before we go in," he whispered and gave her a soft kiss. "Okay are we ready to face the crowd?"

"Let's go."



Sandy walked into alley holding Amy's hand and his bowling ball. He saw the group gathered at a lane and walked toward them. He almost laughed at the looks on their faces. They were probably surprised that he showed up at all let alone with Amy.

"Hi guys." He set down his ball on the floor. "Everyone, this is Amy Taylor." He started pointing out the guys. First was a tall, sandy haired man. "This is Sam, you talked to him this morning."

Amy shook his hand, "Hello Sam."

Sandy pointed to the short blonde next to him. "This is his wife, Candy."

Amy smiled. "Hi."

"This is Charlie." Charlie had black hair and was as round as he was tall.

"Hi," he said.

Amy shook his hand and wondered what he told his sister.

"This is Frank and his wife Stephanie."

"It's very nice to meet you all," she said.

Sandy sat next to Amy while he put on his bowling shoes and took out his ball.

"Can I get you anything from the snack bar?"

"No, I'm good."

Sandy accepted the beer Frank handed him. "Thanks, buddy."

"Amy, can I get you one?" asked Frank.

"Oh, no thanks. I'm good."

"Okay, let's do this," said Frank as he walked toward the lane.

Sandy leaned over and gave Amy a quick kiss. "Wish me luck"

"Good luck," she smiled. Her smile faded a bit when Stephanie and Candy took up spots on either side of her on the bench.

"So, you and Sandy," said Candy. "How did you meet?"

"He did some work on my house."

"Candy, give the woman a break," said Stephanie. "She came to watch Sandy bowl, not the Spanish Inquisition."

Amy smiled. She might like Stephanie.

"There will be plenty of time for questions when after the game."

“After the game?”

“Pizza and more beer,” said Stephanie.

“Sounds fun,” Amy said with a forced smile. She felt herself starting to panic so she looked over at Sandy. He caught her gaze and winked.

“Wow, did he just wink at her? asked Candy.

Stephanie smiled. “I believe he did.”

Amy watched as Sandy and his friends bowled and he had fun. He was a good bowler and Amy got to cheer for him. They finished up and Sandy wound up with the best score. He came over to the bench to change his shoes and whispered in her ear. “They normally go for pizza but we can skip it.”

“No, it’s fine.”

“You sure?”

Amy smiled and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll be fine,” she whispered.

They walked up to the restaurant section of the alley and Amy took a seat next to Sandy. They placed their order for pizzas and they both ordered sodas.

“So Amy says she met you on a job?” said Candy.

“Yes. I did some work for her boss and she recommended me to Amy.”

“What do you do?” asked Frank.

“I design computer games,” said Amy

“Anything I’d know?”

“Well, I designed a Zombie Apocalypse series.”

“No way!” said Frank.

“Oh Lord,” said Stephanie.

“What?”

“Those games are the reason I don’t see my husband and son for hours on Sundays.”

“You have to tell me how to get past level forty two on Revenge of the Zombies. My kid is kicking my ass.”

“It wouldn’t be fair for me to give me you the answer, but I could tell you small things matter.”

“Small things matter,” Frank repeated with a smile.

Sandy squeezed her leg under the table. She looked at him and he smiled. She knew that smile could get her through anything.

When they got back to Amy’s place she offered him coffee. As she set up the coffee machine he got the mugs. He slipped his hands around her waist and gave her a quick kiss on the neck. “I hope you had a good time.”

She turned to him and smiled. “Yes, I did. Your friends are very nice.”

“I’m glad.” He smiled and gave her a small kiss. She threaded her arms around his neck and pulled him into a deeper kiss. The coffee machine’s bubbling interrupted them. “I think the coffee’s ready. She handed him his mug and put another pod in the machine.

“I think we have a minute,” she said as she pulled him back into another kiss. Sandy was surprised and delighted by her passion.

He pulled back and smiled. “Your coffee’s ready.”

They sat and drank their coffee. “I’ll bring the costumes over in the morning. The convention opens at eleven and the Firefly panel starts at one.

“Do we have to line up early for the panel. Those things look like they get crowded pretty fast.”

“No, we have VIP tickets. We have assigned seats in the second row.”

Amy’s eyes got huge. “You’re kidding. Oh my God, that is so cool.” She set her cup down. “Wait, they must have been so expensive.”

He reached for her hand. “Sweetheart. Don’t worry. I do just fine.”

“I’m sorry. Force of habit. I’m not used to people doing things for me.”

“I’m not doing this for just for you. I’m excited about going to the convention too.” He smiled and finished his coffee. “It’s getting late. I’m going to get going.”

“Okay,” she said. She saw him to the door.

He slipped his hands around her waist. “I’m glad you had a good time tonight.” He leaned in and gave her a kiss. He pulled back before he couldn’t stop. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

Amy barely slept with a mix of excitement and fear. This would be the biggest event she'd been to in years. She was hoping that her nerves wouldn't overcome her excitement. Firefly was her favorite sci fi show and she couldn't believe she could get to see the cast in person. She kept telling herself the crowds of people would all be people like them. She'd be wearing a costume. She'd be with Sandy. She'd be fine.

Amy ran to the door when she heard his truck pull up. She gasped when she opened the front door. Sandy made the perfect Captain Mal. He was wearing a dark red shirt, kakahi pants with suspenders and a long brown coat. "Wow," she whispered. "You look great." He pulled a long prop gun out of his hip holster and spun it, then placed it back in it's holster. "Okay, now you're just showing off."

Sandy smiled. "Is it working?"

"Hell yes," she said as she pulled him into a deep kiss.

"Ah, babe, as much as I'd love to continue this, I have your costume in my truck." The costume was complete with a Chinese paper umbrella. "Okay, I won't be long."

Sandy waited downstairs while Amy changed. He was hoping she'd be okay in the crush of people. He paid a small fortune for the VIP tickets but it didn't matter. It meant Amy wouldn't have to wait in line. He smiled when she came downstairs. She'd curled her hair into two small buns and the top of her head. The costume was a green work uniform covered by a blue Chinese silk jacket. She looked like the perfect Kaylee Frye. "Shiny" he said and was delighted at her giggle. The show had mix of English and Chinese cultures and language. Shiny meant all things good. It was nice to be able to share this with someone he cared about.

"You look perfect." She smiled and then got a sly grin. "Tell me the truth. You own that costume."

Sandy tried to hide his blush. "Yeah. How did you know?"

"The gun twirling. You bought mine too, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

She smiled and kissed his cheek. "Thank you, sweetheart."

The convention center was mobbed so Sandy held tight to Amy's hand. She was putting on a brave face but he knew she was nervous. He could feel her hand was a bit clammy and she was slightly pale.

"You weren't kidding about the costumes," she said.

"See, they're all like us. This is the one place where we aren't the only ones who can quote Firefly."

A woman dressed as Inara walked passed them with a little girl dresses as Kaylee. "Mommy, she looks like me?"

"Yes she does," said the mother. "She loves Kaylee."

Amy smiled at the little girl. "So do I."

"Mommy take our picture."

"Would you mind?"

"Sure." Amy crouched down and smiled as the mother took a picture. She smiled when she saw Sandy taking one too.

"Thank you," said the mother. "Say thank you, Mary."

"Thank you."

"You're very welcome."

Sandy slipped his arm around her waist. "Let's look around for a bit before we go in. They have a lot of vendors. Amy suddenly paled and looked around. "What is it."

"Oh God. I completely forgot."

"What."

"My company is always at these things. Elaine's always trying to get me to go." She looked around and saw a raised platform with an "Outer Realm Games" banner. She spotted Elaine but worse, Elaine spotted her. "Uh oh."

"What is it?"

"Elaine's coming over here."

"Oh my God, Amy. I never thought I'd see you at this. I can't believe it." She only then noticed Sandy. "Oh hi, Sandy. You're here for the Firefly panel."

"Yes, we are," said Amy

"That doesn't start for a while. Come up on stage and say hello. The place will go crazy."

“Why?” asked Sandy.

“Because no one has ever met her. They don’t even know she’s a she. She’s billed as A.L. Taylor.”

“Elaine, no.”

Sandy held tight on to Amy’s hand. “Elaine, isn’t half the allure of the games is no one knows who designed them?”

“Well...”

“What do you think all those guys would say if their favorite Zombie Apocalypse games were designed by a Kaylee look a like.”

“I suppose...”

“Why don’t you bring her a stack of the latest games and she can autograph them. You can give them away as prizes and still keep the mystery.”

Elaine got a broad smile. “Genius. Don’t go anywhere. I’ll be right back.”

Amy look at Sandy with tears in her eyes. “Thank you.” She gave him a tight hug. “Elaine’s a friend but...”

“She’s also your boss.” Elaine came back with a stack of games and a silver pen. They moved to a quiet side aisle and Amy autographed the stack. “Can I get one of those?” he asked.

Amy smiled and gave him one. “Of course.” She handed Sandy a disc and he slipped it into a deep pocket in his jacket. She handed the rest of the discs back to Elaine.

“We need to get going. I want to through the crowd to our seats,” said Sandy.

“Of course,” said Elaine. She gave Amy a hug. “Thanks so much. Stop by later.”

Elaine dashed off and Amy sighed with relief. She wrapped her arms around Sandy’s waist and put her head on his shoulder. “Are you okay?” he whispered.

“I will be, just let me stay like this for a minute.” She cuddled into his chest. “Thank you for looking out for me.”

He gave her a soft kiss. “Always.”

They were escorted to their seats by and usher and Sandy was glad to see Amy had calmed down. Being in a room with five hundred people all dressed like you might have helped. There were Mals, and Kaylees and Washs and Zoes everywhere. These

were all people who liked what they liked. They also had no idea who Amy really was. They applauded as the announcer came to the podium and welcomed everyone to the panel. The applause became thunderous as each actor was announced. Summer Glau, Sean Maher, Jewel Staite, Gina Torres and Alan Tudyk all waved as they took their seats. When Nathan Fillion was introduced you would have thought the roar would have literally brought down the house. Sandy looked at Amy and she looked like a kid at Christmas. This is what he wanted, her happy and relaxed. She had no idea what was to happen after the panel.

The announcer began his speech. "I want to thank everyone for coming for this special anniversary panel for our favorite show, "Firefly." Again the crowd roared. "I want to thank the panel and especially Nathan because today is his birthday and he's spending it with us." Everyone stood and applauded and broke into a spontaneous chorus of "Happy Birthday." Nathan smiled and thanked everyone. Sandy could have sworn he was blushing. "I believe we have a cake for you," said the announcer. The man stepped aside as a balding blonde man with a beard walked on stage carrying the cake. The crowd quickly realized who it was and Sandy was sure at least a few roof tiles would fall. It was Joss Whedon, creator of Firefly and sci fi god.

"Oh my God!" exclaimed Amy. She pulled on Sandy's arm. "Look who it is!"

They sat through the panel and Sandy thought Amy never stopped smiling. She didn't ask any questions, but he didn't expect her to. When the panel was over and everyone waved as they left the stage.

"Oh Sandy, that was the best thing ever!"

"It's not over yet."

"What do you mean?" An usher came and led the first three rows of their section through a door and down a hallway. The ushered the door and there they were, the cast.

"Sandy?"

"It's a meet and greet. We get to say hi and have pictures taken."

"What? Oh my God!"

"Come on, it will be fine."

"I'll embarrass myself and you."

"No you won't."

Sandy held tight to her hand while they wandered around a bit. He finally got up the nerve to walk her up to Nathan who was talking to Joss. "Hello, Mr. Fillion, Mr. Whedon, I'm Sandy McIntyre and this is my girlfriend Amy Taylor. He leaned closer and said "A.L. Taylor." He was taking a chance but he heard that Nathan was a big gaming fan. If he was, he would know who Amy was. The look on his face told him he was right.

"What? A. L. Taylor? Revenge of the Zombies?"

"You designed that?" asked Joss.

"Yes I did?"

"This is amazing," said Nathan as he took Amy's hand. "You have to tell me how to get past level forty two on Revenge of the Zombies."

"Why does everyone ask you that?" asked Sandy.

"It's a killer level," said Joss.

"I'm not supposed to tell but I think for you two I can make an exception. Shoot the raccoons."

"What? They're so cute."

"They're Zombie guards."

"Oh my God, this is great. Where's the camera guy." Nathan let out a high whistle and waved over the photographer. Nathan put his arm around Amy and Joss put his arm around Sandy and the photographer took a few shots. "Make three prints," said Nathan. He came back a few minutes later with three copies of the picture. Nathan and Joss autographed a picture for each of them and then he handed the last one to Amy. "You have to autograph it for me."

"Really?" she asked as he handed her the pen. She signed A.L. Taylor on the picture and handed it back to him.

"Can I get an email if I get stuck again."

"Sure," Amy flipped the picture over and wrote down her email. She looked over at Sandy and smiled. He reached into his jacket and pulled out his autographed copy of the game. "I promise to get you another one." She handed it to Nathan. "This is the latest release. I hope you enjoy it." Nathan gave her a big hug.



“Thank you.” He looked at Sandy and looked a bit embarrassed. “Sorry dude. I’m not trying to steal your girl.” Sandy was about to respond when Amy looked at him and smiled.

“You couldn’t.”

“So we’re cool, dude?”

Sandy smiled, still looking at Amy. “Yeah, were cool.”

Amy opened the door to her home and set her umbrella aside. She put her arms around Sandy's neck and gave him a kiss. "Thank you for the best day ever. I can't believe you arranged for all of that. It was very exciting." She walked to the kitchen to make coffee. "I can't believe they knew who I am. It's so surreal." She set out the mugs and realized Sandy looked a bit down. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing?"

"Alexander McIntyre, you've never lied to me before. Don't start now."

"I was just a bit startled. I knew your games were popular but I didn't realize how popular you are until today."

"Do you think you have to compete with any of that?"

"I can't."

She pulled him close. "You listen to me. Until today my work was just what I did in my office upstairs. I knew it was popular but I saw that crowd in front of the company banner and I nearly fainted. I don't want anything like that in my life. Meeting those celebrities and finding out they like my work as much as I like theirs, that was incredibly flattering. But that would have never happened if you hadn't arranged it. You did it for me. You make me happier than I've ever been."

Sandy smiled. "I'm glad you're happy."

"I'm always happy when I'm with you." She stood back and looked at him. She repeated slowly, "I'm always happy when I'm with you. Do you understand? Sandy, I'm in love with you."

He smiled and pulled her close. "I'm in love with you too."

"Well that works out nicely then, doesn't it?" she smiled.

"I believe it does," he said as he gave her a kiss. "Now what?"

Amy turned off the coffeemaker. She took him by the hand and led him up the stairs to her bedroom. "I'm clever. I'll figure out something."