

Girls on Film

(March, 1991)

My door is cracked open, and Beth doesn't even bother to knock. Even after several months, it's still weird to think of it as "my door" and "my room" rather than "ours." I guess it shouldn't be so strange; she doesn't sleep here anymore, but during waking hours, Beth spends nearly as much time in this room as she did when we were roommates. She sits on the bed next to me, and I take the photos out of the envelope and hand them to her without a word. She laughs. "So this is show and tell?"

"Yes," I tell her. "Because you won't believe me without the pictures." It's too silly, and too - well, too *something*, anyway. The first photo is looking out from the lobby of the dorm. Mostly, what you can see is snow piled nearly halfway up the window.

"I heard about the 'freak snowstorm in the Midwest,' but I didn't think you guys got hit." Last week was Spring Break, and Beth got a jump on things. The Thursday before break, she blew off her afternoon classes and caught an early flight down to the Bahamas. She beat the start of the storm by twelve hours.

"But you didn't care enough to call and check on me," I say, putting a theatrical pout into my voice.

"No. I was too busy in the casino," she shakes her head sadly. "I figured out how they can offer unlimited free drinks."

I beat her to the punchline. "Because they're not really free." She nods. "How much did they cost you?"

"Let's see," she starts counting on her fingers. "I had one, two - call it ten drinks, counting Friday and Saturday night. And I lost my whole gambling budget, and the buy-souvenirs-for-friends budget, too," she says, shrugging. "Sorry, by the way." I'm not surprised. Two summers ago, when I went with her and her family on a cruise, we spent a little time in the ship's casino. She was not the most savvy gambler. Clearly, nothing has changed. "So that was \$400 before I quit for good and stuck to the beach. Forty bucks a drink. But on the bright side, at least they weren't watered down."

No, I imagine not. "I don't feel so bad about being snowed in now. We were going to - I don't know, go somewhere for a night or two, but once the snow hit..."

Beth looks at the next picture. It's the lobby of the dorm after Brian, John from New York and Melody Katz got through transforming it, last Sunday afternoon. There's two inches of sand covering the floor in front of the horrible purple couch, and right in the middle of that, a plastic inflatable kiddie pool filled with water.

"It was Brian's idea," I explain. "I was whining about how you were sitting out on the beach living it up, and we were snowed in and how horribly unfair it was. My last Spring Break, totally ruined." I wasn't *really* whining, and I certainly didn't expect Brian to actually do anything about it.

But of course he did. As if I needed any more reasons to love him. “It had just started to clear up Sunday morning, but there was a chance of more snow by the evening, and he said, ‘Maybe there’s something we can do. If we can’t get you to the beach, let’s see if we can get the beach to you.’”

Beth whistles. “He did that, all right.”

“He told me to just be patient, give him three hours or so. You know me, I had a textbook open the minute he left. It was about two in the afternoon when he got back. He came in, told me to get my swimsuit on and get ready to go to the beach.” I didn’t argue; I never do, with Brian.

The next picture is me, in my bikini – the one Beth bought me for my honeymoon. It barely covers anything; I’d never have bought anything like that for myself. To tell the truth, I’ve always favored one-piece bathing suits. That bikini is the only one I actually own.

Anyway, in the photo, I’m laying out on a towel atop the sand in the lobby, with Janet Black and Melody Katz, also in bikinis, right next to me. Brian’s in his bathing suit – and nothing else – sitting in the kiddie pool.

“Wow,” Beth says, laughing. “He wasn’t kidding. Where’d he find the sunlamps?” There were four of them; two are visible in the photo.

“I have no idea. I didn’t ask. I figured that way, if he gets in trouble and there’s a disciplinary hearing, I can’t testify against him.”

“Good thinking,” Beth grins.

There *wasn’t* any trouble, although we did have to vacuum the lobby six times to get all the sand up. But it was worth it. My expression in the next picture – total relaxation – says it all. It’s just Janet and me, each with a drink in our hand, and – naturally – a paper umbrella in each drink. I didn’t ask Brian where he found those, either.

In the picture, we’re on our beach towels, surrounded by shredded paper – the remains of our MCAT review books. Since they’re apparently changing the format of the test starting next year, there’s no point handing them down to anyone. Tearing them up, page by page, and tossing the shreds into the air like confetti, was a lot of fun. More than it probably should have been.

“It was really nice,” I say, remembering how wonderful it felt to just lie there and relax. I barely did any schoolwork all week. Just two or three hours of reading each day – that’s nothing.

I really needed the break, too. I know I’ll have my honeymoon in June, but between now and then, there’s the rest of the semester, finishing my Senior Thesis, sorting out all the final details for medical school and getting ready for graduation. Oh, and my wedding, too. Can’t forget that!

And after the honeymoon, that’s it. Medical school starts the beginning of August, and there are a million things I’ll have to do to prepare for it, once we’re back from the honeymoon. I have no idea how they’ll all get done. Once med school starts, it’ll be endless work for four

years. Then endless work as a resident for three or four more years.

“I can see that,” Beth says, noticing how my eyes have glazed over. “Did anybody ever tell you, you work too hard?”

“I think you might have mentioned it once or twice,” I say, turning over the next picture. It’s Brian and me, on my towel, wrapped in each other’s arms and entire oblivious to the fact that we were being photographed. If Beth needed any proof how much I’ve changed from the shy, uptight, overstressed girl who walked into room 208 four years ago, this picture would be it.

“Who took the picture?”

“Janet said it was her. I’m choosing to believe that,” I say. Honestly? I don’t care who it was. Brian’s my fiancée – I don’t care who sees me kissing him. And we had our clothes on – not many of them, true, but everything we *did* have on was exactly where it was supposed to be.

The last picture is from Thursday night – the last night of our homemade beach. There are a dozen of us there, and in the corner of the photo, the blender is just visible. It got a good workout that night. We went through four bottles of margarita mix, I think.

“I should’ve stayed here. You had a better time than I did,” Beth says. I can see she’s not just joking. And I see something else in her eyes. She’s looking back at the picture of me and Janet. She’s – not jealous, exactly. She is sad, though. After my wedding, we’re going to go our separate ways; I’m going to the Crewe School of Medicine, while Beth will be at Ohio State starting in the fall, to work on her doctorate in psychology.

Maybe there is a little jealousy there. Janet’s got into Crewe Med as well. We’ve already talked about being dissection partners when classes start in August. I can’t pretend that it won’t be nice to have a friend, someone I’ve known for four years, to go through medical school with me. But Janet can never replace Beth as my best friend – nobody can.

I take the picture out of Beth’s hand and give her a hug. “I wish you’d stayed here, too.” I let her go, giving myself enough space to put my hand on my heart. “But you’ll always be *here*. You think I could ever forget everything you’ve done for me?”

“I should be the one saying that,” she answers. I shake my head. She helped me learn to enjoy myself, to come out of my shell. She taught me to balance schoolwork and my personal life, and she helped keep me sane. And all that was before the dreams and Dr. Walters and almost getting killed a year ago.

“Beth, I mean it. I love you. I always will. I know people always say they’re going to keep in touch after college and they don’t, but I’m giving you my word. And you know I never, ever break my word. You’re never going to be rid of me.”

She hugs me back, kisses my cheek. “I’m not real big on breaking promises, either. You’ve got my word on that, too.”

Well, that’s that, then. Neither of us has ever broken a promise to the other. We’re not going to start with this one.

