


S2 Chapter 7

Samantha's POV

"Oh Mom, I'm so upset that I can't go with you to grandma's birthday," I said to my mother while we were having lunch at the mall.

"I know, honey. But she'll love your gift, and you need to work. Responsibilities always come first, Samantha," my mother replied. 

My mother was a very strong woman. She raised me by herself. My father never wanted to take responsibility. He would show up occasionally saying he wanted to see me, but it was more to antagonize my mother. So after I turned eighteen, I pushed him away. I didn't need a father who only appeared when it was convenient for him to cause trouble with my mother. It was very clear to me that he had no interest in his daughter.

"How long will you stay there?" I asked.

"A week. I took some days off and I'm going to make the most of it. I also enjoy being mothered," she smiled, and I smiled back.

"Will you be okay?"

"Yes, Mom, I will."

"Now tell me what's new? How are things at the store?" My mother and I talked about everything. When I was cheated on, she supported me and said I could quit my job, but I knew I had to be responsible.

"Everything's the same. It's difficult, but not impossible," I answered. "Oh Mom, I haven't told you. Yesterday, when I went to buy grandma's gift, this clueless guy came into the store." I told my mother everything that happened at the religious goods store, and by the time I finished, she was laughing hard.

"I can't believe it, Samantha, you really left the card for the man's mother? You're impossible!"

"Well, maybe he'll learn to be less rude. But I'll tell you, he's a gorgeous rude guy!"

"Oh really? That much?"

"He could definitely be a model. Seriously, Mom, the man is perfect. I don't think I've ever seen such a handsome man."

"This man really impressed you, huh?"

"Yeah, too bad he's like Halley's comet - the chances of me seeing him again are practically zero."

"But didn't you say he was rude?"

"Oh, but I wouldn't mind giving him some lessons in manners!" My mother and I burst out laughing.

After lunch, I said goodbye to my mother; I wouldn't see her for days. I was walking to the store, and when I was almost there, I ran into my ex-boyfriend Romulus.

"Dear Samantha, my love!" Romulus came over, trying to hug me.

"Back off, Romulus. And don't call me 'dear Samantha.'"

"Come on, Samantha. We need to talk."

"I have nothing to say to you," I said and tried to move past him.

"Samantha, you have to give me a chance. I broke up with Cybele, and it was stupid to be with her. Come back to me, Samantha. We were together

for two years." Romulus was making a pitiful face that made me furious.

"Funny, you didn't remember we were together when you stuck your dick in Cybele's mouth," I said, very irritated.

"I made a mistake, okay? But I like you."

"Look, Romulus. Enough! If you broke up with Cybele, that's your problem. But I'm not getting back with you. So, move on with your life." I tried to move past him again, and he grabbed my arm. "Let go of me!"

"Things don't work like that, Samantha." Romulus changed his demeanor and now seemed angry.

While we were dating, Romulus often acted more aggressively. He was never explicit about it, never hit me, but sometimes he'd get more irritated than he should. He would yell and grab me forcefully when we fought. My mom even intervened a few times, but it never went beyond yelling and rough handling. I thought it was bad, but convinced myself it was just his strong temperament. My mom hated him and was relieved when I broke up with him.

"Romulus, let me go or I'm calling security!" I said through gritted teeth, and he released me.

"Look, I'm only letting you go because it's time for your shift at the store. But this isn't over, Samantha. We're going to talk."

"Romulus, we broke up over a month ago. You cheated on me with Cybele. This makes no sense. Just forget about me!" I sighed and walked away from him.

"We're going to talk, Samantha!" I heard Romulus shouting behind me.

When I entered the store, the snake pit was assembled. Cybele, Cynthia,

and Laura were perched at the cash register counter, and Cybele was crying.

"Are you happy now, Samantha?" Cynthia came walking toward me with a confrontational tone. "Romulus broke up with Cybele because of you, said you two are getting back together because he still likes you. Cybele is devastated."

I sighed and faced her. I was tired of those three. Walking past them toward the back of the store, I just said,

"Funny, when he was my boyfriend and I caught that bitch with his dick in her mouth, nobody was concerned." I gave a sarcastic laugh. "But you sluts can calm down, I have nothing to do with this. I'm not planning to get back with that idiot."

I went through the stockroom door and headed to the break room to put my purse in my locker. I needed to find another job, and fast.

The day was pretty quiet, which meant the hours dragged by. Near the end of the afternoon, Manuela stopped by the store entrance and signaled for us to go get a snack. Manu was a saleswoman at the makeup store across from where I worked. We became friends because I always went there to buy something. We talked a lot, and since she lived alone in the city, I introduced her to my mom and often invited her to our house. She was a great girl, very smart and fun.

"You seem a bit down today, Sam. What's wrong?" Manu asked when we sat down at the café.

"My mom's going to be away for a week, Manu. I don't like being alone."

"But you don't have to be alone. Stay at my place these days, I'd love the company, and we have the same schedule here at the mall. If you stay at

my place, we can come and go together. What do you think?" Manu offered with a smile.

"Seriously, Manu? I like that idea."

"Then it's settled. We'll go to my place today, and tomorrow, before coming to the mall, we'll stop by your house so you can get your things."

"Manu, won't I be in your way?"

"Of course not, Sam! You'll only be alone in the morning because I have to go to college. I'll love having company!" Manu looked at me suspiciously. "But that's not all, is it? I saw Romulus cornering you."

I told Manu everything that had happened and what Romulus had said. Manu seemed worried.

"All the more reason for you to stay at my place." Manu and Romulus never got along. She had intervened in several of our fights because she thought he was getting too aggressive, and she was right.

"Don't worry, Manu. He never crossed the line," I reassured her.

"But let's not make it easy for him, Sam!"

"Alright. Thank you, Manu! For inviting me to stay at your place and for caring about me."

"We're friends. That's what friends do." Manu gave me a huge smile. She was cute, tiny, wore braces, and had a heart full of generosity. "Now let's talk about more fun things."

"Girl, let me tell you about this guy I met yesterday." I remembered the guy from the religious goods store; I had to tell Manu, she would get a kick out of it. I told her everything.

"Oh, Sam! You're incredible. Imagine his face when the saleswoman handed him your card. But you did leave your phone number, right?"

"No way, Manu. The guy was a jerk."

"Come on, describe him to me in detail."

I described every little detail to Manu, including the scent of his cologne. Manu listened attentively with a big smile.

"This guy really impressed you!" Manu commented when I finished talking.

"Manu, he's simply the most handsome man I've ever seen in my life! But he's also very arrogant."

"Ah, too bad you didn't give him your number. Arrogance can be fixed."

We burst out laughing. It was time to go back to the store. Manu had made me laugh a lot, and I was returning to work more relaxed. At the end of the shift, Manu appeared at the store's door with Pablo, one of the mall's security guards.

"Sam, don't make it obvious, but I saw Romulus near the door, I think he's waiting for you," Manuela whispered. "Pablo will escort us."

"Hi, Pablo. We're going to give you trouble, aren't we?" I said, greeting Pablo.

"What trouble, Sam? It's a privilege to accompany two such beautiful ladies." Pablo was very friendly and kind. The three of us started walking.

"Girls, I'm driving, and I'll drop you off at home."

"Pablo, you don't have to," I said, feeling it would be too much to ask.

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"I don't have to, but I want to. Manu told me you're going to her place. It's on my way," Pablo assured. "Tomorrow I'll talk to the staff to keep an eye out for Romulus, Sam. It's better to be safe than sorry, unfortunately some guys can't take no for an answer."

"Thank you, Pablo."

As we passed through the door, I saw Romulus standing in the corner with a sour face. Maybe being a bit more careful wasn't such a bad idea.

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