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Reunion

Danita Stomp

As the silver and blue Boeing jetliner climbed to its cruising altitude, Pamela Arnold pulled her briefcase from between her feet and placed it on her lap. She opened a maroon folder and removed an itinerary. It outlined the upcoming fortieth class reunion at the University of Miami. She hadn't returned since graduation. Although the activities commenced on Friday, she chose to only attend the Saturday evening festivities, spend the night at the hotel adjacent to the convention center, and fly home on Sunday. The cover letter, attached to the front of the itinerary, was a personalized invitation sent by the reunion committee. The valedictorian from her graduating class, Daniel Williamson, Ph.D., had signed it.

Dan.

Pam admired him and the body of work he produced throughout his career. Nor had she forgotten her warm and tender feelings for him many decades ago. She sighed.

A vague ache lingered as she leaned her head against the edge of the window. Gazing at the landscape far below, her mind drifted to the last time she saw Dan, the time she made her choice clear both to herself and to him.



A book bag on one arm, she had felt the wind whip her mini-dress, and caught it before she was totally uncovered. Pam stood at the edge of the quad, where the noise from the students protesting the war was bearable. Without the breeze, the sun would have been scorching. She moved around the edge of the crowd and walked toward the Marine Biology building, avoiding the continuing demonstration. She was going to hand in her thesis this week and go home to Iowa and Ken. He was one of the few men she knew whose hair wasn't longer than her fluffy brown curls.

She joined the graduate students gathered in the basement to party for the last time. They had attended their final classes and were planning their futures: going home, preparing for distant internships, new jobs, and teaching assignments. She grabbed a paper cup of beer from a guy at the keg, and joined in with some friends standing nearby.

Pam watched the antics of gleeful grads as they immersed themselves in pizza, beer, and clouds of sweet-smelling smoke. There was plenty of loud music and the boom box played *Papa was a Rolling Stone* by The Temptations. Some of the grads were dancing, bell-bottoms swinging and tie-dyed shirts clashing with colorful shorts and short skirts. After talking with classmates, she drifted toward Dan, and they moved to a distant corner of the room where it was quieter and they could hear one another.

Dan asked, "Want another beer while I'm headed for the keg?"

Pam counted on her fingers and grinned widely, "I think I've had my limit for the day."

"Alright, but are you going to at least consider the Florida grant?"

“Do you mean the Gulf Coast internship?”

He considered her question. “Yes, that’s the one. The funds to do research off the west coast of Florida have been approved. It would be perfect for...us. And it’s the type of research we’ve always talked about doing.”

Pam raised her eyebrows.

He was smiling. “Besides, we work well together and would be good company for each other.”

She returned the smile. Dan held her close and kissed her on her lips. She kissed him back. He gently grasped her shoulders. “Come on—join me in Florida.”

She looked him squarely in the eyes, “Let me think about it, Dan.”

“What’s there to think about?”

She took a deep breath. “You know I have other commitments...other responsibilities.”

Dan delivered his best sourpuss expression. “You mean Ken, don’t you?”

“Of course I mean Ken.”

“Well, at least think about it?”

She gazed into his eyes. “I will. I promise.”

A new song played—*The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* by Roberta Flack.

Dan suggested, “Let’s dance.”

After one number, he twirled them toward the double door exit. “Let’s get out of here.”

She was a little lightheaded from the alcohol, but not drunk. “Where are you taking me, Dan?”

“Just around the corner.”

He nuzzled her ear. “Take a chance with me.”

Pam responded playfully, “OK.”

He motioned to her. “Here, take my hand.”

Pam accompanied him around the corner. Using his key, they entered the familiar marine biology lab. He pulled her closely to him, gently caressed her head, and kissed her—a long kiss. Pam returned it enthusiastically. When they separated, Dan asked “You know I care for you...a lot?”

“You’re very special to me, Daniel.” She always used his full name rather than his shortened name when she spoke about something important.

“So you’ll really think about the Florida Gulf Coast assignment soon?”

“I will.”

He rummaged through his pockets and pulled out a marijuana joint. Dan palmed his lighter and lit up, then offered the hand-rolled cigarette to Pam, but she declined.

“Live a little, Pam. School’s out.”

“No, thanks. Besides, I’ve already had too much to drink. I don’t need any other mood enhancing substances!”

He put the joint down on a stack of classroom chairs resting against the cinderblock wall, stared up and down at her, and began to unbutton his shirt. She stopped him. "I can't. I told you I'm serious about Ken and we're making plans for the future."

He lowered his gaze. "Really? Ken?"

"Dan, you know I have strong feelings for you, but my heart belongs to someone else."

"Not even for one night?"

Pam sighed, "No, I can't."

She helped him button his shirt, then pressed her palms against his chest, kissed him tenderly on the cheek, and left. He stood there, alone in the lab, surrounded by the poignant words and soulful melody of Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* playing on the radio.

Their moment together had passed.



Pamela Arnold never really got over Daniel Williamson.

The flight attendant advised, "The captain has just turned on the seat belt sign as we begin our descent and final approach. Please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full, upright position. Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins."

Pam put away her reunion itinerary and stowed her briefcase as instructed. Thoughts of Dan still lingered.

She leaned back in the seat, closed her eyes, and surfed through the years since grad school: Iowa and marriage to Ken, and soon afterwards, luckily, his transfer to San Diego, where she kept her hand in lab work at Scripps Institute. She expanded into deep-sea research—a field she loved—once the children were in school. Yet, she had followed Dan's career with interest, and rejoiced for his successes as he received accolades for carbonate work on coral reefs. She sent him congratulatory notes for his awards. *I wonder if he still has the ones I wrote? I have a file of those he sent to me. I miss that with email. No personal touch there. But I couldn't use the computer at Beth's death...I'm glad I wrote a letter to him...pen, ink, and paper. Their marriage was nearly as long as ours. I wonder if it hurts Dan not to have children. How awful.*

From the cockpit, the pilot authoritatively ordered, "Flight attendants—prepare for landing."



Pam collected her luggage, hailed a taxi, and headed toward the hotel. She thought about her husband and their lives. Ken was a loyal husband, an amazing father, and a good provider. But ever since the kids had gone off to school, she and Ken had less in common. Was it empty nest syndrome or had they simply grown apart emotionally? They had gotten into a pattern of lovemaking that had become more automatic and less than fulfilling for her. Pam was happy with

her work, but wished for fresh passion, romance, and a deeper connection at home. She felt they both deserved more, but was unsure how to broach the issue with Ken.

I'll talk to him when I get home.

After arriving at her sixth-floor room, she noticed the light on her telephone was flashing. A member of the reunion committee left a message alerting her that the class members would be gathering in the lobby outside the main banquet hall for drinks and hors d'oeuvres starting at 5:00 p.m.

Wearing only panties and a satin bra while freshening up, Pam added some deep violet shadow to her eyelids to emphasize her dramatic, dark green eyes. She looked at herself in the large bathroom mirror.

Well, slight sags, but not bad. Do baby stretch marks add character? What about some gray hairs? Her mostly light-brown hair fell in luxurious curls to her shoulders. Making a silly face at herself, she turned and peeked coyly over her shoulder at her backside. *Maybe this is my better side.* Even as a mature woman in her sixties, she was in good shape due to a vigorous exercise program she followed religiously.

Quickly dressing, she ran her hands down the sides of her black lace dress, smoothed it over her curves, and admired the scalloped edging on the just-deep-enough v-neck. She picked up her evening bag.

Okay, good to go. Feeling reunion-ready.



A soaring skywalk connected her fashionable hotel to the convention center. It took less than five minutes from room to lobby, where she picked up her badge and renewed old acquaintances, many of whom she recognized by sight. Several people congratulated her on her last article on black smokers, recognizing landmark work on those deep-sea phenomena whose microbes were looking more and more like a nursery of life. As she politely responded and moved on, Pam surveyed the lobby for one person in particular. She spotted Dan surrounded by people.

Although not as muscular as she remembered, he was a very attractive and healthy sixty-plus-year-old man. Dan's slacks and European-cut sport coat emphasized a tanned physique still able to handle the fieldwork he occasionally did on struggling coral colonies in the Bahamas. His russet beard and thinning red-brown hair were streaked with silver.

He looks as distinguished as he should. I'll bet those groupies are making nice about his last Nat Geo special. To her, Dan's smile was a dead giveaway he knew he was being flattered. She thought he looked great.

They made eye contact across the lobby. Once he had an opportunity to escape his entourage, she met him halfway, and they embraced.

"Pam, it's been a while and you're as beautiful as ever."

"And you still know how to flatter a lady, Dan."

“How’s Ken?”

“He’s well, but doesn’t like to attend these activities.”

Dan smiled. “I know the feeling. All the traveling isn’t as much fun as it was years ago. But this reunion—it’s a special one.”

“I agree.”

Now she wanted to ask something personal and wasn’t sure how he would handle it. She didn’t think it would be right to discuss the topic, except face-to-face. “Dan, how are you coping since Beth passed away? I read of her death in our alumni journal. I am so sorry.”

He took Pam by the hands. “I’m all right, most of the time. It’s just, sometimes being in that empty house....”

He paused and took a deep breath, squeezed her hands, then dropped them. “Sometimes being in that empty house all alone bothers me.”

She was concerned about opening up an old wound. Pam closed her eyes and nodded her head up and down. She also knew what it was like to be alone at home, even though her spouse was alive. Before she could say another word, Dan spoke. “I’m grateful you asked, Pam. There are so few people I can talk to about it, but you’re someone I trust with my heart.”

She held his hands tightly, overwhelmed by his words.

The ushers announced dinner was being served in the main ballroom. They went in together but discovered they were assigned to different tables. Toward the end of the meal they left their tables to rendezvous at the edge of the room, just as the speakers took over the podium.

Dan asked, “Do you want to hear old history, or would you rather get out of here?”

“I’m ready to leave. Talking to classmates and seeing you are the two reasons why I came.”

Without hesitation, he took Pam by the hand, and they left the ballroom for the solitude of the deck. Commandeering two chairs and a table, they made themselves comfortable. The wait staff was happy to bring drinks to them.

They sat near the pool and talked of family, work, and how life had intervened in the past years. Their reconnection flowed smoothly, as though no time had passed.

“Dan, you remember that grant in Florida you invited me to join?”

“Yes, I do. And it was good work with solid results the team eventually published, but...but....”

“But what?”

Dan stared at her. “It wasn’t the same without you. I’m not just talking about your work ethic. I missed you.”

Pam was only slightly surprised by the disclosure. They had been more than simply friends. Her heart raced. She had goose bumps. *It isn’t just because my dress is lightweight.*

In another area of the convention center, a band played and the music floated softly to them. Dan asked, “How about a dance?”

Pam raised her eyebrows before agreeing. “Alright, one dance, then let’s go in where it’s warmer.”

It didn't seem like forty years had passed since the last time they danced together. *Can Dan feel my legs trembling?* They held each other like lovers. *When was the last time I went dancing?* She missed the romantic feeling of being led by a partner who excited her.

The music stopped, but they didn't. Finally, Dan said, "You are shivering. We'd better get inside before it gets any colder. If you'd like, we can go up to my room. The hotel gave me a suite with an enclosed balcony on the sixth floor."

"Thank you for the lovely offer. We really haven't finished talking—so let's go upstairs just for a while. We are both on the same floor."

They took the elevator, and when they exited, walked the length of the hallway to Dan's suite. Her room was the same size, except for the balcony. They sat in two easy chairs in Dan's room and enjoyed the view through the full length windows.

Dan asked, "Tell me again why Ken isn't here?"

Pam decided to be straight. "Actually, since the kids left for school, we haven't done much together. Our friends still see us at activities. But for the most part, we lead separate lives, and have for several years now. I've been thinking about making it formal, but I hope there's something to save."

Silence filled the room for a moment. She leaned forward and touched Dan's hands. "In some ways, my life is like yours. I feel as though I live in a big house—alone."

Dan did not respond verbally. He only nodded.

"I could use a nightcap, Dan. Something refreshing. Do you want one also?"

He smiled at her and stood up. "Me too, but I've got the next best thing." He slipped his hand into his coat pocket and fished out a marijuana cigarette. "I think this is just what the doctor ordered. You OK with this, Pam?"

She laughed and answered, "Times change, why not try it?"

He found his lighter, but failing to find an ashtray, he retrieved the soap dish from the bathroom. Dan lit the joint and passed it to her. Pam took a drag, held it in, managing to suppress a cough. She passed it back to Dan. After two puffs, she was buzzed and sat quietly, assessing her strange feelings. A giggle surprised her, as she wondered if her arm was long enough to reach the table for another hit. It was too much effort, so he handed it to her.

Over the next few minutes, the joint sat in the ashtray and went out, ignored, as Dan expanded on his decision to leave the Marine Institute.

"You know, Pam, ever since I lost Beth, I live my life one day at a time. No more long range plans. The moment is all that exists. I miss the research and the camaraderie. But that's not all of life. I realized I had to make a choice between work and living. I chose living," he said, his voice mellow to her ears.

Just listening to him made Pam want to kiss him, ruffle his hair, and do something, anything physical. While he spoke, she got up and stood close to him, pulling him up. She put her arms around his waist. "Kiss me. No questions. Just kiss me."

They embraced and kissed as they had many years ago. This time, his moist lips and playful tongue held her attention to the exclusion of everything else. Her eyes opened wide as

her lips tingled. No...they were electric. Then she closed her eyes and was engulfed in colors and sensations she'd never felt before. It was just a kiss, but she was held captive by it.

Why couldn't it be like this with Ken? Why had the fire gone out? Stay in the moment, Pam. Stay in the moment.

Dan kissed her everywhere: lips, eyes, neck, ears. She could hear his breathing. The excitement caused her to melt in his arms. Surrendering and being held closely was a wonderful feeling.

"Spend the night with me, Pam."

She opened her eyes. "Yes," she whispered. There was not a moment of hesitation. She giggled slightly as she kissed him again.

They undressed, making no effort to put their wardrobe in any semblance of order, tossing clothes on the floor, the chairs, and desk. Without conversation, they entered the shower, hand in hand. The bathroom steamed up quickly as they probed each other, touching and kissing, enjoying the journey of discovery. Pam laughed when Dan dropped the bar of soap, as if he needed permission to explore her. He started at her toes and soaped his way up to her neck.

After toweling each other off, Dan handed Pam one of the hotel robes and put on the other. He stayed in the bathroom, promising to be out in a few minutes. Pam returned to the bedroom where she tightened her belt robe, knowing it would soon be loosened. She looked at herself in the mirror.

Is...is this the right thing to do? I'm married....in a dysfunctional relationship, but still married.

She ran her hands through her hair.

Dan. The love of my youth. This moment is for me.

She reexamined herself in the mirror above the dresser, turning to the left and to the right, admiring her well-exercised figure.

Yes, this moment is for me.

Looking at the king-size bed, she reviewed her routine at home. Normally she wore a tee shirt nightgown when she slept. But tonight, in a hotel room with Dan, she allowed the robe to fall to the floor and then slipped her naked body between the sheets, enjoying the soft coolness of smooth cotton while she waited for Dan to come to bed.

My lover.... The thought sent chills down the length of her spine.

A few moments later Dan emerged from the bathroom. He turned off the room lights and opened the curtains, letting in the bright light of a full moon. Pam smiled as she looked at him. He threw his robe across the back of a nearby chair. In a flash, he was under the covers beside her.

Having waited for this moment their entire adult lives, they met in the middle of the bed and looked into each other's eyes. Without a word, they resumed their fervent kissing and ardent touching.

Dan pulled the covers from them, exposing their nakedness to the moonlight. He gently moved Pam onto her back, lifted her legs and bent her knees. He positioned himself on his knees

and spread her legs apart, as if to mount her in the missionary position. He rubbed his member against her most sensitive areas.

Oh my God, that feels so good. And he's hard already.

He tapped his shaft playfully against various parts of her willing pubic region. Her face was heating up and began to flush. Pam's lips—those on her face, as well as between her legs—parted, anticipated, desired. Her breathing became more rapid.

Dan leaned forward, pressed against her, cupped each breast with his hand, and licked each one. Pam watched her nipples become tall and firm. She squirmed and whispered a moan. Using slow, circular motions, he relentlessly tantalized her nipples with his tongue.

He moved his lips to her neck, and Pam saw the fire in his eyes, and felt the heat of his body. He placed his arms on her shoulders and kissed her hard. She put her arms around him and returned the favor.

Everywhere, he kissed her, and finally reached her most private parts. He spread her legs, lowered his head, and experimented with his fingers and tongue.

Pam leaned forward to watch, but quickly fell back on her pillow, as if exhausted, unable...unwilling to stop the wordless expressions of pleasure coming from her mouth.

Don't stop; love is colors and lightness and....

He dipped the tip of his tongue anywhere he wanted, testing, probing.

Don't stop, ohhh....

She arched her back and heaved an enormous shudder. He stopped.

“Are you OK, Pam?”

She took two deep breaths. “I haven’t felt this wonderful for a long time—like this, not ever! Don’t stop.”

Dan inserted two fingers inside her, pushing down as he kissed and licked her. Pam clutched his head while he explored her most sensitive areas. She arched her back again and made no effort to push his head away. She grasped his forearms, closed her eyes, and surrendered to pleasure.

Oh my God, that’s incredible.

After her eruption, Dan eased up on his foreplay, moved to her side, and rolled over onto his back, squeezing her hand tightly. His breathing became shallow. Pam’s mouth was wide open. Her body was flush from her cheeks to her breasts. She turned her head to see his face.

“Look at me, Dan.”

He turned his gaze from the whiteness of the ceiling to her face.

“Stay right there and don’t move,” she commanded.

Dan smiled back, “I promise.”

Pam rolled on top of him and moved directly over his engorged member. She slowly caressed it, wrapped her fingers around the shaft, and felt a pulse.

He’s still hard as a rock.

She kissed his manhood on the tip, then opened her mouth wide enough to accept it, swirled her tongue around the head, and plunged it deep into her mouth, fully aware of his squirms and sounds.

After several minutes of vigorous oral pleasure, she paused to look at her lover. He was breathing heavily and his eyes were shut. She also noticed she was very moist.

No need for lubricant tonight.

Pam saw Dan's member was still erect and firm. She straddled him, rose up and inserted him inside her. She was overwhelmed by the sensation and let out a whimper of happiness.

My God, he's so hard.

Dan asked, "Am I hurting you?"

Pam looked into his eyes. "No, not at all, Dan. I can't feel pain right now," she panted.

She pressed her hands down on his chest and began to raise and lower herself, back and forth, up and down, over and over and over again. She moaned in rhythm with her thrusts. Dan's face turned crimson red and his breathing quickened.

He urged her, "Don't stop."

Pam obliged her lover and continued the movement. She stared down at him. They were both a breath away from =orgasm.

Her pleasure reached a peak. "Yes—YES—OH YES."

While she tried to regain control of her breathing, Pam leaned forward to kiss Dan on the lips. However, he had other ideas. He placed his arms around her shoulders, repositioned his knees upward and his heels closer to her back.

What's he up to now?

Dan continued pumping her. The pace was surprisingly fast and thrilled her.

Oh my God, don't you dare stop that.

She reached another climax. Dan slowed. She leaned forward to kiss him.

"Oh Dan, that was—indescribable."

She kissed him again and again. Now it was her turn. She positioned his legs prone and began controlling the rhythm, up and down, then rotating her hips like a belly dancer. Within a few minutes Pam tensed and let out a grunt she tried to muffle, in case there were any dwellers next door. With that momentary pause, Dan resumed his earlier position and rapidly fired his shaft inside her. She was getting pounded and she loved it.

"Please don't stop—please don't stop."

He continued the thrusts until they both erupted with orgasms, rising and heaving in sequence as if controlled by a seismic event.

Dan was panting. Pam fell on top of her lover.

"Oh my God—Oh my God," Pam cried.

Dan tried to talk and just gasped instead.

They held each other and kissed and kissed.

She rested on top of him for a few breathless moments, then dismounted and entered the bathroom to splash some cool water on her face and clean up. She returned with a fresh, moist, warm towel.

“May I tidy you up?”

He nodded. She gently wiped his pubic area and noticed his shaft was still erect and hard.

How is that possible?

She tossed the damp towel on the floor and rolled back into bed. She put her fingers around his member and asked, “What do we do about this?”

Dan inquired, “Aren’t you tired?”

“No—not at all. I could go on all night.”

They rested in each other’s arms for a few minutes before Dan rolled on top of her and suggested, “This time, let’s try something a little different.”

Pam’s mouth shot wide open. She laughed as she hadn’t laughed in years.

She smiled and exclaimed, “Why not? When do we start?”



She spent the entire night with Dan. They talked into the wee hours of the morning, unaware of what time it was, and they had session after session of passionate sex. They simply could not get enough of each other.

Pam lost count of the number of times she climaxed and absent-mindedly wondered how many calories an orgasm burns.

They agreed to communicate more frequently, and this time, to stay in touch, and not just read about each other in academic journals. And at some point, they both felt asleep.

Dan left just as the sky was lightening in the east. He did not wake her. Rising later, and wearing only the robe she borrowed from Dan’s room, Pam carried her evening clothes as she darted down the hall to her own room.

Her thoughts came in giant waves. She wanted more of Dan. She wanted to save her marriage. Better sex with Ken. More closeness with Ken. More of Dan. Another reunion...a conference...a marriage retreat with Ken. She needed to talk with her husband. Is there a way they could restore life into their relationship?

Dan had said he understood her dilemma and would wait to hear from her.

Before she left her hotel room to check out, she noticed the flashing light on the room phone, beside the untouched bed. She checked the message it indicated was waiting for her. There was a small package for her at the concierge’s desk in the lobby. When she picked it up, she noticed it was neatly wrapped in brown paper, with an attached note that read, “Please don’t open until your flight takes off.”



“The captain has turned off the seat belt sign. You are free to move about the cabin.”
A flight attendant approached her row and asked if she’d like anything.
“No, thank you,” Pam responded.

The flight had many empty seats, and she was alone in her row. She got her briefcase from under the seat in front of her and pulled out the paper-wrapped box. Her fingers shook with excitement, making it hard to remove the note card under the ribbon tied around the package. When she got the note free, she removed it from its envelope and read:

Dear Pam,

I want to thank you for yesterday evening and last night. I can’t begin to tell you how special it was to be in your arms. I felt fully alive for the first time in a very long time.

As you travel home, I know you have much to think about, especially your future. I can only tell you I am rooting for your success.

Whenever Beth and I drew apart from each other, I always thought of the reasons why I fell in love with her in the first place. Whenever I did that, I found myself smiling, and falling in love with her all over again. If Ken understands your needs and can express his, I’ll be happy for both of you. If not, remember—you are never truly alone.

Dan

P.S. The box contains the secret ingredients to continued romance, passion, and zest for living. Use them wisely and share the recipe with whomever you like.

All my love,

Daniel

Oh, Dan. You are such a delight.

Curious, Pam couldn’t wait to see what Dan had given her. She untied the ribbon, un-taped and removed the wrapping paper, peeled off a layer of aluminum foil from the top of the box, fished through more paper inside the box, and then laughed so hard she drew the attention of the flight attendant.

“Ma’am, may I get you anything?”

“Yes, I’ll have a cool drink. A vodka and tonic please.”

“Certainly, right away.”

Pam peeked inside the box one last time before stowing it in her briefcase. Inside a foil wrapped Altoids breath mint tin, carefully tucked under layers of tissue, Dan’s gift was a rolled marijuana joint and a little blue Viagra pill.

So that was Dan’s secret! She broke into a satisfied, happy smile, and kept it...all the way home.