

At 23

By Ann Ormsby

Chapter 1

Amanda Owens braced herself as she approached the construction site. While she loved the whistles and cat calls, she never knew exactly where to look as the young men and some older ones pointed to her, whooped and hollered, and asked for her phone number. Secretly she wanted to turn to them and give them a big smile and a wave, but she knew she never would. Tomorrow, she told herself she would walk on Lexington Avenue instead of Third Avenue knowing full well she wouldn't.

It was a beautiful July day. The sun was shining and summer was in the air in New York City. Not the hot sweaty summer of August when the thick air became full of soot but the summer's still endless light sunshine of July. Everyone was taking lunch out today. Amanda was wearing her new cotton knit dress with a form fitting turquoise and white striped top and full white skirt. She wore strappy white sandals and carried a small white bag. With her long tanned arms and legs, her long curly dark brown hair and big white teeth she made every man stop and stare. She was a curious mixture of innocence and sophistication, sensuality and naiveté, worldliness and girl next door. At first glance she could appear haughty. Her height was intimidating to some men, but her green eyes were soft and inviting until, in a flash, they were cold and condescending. Her angelic face would change from approachable to superior when she lifted her left eyebrow and her eyes would narrow slightly and she would look unattainable.

Men did not have to be rich to go out with her, but if not they had to be wild and a little dangerous. She loved fast motorcycles, speedboats, late nights and parties. She was a risk taker and liked to flirt on the edge. Any new experience was the one she was looking for.

As she continued down Third Avenue, she held her head high and looked straight ahead as she entered the block where the guys sat to eat lunch. The whoops and hollers started as soon as she moved into view.

“I love you!” shouted one muscley blonde.

“Hey Mama,” jeered his buddy.

“Weeeowww!” was heard amongst general wees and wows and kissing noises.

Amanda finished walking the block in a hurry and turned on the corner of 52nd Street into the CitiCorp Building. She walked down a flight of stairs and into the atrium of the building that was filled with restaurants and small shops. Across the room she saw her roommates, Pam and Louise, sitting at the top of a short flight of stairs eating their lunch. She quickly bought a yogurt at one of the many lunch carts and hurried over to them.

“Hi!” shouted Louise as she saw Amanda coming toward them.

“Whew. I made it past the guys again. I hate when they call you their Mama. Like I’m his Mama. “Hey Mama,” Amanda imitated the construction worker pinching the air as if pinching an imaginary behind.

“Yeah, like those losers have a chance,” said Louise. The girls laughed enjoying their perceived superiority over the construction workers.

“I hate when they look at me,” added Pam in her hesitant way.

“I love it,” Louise said with a quick laugh. “I saunter by, swinging my butt. They love it!”

“I’ll bet they love it when you swing your butt. Are other pedestrians knocked to the ground? Swinging that thing may be dangerous,” laughed Amanda.

“You’re just jealous of my ample derriere.”

“Ok,” said Amanda rolling her eyes.

“Hey, what are we doing tonight?” asked Pam.

“Nothing,” said Amanda.

“Well, you know that guy I told you about at work? The one with the apartment on 64th Street? Well, he’s having a party tonight and I thought we could stop by.”

Louise rolled her huge twinkling brown eyes, “stop by? Well, maybe, considering these are accountants.”

“On a Wednesday?” asked Amanda. “We never get home before 1 a.m. when we ‘stop by’ anywhere.”

“You’ll have to fight for the couch in the bathroom again,” said Louise. “I just sleep at my desk.”

“What should I tell him?” asked Pam tentatively.

Amanda and Louise looked at each other. Louise’s big, round brown eyes started to get bigger and bigger and they both exploded in laughter. “What do you think you should tell him?” Louise said to Pam shaking her head and tossing her long curly hair from side to side. “Would we pass up a party? Ever?”

Pam shyly smiled. She knew that her two roommates would never forego an opportunity for a free drink and the chance to meet cute young men.

“What about Mitch?” Amanda asked Pam in a sarcastic tone. Pam’s boyfriend Mitch was not Amanda’s favorite person. She called him “the carpenter” because that’s what he said he did for a living, but judging by the way he smelled every night when he came by the girls’ apartment Amanda thought he spent more time hanging out in bars than banging nails.

Pam's blue eyes immediately looked sad and her mouth, which had a large overbite, turned into a frown.

"What's he done now?" asked Louise with a sigh.

"Nothing," muttered Pam refusing to look at her two friends.

Amanda and Louise had held Pam's hand through so many disappointments with Mitch that they both heaved a sigh and looked around the atrium.

"Look at 2 o'clock," Louise whispered. Amanda and Pam immediately looked to their left. "I love long hair on guys. Ohhh."

"Yuck. Just what I want to do is run my fingers through some guy's hair that's longer and nicer than mine. No. No. Look at 10 o'clock. Now that's something to look at," said Amanda.

Amanda nodded her chin toward a tall young man with sandy hair wearing chinos and a light blue polo shirt. The three girls were sitting on the top step of a small staircase eating their lunch. Their tanned legs scrunched in front of them and their skirts pulled down to cover as much thigh as possible. Amanda was the tallest at 5'9". Louise a little shorter and Pam was petite at 5'4". Amanda had a model's figure, tall, leggy and thin. Louise was voluptuous with incredible legs and the tiniest ankles and Pam had a compact gymnast's body. Amanda and Louise both had long curly dark hair while Pam's was short, incredibly thick and dirty blonde.

"Uh oh. Mr. 10 o'clock just spotted us," whispered Pam looking up through her shaggy bangs that never quite parted all the way.

Amanda looked over at Mr. 10 o'clock with a bold look of total boredom as if he was the least interesting person she had ever seen. He stared at her and then smiled at her with the

biggest, whitest teeth she had ever seen. She gave him a hint of a smile with her mouth but a long heavy look with her eyes.

He slapped his pal on the shoulder and started over. As he approached Amanda continued her bold inviting stare.

“Hey, you work in this building?” he asked Amanda.

“No,” she said staring up at him in a way that made him feel shy like he was back in high school.

“I do,” said Pam who couldn’t bring herself to actually look at the handsome young man.

“Do you know what floor Bartlett and Kramer is on?” he asked still looking at Amanda.

While Pam considered if she did or did not know what floor the law firm was on, Amanda and Louise smiled and then started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” the young man asked.

“Nothing,” smiled Amanda turning her head to look at Louise. Her mouth was slightly open and he noticed the perfect bow shape of her top lip.

“No, I don’t know where it is,” said Pam. “But there’s a directory over there,” and she pointed to a large glass-enclosed case.

“Thanks. Do you eat here a lot?” he asked Amanda.

“Sometimes,” and with this Amanda fixed her gaze on the young man in a way that made him delightfully uncomfortable. This was a game Amanda liked to play. Engage, ensnare, confuse. Amanda treated most young men with contempt knowing that they were easily attainable. The young man decided to escape from this girl before he showed her, and his friend, how tongue-tied he was feeling.

“See ya,” he said with a confused look on his face and walked over to the case

hoping he would see her again.

“Why did you frighten him off?” asked Pam.

“What?” Amanda said as she and Louise started to laugh again. “I gotta go.” And with that she sauntered out of the building her full white skirt dancing around her thighs.