

## Dreams Remembered

by Paula Rugen

When the phoner rang, Samantha glanced up from her book. Troy was at the table fitting puzzle pieces together, undisturbed by the noise. The clock read 7:12. After the third ring, she answered and was transported back in time to her first day at UCSanta Barbara 25 years ago.

“Sam?”

“Yes?” Here eyes widened at the sound. No one called her Sam, except...

“This is Beth... Beth Page.” The voice was soft and the words hesitant.

Samantha felt her heart begin to thump as a smile transformed her face and a laugh exploded from her throat.

“Beth!” exclaimed Samantha as she watched Troy gobble a handful of cookies. “I can’t believe it! How are you? Where are you?”

“I was flying to Chicago for a meeting when the plane developed engine problems and was diverted to Omaha. I was glad to find Andrew’s name in the phone book.” Beth hesitated before continuing. “I wasn’t sure you would talk to me after 15 years of silence.”

“Oh Beth, it’s good to hear your voice. I’ve wondered about you and why you never answered my letters.” She paused. “How long will you be here?”

“We’re due to leave around midnight.”

Samantha’s eyes rested on Troy, and her thoughts began to race as she considered how to get him settled for the night. “I’ll come to the airport to see you. Ask someone where the new Starbucks is located, and I’ll meet you there in 30 minutes or so.”

Speeding through light traffic, Samantha thought back to those four wonderful years when she and Beth had been college roommates... the laughter at the pranks performed by the “D” girls... the tears when Beth broke her engagement to Ben... enjoying a bottle of Merlot and Gouda cheese while making promises to always be there for each other.

Samantha parked her car and laughed out loud in anticipation of seeing Beth. But as she approached Starbucks, the smile left her face and she rubbed her sweaty hands on her jeans. "Will we recognize each other? Will we have anything in common? Will the hurt linger?"

Scanning the crowd, their eyes met and time disappeared. After an awkward hug, questions tumbled over each other. "How are you?" "What have you been doing?" "Are you married?" "Children?" Laughter... "Do you remember when...?" More laughter, cups of coffee, a small table near a window, the opportunity to revisit the past.

Beth explained that after five years experience at her father's gallery in San Diego, she moved to a Paris gallery and stayed 12 years. "Inevitably of the excitement of buying and selling in the international art market." Her expensive taste in clothes had not changed, and at five seven, Beth appeared self-assured and content with life.

Samantha nodded her head and grinned, "Wow! Your career has turned out well." She was amazed at Beth's auburn hair with few strands of gray and her lack of wrinkles. She sighed as she continued, "It sounds like your life is just about perfect, but look at me. I am definitely not the girly you knew in college." Samantha was aware that her sweatshirt, jeans and straight hair did not flatter her.

As she glanced at her own reflection in the window, Samantha knew Beth was remembering the tall, thin, quiet girl who blossomed during their four years together. Beth helped her discover the importance of clothes, makeup and good conversation and encouraged her to reach her goals. Now she appeared aged, defeated with little evidence of satisfaction. She squirmed as she remembered the "Sam" that was.

"You look tired," Beth observed, wondering if Sam had been ill. There was a pause, as if Beth wanted to say more. A glance at the clock revealed there was still an hour before her plane left. "Tell me about your life here," Beth encouraged.

"My life is dull compared to yours," began Samantha. "Remember two years after Andrew and I were married, and we moved to Omaha? You said I couldn't be happy here after the years I spent in California. I put my career on hold to begin a family, promising to return to nursing soon, but our two boys became my life and career,"

she confessed. She paused as here eyes held a faraway gaze. She caught her breath as she realized that seeing Beth had made her aware of a yearning...

"Then, 15 years ago, you and I had those dreadful words over my decision to give up my dream of a nursing career. I wrote you, apologizing, but I never heard from you again." Sam held up her hand as Beth started to speak, and continued. "I have been happy being home, but now the older boys are following their own dreams, and I am left with Troy."

"Troy?" questioned Beth, "Who's Troy?"

"Our 13 year old son. My neighbor is watching him tonight. He's described as 'handicapped'." Samantha whispered. "His father does not, CANNOT accept Troy's imperfection."

"But why can't this father accept that?" Beth whispered as she watched Sam twist and pull her napkin into shreds.

"Troy is autistic," stated Sam, dully. "He lives in his own world and does not... seldom..." she searched for words. "He's been in a special school for 10 years and has made great progress. Troy loves books, puzzles and playing video games, but does not interact with others."

Samantha gazed steadily at Beth, watching her reaction and feelings surprise her attentiveness and shallow breathing. "Andrew is embarrassed by Troy's 'abnormal' behavior. The boys have been protective and accepted Troy's limitations, but Andrew never has."

Beth's expression concerned as she watched her friend's eyes fill with tears. "Oh Sam, I am so sorry... about everything."

Samantha recognized acceptance as Beth reached across the table to make contact. They sipped coffee through a long, comfortable silence, afraid to let go of this time of healing and support. Sam jumped as the announcement for the plane to Chicago pierced the silence and intruded on her thoughts.

With questioning eyes, Sam asked, "Were our dreams just dreams, and our promises just the wishful thinking of two naïve girls?"

“I don’t think so... I’ll call you tomorrow.” Beth promised as she gave Sam’s hand a gentle squeeze and left to catch the plane.

Watching Beth walk away, Sam wondered...