

SABRINA

a story by

CHRIS YOST

Book 1

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Character Biographies

Your scorecard to the players of Sabrina the Story

Sabrina Mustelidae: A skunk, 24 years old, with an intense interest in computers, romance novels, collecting action figures, the Internet, and Internet Relay Chat. She's quiet when not with her girlfriends in "The Clique", with a girl-next-door personality and glasses with near-invisible frames who will always help a friend if she can, and has just the right mix of naivete, intelligence, looks, and has a heart she'd willingly give to the right man when he came around.

Chris Foxx: A male fox, 27, network engineer and PC hardware technician for a major telecommunications company that owns a cable TV franchise, telephone companies, and Local/Wide Area Networks, which is the department in which Chris earns his living. He also wears glasses, has an intense interest in Pittsburgh Penguin hockey, has an off-beat sense of humor, and was raised in a strict atmosphere with his elder sister which he believes is what fuels his wild fantasy life. He is also quite possibly the world's last contemporary gentleman, never above holding a door for a lady or picking up the check.

Amy Squirrel: A 26-year-old blonde squirrel who models for cartoons, monitor backgrounds, and functions as part-time spokeswoman for Amiga computers. Her complete history can be seen at the E.S. Productions website (see Links page here). She works with her cartoonist as co-star in Sabrina's comic strip and helps handle whatever work comes to the studio. She's engaged to Thomas Woolfe following a long courtship and a surprise pregnancy.

Thomas Woolfe: A male wolf, and Amy's fiance, working on his Master's Degree in botany. Slowly coming to grips with the prospect of being a father. Loves sports, in fact he played basketball on weekends until Amy's pregnancy and a pending marriage began to occupy his mind. He likes to cook and loves Amy to a fault.

Wendy Vixxen: Chris Foxx's college sweetheart, 25, who left Chris and the college when she developed a case of wanderlust. Before she left, she and Chris were a popular couple on campus. She never forgot Chris, and when she matured she finished her degree work in accounting and bookkeeping.

The Clique

Susan Felin: A lioness, Sabrina's oldest and best friend, almost inseparable since high school, although they were separated for a short time when Sabrina went to Columbus College of Art and Design and Susan went to The Ohio State University at Dayton. Her main interests are boys and cheerleading, and tries to work English and Journalism in as her major. She's very socially active and dates often.

Cindy Lapine: A lop-eared rabbit in her sophomore year, 22, athletic and very shy when away from The Clique. She majors in writing and minors in music, which she loves. She lives with her parents and is very self-conscious and trusting.

Debbie Squirrel: Amy's younger cousin and the youngest Clique member at 19. She met Sabrina through Amy and they instantly hit it off, so Sabrina was insistent that she be accepted by The Clique, which she immediately was. She's a voracious reader and an accomplished flutist. She envy's Amy's popularity and hopes to achieve it herself someday, but studies music and writing in hopes of obtaining a real job.

... and the rest!

Dexter Collie: A 30-year-old border collie and the WAN administrator who works with Chris in the Networking Group, and Chris' closest friend and confidant. Married with two children and still madly in love with his wife. He has the same sense of humor as Chris, and is slightly more pragmatic and logical, supplying Chris with the voice of reason when his own has run out on him.

Clarence Skunk: Your basic nerd with severe nearsightedness, an underactive imagination, and a desire to make people like him by trying too hard. He's had a crush on Sabrina since he took her out after she came to the college from C-CAD, convincing himself he and Sabrina are, at the very least, the best of friends, when in reality she can barely stand being on the same campus with him.

Mr. Canis: A greying wolf teaching college writing and multimedia, fortunate enough to have The Clique as students in his class. He makes his lesson plans with the full knowledge that as long as they're in class every day, he can expect to get about 1/3 of his lesson plans accomplished.

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ACT 1 -- THEY MEET

Chapter 1

Long, lonely night. Typical of most nights these days -- work, eat in front of TV, 'net, sleep, repeat. Canned food tonight in the literal sense of the word; consumed from the can from whence it came in front of a hockey game which was also typical, losing by three lousy goals.

Chris leaned back and sighed heavily, his eyes turning toward the computer. He stared into the remains of his dinner, then at the computer.

He opened his jowls and yawned. "I really shouldn't ... well, maybe just long enough to check my e-mail," which was usually how his marathon chat sessions began every time. Walking over to the computer table he pushed his bushy tail through the back of the chair and logged into his provider.

#

Thomas was out of town again. Amy was in her own world, finding herself reading magazines having less to do with fashion and modern trends and more to do with being a new mother. Thomas had been great, even though Amy'd remarked on different occasions he was floating along in some other world, somewhere between denial and insanity. No word of marriage yet though, and when Thomas left on school projects Amy sat with the thought in the back of her brain ...

Is he really coming back?

She knew better, of course. But the seed was there; he may not, and what if he doesn't? Announcing her pregnancy in the middle of lovemaking wasn't the best moment, and the bombshell that sent him flying at warp speed out the front door was a headlong collision with reality.

Amy turned a page, reading the next paragraph about teething. She'd read so much about teething and diapers and bathing and childhood illnesses that she was ready to do what she did during her periods of morning sickness.

... and in the middle was poor Sabrina, who'd spent more time hand-holding and listening and lending a shoulder to cry on that she finally decided to be selfish.

"I'm taking tonight off!" she yelled! "This is *MY* night, I love both of you and I'll be there for both of you, but I am *TIRED* and I need time for *ME!* I'm sorry but I'm going to take tonight and actually *RELAX!!*"

The mirror in her bedroom agreed with her, and quite possibly Amy would have too had she been there that afternoon. Closing the door to the room where she and Amy kept the Amiga she sat, adjusted her lenses, and logged into her server at Croax-Net.

#

LONELY? COME ON IN AND CHAT A WHILE!

Chris double-clicked his way in, in hopeful search of female companionship. The general chats were fun, but the private chats were more personal, and occasionally much more

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fun! But fun or not, Chris felt he needed the closeness of a female, species unimportant, as long as she had a brain and a personality.

puppy> and when he drove over that bridge..WOW!

Carli> Euuuu! Sick!

ILuvU> LOL Carli

Impala4> When he hit those rocks, that was cool!

Chris felt his mind wander. He began looking at the list. Carli sounded like a nice name.

Carli> I went into Fashions today, and I was looking at these great outfits, so I thought I'll try on just these two, but I found five I liked and when I went to try them on, they said all I could take in was three, okay? But I tried to tell them I wanted all five if they fit, they don't need to know I'll probably only buy one or two, but

Maybe not.

Chris began to look at the list again.

EricS1> Movies are cool, but nothing like comic strips!

SusieQ> Hey Carli, is that Fashions downtown or the big one at the Mall?

>>Sabrina1 has just joined LONELY? COME ON IN AND CHAT A WHILE!

Carli> Hi Sabrina1! LTNS! |8)

Two ears pricked up.

Sabrina1> Hi Carli :)

"Sabrina? Hmm, nice name. Sounds cute."

Chris waited a moment and let the five-subject conversation flow for a few minutes. Next he looked at the list, and she was still there, between Ralfer and SusieQ.

Chris highlighted Sabrina1 on the list.

"She *better* be a girl!"

#

>>Private message from Chris: Hi! How are you tonight?

"Contact!" Sabrina was met with opening lines like this one before, but tonight she didn't care. "If it's a guy interested in anything physical it'll come out in the first three to four messages," she told herself, although tonight she wasn't in the mood to fend off unwanted advances. Clicking on Chris' name, she typed a private message back:

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>>Hi! Been better, I feel like I'm babysitting my best friend

Make it sound depressing, see if he goes away. Good way to find out if he's after something.

>>Private message from Chris: Really? Howso?

"Hmmm, maybe someone I can actually talk to tonight?" Sabrina twitched her whiskers and began to type again. "One or two more lines to go."

>>She's pregnant and her boyfriend's out of town, and she's really depressed

... and she added a :(for emphasis.

Now, Chris wasn't in the mood to listen to someone's problems, but something in the back of his little fox brain said "keep contact". Chris was, after all, not someone to start a private conversation and abandon the other person, much as he's wanted to time and time again. Sigh. "What else have I got to do?" *Besides*, he thought, *she sounds like she needs a friend*.

#

>>Private message from Chris: Want to talk about it?

It's *exactly* what Sabrina wanted to do!

>>Thanks, but I just met you, I really don't want to dump on you

Chris pushed his glasses back up his nose an inch where they belonged. She seems like a nice, likeable girl.

>>Private message from Chris: I'm told I'm a good listener :)

The smile made Sabrina giggle unconsciously. "Well, if he's a guy he's beaten the average!" With a smile, Sabrina probed:

>>BTW, can I ask if you're a guy or a girl?

Private message from Chris: Sure, you can ask :)

Sabrina's smile went sideways. It stayed there, but went sideways. Before she could type it though, her answer came back:

'I'm a male fox. And you??'

>>female skunk

'I love your name; it's very unusual'

>>Thank you, I like yours too

"Why did I say that!?"

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>>*Thanx :)*

I hate the thought of telling him my life story, Sabrina thought. He seems so nice though, and at least he acts like he's interested.

Sabrina also noticed something else. "He's answering me right away too, I wonder if he *is* listening."

It was right then Sabrina heard the sound of a magazine hitting the wall in the living room. Something very unladylike was mumbled under her breath. "Timing ... " Timing was everything! Sabrina thought *It wasn't very loud, maybe I can pretend I didn't hear it.* Then, *No, she did that for a reason, I better go and see if she's okay.*

>>*My roommate needs me. Will you be on for a while? I really would like to talk to you*

Her paw went to her mouth. "Gawd, did that sound *desperate!* Even if he *is* interested he won't be now!!"

And in truth, Chris' reaction was "Geez, that's typical! Just typical!" He looked at the clock; it wasn't quite bedtime yet, and he still wanted to chat. "Yeah, I should still be 'round," he typed. "Come look for me! :)"

Private message from Sabrina1: Thank you! I'll BRB, I promise!

"BRB: Be Right Back" Chris read Sabrina's sincerity, but never heard her new name for her best friend and roommate.

#

Sabrina opened the door a crack and peeked out. Amy still sat on the couch, only now her back was to Sabrina, her feet on the cushions, her arms folded. There was a slight tremble in her shoulders. While Sabrina could have easily remained in the safety and privacy of their study, the compulsion to be a best friend opened the door and pushed against her shoulders until she walked in.

In the corner was the parenting magazine Amy threw. Sabrina fought off the compulsion to pick it up. Rather, she walked to the couch and sat on the edge of a cushion, the only place available to sit on it at all.

"Amy?"

Amy sat, barely acknowledging Sabrina's presence. She was shivering.

A gentle hand lay on Amy's knee. "Amy, are you all right?"

With a snuffle Amy managed to nod and form a sentence. "He's not coming back, Sabrina."

Though her plans completely included being selfish, she simply couldn't abandon her life-long friend, even in lieu of a new-found one who lived God-knows-where and existed as nothing more to her than a first name on her computer monitor. Sabrina searched for

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Amy's eyes; they were mostly hidden by her eyelids poorly hiding the clear fact she'd been crying. *How can I not be here for her?*

Sabrina answered her own question with her spoken answer. "Amy, you say this every time Tom -- *Thomas!* -- goes away for a few days. The term ends in the next two months or so; you know he has to take these trips, and he always comes back to you!"

Amy shook her head. "Sabrina, I'm doing my best to believe that! I just *know* he's with someone else! He's with some other girl who's *not* going to have his baby!" Amy huddled herself closer to herself, fighting back the urge to let loose with a severe emotional fit.

It was times like this when Sabrina wished she had been blessed with the ability to simply come out and tell people how she really felt. "Amy, you've got to stop believing that! I can tell how much it's bothering you -- if Thomas goes on another trip get him to take you with him! It'll put your mind to rest and believe me, you *need* the time away!"

"I can't do that!" Amy said as she looked away.

Sigh! "Amy, do you respect me?"

Amy looked back, a look of disbelief on her dampened face. "Sabrina, of course I do! You know I would *love* to go with Thomas! But between my school schedule and my work schedule, I'd never be able to manage!"

"Let's worry about that when the time comes. In the meantime, when Thomas comes back tomorrow, you'll see it was all your imagination, I guarantee it." And she patted Amy's knee for emphasis.

Amy felt the emotions well inside her again. "He was due back TODAY!!" She was fighting her tears and it was a battle she was losing big time! "He promised to call when he got back over an hour ago!!"

And the tears flowed down Amy's cheeks, working their way through her dark brown fur. Sabrina looked over at the telephone and realized the entire problem. "As long as we're on the Internet, we need a second phone line."

Amy looked up at Sabrina.

#

"Ahh, she's not coming back. I must really be nuts waiting around."

A depressing, boring 40 minutes crept by, taken with four conversations involving movies, boyfriends, sports, and bad Microsoft jokes, one person being ejected for using foul language, and a come-on by a male husky in Wisconsin. And now, surprise! Carli is rattling on about something involving her boyfriend going shopping with her.

Chris snarled. "E-mail before bedtime!"

And Chris moved his mouse to position his cursor over the Disconnect icon.

>>Private message from Sabrina1: Hi! I'm so glad you waited around!

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Chris put his left paw over his right and removed it from the mouse. Returning to the keyboard he typed *I was starting to get worried, is everything okay?*

Chris> I was starting to get worried, is everything okay?

Spanker> Wazzat, Chris?

SusieQ> What's worrying you, Chris? Anything we can do to help?

LightBright gives Chris a cookie

"DAMN!" Chris returned his paw to his mouse and clicked on Sabrina's screen name.

>>Private message from Chris: That was supposed to be a private send. Sorry :/

Chris> Sorry everybody, wasn't supposed to public with that one!

>>Private message from Sabrina1: You got a cookie out of it, anyway :)

>>Wanna share? ;)

Sabrina smiled, wishing she knew a way to tell Chris it was the second time she'd smiled all night.

>>Private message from Chris: Still want to talk? I was getting worried when you didn't come back.

"'Worried' sounds much better than 'impatient', I think."

"Oooooo, where to start!" Sabrina began typing:

>>Well, my best friend's pregnant, her boyfriend was out of town on a class field trip, and she was missing him to the point that she was paranoid he wasn't going to come back

Chris read his screen. "I can see that."

>>Private message from Chris: OIC. But everything's okay now?

Sabrina blushed.

>>Well, he was supposed to call when he got back, and -- um -- he couldn't because I was online. But he came by and everything's okay now.

>>That's good. Sounds like you two need a second phone line :)

>>Private message from Sabrina1: Yeah, we'll have to call and get that done.

On two other ends of the Internet, Sabrina and Chris stared at their monitors.

>>Private message from Chris: So, what do you do when you're not keeping your roommate company and talking to new friends on the 'net?

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Sabrina was amazed at how easily this conversation was flowing. Humor, sensitivity, waiting on-line ... how often does someone see that?

>>Well, during the day I'm a go-fer for a graphics company here in Ohio, and when I'm not doing that I'm going to school for my communications degree. I'm an art major with a minor in writing and a straight-C average

"Hmmm, bright girl, sure is fun to talk to." Chris probed further. "Any hobbies?"

>>Just IRC, and I like to attend computer shows. And I'm known for burying myself in computer magazines and romance novels. :) What about you?

>>Oh, I'm boring. Just hockey and computing. :)

Sabrina turned an ear toward the door. All was quiet. Muffled conversation between Thomas and Amy. And a new friend ... Sabrina was finally beginning to relax.

>>Private message from Sabrina1: You must do more than that! :)

>>Private message from ImaHusky1: Rehi from Wisconsin! :)

"Grrrrr!" Chris clicked on ImaHusky1 and typed /IGNORE, effectively squelching any further messages he decided to send. Chris was fixated with his conversation with Sabrina. A mental picture of her formed in his mind ... a very *nice* mental picture! It matched the smile on his face.

>>Private message from Chris: Well, in the real world I configure PC's and Local/Wide Area Networks for a communications company -- told you I was boring! ;)

The wink was a nice touch; Sabrina giggled. "I wouldn't be talking with you if I thought you were boring!" She typed this, then added a ;) of her own.

The next private message was different; a bad, two-dimensional graphic:

---<----<--'---,---{@

Bad, but to Sabrina, the right touch from someone she'd always hoped to find in a chat room, and at this time when she needed a friend most of all; he sent her a rose.

Sabrina gave him a kiss.

>>Thank you! :*

Then added,

>>I could talk to you all night!

Chris thought for a moment, then decided on the most direct way to say what he wanted to say.

>>Me too! :)

"God, was that DUMB!"

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>>I've got all night, how about you? :)

Sabrina relaxed in her chair, not even realizing she was laying back on her tail.

>>Yessssssssssssssss!

Chapter 2

"Sabrina?"

Sabrina jolted. Amy stood over her, nudging her awake. From the open door to their computer room sunlight shone in. Sabrina raised her paws to her eyes and wiped the sleep away as best she could.

"My God Sabrina," Amy said, "were you on the Internet all *night??*?"

"Oooooohhh." Sabrina was no where close to being fully awake. "I guess I was."

Amy looked over her shoulder at the monitor. Her eyes widened. "You were auto-disconnected at 3:17 -- That was over six hours! How are you going to make it through class *and* work today?"

"Class?" Sabrina slowly remembered something about a writing class she had coming up this morning. Then she remembered last night! "Oh Amy! I met a guy on-line last night; he stayed up, he listened to me, we kept talking ... " She broke long enough to yawn. " ... Did I say goodnight to him? I think I did. I remember nodding off, but I don't think I was talking to him, I was talking to somebody else, I think she was another skunk like me."

Amy watched Sabrina ramble, her head turning to one side.

"Yeah, I *did* say goodnight to him, I remember now." Sabrina stretched, then quickly turned back to the keyboard. "I have to see if he e-mailed me! I remember I gave him my e-mail address. Did I? Yes, I know I did! This won't take long, I promise!"

Right then Amy darted her hand out and grabbed Sabrina's arm. "Uh, I'm sorry to disappoint you Sabrina, but I have a job to go to, and you have a class at 8:30. We only have 25 minutes and it's *your* turn to drive!"

"It'll take me two minutes, three tops!"

"Sabrina!" Amy switched into big-sister-mode. "You -- don't -- have -- time!" She turned off the monitor. "Go wash your face, I'll pour you a juice."

"Okay, okay." Sabrina dragged herself out of the chair and out toward the bathroom. Amy shook her head and followed her out and to the kitchen. She couldn't help smiling. She loved Sabrina like a sister.

"I never saw her like this," Amy heard herself say as she got the orange juice out and poured two glasses. "Girl's gotta learn some control."

In the bathroom, Sabrina washed her face and fluffed her hair in the mirror. She kept thinking about her online chat with Chris. Leaning in closer she stared into her own eyes. "He was something else, wasn't he? I can see him so clearly." They'd described their appearances to each other; she could see every brown and white hair on his body. She could count each whisker. "What is it about him? I can't stop thinking about him." She peeled her Amiga shirt off, trying to look at herself the way she thought Chris would.

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She shook her head. "Nah. I can't see him being interested in me. We only know each other from IRC; I need to get control of myself."

"Sab-rina!"

"Com-ing!" She held her shirt in front of herself in case Thomas happened to have stayed the night and ran to her room to put on a fresh one.

#

Miles and miles away, in the next state, Chris kept reaching overhead trying to smack the clock radio off. Making contact sent it behind the bed where it hit the floor, still playing. "Rats," was all he could manage. Kicking back the covers he put his hands behind his head and let his mind wander in a half-sleep half-awake state.

And as awake began to creep into prominence he remembered his time online last night. "My God, why do I do this to myself? What time did I even get to bed?!"

As Chris thought about that his memory reversed and he remembered talking with the skunkette in Ohio. "Her name ... her name ... "

" ... Sabrina! Yeah! Sabrina."

As he thought about her he felt himself waking more, some of him more than others. "She was a fun girl to talk to. Where has she been all this time?"

Chris watched himself waking completely up. He'd chatted with girls online before, but why was this one making such an impact this morning?

A very big smile crept onto Chris' face. He reached behind him and picked up his wristwatch. Seeing the time made the smile creep back down, too.

"If she's on tonight, I've got to cut it shorter." And he rolled out of bed with enough time to dress, jump in his car, and be ten minutes late for work.

#

"Uh, welcome to planet Earth?"

"Huh?"

Sabrina snapped out of her reverie and made the turn off of the expressway.

"I thought Thomas was in a world of his own these days. Sabrina, you are really infatuated!"

Amy was certainly amused by it. Sabrina, however, was not.

"Sorry, I can't seem to focus this morning," followed by
yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaawwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwn

"I wonder why!" Amy remarked. "You've never stayed on all hours before. How are you going to get through two classes and a job this afternoon?"

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"Don't worry about me," Sabrina said as she pulled the car into the lot. "After my writing class I'll get some coffee and junk food at the Union; I'll wake up."

"You sure?"

"I'm sure, I promise!"

"Okay," Amy said as she got out of Sabrina's car. But before she closed the door she said "Remember, he's just a guy!"

Sabrina felt a slow burn as she backed up the car and turned around. The fur on the back of her neck bristled. "She doesn't understand."

Sabrina pulled out onto the street; the college was minutes away. She ignored the radio morning zoo and talked out loud to Amy. "It's okay, Thomas is 'just a guy' too! And you *have* Thomas! You have Thomas for fun, and you have *ME* to buffer you two!"

She ignored the horn from the car she cut off from missing the stop sign. "Me? I have my Amiga, my schoolwork, my job, and *no one* exciting!"

::sigh:: "course she is right," Sabrina continued, shifting her conversation to herself. "It was only a few hours of just talking on the 'net, not a relationship or anything like that." A smaller ::sigh:: "Wonder if it could be?"

In her half-sleepy state, it was easy for Sabrina to daydream her way into the campus.

#

"Hey, good morning!"

Chris sat in his cubicle with his coffee. "Morning, Dexter." He looked at the clock on his phone. *Not quite 10 minutes, I can live with that.*

"Sleep in or car trouble?"

A sip of coffee before talking to anyone! Then a fierce shaking of the head as the caffeine slid down his throat. "The former."

Chris said that more to force Dexter to think; revenge for his positive attitude first thing in the morning.

Then, "Ah!" when he got it. "Out having a good time late, were we?"

More caffeine first. Chris tried to contain a laugh; since Dexter and his wife had their second child, going out and having a good time was something that ceased to exist in his life, for the most part. "N'yo, ... in having a good time."

"That can make you go blind, you know. You'll stop growing fur on your hands."

Chris set his cup down and turned away from Dexter long enough to turn on his PC. Then he rolled his chair closer to Dexter, as if he didn't want anyone else to overhear. "After

Chapter 2

the hockey game I went on the Internet and met this girl in Ohio. She needed a friend to talk to and I listened."

"... and .. ?"

Leaning in closer, "... and, I haven't stopped thinking about her!"

"Aha!" Dexter smiled. "Then your sleeping in is perfectly justified!"

"No it's not!" Now Chris went on the defensive. He picked up some papers on his desktop he had no use for, to try to give Dexter the impression he had something more important to do. "We didn't do any of *that*! We were intimate strictly in the sense of getting to know each other, that's all!"

"And because of that you can't stop thinking about her."

That did sound foolish to Chris. He pretended to ponder the week-old memo he held, giving Dexter a cock-eyed nod that said he couldn't dispute what he said.

"What's her name?"

Now Chris looked up and smiled. "Sabrina."

Dexter smiled. "Nice name."

Chris agreed.

"Craziest TV show I've ever seen, though."

Dexter drained his mug as Chris put his papers down. "Don't think it's the same Sabrina, do you?"

"Hope not."

Rolling his chair back a bit Chris retrieved his own mug for a drink. "Wonder if she named herself after that character?"

"She could have. How does she know your real name's Chris?"

Chris opened his mouth to answer, then realized he didn't have one. Instead he tried to cover it by using his open mouth to take another drink. "Good point."

"You going to talk to her tonight?"

"If she's on, yeah."

"Lotsa luck!"

Dexter returned to his own cube. Chris turned and typed in his password for the network. Then leaned his elbow in his desktop. "Gotta be her real name. No one'd make up a name like 'Sabrina'."

Chapter 2

Chris looked at his clock again. As long as Sabrina was on his mind, he knew he wasn't going to get much work done.

#

The bell sounded as Sabrina, books clutched tightly against her chest, ran down the hall of the English department. She skidded to a stop just passing the door to her classroom and as her teacher was taking roll. Sabrina liked Mr. Canis for his easy-going manner, although his critiques of her and her fellow students' writing were exceptionally strict. Darting past him she snuck down her row to her seat, answering "Here" to her name before she managed to take it.

Little things like calling a late student's name out of alphabetical order to draw attention to them was one of Mr. Canis' little jokes. It always amused everyone but the tardy one, and until today it always amused Sabrina. She blushed deeply as she took her seat; she was sure even the white stripe down her back was deep red.

Cindy leaned in from the next seat, her lop-ears hanging down past her shoulder. "Hey, the late Sabrina! Sleep in?"

Sabrina leaned back. "Late night on the Internet."

"Somebody special?"

Sabrina grinned big, mostly to create a mystique. "Don't know yet."

"Ooooooooooooo!" This came from Susan, the lioness on her left. "Sabrina's found a boyfriend!"

"Did not!"

Mr. Canis closed his roll book. "Now that The Clique is complete, would you all hand in your reviews on the film we saw last week?"

Sabrina, Cindy, Susan, and Debbye, the squirrel who sat in front of Sabrina, made up "The Clique": their private study and mutual-support group. Sabrina and Susan were the charter members, having gone from high school up through this phase of college together. When Sabrina met Debbye and learned she was Amy's cousin, she was immediately added, and some time later Cindy rounded the group out nicely. One of their constant goals was to always get seats together; the infamously about them was when all four were in a class together, class-work completed always seemed to drop from the intense conversation and giggling that came from their area. Separating them never worked; they always either migrated back together or found a way of communicating which invariably got one of them giggling, which would trigger the other three, then the entire class. And the teacher's dilemma, they were all good students with good records and 3.4 grade point averages or higher, so what could they do?

Sabrina took the stack from the ermine behind her and added hers to it, handing it up to Debbye. She winked at her. "Is he cute?" she whispered.

She kept her head back long enough to hear Sabrina's answer. "He types cute."

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Debbye started the giggle-fest, turned and looked into the impatient eyes of the wolf who was hoping to begin a chapter on script writing for radio today, and already was having his doubts on what would be accomplished before summer break.

#

"... Sabrina?"

"Huh?"

Sabrina blinked, the smile fading from her face. Mr. Canis was standing beside Debbye, looking down at her. "You know, ladies and gentlemen, although I do try to keep the class as light as possible, I have to insist you save the daydreaming for Classic Lit."

Looking up sheepishly, Sabrina wondered if he'd notice if she slinked completely under her desk. She'd been caught very deep in a daydream about Chris she was very sorry to be forced to give up. While the rest of the class laughed quietly at what the teacher had said, Sabrina tried to decide whether or not to apologize. But she was let off the hook: "Now, Sabrina, can you tell me a benefit of radio over print media?"

"Yes ..." Sabrina sat up and tried to look attentive; better late than never. "In radio, you have a voice. It holds your attention better since you're listening; you can't put it down and pick it up later." *I hope!*

"Interesting ... and if I had a better voice, you'd listen better then?" The class laughed again, Susan inadvertently laughed out loud, quickly stifling it when she realized what she did. "But a lot of people have the radio in the background. How would a voice hold your attention then?"

Mr. Canis began walking back to his own desk as his answer came. "You'd hear it subliminally. You're listening, but you don't realize you're listening. Kind of like when you read, you can hear a voice with the words, but it's not necessarily your own, y'know?"

Canis stopped cold at the front of his desk, then turned back. "Very good answer, Sabrina. Pulled from no where, but well done." To the other side of the room. "John, a benefit of radio over print media?"

Susan leaned in, speaking just loud enough for the entire Clique to hear. "Nice save, girl!"

"Teach you to laugh!" Sabrina whispered back.

"Think Chris would've liked it, too?"

Cindy covered her mouth quickly, but Debbye's attempt to suppress her laugh made a snort that caught the entire class by surprise.

Mr. Canis leaned against his desk, waiting for ... *hoping* for ... the class to come to order on its own. And when it came to a semblance of order he very graciously said "Thank you." He looked at the clock, then reaching behind him he picked up his assignment

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book. "I want everyone to completely read through chapter seven, and complete the review questions at the end ...

"... due Wednesday people!" Mr. Canis competed against the bell in his attempt to complete giving out the assignment. "Everyone in *before* the bell, please!" He looked at Sabrina to see if she'd react.

She did. She hid it well, but she did, keeping her head down.

Cindy leaned in and said quietly "Bluuuuush!"

Sabrina's cheeks turned bright pink. "Stop it!" she laughed.

"By then," Mr. Canis continued for the benefit of anybody left to hear, "I'll have decided whether or not it's too late for me to go into advertising." And he took his seat as the rest of the class filed out the door and took a deep swallow from his Thermos.

And The Clique, four girls together, walked with a brisk pace down the hall, one thing on the minds of three of them: teasing Sabrina.

"Anybody up for the Union?" Sabrina asked. "I promised Amy I'd get something for breakfast."

"Sure Sabrina," Cindy said. "But only if you tell us about your boyfriend."

Four abreast they walked down toward the door, laughing more like schoolgirls than college students. "I don't *have* a boyfriend! Now c'mon quit it!"

"Lookit girls, she's gonna blush again!"

Sabrina felt her lips tighten as they all shared the fun, watching Sabrina blush again as she pushed on the panic bar that opened the door to the quadrangle. Once outside, they made their way to the Student Union building.

"Okay, here's what it is. I was on the Internet last night, and I met this really nice fox named Chris."

"C'mon, Sabrina," whined Debbye, "we *know* that part!"

"Anyway, he's just a really nice guy, that's all. Between trying to comfort Amy because she's having this baby and listening to Thomas because he's still having a hard time coming to grips with being a father, I called 'time out' for myself and went online to talk to somebody. I met Chris and we talked."

The Clique stared at her as they approached The Union.

"... and we talked ... "

"Uh-huh, ... " said one of them.

Sabrina smiled. " ... and we talked."

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Now the girls were definitely in a teasing mode! Amidst a sea of "Oooo"s she heard "Sounds serious, Sabrina!" This from Cindy again, holding her ears down to keep them from blowing in a sudden gust of wind as they walked under the overhang of the building. Cindy held the door for them all, and Susan held a table while everyone got their snacks and returned to join her.

"Why'd I get coffee?" asked Sabrina. "I didn't want coffee."

"Here, trade." Debbye took her coffee and gave her her can of cola.

"Thanks," she said, and opened her book to chapter seven. "Anybody up for doing the review questions first?"

"Nope," said Susan. "Up for wanting to know if you're gonna talk to him again!"

"Aw, let's leave her alone now," said Cindy. "After she talks to him again we can bug her after class Wednesday!"

Sabrina pursed her lips. "I think I'm planning a headache Wednesday."

Debbye couldn't resist. "Sabrina, you're supposed to save those for your dates!" And she opened her book also.

#

Amy walked out of the studio and sat on the couch in the office. Her session in front of the camera was no different than any other, and it was just as much fun as it always was. When her boss came out and set his camera on the desk he looked at Amy. "What's up? You look like a girl with a problem."

Amy smiled. "Nothing really, Eric."

Eric tugged his tail through his trousers in an attempt to dislodge his shorts, which had ridden up where they didn't belong. "Talk to me, Amy."

With a quiet sigh she confessed. "I just wonder how much longer I'll be able to pose."

Eric walked over and moved Amy's tail so he could sit beside her. "If it's any consolation, I'm not going to get rid of you when you start looking pregnant. After all, you help keep this studio going, I hope you know."

"Oh, I know ... "

As her voice trailed off Eric took the opportunity to continue. "There's just as much to keep you here, whether you're in front of the camera or not. Personally, I don't know sometimes what I'd do if I didn't have you here."

Another sigh, this one deeper than the first. "I only wish Thomas felt that way."

"Aha! So that's the real problem."

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Amy looked up finally. "No. Well, yes, sort of, I mean ... no, when I sat down it was how long I'd be able to model. On the side, Thomas is the other problem.

"Don't get me wrong Eric, I love him with all my heart! And I believe he loves me too. But here it is; how long have we both known I'm going to have our baby and so far, not one word about getting married, plans for the future, about us, about our baby ... names ... anything ... "

Eric put an arm around Amy and held her long enough for her to work herself up for what he expected to be a good cry. But to his surprise, she held off. She got her second wind, her shoulders lowered to where they belonged. "Thank you, Eric." She put her arms around him and held him, hugging him close.

"Are you seeing Thomas tonight?" he asked.

Amy nodded.

"Take my advice, kid. Tell him how you feel. It's good to tell someone, but it'll be a whole lot better if you tell *him*, and soon."

"That's hard to do." Amy sniffled, then grinned big. "We usually don't get that far!"

"But you get farther, right?"

Amy nodded again with a giggle. "Mm-hm!" She raised her head and look into Eric's eyes. "Thank you." And as a gesture completely out of character with Amy, she kissed Eric on the cheek. "I promise I'll try."

"Okay." Eric got up and took his camera into his office to give Amy time to pull herself together privately.

Later, as she and Eric returned from lunch, a blur came through the door and took form when it came to a stop.

Eric called out from the open door of the studio. "Hello Sabrina!"

"Hi Eric!" Then, "Hi Amy." With a half-eaten sandwich in one hand she jiggled her key in the lock of the business across the hall.

"Make it through class alright, Sabrina, hmm?" Amy asked, one hand on her hip.

Sabrina looked over her shoulder. "Sure! Haven't fallen asleep in class yet." Of course, she wasn't about to tell her she was caught by both her writing teacher *and* her literature professor daydreaming about last night's chat session, and how she hoped it would go tonight if Chris was online!

"Good."

Amy followed her artist into through the door and returned to the layout board. Sabrina brought up the billing records she was working on yesterday.

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And she *wasn't* about to tell her about how The Clique teased the ... um ... well, how they teased her about it!

#

Long, lonely day.

Chris let himself into his house and found his way into the kitchen. Fishing out a clean fork he turned on the television and began attempting to eat at his Chinese food. He stared down into the white cardboard container, then poked his snout inside and sniffed. "Funny, it seemed hot when I bought it." Returning to the kitchen he tore one side of the carton removing the wire carry handle and put it into the microwave.

He looked at his watch, then his computer as his dinner became radioactive. "I *know* it's too early!"

Chris returned, impatiently and hungrily watching the timer tick down, a long 90 seconds. He took the time to return to his PC and turn it on, watching it boot up until he heard the **beeeeeeeep** of the microwave. Retrieving his dinner he took a mouthful and moused his way to his Internet provider and launched his e-mail.

The bottom of the screen read NO NEW MESSAGES

"Told you so, Chris." Leaving the system on he returned to find something tolerable to watch on television while he ate.

#

"You guys have plans tonight?"

"Nothing I know of," Amy answered as they rode home. "Bet I can guess what you're doing."

Sabrina grinned to herself. "Yeah, I have a writing assignment due Wednesday. We're starting a chapter on radio."

Amy looked at her. "Before or after you burn up the phone wires?"

"Well ... " Sabrina searched for an answer Amy wasn't going to turn against her. " ... I'm going to check my e-mail first, see if I have any."

"Before or after you eat something?"

"I'm not hungry right now. I'll probably order out something later."

"Uh, Sabrina? What if he didn't send you anything?"

Sabrina began to feel that slow burn again. "I don't know." She tried to contain her terse attitude as much as she could. And she said nothing else.

And Amy didn't press the issue. The radio was all that broke the silence until they got home.

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And at home, Thomas was sitting on the stoop waiting patiently. Sabrina parked in front of their building and Amy rushed out to Thomas, running into his waiting arms.

Thomas opened his mouth slightly and Amy did the same, deeply kissing each other. Sabrina watched as she slid her purse over her arm with her books and threw the door shut. "Geez, just go upstairs," she said under her breath.

She watched Thomas press Amy close to him as they hugged. Thomas was holding Amy especially close for some reason. He hadn't held her this close since before Amy told him the news of her pregnancy. Turning her nose up Sabrina locked her car door and walked around.

Amy had completely melted. A "Hi" trailed off into a "Hi-i-i-i-i ..." as she formed herself into his body.

"Hey Sabrina!" Thomas pulled away from Amy for a moment. "Leave your stuff, come get some pizza with us."

It wasn't the e-mail or her fantasy guy now. It was a combination; that and Thomas' very innocent invitation. Her ride back and forth with Amy today and watching the attention Amy received. Basically, she felt her nose was being rubbed in it. "Thanks Thomas, but I'm going to go up and start my homework. I've got an entire chapter to read and a lit paper to get started on."

"Do that later! I promise I won't keep you out late."

Amy cuddled close to Thomas. She had no idea Sabrina was seeing it and quietly seething. *Just like I said this morning, YOU have somebody!* "Thanks anyway, but I really need to get this started."

"C'mon, Sabrina!" This was Amy now, trying to convince her. "Everything can wait an hour or so, I promise."

That slow burn again. Sabrina sighed just to keep herself from exploding. "Okay. Let me go upstairs and put my books away."

Thomas smiled. "Great! We'll wait for you, hurry up!"

Sabrina ran in through the front door and up the steps. What she said was nothing short of vulgar. It shocked her a step closer to reality when she heard herself mutter what she'd muttered. "I never knew I could talk like that!" At her apartment door she fiddled with the key and pushed it into the lock. "Why can't they just leave me ALONE??" She turned the knob and locked the door behind her.

Running into the computer room she powered up her system and ran to the front window, opening it and sticking her head out, looking down at Amy and Thomas. They were leaning against Thomas' car, holding hands and talking. She whistled to get their attention, then whistled again and waved when they couldn't see her.

"Give me another minute to freshen up!"

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Thomas waved up at her. "Okay!" he yelled.

When her head disappeared back inside Amy said "She's not freshening up. I know."

And you know Sabrina wasn't, either. She ran back to the Amiga, impatiently waiting for the MiAMI client to launch, impatiently waiting for the modem to connect, quietly saying "Oh please oh please oh please oh please ..."

Three minute wait over. Sabrina jumped straight into her e-mail account.

TWO MESSAGES WAITING

Taking a breath she clicked on the first one and opened it.

"YES!!"

Sabrina had left the window open. Amy looked at Thomas. "He wrote." And she leaned her head on his arm.

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Sabrina unconsciously bounced in her seat. "Calm down, Sabrina, whatever it is he wrote it's not going to be anything elaborate, probably just a 'Hi, how are you' kind of message." And she opened the electronic message up and read it.

Hi Sabrina!

I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed chatting with you last night.

He enjoyed chatting with me last night! "Yesssss!"

I hope talking helped you. You seemed down when we started, and by the end you really seemed to perk up.

Sabrina's eyes widened. "He could tell that??"

If you enjoyed it too, please e-mail me and let me know when we can meet again.

Best,

Chris

Sabrina's hand slid off of the mouse and she leaned contently back. Every ounce of tension drained out of her. Her shoulders relaxed, and she sighed deeply; the body's own way of relaxing itself. She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them, sat up, and clicked on **REPLY TO AUTHOR**

She censored down below ... *let me know when we can meet again.*

How about tonight? Same time?

I can't wait!!

Love,

Sabrina

And just before she sent it off on its merry way, she looked at it. "Hmm, maybe not so bold right now." She clicked next to 'Love' and erased that.

And she sent it.

#

"She can't wait! All *right!*" Chris' ears stood straight up as he replied back.

I'll be waiting for you, Sabrina!

----<--'----{@

"She liked that last night. Let's do it again." And the message was on its way back.

Chris leaned back. "Now, how to kill two hours?"

#

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Somehow, Sabrina made it through pizza. Seeing the e-note help settle some of her anxiety so she was better company with Thomas and Amy at the pizza house. And of course, when they came within about four blocks of their apartment building the anxiety started returning. When Thomas pulled up and parked Sabrina did everything she could to contain herself and walk calmly up the steps, not to mention to avoid pushing past Amy to get into the apartment and not to run into their study.

Thomas watched her disappear and the door close. "Sabrina's found a friend," he said.

"Yeah," said Amy. She put a hand on her shoulder and rubbed at a stiff muscle. "I don't know what he's said to her to get her worked up like this. Honestly Thomas, I've never seen her like this."

"It's good for her. Since she learned how to fend off all the unwanted advances maybe she's finally found somebody worth talking to." He slid his hands onto her shoulders, dislodging her hand, and began massaging.

Amy watched the scenery change as her eyes rolled skyward. "Oh, Thomas, what that does to me." She felt layers of tension (largely because of Thomas) find their ways out of her, and she led him to the couch and lay down so he could continue properly.

And in the study, Sabrina made herself comfortable too. Firing up her computer she first went into her e-mailbox.

TWO MESSAGES WAITING

Sabrina's smile formed a bridge from her left ear to her right.

She opened the first message, left over from earlier.

SOFTWARE FOR THE DINOSAURS!

TI-99, COMMODORE AMIGA

Her smile dropped like a brick from the ceiling. "*I hate spam!*" And as fond of her Amiga as she was, she *quickly* deleted it. Oh, the reply she had for them would've insured she never heard back from them again, but she decided the lady-like thing to do would be to quietly kill it from her mailbox.

"Next message."

... and she smiled. Boy, did she smile.

Checking her watch she decided to go into IRC. She scanned through the chat room list.

"Where is it?"

The room she met Chris in wasn't there.

Sabrina ran her hand through her hair in a small panic. She saw a room with the name **OPEN CHAT**, so she let herself in.

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GuideMW> Welcome, Sabrina1 :)

Sabrina looked at the on-line list. Then checked her watch.

Sabrina1> Hi everybody! Does anybody know if Chris was in here?

A pause.

>>Private message from Lucky: Wanna go talk in private?

Raspy> Nope, sorry

LiteBrite> Sorry, haven't seen him/her :(

GuideMW> Haven't seen him, Sabrina1, sorry.

Then,

>>Private message from Lucky: Go private with me! I'll make you forget him!

As Thomas had said, Sabrina knew how to handle people like this. And it didn't involve private messages either.

Sabrina1> No Lucky, I'm *NOT* going to go private with you, leave me alone!

It never failed.

LiteBrite> WTG girl!

GuideMW> Lucky, please stop harassing people or I'm going to have to bump you.

Spanker> Yeah Lucky, quit hitting on every girl that comes in here!

TobyW> Wanna hit? I like to hit.

Lucky didn't have much to say before his name disappeared from the list.

Sabrina snickered to herself.

Sabrina1> Thanks everybody :)

LiteBrite> Don't feel too bad, Sabrina. He's a total jerk.

Sabrina1> Guess I've gotta get used to them if I'm going to be in IRC, huh? :)

There were replies, but nothing she saw right away. She brought down her email program and sent a quick note:

Chris, the room we met in last night isn't there.

I'm in one called 'Open Chat'

I hope you get this in time!

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Sabrina

Sabrina1> Sorry everyone, went into e-mail mode :)

Guide MW> No problem, Sabrina1. We're all friendly folks here :)

Snoobie> NP Sab

And chat went along very friendly from that point on. And then, about twenty-five minutes later ...

>>Chris has just joined OPEN CHAT

Sabrina grinned wide and melted completely.

GuideMW> Welcome, Chris :)

"Yes," said Sabrina, "welcome!"

Hi Chris! Then, in a private message, *I'm glad you got my e-mail!*

Unconsciously, her tail twitched from side to side.

On the other end, so was Chris'. "What is it about this girl," he asked himself out loud, "that's got me so intrigued in her?" He typed back for public viewing *"Thanx everybody, nice to be here :)"*

Chris> Thanx everybody, nice to be here :)

LiteBrite> Hey Sabrina1, Chris is here!

Snoobie> Nice to see you, Chris. Sabrina's been here looking for you!

Chris leaned in closer. "Do tell!"

Chris> Oh, really? She has, has she?" :)

Snoobie> Yep

GuideMW> Yes she has, Chris. She must really like you ::wink::

Chris couldn't see Sabrina's embarrassed reaction. "Why did he tell him that!?" She looked back at her monitor.

>>Private message from Chris: Where you really looking around for me, Sabrina? I'm flattered! :)

And Sabrina typed back:

>>Private message from Sabrina1: Well, yeah, I was :) How are you?

The conversation in the chat area, as it did the night before, went on around them. Chris clicked on Sabrina's screen name again and sent back to her:

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>>*Private message from Chris: I'm doing fine, thanx. Say listen, would you like to continue this in a private room?*

"That'd make more sense than doing it this way." And she told him so.

Next, she saw on her screen a new room open. Sabrina smiled, and connected to it.

>>**Sabrina1 has just joined SABRINA'S ROOM -- PRIVATE CHAT**

Now she was totally alone with him. No other distractions at all.

Chris> Now, isn't this much easier? :)

Sabrina1> Yes it sure is!

Chris> And how are you this fine evening?

Sabrina1> You have no idea! I haven't stopped thinking about you all day!

Sabrina looked at that last line she'd transmitted. "Jeepers, I wonder if I should've said that."

Chris, however, felt his eyes widen to the size of dinner plates. He typed back to her:

Chris> You too?

Sabrina felt her eyes do the same thing.

Sabrina1> You don't mean you thought of me too! Did you?

It seemed crazy, but it was true. "Now, how to phrase it so she doesn't think I'm coming on to her!"

Chris> It's silly, isn't it? I mean, we only just met last night. And I got very little work done because I was thinking of you all day!

Sabrina's mouth opened. The little girl in her made her open mouth turn up at the corners. "That's too hard to believe!"

"Everything okay, Sabrina?"

Sabrina's head spun around. Amy stuck her head through the door. "I heard you talking, I just wanted to check."

Sabrina felt embarrassed as she looked back at Amy. She both felt and saw the suppressed amusement Amy fought to hide. What she'd meant to say was 'I heard you talking *to yourself*', and Sabrina knew it. "No, I'm okay," she told Amy, smiling, wondering if Amy could read what *she'd* meant to say.

"I'll be out here if you need me," Amy said, closing the door, trying to hide a smirk as the door clicked shut. Sabrina turned back, mumbling "If I need you I'll *call you!*" She turned back and read where she'd been interrupted. She typed:

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Sabrina1> No, I don't think it's silly at all. In fact, I *know* it's not silly! If you knew what *my* day was like, you'd know it wasn't silly!

Chris pondered what Sabrina wrote. *She couldn't have spent her day thinking about me too!* "Could she?" He decided to find out.

Chris> Tell me about it

And she did, too! From being waken in front of her computer to The Clique's teasing to taking 3/4 of an hour to type a letter because her mind kept wandering ...

Sabrina1> still think it's silly? ;)

Chris sat back in stunned amazement. "I swear to God, she is talking about me! How can this happen after only *one* chat session?!"

Chris> Not anymore! You sure you weren't next door watching me and saying it happened to you?

"I wonder if I'd like to." Sabrina smiled as her mind's eye formed a picture of Chris, and *oboy* was it something!

Sabrina1> Nope, I promise! Now, tell me about your day

She read every word ...

Chris> Well, after our first meeting you made me late for work ;)

Sabrina1> LOL!

Chris> I told a guy in my department about you, he wanted to know if you made up your name from that 'teenage witch' show on TV

Sabrina1> Nope, it's my real name. I get that a lot, though.

Chris> I'm not surprised ;)

Sabrina1> Please go on

Chris> I got lost in thought for about 10 minutes in my cubical, then brought a new PC up from downstairs, rode the elevator past my level and had to take it back down, took it back to my cube where it sat while I daydreamed, which I don't normally do, honest!

... and absorbed them. He kept writing, and the more Sabrina read, the more flattered she felt.

Sabrina1> I never affected anybody that way before.

"I never thought I could."

Chris> You did today, kiddo!

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giggle!

Chris> And apparently I did too, or was it the late night chat? ;)

Sabrina1> You keep winking, it's cute :) It might've been both, I dunno

Chris> Wanna do it again? ::wink wink::

Sabrina1> LOL

Chris> ;)

Sabrina1> Yeah, I do.

And again, they did. For over two hours they became intimate with each other's peeves, problems, interests, likes, dislikes, and anything else they could think of.

Sabrina1> I can't get over how much we've been sharing. I never opened up to anybody like this before!

Chris> Then you'll excuse me if I try something?

Sabrina's yawn stopped midway, the time of night starting to creep up on her. She raised an eyebrow.

Sabrina1> Sure, what?

Chris smiled. He entered an action command, allowing the computer to describe an action being taken. It came out like this:

Chris kisses Sabrina1 on the cheek

"Awww!" Sabrina smiled, her heart thumping just a bit faster.

Chris, however, waited to see if he'd taken one step too far.

Sabrina1> Thank you. You're very sweet. :*

Sabrina received and gave her first online kiss.

Chris sighed. His heart also beat an extra beat.

Sabrina1> I hope you make through work tomorrow okay! :)

Chris> I will if I know you'll be there at the end of it

Sabrina melted again.

Sabrina1> I promise. Same time?

Chris> Sure. Look for this very room; I'll be waiting.

Sabrina1> Okay. Goodnight, Chris

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Sabrina tried an action command herself.

Sabrina1 hugs Chris

Chris> Oh, that felt GOOD! :)

Sabrina1> I'm glad.

If he could only see my smile!

Chris> nite, Sabrina

Sabrina1> nite, Chris :*

Chris> :*

She watched her screen for several moments, not knowing that Chris was doing the exact same thing. Until she saw:

>>Chris has logged off

Sabrina ran her hands through her white hair and down across her face, again yawning, and yawning big. Looking at her watch she realized why. Walking out quietly into the empty living room she faced the dark night beyond the window of the apartment she shared with her best friend Amy.

"Good morning, World."

#

"Good morning, Sabrina."

A groggy "Hmmf?" made its way to Amy's ears. Sabrina rolled over on her back, feeling the covers roll under her. She managed to open her eyes, while the sleepers made sure she knew they were there. "I overslept, huh?"

"Not by much," Amy told her. She was already dressed in her knee-length jeans and a flowery blouse. "You still have time to take a quick shower and we can grab bagels on the way in to work."

"Okay." Sabrina yanked the blankets out from under her and made her way to the bathroom. Amy watched her walk past and said "You slept in your clothes again."

Sabrina stopped and looked at her shirt. "Yeah, I guess I did." And before Amy said another word she went on. "And yes, I stayed on IRC late, and yes, I spent almost all of it talking to Chris. He's a really nice guy, he's fun to talk to, and he listens to me. And I'll probably be talking to him again tonight."

Amy was taken aback. "Wow." She followed Sabrina out of her bedroom and watched her go into the bathroom and close the door. Her "Wow" wasn't for Sabrina's description of Chris, it was for the way she'd reacted. She put her paw on the bathroom doorknob, and withdrew it when she heard the shower turn on. Retrieving her morning tea from the

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coffee table, she sat, still dumbfounded. *Best to wait a while before I ask her anything more about it*, she thought. She sipped her tea and waited.

#

Chris opened the electronic lock to the door of the Data Processing section with his coffee in hand and took his seat. Dexter's timing was perfect, catching Chris in the middle of a yawn.

Dexter couldn't hide the smile spreading across his mouth. "I see we had another late night in IRC last night, didn't we?"

Two thoughts crossed Chris' mind at this point, *Go away* was one of them. "Not late this time," he said, opting for the second. "I was off before midnight." Then, adding "And her real name *is* Sabrina." After he swallowed a large muzzle-full of coffee he went on. "She gave me an idea of what she looks like. Dex, she sounds *gorgeous!*"

"Gorgeous"? Sounds like a man obsessed." Dexter smiled. "Why don't you ask her for a picture? See what she really looks like."

Chris widened his eyes and nodded toward Dexter. "I considered doing that. The timing has to be right though. I don't want to give her the impression I'm one of those Internet sex-hounds who goes out looking for girls and tries to get them to send pictures of themselves."

Now Dexter leaned against Chris' desk. "I don't know Chris. From what you've told me over these past two days, she shouldn't think that. You ask her tonight, I bet you get one before the week's out."

"She does have me curious! Okay, I might do it." His phone rang just then; Chris and Dexter made the dull trip back to real life.

Actually, Chris made it about a third of the way there. "Obsessed" was a word well-chosen these past two days.

#

Wednesday morning, and Sabrina made it on time to her writing class. The Clique was true to Cindy's promise, too. Before the final bell Sabrina managed to back their teasing off with slightly more intimate details of last night's conference in 'Sabrina's Room'. There was nothing short of fascination in the eyes of these three girlfriends as Sabrina told them details of her second and third nights online with Chris.

"... whole trouble is," Sabrina told them, "is I'm afraid of running out of stuff to tell him."

"Can't happen, girl," said Susan. "We'll give you all kinds of things to tell him." And she grinned big.

Sabrina laughed as the bell rang. "That's what I'm afraid of! And he asked me for a picture of me, too."

Chapter 3

Mr. Canis' mouth opened just as the sea of "Oooo!"s came from the only direction it could have come from. With a sigh he began "Ladies, if I may be allowed to be in charge for the next 50 minutes or so, I'd like to take roll."

Cindy was a hairsbreadth from saying "Okay, no problem, go ahead," and managed to stop herself before she did. As roll progressed Debby turned herself a bit in her seat. "Are you going to send him one?" she whispered.

Leaning forward, Sabrina whispered back "I didn't know at first, but I told him I would if he sends me one of him."

"Is he?"

"Yes!"

"Yes!!" came from Susan, quietly but excited. "We get to see what he looks like!"

Canis turned an eye in their direction.

"You have one to send him?" asked Cindy

Sabrina shrugged. "Nothing recent."

Canis cleared his throat.

"I've got a camera in the car," said Susan, her voice slightly louder than a whisper. "After class we can take one!"

"Susan! No!" Sabrina's voice was almost as loud.

"Yes! You're stuck, we'll take it!"

"GIRLS!"

The entire Clique jumped as a unit, facing Mr. Canis. "I'm asking you four to stay after class for a few minutes this morning."

This time it was the rest of the class who "Ooooo!"ed. The four girls sat up a little straighter. Phased only slightly, but they knew it wouldn't last long.

... and it didn't. Homework was passed up, handouts were passed out. And Mr. Canis enjoyed almost one half of the class time with peace, and managed to follow his lesson plan on time for a change.

Chapter 4

Mr. Canis closed the door behind the rest of the exiting class. Walking back to the other side of the room he reached over his desk and picked up the stack of homework papers handed in earlier. The Clique watched him, unusually quiet now. They'd inadvertently gotten themselves into trouble this time, and they could feel it.

Canis walked down and stood beside the desk beside Debbye, looking down at the four of them. "Girls," he started out, "why do you do this to me? "

Together, all four girls shifted in their seats. Susan let her tail sway uneasily over the linoleum floor. Sabrina lowered her eyes. Debbye and Cindy exchanged guilty looks. Did he want an answer? Was this a rhetorical question? All four decided to themselves that the best thing was probably to keep their mouths closed and listen quietly.

"You're all adults, you or your parents or someone is paying a lot of money for each of you to be here, you're all excellent students and yet every day I feel I have to compete with you four."

An uneasy pause followed. Cindy quietly cleared her throat. "Uhm," she started, "we never meant to, Mr. Canis. I guess ... we just got carried away today."

Canis shook his head. "It's not just today, Cindy. I mean, by rights maybe I shouldn't even say anything because you four are actually a sort of legend on-campus. Anybody says 'The Clique', immediately they know it's you four. But I'm sorry, today I felt I had to say something."

He waited for somebody to react. They all did, but only to themselves, privately embarrassed.

"Sabrina, you want to be a technical writer, right?" Sabrina nodded. "Cindy, you're interested in journalism?"

"Sort of.," she answered as Canis began looking for their papers in his homework stack. "I'd like to write feature articles."

"... and you'll need an education in writing to accomplish that, right?" Cindy nodded, looking down some.

Looking at the back of a paper, Canis said "Sabrina, these last two classes you seem to have been pre-occupied with something."

Sabrina felt herself pinned in the corner a bit now. "Uh, yessir." She managed to stammer her way through her explanation. "I met someone on the Internet, and I guess I've been thinking about him a lot."

"He must be some guy. His name wouldn't be Chris, would it?"

The Clique's eyes all widened at once. *It can't be him!* Sabrina thought quickly! "Y...yes. How did you know?"

Chapter 4

Mr. Canis took one of the pages from his stack and turned it over to show her. "Because you've scribbled his name at least a dozen or so times on the back of one of your homework sheets."

Four mouths opened in unison, two with a grin attached. Sabrina felt her cheeks burn. *I didn't even know I'd done that!* "Uh ... "

"You're not the first one to do this," he went on, "I'm thankful you only did it on the back side. And no, I'm not going to count it against you, just try to be more careful, okay?"

A quiet "Okay" came from Sabrina.

"I didn't mean to embarrass you, and I'm sorry if I did." He turned his attention back to all of them. "But girls, you have to try to have just a little less fun in the classroom. Would you please do that? For me?"

One by one, each girl nodded and murmured some sort of agreement.

"Thank you. You're dismissed."

Together The Clique gathered their books and belongings and headed out the door.

All five of them knew what he asked wouldn't last. And Mr. Canis would never admit it, but in a way, he hoped it wouldn't either. They were, as a group, as much a part of the college as he was as a teacher.

#

Chris> Kinda hard on you, huh?

Sabrina1> Oh, I dunno. I guess we should've been expecting it. I told you, we're always like this! :)

Chris smiled and typed on.

Chris> You must be one fun-loving bunch!

Sabrina1> Oh yeah! You should've seen us when they were taking my picture for you -- ROFL!

Chris felt his excitement level go from high to peak level!

Chris> Didja scan it yet?

" ... he asked hopefully."

Sabrina1> Check your e-mail!

Chris quickly launched his email program and scanned through his new messages. There were two new ones from Sabrina, one of them with a picture of a paper clip. He opened the message and bypassed reading the letter for now; he clicked on the paperclip and opened the attachment.

Chapter 4

And the picture built, line by line. "WOW!"

Sabrina stood in a pose The Clique had to have put her up to, one arm in the air, one hand on her hip, big open-mouth smile as if they'd caught her in mid-laugh. Her blue sweater was all she wore.

On the other end, Sabrina noticed the lag in the conversation. *He must be checking out the picture. God, what if he doesn't like it!?* She felt the same anxiety she felt when Susan took the picture, when she got the pictures back from the one-hour photo center, when she scanned it, when she e-mailed it, while she waited for 8:00 when she and Chris were scheduled to meet ...

Chris> That's really you?

Sabrina felt herself swallow. She typed :

Sabrina1> Yes

And when she read the reply ...

Chris> One word -- WOW!

siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiigh!

Sabrina1> Did you like it?

" ... she asked hopefully."

Chris laughed on his side of the modem line.

Chris> Ho, BOY, do I like it!

Sabrina smiled, relieved. She didn't quite know why, after all, he *was* just a name on a monitor, right?

Sabrina1> Got one for me? ;)

Chris> Sure do! I scanned it at work and I'm sending it over now.

After Chris sent that last part, he dug the diskette out of his shirt pocket and jammed it into the disc drive. Re-opening his e-mail program, he attached the file and sent it over.

Chris> Sorry for the delay! Go see if you like what *you* see :)

Sabrina1> OK! BRB!

Sabrina jumped into her e-mail account and checked her in-box. "Nothing!?"

Just then it came up: **ONE NEW MESSAGE**

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Sabrina clicked on it, and opened the attached picture file. There was Chris, leaning against his car, nicely dressed in casual shirt and trousers with a V-neck sweater, one leg crossed in front of the other. And Sabrina's word wasn't "Wow," but ...

Sabrina1> I *LIKE* it! :)

Chris> Really?

Sabrina1> YES! You really liked mine?

Chris pondered his answer. "Time to ask," he said to himself.

Chris> I liked it enough to ask if you'd like to chat on the phone :)

Sabrina immediately transmitted her phone number.

Chris> I got it! Log off and I'll call right now!

Sabrina1> Okay, logging off!

And as always, they both waited to see who logged off first. This time it was Sabrina, and Chris got up to get his cordless phone.

#

At the dinette table Thomas and Amy were engrossed in their individual projects. Amy was leafing through a catalogue of baby furniture, and Thomas was tending a small terrarium he'd put together for Amy, or so he'd said it was for her; the underlying reason was to tend the tiny environment inside for a course in plant behavior. As he tended it he'd picked up the habit of exhaling slightly more than normal into the tank to entice the plants inside to grow better with a carbon-dioxide boost.

"I laid one of these away," Amy told Thomas, pointing to a bathanet. "It'll make bathing her a lot easier than squatting down into the tub."

It took a few moments before Thomas' brain registered that Amy had even spoke. When it did he looked up. "Her?"

To reply, Amy ran the palm of her hand over her belly, which hadn't taken her away from her cartoon modeling career as yet, although she could feel it wouldn't be long to wait. "Wishful thinking. I'm hoping for a girl."

"Oh." He returned to the fern he was nursing. "Your Purple Cliff Brake isn't doing well."

"My what?"

"Your fern. Are you remembering to mist in here every other day?"

Should I tell him I lost interest in the stupid thing? "Uh, I think so. I might've skipped a day, I don't remember."

Thomas picked up a small spray bottle and began misting water inside the tank.

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"I've been kinda pre-occupied with other things, y'know?" she prompted.

"Uh-huh."

"I mean," Amy leaned into the table, standing halfway up, "I've got this baby to consider."

"Yeah." Thomas patted the soil and cover loosely around the plants.

Steam started to come out of Amy's ears. She unconsciously straightened her tail to its full length, fighting anger! "*Our* baby. Thomas."

"I know." He straightened the ceramic frog in the corner and picked up the glass lid, whereas Amy was ready to take the entire terrarium and -

Riiiiiiiiing!

Ambivalent, Thomas cleaned the glass cover. Amy's head spun toward the phone across the room. "Wow, she gave up early tonight!" She walked across the room. "I'm not used to hearing the phone ring in the evening anymore."

Three steps away, just after the second ring, the study door flew open! Sabrina ran out and made a flying leap for the phone; clutching it like a hungry man with a sandwich.

"Hi! It's for me! Thanks!" And she disappeared, phone and all, back behind the closed door of the study.

Amy's hands went to her hips. "What in the *world?*" Thomas looked up and watched Amy turn around and walk back to the table.

Thomas smiled, hoping he was off the hook talking about the baby. "Must be some hot phone call," he said. He took the terrarium and replaced it by the window. He wiped a finger over the window pane, looked at it, stuck out his tongue, and picked up the glass cleaner.

"Must be." Amy sat down, then stopped before she made contact with the seat. "*She gave him our phone number!! She had to have!*"

Before Thomas could turn and stop her, Amy jumped and made for the closed study door.

#

Sabrina dropped to the floor, setting the phone down with little line cord left to spare. Taking and letting out a deep breath she picked up the receiver. "Hello?" Her heart was beating like a baby rabbit's!

"Hello," the male voice on the other end said. "Sabrina?"

"Chris?"

Chris smiled on his end. "Yep."

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Sabrina pulled the throw rug over and sat cross-legged on it, smiling. "Hi."

Chris also had to fight a loss of words. "And how are you this fine evening?"

"Oh, fine, thanks." *My God, he's got a great voice, too!!* "How about you?"

"I'm fine, thank you for asking. And what a lovely voice you have, my dear."

Now, for Chris, this was sheer, intentional, flattery. *With a personality, body, and voice like this, I'm using every ounce of charm there is!*

And as far as Sabrina was concerned, he could use every ounce of charm he had! "Aw, you're sweet."

And that's about as far as they got before the door flew open, missing Sabrina by about a foot. "*I don't believe it!*" Amy yelled at her!

Sabrina put her hand around the mouthpiece and said "Just a minute, please." She held down the mute button. "What!?"

"You gave him our phone number! Our *home phone number!!*"

"Why not?" Sabrina yelled back, uncharacteristic for her, but Amy's foot was hovering over her one final nerve. "The phone's one half mine, too, you know!"

"But you gave it out to a total stranger! Some guy on the Internet! All you know about him is what he told you online! For all you know he's a sex fiend, or *worse!*"

That was it! Sabrina, clutching onto the handset of the phone, turned herself completely away from Amy, lifted her hips, and raised her tail as high as it would go.

"That was total irresponsibili -- *YOU WOULDN'T DARE!!!*"

Sabrina seethed through her closed teeth. "Just -- try -- me!"

Amy stared at a part of her roommate she had never seen before. With no further word she let herself out of the room and closed the door.

Sabrina lowered her tail and sat back down, lifting the mute button. "I'm sorry about that, Chris."

"Sounded like someone was mad over there! What's up?"

"Oh," Sabrina sighed, "my roommate Amy, remember I told you about her?"

"The one expecting the baby?" Chris said. "Yeah, I remember her."

Sabrina felt foolish telling him this. "She's heard all of these stories of people meeting other people on the Internet and all of these bad things happening. She doesn't know you, but she knows me and she's worried I'm making friends with an axe murderer and gave one our phone number."

Chapter 4

"Geez! I didn't mean to cause any problems. I'm sorry."

"Don't be!" Sabrina waved her hand through the air. "She'll get over it. I think once her boyfriend finally gets the guts to propose to her, she'll lighten up on a lot of things."

"That's Thomas, don't ever call him 'Tom' in front of Amy, right?" Chris asked.

Giggle! "That's him! He's one of the nicest guys I've ever known, but for some reason he seems to keep avoiding the subject of marriage with her."

"It's a 'guy thing', Sabrina," Chris explained. "A lot of guys don't like to be committed. Although in this case, the commitment's kinda sorta already made."

"Yeah, it sure is."

"Do you know you have an incredibly sexy phone voice?" Chris asked. "Not meaning to change the subject, just asking."

Sabrina liked having the subject shifted to her. After all, that's why they're talking now, right? "Yours ain't so bad, either! I love that picture of you."

"I'm glad," Chris turned to look at his monitor. "I still have yours up on my screen."

"You do?" Sabrina turned toward her screen, where his picture was there for God and the whole world to see.

"I sure do. I may make it wallpaper."

"Make it *what?*" Sabrina never considered herself an IBM-kind of girl.

"Wallpaper. The picture in the background."

"Oh." Then, "Oh! You'd do that?"

She heard a mouse clicking over the phone. "I'm doing it now. Converting it, putting it up, centering, set background color, done."

Sabrina lay on the floor, resting on her elbows. "You really did that? You are something."

Chris laughed politely. "I try my best."

"Of course, remember, you're an IBM-PC guy, I'm an Amiga girl," Sabrina teased. "Do you think we're compatible at all?"

Chris thought of an answer. "Well, if it'll help," he said, "I still have my Commodore 64 where I can get at it."

Sabrina laughed out loud. "Oh, boy! Yeah, we're compatible!"

"I agree," said Chris, "We're both silly."

#

Chapter 4

On the other side of the door, Amy had managed to get Thomas to at least look at baby clothes with her. Occasionally Sabrina's voice or laugh would come past the door to her ears, and she'd stare at the door with impatience.

"She's a grown woman, Amy," Thomas said, hoping to be helpful.

"Yeah, 24 going on 18. I still can't believe she gave that guy our number."

Thomas looked at his watch. "He can't be that bad a guy. She's been talking to him over an hour."

Amy shook her head. "She's got a crush. I'm just afraid she's going to get hurt is all."

Thomas was about to ask "Are you sure that's all?", but thought if he did, she might answer him. A knock on the door broke the conversation nicely.

"That's probably him now. She probably gave him our address, too." She never saw Thomas raising his eyes to the ceiling and shaking his head as she got up to answer the door.

"Debbye!" she said. "Come on in!"

"Hi Amy. Hi Thomas!" Debbye came in and leaned down to Amy's belly. "Hi, new cousin!" Laughing for the first time all evening, Amy closed the door.

"You're not showing yet," Debbye said. "When's that supposed to happen?"

"With any luck," Amy replied, "never! But, I know better. It won't be much longer now." Then, "So, what're you up to?"

"I came over to study with Sabrina. We've got a lit test tomorrow."

Amy sighed a sigh of relief. "Debbye, you're timing couldn't have been better! She's in the study, go right in!"

Thomas stared, wanting to stick up for Sabrina, but not wanting to get in the middle either.

#

The knock on the door made Sabrina jump out of her aroused state. She sat up and adjusted herself before the door opened. "Hey there, Sabrina!"

Sabrina covered the mouthpiece. "Debbye! Oh, I forgot, we're supposed to study tonight!" Taking her hand away, "Uh, Chris, I completely forgot I was supposed to study with Debbye tonight."

Debbye spoke in a loud whisper. "Is that *him*?" she asked, pointing to the phone.

Sabrina nodded, and pointed to the Amiga screen. "I'm really sorry," she told Chris.

"No problem," Chris explained to her. "I understand. I'm glad I got to talk to you!"

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Debbye pointed to the screen, then to the phone. Sabrina nodded to her.

"Sabrina, he's *cute*!!" Then, she yelled, "Hi Chris!"

Sabrina jumped! Chris yelled back "Hi Debbye!"

"He says 'Hi Debbye'."

"I have to get a shower anyway," Chris told Sabrina. "I'll be seeing you soon."

"Sure will! I can't wait. Bye."

No sooner did Sabrina hang up the phone than Debbye said "Wow Sabrina! Does he have a brother?"

Sabrina smiled smugly. "No brother, sorry. He's got an older sister though."

Debbye made a face. "Not my type. What's he sound like?"

Slowly Sabrina's face turned into an uncontrollable smile, excitement welling inside her again! "He sounds *great*! *Sexy*!"

Debbye put her bookbag down and hugged Sabrina. "All *right*! And all this from the Internet?"

"Every bit of him! All *mine*!"

The girls released each other. "Wait'll Susan and Cindy hear you finally talked to him! They'll flip!"

"No," corrected Sabrina. "Wait'll they find out the *rest* of the story!"

Chapter 5

"Meet her!?"

Chris looked out from behind the network switch he was installing into the rack. "Yep. I'm driving over to her neck of Ohio Saturday morning, and we're going to meet for lunch."

Dexter held the mass of jumper cables dangling from the hub on the front of the rack to one side to look at Chris better. "You don't think you're moving in on her too fast, do you?"

"Dex, I'm not moving 'in on her'" Chris laughed. "This is just lunch; to see if we're as compatible in person as we are on the computer and the phone."

"Compatible?" Chris, if two people of opposite sexes are concerned with compatibility, that usually means they want to be more than just friends."

Chris tightened down the last screw and gave the switch a couple of tugs to be sure it was secure. Working himself out from behind the racks of equipment he said "Well, one never knows. You saw her picture; what do you think?"

Dexter went to the PC that controlled the new component and launched the software while Chris picked up the wiring diagram. "Seriously? I think you are hoping to be more than casual friends. Remember though, you've only been corresponding with this young woman less than a week."

Chris started plugging cables in from the network hub, then stopped for a moment. Looking at Dexter, he said "You think we're going too fast?"

"Way too fast."

Plugging in another cable, Chris thought about this. "It's not like we're looking for romance necessarily ... "

"No," Dexter said, "it was only a few days ago you said you couldn't get her out of your mind." And he cracked a wry smile, turning away from Chris as he did. In a way Chris reminded him of himself and Angel when he first met her at college. After the first couple of dates he couldn't get her out of his mind either.

"Well, all I know is I want to meet her, and she wants to meet me. She's going to pick a restaurant for us to meet at. I think she'll be more comfortable, meeting for the first time in a public place. It should please her roommate too, so far I don't think she's really happy with me."

Dexter swore to himself. The software didn't recognize the new switch. "Windows 95 Plug and Guess," he grumbled, pulling a chair over and rising it higher before planting himself into it. "I know I'd want to do it that way," he agreed. "Makes it a lot safer for both of you. If you decide you don't like her, you can stick her with the check."

Chris laughed out loud. "Somehow, I don't think that's gonna happen."

Chapter 5

#

Saturday morning. Sabrina made sure to set her alarm so she'd have plenty of time to get ready. Also to make sure she didn't miss her lunch date; as she'd predicted she was so keyed up about today she didn't get to sleep until the wee hours of the morning.

Amy stayed the night with Thomas, so Sabrina only carried her dressing gown to the bathroom, along with a bar of rose scented soap she'd been gifted with yesterday, largely at Susan's insistence while they were shopping. "You've got to look good, girl, you know this!" rang in her ears. They'd scoured the entire mall it seemed as Sabrina took the benefit of Susan's expertise in dating.

"But I'm not used to getting dressed up," Sabrina had whined. She'd finally opted for a soft blue cowl-neck sweater that, when she tried it on, met with Susan's immediate approval! Tight, soft, "Sexy," said Susan. "If he doesn't like you in that, the man needs to be buried!"

Sabrina giggled. "I've never been this nervous about a date before," she said.

"That's because you don't date hardly at all! Stick with me, Sabrina, you'll have him eating out of your hand, guaranteed!"

"Easy for you to say," Sabrina said as she handed the sweater and her credit card to the cashier. "You're BGOC."

"You should've tried out for the cheerleading squad when I told you to! You'd be Big Girl On Campus too!"

As they left Fashions Sabrina laughed out loud! "Can you imagine me in a cheerleader's costume? Susan, get real! I don't have the hips for that!"

"Heck with that, there's nothing wrong with them! You still should've tried out. You need to be more outgoing!" That's when she steered them both into a small shop in the center of the mall where Susan bought Sabrina the rose soap. "You and he'll love this," she told her. "The scent lingers on you for hours!"

"I think you're getting more into this date than I am," Sabrina kidded. As she thought of that she laughed out loud as she adjusted the water and climbed into the shower. The hot water drained pound after pound of tension out of her! She completely saturated her fur before she remembered she hadn't unwrapped the soap. When she broke the cellophane the intense aroma of roses met her nostrils and she sighed deeply. As she bathed the hot water continued to release the aromatic oils and in no time the entire stall smelled like a florist's shop. It all took an effect on little Sabrina, her arousal began to pique as her body unwound, thoughts flooding her mind as she continued to wash ...

When she finally stepped from the shower she completely toweled herself off and made sure to completely blow-dry her bright white hair, untangling it with a hair pick before brushing it up as prettily as she could. Looking into the mirror she realized she'd have to do it all again after she put on her new turtleneck sweater.

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She met her own eyes in the mirror. "Sabrina, she's right. You need to get out and date more often." She stepped back and looked herself over, much as she had the morning after her first online chat with Chris. She turned her head to one side. "Lot of trouble over a lunch date, isn't it? Well," she answered herself, "he is driving a long way to meet me." She smiled at herself. "And he is awfully good looking." Her mind began to wander when she shook her head suddenly, sending the last few droplets of rose-scented water across the bathroom. "If I don't want to miss out, I better get myself focused and moving." She walked briskly back up the hallway to her bedroom.

#

Five minutes to twelve. Sabrina pulled her little blue car into the parking lot of Furry's Restaurant and began to make a circuit of it. Three cars with Pennsylvania license plates, two cars with no front plates which could be from Pennsylvania, but the wrong color. *Oh please let him be here, oh please!* Circling back toward the entrance she saw a red Mazda, dirty from late winter driving. She found a spot two spaces down and parked, adjusting the flower in her hair she got out and walked over to it. The window slid down so she could talk to the three women inside.

"You guys are early," she told The Clique.

"Better early than never," said Cindy from behind the wheel. "We thought you would've beaten us by a good hour!"

"Ask me how many times I kept looking at the clock! I was seriously considering coming out for breakfast and camping out until now."

As they talked a silver Mercury pulled into the parking lot slightly faster than normal for a car pulling into a parking lot. Debbye noticed and pointed. "Hey, lookit."

Sabrina turned in time to see a brown and white tail disappear inside, the door closing behind it.

"Gotta be him, Sabrina!" Debbye said. "Quick! Go see!"

Bending herself at the knees Sabrina crossed her fingers on both hands and ran over to the Mercury and checked out the license plate. The top and bottom clearly showed the state slogan YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN PENNSYLVANIA.

She looked back at the three girls craning their necks in the Mazda and gave them an OK signal. Then, straightening her sweater, she took a deep breath and said "I sure hope that friend in Pennsylvania is him." And she walked toward the door.

The Clique watched her disappear inside. Susan said quietly "Good luck, girl!"

#

Chris, out of habit, pulled his tail closer to him as he ran into Furry's, having had it caught in a fast closing door enough times to be cautious. In the foyer the lunch crowd apparently hadn't kicked in full force yet. Slipping up to the hostess and trying to catch

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his breath he asked "Has a young lady skunk been here yet? Early twenties, flower in her hair, very pretty?"

"None with a flower in their hair, sir, I'm sorry."

Chris sighed. "Don't be. Maybe she hasn't been here yet." He sighed again. "Table for two please, nonsmoking."

The feline hostess checked her list. "Last name?"

"Foxx."

She wrote his name down and looked back up, then past him. "That wouldn't be her now, would it?"

Chris turned around. Through the door walked a trim, pretty skunk wearing an open white ski jacket, underneath a soft, tight cowl-neck sweater, and a bright red carnation in her stark white hair.

Chris leaned in to the waitress. "I pray to God it is!" He walked across the tiny entrance to her. She turned to him, and he said "Sabrina?"

Sabrina looked up at him, looked around inside herself and found her voice. "Chris?"

Of course he's Chris, stupid! What other fox would ask if you're you??

Chris put his right hand out and took hers, holding it in both of his, looking down at her. "It's great to finally meet you. What a long week it has been!"

Des-par-ate!

"Uh ... " Sabrina felt suddenly embarrassed! "I, uh, I can't believe I don't know what to say! It's great to meet you too!"

Chris pointed a hand toward the hostess station. "I have a table held. This is a good restaurant, isn't it? I mean, Furry doesn't refer to the food, right?"

Comic relief was exactly what Sabrina needed to break the ice. "Right, silly!" she laughed. "No, the food's very good. I don't get here often, but it is good."

"Good. Hope you're hungry."

They were staring at each other again. It was the second time the cat holding the menus said "Foxx?"

Together they blinked, and their hostess tried to keep from smiling too wide. "Your table's ready now."

Chris looked at Sabrina. He was taken with her big, beautiful eyes. "Last chance to run away," he said.

Sabrina never lost eye contact, and spoke matter-of-factly. "I'm not running."

Chapter 5

Extending his arm, he let Sabrina precede him and they followed the hostess to their table. Chris helped Sabrina off with her wrap and held her chair. "You smell nice," he said.

Good call, Susan! "Thank you," Sabrina smiled as she sat. Chris slid her chair in and neatly hung her coat on the back.

Taking off his own overcoat, Chris folded it and placed it on the chair between them. He took his seat and without thinking, touched the back of Sabrina's hand. "Do you have any idea what a long week it's been?" he asked. He gently squeezed the back of her paw, then suddenly realized what he was doing and slid his hand away.

Sabrina watched him take his hand back. "You don't have to do that," she said. To show him, she raised her hand up on its palm, spreading her fingers. Chris did the same, and their hands clasped together.

"I'm not usually this forward with women, just so you know," Chris said, almost apologetically.

"And I don't usually go on blind dates with men I meet on the Internet," Sabrina said. "So you must be somebody special."

Chris felt himself starting to relax. "Somebody's special," he said, "but I don't think it's me."

Sabrina began to melt.

#

"Can you see anything?"

Susan was drawing interesting looks from the diners sitting at the windows as she was trying to look past them. "Nothing. I wonder if they're even sitting down yet."

The parking lot was still lightly filled for a weekend lunch crowd. "Well, if we don't go in ourselves, we're not going to get seated!" Debbye warned them. "And I, for one, am getting hungry."

"Waddaya think?" asked Cindy. "Do we go in now? Take a chance they're at their table?"

"You know," said Debbye, "we must all be some good friends! Who else would look after each other the way we four do?"

"No-body, sister." Susan checked her watch. "Yeah, we better get in there."

And they did, locking the car they raced inside and up to the hostess. "Excuse me," said Debbye, "did you seat a certain couple yet? He's a fox, she's a skunk in a white coat with a red flower in her hair?"

"She must be one popular person," the hostess said. "I seated them about five minutes ago. Would you like me to take you to them?"

Chapter 5

"No!" Susan yelled. The calico hostess eyed them curiously, and Susan explained. "She's our friend, and she's on a first date here with a man she met on the computer, and we're here to bail her out if she needs it." Then, "Uhm, got a table for three near them?"

"I see now." Checking her list, "I can have you one in probably five or ten minutes, if you'd care to wait."

"Oh, yeah, we'll wait all right!" Susan gave her her name and the three Clique members gathered together to talk and wait.

"They need to have someone passing out hors d'oeuvres," Debbye said as she pressed her hands against her belly in her coat pockets. "I'm really getting hungry."

Just then Cindy turned to look toward the door. A hare who had been looking in their direction turned away. Cindy smiled and turned back.

"Did you see that?" she whispered, interrupting the other two. "That guy over there was checking me out!"

Susan looked up, then back to Cindy. "How do you know?"

"He turned away really fast when I looked over." She turned back, and the smiling hare turned away again, making Cindy giggle.

Debbye nudged her. "He's cute," she said. "Go talk to him."

"I can't do that!"

"Why not?" Debbye asked. "Sabrina did it, you can too!"

Cindy lowered her voice. "Because he's supposed to come talk to me, that's why!"

"Oh, that's so old fashioned!" said Susan. "It's okay for you to make the first move! Now go make it!"

"I can't!" Cindy glanced back. This time he didn't turn away; he smiled right at her. Cindy smiled too, then turned back to see her friends walking over to a bench against the wall.

"Hey!" Cindy felt herself on the spot -- run over with the girls or stay and hope he comes over! Cindy placed a hesitant step in the direction of The Clique.

Then it happened. "Hi there."

Cindy turned quickly around. "Hi. How are you?"

"Fine, thanks." He smiled. "I'm Trevor."

Cindy shook hands with him. "I'm Cindy Lapine."

"That's a very nice name."

Chapter 5

"I like yours," Cindy said, quietly eyeing him over, smiling. "It sounds like a doctor's name in a soap opera."

"Well, a doctor I'm not," Trevor laughed. "I'm manage the record store at the mall. I'd like to buy you lunch, but I see you're with your friends."

Cindy paused awkwardly. Susan called out "It's okay, go ahead!"

And Cindy felt her cheeks burn! Trevor laughed shyly.

"Are you busy tonight?" Trevor continued. "We could take in dinner and a movie."

After a moment's thought Cindy said "Sure, that'd be okay. Got a pencil?"

"Sure." He handed Cindy a pen and a business card. She took them and wrote her phone number on the back. "Give me a call."

Cindy didn't know the eyeful her new friend was taking of her. "Thanks, Cindy, I will." He followed the hostess in to the dining room.

Susan and Debbye returned to her side. "Gonna hafta take you shopping next, girl!"

The two looked at Cindy -- she was staring after Trevor until he disappeared behind a room divider. Debbye waved a hand up and down in front of her. "Cindy?"

Cindy sighed and turned back. "Did you see that butt? That was a nice butt."

Susan nodded in agreement. Debbye looked at her. "She's gone. Two down, us to go."

#

Chris and Sabrina were laughing and talking. "Yeah, you need another phone line," Chris said. "I know from experience, it helps."

"It gets better!" Sabrina said. "I'm fighting with this software *forever!* Then *just* as I get it *finally* set up, Amy comes in with a magazine and tells me there's a brand new client for Amiga that's *completely* foolproof! She's reading the information to me, and I'm steaming, squeezing the mouse so hard I thought it was gonna crumble!"

"Oh!"

"I warned her I was giving her a ten-second head start, but I yelled and cursed and eventually went out and bought the MiAMI program. It was easy too, and I've been using it ever since."

Chris gave her paw a gentle squeeze. "Well, I for one am glad you figured it out."

"Oh, you don't know the half of it! I *finally* get the IRC client launched, and when everybody on the channel found out I was really a woman, I got descended on by every one there! Here I am, my first time ever there, and not only is every one there a guy, and pretty much all the women there were guys, but I'm getting hit on from every direction!"

Chapter 5

Chris's head was back, laughing along with Sabrina. "That's too wild a story!"

"It's true! Every word."

Chris shook his head and took a drink of water. "Well, they're all lonely guys. Lonely, horny guys looking for companionship online."

Sabrina and Chris were so focused on each other they never saw the lioness with the trim figure, swaying hips, and swaying tail walk past their table. Just behind her was the waitress who put a big salad in front of Sabrina and a hot sandwich in front of Chris.

Sabrina speared a forkful of lettuce. "Is that what made you page me last week?" she asked, sporting a wry smile.

"Well ... " Chris thought before he answered. "Not necessarily the horny part, but originally, yes. I was lonely, and I was hoping to find a nice lady to talk to."

Chris began eating and Sabrina swallowed her first bite. "Why didn't you try to hit on me?"

"You seemed like you needed a friend, and I've got a good ear."

"Did I ever!" Sabrina picked an onion out of the way. "You came along at just the right time."

As Sabrina took another bite of her salad, the lioness walked past a partition in the dining room and rejoined her friends at a table. "He passed the first test," Susan said. "He was so focused on Sabrina he never noticed me!" Then, "Hey, I think I ought to feel insulted!"

"Okay, let's look at the facts," said Cindy. "He's good-looking, he's charming, he drives a nice car and has a good job, he's sweeping Sabrina off her feet, ... "

Debbie nodded with Susan. "There *has* to be *something* wrong with him! *No* guy is that perfect!"

The sound of Sabrina laughing wafted over the room divider to the ears of The Clique. Each girl exchanged a glance with the other and smiled, then Debbie lost control and laughed out loud first. "Y'know," she said, "I don't think she's gonna need us to bail her out."

Cindy agreed. "No way."

And Sabrina would've agreed; months of reading romance novels were finally beginning to come true. The waitress refilled their drinks and Sabrina asked "So, what are your plans for today?"

Chris swallowed before he answered. "Well," he began, "I booked a room for the night, and as I'm stranger in a strange land I was hoping you could show me around town. Provided of course you don't have other plans."

Chapter 5

"No." Sabrina couldn't help answering quickly. "I don't have any plans at all. I'll warn you though, there's not much to see. There's a really nice park in town I like to walk through, I could show you that first if you'd like."

"Sounds like a nice place to walk off lunch."

"Sabrina?"

Sabrina and Chris looked up at the tawny-furred vixen standing beside their table. Sabrina smiled and got up. "Tammy!" she said as they hugged quickly. "How are you? I haven't seen you in ages!"

"Christmas Eve '95," she smiled. "I was passing by outside of town and Roxi told me Amy was expecting, so I detoured to see you two." She looked at Chris who also stood. "This your new boyfriend?"

Chris and Sabrina eyed each other. "Tammy, this is Chris Foxx. Chris, Tammy Vixen, an old friend."

She successfully skirted by Tammy's question. Chris stood and they shook hands. "Nice to meet you, Tammy."

Tammy smiled back to him, and Sabrina explained "Chris and I met on the Internet last week. And he came over from Pennsylvania to meet me."

"Oh, I see! So this is your first date, eh?"

Chris smiled. "Kinda sorta."

Tammy turned Sabrina slightly and whispered "If you don't snag him, I will!" Then, turning back, "I'm going to go see Amy before I leave town. Good seeing you again, and nice meeting *you*, Chris!"

Sabrina and Chris took their seats as Tammy disappeared to the cashier. Sabrina turned her head slightly to watch Tammy from the corner of her eye.

"Nice friend you have," Chris said.

"Yeah ... " What Tammy said bristled the fur on the back of Sabrina's neck. As innocent and as kiddingly as she had said what she said, Sabrina felt tiny pangs of jealousy bother her. *Jealous? Me?? This is just a first date!* She turned back to her salad and began eating with a fervor. When she realized what she was doing she swallowed fast. "I've known Tammy and her sister for a long time. At one time or another we all worked together at E.S."

"E.S.?"

"E.S. Productions, where my comic strip is drawn. Hey, there's somewhere else I can show you."

"Sounds good," Chris said. "But what'll we do with your car?"

Chapter 5

"Mmf!" Sabrina swallowed her cucumber. "No problem." She put down her fork and fished through her purse for her car keys. "Be right back!"

#

"Hey! Howzit goin', girl?"

"Gr-eat!" Sabrina leaned into the table, keeping her voice down as much as her excitement would let her. "Listen, can one of you drive my car home for me? I'm going to show him around town."

"Oo, going in his car!" said Susan. "Sounds serious!"

"Please!" giggled Sabrina. "Seriously, can you please? Everything's going really well with him; I feel perfectly safe going with him."

"Sure," said Debbye, taking her keys. "I'll take it over for you."

"Thanks!"

"But Monday morning, we want *details!*"

Sabrina laughed an "Okay" and zipped back to her table.

"All taken care of," she said, and took a sip of her diet cola.

Chris tried to look around the partition. "That's what I call an efficient restaurant," he said. "They take your car home for you too?"

"Uh," Sabrina looked back toward where she'd just been, and turned back to Chris, slight embarrassment showing. "The Clique's around the corner."

Chris nodded. It was pretty much what he'd thought. "You asked them to come along to look after you, just in case Amy was right, right?"

Still embarrassed, Sabrina nodded. "I'm sorry Chris, I sorta let myself get talked into it. I didn't want you to know, and you're so sweet I thought I could get away with you not knowing; I'm sorry."

"I thought that was what Tammy was here for!" Chris put down the roll he was using to sop up the gravy from his plate. "Sabrina, you did the right thing. Don't apologize, and certainly don't feel embarrassed about it! I would've done the same thing, anybody would've."

Sabrina looked up at him again. "You don't mind?"

"The only thing I mind is you weren't going to introduce me to your best friends!"

"Sure I was!" Sabrina answered quickly. "Only, ah, ... "

" ... you didn't want me to think you didn't trust me."

Sabrina nodded.

Chapter 5

"Sabrina," Chris put his paw back over hers, "You did everything one hundred percent right. A young woman can't be too careful, especially if she's meeting people from the Internet."

"I know ... " Sabrina smiled. "You really are a sweet guy." Two fingers went into her mouth and whistled a *twEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEt!!!*

Zing!

Chris felt the breeze against his fur before his eyes focused on her three girlfriends. "Hi," said the rabbit.

"Hi," said Chris as he stood, trying not to laugh but amused as anything!

Sabrina started the introductions. "Chris, The Clique."

"Don't tell me." Chris pointed left to right. "Susan, Debbye, Cindy."

"This guy is *good*," Susan told Sabrina.

"Clique, meet Chris."

"Nice to meet you," Debbye said, "You're all Sabrina's been talking about this week."

Chris glanced at Sabrina through the corner of his eye and caught her in the beginning of a blush. "Did she tell you about her homework last Wednesday?" she finished.

Sabrina brought her hand down from trying to hide the rosy glow in her cheeks. "Deb-*bee!*"

"Be nice to me, I'm driving your car home!"

"Yeah, she told me," Chris said.

"Say," said Cindy, "think we can add Chris to The Clique?"

"Cindy!" said Susan, "he's a *guy!*"

"Yeah, but he's Sabrina's guy!"

That did it! Even the black in Sabrina's fur turned beet red! Chris noticed and tried to help let her off the hook. "That's nice of you girls," he said, "but I'd never be able to make the meetings."

This eased the pressure off of Sabrina's shoulders, and had the other patrons scratching their heads wondering what the five people at that table were drinking. Finally Susan said "C'mon, let's leave 'em alone." After a chorus of "Nice meeting you"'s they returned to their table and Chris sat down with Sabrina.

"You've got some neat friends," he said.

"Thanks," she said. "I really had no idea Tammy was here - she was a bonus for you."

Chapter 5

"What I liked is that everybody automatically thought we were boyfriend and girlfriend."

Sabrina glanced over the top of her lenses. Their eyes met. Then together they smiled.

"Dessert?"

Sabrina shook her head politely, then ran her hand over her tummy. "No, thanks. If I don't watch my figure, no one else will."

Wanna bet? Chris held Sabrina's chair, then her coat for her to slip into, and after Chris paid the tab they left Furry's. Lightly placing a paw on her back, Chris guided her to his car and held the door for her.

"Why, thank you," Sabrina said as she slid into her seat. "I'm not used to having doors held for me."

"You oughta be." Chris closed the door and ran around to the other side. "A girl like you should have doors held for her all over town."

Sabrina fought the oncoming blush. "Nice car," she said quickly. "Is a stick hard to drive?"

"Nah." Chris backed up and drove to the edge of the parking lot. "Takes practice, that's all. Wanna try?"

"Uh, maybe some other time," she politely said. Sabrina didn't have the first clue how to drive a stick shift. "A first date is a lousy time to total a guy's car. Turn left here."

Chapter 6

"There it is." Sabrina pointed across the street to the park in the middle of town. Chris found a parking spot across the street and slid neatly into it. Jumping out of the car he ran around to the other side, then stopped and put his hands on his hips, staring over the tops of his glasses at Sabrina as she stepped out. "I told you, I'm not used to guys holding doors for me!"

Chris took the door and closed it. "If you're gonna be with me, lady, you better get used to it." He extended his elbow. Sabrina slid her arm through it, and they walked across the street and through the park.

The park was typical for late winter; the grass was green, the trees weren't. Chris looked past them at the buildings, then at the empty fountain, then at Sabrina on his arm and smiled to himself. "It's a very nice place," was all he could think to say.

"I like it here." Sabrina pointed across from the fountain as they walked. "Over there they plant that area with all kinds of big, colorful plants and flowers, really pretty. I bring a cushion and some books and I sit next to them and read, or study. I'm there for hours sometimes."

They walked around to the other side of the park where there were some benches and a wide pond as the centerpiece of a large open area. "Still some ducks hanging around," Chris noticed.

"Yeah." Sabrina had unconsciously pulled herself closer to Chris' arm. "Mom tells me when she brings Tabitha here, the ducks go crazy and run the other way. She has no idea why."

"Tabitha?"

"My baby sister. Cute little girl, I love her, but so *annoying* sometimes!"

Chris laughed. "Annoying to her big sister in college, eh?"

Sabrina smiled and nodded. "Yeah. But I've gotta call her a brat or no one'll know we're sisters." They stopped walking a moment, and their eyes met, and stayed there, for several long moments. Sabrina had no idea her tail was bobbing up and down. Shortly they realized what they were doing, and they both knew each other's thoughts. Sabrina squeezed her eyes closed and open.

Chris cleared his throat. "So, *::ahem::*, they run away, huh?"

Sabrina swallowed and they walked toward the pond again. "Yeah, no one seems to know why; they never run away from anybody else. Not in a dead heat, anyway. Amy watched her for me once, maybe I should ask her if they ran then."

"Is she still angry with Thomas?"

"Nah, he finally proposed. Gave her a nice ring, too. He's in the process of moving in with us."

Chapter 6

"Sounds like a dream come true."

"Yeah, for *Amy*. Thomas proposing finally made her let up on me, and now I get to watch the two of them together every day of my life. But at one-third rent, there's no way I'm moving out." She hugged Chris' arm. "You don't know how bearable you've made this week for me."

Chris touched his head against Sabrina's. Then, "She asked you to move out?!"

"Not directly," Sabrina said. "It was like 'Sabrina, what do you think if Thomas moves in?', then 'Sabrina, would you feel comfortable with Thomas being here?', then 'Sabrina, what would you think about moving out?' ... "

They continued their walk toward the pond. Chris looked at Sabrina wide-eyed.

"Luckily," she went on, "my name's on the lease too. And I can use the extra money."

Three different ways of telling Sabrina she could have another place to live went through Chris' mind all at once! *If only this wasn't a first date!* "I can't believe she'd ask you that."

"Hey, I should've been expecting it. As much as Thomas is there I'm surprised it took this long."

Why Chris decided to be this bold, he couldn't even answer. "I know we've only been friends for a week, but if there's ever any way I can help, ... well, you know where I am."

Sabrina looked up at Chris as they walked along. "You really are a sweet guy."

Chris smiled at her. "I do my best."

"And you're awfully generous."

"I try."

"And handsome."

"I like that one."

"And you're walking in mud."

"Absolutely."

It took a moment. Chris looked down. As they walked they'd migrated close to the pond where Chris found himself two dozen steps and up to his ankles in mud and duck droppings. Somehow Sabrina had managed to stay in the grass, but Chris had walked right through it all. "Ack!!" He leapt out of it in front of Sabrina, who began laughing uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry! **snort!*" Chris wiped his feet over and over in the grass. Sabrina tried to hide herself behind her hand. "I'm really sorry! **giggle**" Chris bent his ankles and tried wiping the tops of his feet. "I -- *::pant::* -- never had that -- *::pant-snort-giggle::* -- that kind of effect on a man before!"

Chapter 6

Now Chris was understandably upset, as you can imagine. He looked around quickly to see how many others had seen what had happened, realized it didn't matter since nobody else there knew him anyway, then looked up at Sabrina, and she got him laughing too. "I guess it shows where my priorities are." And he smiled big at her. There was no way he was going to let *anything* spoil this weekend!

Sabrina took his arm again. "Maaaay-be we should go back to my place so you can wash your feet, huh?" *giggle!*

Chris nodded, trying to hide his reaction at Sabrina's suggestion - *back to her place!*
"Uhm, is that such a good idea? Your neighbors see you walking in to your building with a strange man ... "

Sabrina laughed. "It's okay! Remember, Amy goes in with a man constantly these days. If the neighbors see, they see."

"Well heck then," Chris said, "if it's okay ... "

Her arm went in his again. "Come on," Sabrina said with a smile. She led Chris back to his car, with him dragging and wiping the bottoms of his feet all the way.

... and twenty minutes later ...

Sabrina led the way up the steps and unlocked the door to the apartment. Opening the door she extended an arm. Chris wiped his feet again and led the way in.

Chris couldn't believe it. *I'm here in her apartment!* "Very nice little place you have here. Cozy."

"Thanks. Here, bathroom's this way." She led Chris through the living room and up the hall. En route he saw an open door and peeked in as nonchalantly as he could. *Could be her room ...*

"Here y'go."

Chris snapped his head back in time. "Thank you." And he kissed Sabrina on the cheek on the way in.

Sabrina's eyes grew. And Chris, he stopped dead and spun around. "I'm sorry!" He saw her eyes and swallowed.

"Hey," said Sabrina, "don't be." She scritch'd Chris behind the ear and ran her paw down the fur on his neck to his shirt collar, giggling to herself as his tail twitched a little faster.

"I just don't want you to think I'm this forward normally. It was all subconscious."

"Tells me I'm being thought of ... I like that." Deciding to be a little forward herself, she kissed Chris on the cheek. His tail beat against the doorframe, and less embarrassed than he was, he went in and turned on the bathtub faucet.

Chapter 6

Sabrina took two steps, then dashed into the living room, twirled on one foot, dropped to one knee and drove her elbow toward the floor. "Yes!"

She took a quick peek to see if Debbye brought her car by yet, zipped back up the hall to peek in at Chris, and back into the living room. "I like him!" she yelled quietly. "He likes me! This is like the last novel I read! This is *great!*"

It wasn't long before Chris came back to her. "Clean as a whistle. Thanks."

"Sure thing." Sabrina sauntered over to Chris and ran a hand up and down his arm. "Tell me something: why is someone like you not married yet?"

Chris raised his eyebrows in thought. "I dunno. I was sort of serious with someone once, a long time ago. A vixen named Wendy; I nicknamed her 'Windy' because we were in a windstorm once and it picked up her tail and it fluttered beside her like a flag beating. Was never sure if she liked that or not."

"What happened?"

A shrug. "She had her plans, I had mine. She moved on and when I graduated I got hired and buried myself in my work. Until now I never made time for a relationship with anybody."

Sabrina couldn't suppress a grin. She moved closer to him. "I'm even more flattered now. I'm your first serious interest since then?"

Chris nodded. "I should've taken chemistry instead of computers." He stepped up against Sabrina and put his arms around her. And Sabrina did the same to him. "I think there's a lot of it here."

Their eyes locked again. Sabrina felt herself hugging him back; their mouths only inches apart.

This guy writes like one of my romance novels!

But all she could manage was "Uh-huh."

Inches became centimeters.

"I could fall for you if I wasn't careful."

Sabrina felt herself hug tighter. "Uh-huh."

Chris pressed his fingertips against Sabrina's shoulder blades. "You feel so tense."

Sabrina finally found herself able to blink. "I'm not surprised. The excitement of finally getting to meet you, wondering if you'd like me, wondering if I'd like you, ... "

Chris brushed his vulpine nose against Sabrina's. "C'mere," he said, unwrapping his arms and taking her hand gently in his. "Lay down on the couch."

#

Chapter 6

Thomas found a parking space around the corner and backed into it. He and Amy walked up the steps to their apartment building, Amy carrying a container of chocolate fudge ice cream.

"I can't believe how the street's so parked up today," Thomas said. "It *is* Saturday, right?"

"Someone must be having a party. Be nice if they'd invited *us*!" Amy kidded.

A loud female "OH!" went only half noticed as they ascended the steps to the second floor.

"Some people just don't believe in the Good Neighbor Policy." They rounded the turn from the top of the stairs as another "Oh WOW!" came across the air. *This* time, they both heard it. Walking over to the door of their apartment they stopped short.

"Gawd yes. Oh YES! Mmmmmm, OooooOoooo!"

Amy's mouth dropped open. In a hoarse whisper, "That's *Sabrina*!"

Thomas put an ear against the door. "I think we found the party."

Amy smacked Thomas on the shoulder. "Don't listen in!" she whispered. "You can't do that!"

In just as hoarse a whisper, "Neither can you!"

Amy looked at Thomas and took her ear away too. She pointed a thumb toward the door. "Do y'think ... ?"

"What?"

"OH YES! OH GAWD CHRIS *YES*!"

Thomas nodded. "Yup."

Amy stared at the door dumbfounded. The door stared back normally.

"OH Chris are you ever GOOD!"

"We better leave."

Thomas turned to go as Amy grabbed his arm. "What about the ice cream?" she almost whispered.

"Bring it. We can buy spoons."

"*Yeow*!"

"It's a half gallon, Thomas! It has to go in the freezer!"

Thomas hopefully nodded his head toward the stairway. "We'll put it in mine."

"Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!"

Chapter 6

Amy held out her free hand and shook Chris'. "Hi. Uh, I've heard a lot about you, too. Nice to meet you."

As she withdrew her hand Chris pointed to her. "Wait a minute. Amy Squirrel, right?"

Amy nodded.

"The same Amy Squirrel who did a Japanese anime movie some time back called *Warriors from Venus*?"

gasp!

Sabrina looked up from the couch, watching amusedly.

"You wore this silver bikini outfit, with this sword that was almost as big as you ... "

Amy put her hand to her open mouth. "*You didn't see that!*" Then, "Did you?"

Chris nodded.

Amy still had the embarrassed blush from before. She ran her hand through her blonde hair. "There aren't supposed to be any more copies of that film around!"

"Well, someone found one," Chris said. "Of course, I saw it on that show where the guy and the two robots watch bad movies and make fun of them, but I liked it anyway."

"Uh, thank you." Amy laughed to break her own tension. "I hated it. It was fun working there, but the limited animation over there really was stifling to work in."

"Well, I still liked it." Chris noticed the container Amy was carrying. "Your ice cream is melting."

"Wha -- ?" She remembered quickly why she was there. "Oh! Thomas and I were just, ah, wanting to put this in the freezer."

Sabrina smiled up at Amy. "Thomas?" she asked.

"Yes. *Oh!* Thomas! He's outside the door." Amy leaned over toward the door. "Thomas! Don't just stand outside the door, come on in!"

Everyone turned to look at the open door. A head poked in, then the rest of the person stepped inside.

"Thomas! Come on over, silly man!"

Thomas came in, trying not to feel like a stranger in the apartment he spends most of his time in. Amy guided him over to Chris. "Thomas, this is Sabrina's new boyfriend Chris, *who was giving her a back massage on the couch.* Chris, this is my fiancé Thomas."

The men shook hands. "Good to finally meet you," Thomas said awkwardly.

Chapter 6

"We were just putting this ice cream in the freezer," Amy announced. "Thomas, why don't you come help me put this ice cream in the freezer." She looked at Chris. "Would you excuse us please? We're just going to put this ice cream in the freezer and we'll be going on our way." She took Thomas' hand and started darting them both to the kitchen.

Sabrina stood up and walked over to Chris. "I wonder what's up with her?" she asked. Chris only shrugged as Sabrina put an arm around his back. "Must be the pregnancy."

Chris watched them go into the kitchen, then turned Sabrina to him with both hands. "You know, your roommate now called me your 'boyfriend'". He drew a nervous breath. "I know it's only a first serious date, but if everyone's going to think that, what do you think about making it official?"

Sabrina felt her heart melt ... again. She smiled *big*. "I would *love* to be your girlfriend!"

Now they embraced.

"It'd mean I'd have to kiss you on the mouth on purpose," Chris said, his big green eyes staring into her blue. "Would that be a problem?"

"I don't see a problem with it." Their mouths went from centimeters to millimeters apart. "I don't see a problem with it at all, Mister Boyfriend." And Sabrina completely closed any gap between them. Standing on her tiptoes she pressed her mouth against his and as they kissed her head swam and her body completely relied on Chris' arms to keep her upright.

Amy pulled her head back into the kitchen and hugged Thomas. "Looks like the start of a beautiful friendship in our living room."

And she lifted one leg as she kissed Thomas with the same passion as Sabrina kissed Chris.