

Chapter 1

Today is Kara Baker's big day. It is her birthday. She's another year old ~~er and oh boy~~ how time just flies right on by you! Hell, one day you're a young lady, the next day you're a mother, ~~and then~~ the next day ~~you're~~ a good, old, grey-headed grandmother.

She was smiling to herself. Kara had been taking care of her family most of her life. First, sister and brother, now her own family. But today she is all alone, no one to care for anymore. Kara was studying her reflections in the mirror. There were a few lines around her mouth, her eyes, and forehead. Yes, Ms. Gray is looking for a long time home to lay around in – she and her whole family in her dark brown hair. So Kara knows that it's about that time to start looking at life in a different way. She is sliding right into the middle ages. Yes, it is that time to start some of that quality time. She needs to start treating herself to some luxury, a little excitement, and some fun, too. Boy, she sure needs it too. She has earned that quality time. Kara does not look her age. She looks much younger. She is a healthy and happy woman all the time. So what more could she be asking for except to try to live it to the best of her abilities. She has spent most of her life being a mother to two most marvelous boys and her two beautiful nieces ~~and she has raised~~ four wonderful children. In between that time, she operated her own travel agency. So Kara thought it was time to take herself on a fantastic cruise. She really needs a vacation. She is always booking trips for other people. ~~So~~ now it is her time to be the other party to take a trip somewhere besides home all the time. Now she is going to have a life ~~of her own~~ after all.

Ms. Kara is going to take a cruise to the islands. Now there's more to this trip. ~~It~~ is a birthday gift to herself. ~~Take~~ a good look at this picture. One day my girl is all alone, and for six years she ~~has been~~ without a man in her life at all. Now three months later, here comes Mr. Right riding in on a big white horse and swept my girl right off her feet. Now she is taking a two week vacation with a complete stranger. This is the first time she has ever received a gift that big before, not even ~~once~~ from that husband ~~of hers~~. Now you tell me what more could a woman ask for ~~than~~ to try and live it to the highest. She will be taking the first two weeks in March.

Now let's bok at the ~~another~~ picture of her. Kara is getting ready to take her trip with this man and hasn't told her family about ~~neither~~ the man nor the trip. The only people ~~who~~ know about this trip

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are her best friends, Dr. and Mrs. Helen Nicholas. They are the ones who introduced her to the man in the first place.

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Kara has never, ever had a vacation with her children, and now she is taking one with Larry Grant. It's eight a.m., and no one has called to wish her a happy birthday yet. Her family knows she is a very early riser. She is thinking to herself about all the things she and her kids used to do together, and she begins to smile. How time just flies right on by you. It was like yesterday. They were children, and now they're all grown up into young adults.

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Well, it is getting that time to go do some shopping for this trip. She needs some new clothes, and anyway it has been a very long time since she has brought any clothes for herself. Kara walks down the hall and picks up her car keys on the table. She is ready to do a little shopping for today. She walks out of the house, gets into the car, and is on her way to the mall. Kara did not like to be in large crowds. She likes to shop very early in the morning. Her thoughts were the early bird always gets the worm. So, therefore, there's not a lot of people just a few people at the mall when she arrives.

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Kara arrives at the mall and found a good parking space. Once inside the mall, she starts looking into a few store windows. Kara has her own favorite store where she does all her shopping, and it's Pam Brown's shop, her best friend. She walks into Pam's place, and a young salesgirl helps her with finding all the clothes that she needs. She has everything from nighties, matching loungewear, evening gowns, three-piece pantsuits, and formal suits. The sales assistant also helps her with some casual clothes and shoes. Kara is now all set for her cruise.

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Pam, the store owner, is five feet six inches in height and weighs 105 pounds. She is light complected with long, sandy hair and large green eyes. She is a beautiful but childless woman. Pam is also the perfect godmother to Kara and Helen's children. She doesn't play around when it comes down to her babies. She will raise hell about them to the mother and father.

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"Well, well, Ms. Thang. Today is your birthday. So I'm wishing you a happy one. This is your gift from me and Ronald. And, Ms. Thing, are you happy with everything? Did you get all you need?"

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"Yes, Pam."

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"Well now, Ms. Thing, what's this? You're buying new clothes. It looks like you're getting a brand new wardrobe. Come on now. You know you don't spend any money on yourself unless it's a special occasion. Now, my girl is not getting married, because I would know all about it. So let's have it. Well, Pam, I'm taking a trip. So I thought I would by me some clothes for this occasion."

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"Oh!

“You know that I’m very happy. I don’t have a thing to complain about. You know this is my favorite store, and I do all my shopping here because you have everything that I need, except groceries. Oh, come on! You know that you are my best and dearest friend!”

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“Yeah, right!” said Pam. “So, Miss Thing, you’re finally going to take that vacation. In all this time, you have never taken a day off of your job unless it had something to do with your children. So, now, Ms. Thing, you need to start talking to me, and I mean right now!”

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“Well Pam, it’s like this. I met this man, and we have been talking about a two week vacation. I was going to tell you all about it.”

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“Oh, hell no! You just wait one minute! You can’t be telling me there’s a man in your life.”

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“Yes, Pam, but . . .”

“But what, Miss Thang? A man just walked into your life. So we’re off to who knows where?”

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“Pam, I’m taking a two week trip to Bermuda with him. It’s a gift from him.”

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“Well, well Miss Thang, a new man just up and walked into your life, and you’re off to some island for two whole weeks with this ‘Mr. Man.’ One thing I would like to know is whether or not my kids know about this man and trip?”

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“Well, no, Pam.”

“Oh hell, Kara Baker, you can’t be telling me the children haven’t ever met the man and doesn’t know about the trip. Hell girl! You’re falling on your job! You can’t be telling me you haven’t said a thing to my children about this man and a cruise!”

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“Well, you get it, Pam.”

“Okay, Miss Thang. A new man walks into your life, and you’re off to the islands for two weeks with Mr. Right. So, when will we get a chance to meet this man before you go running off to some Bermuda with this strange man, my dear friend? Are your kids going to meet this man?”

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“Yes, my family will meet the man and my mother, Mrs. Pam.”

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“Yeah, right, Miss Thang. How did you meet this man in the first place?”

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“My God, Pam! Helen and Willie introduced me to the man. He is Willie’s best friend. They brought him over for me to meet. He is a very dear friend of the Nicholas’ family.”

“What is the man’s name?”

“His name is Larry Grant. Now come on, Pam! You will get a chance to meet him. That’s a big promise. Look, I am long overdue. I must be leaving now. Your customers will be coming in soon. Remember you are open for business.”

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"Ha, ha to you, Ms. Thang! Are you trying to tell me to mind my business? Oh no! Baby girl, you know better than that. I will be talking to you later on tonight. We will continue the conversation, okay! Now I must dismiss myself. I do love talking to you, but time is flying right on by. Good day, love, kiss-kiss.

"Come and give me a big hug and kiss, and do thank my brother, Ronald, for my birthday gift and lots of kisses and hugs.

"Good day, love, and the same to you."

Kara walks out of the store and proceeds to her car. She climbs into the car and heads toward home. The traffic is already jammed on the freeways. She had to stop at the grocery store. She needs to do some shopping in order to prepare dinner for the evening. She needs a few special items to go along with the chocolate cake that she is planning to bake for her granddaughter. She loves her grandchildren.

Kara returns home. It was still on the early side of the morning, but at least all of her shopping was completed. She still has awhile before the family comes over. After storing all the groceries away, she begins to walk down the hallway, and the phone begins to ring. She walks over to the phone and answers it. Her oldest sister was on the other end wishing her a happy birthday. They talked for awhile, and then she brings the conversation to an end by saying everyone sends their love to her. Kara is now getting a little hungry. She decides to make herself a chicken salad sandwich with a cup of French Vanilla coffee. She always has a cup of coffee first thing in the morning.

Unfortunately, this morning things were changed around a little. Shopping came first this morning. So Kara decided to sit, relax, and have a snack. After finishing her snack, she begins making the cake and then decided to get dinner ready. The family will be coming over for her big day, and she has always been the one to cook for the family.

Just then the doorbell rings. She wasn't expecting anyone this early in the day. She began to wonder who could it be coming by this early in the day. It was too early for the kids. Well, one thing about it, she will never know if she doesn't go to the door to see.

Kara goes to the front door and opens it. To her surprise, on the other side of the door is a big smile. It was the other best friend. In her hand was a large box and two large bags.

"Happy Birthday and good morning! How does it feel to be another year older, old, girl?" she said laughing at Kara.

"Well, Good morning to you, too, and do come in," Kara said. Kara begins to pick up one of the bags and walks behind her friend into the kitchen.

"Hey, what are you cooking that smells so good? You can't be cooking for the Baker tribe again."

"You know it," says Kara.

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Helen Nicholas is a very beautiful woman with honey-nut complexion. Her hair is light brown, and her eyes are light grey. She is six feet and two inches tall and weighs 110 pounds. Deleted: ¶ [21]

Kara, Helen, and Pam have been the best of friends all through school. They all grew up together. They had gone through some good times and bad times but had never stopped being the best of friends. Deleted: ¶ ve [22]

Helen is dressed in a white three piece pantsuit. She is looking good in it. Her hair was hanging loose down her back. Helen always looks cool all the time. She is a college professor, and her husband is a medical doctor. He specializes in women. Deleted: ¶ was...was.....s [23]

The three girls are the best of friends. They entered kindergarten together and continued their education journey all the way through high school and graduated. Upon completion of graduation, they all had their wedding. It was a double one for the Three Jersey Girls. Pam Brown married a bank president. She and her husband have no children. Helen and her husband have two children, a boy and a girl. Kara Baker married a big time building constructor and a woman lover. She was the first one to get a divorce. Pam opened a clothing store. Helen is the college professor and Kara owns her own travel agency. So the 'Jersey Girls' have good lives. Helen went back to the door to get the other bag and returned to the kitchen. Deleted: ¶ [24]

Kara and Helen put the bags on the table. Helen tells Kara that she and Willie went to the Farmer's Market this morning. Deleted: ¶ [25]

"I thought you might would appreciate some fresh fruits and vegetables. They were on sale today, so, old, dear friend, I decided to look out for you this morning." Deleted: ¶ [26]

Kara was smiling. "That was so sweet of you and Willie to do that for just little old me. That was very thoughtful of you two." Deleted: .

"Yeah right! Do you want to pick out what you want?" Deleted: ¶

"Oh yes," says Kara. Deleted: ¶

Kara starts working in silence, putting away the fruits and vegetables. Helen asks Kara again, what was smelling so good. Deleted: ¶she was cooki [27]

"Like I said, you're cooking for that Baker Tribe. Are they all coming over today?" Deleted: ¶

"Yes, you're right. My tribe will be coming by today." Deleted: ¶

Helen turns to her. Deleted: ¶

"Alright, old girl, this is your day. So open your presents. It is from the whole Nicholas Tribe with lots of love and kisses. Now my friend, we do have some talking to do. That is the reason I took my better half home so I could talk to you, and he wouldn't be in my way." Deleted: ¶ s...st... [28]

"Yes, right. You don't want him to tell you to mind your business." Deleted: ¶

The two started to laugh. Deleted: ¶

"Hey, some girl-talk -- a few questions. Now Kara, you know that Dr. and I will always have your back. We would never misjudge you about anything. We love you too much for that. We have always been at your side at all times."

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"Oh, Helen, you are the best. I do hope you will be by my side because if I so much as fall, I will need someone to pick me up, someone that understands. Helen, would you like to talk about your friend and mine?"

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"Yes," says Helen.

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"Oh Sis, well I do have some kind of relationship with Mr. Larry Grant. We have developed slowly over the past six months. We have occasionally dated and had a few kisses, but hell, Helen, I'm still one of the small fishes in a tiny pool."

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She was looking at Kara.

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"Oh, come on sweet. I strongly advise you to take this trip with Larry. You need a life! So little Sis, go for it, okay? My man is crazy about you.

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"Yeah, right. And thanks a lot. Your girl just jumped all over me about this man and really tripping this morning. She asked me some questions about him. She wants to meet him, and she is mad as hell with me because I didn't tell her and the kids about him. Helen you know how she is when it comes down to her godchildren. She loves them. She is mother number two."

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"Yes, you're right Kara. You know how Pam is. She is very funny when it comes down to all the children. You also know that we never keep anything away from one or the other since day one. Come on Kara, we always tell each other everything. We've never kept secrets from one another. We have always been loyal to each other."

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"Hell, Pam is the same way with my kids. You know how she is. Anyway, you and Dr. Willie started this entire mess in the first place. You two had to bring this man over, talking about I like you to meet our best friend. So I met Mr. Right like a good friend would do. Now I've kept things away from my best friend and my children. I did tell her she would be seeing him very soon. I've also decided to tell the kids today, and that's my promise."

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Helen was smiling at Kara.

"Well, well it's about time," says Helen.

She crosses her arms over her chest. She sits down at the table and looks at Kara.

"Okay old girl, don't start that worrying all over again, okay? You still have some time but not too much. Listen to me. Take my advice. Sit your family down and tell them all about Larry and your vacation all in one big nutshell."

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Kara smiles at Helen.

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"Yes, I know," says Helen. "But I would like very much for you to stop worrying about everybody and start enjoying your life for once. So will you please do that for yourself and me."

"Helen, I doubt if my life will ever be quite the same again. I simply didn't believe that in all this time I would actually find a man. My God, Helen, I was never looking for one either. I've been man-less for six years and up comes one now. I call myself courting or dating again. Now that's one big laugh to me."

"Well, yes," said Helen. "That's one big one alright, but it is about time you start to live again. You are always worrying about everyone but never thinking about no one. Kara, I see you as being so devoted to your family and your business until you can't see anything that is for you. Hell, you're talking about you're still some little fish in a small pond. Well, young lady, you are going to be a big ass fish in a big pond (ocean), and a big ass shark is moving right beside you with some quick movements. And you're not going to be able to shake him, can you, Ms. Thang."

She gave Kara a second hug.

"Now sweetness, don't you start that worrying all over again. You still have some time left but not too much is there? Now you take care of your personal, Kara. I don't want to see you all dried up before your time. My God we've been through a lot together, some bad times and some good times, too. We all went through a crying time with your separation and with the divorce, but we're still here, the four of us. We are the reliable ones Kara."

"I am very aware of the Four, Boss!"

"Okay Ms. Thang," says Helen. "Larry has already paid for this trip. So Kara, you need a life. Little sis, I think I have talked out."

"Yeah, you're right. I do need to get a life. I know you and Pam are right, but I haven't had a man in my life since lover boy Mike walked out on me six years ago. My God, Helen, not one man has ever asked me out on a date, let alone to dinner or a movie. Hell, I was always looking down on men. I realized I didn't have much confidence, or trust in any men. Mr. Mike took all that away with him. So I put myself in safe mode away from all the other wolves. Now I'm going out with one of the wolves. You know something Helen? To be perfectly honest with you, I didn't want to meet this man. I never told you this, but one day your husband came by my job and told me if I didn't meet this man I was going to be by myself spending the remainder of my life all alone. Even my grandchildren will be all gone away and never ever look back at me. I will be here sitting all by myself looking, hoping every day that Mike might decide to come back. He said if he hasn't returned in six years, then it was time for me to get up off my ass and start to smell the damn coffee for a change because you four were

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moving the hell on. He said he was talking to me as a big brother and not as a friend. Helen, Dr. Willie shook up my happy little home without a giggle or a laugh. I was crying like hell. He looked at me and said no more. He then walked out of the door and didn't look back."

"Oh my! Did Doc say all that to you?"

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"Yes, he did."

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"Kara, he never said a word to me about having this talk with you. I know the first time I mentioned Larry to you, you told me, no."

"Yes, I did, but Mr. Boss changed that song for me."

She was laughing, not crying this time.

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"Helen, I needed that talk because you and Pam are always holding my hand, but not Mr. Doc. He talked to me as if he was talking to one of his patients. My God, Helen, I deserved that. All I was doing was destroying my life and everyone that came along."

"Kara I'm so glad that Willie talked to you because we love you.

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Mike has never been the best when it came right down to you. One thing about Mike, he is a good father to his children. He would give them everything they would ask for. Now the grandchildren, those are his heart, but the man is not a good husband. Willie and Ronald were always at your ex-husband's neck. One night my Willie was so mad with Mike, he told him that he would operate on him like he does surgery on his female patients. Kara in all the years I have been married to Willie, I have never seen him that angry. He would always walk away, but this time my man was about to cut up your ex-husband. Pam and Ronald kept talking to him. I asked Mike to please leave. Pam told us not to tell you anything about that night."

"Oh my God, Helen, now you tell me about this incident."

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"Oh hell, Kara, you were so much in love with Mike you would have disagreed with everything anybody told you about that man. We say right, you are wrong. So to keep you happy, we just kept it to ourselves and waited for today."

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"Mike said you people were bad influences on me. That you people were crazy as hell. I just looked at the man. Now I know why you people are so crazy."

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She started to laugh.

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So bro, Willie was going to cut up my husband and turn him into a female."

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Helen and Kara started to laugh.

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"Well Kara, it's about time for me to head home to my family. I'm sure they are expecting me any moment now. Oh, are you going out tonight to celebrate your birthday with Mr. Grant?"

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"Yes."

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"Well, my friend do not call me when you get home tonight. Oh, Kara, don't look so down-hearted. Larry is good for you. Please

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believe me. If he wasn't I wouldn't have introduced you to him. Kara you are so devoted to your family and your job. Please start to live a little for all of us, okay Kara?"

"Yes Mom Helen. But my God, Pam makes me look like I'm not a very good mom or a very good friend after that outburst today.

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"Kara, our Pam will be alright. She is angry with you right now, but before the day is over with she will be her old self again. So you make sure you call her later today or tonight."

"Okay, Mom Dearie. I will, but I was wrong and very much unjust. I made a big mistake by not telling her or the kids about this trip and Larry."

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"My Kara, you are right one way and wrong another way. I'm on your side. You need to start reliving your life again. Also, start to think about yourself for once. If not, you will fall right back into that dark hole that was holding you for years. Kara I don't want you to become all dried up before your time. My God, Kara we all have been with you through a lot of bad times, good times, and when your marriage just fell apart. Pam and I were right by your side. We are still there for you, your two good old reliable friends, one for all. Kara we are not complaining we all just love you and would like for you to have a good life again. You have met a good hardworking man that likes you for yourself."

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"Helen, I know that you would never complain. You and Pam are the best. I'm the luckiest person in the world to have such good friends.

"Yes, the three 'Jersey Girls.' No more secrets and always the truth to one another, okay? Now I must be leaving right now. If not Doc will be calling me, asking what's the hold up? So I think I need to be walking out the door right about now. Kara, you and Mr. Larry have a good time tonight, okay?"

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Kara was walking with Helen to the door. She stops at the door and hugs Kara.

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"Love you and enjoy the remainder of your morning.

Kara says, "Love you and give all my love to the family."

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Helen walks to her car and drove away. Kara closes the door and walks back down the hallway to her room. She was thinking about calling Brian's office to talk to him, but she decided to wait a little longer before she calls him. She was smiling to herself, thinking about Larry. She walks into her bedroom to put away her gift that Helen had bought her.

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"My God, this is one sexy red dress."

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It was the most beautiful, sexiest dress she had ever seen in her life. If she should wear this hot number, Larry just - oh! Kara went back into the kitchen to make herself a pot of coffee. She was about to call Pam when the front door opened. In walked her entire family. Well, there's

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no need to call Brian. Now he was at the house, and the whole Baker tribe was on hand. She was all smiles. Her loving family was all at the house at one time, and she was so happy. Her three daughters, two sons and her two grandchildren. She could stop all the worrying now. The whole tribe was there. Brian, the oldest, was married and has two children. Mary is his wife, and Michelle and Mark are his two kids. Jon, her other son, has no wife but lots of women. He is like his father in every way. Her two nieces are Diane, the oldest, and Carol. Now, Carol is Pam's heart. You can't say anything about Miss Carol because if you do you will get into a lot of trouble with Pam, and you got something on your hands. Don't get me wrong, Pam loves all the children, but she says Carol is her daughter and also Helen's daughter Crystal. She thinks the two young ladies are the Miss University.

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