

3. LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD

At one point during her nap, Cheryl feels that she is out for the night. She just gives in her fatigue. She wakes up and takes a look at her clock and reads 10:00. She starts to believe that she's missed an important morning appointment. Then she realizes that she's been oversleeping from her nap. She jumps up.

"Damn I was supposed to meet the girls at 10," she says to herself.

She quickly gets ready. Robert always complains how long she takes to get her make-up on. But this evening she does it in a flash. She marvels at her skill.

When she walks in the Anchor, the girls have already been there for almost an hour. The place is hopping. They are all at their table near the bar.

Stevie is a little tipsy. "What do you want to drink?"

"I'm drinking coke."

"What's got into you?" asks Trish.

"Robert told me that we may get together tomorrow. I don't want to be messed up tomorrow."

"You really believe that he's going to forego golf to hang out?" Trish wonders.

"He told me that he'd give me a call after the game."

Diane adds her perspective, "I'd get trashed. It'll make you able to better deal with things if he stands you up."

"I'm already trashed," Stevie slurs her words.

"How long have you been drinking?"

She confesses, "You know how I get after a few drinks."

"She's been here since 8," reveals Trish.

"I have not,"

Cheryl feels as if she's sulking.

Trish tries to encourage her. "Just have a drink. You're making the rest of us feel guilty just watching you."

Cheryl is still hoping that Robert will rescue her tomorrow.

Trish is looking after Cheryl's interest, "You don't want to have to waste your whole night playing the martyr."

Cheryl tells them, "I'm not playing the martyr. I've been zoned two nights in a row."

"You're not working tomorrow."

"All the more reason to make my time my own."

Diane is already going for some guy at the bar. Stevie is staring in space. It's up to Trish to take care of her friend.

Cheryl notices someone waving at Trish, "It's the guy from the other night."

Trish looks over in his direction, "That's not him. I don't even know that guy."

"Why is he waving at you?"

"I have no idea, Cheryl."

"He's cute. Go and see what he wants."

"I'm not a call girl. Some guy can't stomp his foot, and I'll just come running."

"It doesn't hurt to see what he's up to."

Somehow, Trish makes it over to the other end of the room. Next thing, she's bopping with the loser by his table. Cheryl is just staring at the both of them.

"Cheryl, you're in worse shape than I am." Stevie has a bizarre grin on her face.

"I'm just not getting up from this table."

Stevie chides her, "Quit playing the spoil sport. Robert hasn't changed between last night and tonight. What's going on?"

"I forgave him for being a dick. And he's still pissing me off. All this bull about tomorrow."

"So don't even call him. Just get shit-faced like me."

"Stevie, you can't have drunk that much. I'm not going to get zoned on that little."

Stevie informs her, "You still have a few hours left."

Cheryl asks, "Am I on the clock?"

"You are on the clock."

"So boss, what is my mission?"

Stevie takes her job seriously, "Your job is to blow this place wide open,"

Pat Benatar's "Love is a Battlefield" is now blaring on the speakers. Cheryl springs up and starts dancing. She shakes her hair so that it does a quick flip on her head.

Trip is in tight jeans and a t-shirt. "I saw you moving to the beat."

He flits around her. She decides to play along with the mosquito population. Sometimes you have to give in to the summer heat.

"What's your name, baby?"

"Cheryl." She's going along with the temporary game. Stevie is her audience.

By the time the DJ has put on "Super Freak" by Ric James, Cheryl has even loosened her blouse.

"What's your name, chief?"

"Trip."

Cheryl asks Trip, "What do you do?"

"I'm in graphic design."

"Classy!"

Stevie is still watching it all. She's already ordered another beer. She doesn't want to lose her buzz.

Meanwhile, Trish has escaped from her superstar. She asks Cheryl, "Who's the prick giving you dancing lessons?"

"I'm Trip. And I'm not a prick."

"Well, it's time for girl talk. So why don't you head back to your wolf pack."

He looks like a sheep as he appeals to Cheryl.

"Sorry, Trip baby. But your half-life is now cut in half. That leaves not much of you left for funny time. I'll catch you on the way out."

He challenges them, "Is that what you girls do—you entice men, and then you throw them back?"

Trish is more severe, "Back to the fish pond, guppy."

Stevie asks, "Is that what we do? Just throw men back in the water?"

Cheryl has a more analytic point of view, "We don't have to love these really disgusting

creatures, do we?"

Trish begs them to do shots.

Cheryl relents, "Just one."

She is mesmerized by the honey kiss of a "Candy Cane". Then she feels the minty bite—BOOM!

She is deeply committed to the night and all that entails. Even as the music heads into a heavy set of hip hop, Cheryl is grooving. Ben knows that no one has that slinky appeal of his girl Cheryl. He's promised to himself that he's going to do everything that he can to get to know the star of the night. It's going to be a tough time with the phalanx of the three girls together blocking his way. He knows that he needs to separate Cheryl from his interference.

Benny has already seen them make quick work of Trip. He's not going to go down to the same defeat.

"I love your eyes, sweet thing."

Trish has a quick rejoinder, "You think that she's going to melt with those punk-ass lines of yours. Who taught you how to talk to a woman?"

"I'm doing to best that I can."

Cheryl watches helplessly as her friends make mince-meat of lover boy.

Stevie even gets in the act, "You're going to have to do a whole lot better if you think that you're going to come on to an A-1 hot thing."

"Do you want to see me crawl?"

"That wouldn't be a bad idea," suggests Trish.

Cheryl is being entertained by her friends.

Benny asks, "Don't I get a chance here?"

"Let's see what you can do with that body. Dance, Benny boy," says Trish.

"He starts to dance around. The girls surround him as if they are going in for the kill.

He's trying to make his own way. But they start to push at him.

He tries to defend himself, "You're ganging up on me."

Trish asserts, "That's because you're a little tough ass."

"If I pass the test, what do I get?"

Trish tells him what the rules are, "You get to buy us all drinks."

He reluctantly agrees. "Are you trying to get in my wallet?"

"If you go to a show, you have to pay the admission charge," tells Stevie.

"You're just good at shaking men down for drinks," Benny criticizes them.

"If you want a fantasy, then you have to give us a little reality," asserts Cheryl.

He opens his wallet to pay for the round of drinks.

Cheryl hears a song that really turns her on. She breaks from the pack and does her own dance. Benny tries to follow suit, but the other girls block his path.

"What are you doing?"

Trish holds him back, "Let her have her moment."

Cheryl is truly inspired. She twirls around the floor. Every guy in the room is looking at her. Benny feels honored just to be in their company.

"Thanks, Benny."

"I can't stay any more," Benny wonders.

“No, your time is done. It’s been nice having you over,” Cheryl gives him his walking papers.

She stays up to dance to another song. Stevie and Trish are doing another shot. Cheryl has begged off. “I told you all that I was going to stop at one.”

Trish tries to contradict her, “You originally said that you were going to stop at one.”

“I didn’t think that anyone was counting,” Cheryl asserts.

Stevie has her own terms, “Enough is enough. I still haven’t had enough. So I want some more.”

Benny has already stopped trying to hassle Cheryl. But Stevie is suddenly interested.

“This is pretty funny. I think that Stevie is so fucked up that she’s going to take your cast offs,” Trish observes.

Stevie doesn’t like Trish’s comment, “I don’t really appreciate that.”

“I’m just watching out for my friend.”

Stevie stands up for herself, “Friend. You’re not letting me be myself.”

Stevie heads over to the bar with Benny. Trish heads to the bathroom. Cheryl is sitting at the table with Diane. Even though they are friends, she realizes that she has always been a little afraid of Diane. What is it? Her imposing beauty. She feels a hint of jealousy on her own part. What has made her this way?

She and Diane have hung out together without the other girls. Back in the day, they worked shifts at the Anchor. But there has always been this distance between them. It could be Diane’s ease with guys. She has no inhibitions. If she wants something, she never hesitates.

Diane uses the lull between them as motivation to tell what she did with the guy that she met last night.

“Cheryl, I’ve told all of you that there’s certain thing that I won’t do if I go home with a guy that first night.”

Cheryl is not sure if she wants to hear this. She always feels as if Diane is bragging. And why? Of the four girls, she always seems the loneliest. She drinks just to fill in that gap. If there’s a guy in the room, she’s the moth that’s attracted to the flame. And she never has to work at it.

Cheryl feigns interest, “That guy was sort of cute.”

“He was more than sort of cute. You should have seen the cute little tushy on him. I feel like some kind of sinner admitting what we did.”

She knows that Diane is waiting for the requisite *do tell* or some other kind of cue. Cheryl does not want to play along.

“Did you have sex with him?”

“We did more than that. I have to admit that I’m so ashamed with myself that I don’t want to see the guy again.”

What could Diane possibly be talking about. Cheryl imagines her friend tied up in front of the guy’s bed while a herd of cattle run at her. What could be more demeaning than that? All her drama is an excuse so that she doesn’t have to see the guy again. That way she doesn’t have to deal with her solitude. She can go right back to the same game tonight.

“Don’t you ever feel a little afraid with some of these guys? You don’t really know them.”

“Let me tell you, Cheryl, after I’m finished, I really do know everything about them. And I do mean everything.”

Cheryl won’t go for Diane’s argument, “But it’s not like you learn something that makes you want to go back to them.”

“Sometimes. I was totally faithful to Louis for ten months.”

Cheryl comments, “A lot of good that did you. You caught him one night with his secretary. He was stupid enough to go to some bar that he used to frequent with you.”

“That was stupid on his part. I’m just not going to let that kind of shit happen again.”

“Having a broken heart is all part of life, Diane.” Cheryl offers her view of romance.

It is just too severe for Diane, “My heart wasn’t meant to break. I just can’t take it. There’s too many other guys in the world.”

Cheryl knows that Diane isn’t all that shallow. But she doesn’t want to slow down to take a longer look at herself. It’s not really up to Cheryl to tell her.

“Admit it, Cheryl. I know how you feel at this moment. Let’s do a shot of Jager and try to forget about all this.”

Diane could never understand Cheryl’s anguish over Robert. “Find another guy,” she would advise her. At a moment like that, Cheryl feels unattractive. She’d have trouble explaining that to Diane.

The swig of Jager is potent enough to shake Cheryl out of the doldrums. For the moment she feels that same rush that Diane gets when every guy is looking at her in the place. Cheryl feels daring. Then she takes a sip of her water and calms down.

“Cheryl, there’s some guy over there that I sort of dated. I’m going to go say hello.”

Diane follows her heart, and Cheryl goes looking for Trish.

Cheryl realizes how the girls have always used this place as buffer. No guy can take over her life because there’s always something bigger here. Still, she is feeling hurt over Robert. When she feels this way, no one else can make it better. She hates that feeling. It makes her so isolated. Even the girls can’t understand.

She can’t find Trish. She thinks that maybe she’s gone out for a while. She doesn’t check the patio. Frank approaches. He’s a tennis buddy. They were such good friends when she was in college and dating Brian. Frank always hoped that something might develop between them. In the back of her mind she felt the same way. But when she broke up with Brian, Robert seemed to come from out of nowhere. His northern manners were way more imposing than Frank’s Southern charm. When she talks to Frank, she considers how she may have made a mistake. He is so gentle. He always looks her in the eyes.

“I love your hair, Cheryl.”

It’s not just cheap flattery on his part.

“We have to get together to play tennis again, Frank. I’ve never found a partner like you.”

Frank feels a little uncomfortable. He has just started seeing a girl that she knew when he was in school. He’s afraid that he might reignite his crush on Cheryl.

“Let me get you a drink, Cheryl”

“Sure thing. You know what I like.”

They sit down at the table in the hope of reminiscing. She is using the contact to

compensate for her fight with Robert. She doesn't let on. But that makes it worse. She wants Franks's undivided attention. She wants him to forget whatever might be waiting for him at home. It is a vicious game.

She feels as if she is playing tennis with him. He is such a comfortable player. She easily returns his volleys. He becomes a little more aggressive. He doesn't realize how caught up in the game he has become.

"I would like that very much, Frank"

He hardly realizes what he has just said. He put his hand on her wrist. He doesn't want to lift it off.

"I've missed you Frank." He forgets about all that time in between. He is back with her in the past, before Robert. There is no hesitation on his part. In his mind, he is kissing her. He wants to hold back. He tries to visualize Anne. She's somewhere thinking about him. But all that he sees is Cheryl. He is lost in her eyes.

He thinks another drink will do the trick. It will help him snap back to his senses.

"Let me get you something, Cheryl."

"I've got to leave in bit. Just get me a water."

He senses that he could just walk out now. But he is already too deep.

She is using the attention to help her brace for the next day. She is taking everything that she can from Frank. Just draining him of his affection. It is a better liquor than any alcohol. She licks her lips as she senses its honey draught.

She is already appropriately numb that she no longer feels any fear about her wait for Robert tomorrow. She makes short work of Frank. She gets his phone number and says good bye. He is in awe. He is still vanquished as he watches her walk off. It all has happened so fast that he can't even move.

Dusty had loads of prospects in his early twenties. Tooling around in his new Z, he was a superstar at the Anchor. But in the past few years, he has been seriously spinning his wheels. He lost the prime job that made him such a celebrity. Now he bounces around from sales job to sales job.

Dusty has been chatting up Trish all night. She looks stunning in her tight jeans and new heels. As they start to leave together, Diane blocks their path.

"You're not leaving with her, Dusty. She's my friend,"

He starts to sputter and slurs his words.

"What business of yours is it Diane?" asks Trish full of venom in her voice."

Diane is angry, "What do you mean Trish? I went out with him."

Trish has her sights set on him. She doesn't want him to get away. She can feel the hate, the kind of hate that you're more likely to feel for someone close. She realizes what she's said after the words slip out of her mouth, "Diane, you've slept with practically every guy in here. Now you're trying to stop me from going home with one of your conquests. You're the club whore!"

Dusty sheepishly sneaks away. He hates conflict even if he's in the middle of it. He knows that he can find a safer pick up.

Diane starts to cry. Trish realizes that she has been a bitch.

"Dusty was fucking with you, Trish. He knew that you and I were friends. And I just

never told you about him.”

“How was I to know?” Trish wonders.

“You couldn’t have known.”

“I guess I should watch who I go home with.”

“It looks like he’s gone AWOL.”

“That may be just best for both of us,” Trish affirms.

Diane runs back to Cheryl with her story.

“Diane, I was on my way out the door.”

“If you have to go.”

“No, I’ve got a minute.”

Diane tells her what’s just happened.

“Are you talking about that guy over there with a girl on his arm?”

Diane is even more pissed, “He wastes no time.”

“He’s a real dick!”

“I know, Cheryl. I used to think that he was so cool.”

“We all did. I’m just surprised that Trish hasn’t caught on. I don’t know what’s up with her tonight. I guess that she feels that she’s playing a losing hand.”

“Competition is a little fierce. I should let you go.”

“I’ll be back tomorrow.”

Cheryl is glad that Diane sought her out for advice. Maybe the distance between them isn’t so great.

Saturday morning, Cheryl wakes up refreshed and goes over to the gym. She feels so much better than on Thursday or Friday. Cheryl had been good the night before. Only a couple of drinks. She hardly let herself go. Everything makes sense to her.

After her work out, she goes for a short swim. It gives her a chance to come down. She moves through the water with such casual ease. There is a touch of fatigue. She likes the sensation. At home she makes herself a salad. Then she plans to relax for the rest of the day and wait for Robert’s call.

After eating, Cheryl cleans up and puts away her dishes. She also does some minor cleaning in the apartment. Then she sits down in the living room and picks up a book to read. It’s a mystery. She’s been telling herself that she’s going to read it all summer long. Today she has all the time in the world. But she can barely concentrate.

The main character is a female detective. She is following her prime suspect. But she is also attracted to him as well. Cheryl finds the premise of the novel a little silly. She lets it become her story. She is spying on Robert. She wonders how interesting it would be to spy on him.

She rethinks the story. She is the prime suspect. And Robert is following her to the Anchor. What does he see? What does he think? When she dances too close with some guy, is he in the corner all twisted with jealousy? Or does he really care? She wants to shake him up. To get him to come out of that shell of his.

She puts down the book momentarily. It is already 1:30. Robert probably already got in his golf game. He should be relaxing at the clubhouse with his buddies. She is trying to ignore her anticipation. She stares at the book and wants to pick it up. She’s having trouble

concentrating.

When the clock hits 3, she's figured that she's given it the requisite time waiting. She's been flipping through magazines, jumping up to get a drink of water, running to check on things in her bedroom. Something to fill the time. He's hardly doing the same thing on her behalf. He never does.

"You can't live your life waiting on someone else. You have to do your own thing." Cheryl has called up Trish, and she is listening to her advice.

"He can't be playing golf all this time."

"Or course not. He's on his own clock. He'll get to you when he sees fit."

"Should I call him."

"Not until after 5 sometime."

Cheryl takes Trish's advice literally. She hangs by the phone for two hours counting the seconds. It seems interminable. It is like a water torture. She listens to the drip of the water and keeps time. The gentle drops become a deafening roar. She covers her ears, but the drip is inside.

Around 4:30, she starts to doze off. She's trying to stay awake. But the boredom overtakes her. When she wakes up, it's 6:30. She checks her phone. No calls. No calls at all.

She calls up Robert. He answers, "I've been meaning to call you. I just got so involved talking with the guys. I couldn't get away."

Likely excuse. She lets him talk on, "I'm fried from all this sun and outdoors. I'm going to grab a light dinner and turn in early. Why don't you stop by tomorrow."

"I'm going to the pool with the girls."

She can feel him sneer when she says *the girls*.

"Call me in the evening. I have nothing on tomorrow."

Thanks for fitting me in, she says to herself.

"I'll be in touch."

"Love you dear." She can imagine his embarrassment when he says that in front of the guys.

She is fuming. She has been waiting all day. She thought that he might reserve some time for her. Not at all. He is completely in his own world. She took it easy for him last night, and this is all that she gets. She is more than mad.

She's already dumped on Trish. She calls Stevie, "I waited all day and now this."

"He's being a real man, Cheryl. Don't let it bother you."

Cheryl admits, "I think that guy Frank really wanted me last night."

"File that one away. You can always call him back if you need him."

Cheryl has a request of her friend, "I need a little something tonight."

Stevie offers her support, "We're all going to be out there tonight to help you forget whatever went on today."

Cheryl gets to the Anchor a little early. She's looking for that buzz immediately. After two gin and tonics, she is zoned. By the time Trish arrives, Cheryl is feeling good, very good.

"Trish, what was up with you last night?"

"Did Diane tell you how I took her head off? I was a real bitch. It's just that I thought I had a sure thing. I don't know. I just needed something to pick me up."

“We’re friends. We have to look out for our own.”

Cheryl can sense this long-standing rivalry between Trish and Diane. Trish recognizes Diane’s ease with guys. She wants to be the center of attention. But she finds that she always has to work so hard to get what she deserves. She feels unappreciated.

Stevie and Diane roll in at 10:30. Before she can get in the door, a guy is already hitting on Diane. Stevie hardly sees a thing and keep walking. Diane is considering if he’s the one for the night.

Diane looks at his hands. They seem so tender. She imagines them touching her in that knowing way. She doesn’t want to let go of a sure thing. Especially after last night.

The girls are surprised how easy the guy does his thing.

“Does she need rescue?” asks Trish.

“We better not do anything after last night,” says Cheryl.

Cheryl stares intently. Diane is making out with her new catch. Her dress has already slid up. He is caressing her bare leg. She moves her head back as she gives in to the passion.

Cheryl wants to be like Diane. She wants some guy to take her pain away.

Bill can sense that carelessness on Cheryl’s part.

“Do you know them?”

Cheryl looks up, “What?”

Bill wonders, “I saw you staring at that couple over there.”

“Diane’s our friend. She never even made it to our table.”

“You know what they say about all’s fair in love and war.”

She hardly sees how this applies. Bill is more mature than she’s used to. At this point, anything will do.

“What’s your name?” she asks.

“I’m Bill.”

“I’m Cheryl. What does Bill do besides approach strange women.”

He gives her a look, “I like your shoes, Cheryl.”

“Oh these things. Do you work in a shoe store.”

“No, I’m a lawyer.”

Cheryl teases him, “Wow, a real catch.”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“You want to get me a drink.”

“You waste no time, Cheryl.”

“Bill, you came over here. You’re the one who’s looking for action. There’s going to be no action if we don’t get a little juice to lubricate the engines.” Cheryl can’t even make any sense of what she’s just said. But Bill obliges with drinks for her and her friends.

“Bill, you’re a big spender.”

Bill’s a little taken aback by her wit. But she spares no punches. She wants to soften him up.

As the night settles in, she realizes that he has none of the fast moves of the other guys here. He’s just looking for some company for the evening. So much for Cheryl’s devious plan. She feels a little sloshed, and she’s wasting her loose morals on a saint. What is this world coming to?

When Bill goes to the bathroom, Stevie questions her, “Do you have a live one?”

“I just think that he’s a nice guy. Where’s a sinner when you need one.”

Diane finally makes it over to the table. “Dave’s told me about this party. I’m going to head out. See you at the pool tomorrow.”

Cheryl wonders if it is a private party. Just thinking about it makes her hot.

Bill comes back. He starts to tell Cheryl about his ex. It’s getting too much for her. She’s been hearing too many stories. Even her own. She wants some action.

When she realizes that she can’t get a rise out of Bill, she wants to throw him back. But he keeps on.

“Bill, be a dear and get me a drink.”

When he leaves, Cheryl asks Trish what she should do.

Trish has a plan, “I’ll keep him company. You just go find some guy to stand next to. He’ll get the point.”

Cheryl finds some unsuspecting soul.

“I just need you to run interference for a while.”

Keith is not sure what to make of it. He gives her his hand to shake.”

“I’m Keith. I’m an accountant.”

“Keith, I need you to be a good boy for a while and just take care of me.”

He takes a quick glance at her. He is more than willing to give her the world. Bill is a little impatient. He decides to come over to the other table.

“Cheryl, it was nice meeting you. I should go. Maybe another time.”

She gives him a perfunctory hug and watches him retreat out the door.

“What was that about?” Keith asks Cheryl.

“It was about you. Thanks, guy.” Just like that Cheryl goes back to her crew.

“That was easy,” Cheryl tells Trish.

Stevie comes back with shots for them all. Cheryl gives in to the party atmosphere.

The next day, the women agree to meet at poolside. It’s going to be a real test of will. Trish’s suit looked so good when she tried it on in the store. She was surprised that she could get away with something that risque. But now she feels completely naked in the skimpy thing. She is ready for her friends to mock her. Once she has it on, she can barely move from Cheryl’s apartment. She is sure that she is paying for every mistake of the past month.

Stevie appears sympathetic, “That looks fantastic.”

Cheryl concurs, “It takes daring to wear something like that. But you have the body to do it.”

For Trish it means admitting to all the work that she has done just to reach this point. Sweaty evenings in the gym and constantly watching her diet. In her own way, Diane takes Trish’s side. But Diane is wearing an elaborate designer swim costume with matching robe. Diane could clear a buffet table and hardly tip the scale.

“Trish, you can get away with it. Just do it.”

Cheryl consoles herself with a modest one piece. She’s not really one for the sun. She coats herself with generous helpings of sun screen.

“Cheryl always looks so youthful,” Trish complements her. Cheryl also brings with her a big hat.

“If I’m going to indulge, it’s going to be with the drinks.”

Stevie hears Cheryl’s request. She has filled the cooler with a generous quantity of various treats.

“Stevie, I’m afraid when they give you that blender. There’s no stopping you.”

Diane adds to Trish’s tribute, “Those concoctions are just so sweet that you don’t know what hit you until you’re completely zonked.”

Diane’s thinking about a serious tan.

“Are you sure you want to get that beautiful outfit wet?” Cheryl asks.

Diane is showing off, “I think that it looks more shapely when it’s wet.”

Like Cheryl, Stevie’s suit is more practical. She loves the beach. But the pool is more for intimate get-togethers with friends. She’ll find the closest umbrella and just camp underneath it. There she can make the best of her full cooler.

They’ve all got their bags stuffed with towels and magazines and are ready to head down in the elevator.

Cheryl reminds them, “We can always come back if we’ve forgotten something. It’s not as if we’re going to Florida.”

The girls colonize a corner of the pool just like they do to a table at the Anchor. There are a bunch of chairs down on the deck. They make claim to the best. It may be a little earlier for the rest of the inhabitants of the complex. But Cheryl’s guests have staked out the prime territory. The grazers have the perfect angle on the sun. Cheryl and Stevie are protected against the harsh rays. They will all enjoy the invigorating heat of the summer’s day.

For Trish, it has been a long night. And she is now recovering. She lets the sun burn the alcohol out of her. It dissipates what’s left of the morning buzz. There’s none of the usual queasiness as she alternates bouts of tropical burn with the cooling of the refreshing waters. She is very careful that the sun is not too aggressive with her. At the same time, she is still embarrassed by her suit. She feels the need to hide herself with a number of strategically-placed bath towels.

Cheryl looks over at her. Trish has nothing to worry about. But if the girls say anything more, it will only make her more self-conscious. She leaves her to her personal struggle. It gives Trish something to contemplate in the summer wasteland. It also encourages her to pull out a book. That will get her mind off the body-conscious models of the fashion mags.

Stevie asks Trish, “What have you got there?”

“Murder mystery. I like reading then during the daytime. At night, I get a little susceptible to fear and nightmares.”

Stevie confesses the same weakness, “I think that’s why I actually have got into reading them at night. Sort of a reverse therapy.”

Trish seems so relaxed as she zones out in her deck chair. Cheryl is trying to perfect the same sense of zen. She is struggling in the humidity. Diane notices her predicament.

“Cheryl, dive into the water. It feels so good.”

She follows Diane’s advice. The immersion treatment seems the perfect answer to balancing a hangover and the heat of the noonday sun.

Except for the girls, the rest of the deck is empty. They impose their dazzling presence on the locale. It seems the perfect defense for the women against marauding guys. At the same

time, any other girls would have difficulty cracking their secret society as they have mastered the intricacies of sun-bathing.

Of the four of them, Diane is the most natural. She was born for this. Stevie is checking out her magazine against Diane's silhouette. She almost believes that the girl has casually stepped from the pages to grace their company. Stevie doesn't feel intimidated. She's just always marveled at how some women can cop the pose with barely any effort. Trish almost equals Diane's style. But Stevie knows all the effort and worry that goes into Trish's stance. Diane barely gives it a second thought. She hardly worries about a trifle. When she does, she knows her girls can pull her through.

The sun has Diane beaming. She goes over to Stevie to fill up. She really doesn't want to get too tossed by the alcohol. Just enough of veneer that she isn't dried out by the heat. She is sure to alternate her sunning time with dips in the pool. She also moves in and out of the protection of the umbrella.

Cheryl is still the fish out of water. She can't settle on the ease of Stevie's domesticity. She almost wonders if she could be doing something more productive. She thumbs through a magazine and pretends that the images really have something to say to her. She'll even pause before a recipe and wonder if her dining room could bear such fare. But in the end, none of it really talks to her. The food is too elaborate for a busy single. And the fashion seems painted on these Amazon princesses. She doesn't like to think of herself as quaint. But this slant on sophistication hardly appeals to her.

She settles on an article on summer makeup tips. For the moment she plays the part of an actress designing her face in the dressing room. She loves the ability of these masks to redefine emotion. She can feel herself staying in pose so her latest suitor can never guess her actual intentions.

She tells herself, "I really need a script to go along with these circumstances."

Stevie snaps her out of her reverie, "What are you looking at?"

Cheryl is making faces, "Just some make up tips. I can never get my face to stay that still when I'm applying paint to myself." They both smile.

Stevie has her own point of view, "I keep trying to get ideas for my store. I keep telling myself someday. I know my Dad says that he's going to help. But I may need more than that."

"That's quite a first step."

"I don't want to be too extravagant. It's just that I've got a little crazy with some of those design classes. I'm just trying to keep my head on my shoulders."

Cheryl wishes that her career had such magic for her. Numbers do have a way of coming to life for her. She loves to watch the ups and downs of the market. But often it only makes her frantic. But the end of the day, she is glad to close the door on work.

Late in the afternoon the girls are all flying. Diane jumps in the pool and tries to splash the others. It turns into a mini-battle in the pool.

When Cheryl gets back to her apartment, she feels that drain of the sun. Robert calls her. He's prepared dinner for her.

She is exhausted. She slinks over to his place. After dinner, she crawls into bed with him. He tries to make up for the weekend. That is good enough for now.