

Friends, Foes & Forever
A short story by
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Devlin Bloom reclined on her bed as she flipped through a magazine. She lay on her stomach, knees bent, and feet in the air. One of her favorite CD's played and her feet moved to the beat. She looked up as her best friend, Courtland Morris, walked into the room wearing another dress for Devlin to judge. Devlin's gaze wandered from the top of her head down to her feet, and then she pursed her lips.

"What do you think?" Courtland asked as she stood in front of the full-length mirror.

"I don't know about that one, Court. I think I liked the first one," Devlin said, referring to the third dress Courtland had modeled. Devlin wasn't sure she liked how any of the dresses looked on Courtland. They just didn't seem to hang right.

Devlin rolled to the edge of the bed and stood. She walked over, standing behind her much taller friend. Devlin looked around her to see in the mirror. As she gazed at Courtland's reflection, Devlin had to admit that her friend was pretty. Courtland's long, wavy blonde hair and chocolate brown eyes were the total opposite of Devlin's short dark brown hair and cobalt blue eyes. With the right clothes, Courtland could be a model. Her height and slim hips made her statuesque. Devlin's gaze dropped to her friend's slender hips, which the current dress accentuated even more.

"Where's your waist?" Devlin asked, reaching to smooth the dress just above Courtland's left hip, but her friend stepped aside. Devlin arched her eyebrows but didn't comment. Since they had met, Courtland had never wanted Devlin to touch her. Devlin thought it was strange, but they had met under strange circumstances.

Devlin thought back to her first day on campus. She had been registering for classes for her first semester at college. She didn't know where she was going or where she needed to be. This had been the first time she had been away from her home and parents, and she was a little scared. She had been running through the halls trying to find the gymnasium, when she ran into someone, almost knocking him down.

"Oh, I'm sorry." She blushed furiously. She had plowed into his chest, and his hands held her shoulders to keep her from falling.

"Don't worry about it. Where's the fire?" She looked up to meet his eyes and sucked in her breath. He was gorgeous with light brown hair and crystal blue eyes.

"I'm lost. Do you know where the gymnasium is?" She stammered.

"Sure, follow me."

She felt she would follow him anywhere. As they walked, he would occasionally look over at her and smile. Her heart fluttered as she marveled over the waking dream. When he looked away, she let her gaze travel down his six-foot frame. He was very thin, and his untucked white shirt fell below his hips, showing only denim-clad legs. She

glanced back up and watched his long bangs fall into eyes. He brushed them aside before he looked at her. His hair had golden blonde highlights, which sparkled when the sun hit them. As he turned to open a door, she didn't even look forward as she walked through it.

By the time she realized she had been led into a darkened room, it was too late. She turned around, but he was gone. One by one, candles were lighted around the room. When she was able to focus, she realized there were several people in the room and all wore masks. She panicked and tried to get out, but the door was locked.

"What do you want?" She asked, as they approached her slowly.

Devlin shook herself from the memory, as she realized how bad it could've been. They had stripped her down to her underwear, tormented her for awhile and then threw her in the campus swimming pool. It had taken some searching to find her clothing, but she had then rushed to campus police. She wasn't able to identify anyone except the cute guy who had led her, but she never got his name. She'd been tempted to call her parents, but she loved school. Her parents hadn't wanted her to go away to college, and she knew they'd insist that she come home. Since her parents were famous, she had grown up in the public eye and had deliberately chosen a college out of state. She had never known if people who met her really liked her, or only wanted to meet her parents. She was careful not to let anyone know who she was.

As she started her first semester, Devlin always kept a look out for the man who had betrayed her. When she thought she had, she cowered in a corner and cried. That was when she had met Courtland. She had placed one hand on Devlin's arm to get her attention. Devlin's head jerked up, and her gaze locked with Courtland's. She calmed when she looked into those brown eyes.

"Hey, are you alright?" She asked Devlin in a deep but pleasant voice.

"Yeah, of course." She got to her feet as she realized how stupid she must look. Courtland stepped back and held onto her books. As Devlin stood, she realized how tall the other woman was. Devlin wasn't short at 5'7", but Courtland was a good four inches taller. She looked down and noticed that Courtland wasn't even wearing heels.

"You don't look alright. What's wrong?"

Devlin had been searching the hallway for the face that haunted her, but the sincerity she heard drew her gaze back to Courtland. For the first time, she actually looked at her. Courtland wore what Devlin would soon realize was her style: A loose long sleeve sweater that fell below her hips, a full floral skirt that fell below her knees, colored hose and ankle boots. The look wouldn't have flattered a short woman, but Courtland's height allowed her to pull it off. Devlin immediately wondered if she had ever done any modeling. She had a pretty face but wore too much make-up.

"I wouldn't know where to start."

Her response made Courtland smile. "Well, how about at the beginning. Oh, by the way, my name is Courtland, what's yours?"

Devlin couldn't help but return the smile. "Devlin. The beginning? How much time you got?"

This time Courtland chuckled. "As much as you need, Devlin. Let's get something to drink."

They headed over to the cafeteria. On the way there, a group of guys passed them. When one of them saw Courtland, he smacked another to get his attention. All three guys whistled as Devlin and Courtland passed them.

"Lookin' good, baby."

"Knock it off, Brad." Courtland responded, which surprised Devlin.

"You know them?" Devlin asked once they were out of earshot.

Courtland glanced at Devlin and shrugged. "They've been giving me a hard time since I started. I guess tall women threaten them."

"I guess so." Devlin looked behind them. The three guys were leaning against a locker and watching them. The looks they gave Devlin made her uncomfortable.

When they reached the cafeteria, Devlin poured her heart out. It felt good to be able to tell someone how she felt. Since her parents had traveled so much, she hadn't had many friends growing up. Courtland was easy to talk to and actually seemed to care about what Devlin said. After she finished telling Courtland about the young man who had led her to that room, she was near tears again.

"I just don't know why he did that to me. What had I done to him? It was my first day here. Not exactly a great welcome." She tried to smile but failed. She saw a pained expression flash across Courtland's face before her gaze lowered to the table.

"I'm sorry that happened to you." Courtland said with a sigh.

"Don't be sorry. It wasn't your fault." She replied. "I just want to know why it happened." She picked up a napkin to dry her eyes.

Courtland seemed uncomfortable for a moment. Devlin was just about to ask, when Courtland sat back and met Devlin's gaze.

"I may be able to help you with that."

"What do you mean?"

"Uh, something like that happened to me last year."

"To you?" Devlin couldn't imagine anyone messing with Courtland, who was taller than half the guys. True, she didn't look like she weighed more than 130 pounds, but the height alone was intimidating.

"I was also a freshman just starting my first year." Courtland continued. "It was a fraternity prank. They tell either a pledge or a newly initiated brother to find a pretty girl and lure her to a dark room. They aren't even told why. Out of fear or loyalty or stupidity, they do it. They may regret it later on, but they do it."

Devlin was shocked. "You sound as if you are condoning what that guy did to me." She didn't know if she should be flattered or insulted that she had been the pretty girl picked.

Courtland looked back at her sharply and shook her head. "No, I don't condone it. I was just trying to help you understand why it happened. That is if it was the same situation. It may have been a different college, but fraternities are world wide in their hazing rituals."

"But why would a fraternity let me see one of their faces? If I ever see him again, I will turn him in. What they did was criminal, but it wouldn't have happened *if* he hadn't led me to them." She paused as she remembered how attracted she had been to him. His face had been angelic, and his smile had been so sweet. Was it possible that he had not known what would be done to her? He knew that something was going to happen, and he

led her to it like a lamb to slaughter. "I don't know why, but I trusted him, and I feel he betrayed me."

Courtland reached up as if to run her fingers through her hair, but she halted her hands. At first they hung there awkwardly; then one was lowered to her lap and the other massaged her forehead. "I felt that way, too."

They sat in silence for a moment and suddenly realized they shared something very personal and private. It was at that moment that Devlin considered Courtland a friend.

They had gotten closer over the next couple of weeks, but Devlin always felt that Courtland held something back. They confided in each other, and Devlin felt she could tell her friend anything. Courtland was the only person on campus that she revealed who her parents were. She had been appropriately surprised.

"Jack Bloom is actually your father?" She had asked in shock.

Devlin had smiled and nodded. Her mother had stopped acting years earlier, but her father was still highly demanded in Hollywood. Most people felt he had aged better than Mel Gibson and would even surpass Sean Connery in appeal. Devlin had acted in one of her father's movies, but it had been an uncredited role. She was thankful of that now, since she didn't want the name recognition. Of course, she looked so much like Jack, that she was constantly amazed how few people put it together on their own.

"You must have had one hell of a childhood. Don't you have a brother?"

Devlin nodded. "Dakota wanted to go to college closer to home. My mom was happy to hear that, since she didn't want me to come here. If I had told she and Dad about what happened to me here, they would have flown out here and packed me themselves. They've always been overprotective of me."

"God, I had no idea." Courtland muttered and sucked in her breath.

Devlin shrugged. "I've not exactly advertised who I am. My parents have tried to keep me and my brother out of the limelight. They wanted us to have normal lives. I've changed quite a bit since the last pictures were taken by the press." She smiled. "I'm just glad I now have a friend I can confide in. I'm glad I met you, Court."

Courtland searched her face for a moment before nodding. "I'm glad I met you, too."

Since Courtland was a sophomore, they didn't share any classes, but they were both new to the campus and enjoyed discovering things together. It took about a month before Devlin realized that something was different about their friendship. Courtland never let her guard down around Devlin. She always looked stunning, never a hair out of place, and never without her make-up. And of course, any time Devlin would touch her, Courtland would back off.

Devlin always tried to get Courtland to find a new look. She wanted her to wear dresses that flattered her figure instead of hid it. With enough persuasion, Courtland agreed, but had insisted on shopping alone. She brought her purchases to Devlin's dorm room to model the outfits. After making the comment about Courtland's waist, Devlin smiled. It suddenly occurred to her that it wasn't that Courtland's hips were slender, but that she didn't have any. They were barely wider than her waist.

"I guess I have a strange shape." As Courtland looked again at her reflection in the mirror, Devlin looked her friend over.

"Why do you wear so much make-up?" The question slipped out. Courtland's gaze shifted and locked with Devlin's reflection. Devlin felt she had to amend what she

asked. "Not that you don't look good. It's just that you have such a pretty face, I don't see that you need so much junk on it."

Courtland shrugged, but Devlin could see that the topic made her uncomfortable. "Maybe my face wouldn't be so pretty without all this junk on it."

"I wouldn't know. You've never let me see it." A thought suddenly occurred to Devlin and she nearly squealed. "Ooh, I got it. Wouldn't it be fun if we gave each other facials?" She tried to ignore the shocked look on Courtland's face. "Wouldn't it be nice if we were roommates? Then we could do that sort of thing all the time. You could let your hair down around me. We're supposed to be friends."

"We are friends. I care a lot about you." Courtland responded quietly.

Devlin's eyes misted. "Well, you're my best friend, Court. I don't know what I would have done the last month without you."

Courtland lifted her hand to Devlin's face, but it changed direction half way and landed on Devlin's shoulder.

"You're stronger than you think. You would have managed just fine."

"Why do you do things like that?"

Courtland looked puzzled as she stepped back. "Things like what?"

"Like that." Devlin replied, referring to Courtland backing off. "Just now, you were going to touch my face, but you didn't. I've noticed things like that a lot lately. When I got upset last week, you almost hugged me but backed off. What are you afraid of? It makes me feel like we're doing something wrong, and we aren't. Neither of us is gay... at least, I know I'm not." That had never occurred to her. She looked at Courtland with the question in her eyes.

Courtland took a step toward her and shook her head. "I'm not gay, Dev."

Devlin sighed and then smiled. "Thank God!" As she took in Courtland's serious face, she started to laugh. After a moment, Courtland's deep chuckle joined in.

Courtland was happy to get out of the dress and back into her comfortable clothes. After thinking about it, Devlin decided she had grown accustomed to Courtland's unconventional look. It had become a part of her personality. When Devlin had joked that Courtland should try on one of Devlin's mini skirts, Courtland's expression had been priceless.

"I don't have the legs for it."

"Not with those thick hose on, you don't."

"Hey, stop making fun of my wardrobe." Courtland punched Devlin in the arm.

"Ouch, I bruise easily."

"Wimp."

Devlin punched her back. "Who's the wimp?" They were soon both laughing and joking.

The next day, Devlin sat in the courtyard and read her notes from Chemistry. She looked up and saw Brad, the one who whistled at Courtland the day Devlin had met her. He was one of the most popular guys on campus and was the President of Alpha Beta fraternity. Since Courtland had told her of fraternity pranks, Devlin wondered if Brad had been one of the masked people who had accosted her.

As Devlin stared, she was shocked to see Courtland step out from behind a column. She and Brad conversed, but they were too far away for Devlin to hear. Brad reached out

and tugged on Courtland's hair, but she knocked his hand away. Was her friend in trouble?

Devlin stood and approached them. By the time she could make out their words, Brad noticed her.

"Well, look who's here."

Courtland followed his gaze. Devlin was surprised to see guilt cross Courtland's features. What did Courtland have to feel guilty about?

"Are you OK, Court?"

Brad looked back at Courtland and repeated what Devlin had just asked, but his sarcasm was thick, "Yeah, are you OK, *Court?*"

Courtland glared at Brad. "Yeah, of course." She looked back to Devlin, who stared at Brad suspiciously. "Brad was asking me if I would tutor him. I was telling him that was a lame way to ask me out."

"Yes, it is." Brad gave Devlin the strangest smile. As she again visualized him in a hooded robe, her eyes narrowed. She certainly didn't trust him. Grabbing for Courtland's hand, she pulled her away from him. When they reached her notes, Devlin retrieved them. She looked over her shoulder and saw that Brad still stood there. "I don't trust him. I just know in my gut that he's one of the guys who threw me in the pool."

Courtland looked at Brad, who blew her a kiss. She scowled and looked back at Devlin. "I wouldn't put it past him. Let's go."

Devlin went to student relations later that afternoon. She wanted to surprise Courtland by making them roommates. When Devlin had asked Courtland where she lived, her friend had replied that she stayed with friends. Devlin had never met any of them, though she felt certain that Courtland would tell her if she had a boyfriend.

When her number was called, Devlin walked to the counter and gave the woman Courtland's full name. When the woman found Courtland's record, she looked puzzled.

"I can only find one Courtland Morris, but something must be wrong. Do you know your friend's birth date?"

Devlin nodded as she gave the woman the date. The woman grew even more puzzled.

"I'm sorry, but Courtland Morris can't be your roommate."

"Why not?" Devlin asked.

"Because this isn't a coed dorm."

"What do you mean? What does that have to do with anything?"

"Everything, I'm afraid, since Courtland is a male, and that just isn't allowed here. If you want to shack up with your boyfriend, you'll have to move off campus."

Devlin felt as if the world had gone crazy. "Wait a minute. There must be some mistake. Courtland is a girl, not a guy. She's my best friend."

The woman stared at her. "Not according to my records, he's not."

"Your records are wrong!" Devlin yelled and stormed out of the office. As she ran outside, the initial anger started to cool as her mind sorted through all the odd things about Courtland: her height, deep voice, odd clothing, perfect hair and make-up; not to mention her standoffishness at times. Was it even possible that the records were wrong?

Devlin had just reached the cafeteria, when she spotted Courtland with Brad. Two times in one day? Devlin noticed that Courtland wore the same outfit as when they met.

For the first time she saw that outfit as hiding something. There was no doubt that Courtland was thin, but Devlin had always thought there was something unfeminine about her shape. She tried to control her features, as she walked toward her friend and forced a smile when Courtland turned her way. Brad wore the same strange smile, and it made the hair on the back of her neck stand on end. Devlin had to know the truth, and she suddenly knew how to get it.

“Hi, Dev.” Courtland smiled as Devlin drew near.

“Court, could you come with me? I need to show you something.” She ignored Brad.

Courtland nodded but looked concerned. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, come on.” She forced another smile and led the way. They didn’t speak as they walked. Devlin wished she could think of something to say, but she couldn’t. She could tell that Courtland knew something was wrong and also couldn’t think of what to say.

Devlin led them to the campus swimming pool. She had not been there since the masked men had thrown her in halfnaked. As she neared the edge, Courtland grabbed hold of her arm.

“Dev, what’s going on? Why are we here?”

“I wanted to show you what’s in the pool. You’ll never believe it.” She pointed to the deep end. Courtland eyes narrowed, but she walked to the edge. Devlin noticed movement and was only half surprised to see that Brad had followed them. She ignored him.

“I don’t see anything, Dev. What?” She was cut off when Devlin shoved her into the water. Her yell was a little too deep before the water cut it off. Devlin went down on her knees by the edge and reached for Courtland as she swam to the side. She looked over at Brad, whose mouth had fallen open in shock. He then laughed.

“Go to hell!” Devlin yelled at him before she grabbed Courtland’s hair and wasn’t surprised when it came off in her hand.

“You son of a bitch!” Devlin yelled at Courtland as she threw the wig into his face. “You bastard!” She leaned forward and shoved Courtland’s head under water. He grabbed her hand and pulled her in with him. Her scream was shrill as the water claimed her, but she came up fighting. He quickly overpowered her and pinned her arms behind her back, which left her pressed against his chest. As Courtland flipped his head back to get the long bangs out of his eyes, Devlin was forced to stare into those crystal blue orbs. Courtland had brown eyes. Devlin gasped, as she realized he must have worn color contacts.

“You!?” Her strength returned tenfold as she fought him wildly. He was forced to let her go. She pushed away from him and backed toward the side of the pool. She was so furious, she didn’t know what to do.

“Let me explain.” Courtland began. It was then that he too noticed Brad standing beside the edge of the pool.

Devlin let out a cry of frustration. That voice, and that face. How had he been able to deceive her for so long? Her hands tightened around the ladder as he slowly approached her.

"It was you! What were you trying to prove? Don't get any closer to me!" She yelled at him. She turned abruptly and pulled herself out of the water. Brad stepped forward to help.

"Don't you touch me," she yelled at him.

He backed off to allow her to exit the pool. After she marched past him, he held out his hand to Courtland. Disgusted, he pulled his drenched sweater over his head and rubbed it across his face, removing most of the make-up.

"Damn, I hate wearing all that crap!"

She started to shake as she stared at the two men. It suddenly occurred to her that they were friends. If Courtland had led her to that room, then Brad had been one of the masked people.

"Were you mocking me? Telling me that the same thing had happened to you? You made me think we had a bond, you bastard!" Her lower lip quivered, so she pulled it between her teeth and bit down.

She wanted to attack him. He could sense it and stayed away. "I didn't do this to hurt you. I didn't know of any other way to get to know you and let you get to know me."

Devlin shook her head but didn't speak.

"Devlin, you have become my best friend. That wasn't acting. I felt so bad about what happened to you, I wanted to make it up to you. I had no idea what was going to happen. I stood there and watched but didn't stop it, and I will regret that for the rest of my life." He glared at Brad and then stepped closer. "I couldn't show my face at school. It was my first semester, so no one knew me. I had to get close to you, but I didn't want to go to jail for a prank. This was the only thing I could think of." Courtland moved even closer. When he reached out to touch her face, he was surprised when she didn't back off. He could see she was fighting tears. As if a spell broke, Devlin moved away from his caress and slapped him soundly across the face.

"You stay the hell away from me. I can still have you arrested, you know." She looked at Brad. "You, too, you bastard. I may do just that."

When Courtland's hand moved out to touch her, she shrank from his reach. She tried to turn away but Brad flew at her and grabbed her arms. She sucked in her breath as he pulled her up against his chest.

"Don't you threaten me, you little bitch. If you even--" That was as far as he got before Courtland wrapped his arm around Brad's throat from behind and pulled him back.

"Get your damn hands off of her." Courtland hissed as Brad turned to face him. As soon as she was free, Devlin turned and fled. Courtland could only watch her go before he had to give Brad his full attention.

When Devlin reached her dormroom, she flung herself across her bed and burst into tears. All that time, it had been him. Her best friend, her confidante, and the one person at school that she trusted the most. Courtland had been the one who led her to that darkened room. He had even admitted that he'd watched what was done to her. She had never before felt such pain.

When the tears finally subsided, Devlin rolled over and stared up at the ceiling. She didn't know what to do. Her first impulse was to go to the police and turn him and Brad in, but her heart wouldn't allow her to turn in her best friend. She didn't understand how she could still feel that way after what he had done. Her best friend didn't even exist.

She had been an act. What would Devlin do without her? Courtland had helped her so much in the past month. This made her pause, since Courtland *had* helped her. Devlin had been a mess after her ordeal and needed a friend, and Courtland had been that friend. Devlin let her mind travel back through the month. Courtland had never taken advantage of their closeness. He hadn't let them get too close. Devlin smiled as she remembered how much that had bothered her. She remembered the time she changed clothes in front of Courtland, but he had made some excuse to turn around. Devlin hadn't even thought about it until just then. He had gone out of his way not to do anything inappropriate. Was it possible that his motives had been pure? Did he really regret his role in what happened to her and wanted to make amends? Could she forgive him?

Devlin sat up and swung her legs to the floor. As she thought about never seeing Courtland again, her eyes misted with fresh tears. She realized she had to forgive him, since she would miss him too much. True, it would be hard to think of him as a man. She remembered how charming he was when she had met him. She had felt she would follow him anywhere. Could she trust him? Would he ever betray her again? He had defended her by the pool just now when Brad had threatened her. He had actually stood up to his friend and may even have had to fight him.

As she sat there, torn between forgiving or forgetting, someone knocked on her door. She stared at it a moment and sensed who it was. Devlin stood slowly and walked across the room. She took a deep breath and then opened the door. She sucked in her breath at what she saw.

Courtland had cleaned himself up. His light brown hair was dry and his bangs were hanging in his eyes. His shirt and jeans resembled what he wore the first time they had met. She looked him up and down. It amazed her that this was the same person. Devlin was speechless but stood back to allow him entry and closed the door behind him. He stuffed his hands into the front pockets of his baggy jeans. She could tell he was uncomfortable.

"I thought I'd give you time to calm down, but I can't give up on you, Dev. You mean too much to me. Please believe what I told you earlier." He paused for a moment. "I thought it would be great to be in Alpha Beta. Brad was popular, and I thought it would be a way to meet people and make a place for myself here. Dev, I haven't had anything to do with the fraternity since that day. Brad has tried to get me to come back, but I couldn't. I had no idea what he had planned for you."

"So he's not a friend of yours?"

"No, all those times you saw me with him, he was just getting a kick out of seeing me dressed like a girl."

"I can't let him or the fraternity get away with what they did. They may do it again to someone else. Will you help me?"

He looked down. "Yes." As he looked back up, he stepped closer. "I'll do whatever you ask. I'm so sorry, Dev."

She looked at his face as he drew near. She reached up to move his bangs aside and noticed a slight bruise above his cheek. "You're going to have one hell of a black eye."

"You should see him." Court replied with a shy smile.

Devlin's lip quivered at that. He had actually fought Brad. He had stood up to the big man on campus, all because of her. The idea of that touched her deeply.

The tears in Devlin's eyes gave him courage. "You're not only my best friend. I've fallen in love with you. I know I betrayed your trust, but believe me when I tell you that I will never let anything happen to you again."

Devlin looked down and shook her head. "I wish I could hate you." She wiped a tear that rolled down her face. Courtland nodded, as he stepped closer and cupped her cheek in his hand. She leaned into it and then reached up to place her hand on his. "I love you, too."

Courtland moved his hand behind her neck and pulled her to him. She was tempted to resist, but his gentle yet firm hold caused her to relent. As her breasts pressed up against his chest, she sucked in her breath. Her chin lifted as Courtland's head lowered. She closed her eyes and felt his breath on her face. When their lips met, there was no longer any doubt. She loved and trusted him. Everything would be fine.

The End

Thanks for the interest and I hope you liked what you just read. Please visit my site at <http://www.judesplace.com> to read more about my writing.

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Jude Liebermann read her first romance when she was thirteen and quickly went on to read several more. Five years later, she began writing her first romance novel. Her writing has evolved through the years to include many genres, all of which have a foundation in romance. Her books range from action/adventure to time-travel, and she's always excited to see where her next inspiration will take her. She has self-published four books, one of which is a sequel, and is currently working on her first trilogy of occult books. She has also begun writing screenplays from her books and hopes to see them on the big screen someday. Self-publishing is big business now a days, and she has gotten quite good at editing and typesetting her own manuscripts. She does hope to be professionally published and is always looking and hoping for that big break. If you have any questions, please feel free to email her at leebooks@juno.com.