

# Season 2, Chapter 62 – Call of the Mall



**Turn-based combat honestly sucks when I have to type everything out like that. Was I about to go through three more pages of losing HP and making no progress? NO. Skip, I skip, I skip!**

Anyway, the day began with me and Amber eating breakfast at the kitchen table. I was munching on cereal while she was eating low-fat toast because she's on a veto diet or whatever she said earlier. We sat in silence for the longest time before she slammed her toast down and it broke into tiny pieces.

"I AM SO SICK OF THIS!"

"What? The veto diet? I told you it would suck."

"It's KETO. KEEETOHHHH. And I'm not talking about that! This toast is DELICIOUS!"

She scooped up all the crumbs, smashed them into her face, and aggressively dabbed her mouth with a napkin.

"I am TALKING about how we live our lives! Look at us, sitting at a table, eating breakfast on a bright and sunny winter morning! It's SO BORING!"

She gestured to the heavenly sunlight and chirping regional birds visible through the sliding glass doors with a disgusted look on her face. I continued munching because I was quite content with life at the moment, but she kept talking.

"What we need is thrilling action and adventure!"

I lowered my munching spoon and gave her a look.

“Amber, we literally *just* finished a series of massive adventures. The island quest, the hunt for Rex that took us to a bar, a castle and a store, the glitched show we were trapped in... We’ve only just now begun to settle into a calm slice-of-life setting.”

“Exactly! And it’s BORING. Here’s what I propose: we head to the mall this afternoon to spice up our lives!”

My look transitioned into a raised-eyebrow stare.

“Your proposals always end the same way: with tears and regret! You have the *gall* to suggest the mall?!”

“Yes! It’s the gall of the mall!”

“The gall of them all? Who is them?”

“Actually, let’s go with ‘call’. It’s the call of the mall! Think about it... we can go out, buy a new TV, loiter in the food court, and maybe even meet some new people who can become recurring characters for the rest of the Season!”

“Absolutely not. Don’t you remember what happened the *last time* you tried to meet someone new?”

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We cut to a flashback where Amber was browsing a new store that had just opened. While she wandered up and down the aisles looking at the food and books and other things for sale, she was really scoping out the people shopping there in the hopes of meeting someone new. Unfortunately, those present were frequently seen background characters that she had already become well-acquainted with.

“Ugh! These are people I already know so well! Isn’t there anyone *new* here?!”

Then, she spotted someone standing by the milk freezer that she didn’t recognize. He wore a green coat, black pants, and had shaggy blonde hair.

“Finally! Time to introduce myself.”

She strutted over to him and flipped her hair before speaking.

“Hey there. My name is-”

He turned to look at her and she immediately started screaming.

“AAAAHHH! OH MY GOD! NOOOOO!”

She took off running, slamming into a large wall made entirely out of cases of soda that had been expertly stacked to spell out the store’s name. She went right through it, exploding some cans in the process while the rest of the stack caved in on top of her. Soon, only her legs could be seen sticking out from the pile and a puddle of soda gradually overtook the tile floor. The man in the coat turned further, his hair and outfit apparently just an angle illusion because it changed as he did, revealing that it was actually Zack floating with his toes in the milk freezer!

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We returned to the present where Amber started throwing a tantrum at the table.

“THIS IS SO UNFAIR! You never let me do ANYTHING besides everything required to achieve my dreams! I HATE YOU!”

She kicked and flailed and the entire table rattled. It was at this moment that FlamDawg came downstairs dressed like a chef and holding a plate with a piece of pie on it.

“Hey, are you guys still hungry? I need someone to taste-test my new pie recipe.”

My eyes lit up, and we’re talking starry-eye sparkles.

“Right here! I’ve still got some room! Gimme!”

He approached me and went to set the plate down but Amber stopped him.

“NO! No pie for him! He’s on a pie embargo!”

I rolled my eyes and sighed.

“Alright, FINE. If you’ll shut up and let me have some pie then I guess we can go. But only because you remind me of cheese today. Mmm, cheese.”

She stared at me for a moment, not sure whether to take that as a compliment. In the end, she decided to just accept it out of fear that I might change my mind otherwise. With that taken care of, she allowed FlamDawg to set the plate down in front of me, but pulled it towards her almost immediately.

“I’m having some too!”

“It’s not keto.”

“It’s fine! I already had some toast so I’m, like, protected for the rest of the day.”

We pulled out forks and stabbed into the succulent slice of what appeared to be banana cream pie before shoving large bites into our mouths. After swallowing, we both stopped and stared at it.

“FlamDawg... this tastes like grass.”

He clapped his hands together and made a particularly sinister face.

“Good... good...”

We watched him for a moment before jumping up and heading out the side door to start our big mall adventure. Anything was better than being around FlamDawg when he gets like *that!*

**Sometime later**, we arrived at the parking lot of the Shoreline Mall, the largest and only mall in town. Did you know it was once a mansion in the 1950s? I actually knew that offhand- I’m browsing Twitter right now. Obviously, we had been to the mall countless times in flashbacks and the like, but had we ever really stepped inside and detailed the interior design? NO! So we’re gonna do that. You’re welcome!

Amber skipped around the parking lot like a kid preparing to enter a toy store, startling those who were both entering and exiting. Perhaps she should refrain from skipping in circles *around* people. As we entered the sliding glass doors, we were greeted with a bright, glassy interior. The tile was a shimmering white and there were glass windows on the ceiling and front and back walls. In the middle was a large fountain surrounded by sitting areas and assorted greenery where people could stop, rest, and relax. The mall had two floors- one with more popular shops selling electronics, clothing, and the like and the other containing the large food court with more random, lesser-known shops. Who ever heard of Sears or JCPenny? Not me! But Kohls? I know a *lot* about Kohls. Oh, there was technically a third floor but that was off-limits to the public, being where they store various stock and keep maintenance equipment. I heard one day they might open it up for business if the other two floors get filled!

The moment we stepped inside, Amber’s eyes lit up like a kid entering a toy store. Huh? I already made that comparison? Well, writing is hard! She immediately took off running towards the fountain but thankfully I had repurposed FlamDawg’s retractable leash collar so she was tethered to me whether she liked it or not. She only got about halfway there before I pulled out the thing and hit the button, pulling the leash- and by extension the collar around her neck- tight and causing her to stop and gag. She fell to the floor and started choking on her own saliva as I hit the other button and pulled her back over to me. She slid across the floor with an audible squeaking sound while several people stared at us, but at this point I don’t care about our reputation, I just want to make it out of here with the mall in one piece.

As soon as she reached me, she popped back up with a smile, apparently accepting the fact that we would be joined at the hip for the entire outing. No, I didn't like it either. We strolled past the large fountain in a calm and civilized fashion, though I had to yank on the leash again to stop her from trying to lap up the water like a rabid cat. And if she saw that there was shiny money at the bottom? No leash would be able to stop her. Finally, we reached two of the three options for ascending to the next floor: an escalator and a glass elevator. You might remember that there are also stairs as a third option, but Amber barely survived that the first time. She admired the shininess of the glass for a moment before smiling.

"Let's ride the elevator!"

The camera suddenly zoomed into my wide eye as I had a vision of what might transpire should we dare to do such a thing. It ended with either the shattering of glass and Amber falling out halfway up, or she would lick the glass and get stuck, requiring professional aid to free herself which would ruin everything for everybody. We zoomed back out and I blinked a few times before responding.

"Actually, let's ride the escalator instead."

Her smile faded and she turned to look at the escalator before throwing her head back and groaning.

"Ugh, STAIRS."

"Amber, it's an escalator. It does the walking for you."

She straightened back up and smiled.

"Oh! Yay."

We stepped onto the escalator and began the slow ascent to the second floor. Along the way, she attempted to breakdance on the moving steps, ride the side bar like a horse until she got a wedgie, and screamed profanity at several people riding down to the first floor. Those were, by far, the seven most dreadful seconds of our entire mall experience. About halfway up, I turned and glared at her while she was still dancing.

"Amber, why are you like this?"

"Whaaat? Nothing's gonna happen!"

The camera zoomed into my eye again as I had another vision, this time of Amber's pant leg getting caught in the escalator. It pulled on it until all of her clothes tore off, leaving her stark naked in the middle of the mall which traumatized everyone for their next three lives. The entire mall had to be burned down because even the glass reflections remembered that image

so no one was safe. Upon zooming back out, I grabbed her by the arm and took off running up the rest of the steps. She tripped and hobbled along the way as I yanked her.

“Hey! HEY! Ow! Walking! YOU SAID NO WALKING!”

We soon reached the top and I smiled as she fell and smacked face-first into the tile floor.

“Ah, we made it.”

After a moment of soft crying, she picked herself up and we continued our amazing mall quest. I still wasn't quite sure what we were doing, but I assumed part of our adventure involved exploring some of the weird stores on the second floor. We walked past the food court without any trouble, though I did have to stop her from trying to eat from a tray of food someone left behind. Maybe I should feed her more than once a day. I was busy looking at all of the stuff on display and when I turned around, Amber was gone!

“What?! I knew I shouldn't have stopped writing about the leash!”

I glared down at my empty hand where the leash had been once upon a time, then looked around and spotted her standing with her face pressed against the window of a store named “Marvelous Merchandise”. Judging by what I could see on the shelves, it was a store full of foreign curios and knickknacks run by a macho guy from a far-off land. They even give you a Box of Marvels if you buy enough stuff! That warrants checking out later. But as for Amber, a hyperactive woman and knickknacks that can break into tiny pieces do not mix. I called out to her as she went to run inside.

“Amber, no.”

She immediately stopped and remained frozen for a moment before whipping around and looking at me with a dark expression on her face.

*“Amber says yes.”*

I wasn't prepared for this oddly intimidating reaction and cringed a bit as she stepped towards me.

*“Amber wants to go into the nice store to see if they have Bubblegum Melody merchandise. Amber has also decided that she will only speak in third person until she tires of this bit.”*

I sighed loudly as she stood there and glared at me.

“I'll let you go to that clothing store you like if you don't go into this store.”

Her mood vastly improved on the spot.

“AH! You'll let me go to Frou Frou Frillies?! YAY! I can't WAIT to get some new clothes!”

She leaned over and hugged me, then turned and started skipping away with a speed that was unlike her. I sighed again before reluctantly following.

“I didn’t say you could buy anything.”

I felt my pants pocket for my wallet.

“Hey, where’s my wallet? Amber?! HEY!”

I knew that hug wasn't just for the love.

**Meanwhile**, life was chugging along at home even without me and Amber around to witness it. FlamDawg was in the kitchen, choosing to follow Zack’s lead in cooking something tasty. He had ingredients strewn all over the countertops and was proudly standing in front of a pot on the stove.

“This new pie recipe I came up with is sure to be amazing! I won’t let Zack outshine my cooking abilities! Even if he never actually cooked anything and just passed out in the oven. How do I know about that? I don't even know!”

Unfortunately, it seemed this new recipe wasn’t working out too well. Instead of whatever it was supposed to look like at this stage, it was a bubbling, bright green mass of toxic goo. Slightly healthier than the pie would have been! Cat had been sitting at the kitchen table but jumped up and started screaming when she saw what was happening with FlamDawg’s pot.

“OH MY GOSH! What have you DONE over here?!”

He whipped around and gave her a look.

“It’s fine. Calm down.”

“But LOOK AT IT! IT’S GONNA EXPLODE! Then the kitchen will be RUINED and we won’t be able to have pizza tonight all because YOU AND YOUR STUPID-!”

“Stop using words and listen to me!”

“NUMBERS NUMBERS NUMBERS NUMBERS!”

He slapped her across the face which seemed to calm her down. She turned back to the pot while rubbing her cheek with a somber expression.

“Oh, I see. It’s fine. Nothing to worry about.”

He smiled proudly at her.

“I told you! I’m an experienced chef with THREE YouTube videos so I know what I’m doing!”

While his back was turned, something began to rise from the pot slowly but surely. Cat saw it, but her expression didn't change.

"Oh, no it's not. It is not fine."

FlamDawg didn't hear her because he was too busy talking.

"-after all, he who laughs last always has the last laugh! I know that's pretty complicated but in reality it's quite simple."

"Um, FlamDawg? Situation."

"Laugh times the last minus the air intake divided by my asthma..."

In that moment, Pillbug burst forth from the green goo and the pot exploded, sending the goo flying in all directions! FlamDawg was now frozen in shock with wide eyes and a raised know-it-all finger while Cat's expression had evolved to include raised eyebrows. All was quiet for a moment before he slowly turned around, seeing that Pillbug was floating there with large, bulging eyes.

"HELLO."

The two ran around screaming at the top of their lungs before slipping on individual puddles of goo and crashing onto the floor with an audible cracking sound. Pillbug continued to float there for a moment before smiling.

"That works for me!"

He waved his arms and the three vanished in a puff of blue smoke. Have I ever mentioned that I love the blue smoke? Gorgeous! They reappeared in the *Viewer Fun* studio, also known as the most traumatic place in the entire house. I think we all know why by now. Pillbug waved his arms again and Amber and I appeared in another puff of blue smoke! I was hovering in the air in a sitting position, apparently having been sitting in a chair, and crashed onto the floor accompanied by the sound of all my bones snapping at once. I'm very fragile! Amber was in the middle of sliding her shirt back down when she realized she wasn't where she thought she was and looked around before turning and glaring at Pillbug.

"Okay, you are LUCKY I was putting my shirt back on because my summer body isn't ready yet."

FlamDawg gave her a look.

"I don't think it's ever been ready."

She whipped around and squeezed his snout until his eyes popped out and flew across the studio. When this effectively silenced him, she whipped back around and started flailing around.

“Wait, WAIT! But if you would have taken me when I had that dress on, I could have gotten it for FREE!”

I looked up from my broken-bone position.

“Amber, that’s called stealing.”

“Not if it’s on accident!”

I managed to pick myself up and FlamDawg popped his eyes back in just as Pillbug began doing... something. His legs flailed around and he began to shake until... until... there was a puff of smoke and his head was replaced with that of Zack!

“AAAAAHHHHH!”

“DEAR GOD!”

“NIGHTMARE CREATURE!!!”

Everyone ran around screaming at the top of their lungs except for me because I was so dead inside that it barely affected me anymore. Half a year of nonsense will do that to you! I watched as they ran about while Pillbug just floated there like a balloon before sighing.

“As usual, it’s up to me to round them up.”

I pulled a shimmering Golden Net out of my pocket- it’s twice as big as the standard net, by the way- and started swinging it around at the others. I hit them in the head and limbs a couple times on accident, then timed a perfect swing that caught everyone in one fell swoop! They were now in a makeshift cage of sorts so I let go of the net and did a little dance before thrusting my fist skyward.

***All RIGHT! I caught all the characters! Now the novel can get back on track!***

They were all face-down in there, but I’m sure that’s fine. The net has breathing holes I think. Suddenly, music began playing from seemingly nowhere. I’m pretty sure we all know where this is going. A Bug Bang practically kicked the door down and marched over to me with a wild look in his eye.

“HEY! I got a complaint that someone was using a... SWEET BEANS AND CENTIPEDES!”

He saw the giant net and stopped dead in his tracks. Pillbug dropped the phone he was using to call the police and started floating away. In the time the Little Bang was stunned, Amber managed to crawl out of the net and join me in standing around, though not before she shot an ugly look at the nice police officer.

“Ugh, can I help you?!”

I gave her an ugly look of my own.

“Hey! I’m here, too!”

She rolled her eyes.

“FINE, can WE help you? Is that okay?”

“Yes... Yes, that’s fine.”

The Bug Bang sucked in a deep breath.

“Do you have ANY idea how disrespectful it is to use a NET in the presence of bugs?! And look! LOOK HERE!”

He pointed at FlamDawg and Cat who were still face-down under the net.

“You actually went so far as to CAPTURE some BUGS! My own people!”

I stared at him for a moment.

“But... those aren’t bugs.”

“I see pitiful insects! They are bugs!”

He whipped out his ticket pad and began furiously scribbling away. Thinking quickly, I grabbed the net, whacked him over the head with it, and he went inside with a loud popping sound. I then fished him out and held him out at you, the dear reader.

***WOO! I caught a Bug Bang! Creepy crawly cop!***

I let go and he smacked face-first onto the floor. Amber and I watched in horror as a green puddle began to form beneath him.

“Oh... Oops.”

He remained on the ground for a moment before violently exploding, sending bug tickets flying in all directions! One landed on Amber’s face and she transformed into an Ambeetle which I instinctively stepped on, one landed on FlamDawg’s back and he transformed into a FlamAnt though remained unmoving, and one landed on Pillbug just as he was about to leave the room and he transformed into a Pillbugbug! What a world we live in. Pillbug was now too much bug and not enough whatever he was supposed to be which shorted out his Hacks and caused the entire studio to collapse around us! Thankfully, it was just some procedurally-generated map so we weren’t actually harmed nor did we have to pay for damages. Everything returned to as it was before with me and Amber at the mall and Cat and FlamDawg in the kitchen. A happy ending for all those involved except for the Bug Bang who died a tragic death. Sorry about that!

Once we were back at the mall, Amber resumed her shopping spree. The very spree that I said she wasn't allowed to have. See, this is *exactly* why I didn't want to go to the mall. We were shopping at a place called "Frou-Frou Frillies" which was easily the most feminine establishment I had ever set foot in. Pink and white, pink and white everywhere. Also, clothes. So many girly clothes. I sat outside the fitting room in the Husband Chair and watched as several glamorous ladies passed by. They looked over and giggled at me and I had to really restrain myself not to get up and punch them in their pretty faces. I can save that for Amber, I thought. It will be better that way, I thought.

Amber was currently inside the fitting room having a Totes Glam Fashion Montage which I didn't understand but it didn't matter because I wasn't a part of it anyway. Hot pop music blasted as she tried on a variety of different outfits and twirled around. A pink dress, a blue blouse, a green cardigan, and even a hipster rap outfit! That's how you know this is a comedy. Then she tried on various different wigs, starting with a long blonde one. As she slipped it on, she noticed that the hair seemed to flutter in the breeze all on its own without any breeze to speak of. She put on a sun hat and did a charming blush at her love interest as she stood in the meadow with the sun setting behind her. Now it's a romantic comedy! She then ripped that wig off and slipped on one that was absurdly pointy. It was like dozens of jagged spikes sticking up all over the place and she seemed hesitant to move around for fear that she might hurt herself. Deciding it was best to just remove it, she slowly reached up and went to pull it off. But that was when I started pounding on the door with all the force I could muster.

"HEY! ARE YOU DONE IN THERE?!"

She screamed and fell over which was followed by a loud pointy-stabby sound effect when she hit the floor. All became silent after that and I stood outside the fitting room with a confused look on my face.

"Hello? Are you okay? ...I would like to leave as soon as possible."

I turned towards the group of ladies that had gathered around me and chased me out of my chair.

"Honey, you NEED a new outfit."

"Let me do your hair!"

"This blush would look GREAT on you!"

I threw my head back and groaned.

"Go AWAY!"

**Sometime later**, Amber was now bandaged up and standing with a smile at the checkout desk where a fabulous woman was scanning the five emergency hairpieces she had purchased and slipping them into a plastic bag. I was standing next to her, now with styled hair, makeup on, and an incredible new outfit.

“Remind me again why you need hairpieces?”

She turned to me.

“Don’t you remember? I used, like, a LOT of hairspray that one time we were going to the movies and I thought I had a chance to go up on stage. All my hair fell out and the doctor said it would, like, never come back. So now I wear a hairpiece!”

“Oh. That’s... kinda sad.”

“No way! I mean, I have no idea what hairstyle this is or why I even chose it but the good news is that I can, like, change my hair whenever!”

She straightened her hair a bit before smiling at me.

“By the way, you look great!”

I rolled my eyes and sighed.

“Yeah... you didn’t come out of the fitting room fast enough. They got to me.”

It was then that a Little Bang stormed over to us accompanied by his theme song. Turns out it was a Money Bang dressed in a uniform made entirely out of money. The cuffs were silver dollars! He marched right up to Amber and got in her face.

“HEY! You there!”

“Me here?”

“YES! You need more MONEY!”

She blinked a few times before holding up my credit card.

“No I don’t. I’ve got this.”

I grumbled a bit while the Money Bang seemed offended.

“A CREDIT CARD?! In this day and age? What you NEED is a rocket mortgage by Quickie Loans!”

He handed her a wad of paperwork that she stared at as he continued.

“First of all, blah blah blah blah.”

She immediately threw the paper wad onto the floor, whipped out the golden net from earlier, and whacked the Bang over the head with it. His eyes went in different directions and he collapsed onto the floor. We then got a little pop-up saying we had received a large sum of money for defeating him. The gorgeous ladies around us applauded and I smiled proudly.

“I’m glad the net thing came back.”

With that, Amber took her things and we left the mall without any further trouble, distractions, or escalator escapades. We returned home about twenty minutes later where I proceeded to whack FlamDawg over the head with the net for making a mess of the kitchen with his new pie recipe. Yes, it was still goo and yes, it did explode at one point like Cat had feared. Thusly, our day ended, though I never did find out what the “call of them all” was supposed to mean. Who was “them”? The gorgeous ladies that dolled me up? They did make me look nice. Ah well, I suppose some things are better left unknown.

**So then! Our glorious trip to the mall comes to an end! It was quite the adventure and I can safely say that I hope to never go there again. At least not with Amber. She’s a nightmare!**