

A Change of Heart

Author: Ann geisterschloss@hotmail.com

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Setting: early third season

Author's Note: Several fanfics have been written about Amanda's heart shaped necklace, which she first wore in the first episode of season three. What always intrigued me was that at about the same time she stopped wearing another necklace. This story tries to explain why.

This story was posted on smkfanfic@yahoo.com as "N is for Necklace"



"Amanda, I'm afraid I won't be able to make it after all."

"What do you mean?" she answered blankly, her hand unconsciously tightening its grip on the telephone receiver. Surely he wouldn't be canceling now, at this late date.

"I'm sorry, but something's come up over here."

Amanda sighed. How many times had she been subjected to this particular excuse? "And no one else can take your place?" she asked in resignation, not really expecting him to say that he had suddenly changed his mind. She might have known something would interrupt their plans yet again. The last few years should have taught her that lesson, if nothing else. "The boys are going to be so disappointed," she continued. "They've been looking forward to this for months."

"Amanda, I think someone's involved in an embezzlement scam," he said earnestly. "There's no telling how high up this corruption might go." He paused, apparently unsure how to broach the next bit of bad news. "Look, can you explain all this to the boys for me?" he finally asked in a rush.

"You're not even going to tell them yourself?" she sputtered. Of course not, why would he? When had he ever been able to be straight with them? Even now, the timing of his call was

perfect, Phillip and Jamie safely at school so that there would be no chance he'd have to let them down himself.

"Amanda, I wouldn't be canceling this trip unless it was important," he tried to explain once more. "These people need me."

"No, Joe, your sons needs you," Amanda said in exasperation as she hung up the phone with a decisive click. She slumped down on the couch, leaning her head back in an attempt to relax the muscles in her neck. They'd been divorced for over three years, yet her ex-husband's priorities still managed to take her by surprise at times. She cared so much about her two sons and tried so hard to be part of their lives, that she still found his largely disinterested attitude towards them incomprehensible.

As she reached up to massage her tense muscles, her fingers caught in the slender gold chain she wore. She took the pendant between her fingers, absently sliding it back and forth. Finally she undid the clasp, and looked closely at the small diamond solitaire. Her mind drifted back to the first time she had seen it...

"Amanda, I'm sorry the diamond is so small. You really should have something better."

"No, Joe, it's beautiful. I love it. I love you." A few tears welled up in her eyes as he gently took her left hand in his and slid the ring into place.

"Someday I'll give you everything you deserve," he promised fervently.

"As long as I have you, I've got everything I need," she whispered just before their lips met in an impassioned kiss.

Amanda's fingers tightened around the small stone, the sharp edges of its setting biting into her fingertips. She shook her head, trying to pull herself out of the past. They'd both been very much in love back then. How had they ended up where they were today? Her mind drifted into another, more painful memory.

"Joe, there are so many places here in the States where you can do good. I don't understand; why do you feel you have to go so far away? How can you just abandon your own children?" She had tried to keep the bewildered tone out of her voice, hoping that for once he would listen to reason.

"Amanda, I'm not abandoning anyone," he said pointedly. "Any time you want to join me, I'll be happy to see you."

That was the heart of their problem, she thought reflectively with the objectivity the past few years had given her. Joe had always been up front about what he wanted. He hadn't changed; she had. Initially she'd been an enthusiastic supporter of his plans to join EAO as soon as he earned his law degree. In fact, his idealism was one of the things that had attracted her to him in the first place.

So many of their fellow students were loud enough in their condemnation of people who settled for the status quo. But other than experimenting with drugs and engaging in free love, few had any concrete plans to do something to change the world around them.

Joe, on the other hand, had plans in abundance. After completing his law degree, he wouldn't simply become a corporate lawyer — or worse, one of those suits for hire who defended anyone with enough cash. He would use his degree to become a true lawyer for the people who needed someone to speak up for them.

Once overseas, he had wholeheartedly thrown himself into his work - writing enthusiastic letters home outlining what he was doing and his plans for the future. She'd written him back each time, chronicling the landmark events in Phillip and Jamie's lives - first teeth, first steps, first days at school, still in astonishment that Joe would willingly miss these milestones. She was so disappointed for her sons that they would only know their father from his letters and infrequent visits home.

They'd let their relationship drift along for a few years until finally during Joe's visit home for Christmas in 1981, they sat down for a long put-off talk.

"I think we've been pretending long enough." Amanda was the one who had initiated the conversation. She now wondered how many more years Joe would have let things slide, apparently content with the way things were. "I think it's time we faced the truth. You're never coming back, are you?"

"No." There was genuine sorrow in his eyes. "And you're not coming to join me either."

She shook her head. "I don't think that's ever going to happen."

"So, where does that leave us?" he asked softly.

"Friends," she said firmly, hoping he felt the same way. The marriage might be over but she was determined to salvage that much from their relationship.

"Good friends," he agreed readily.

"But not husband and wife," she added. In her heart she knew the timing was right for them to take this step. They weren't married anymore in any real sense of the word and hadn't been for quite a while. It was time they made it a legal reality as well.

He slowly nodded his head.

"Do you want this back?" she asked quietly, slipping the ring off her finger and holding it out.

"No, you keep it." He reached out and closed her fingers around the circlet of gold. "It belongs to you."

Now she sat back on the couch, idly fingering the diamond, long since transferred from a ring setting into a pendant. She watched as its facets caught the light. The beauty of the stone was unblemished, having made it through the years in much better shape than their relationship. Their marriage had never really had a chance. The divorce had been surprisingly simple - probably because they had essentially become strangers to each other.

"Amanda, those aphids may have won the battle, but I vow I'm going to win this war." Amanda looked up, startled by the sound of the back door opening. Her mother breezed into the room, brandishing a shopping bag from The Green Thumb. "Mr. Yamimoto swears this spray is potent enough to drop an elephant, let alone a few insects." Her tone changed abruptly as she caught sight of her daughter's face. "Darling, are you okay?" she asked in concern.

"I'm fine," Amanda reassured her. "Joe just called. He won't be coming to the States next week after all. Something's come up at work."

"I see." Dotty sat down next to her. "And that's got you thinking..."

"I can't help but wonder how things would have turned out if I'd gone with him to Africa. Or what if I'd managed to convince him to stay in Arlington? Where would the two of us be now? Still divorced? Happily married with an even larger family?" She sighed.

"Amanda," Dotty said briskly, "you can play this 'what if' and 'maybe' game as long as you like, but it's not going to change anything. It's not as if Joe gave you much choice back then."

"I really did want to be the supportive wife he needed," Amanda said wistfully. "But after Phillip was born things changed. I thought Joe understood that when he agreed to take a desk job at EAO here in DC."

Dotty shook her head. "I had hoped so too, for your sake. But the minute he got back from his first overseas scouting trip, I knew it was just a matter of time."

Amanda sighed. "It's one thing to decide to live my own life in a remote part of the world and quite another to raise a baby there. When the nurse placed Phillip in my arms for the first time, I knew I'd do anything to protect and care for him. I still can't believe Joe didn't see things the same way."

"Amanda, you can't blame yourself. You were more than reasonable when you asked Joe to wait a few years until Phillip was a bit older."

"Except when Jamie was born less than two years later, Joe saw it as yet another delay." Amanda's expression clouded as she thought back to that particular conversation. "He said he'd put his life on hold long enough and was going, with or without us. I just couldn't do that to the boys."

Dotty patted her daughter's hand sympathetically. "I know, darling. Every mother feels that way about her children. I've always wanted only good things for you." She reached over and touched the necklace still dangling from Amanda's fingers. "Maybe it's time you stopped wearing this. Make another break with the past."

"You think so?" Amanda reached up and rubbed her neck. "It just feels so odd not to have anything around my neck."

"What about the necklace the boys gave you for Mother's Day?" Dotty suggested.

"I've been saving it for special occasions. But maybe you're right, maybe I should start wearing it more often. It's such a beautiful design. Much more tasteful than the 'Hot Mama' shirt they got me the year before," Amanda laughed.

"Don't remind me." Dotty rolled her eyes. "I learned my lesson the hard way, letting them go off on their own. This year I steered them into a jewelry store the minute we set foot in the mall."

"I think you did more than just help them choose it. I know the boys could never have afforded it on their allowances."

Dotty flushed slightly. "They really wanted to give you that particular necklace. I couldn't bear to disappoint them. Besides, I think their choice was very appropriate." Amanda looked up at her mother questioningly. "If anyone has an open heart, it's you, Amanda. You just have to find someone who appreciates it."

"Thanks, Mother, I needed to hear that." She gave Dotty a quick hug, got up and went upstairs. Her mother was right, she had changed so much over the years - she wasn't the naive girl who had accepted Joe's engagement ring with such enthusiasm any more.

And why should she be, she thought. A person shouldn't have to stay the same, just to try to keep someone else happy. They should be able to change and grow and yet remain a part of each other's lives. She smiled then, thinking of how much she had changed since Lee had come into her life. And, she liked to think, he'd done quite a bit of changing of his own.

She opened her jewelry box and tucked the diamond into a drawer. It would be waiting there if Phillip or Jamie ever wanted to give it to someone special. Her smile grew wider as she took out her new necklace. The ring of diamonds forming the pendant winked up at her - as if they too were looking forward to the future and all it had to offer.

The End