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xxxxxxx

The Last Place Anyone Would Look

Pausing for a moment at the top of the staircase I listen intently for any sound from below that would indicate that someone has been alerted to my presence. All I hear is the usual chatter of the building's other occupants. So far so good.

I make my way down the short hallway to the room at the end. Quietly opening the door, I slip into the small room. As I had hoped it is unoccupied and I let myself relax for the first time in ... how long?

I think back to the previous evening when Amanda and I had been sitting in my car. We had been so optimistic - hoping that we could quickly finish up the night's assignment and then spend whatever time we could together.

Except that wasn't the way things had worked out at all.

Instead, I spent the night trying to stay at least one step ahead of the various people trying to track me down. Having managed to find and discard what I hope is the only tracking device planted on me made evading capture a much simpler task. Now I'm sheltering in a safe place, well at least for the time being.

And Amanda? I have no idea where exactly she is right now. Silently I plead with her to please, please listen to the last instructions I gave her. The two of us like to joke about how she still never listens to me, but this time her life might very well depend upon it.

"You've got to go home."

"Go home? What are you going to do?"

"I'm trying to find Sonja. The Agency's all over her apartment. She won't go back there anyway."

"Let me help you."

"No. All you can do now is lead them to me. You've got to go home. Take the long way home. Use up their manpower but don't lose them - they're your security blanket. I need time to play one more card."

Playing that card had proved to be futile and in the end brought me dangerously close to being captured. Having managed to evade the Agency's best people (well, the ones who weren't currently trailing after Amanda as she leads them on a protracted tour of Arlington and the other suburbs of DC) I had carefully made my way to my current hiding place.

And now ...

If I had any sense at all I would be headed as far away from my pursuers as I could manage. Then I could spend the day trying to regroup and making plans to contact members of my family and collect my insurance policy.

One place I definitely should not be is here. My current location is certain to be coming up soon on the Agency's list of places to search. Tactically speaking if Amanda's house isn't the worst place for me to be, it's at least in the bottom five choices of hideouts.

Despite the situation I have to laugh as this thought brings up an old memory.

"It's in his car."

"Amanda, his car is the first place anyone would look."

"Exactly. Perfect hiding place."

"No, that doesn't make any sense."

"Of course it makes sense. The first place that anyone will look is the last place that anyone will ever look."

I'm pretty sure Amanda's bedroom isn't the first place anyone would think to look for me. In fact it's probably the last place anyone would look.

Then again, following Amanda's convoluted brand of logic, doesn't it follow that the last place any would look automatically becomes the first anyone should look?

I walk over to Amanda's bed and sit down hardly daring to let myself let down my guard. Glancing at the closet I wonder if in fact someone might have anticipated my movements. I get up and yank open the closet doors.

Sure enough two eyes stare back at me. Except these are the beady eyes of the stuffed panda I gave Amanda so long ago. Despite her saying at the time that I could buy her affections with the bear, it had actually taken me over two and a half more years to accomplish that goal.

I give the bear a quick pat on the head, adjust the autographed football it holds in its paws, close the closet doors and sit back down on the bed.

Looking around the room again I realize it's been almost exactly one year since the last time I was here.

Back then I had also been sitting on Amanda's bed except it had been part of a late-night strategy meeting. And more importantly Amanda had also been there, reaching out to hold my hand. The energy between us had almost been palatable.

She had looked intoxicatingly adorable with her rumpled hair and cotton nightie. Which isn't to say I wouldn't have appreciated her in satin or silk. But that's one of the things that makes Amanda so attractive to me. She doesn't need any of 'window dressing' for lack of a better word for her to make every other woman I've known pale in comparison.

That night last year I had wanted so badly to stay with her but had known we were nowhere near ready for that level of intimacy in the current stage of in our relationship. And now, though I'm back in Amanda's bedroom given our present predicament I know we won't be consummating our relationship today either.

So what the heck am I even doing here. After all I know Amanda's headed here with a trail of agents in her wake who would be only too happy to take me in.

But the thing is, I can't go underground until I've seen her one more time and had the chance to say a proper goodbye. And I absolutely can't leave Amanda without telling her in person that I love her. After everything I've put her through over the last three years, this is the very least she deserves. Not to mention that I can't go back and change the fact that the first time she heard it was when I blurted it out on the phone before immediately hanging up on her. Call it selfish but at least one time I want to see her reaction when she hears it directly from me.

And I want to believe that we'll come out the other side of this mess and still have years together to tell each other how we feel. But I have to be realistic - this might be it, the last time we ever see each other. Despite the risk of letting myself get so close to the agents hunting for me, there is no doubt in my mind. I have to see Amanda in person before I disappear.

Later that afternoon after Amanda and I successfully make it out of her neighbourhood I reassess our situation from our makeshift shelter underneath a highway overpass. As I had anticipated Amanda's face had lit up as I told her for the second time that I loved her.

But in that moment, I realized I had been deluding myself the whole afternoon. Yes, I had wanted Amanda to hear me say it in person. But just as badly, I needed to hear her say it back to me.

And I had to acknowledge to myself that I hadn't gone to her house to say goodbye to her but rather to give her the chance to come with me. I would have reacted the same way if our situations were reversed.

After all, as we both had realized, it wasn't just my tail anymore, but her tail too.