

Title: Pine Top

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Synopsis: Lee and Amanda go away for a long weekend. (Takes place right after the episode "Billy's Lost Weekend")

PINE TOP

"It was nice of Billy to give us this long weekend," Amanda King sighed contentedly, relaxing in the passenger seat of her Wagoneer. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the warmth of the morning sun slanting through the windshield.

Lee Stetson smiled over at her from the driver's seat. "I'm just glad things turned out as well as they did. For a few days there I thought we might lose Billy. Forcible early retirement - it would have been a terrible way for his career to end."

"Well, all's well that end's well. And since I end up with you headed for a long weekend of skiing, I'd say it ends pretty well." Amanda opened her eyes and smiled back at Lee.

They turned off the Beltway and headed north towards Baltimore on I-95.

"I've been to the Poconos on a couple of occasions," Amanda remarked, "but never to Pine Top."

"I have, several times," Lee replied. "You'll love it. It's a spectacular resort - swimming pool, indoor tennis, the main lodge is huge. They even have a four star restaurant. I used to eat there even when I wasn't staying at the resort itself."

"Was that with Jillian?" Amanda asked innocently.

"What?" Lee was startled.

"Jillian has a lodge in the Poconos," she remarked mischievously. "You told me that in Munich - when you had to come and take care of the mess with that counterfeit 20 dollar bill. You had planned to go away for a long weekend with Jillian but I had ruined it all."

"You didn't ruin anything," he objected, and then continued with a twinkle in his eyes, "Although, come to think of it, if I had gone away with her that weekend, maybe I would have ended up with her, not you."

"Why don't you pull over at the next rest stop? I'll give her a call and see if she's still available," Amanda mock pouted.

Lee laughed and reached over to hold her hand.

"It's so wonderful to think we can just be ourselves this weekend," she continued in a much different tone. "Away from the Agency, Washington, even my family. No one from the Agency knows where we are and no one in Pennsylvania knows who we are."

"Speaking of your family, what did you tell your mother?" he asked curiously, grinning.

"I said that IFF had been hired to do a series of promotional videos for the Pennsylvania Tourism Bureau and I was going to scout locations for the section on winter sports."

"Alone?" Lee raised his eyebrows.

Amanda laughed. "That's exactly what she said. You know ever since she met you a few weeks ago she's been full of hints and questions."

"Such as?" he asked with a grin.

"How long exactly have I been working with you? Why haven't I brought you home for dinner sometime? Are you married, seeing anyone?"

"I take it I made a favourable impression on her?"

"To put it mildly," she sighed. "I haven't had her push someone at me so hard since Dean."

"Well, considering that we're already engaged she's actually a little behind," Lee pointed out.

"Lee, we should talk about all that - when are we going to start telling people? You haven't even met Jamie and Philip yet. And what about the Agency? Is this going to affect our jobs?"

"Whoa! You're right, we do need to work all of this out. But not this minute or even this weekend. It's not often we get this much time alone together. Let's just relax and enjoy it."

"I like that idea. After all we have the rest of our lives to be together."

"The rest of our lives?" he repeated, frowning. "I'm not sure that's enough time." He broke into a smile again. "I think I want more."

She smiled back.

Underneath the chassis of the vehicle a small metal box hummed almost imperceptibly. Twenty miles back a small black car sped along following the signal.

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After bypassing Baltimore they headed north towards Pennsylvania. Shortly after crossing the state line they noticed signs for communities with names like Bird-in-Hand and Paradise.

"Why don't we take the scenic route and go through Lancaster County?" Lee suggested. "Now that we have this extra day off we can take our time."

He took the next interchange off the highway. Soon they were driving along country roads past picturesque farms. The fall colours were well past their prime but still it was a welcome change to get out of the city.

"Mother and I drove up here last spring," Amanda remarked. "She wanted a real Amish quilt for her bed. Did you know there's a quilt museum in Intercourse?"

"Where?" he questioned, startled.

She laughed at his expression. "Intercourse. It's a real place. It's an old Amish name."

Seeing the still skeptical look on Lee's face she teased, "Now who has their mind in the gutter?"

As they passed a horse drawn buggy Amanda glanced over at Lee with a smirk on her face. Catching her look out of the corner of his eye, Lee asked "What's so funny now? These people are very serious about their way of life."

"I know," she replied. "It's not that. I was just thinking about the movie Witness - when Harrison Ford went undercover in an Amish community. I was trying to picture what you would look like dressed all in black and with a long beard."

"Oh, you were, were you? Well, you'd look pretty cute in a bonnet, you know. Besides, it would give me a chance to drive a horse, not a car for a change."

"A dream come true for you," Amanda replied. "You forget I'm allergic."

They stopped for lunch in Lancaster at a Pennsylvania Dutch restaurant whose specialty was schnitzel. While they ate, another patron of the restaurant made a quick phone call from the booth in the back. "It looks like he's headed your way. He's with his partner, Amanda King," the man said into the receiver while taking care to keep out of Lee and Amanda's line of vision. He paused, listening to the person on the other end.

"No, I don't think it's work related," he continued a few moments later with a sardonic grin on his face. "Don't forget the two of them aren't just partners at work. Anyway, I've done what you wanted. The rest is up to you. Now when do I get my money?"

Across the restaurant, Amanda and Lee were concluding their meal with a shared dessert. "I've always wondered what exactly is in shoofly pie," Lee remarked.

"I think that's one of those things you're better off not knowing," Amanda said. "Kind of like filler in hamburger."

Once back on the road Amanda asked Lee, "Do you mind if we make one more detour this afternoon? When I told the boys where I was going this weekend they asked if I would stop in Hershey and bring them some chocolate."

"Your wish is my command." Lee smiled over at Amanda.

His smile changed to bemusement when they arrived at the Hershey plant in the city of the same name. "Amanda," he said in shock, "the street lights are shaped like giant Hershey's kisses."

"I know," she laughed, "and just smell the chocolate in the air. You can't get away from it in this town. Isn't it great?"

"Yeah, if you're Francine," he muttered, finding the smell a little overpowering. "I think she should retire here."

"So you don't want to take the factory tour?" she teased. "The boys loved it."

He glared at her sharply.

"Okay, we'll just pick up some chocolate in the factory store," she conceded.

As they got back into the car she said, "You know, you're going to have to get used to stuff like this once you become the boys' stepfather."

"I know," he admitted reluctantly, "but I never did this kind of thing when I was a kid. The closest my uncle came was giving me a tour of each new army base he was stationed at. You're so good with the boys - taking them places, doing things with them. I'm just afraid I'll never be half the parent you are."

"You're nervous about meeting the boys, aren't you?" Amanda reached over covered Lee's hand with her own comfortingly. She knew how difficult it was for him to open up like that.

"Amanda, they're a big part of your life. What if they don't like me? What if they think I'm only interested in them because of you? They don't know I've been watching them grow up for the past three and a half years."

"Lee, don't worry about it," she reassured him. "I'm sure they'll come to accept you. Just don't expect to be their best friend all at once. Take it slow and be yourself. Besides, I thought we weren't going to have this discussion this weekend."

The last part of their journey was through the mountains. They finally reached Pine Top at three in the afternoon.

"Lee, you weren't exaggerating about this place," Amanda said in an awed voice as they got out of the car and walked into the main building. "It's fabulous!"

The atrium soared to a skylighted ceiling three stories above them. The pine trees which gave the resort its name towered overhead, their fragrant greenery in stark contrast to the pristine whiteness of the surrounding slopes. A fire was crackling invitingly in a huge fieldstone fireplace in the bar opening off the lobby.

"It's beautiful," she sighed. "I can't believe you even considered going somewhere else for the weekend."

"And this is only the main lodge," he said slyly. "We're staying in one of the individual cabins. They're much more private," he concluded with a wink.

Once they had checked in they got back in the car and drove to their cabin. They quickly unloaded the car dumping their suitcases in the living room of the cabin.

"We can unpack later," Lee said. "Let's hit the slopes."

"Good idea," Amanda concurred. "I assume they have night skiing but this is my first time out this season. I'd feel more comfortable if there was still some daylight."

"I know what you mean. The last time I skied was in Gstaad last spring." He stopped, noticing her shaking her head at him. "What?"

"Gstaad," she repeated in a disbelieving tone. "Sometimes I think I'm never going to make you into a normal person."

"I hope not. That's the original fate worse than death." Lee joked.

They tried each of Pine Top's seven ski runs, working their way up in difficulty. Since it was still early in the season there were few other skiers around. At one point Lee took Amanda by the hand as they got off at the top of the chair lift. Leaving behind their skis, they walked for a few minutes into the woods, finally stopping at the top of a precipice. A panoramic view of trees, snow and the setting sun spread out before them.

"It's breathtaking," she whispered, not wanting to break the spell, "and so quiet and peaceful. It's like we're the only two people on the planet."

"Don't I wish that were true," he said suggestively, pulling her into his arms and kissing her. "What do you say we build an igloo and stay here."

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"How about one last run before we call it a night?" Lee asked half an hour later, pausing at the top of Devil's Glen, Pine Top's most difficult slope.

"Sure," Amanda replied with a grin. "Race you to the bottom."

Before Lee could respond she had pushed off and was headed down the slope. "Loser buys dinner tonight," she called back over her shoulder.

"No fair," he called. Quickly he raced after her. Within a few minutes he had managed to catch up. "You should be more careful," he warned.

"Afraid you might lose?" she teased.

"Not a chance." He sped off into the distance.

Amanda was so intent on trying to catch up to Lee that she didn't hear another skier approaching from behind. Her first intimation that something was wrong was a voice yelling "Look out!!" from higher up the slope.

As she glanced back a gloved hand caught her full across the face. She caught a half-glimpse of a ski mask as she lost her balance. Powdered snow flew all around

as she crashed into the ground. A sharp pain shot through her ankle and she lost consciousness.

A pair of skiers hurried down the slope and over to where Amanda lay. The woman said, "She looks pretty bad. We shouldn't move her."

"I'll get the ski patrol," the man replied and continued down the run.

Lee was waiting at the bottom of the hill, anxiously scanning the darkening slope for any sign of Amanda when a man came racing towards him. Quickly coming to a stop he skied over to an emergency phone and picked it up. "There's been an accident," Lee overheard him say. "There's a woman unconscious half-way down Devil's Glen."

Lee hurried over to the man. "This woman," he asked apprehensively, "what does she look like?"

"She's got dark hair and she's wearing a blue and white ski outfit."

"Amanda," Lee groaned. "Where is she? Is she alright?"

"I told the ski patrol I'd wait for them. But she shouldn't be hard to find. My wife stayed with her and she's wearing a bright red jacket."

Quickly Lee boarded the chair lift. Earlier in the afternoon it had seemed quick enough, but now the ride to the top seemed to take forever. Lee thought he would scream from impatience by the time he finally got off. Swiftly he began the descent. A few minutes later he stopped next to a woman kneeling beside Amanda's crumpled form.

"Amanda," he gasped out. "What happened?"

"Are you Lee?" the woman asked.

He nodded.

"She was conscious for a few minutes and was asking for you. I'm Robin, by the way. I don't think it's as bad as it looks. She's hit her head and will probably need a few stitches and she said her ankle hurts. My husband Bob went for help."

A few minutes later the ski patrol arrived on skidoos. Carefully they loaded Amanda onto a stretcher and transported her to the ambulance waiting at the base of the hill. Robin and Bob drove Lee to the hospital in Stroudsburg and sat with him while the doctor examined Amanda.

"How did this happen?" Lee asked them anxiously. "Amanda's a pretty good skier. We were racing each other to the bottom but she's not the kind of person to take careless risks."

"It wasn't her fault," Robin told him. "This other skier came flying down the slope and plowed right into her. Then they just took off."

"Did you see what they looked like?"

"No," Bob apologized. "It was getting dark and I'm pretty sure they were wearing a ski mask. We were concerned about Amanda's condition so I didn't go after them."

The doctor came to the door of the waiting room. "Mr. Stetson?" he asked.

Lee stood up. "How is she?" he asked worriedly.

"She's going to be fine," the doctor reassured him. "She wants to see you."

"We'll wait for you," Bob promised.

Lee stood at the door of Amanda's room. She lay back on the pillows with her eyes closed. A bandage covered the cut on her forehead. A lump formed in his throat as he thought of how fragile happiness can be, how easily he could have lost her.

"Amanda," he said quietly and she opened her eyes.

"Lee," she greeted him warmly.

"How are you feeling?" He went over to her side and took her hand in his, squeezing it tightly.

"Okay, just a bit banged up. The doctor said I don't have a concussion and my ankle is just badly sprained. I don't even have to spend the night in the hospital."

"Are you sure?" he questioned dubiously. "Maybe you should stay just to be on the safe side."

"Lee, I don't want to spend my weekend in the hospital," she complained unhappily. "I want to be with you. Now they're already doing up the paperwork. Give me a couple of minutes to get dressed and I'll be ready to go."

"Okay, if you're sure," he agreed reluctantly.

"I'm sure."

Lee went back to the waiting room to tell Bob and Robin the good news.

"We can give you a ride back if you like," Bob offered. "We live at the Pocono Knob condos right by Pine Top."

Half an hour later they dropped Lee and Amanda off at their cabin. Amanda was cautiously making her way down the walkway to the cabin's front door when one of her crutches skidded on an icy patch.

"Careful," Lee cautioned her, catching her by the elbow to keep her from falling. "You've already hurt yourself once today."

"I'm just not used to walking with these things," she complained.

"Then don't walk." He scooped her up in his arms and carried her through the door. "Consider it practice for our wedding night. You know this is a lot more fun when you're conscious. Usually I'm carrying you because you need rescuing."

He gently set her down on the sofa. "Now just stay put and relax. I'll start a fire."

Within the space of a few minutes they were both settled on the couch in front of the fireplace, wine glasses within easy reach and Amanda's foot propped up on an ottoman. Amanda leaned against Lee, his arm curved protectively around her. She took his hand in hers, entwining her fingers through his.

"It's been quite a day," Lee remarked with a yawn.

"I know," Amanda replied. "You would think we could get away for a few days without an accident happening."

"Amanda, someone skied right into you. That doesn't sound very accidental to me," Lee pointed out.

"You're just being paranoid. Of course it was an accident."

"Maybe you're right." He looked down at her tenderly. "You really need to be more careful," he advised softly. "I don't know what I'd do if you were seriously hurt. And I wouldn't want to have had to call your mother and explain."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, each lost in thought.

"You know, you're not allowed to get hurt either," she remarked a while later. "I'm counting on at least fifty years of wedded bliss. Speaking of which, is there anything else you'd like to practice for the wedding night?"

When Lee didn't answer she glanced up at him. He was fast asleep. She sighed, lifted his hand up to her lips and gently kissed his fingers. Then wrapping his arm more tightly around her, she leaned back, closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep as well.

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Amanda slept late Saturday morning, not awakening until the midmorning sun shone through the cabin windows and into her eyes. She sat up bewildered for a moment as to her surroundings. Remembering where she was, she called out, "Lee?" but the cabin remained silent.

Wondering where he could have disappeared to, she cautiously stood up, gingerly trying out her ankle. It was stiff, but not too bad. She'd probably only need to use the crutches outdoors. She hobbled into the bathroom and took a quick shower. The sound of the blow dryer as she dried her hair covered the noise of the front door opening and footsteps crossing the hardwood floor. She jumped as a pair of arms reached for her.

"Lee," she gasped in surprise as he encircled her waist with his arms. "You gave me such a start. I didn't hear you come in."

"Sorry," he said unrepentantly, leaning forward and kissing her neck. "Bad habit, I know."

"Where were you?"

"Picking up our ski equipment from the ski patrol, although I don't think we'll be using it much more this weekend." He looked down at her ankle ruefully. "How's your foot?"

"Not too bad," she answered.

"I also brought breakfast, lunch actually. We missed dinner last night - you must be starved."

"Now that you mention it, I am."

After lunch Amanda asked Lee, "So since we can't ski, what do you want to do this afternoon?"

"We can still get some fresh air. How about a horse drawn sleigh ride? Or is that going to be a problem with your allergy?"

"No, I'll be fine as long as I don't have to actually ride one. A sleigh ride sounds wonderful."

They walked along the trail to the main lodge, Lee slowing his pace to match Amanda's as she cautiously made her way on crutches. "We could have taken the car you know," he pointed out.

"We would have had to stick to the road then. This way we get to enjoy more of nature. Besides, I'm fine," she protested.

"Right. You're fine," he sighed in frustration and glanced around. He frowned as he caught a glimpse of a man in the woods to their left. He appeared to be aiming something at them, something that looked like...

"Amanda, look out!!" Lee flung himself against her, knocking both of them into the snow.

"Lee, what's the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"I thought I saw..." he raised his head and scanned their immediate surroundings apprehensively. "Someone was over there."

Amanda tried to get up, but her efforts were hampered by the tangle of crutches and limbs. "I don't see anyone. I think you're overreacting after yesterday."

He stood up and looked around again, dusting himself off. "Maybe you're right. There's no one around now." He offered her his hand to help her up.

"Not so fast," she said, grabbing his hand and pulling him down beside her again. "Not until I get a chance to do what I couldn't the last time we were in this situation." She leaned in and kissed him. "You seem to feel this need to knock me off my feet every time we're in the woods."

His arms slipped around her. "You know you do that to me every time I see you." They shared a few more kisses. Then he stood up again and helped her to her feet.

As they continued down the trail he said, "I guess I'm just a bit suspicious after what happened yesterday. I'm not so sure it was an accident. We've made a lot of enemies over the last few years."

"Lee, no one even knows we're here."

"Well you can't be too careful. Maybe we shouldn't be outside today," he continued innocently. "I can think of at least one indoor sport that would be fun."

"Oh you can, can you?" Amanda laughed. "Well you had your chance last night, sleepyhead. I want my sleigh ride." She hobbled on down the trail.

Entering the main lodge Lee went over to the front desk to make arrangements. Amanda walked to the huge windows on the far side of the atrium and looked out over the snow-covered vista. It was a beautiful sunshine filled winter day. She frowned as a sudden movement caught her eye. Was it just her imagination or did someone just duck back behind the trees? She shook her head in exasperation. Lee was just making her paranoid too.

The sleigh picked them up at the front door half an hour later. It was an old fashioned four seater cutter, varnished to a high gloss. Lee helped Amanda into the rear seat then got in beside her. He tucked the lap robes carefully around her, then gave the driver a nod and they were off.

The huge Clydesdale horse pulled them effortlessly along, the bells on his harness making a counterpoint to the sound of snow crunching under the runners of the sleigh.

Shortly after leaving the main lodge they passed the gatehouse of Pocono Knob Village. "Those are the condos where Bob and Robin live. You know, the couple who drove us back last night."

"I remember," she replied. "I didn't hit my head that hard!"

"Hard enough." He reached out to brush her hair back and kissed her bandaged forehead.

"But what's a Pocono Knob?" she asked curiously.

"It's actually a scenic lookout not too far from here. On a clear day like today you can see all the way into New York State. If you like we could go there after we get back."

"Sounds good to me," she agreed readily. "You know I enjoy good scenery." She smiled flirtatiously and cuddled up to him.

The driver took a turn into the woods, following one of the cross-country ski trails. At times the dark green of the pine trees met overhead to form a canopy. In other places the bare branches of the trees were sharply outlined against the sapphire blue sky. Here and there a few dead leaves clung stubbornly to their branches. The sun winked in and out of the trees turning the snow banks into myriad crystals.

Amanda snuggled even closer and sighed.

"Happy?" Lee whispered.

"More than I ever thought possible. And you?"

"So much I'm afraid it can't last. You really gave me quite a scare last night. Amanda, things can change so quickly. In one split second, I almost lost you. Life can be so unpredictable."

"But in good ways too," she pointed out. "Three and a half years ago, in one split second we went from being total strangers to..." She laughed. "I don't know what we were that first year."

"How about blind as bats? All I know is I've never argued with anyone so much before in my life."

"Hmm... and we didn't have the fun of making up either." She leaned in for another kiss.

After they were dropped off at the lodge, Lee suggested that Amanda wait while he picked up the car. "You shouldn't be on your feet so much," he insisted.

"Okay, okay," she acquiesced, trying to mollify him. "I'll wait for you in the bar. And while you're there could you please pick up a scarf for me? I didn't realize earlier how cold it was out today."

"Sure."

Returning to their cabin Lee crossed over into the bedroom to grab Amanda's scarf. As he stood up he stiffened at the sound of a gun being cocked directly

behind him. A familiar voice said, "Let's go, Stetson. Hand over your gun first, of course."

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Amanda sat by the fire in the bar lost in thought. As the minutes passed without Lee returning she began to get worried. What if Lee wasn't being paranoid. What if someone really was after them? She checked her watch and realized with a start that he'd been gone half an hour, more than enough time to walk to the cabin and drive back. She got up and went back into the main lobby.

As she scanned around the lobby, hoping to see Lee, Robin came up and greeted her. "Amanda, how are you feeling? That really was a nasty fall you had last night."

"Oh, I'm okay," she tried not to let her see how distracted she was.

"I see we might become neighbours," Robin continued.

"I beg your pardon?"

"On my way over here I saw Lee and one of the sales reps from our condo complex going into the main office. They looked pretty deep in conversation."

Now Amanda was really confused. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know what they were talking about, but Davy sure had Lee's attention."

"Davy?"

"David really. I think his last name is Banting or something like that. He's out here most weekends showing prospective buyers."

"Oh no," Amanda thought, briefly closing her eyes. She had a sudden suspicion of who she had might have caught a glimpse of earlier. "I've got to find Lee," she told Robin. "I'll see you later."

As she hurried out of the hotel, Robin called after her, "Don't worry, Amanda, you'll love it here."

As Amanda had expected their cabin was deserted. Her scarf lay on the bed where Lee had dropped it. She quickly went through Lee's luggage. His gun was gone, so he must have been carrying it earlier. Hopefully he had been able to use it, but that left her without a weapon of any kind. She sighed in annoyance. Lee had been after her to start carrying a gun, but she really hated the idea. Maybe he was right. She just hoped she'd have the chance to tell him.

Not knowing what else to do but aware that precious minutes were ticking past, she got in the car, drove over to the condo complex and parked a short distance from the main office. She cautiously crept around the exterior of the building, hampered by the crutches. The blinds were drawn in the windows of one of the back rooms. She peered upward through the slats and was able to make out the outlines of two men - one standing and the other seated in a chair with his hands bound behind his back.

Amanda returned to the front of the building and quietly picked the front door lock. She opened the door and slipped inside. She abandoned her crutches in the foyer, fearing that they would be more of a hindrance than a help.

Lee's voice came from the back room. "How on earth did you get out of prison so soon? You should have gotten a hell of a lot more than three years for treason."

"Haven't you ever heard of a plea bargain?" Amanda's fears were confirmed as she recognized David Benson's voice. "I supplied enough information to get two minor Russian operatives deported."

"Aren't you concerned the Russians might come after you now that you are out?"

"Not at all," David replied smugly. "They had planned to send them home anyway. In return for their help in getting me out of prison I promised to deliver a major player to them. You, of course. You weren't that difficult to find. I had a friend of mine monitor your car and call me when you were headed up this way."

Lee tried to keep David busy talking so he wouldn't notice him surreptitiously working on untying his hands. "What made you think I'd come up here?"

"You come up here every winter for a few weekends. At first I expected you to be visiting your friend Jillian. Instead I soon found out you were dating Amanda King and with luck I'd get the extra bonus of another agent on the side. That's when I decided to monitor your partner's car as well."

"She's got nothing to do with this." Lee's heart leapt into his throat. If David went after Amanda...

"Still singing that old tune? Stetson, she's a full operative now, or at least in training. I'm sure the Russians will be interested. I have to admit though that I was surprised to find she'd made it this far. You certainly weren't expecting this either when I was back at the Agency." He laughed unpleasantly.

Lee tried to concentrate on undoing the knots. He didn't like to think back to when David had first met Amanda. He had just about thrown Amanda at David, unable to admit to her that he felt even a twinge of jealousy at their dating. In reality the thought of her with David had made him furious.

"At first I thought this little weekend jaunt was an assignment. But the two of you just wanted to be alone - how sweet. A housewife," David continued derisively, "lose a bet, Stetson, or just decide to go slumming? She's not exactly your usual type. I remember three years ago you couldn't even stand to work with her. What was that you said to Francine once - the one thing about Amanda King that really got to you was her total lack of everything."

From her vantage point in the other room, Amanda's eyes watered. She had known of course that Lee hadn't been enthusiastic about having to work with her at first. But to hear this! Apparently he had voiced his objections to everyone in the Agency. Francine must have been highly amused at Lee's total lack of regard for her - she hadn't liked Amanda from the start.

"It doesn't matter," Amanda told herself fiercely. "Be a professional and get the job done. You can worry about hurt feelings later."

"I seem to remember you and Amanda went out on a date once." Lee pointed out while starting to work on the last knot.

"That was only to keep an eye on your investigation for Blue Leader. You really think I was interested in her?" David laughed again and glanced down at his watch. "Enough reminiscing about the good old days. I'll call my associates and let them know I've got you ready to be picked up. Once they're here I can get Amanda."

Amanda realized she'd have to do something and quickly. She glanced around but couldn't find anything to use as a weapon.

She went back into the front foyer and retrieved her crutches. Looking at the phone on the receptionist's desk she saw that there were five extensions connecting to the various offices in the building. She picked the receiver off the desk and placed it on the floor. "I just hope this works," she muttered to herself as she quickly pushed the buttons for all five extensions.

Immediately the sound of phones ringing began echoing throughout the building.

"What the hell?" she heard David say. As she had hoped he came running out of the office and down the hall. As his footsteps approached her she stretched the phone cord tightly across the hallway at ankle height. In the semidarkness David tripped on it and fell headlong, dropping his gun mid-flight. As he started to get up she brought one of her crutches down on his head. He fell back again and was still. She leaned over and picked up his weapon.

Lee came racing out of the back room, rope trailing from his hands. He relaxed as he saw Amanda standing there holding the gun over David.

"I heard you might need rescuing," she teased, grinning.

"You heard right," he admitted gratefully, picking up the phone and pushing a few buttons to stop the ringing. "Listen, I'm going to call someone from our New York office to pick David up - it's a lot closer than DC. I can have the local police hold him until they get here. Why don't you go back to the cabin though? David never actually saw you and I'd like to keep your name out of this in case word gets back home."

"Okay," she agreed, slightly subdued. She handed Lee the gun and turned to go.

He called after her, "Amanda, I'll have to go with the police to give a statement and wait for the agents to drive in from New York. If David cooperates and gives us the names of his associates, we'll try to pick them up as well. It might take a while so you'd better get some dinner. If I'm really late, don't wait up."

Amanda stopped at the main lodge and had a solitary dinner. Then she drove back to the cabin. Despite Lee's admonition she was determined to be awake when he returned. She built a fire, wrapped herself in an afghan and sat on the sofa.

Only then did she let herself think back to the conversation she had overheard between David and Lee. She felt like such a fool. A few tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. She swiped at them with a tissue, reminding herself that it wasn't fair to hold Lee accountable for things he had said three years earlier. After all, she hadn't been totally impressed with him right away either - he had been rude and insensitive and she had mentally written him off on more than one occasion. She sighed and stretched out on the sofa, closing her eyes.

Lee found her there fast asleep when he finally returned at two in the morning. He stood watching her for a few minutes. While giving his statement to the other agents he had realized she must have been in the building when David was taunting him about their relationship. He sighed as he observed her tearstained face and the crumpled tissues she still clutched tightly in her hand. David Benson hadn't succeeded in handing him over to the Russians but he still could have hurt him immeasurably.

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The next morning Lee and Amanda had brunch at the main lodge. All through the meal, Lee found her uncharacteristically quiet. He didn't want to pressure her though and figured she'd bring the topic up if she wanted to talk about it.

They returned to the cabin and packed for the return trip to DC. After taking the last load to the car, Lee asked Amanda, "Ready to go?"

She nodded and turned to head out the door. Lee couldn't take the silence anymore. He reached out and touched her shoulder. "Amanda, we've got to talk about this. How much of what David said did you hear?" he began uncomfortably.

"All of it," she admitted.

Lee sighed. "It was a long time ago. Yes, I said those things. But everything's different now. You know that."

"I know," she admitted honestly, "but it hit me where I'm most vulnerable. I know you love me, and we're engaged now, but..." She trailed off, not knowing how to phrase what she wanted to say.

"But what?" he encouraged her, yet half-afraid to hear the answer.

"Sometimes I still worry that you'll get tired of me." Her voice was barely above a whisper. "David was right. I'm not like your other girlfriends. Sometimes I think you'll wake up some morning and realize I'm just a housewife and start looking for someone else."

"I know, I worry about the same thing," he remarked unthinkingly before he realized how it would sound.

"Oh," she said in a small voice, turning away to keep him from seeing the tears that threatened to overflow.

"No, Amanda, that's not what I meant," he clarified hastily, taking her by the shoulders and turning her so she faced him. "Not me, you. I worry that someday you'll realize that you're involved with someone who can't give you any security or stability."

He sighed and continued, "Do you remember when your ex-husband came back from Africa? I kept pressuring you to tell me why your marriage didn't work out. You asked me why it was so important to me."

Amanda nodded.

"I was hoping you'd say it ended because Joe was too boring and predictable; that you felt something was missing from your life. Instead you told me you broke up because he was never there - that he put his job before his family and what you really wanted was just to be a housewife with a stable, normal life."

He let go of her and looked away. "Amanda, I can't give you that either. At least Joe was a lawyer; you always knew he was going to come home at the end of the day. I can't even offer you that much security. I've just added danger and confusion to your life. I would hate for you someday to look back at me as the man who destroyed your life."

"You never told me this before," Amanda said quietly, moving so she could look him in the eyes.

"I was afraid you would choose Joe over me." He had never shared so much of his inner feelings with anyone before. Only Amanda could get him to open up like this.

"I suspected as much." She smiled.

"You did?" he asked, surprised.

"I saw you spying on Joe and me that night in Dooley's."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I wanted to wait and see what you would do. Years ago when Eva told you about Angelo, you just let her walk out of your life, figuring she had made her choice. Lee, you have a right to ask for what you want. I waited to see if this time you wanted it badly enough to say something. At first I thought maybe you would just bow out again."

Lee objected, "It may have taken me awhile to say it, but there was no way I was going to let you go. I never felt about Eva the way I feel about you. I've never felt this way about anyone."

"Me neither." She reached up to caress his cheek. "Lee, you could never destroy my life. You ARE my life. All those things you said about my marriage were true. At least I thought so at the time. But you know, to some extent they were just

excuses. If I had loved Joe, really loved him, none of that would have mattered. I would have followed him across the country, to Africa, anywhere just to be with him. But I didn't. I could live my life without Joe just fine. But when I think about being without you... I can't even imagine what my life would be like."

He put his arms around her and held her tightly. "Amanda, I can't change the past, but I promise I'm not going any where. I finally figured out where I belong and it's with you. Now let's get back to DC so we can start working on the future together." They walked out to the car hand in hand.

As they got into the car and drove away, Amanda laughed and asked Lee, "So do you feel relaxed after our get-away weekend? It wasn't quite the peaceful three days we planned."

"To say the least."

"What are you going to say to Billy if the New York office calls him about all of this?"

"I'll tell him I went up here myself for a few days," he said with a grin. "And other than capturing David Benson it was a uneventful weekend. There really weren't a lot of people around and the skiing was lousy."

The End