

Psyche



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Rating: TV-M (DLSV)

Summary: Amanda and Lee deal with the repercussions of the events in “Mission of Gold.”

Timeline: Season 4

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Notes: I really struggled with the title before settling on Psyche, so I want to explain the meaning behind it. In Greek, psyche means both soul and butterfly, which is one of the metaphors I was attempting to associate with Amanda. In addition, Psyche was the bride of Cupid, I’ll let that one pass without any additional comment <eg>.

Kudos my beta quartet who in addition to threatening grievous bodily harm if I didn’t finish this, also helped me stretch the limits of my writing ability to make this story what it is now.

Disclaimer: Scarecrow and Mrs. King belongs to Shoot the Moon and Warner Brothers. Just to clear up any potential confusion, this story is a product of my own twisted little mind, and I received no money in like or in kind from the creation of it.

Feedback: Is welcome, encouraged, and appreciated. This is the first time I’ve ever written anything like “this,” so I’m more than willing to hear what others have to say about it in order to improve – thanks <g>

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With only half a mind on the task at hand, Lee smoothed the throw on the back of his couch. Amanda was coming back. He surveyed the room in nervous apprehension — taking in the flow, the décor, the lighting - wondering if it was too late to rearrange. Amanda was coming back.

He reached for the phone, then quickly placed the receiver back in its cradle. It was too early to call. Time with her mother and sons was going to come first. He would have to wait. It was nothing new; he'd grown used to sharing her.

He made his way to the bedroom, and opened the sock drawer in his bureau. Taking out a velvet jeweler's box, he opened it to place a thin gold band on his left ring finger. Amanda was coming back.

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She watched from the tiny airplane window as the Washington Monument grew clearer and the Potomac River came ever closer. She tried to tell herself that the apprehension she was feeling was tied to the flight, to landing, to the fact that the runway at National Airport was so close to the river that touching down always made her mentally review the “in the event of a water landing” instructions the stewardess gave. Amanda was never a good liar, however, and self-deception came no easier than any other form. Being honest with herself, she had to admit that the landing was only part of it, there was more.

Dotty, her maternal radar in high gear since Amanda's accident, immediately picked up on her daughter's discomfort and gently squeezed her hand. “You're doing just fine.”

Fine. She was fine. Lee was fine. They were going to be ‘just fine.’

“Thanks, Mother.” Amanda returned the squeeze, and then directed her attention back out the window as the plane skidded to a stop. Everything

looked almost exactly as she'd left it a month ago. The grass was a little greener, the sun a little brighter, but little else had changed. As the door opened, and the passengers filled the aisle, Amanda stood with her mother -- ducking to keep from hitting her head on the overhead compartments. It was time to come home, a home that was in many ways completely different and in every way the same.

“Amanda! Dotty!” Joe met the women at the gate. Seeing his ex-wife, he rushed toward her, and then stopped awkwardly, as though afraid she would shatter in his arms.

“Hi, sweetheart.” Amanda bridged the gap, and gently embraced him.

“It's good to see you.” He offered her a friendly smile.

“Thank you.” Amanda returned the smile. “It's good to be back.”

“Well,” he offered, clearing his throat, as she stepped out of his embrace.

“Let's get your luggage and get you home. The boys will be so happy to see you.” He wrapped an arm around Dotty's shoulders and led the two women downstairs to the baggage claim.

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Lee glanced at the clock again. Although aware that his repeated checking would do nothing to speed the hands' rotation, he found comfort in the ritual. Amanda was coming back.

In the kitchen, he measured coffee and had to stop -- emptying the filter, and re-scooping -- when he realized he'd lost track of what he was doing. Only after the machine had been plugged in and the coffee began percolating, did he allow himself the luxury of checking the clock again. Amanda was coming back.

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Dotty insisted on serving an elaborate dinner, and though it was late and she was not hungry, Amanda forced herself eat all of it. “Jamie,” she tried to catch her son’s eyes, which had been steadfastly directed at his plate through the meal. “How did your science project do?”

“Fine,” he mumbled, and picked up another forkful of mashed potatoes.

“He took first place,” Phillip volunteered. “He’s going to the county-wide fair in April.”

“Sweetheart that’s wonderful.” Amanda beamed at her younger son, maternal pride clearly reflected in her eyes.

“Thanks.” He stabbed at a green bean.

“Well!” Dotty stood clapping her hands together noiselessly. “Why don’t I get the cheesecake?” She quickly cleared the dinner plates and returned with a cherry laden confection.

“Mother, that looks DELICIOUS,” Amanda gushed over the dessert.

“Doesn’t it, Sweetheart?” she asked Jamie as Dotty swiftly served up slices.

“Sure,” he responded noncommittally.

“Yeah, Grandma, it looks GREAT!” Phillips enthusiasm seemed magnified by his brother’s recalcitrance, and he ate his serving in three bites.

After the others finished their desserts, Dotty turned to her grandsons. “Why don’t you two go get ready for bed?”

Amanda rose, and hugged each boy in turn. “I missed you both SO much. I love you to pieces.”

As they ascended the stairs, Amanda turned to her mother; “He’s still angry.

He was so distant on the phone, but I'd hoped when I got back things would . . ." Her face was marred with pain.

"He's scared," Dotty responded. "He almost lost his mother, and he's still trying to figure out how to handle it. It's just going to take some time. But now," she took Amanda's hand between her own in a gesture of maternal tenderness. "I think there's someone else wanting to welcome you back, hmm?" Amanda blushed, but quietly acknowledged the truth in her mother's words. "Well go on then, darling." Dotty kissed her on the cheek, "and tell Lee hello for me."

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Life. Death. Rebirth. When he closed his eyes, he could still see it - the splintered glass, the crimson stain mocking him from the navy and white of her sweater. Red, mixing with white and blue in some sort of cruel patriotic joke.

After all he'd done to protect her in the field, she was shot on their honeymoon. Amanda, HIS Amanda, the epitome of strength and vitality, prone in the passenger's seat of the rental car with her life's blood flowing out of her.

He blinked, and he saw her again, ashen in a hospital gown. Her pulse a flat-line on the monitor as hospital personnel held him back. She was his wife, his love, his life, and there was nothing he could do.

She had awakened so much in him. It was through Amanda that he learned what it meant to truly live, and it was for Amanda that he had discovered his capacity to take life.

He'd killed for his government. He'd killed in self-defense, but it wasn't until he stood over Scott, until Barney had to pull him back, that Lee realized he was capable of killing for other reasons. That knowledge scared him, and he tried to push it away. Returning to the present, he glanced again at the clock. Amanda was coming back.

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She maneuvered her Wagoneer through the D.C. traffic, and parked against a curb a few blocks from Lee's apartment. With the hand brake set, she let the engine idle, as she reached with trembling hands for the instrument panel to turn the air conditioner as high as it would go.

She sat with ice cold air pouring over her, and engaged in an inner dialogue.

Willing her nerves to calm, her heart to slow, was fruitless. The anxiety would not subside. Much as she wanted to assure herself that nothing had changed, things were different now. She was different. He was different. They were different. Amanda inhaled, holding the breath longer than usual, and then let it out in a slow, steady stream. Then, putting the Jeep into gear, she eased back into the late evening traffic and parked in front of Lee's apartment.

She was okay. He was okay. They were going to be okay.

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When he had arrived at the hospital, he did not know whether she was alive or dead. They, the scores of doctors, nurses, and medical personnel wandering the corridors like ants in white lab coats, would not tell him. He had pushed through the hallways like a man in the desert does when he spots an oasis, thirsty, not for water, but for knowledge.

At her room, Dotty had informed him that she was alive, that she was going to be okay, and he drank of this information greedily. Entering her room, seeing her in the bed offering weak jokes, he saw in her the indomitable spirit that he'd come to love. He had sat at her side until she was sleeping, then quietly slipped from the room.

Leaving her in California was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do. Two weeks after their arrival, the Agency had recalled him. Billy had been apologetic, but Lee was, after all a senior agent, and though Amanda was his partner, he could not remain there indefinitely. He had to return to D.C.

He'd spent the last night in a chair by her bedside. If he could have, he would have crawled over the iron bars framing the narrow bed, and lain there with her. Instead of holding all of her, he had to settle for holding her hand.

He was gone the next morning before Dotty arrived. Few words were exchanged, neither Lee nor Amanda wished to prolong the bittersweet farewell. In the end, she'd lain a hand on his cheek and promised to return soon. He turned to kiss her palm, sealing the agreement. And now, two weeks later, Amanda was coming back.

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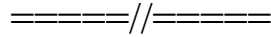
All that separated them was a door - a wooden barrier seven feet tall, three feet wide, and two and a half inches thick. She held the key in her hand. She could, if she so chose, open the door herself. Yet, somehow, it seemed presumptuous. Married little more than a month, she had only spent two nights with him. Was now the time to walk in and announce, "Hi honey! I'm home!"?

So, with steadier hand than heart, she rang the doorbell.

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The phone calls offered little to either of them -- stolen moments in time, between doctors' and nurses' visits, and when Dotty was otherwise occupied. They counted the minutes until her return, neither of them ever able to say everything that they wanted to. After three weeks, she moved to a convalescent home -- well enough to be out of the hospital, but still to weak to travel. Now, finally, Amanda was coming back.

He'd copied her flight information, wishing he could meet her at the airport -- wishing he weren't caught in the connubial limbo imposed by their mystery marriage. Knowing that Amanda's primary responsibility was to her sons, he would have to wait. Now, though, at the sound of the doorbell, the regrets and frustration were rendered moot. Amanda was back.



“Lee!” In his thirty-five years, he could not recall a more joyous vision or beautiful sound than her greeting on his doorstep. Amanda was back.

“Oh, Amanda!” He swept her into his arms, holding on to her as though she might slip away. Hungrily, he brought his mouth down to hers, and she responded with equal passion. Fear and awkwardness melted away and Amanda found comfort in the renewed knowledge that her place was wherever Lee Stetson was. She belonged with him. He belonged with her. They belonged together.

It was Lee who finally broke the contact. “I made some coffee. Maybe we can . . . talk,” he suggested, though he knew talking was the last thing on either of their minds.

“That would be . . . nice.” She sat on the couch as he made his way to the kitchen. For the first time, she noticed the deep aroma of the Kenyan blend drifting in from the kitchen. He emerged to find she had kicked off her shoes and tucked her feet underneath her. He handed her a mug, and setting his own on the table in front of him, sat next to her.

She sipped the deep nutty liquid, and reveled in the warmth spreading through her from the inside out. She turned to face her husband and discovered that he was not drinking his coffee, but rather, watching her with an intensity that warmed her more quickly and more completely than the coffee had. She set her mug on the table next to his.

The kiss this time was tender, reverent. He moved his attention away from her mouth to pay homage to her jaw line, her neck, and the delicate flesh of her earlobe. She responded eagerly, her fingers exploring the play of his muscles beneath his turtleneck. Eager yet tender, he continued his journey. Hands leading mouth, he slowly began to unbutton her blouse, easing the silky material off her shoulders. Trailing soft kisses from her collarbone to the hollow of her neck, he realized she had frozen.

“Amanda?” He pulled away. Her face was drawn in apprehension, and all too quickly, the source of her anxiety became clear. It. The scar. An angry pink line running down her breastbone next to it, yet hidden by the fabric of her camisole, he knew he would find the puckered reminder of where the bullet had ripped through her flesh to lodge in her chest cavity.

“Oh, Amanda.” His throat swelled in response to the many emotions that threatened to take him hostage. Anger, guilt, fear, respect, love, devotion. Slowly, he reached out to trace it stopping where it slipped beneath the neckline of her camisole, and she watched him, with no power to move. It was only when he stopped that she let out the breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding.

“The doctor said it would fade,” she whispered, looking to him for approval. “Cocoa butter, and vitamin E . . .”

“It doesn’t bother me.” He slid a hand under her camisole, lightly tracing the underside of her left breast. He was looking, however, not at her, but at a point over her shoulder.

“Lee . . .” She pulled away from him. “It bothers you.”

He stood and turned his back to her, unable to confront the pain etched in her face. When he spoke, each word was measured. “Yes, it bothers me. So help me, Amanda, it bothers the Hell out of me, but not in the way you think.”

He continued. “When I see it . . . the scar . . .” He started pacing, still not looking at her. “Amanda, I almost lost you! You . . . almost died, and there was nothing I could do about it. That . . .” He finally turned to face her. She was flushed with emotion and the scar had taken on an angrier redder hue. He pointed to it, tracing its shape in the air. “When I see it – it reminds me.”

His words were thick, forced out through a crack in the emotional wall he had spent years developing, and she had bit by bit been able to penetrate. He stood on the opposite end of the room and turned to train his eyes on her. “What I feel for you . . . it’s so powerful . . .” He paused, standing in front of

her, willing this moment in time to be over. He found himself wishing with all his might that the events that had led up to the moment could be erased, and they would be as they had been, newlyweds with no greater concern than the celebration of their union.

He struggled with his words, knowing they would be unable to bridge either the physical or emotional distance that separated them unless he was able to make her understand what he was trying to tell her. He took a step closer. “Amanda, I’m scared.” The dam had been broken. The force of his admission cleared the way for a verbal tidal wave.

Words tumbled and cascaded over each other riding a flood of emotion. Whirling and eddying, they lost none of their force as they hit her. “I’m scared,” he repeated, “scared of losing you, scared of these things I feel, things so powerful that I don’t even know who I am sometimes. I feel. . .”

The floodgates were now open, and there was no turning back. She brought her knees up and was hugging them to her chest, cocooning herself against the verbal deluge. It was as though they had switched places – Lee was the emotional one, Amanda reserved. There were more scars than the physical, the bullet had also scarred her psyche, bringing her close to death, and leaving her afraid of life.

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After the doctor had removed her stitches, she’d stood in front of the mirror in the tiny bathroom adjacent to her hospital room naked from the waist up. She forced herself to stare at her scar until she was numbed to its effects. The bullet had entered just below her heart on the left side of her chest. She’d been told by many people -- the surgeons who operated on her, the team of trauma doctors who had saved her life, the counselor they’d sent to talk to her, the nurses who changed her bandages -- how lucky she was. Yet, she did not feel lucky. Lucky would have been not getting shot at all.

In the fraction of a second it had taken the bullet to travel from the gun to her chest, her world had been as shattered as the windshield of the rental sedan.

Her honeymoon was cut short before it had begun, her husband called away. They had chosen California carefully. It would provide them the anonymity to be allowed to live publicly as a married couple, and the week away would give them the time to get to know one another as man and wife should. Instead, they'd had just two nights, two all too short nights.

Things were different now – different than before they were married, and different still from the two nights they'd been able to share. She'd studied the scar in the mirror, clinically trying to predict Lee's reaction. Though deep within, she knew that just as nothing could change her feelings for Lee, nothing could change his feelings for her, she couldn't help but wonder whether, when he saw her again, he wouldn't find the scar ugly, and by extension, find her undesirable.

Amanda was not vain, but she knew she was attractive. She could not help feeling however, that in comparison to some of the women in her husband's past she was somehow 'lacking.' Before her eyes, the scar had seemed to grow more prominent, as if feeding on her doubts and fears. She'd reached for the bottle of vitamin E oil, and begun to massage it lightly into her tender new skin. She was okay. He was okay. They were going to be okay.

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“Amanda,” he took a step closer. “I love you.” Those words, traded so freely in their early joy in having found one another, seemed now to be taken for granted and used all too rarely. It had been so long since he'd said them, and their elegant simplicity cut through her shell with the precision of a finely tuned laser.

“Nothing,” he stressed the word, “will ever change that. If anything,” he took another step closer, “it makes you more dear to me.”

She stood then. With the same grace as a butterfly unfurling its wings for the first time, Amanda emerged from her own cocoon. Her long legs bridged the gap between them in two strides. Wordlessly she looked up at him, her expression one of quiet passion. Taking his hand, she pressed it to her chest

covering the scar. She was okay. He was okay. They were going to be okay.

Her heart was beating an allegro rhythm that matched the quick tempo of his own. “Oh, Lee.” It was a whisper, and but for the feel of her voice under his fingers, he would have thought he had imagined it. “I don’t want to lose you either.” There was more there, many things left unsaid, but for now, those could wait. Now, all they needed was one another; they existed only in the moment.

Without another word, he let his hand slip from Amanda’s breastbone to encircle her waist, and draw her closer. With a deliberation born of weeks of quiet desperation, he kissed her tenderly on the forehead before moving to each eyelid, the tip of her nose, and finally her mouth.

Amanda’s mouth opened inviting his tongue to engage in a passionate dance with hers. Her hands moved down to cup his buttocks, and he moaned into her mouth at the sensations she was awakening in him.

As the kiss ended, Amanda sighed and looked up at his face, leaving her hands wrapped loosely around his waist. “What are you thinking?” He smiled down at her affectionately.

“How lucky I am to be married to such a wonderful man.” She punctuated her thought with a light kiss.

“Married . . .” Lee echoed, letting his gaze wander over his wife, taking in all of her. The softness of her skin, the softness of her curves, the softness of her eyes – Amanda was everything necessary to complete him. He was as lucky to be married to her as she was to be married to him.

“Married,” she repeated, letting herself melt against his solid chest. The word had come to mean a lot more to her over the years. When she’d been wed to Joe, she entered into the union with a lot of dreams – visions of white picket fences, babies, and a husband home for dinner at six. Reality had set in all too soon. She had the white picket fences and the babies, but the husband

was not home for dinner at six.

Her marriage with Lee started with even more obstacles, but it also had a lot more in its favor. They were partners. Beyond the physical, she connected with Lee on an emotional level. He was there for her in ways that Joe had never been.

He bent his head to plant a light kiss on the top of her head. “So,” he whispered nuzzling into her hair, “what do normal married people do?”

“Well . . .” Amanda looked up at his hazel eyes, enjoying the turn the conversation was taking. “Usually they discuss their days and then fall asleep watching the late show.” She stood on her tiptoes to kiss the edge of his jaw.

“It’s a good thing we’re not normal then,” he answered, before leaning down to claim her mouth.

“Yes,” she sighed in response; “it’s a very good thing.” She answered his kiss with one of her own. He tightened his arms around her, but it wasn’t enough. She wanted more, needed more. “Shirt . . . off . . .” she gasped, stepping away, to tug at his bottom of his turtleneck.

With the offending garment shed, he drew her back into his arms, reveling at the feeling of her satin camisole against his bare skin. Soon, he too wanted more, and lifted the thin undergarment away, revealing her to him.

“Have I told you lately how beautiful you are?” he asked, his voice husky as he took her in appreciatively. He tenderly traced the curve of her waist, gazing at her in admiration. “I could never grow tired of just looking at you.”

“If this is your way of trying to get me into your bed, Scarecrow, it’s working.” She leaned in for another kiss, her nipples stiffening into hard rosy peaks as they came into contact with his bare chest.

As their kiss deepened, she felt the swelling warmth of his arousal against her hip. Moving her hands lower, she reached for the button on his jeans.

“Amanda . . .wait” his words were grunts.

She looked up at him, her eyes wide in confusion, her pupils dilated in desire.
“Lee?”

“I don’t want the first time we make love in here to be on the floor.”
Effortlessly, he scooped her into his arms, and she gasped in surprise, before wrapping her arms around his neck.

“I like the way you think,” she smiled up at him, as he carried her to the bedroom.

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“Now, where were we?” Amanda asked, smiling crookedly at Lee from the comfort of his bed.

“Right about here,” he answered, leaning in to kiss her.

“Mmm, that’s good,” she sighed. “But I think you’re wearing too much.”
Amanda moved to kneel over him, reaching for the button on his jeans.

“You’ve got a one track mind,” he said in mock accusation, as he moved closer to playfully kiss the tip of her nose.

“I don’t hear you complaining,” she answered, as she carefully worked his zipper down and slid the denim from his hips, leaving him clad only in his boxers.

Lee marveled at her. She seemed to know where to touch him, how to caress him almost as if by instinct. There was no question that they belonged together; Amanda was as necessary to him as breathing. “Lay down.” He placed his hands on her upper arms to guide her back against the bed.

With their positions reversed, Lee wasted no time in helping Amanda wriggle out of her slacks, leaving her clad only in a pair of cream-colored tap-pants.

Reaching toward her, he drew his hand along the length of her thigh, sending a small shiver of anticipation down her spine as her muscles quaked under his fingers.

While he continued exploring the contours of her body, Amanda began to trail light nibbling kisses along his collarbone, slipping her tongue out periodically to sample the salty warmth of his skin. “Oh, Lord I’ve missed you,” he sighed as she started working her way toward the hollow of his throat. She silenced him with a tender kiss, drawing his lower lip gently between her teeth.

Lee slipped his hand into the wide leg of her tap-pants caressing the soft skin of her inner thigh before bringing his fingers slowly higher to explore her depths. Her muscles tightened in response to his attention. As she bucked her hips toward him, he slid the silky underwear down her legs.

Working the fabric over her feet, he realized that he’d never really paid attention to that part of her anatomy before. So much of Amanda was uncharted territory; he could hardly wait to commit all of her to memory. “You’ve got some amazing feet,” he whispered, lifting her leg to kiss her arch.

“Oh, really?” She grinned as he let go. Pointing her toes, she began to run her foot along the inside of his calf.

“Yes, very amazing feet.” He sucked his breath in as her foot began to inch higher.

Enjoying his reaction she moved her hands to stroke him skillfully through the cloth of his boxers. Lee’s arousal was growing even more unmistakable, and she was becoming excited at her own power over him. Though she was hardly a blushing bride, she still approached physical intimacy with a sense of wonder and enthusiasm, and this was compounded by his response to her attentions. With careful deliberation, she pushed him back into the mattress, and worked his boxers away. When he was freed, she slowly drew her fingertips along the length of his shaft. He trembled in anticipation.

“Amanda,” her name, when he spoke it, became a prayer – one of both praise and supplication, and one which Amanda had no problem in answering. Moving to straddle his hips, she fit the length of him inside her.

Together they moved, a frenzied, passionate dance born of need, desire, and love. Amanda rocked her hips in counterpoint to Lee’s, her hands clutching his broad shoulders, as her mouth moved along his square jaw seemingly of its own volition. As their tempo increased, Lee clung to her more tightly, moving his lower body against hers and bringing her ever closer to the edge.

In that moment, all that existed for Amanda was Lee. She felt herself tumble over the precipice as her inner core contracted around him, drawing him ever inward. Moments later, he joined her release before sinking into the mattress, sated. Amanda was back. She was okay. He was okay. They were going to be okay.

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Drowsily, Lee brushed the hair from Amanda’s eyes. “You okay?” He realized for the first time that there was still an edge to her, a tiredness that hadn’t been there before their honeymoon. He again felt a surge of emotion; she had had to endure too much.

“I’m better than okay,” she offered him a lazy smile and leaned over to kiss him warmly. “I’m with you.”

“Amanda,” his tone was serious as he broke of the kiss, and she looked at him expectantly. “I need you to know . . . I’m sorry.”

“For what?” She raised an eyebrow in confusion, but he remained silent. “For this?” she questioned, pointing to her scar, as realization began to dawn.

“Oh, Lee!” Of all her concerns, the fact that he might feel in some way responsible had never crossed her mind. “You had NOTHING to do with this. It was a freak accident.” She propped herself up with an elbow as she

was speaking, to better participate in the conversation.

“I can’t help thinking about the next time.” His voice was little more than a whisper. “Amanda . . .” he was reluctant to say what was coming next. He felt again like the five-year-old he once was, learning that he was an orphan; the green agent he had been, his partner and lover dying in his arms. He’d lost so much already, and Amanda was more precious to him than he could express. He could not survive another loss. He struggled with his words, knowing she wouldn’t like to hear them, but having to say them nevertheless. “Have you thought about coming in from the field?”

“Take a desk job?” she whispered in incredulity. He nodded. “Lee, I’ve worked hard to get where I am. I’m *proud* of what I do.”

“It’s different now, Amanda. I need to know that you’re going to be there.” He spoke with conviction; this was obviously not the first time he had considered this.

Her eyes blazed, and he was surprised by what came out of her mouth next. “You think you’re the only one that stays up nights worrying?!! You selfish son-of-a-bitch! How DARE YOU?” In her anger, she’d crawled out of their bed to stand over him, a sheet drawn to her chest.

She breathed in and out slowly, calming herself enough to speak, each word slowly and carefully considered. “Every time you go out in the field to face someone, I can’t think straight until you come back. You’ve been pumped full of more lead than a pencil factory, and I can’t stand thinking that the next time might be your last. I have nightmares about receiving a call from Billy one night, telling me that you’re dead . . .” Her voice broke, and she stopped.

Leaning against his bedroom wall, she drew more deep shuddering breaths, determined that he would not see her cry. Finally, she whispered, “You’re not the only one with someone you love in the field. We’re in this together, Stetson.” ‘Just like we’ve always been,’ the phrase echoed unsaid through her mind. He looked wounded, and part of her felt sorry, not for the words,

but for the pain they caused.

“Amanda . . . I had no idea.” His looked at her with sincerity.

“I know,” her voice was still thick with unshed tears.

“I don’t know what to say.” He was at a loss, pain and confusion clear on his chiseled features. “What do you want from me? Do you want me out of the field?”

“No.” She slumped further against the wall in frustration and defeat. “I couldn’t ask that of you; it’s too much a part of who you are, who we *both* are.”

“What then?” He was more confused than ever.

“I don’t know . . .” and she didn’t. Her face implored him to help her reach a solution.

“Come here.” He patted the place on the bed she had recently abandoned. It wasn’t a request. She looked at him equally confused, curious, and concerned, but she slowly crawled back in with him.

“How much do you remember?” he asked after she had settled in next to him.

“I don’t remember a thing, Lee. You know that.” She only knew what had told her – a confusing tale of sunken treasure that wasn’t, a gold heist, and treasure hunter that had gotten too close to the truth at about the same time she and Lee had gotten in the way.

“You’re lucky.” He looked at her, pain etched in his face. “I can’t get it out of my mind.” He reached out to trace the scar again, and she tensed involuntarily.

“Lee.” She placed a hand over his, stopping him. “What aren’t you telling

me? What can't you get out of your mind?"

"You. Lying there. In the car. Shot." He ran a hand roughly through his hair before continuing. "And later. At the hospital. When you flat-lined." His voice was an expressionless monotone -- the mere memory of the moment so painful that he created a psychic distance in the narrative. "It was like it was happening again, everything I love being taken away from me and nothing I could do about it."

His words stung her like a slap. He had not intended to hurt her, but any pain he experienced became hers as well. "I'm here," her voice was melodic in timbre, as she reached out and gently caressed his cheek. "I haven't gone anywhere, and I don't plan to for a long time."

"I'm still scared." He admitted reluctantly.

"So am I." She responded.

"This is all new to me," his voice faltered as he twisted the wedding ring on his finger.

"It's new to both of us. We're just going to have to work it through it together."

Her hand was still resting against his cheek and he turned his head to bring her palm lovingly to his mouth. "That sounds nice."

"Mmm," she leaned into him, resting her head against his chest.

"Amanda?" he asked, his voice sending a tingle against her cheek. "Stay the night."

She didn't know whether it was a directive or a request, but she would comply either way. "Yes." Without another word, she leaned up and met his lips.

He returned her kiss, gently pushing her lips open with his tongue, exploring her mouth and savoring her taste. Pushing her effortlessly back to the mattress, he slid down the bed to suckle her, occasionally flicking his tongue out and teasing her nipple. In sweet agony, she let her head slip back as she ran her fingers down his back.

He brought his mouth to her other breast, lapping and suckling until she thought she could take no more. With his hands, he found his way lower urging her legs apart. Slipping his fingers inside her, he used his thumb to caress the center of her womanhood. She writhed beneath him, feeling wanton and primal. “Lee . . .” her voice echoed from deep within her.

She twisted to reach for him, adroitly stroking his length, wanting to return a small portion of the pleasure he was giving her. He hardened further as she continued her attentions. Soon both of them were dangerously close, and Amanda effortlessly guided him inside her.

Their union was slower this time. He drew himself slowly out and then moved just as slowly inward, prolonging the moment of climax for as long as possible, living for that moment, in the exquisite point of awareness that exists just before the peak. She had never known it could be like this – this intense, this overwhelming, this amazing. Thrusting again, Lee found his release, and with a moan plunged deeper.

Within moments Amanda, too, had hit her high point. She tightened her legs around his waist. “Perfection,” she thought just before all coherence slipped away. “This must be what it feels like.”

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“I love you,” she whispered before falling asleep, sated and content, spooned against her husband. Amanda was back. She was okay. He was okay. They were going to be okay.

Finis