

Stay With Me

Scarecrow and Mrs. King fan fiction

by Cat Lady Firebird

This story is intended for mature audiences only.

For the moment, Lee's barely a shell of the person she's come to know in the past three-plus years. He's leaning his forehead against Amanda's, eyes closed with his arms wrapped around her waist. His breathing's erratic, he's pale and sweating, hands shaking as he reaches for her.

He hasn't spoken since that one sentence. *The monster has a face.*

Nor had he objected when she'd taken his weapon from him and laid it on a nearby table.

Lee's hands flex against her, tightening, and she realizes he's clinging to her for support. It's not quite enough; he's swaying on his feet anyway. Knowing she can't catch him if he falls, Amanda gently guides them both down to the floor. Once there, he buries his face against her neck. He's shuddering and gasping, but there's no new moisture against her skin. He's not crying. He's not doing anything at all. It's as though all his strength left his body when he fired that fatal bullet.

She has no idea how long they stay there, huddled together on the floor, before the door opens to admit Mr. Melrose and Francine with their own weapons drawn. Recognizing the lack of threat, both of them holster their pistols. Mr. Melrose nods at Francine, indicating the desk with its scattered papers and the legs they can see just beyond. She nods back and goes over to begin processing the scene.

He comes over and kneels down next to them. "Oh, Amanda."

When Phillip was six, he'd gone through a biting phase. She'd tried everything to stop it: talking to him, denying privileges, and even, once, swatting his rear end. Nothing had worked. Then, one day he'd bitten a classmate so badly she'd been sent to the emergency room. Amanda still remembers the horror of realizing the only way to cover the girl's medical bills was to use the money she'd saved for the boys' summer t-ball league.

She sees that same horror on Mr. Melrose's face now. He'd been angry before, loudly ejecting them from his office. Now, his hands are almost gentle as he separates the two of them and gives Lee a long stare.

"What's he on?" he asks her without preamble.

"Sir," begins Amanda, "he was using it as a tool and the side effects haven't been as bad today as they were —"

The softness in his voice is almost scary. "Just answer the question."

She takes a breath. "Bromazepam."

"Broma —" there's a flash of pure rage on his face before he schools his expression. "All right. We'll take him to the Agency's hospital."

Amanda tries to explain things again. "Mr. Melrose, he was trying to remember things he'd seen when he was five and you know how our memories can get about something like that. It doesn't help that he'd buried all the memories due to the trauma, and all he was trying to do was bring back enough to testify —"

He interrupts her a second time. "Amanda, shut up." The words are harsh. The tone isn't.

Finally seeming to recognize who's there, Lee starts pulling things out of his pockets. His switchblade. His Agency ID. His handcuffs. Mr. Melrose takes the first two items and lays them aside but hesitates over the last one for a long moment before shaking his head.

"No," he says. "Not with your own pair." His eyes flick back over to her. "Where's his pistol?"

"On the table," she murmurs, and she can't help herself, desperately reacting to the look in her supervisor's eyes. "He only used it for —"

Mr. Melrose's voice is tight. "I have to read you your rights now."

"You're arresting us?" she cries.

"Yes. Both of you. For murder."

Her voice rises almost to a squeak. "But, *Sir!*"

"Don't say another word until you talk to a lawyer." He's still calm, but she can see the bluster and fury underneath now, and something else as well. He's scared and worried, sick at what he's found. He won't sleep well tonight, and she doesn't even want to think about how badly his stomach must be churning.

Lee still hasn't said anything. He mutely holds out his hands after the Miranda warning. Mr. Melrose pulls the handcuffs from his own belt, snapping the restraints over Lee's wrists. "Francine, come over here for a minute."

The other woman complies. She looks them over with a long sigh before squatting down and pulling out her own set of handcuffs. "You, too, Amanda."

Staying quiet takes all of her willpower. Why can't they understand? Or at least give them the benefit of the doubt?

Francine helps Amanda to her feet after the cuffs are on. It's awkward, not in the least because she won't meet Amanda's eyes. Instead she looks at their boss. "Billy, do you need another ambulance for Lee?"

"No," whispers Lee as he, too, is helped to his feet. His voice is hoarse and thick.

Mr. Melrose hesitates for a long time before nodding. "Okay. But we're taking the two of you in separately."

Lee nods in acknowledgment. It's the last thing Amanda sees him do before Francine leads her away.

For his punishment, she'd made Phillip explain to Jamie *exactly* why they weren't participating in tee-ball that summer. He'd never bitten anyone again, and in a way the incident had almost come as a relief. The worst had happened, and it had been bad, but not unsurvivable.

Amanda closes her eyes as Francine puts her into the back of her car. That had been a long summer, both for the boys and for her, but they'd all gotten through it somehow. Just like she and Lee will get through this now. Somehow.

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The sound of screaming brings Amanda to her feet before she's completely awake. Lee. That had been Lee's voice.

She rushes forward, pounding on the door to her holding cell. "Let me go to him!"

No response.

"Damn it!" she yells as she whirls toward the cameras. She can't see them, of course, but she knows where they are. She's looked through them from the other side before. "He's in pain! Can't you hear it! Let me help him!"

Still no response. Lee's cries are getting louder, angrier, and every one of them is an arrow through her heart.

“Please!” she implores the hidden cameras. “I can calm him down!”

After another long stretch of silence, Amanda hears a key and the door opens. The guard is brandishing a rifle that’s much too large for the circumstances. She doesn’t care. The only thing she cares about is the nurse behind him, beckoning her forward. She rushes to comply. Lee is still crying out, though she can’t make out the words.

Down the corridors, around two corners, and they’re at the Agency’s underground hospital clinic. In one room, Lee’s strapped to a stretcher, fighting with all his strength. She can make out his words now: “No, *no!* The monster — he’s coming, can’t you hear him! Why are you *trapping* me!”

He’s surrounded by various medical personnel, including one who seems to be trying to get restraints onto his hands. They’re soft ones this time, the kind used in hospitals when patients aren’t cognizant of their surroundings.

Amanda steps between them and puts her hand on his face. “Lee, *stop it!* The monster’s gone. You froze him and now he can’t hurt you anymore!”

As if a switch flips, he stops struggling and flops back onto the hospital bed. It’s so sudden that one of the techs loses his balance.

“Amanda?” whispers Lee.

She strokes his cheek, smooths back soaked hair. “I’m here, sweetheart. I’m right here.”

“Amanda,” he repeats, a note of wonder creeping into his voice. Then his face crumples. “Amanda. I remember more. They shot Frenchie. Oh, damn it, it was supposed to be me on that stakeout —” his voice begins to rise again, but this time there’s no anger, no panic. Instead she sees a kind of helpless grief, a cousin to the sick horror she’d felt hours before.

She’s never heard Lee speak Eric Devereux’s code name before, wouldn’t have known that was his former partner if she hadn’t seen the Agency records. “Lee, you’re having flashbacks. It’s from the bromazepam. Can you remember what happened?”

He closes his eyes. Nods. Wraps his shaking hands around hers. “Blackthorne. Dead. Because I remembered.”

“Yes,” she told him. “Do you also remember what you did so you could remember that?”

He takes a breath and opens his eyes. “Yeah. Needed the pro-maz-e — bro-maz — the drug to help me. Stole a vial from the dispensary.”

“And it scrambled your brains around, just like we’d been told it would. You’re —” she hesitates, looking at the medical personnel. “Are these normal withdrawal symptoms? Including a flashback to something else?”

One of the techs, the one who’d stumbled, nods. “Any one of his buried memories could come back without warning.”

“All right,” she says to Lee. “It’s okay. You’re just in the middle of coming off the drug. You have to stay here until it’s completely clear of your system.”

His hands tighten even as his eyelids flutter back down. “Stay with me. Please. Everything hurts, and it’s all so crazy —”

“Oh, sweetheart, I know. But they only let me out of the holding cell so I could calm you down. They’re not going to let me stay out.”

“Please,” he repeats. “Don’t go. Don’t leave me here by myself.” Now he’s begging, and she can’t stand to see it.

She turns to the techs and the guards. “This room is secure, isn’t it? Let me stay. We all know you can monitor everything we say and do.” She’s the one who’s appealing now. “Record as much or as little as you want. I don’t care. I just want to keep him calm and help him through until he clears up.”

The techs and guards exchange glances, the questions silently bouncing between them. Then one, who seems to be in charge, nods. “If you can keep him settled down, coming off the drug will go a lot easier.” He glances out the door. “Bring Mrs. King a stool, and you might as well bring her a cot, too. We’ll let her stay until he clears up. That’s going to be a little while yet.”

“Thank you,” she tells him, and she means it. Then she turns back to Lee, and their surroundings and all the other people in the room fade to the far edge of her awareness. “It’s going to hurt for a while longer, sweetheart, but if you can make it through without fighting, they’ll let me stay until it’s over.”

“I’ll make it,” he says, “if you’re here with me.” His voice is still scratchy and hoarse from all his screaming, but he’s opened his eyes again.

Amanda sinks down onto the stool that seems to have magically appeared, leaving her hands in his.

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It's a long night, and it leaves Amanda exhausted. She's determined to keep her word, though, so she's careful not to let that show.

Lee doesn't have an easy time of it, flashing back not just to his parents' and partner's deaths but to other traumas as well, many of which she hadn't ever suspected. Toward morning, he finally falls into a light, but restful, slumber. She drags the cot over next to his bed. Collapses on it. Follows him into sleep, praying she won't have nightmares after hearing so many of his.

When she wakes up, several hours have passed and Lee's gone. Mr. Melrose comes in a few minutes later, forestalling her questions by explaining that there will be a board of inquiry to determine whether there needs to be a trial. But she'll be released on her own recognizance until that meets. "Once you've cleaned up," he tells her, "come to my office and I'll give you the name of a good criminal defense lawyer." His gaze falls to the floor. "You'll need an escort, so just call for one when you're ready."

She declines the offer. She already knows of a good criminal lawyer, Dewey Lawrence, thanks to having once been charged with Byron Jordan's murder. Still, she appreciates his effort and the opinion lying underneath it.

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The Agency moves fast when it wants to. She doesn't see Lee again until he's in front of the review board, but that's only seventy-six hours after she's released. It's a long three days, during which she isn't able to reach Lee on the phone.

When she steps into the board meeting, Mr. Lawrence just behind, Lee's already there with a representative of his own. He's showered, shaved, wearing the navy suit she likes so much, along with the blue, pinstriped, white-collared shirt she hasn't seen since they argued about David Benson. He's pulling out all the stops, projecting the image of the calm, cool, and collected Scarecrow. But he turns to look at her as she comes in, and for a brief moment she sees warmth in his eyes.

The questioning and testimony go on for hours, finishing well after 5:00 p.m. "We'll review all the information," the chair says. "Then issue a decision within forty-eight hours."

No, the Agency definitely doesn't believe in dragging things out. Amanda takes a step toward Lee, but his head shakes in the tiniest of motions, and she stops, clamping

her teeth around any words that might try to get out. It's only when he passes out the door that she sees the armed guard, waiting with open handcuffs.

She feels like crying. She feels like screaming. Why can't anyone understand that he's not a risk anymore?

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Mr. Melrose calls her with the news. "The board isn't going to take any disciplinary action against you, Amanda, and Metro PD has dropped the murder charges. But we're going to have to cut your hours for a few weeks."

"And Lee?" she asks, trying to keep a tremor out of her voice. At least it's late morning. The boys are at a friend's, and her mother is off running errands somewhere.

"I'm sorry," says Mr. Melrose. "That's need-to-know, and your clearance hasn't been restored yet. Come back on Monday. We'll talk then."

"Sir —"

"Come on back and we'll talk then, Amanda. But not before."

The cut in her hours is going to hurt, particularly since it's summer and the boys' Little League team appears to be headed for local playoffs. That means extra charges for travel and different uniforms. Since she'll get to spend extra time with them, though, it's not a complete loss. Except what good will that extra time be, if she spends all her time preoccupied with worry about Lee?

He still isn't answering calls, either at his office or at his apartment. Amanda wonders if it's possible to literally crawl outside your skull with anxiety. She has to force herself to focus on cleaning the house and making herself a light lunch. It comes to her when she's doing the latter, and for a long moment she stops, butter knife in hand, the mayonnaise on her sandwich only half-spread.

She knows where he is.

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"I sure wish you could have met them," says Lee, and there's real regret in his voice.

"I think I already have," she replies, and they share a long look before he pulls her into a hug. They stay that way for a while, rocking slightly in the afternoon sun, and at that moment Amanda knows that everything they've suffered, every consequence of

their actions, is more than justified. She doesn't know if she's ever seen him at peace with himself the way she sees him today.

Lee steps back from the embrace and touches her cheek. "Thank you, by the way."

"For what?"

"For being there. For standing beside me. For not giving up, even when you were mad as hell about me stealing the bromazepam. You saved my life, you know."

She'd suspected as much at the time, but now she only smooths his hair. "All I did was throw a plate."

He leans over to kiss her forehead before resting his own against it. "You did a lot more than that."

Now that she's with him, Amanda's able to relax into the moment. They stay that way for a few minutes before she remembers to ask. "What happened? With the review board, I mean."

Lee leans back and sighs, his eyes distant but his hands still warm on her waist. "Thirty-day suspension. No pay." He holds up a hand. "Don't worry about it, Amanda. I can cover it. I'm concerned about you. Will there be enough hours for you if I'm not on the job?"

With a sigh, she shakes her head. "Mr. Melrose told me my hours would be cut for a while. He wouldn't explain why, but it makes sense."

"Are you going to be all right?"

"It'll be a tight summer," she admits. "But we can muddle through."

"I'll see what I can do to help you."

"No!" she protests, and her voice is a little louder than she means for it to be. "No," she says again, more quietly. "Even if you can cover it for yourself, you can't cover a whole month with no pay for you *and* less pay for me. With the raise you got me not too long ago, my net should about the same as it was before Mr. Jordan was murdered. We made it work then. We can make it work a little longer now, especially since my car's been repaired and my property taxes paid."

Lee sighs. "That's not all that's going to happen. Billy wasn't specific but he said there'll be some changes to the organizational chart."

"Will you still be in the Q-Bureau?"

“I hope so,” he replies. “I keep trying to tell myself not to worry about it, that it won’t get me through thirty days any faster, but I can’t help it. God only knows what the place is going to look like once I’m back.”

“I’m pretty sure he’ll at least let me keep it organized.”

“Yeah,” says Lee. “I suppose.” He draws her back against him. “Amanda, I...” but then he trails off.

The silence stretches a few moments too long before she picks up the conversational thread. “You what?”

“I — it’s just that — I mean, I know it’s been rough and that some pretty strange and bad things have happened —”

She wraps her arms tighter around his waist. “Just say it, sweetheart.”

He blows out a breath and inhales again. “Will you come over to my place with me? Dinner, and maybe just...oh, I don’t know. It’s too warm for a fire, and I don’t have any other ideas, but I just...it was so *quiet* in that holding cell. By the time I got out I could barely stand to hear myself think. And now...” he trails off again. “I don’t really want to do anything like that for a while. I just want to be, but I don’t want to be alone. I know that doesn’t make sense. Hell, it doesn’t make sense to me.”

“Oh, Lee.” She kisses his neck. “It makes perfect sense. Of course I’ll come with you.”

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They talk of everything and nothing for the rest of the afternoon, during which the sun goes down. Since neither of them feels particularly hungry, he puts together a salad for dinner. It’s a kind she hasn’t had before, shrimp and avocado with sweet corn, but it’s quick and doesn’t require much more than a few minutes to boil the shrimp and corn before tossing them with the other ingredients. It’s also surprisingly tasty, and Amanda finds she had more of an appetite than she’d thought. Lee apparently had, too; there aren’t any leftovers.

“Fortunately for us,” he says as they clean up, “that recipe’s for three servings.”

“It was delicious,” she tells him, and she’s not exaggerating. “Do you have the recipe written down anywhere?”

“No, but I’ll write it out when we’re done in here.”

He sits down with an index card and a pen as soon as they're done in the kitchen. Amanda smiles and wanders into the living room, pausing to look out the windows into the night. Her mind has finally stopped its frantic whirl, and she's able to exist in the moment, to *just be* the way Lee had mentioned. She wonders if she's ever told him about this particular effect he has on her.

Arms wrap around her from behind and there's a kiss on her temple. "How you doing?"

She leans back into him. "Much better now."

Gently, he turns her around to face him and pulls her into another embrace, one just like the one they'd shared at the cemetery. Amanda realizes he's put some soft music on, and after several long moments she feels him begin to sway in time to it. She steps back a bit so that they can dance, but remains close enough to do it cheek-to-cheek. There's no need for conversation. Not right now.

After two songs, Lee sinks onto the couch and draws her down next to him, wrapping himself around her. She runs her fingers through his hair, stopping to scratch the sensitive spot on the nape of his neck. He sighs in response before turning and brushing her lips with his. Amanda isn't sure how long they stay like that, wound around each other on the couch and sharing the occasional gentle kiss. It doesn't matter, anyway. She's with Lee and he's with her and that's what counts right now.

They stay like that, cuddled together, as they both slip into sleep. Neither of them dream.

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Amanda wakes with a start, and the first thing she sees is the clock near the telephone. It's quarter to two. She moves to untangle herself from Lee, waking him in the process.

His eyes narrow as he looks at the clock. "Wow. It's late."

"Yes," she acknowledges. "I should get home before they wake up and find me gone."

"Why don't you call them instead?"

"Lee, they're already asleep."

"You can leave a message on the answering machine," he replies. "It's really too late for you to go home."

"I..." she trails off, not quite sure of the question that hasn't quite been asked.

He strokes her face. "Stay with me."

Amanda continues to hesitate.

"Please," he continues. "It's just to sleep. I promise. And only for tonight."

His words from several weeks before echo in her mind. *I do want to make love with you. When the time's right. Not until then.* He's held true to that statement, never pushing for anything more than cuddling and kissing, never complaining, never chafing visibly at this particular boundary.

Since it's what she wants anyway, she gives in and calls her house, leaving a brief message on her answering machine. He gives her one of his t-shirts and a pair of shorts that have a drawstring, and they take turns in his bathroom. He himself is wearing another t-shirt and boxers, and when she comes into the bedroom, he holds up the covers to invite her into bed. She's a little uncertain at first, especially when he wraps his arms around her from behind, but that's as far as it goes.

He kisses the pulse point under her jaw. "This is much more comfortable."

"Yes," she admits. "It is." It takes a few minutes, and she has to do it in stages, but eventually she relaxes into him. It's not the first time they've spent the night together, nor is it the first time they've seen each other in a state of undress. But it is the first time they've intentionally slept in a bed together, and despite his assurances she's still a little nervous. He falls back to sleep before she does.

Taking a deep breath, she focuses on the fact that his scent is everywhere: the sheets, the comforter, even the clothes she's wearing. Not to mention the scent coming from Lee himself. It's comforting and reassuring, and she knows he'll keep his promise. That's the last thought Amanda has before she, too, drifts back off to sleep.

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Amanda opens her eyes to a sun-brightened room. She doesn't see the actual sunlight, of course, since sleeping on her left side means she's turned away from the window. But there's something about the quality of the light in the room: a fresh newness, the kind that only happened in the early morning, well before the sun reached its zenith.

It's summer; the sun comes up around six. This means she's only slept for a little over four hours, but for some reason, she feels as though she's had a full night. Behind her, Lee is still breathing deeply and evenly. He's spooned up against her, and when she

shifts slightly, he moves with her. He mumbles something she can't quite hear and drops a kiss onto the nape of her neck even as his arms tighten.

That's when she realizes she can feel something poking her down low, at the exact place where —

She closes her eyes but doesn't try to stop the blush. She's lived with a man before. She knows what it is, and more importantly, what it isn't.

"Lee," she whispers, just loud enough for her voice to carry in the room.

"Mmm-huh?"

She can't tell if he's awake or asleep, but that question gets answered when she feels his arms go rigid. Amanda wants to turn over, to reassure him that she knows such things can happen first thing in the morning, that there's nothing wrong with it. Before the words reach her lips, though, he's out of bed like a shot, heading for the bathroom. A minute or two passes, and then she hears the shower start running.

She rolls over onto her back, staring at the ceiling, seeing a few rays of sun now. She's surprised by the direction her thoughts have taken, and she lies there for a bit, pondering what she's going to do about them. If she does anything at all.

Stop thinking, Amanda, she tells herself. Just be.

Taking a deep breath, she heads for the bathroom door and checks it. Unlocked. But that's probably only because Lee's not used to having someone else in his apartment when he showers. It doesn't mean anything more than that. It doesn't have to mean anything significant at all.

Amanda turns the knob and steps into the room. She's unsurprised to note that while it's humid, it's not particularly steamy. Of course he'd be taking a cold shower.

Her hands shake a little as she pulls the t-shirt and shorts off. After a long, steadying breath, she pushes the shower curtain aside and steps over the tub's edge.

Lee reacts immediately, grabbing for a fold of the curtain's opposite side, heedless of the fact that his actions have pulled its edge away from the shower wall and tepid water is splashing out. "Amanda! What the hell are you doing?"

"I, ah." She has to lick her lips before she can continue. "Seems pretty obvious to me. You should let go of the curtain before you completely soak the floor."

He does so, but now he's shaking his head. "No. No, I'm sorry I woke up like that. It's something that —"

“—happens to men in the morning, sometimes,” she finishes. She forces herself not to shiver in the cool water. “I know that. But why not take advantage of it?” Before he can protest further, she steps toward him and draws his face to hers, and for a long, glorious moment, she feels his arms tighten hungrily around her even as the kiss becomes passionate. He wants her. She can feel his arousal beginning to return, and she presses up against it.

In response, he pulls away. He’s gasping. “I promised I wouldn’t do this. I meant that.”

“That was last night,” she points out. “This is this morning.”

But he won’t hear it, instead pulling the shower curtain back open so he can exit. He lets it fall back into place behind him, and she doesn’t reach out for it. She hears the bathroom door open and close, and shivers again. The water’s still cool. Amanda adjusts its temperature to something warmer. What on earth has just happened?

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He’d put out an extra towel the night before, and she uses it to dry off before considering the heap of clothing on the floor. Amanda wonders if she should just put the t-shirt and shorts back on, go out and see what he’s doing, pretend that nothing happened at all. If she does, she knows, he’ll follow her lead. They won’t talk about it, instead going on just like they had been. It could be that easy.

She doesn’t want easy anymore. She hadn’t known that before she walked into the bathroom, but now it’s as though she’s always felt this way.

Taking the clothes with her, she pads across the hallway to his bedroom. He’s not in it, but his robe has vanished. She looks for a hamper without success; apparently he’d let his clothing just fall on the floor last night. It’s still lying there. For a second, she wonders how he ever keeps it in good condition, with such bad habits.

The fabric of his dress shirt is cool and crisp against her skin as she slips into it, buttoning all the way down the front but not bothering with the cuffs. She leaves the towel wrapped around her head and follows the sound of clattering dishes out to the kitchen.

His back is to her as he whips eggs and milk together. She can smell both cinnamon and vanilla, and there’s a loaf of thick-sliced bread on the counter. He’s also put a

griddle pan on the stove, although he hasn't yet turned the heat on. French toast. He's making French toast.

"I thought," she says, "you don't like to eat breakfast."

Lee's so startled he nearly drops the bowl, but he recovers at the last instant, putting it in a safe place on the counter before turning around. "We don't have to have a lot. What are you wearing?"

What do you care? her mind retorts, but she squelches the memory of those words. In their place, she asks, "what does it look like?"

He takes a breath. "That's my shirt."

"Very observant, Stetson."

He's blinking rapidly. "Look, after breakfast maybe there'll be enough time to run your things through the wash —"

"They'll be fine," she tells him. "So will I. But you should finish your shower. Come back there with me."

"No." He shakes his head. "I made you wait for me. I *owe* it to you to wait until you're ready."

"That's —" She runs out of breath and has to try again. "I'm trying to tell you that I am."

He searches her face, turning his hands over so that their fingers intertwine. "I want you to be sure. And I don't want it to be because you feel sorry for me, or because you want to offer some sort of comfort. Not even a little bit."

"I'm not. I don't. You've had a rougher week than I did, but mine hasn't been any picnic."

His breathing quickens, but he still hesitates. "It shouldn't be because *you* need or want comfort, either."

"Lee," she says. "It isn't. And I'm sure." Then a new thought occurs to her. "But if you're not —"

"No." He breathes the word. "No, I've been sure for a long time."

And then he's kissing her, his lips slow and hot, his hands leaving hers to wrap around her waist and pull her against him. She thrills at feeling the same hunger, the same heat, the same desire that he'd briefly demonstrated in the bathroom. He's not trying to hide his body's reaction now, and feeling him kindles something within her

own body, a deep yearning that transcends mere physicality. She wonders if he'll pick her up. She wishes he would.

But he doesn't. Instead, after the kiss comes to its natural end, he gently tugs her back toward the bedroom. She follows, unwrapping the towel from her head with her free hand and tossing it in the direction of the bathroom. Normally she'd chastise herself for being so sloppy, but there are more important things right now.

In the bedroom, next to his desk, he kisses her again, deep and ardent. Afterward, his gaze flickers downward. "You know, that's always been one of my pet peeves."

"What has?"

"A woman, wearing my shirt. Feeling as though she has the right to do something so..." his voice lowers. "Intimate."

Amanda reaches for the top button. "I can always take it off, if you don't like it."

His hands stop hers. "That's the thing. On you I do. It's so damn sexy." He kisses her again, briefly this time, and then holds her gaze as his hands travel down the front of the shirt, unbuttoning as he goes, his fingers just lightly grazing the skin underneath. When he's done, it only takes the slightest of shrugs to send the shirt back down onto the floor.

"My God," Lee chokes out. "Oh my *God*, Amanda. You're beautiful."

She reaches for the belt of his robe, untying it and pushing it off his shoulders, letting it fall wherever it lands. More sloppiness. She couldn't care less.

Underneath, he's only wearing boxers. No t-shirt. Her hands flex at his hips for a moment, and all of a sudden, she's nervous. Biting her lip, she trails her fingers around the waistband, and, with a deep breath, slips her hand inside. He's hot and smooth, pulsing underneath her fingers.

Lee pulls her against him, his head falling on her shoulder. "Do you know how many times I've fantasized about this?"

"Maybe," she replies, thinking it might be as many times as she has. And just like that, it's as easy as it always has been between them. She reaches for him again, pushing the boxers all the way down, and then he walks both of them across the room to the bed.

When they reach it, he kisses her again, and it's the most amazing kiss she's ever known. It's gentle and sweet, but also deep and thorough, and it leaves her whole body shaking. Her legs won't keep holding her up. Amanda winds her arms around his neck,

clinging to him, whimpering as the sensations crash and ricochet throughout her body. She continues to shudder as the kiss ends and he lowers her to the mattress.

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There are some things that Lee's extremely careful about. Her safety, Amanda knows, is one of them. He gets up immediately afterward to dispose of the used condom, lest there be any leakage. She hears water running in the sink, and then in the shower. Apparently, he's going to finish bathing now.

Amanda's legs are still shaky. She probably shouldn't risk trying to get up. Not just yet. Instead she leans back against the pillows and inhales, letting her breath back out slowly. She's not a complete innocent, nor is she as strait-laced as most of her co-workers want to think. While she hasn't admitted to it — and she might not ever — she's listened to the gossip in the steno pool. Especially when Lee's been the topic.

So she's not entirely surprised that sex with him was absolutely extraordinary. What does surprise her is the unimaginable tenderness he'd shown. They've never spoken the word *love*, but that's what she felt in every brush of his lips, every stroke of his fingers, every word whispered against her skin. His focus had been completely on her, and he'd taken his time, seeing to her needs ahead of his own. She had known he could be intense with his attention, but this had been something more. His lovemaking had been *reverent*.

It leaves her feeling cherished.

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She doesn't remember falling asleep, but she wakes up when she feels his hand stroking her face. Lee's sitting on the edge of the bed. "Hey, hon. You all right?" It's the first time he's ever directly addressed her using an endearment.

Amanda pushes up to a sitting position. "I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be?"

His eyes flicker downward, darkening as they trace her figure, and she feels a rush of warmth spread through her body. He's wearing a fresh set of boxers but hasn't yet put his robe back on. She reaches up to his chest, stroking the skin there, and thrills when he sighs softly and leans down for a lighter, though no less ardent, kiss as compared to the ones they'd shared before.

When it's done, he leans his forehead against hers. "I was afraid I might hurt you."

She will feel sore later, but it's nothing she can't handle. "Okay, yes, it'd been a while."

"For me, too," he admits.

She decides she doesn't want to go any further with that topic of conversation and heads off in a different direction. "You didn't hurt me. And I don't regret it." She can never regret this. Not with him.

Still leaning against her with his eyes closed, he nods. "Me, either. Can you stay long enough to let me fix you — I don't know what time it is. Breakfast or lunch or brunch or whatever."

"Lee, you don't have to feed me."

"I know I don't," he answers, straightening up. "I want to." There's a faint hint of frustration in his tone.

She responds to that hint. "I can stay for a while. Not all day, though. The boys have a game tonight." Today is Friday, and they also have weekend plans. She's disappointed. She wishes she could spend those days wrapped up with him.

But Mr. Melrose has told her she won't be working as many hours. They'll have time.

As she stands, Lee pulls her against him once more, his hands roaming round her lower back. "Thank you."

That wasn't what she was expecting to hear. "Thank you?"

"For being here. For...this." He leans back to look her in the eye. "For staying."

In response, Amanda smooths back his hair where it had gotten spiky in the shower. "Oh, sweetheart. Of course I'll stay with you." And she will. Whenever she can.

This fic assumes that "Unfinished Business" happened before "Stemwinder."

I'm aware that the script and the closed-captioning spell the drug as "promazepam." However, when I was researching this story I discovered that it's a real drug (albeit one not available in the United States) – and that this is the more common spelling.