

# *Weekend Getaway*

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**T**here was something peaceful about a blizzard. Penny cupped her hot chocolate in her palms, enjoying the prickly warmth of the mug.

“Supposed to let up tonight,” her companion said, across from her, sliding his phone back into the pocket of his Aran-knit sweater. Blake sipped at his own drink.

“We can wait.” Penny smiled – pouting her lips ever so slightly. She threw in an eye-lash flutter for good measure. Blake replied with a scowl that only enhanced his rugged looks.

“You’re overdoing it.”

“At least I’m trying,” she said through the smile. “We’re supposed to be on ‘holiday’.”

“I’m sorry, Penny. I’m just on edge. I want to be done with this and get across that border.” His fingers rose to his chest of their own volition, until Penny flashed him a look.

“Quit feeling for it; it’s there!” Her eyes flicked to the weather outside: snow was coming down in such thick and heavy flakes that she could barely see the ski lockers across the courtyard, much less the hill beyond. “We stick to the plan: enjoy ourselves this afternoon, then head across at first light.”

She began to scan the room. The lounge was full of relaxed couples, not the least bit put off by the weather, as long as the toddies continued to flow.



There was one lone man, sitting at a table near the hearth. Oddly, he wore a dark suit. And he was watching them. Penny continued her casual sweep of the room before turning back to Blake.

“We’ve been spotted,” she whispered. Blake – to his credit – kept his expression neutral.

“Where?”

“My seven o’clock – guy by himself.” She waited as Blake checked him out in his peripheral vision.

“I think I recognize him...”

“Me too.”

“Too much of a coincidence, him being here.”

“Agreed. We leave now.”

“You sure?” Blake asked, his dusty blond brows drawing together. In response, Penny rose slowly, extending a hand to her fellow agent.

“Stand up and kiss me.”

“Penny...” Without giving him an option, she closed the gap between them before he could rise fully, forcing him to embrace her to keep his balance. He growled under his breath. She winked, turning to guide him – arm in arm – for the staircase.

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Once they reached their room, all pretense fell away, as they prepared for a quick departure.

“What’s the plan?” Blake asked, fastening his gun strap, then pulling his sweater back on.

“I saw a nice 4x4 parked outside; we’ll borrow it to drive to the village. From there, we’ll arrange transport across the border.”

They emerged into the corridor and turned towards the staircase. Facing them was the man from downstairs, accompanied by another pair of men.

“Dammit,” Penny swore. “This way.” She took off in the opposite direction, Blake behind her.

“Wait!” the man cried out. Penny ignored him, punching open a door that revealed a staircase leading up. She took the steps two-by-two, until reaching an exterior door. She threw her shoulder into it, but it was jammed. Thick snow barricaded it from the other side. Blake added

his shoulder, and they managed to open it enough to slip through.

They were on the roof of the lodge. Beneath them lay the courtyard, across from which stood the ski locker.

“Change of plan,” Penny announced, leading them to the far edge of the roof, where they dropped to the ground, the snow absorbing their fall. “I’ll get us some skis; you get that lift working.”

In moments, they were seated on a lift chair, heading up the hill – Blake having jammed the mechanism on. Looking back, Penny ground her teeth; she could just make out dark figures occupying a chair four or five behind them.

Once at the hilltop, Penny wasted no time skiing for the nearest black diamond. If memory served, this trail came close to the border – and safety. She let gravity accelerate her down, Blake close on her trail.

“Stop!” Came a cry from above. She ignored it; Blake did not. He glanced back, and in that instant, lost his footing. He tumbled head-over-heels, coming to a cracking halt at the base of a snow-covered tree. Penny skidded to a halt, popping out of her skis, conscious of the narrow lead they had on their pursuers.

“Blake!” A glance told her all: he’d snapped his femur. He was going no further. He fiddled inside his jacket, then thrust the memory stick at her.

“Take it!”

“But...”



“You *know* I’m lost. Finish this!” She grabbed it from him, shoving it inside her mitt.

“I’ll send someone...” she began, then trailed off. They both knew there’d be no rescue. Shouts of their pursuers penetrated the veil of snow about her: there wasn’t much time now.

She snapped her skis back on, and – without a backwards glance – shot down the hill, skiing as fast as she dared. The border could not be far now.

She navigated turns and twists, popping over moguls with ease – the wind and snow whipping past her as she descended. As she neared the hill’s base, dark shapes coalesced out of the obscuring snow. Her heart sank.

She slid to a quick stop, considering her narrowing options. Her pursuers from above whooshed to a halt behind her. It was over.

*No! I’m not going down without a fight!*

She reached inside her coat, flicking off the safety of her Walther PPK even as she prepared to draw it.

“Penny Farthing?” Yelled one of the men behind her. The rest of them began to converge, pointing their weapons at her. She took a deep breath.

“Are you Penny Farthing?” The man yelled again.

“Of course I am!” She snarled, readying to take out the man nearest her, his video camera extended towards her. ...*video camera*? She glanced over at a pair approaching from her right, holding a large rectangular piece of cardboard between them. She could just make out her name written on it in flowery print... and...

“Congratulations, Miss Farthing; you’re this year’s winner of the Reader’s Digest Sweepstakes!”

Penny blinked.