

Artist in the Woods
By Ginger Summers



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On a clear day in late spring, Amanda decided to go on a hike. It had been raining a lot the past several weeks, so she knew that most of the snow would be melted. Today was a beautiful day, so Amanda packed her backpack, pulled her long blonde hair into a ponytail, put on her hiking boots and headed up to the mountains. Her parents, who had always gone with her, had finally allowed her to drive with her newly minted driver's license. The temperature was a pleasant seventy degrees when she started toward the mountain. She headed up the curvy road a good forty-five minutes from her home. She was glad that the traffic was light today.

Arriving at the trailhead, she checked to see that she'd included everything she needed for her hike. Her parents had taken great strides to teach Amanda survival skills when hiking, to always be prepared for anything. She retied her sturdy hiking boots and put on her hunter orange backpack. She was ready to go. She left her cell phone in the car, looking forward to a quiet hike between herself and the wilderness with high hopes of seeing wildlife and soaking in the beauty of nature. She chose a trail that appeared to be overgrown and rough. With confidence in her ability to stay safe, she ascended the path blanketed with tall green grass, brush and weeds. The fallen trees added another challenge she was happy to face as she climbed over them with a smile. This was the world she loved; wild and free, undeveloped by man.

As she enjoyed the peace, she soaked in the fresh spring breeze, strolling at a comfortable pace. She had hiked for awhile when she decided to take a break. She opened her pack and pulled out a luscious juicy apple and some jerky to refuel her grand adventure as she continued up the trail. She relished a long cool sip of water. As it trickled down, it cooled the dryness of her throat.

In the distance she heard the thundering sound of a waterfall. The trail was lovely, smothered with purple and yellow wildflowers. Intrigued by the fierce sound of the waterfall, she headed in the direction of the sound. As she approached the foaming waters, she noticed many broken branches, torn by the spring floods. Gigantic boulders glistening with crystal clear waters reflected the sunshine as the water raced off the cliff. Mist tickled her nose like a kitten's whiskers as she began her ascent. Climbing over slippery rocks, searching for firm footing, she crossed over the top of the waterfall. She sighed with a smile as she was greeted by a valley filled with multicolored flowers. She settled to absorb the fascinating sight, preparing to eat her lunch, sandwiches and grapes, slurping down the icy water she had brought with her. As she finished her lunch, she dug out her sketch pad and pencils to record the beauty she witnessed. The gentle breeze renewed her spirit. Caught up in the lushness and stillness around her, she forgot to mark her path as she wandered through the valley.

As she sloshed and slipped across the lovely valley, she spied a family of wolves, soaking up the warmth in a dry warm patch of sun. She slowed her pace, quietly placing each boot as she stepped through the mud, careful to keep downwind from the wolves. She slowly sat down on a fallen Ponderosa Pine, the sweet smell of vanilla flowing into her nose. She was intent on observing the majestic beasts that had become so rare in her area. Peacefully, the wolves were enjoying the day. She smiled as she watched the pups, little fur balls racing around each other and bravely walking away from the pack. Lazily, the adults dozed. As the pups tired, they headed over to snuggle with their mama.

Grabbing her sketch pad and pencils again, Amanda drew the wolves surrounded by a variety of brightly colored wildflowers that covered the valley with the spring green grass

flattened where the pack lay in the sun. She glanced at the sun and realized that it was already mid-afternoon, and she needed to head back to her car. As she looked around, she was startled to realize that she was unfamiliar with the area. She had strayed far from the path; she was lost.

Taking a deep breath, she contemplated her situation. “How do I find my way back to my car.” She searched her memory for what to do, nibbling on a power bar.. She recollected that she could look and listen for a river if she got lost. Hearing the fast flowing river, she gathered up her supplies, put them back in her pack and headed toward the sound of swiftly rushing water of the river. She recalled that rivers run downhill and that following them, she would eventually arrive at civilization. She remembered that there had been a river near where she parked her car and hoped this was the same river.

Walking along the riverside, she enjoyed the scenery as she trudged through the mud and brush of the river’s edge. She looked up into the sky and was amazed at the sight of an eagle circling above the river. Quickly she lifted her sketch pad and pencils out of her backpack to draw the scene. With a sharp dive and a screech, the eagle careened down from the sky, targeting his prey, a large trout, and swiftly grasping the unsuspecting fish with his talons. Swooping back up into the sky, he headed for his nest on the cliff.

Continuing toward the river bubbling with flood waters, she saw the road on the other side of the crashing river overflowing from the recent rains and snow melt. Wishing she had some magic shoes to fly her across the river, she decided that was a foolish thought. She remembered a trick her dad had taught her to use a mirror to reflect the sun to signal for help. She dove into her backpack to retrieve her mirror, preparing to signal. With cars rushing by, she hoped someone would stop and help her. Starting to get concerned when the cars continued to

rush by, she continued to signal. Finally a car stopped. A young man stepped out of the car, blinded temporarily with a flash of bright light in his eyes. He heard a whistle also blowing and recognized that someone on the other side of the river needed help. As he approached the bank, he recognized Amanda as one of his coworkers at REI.

Shouting across the river, he let her know he would phone for help. As he got closer, she recognized him also. She was glad it was Kenny, as she knew he could help her. She settled down to wait with a sigh of gratitude for the help to come. She heard her stomach complaining loudly, reminding her how hungry she was. She pulled out a snack and munched on it.

With flashing lights and blaring sirens screeching, the rescue team arrived. Preparing for rescue, Amanda felt a bit ashamed and embarrassed about having to be rescued. She took some more deep breaths as she waited for the rafts to steer across the angry river, weaving through monstrous rapids. When they arrived, she tentatively stepped onto the raft with the strong men holding tightly to her hands, securing her onto the boat.

Kenny had been nervously waiting, hoping she would be safe. Relief showed on his face as he saw Amanda arrive on shore. With gratefulness showing on Amanda's face, she hugged Kenny while thanking him for getting help. However, she still had to get to her car ten miles up the road. She also needed to let her parents know she was safe.

“Hi Kenny. Thank you so much for calling for help. I need to call my parents. Can I use your phone?”

“Sure,” he said as he handed her his smart phone.

Knowing that her parents wouldn't answer an unknown number, she left a message saying, "Hi Mom. I met a coworker on my hike. We hiked together and lost track of time. I'm sorry that I didn't let you know sooner."

Kenny asked, "Would you like me to give you a lift to your car? I am familiar with all the trailheads around here. The closest is about ten miles away. Is that where your car is?"

Amanda responded gratefully, "Yes, my car is at the second trailhead. That would be great! Thanks!"

As Amanda got into Kenny's car, she became a little nervous. She didn't really know him very well. After a short period of time, Kenny started a conversation as they headed to Amanda's car.

Kenny asked, "Where did you learn the mirror trick to signal for help?"

"My dad has been teaching me survival and safety skills since I was five," Amanda said.

"That's cool! I mainly taught myself how to stay safe. My parents were too busy to take me hiking," explained Kenny.

Amanda started to relax. "What do you like to do when you are off of work?"

"I enjoy hiking and capturing the beauty of nature through painting and drawing," responded Kenny.

"I am an artist too! That's why I lost track of time and didn't pay attention to my surroundings," Amanda divulged.

"What captivated you that caused you to lose track of time?" inquired Kenny.

With excitement, she replied, "I saw a family of wolves in the valley soaking in the sun and an eagle catching a fish by the river."

"That is amazing! Can I see your drawings when we get to your car?" requested Kenny.

"Sure. Do you have any of your sketches with you?" asked Amanda.

"Yes, they are in my trunk," Kenny revealed..

Amanda was surprised at how much they had in common. As they approached her car, they decided to arrange to go hiking next weekend if the weather was nice.

"Thanks Kenny for the ride. I am looking forward to our hike next weekend," Amanda said with a smile.

She looked at her phone and saw that her parents had been trying to get hold of her for quite awhile. Giving them a call, she assured them she was all right and decided not to tell them the truth. Instead, she explained that she met a coworker, and they hiked together and lost track of time. It was nearly eight, and she needed to get home quickly. Kenny suggested they stop at a restaurant on the way home thinking that Amanda must be starving.

"I really need to get home. My parents have been worried sick about me, but thank you. I have a sandwich in my pack that I can eat on the way home," Amanda said as she quickly climbed into her car.

When Amanda arrived home, it is nearly nine. Her parents were furious! They had learned from the evening news that she had to be rescued from across the river. Not only that, she had lied to them about meeting a coworker on the hike, when in reality she had to be rescued.

Her parents grounded her, saying that she could not go hiking next weekend. "You lied to us, Amanda," her father said in a strained voice. "You know we do not tolerate lying in this

household. We trusted you to be a responsible hiker, paying attention to your surroundings. And marking the trail you took!”

Her mother whispered, “What if by the time you got to the road the sun had set? Or you got hurt?”

“Why in the world did you not keep your cell phone with you!” her father expounded.

Amanda replied, “I wanted a break from digital attachment, and besides, cell reception is spotty in the mountains. I got to observe a family of wolves and an eagle diving...”

“That’s nice, but don’t change the subject,” interrupted her mother. “What if you had gotten hurt? Or kidnapped or killed? We would not know for a long time what happened to you,” she continued.

“The reason we gave you a cell phone was so that you could carry it with you, and if you got into trouble you could call,” her father stated firmly.

“Okay! Sorry!” yelled Amanda as she stomped up the stairs and slammed her door. She dreaded having to call Kenny to cancel their plans, but she knew that she had really gotten off easy with her parents. She smiled as she remembered her adventure, still picturing the lovely valley filled with wildlife.