

## All Trussed Up and Nowhere to Go

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"Francine, I've spotted him." Amanda King spoke softly but emphatically into her hand held radio. "He's on the west side of the ballroom, just beside the door to the kitchen."

"Got it. I'll move in from the north and we'll box him in."

"Any sign of Lee?" Amanda asked anxiously. "He's missed his last two check-ins," she reminded her fellow agent unnecessarily.

It was February 13, their first anniversary. As usual when they had something special planned, an urgent case had come up at work and they had been forced to postpone their celebration. The restriction of not being able to confide in any of their co-workers only added to Amanda's frustration.

"Once we have Thorndyke in custody, we'll find Lee." Francine's voice sounded as if she actually believed it would be that simple.

Amanda could only hope her friend wasn't merely trying to pacify her. She vainly tried to put Lee from her mind as she moved in closer to their quarry. "Hurry, Francine," she said, "I think the deal's going down right now." She watched as Roger Thorndyke, aka the Prankster, handed off an envelope to another man, and received a small attache case in return. She waited until Francine was in position, then both agents drew their weapons.

"Hold it, Thorndyke." Amanda authoritatively stepped up to him. "Federal agents."

She and Francine quickly herded the two men into the hotel's kitchen, most of the guests unaware of what had just transpired. Francine covered them while Amanda relieved the two men of their guns. She snapped open the briefcase, not surprised to find stacks of currency in various large denominations. As she ripped open the envelope a hotel key for room 501 and a Polaroid snapshot spilled out into her hands. She gasped as she took in the photo.

Thorndyke unconsciously took a step back as Amanda whirled to face him, her eyes blazing. "THIS is what you were going to sell?" she demanded indignantly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "The KGB pays top money for American agents. It's a seller's market."

Aghast, Amanda turned to Francine. "It's Lee. Thorndyke's got him tied up and ready to go."

Francine turned to the smaller of their two captives, who shrank back in fear. "It's not my fault," he whined. "I'm just the middle man. Please don't send me to jail, I've got two small children."

"I've heard that one before." Francine rolled her eyes. "You should have thought of them before you got messed up in all this. Now we may be able to cut a deal with you, if you take us to your contact."

The rear door of the kitchen burst open as their backup team finally arrived. "Francine, I'm going to find Lee," Amanda said, immediately heading for the door.

"Do you need some help?" Francine called after her.

Amanda glanced down again at the picture she held in her hand. "No, I think I can handle it."

"Fine. Davis, as soon as our friend here gives us the rest of the details, you and I are going to keep his appointment with the KGB."

Francine's voice faded into the distance as Amanda hurried away, tucking the picture into her pocket. Lacking the patience to stand around waiting for an elevator, she raced up the stairs to the fifth floor and rushed down the hallway. Her shaking hands dropped the key twice before she succeeded in opening the door to room 501.

Upon entering the room, Amanda immediately caught sight of Lee and sighed in relief - he was all right. Or as all right as anyone could be in the predicament he had been left in, Amanda thought wryly. The Prankster had certainly lived up to his nickname. He had begun by removing a ceiling panel, exposing the overhead pipes and wiring. Lee hung suspended from one of the pipes, his hands held tightly by a pair of handcuffs. His arms were nearly wrenched out of their sockets, Amanda realized in dismay, catching sight of his precarious footing.

A large block of ice sat directly below Lee's feet. From the puddle of water forming underneath, it had apparently started out much larger. As it had melted, Lee's support had gradually sunk beneath him. The pressure on his arms had increased until almost the entire weight of his body hung from his wrists. The only chair in the room stood nearby, tantalizingly out of reach of his feet. Amanda took quick action, pushing the chair underneath him.

Now that Lee was out of danger, Amanda stood back to fully appreciate the Prankster's handiwork. Apparently humiliation as well as discomfort had been his motivation. Not to mention his liberal use of the seasonal Valentine's theme.

Lee was stripped to his waist, a bright red satin ribbon looped around his neck and tied into a bow. Crimson lipstick had been used to scrawl a large heart on his bare chest, surrounding the words "BE MINE". His shoes had been removed, revealing white socks with a gaudy heart motif. The crowning touch was the dozen long stemmed roses tucked into the front of his pants.

Amanda tried hard not to laugh as she climbed up on the bed and reached over to untie Lee's gag. He gasped in several deep mouthfuls of air as Amanda updated Francine on the radio, telling her only that she had found Lee and that he was safe.

"Are you sure he's okay?" Francine asked. "Do you need any help?"

"He's fine." Amanda was quick to reassure her. "It may take a bit to get him cleaned up though."

"Well if he's in any where near the condition of the Prankster's last victim, tell him we don't need his statement until tomorrow morning. Thorndyke can spend the night in a holding cell, cooling his heels."

"Thanks, Francine. See you first thing tomorrow." Amanda hit the off button and turned to face Lee. "How exactly did you get yourself into this mess?" she asked. "I thought it was supposed to be a simple surveillance, no direct contact."

He rolled his eyes. "Thorndyke had other ideas. Somehow he managed to come around and get the drop on me. He hit me with some kind of gas and I passed out. The next thing I know, I woke up here, trussed up like this!"

"Well, let's get you out of this." She untied the ribbon from his neck and let it flutter to the floor. Next she reached for the roses. Lee let out a howl of protest as her fingers closed around the stems.

"Amanda! Those things have thorns! Stop!"

Contrite, she pulled back her hand. "Sorry."

"Let's just start with the handcuffs, okay?"

Amanda frowned as she realized she had left her purse in the car. She looked at Lee in dismay. "I don't have a lock pick with me. I could call Francine for help."

"No way," Lee said emphatically. "You'll have to improvise. Here, take my belt. You can use the metal prong to open the cuffs."

"Lee, some of the other agents are probably still downstairs. I'm sure one of them could lend me a lock pick." She hopped off the bed and headed for the door.

"Amanda, the last thing I want is for anyone else to find out about this," he called after her. "Now take off my belt. Take off my belt."

"But..."

"Amanda, don't make me ask you again, take off my belt!"

She climbed back up on the bed. "Fine, but this is going to take longer." She nimbly undid his belt and threaded it out of his pant loops. Reaching over his head she began to work on the locks. Their faces scant inches apart, she couldn't help but smile. "I thought I was the one who got herself into ridiculous situations." She leaned in and touched her lips to his.

"Ouch!"

Amanda looked him. "Not exactly the response I hope for when I kiss you," she said, eyebrows raised.

"I'm sorry, it's just these damned thorns."

"Lee, I'm going to have to get rid of those roses. Now just hold still." She carefully undid the button on the front of his pants and pulled down the zipper. Gingerly she eased his pants over his hips. Her lips twitched in amusement as she caught sight of Lee's underwear - white boxer shorts liberally sprinkled with a Valentine motif of red lips. "More of the Prankster's work?" she asked.

Lee blushed. "Actually, no. I bought those as a gag for our anniversary."

Amanda laughed and turned her attention back to the roses. She pulled on the waistband of his boxers, carefully removed the bouquet and discarded it to one side. Then she turned her attention back to the handcuffs. After a few more moments' work, she felt the last tumbler finally snap into place.

Released abruptly from his bonds, Lee fell against Amanda, the impact propelling both of them onto the bed. Amanda struggled beneath the weight of his body. "Lee, I know it's our anniversary but couldn't you be a bit more romantic?"

"Amanda, this isn't funny. I think I've lost all feeling in my arms - I can barely move them!"

She gently rolled Lee over onto his side. "I'm sure you'll be fine. Just lie there for a few minutes." She frowned in concentration as she worked on the cuff still encircling his other wrist. A bit of manoeuvring with the belt buckle and she was able to fling the offending restraints aside.

She lay back beside Lee, thankful to have him back again and in one piece. Reaching out, she traced the lipstick marks on his chest. "I'll think I should get you cleaned up a bit before we leave." She headed into the bathroom, calling out to him a few moments later, "I found your shirt in here, so at least you won't have to walk through the lobby half dressed."

"That's good," Lee replied, his words dying away as he caught sight of Amanda as she walked back into the room, carrying a washcloth and handtowel. He struggled to lift himself up on his elbows but found his arms still unable to support his weight. "Amanda, what exactly are you up to?" he asked suspiciously. "We really should be heading back to the Agency."

"I'm not the one who is supposed to be up to anything," she said in a beguiling voice. She stood before him, wearing his shirt, and as far as Lee could tell nothing else. His suspicions were confirmed when she sat down, not on the bed beside him, but astride his legs.

"Amanda," he began again but she cut him off, pressing her hand against his lips.

Shh... just lie there. Francine said they don't need us until tomorrow morning. Besides you're in no shape to go anywhere right now. So why don't you just relax and enjoy this?" Her eyes met his in a playful look. "It's not like you have much choice, you know." She ran the cloth in lazy circles over his chest, gently erasing the crimson marks from his body.

"There, all better," she soothed as the last of the lipstick was wiped away. She dried him off, then brushed her fingers across his chest. Leaning down, she retraced her path with her lips. "How are your arms?"

"Still pretty numb," he said, wincing as he tried vainly to lift them more than a few inches. "I must have been hanging there for over an hour before you found me."

Amanda straightened up and reached for his left hand, holding it in both of hers. "I hope you haven't lost all feeling in your hands."

Bringing his hand up to her lips, she kissed each finger in turn, starting with his pinky. When she reached his thumb, she took it into her mouth, the warmth of her tongue pushing against his flesh.

"Amanda," Lee groaned softly.

"So you do have some feeling left. Glad to hear it." She smiled and ran her tongue over his palm. "Can you feel this?" she breathed.

"Yes." Lee closed his eyes and sighed.

"Still want to go back to the Agency?" she asked.

"No," he groaned. "No."

"Good."

Lee opened his eyes to find her lips a mere fraction of an inch from his. She moved to close the remaining distance between them, her tongue pushing its way into his mouth. Breaking the kiss at last, she sat back up and moved further down his legs.

"Now let's take a look at those scratches." Her eyes danced as she looked down at his boxer shorts. "I still can't believe you bought those yourself."

"What exactly do you have in mind?" Lee asked, recognizing the look in her eyes.

She smiled mischievously at him. "Just want to make sure you're okay. I have a vested interest in this too you know." She pulled off his soggy socks, then untangled his pant legs from around his ankles before discarding them too. "Your poor feet are freezing," she said, giving them a quick massage. Next she reached for his boxer shorts, easing them down his legs.

"Hmm..." she said, observing the red marks left by the roses' thorny stems. "Those look rather nasty. There's some lotion in the bathroom." She got up and left the room again, returning a few moments later with a small bottle. "Just a complimentary sample from the hotel I'm afraid," she said, "but it's all we've got."

She straddled his legs again and opened the bottle. With a teasing smile on her face, she tilted it, letting lotion slowly drip onto his abdomen. Lee's muscles contracted at the sensation of the cold liquid against his flesh. Amanda ran her hands through the small puddle of lotion, smearing it over his chest with firm strokes. She traced his nipples with her fingertips, then lay her palms flat against his chest, spreading her fingers out as she drew her hands back down his body.

She tenderly fingered his injuries, her fingers moved carefully over the red welts where the thorns had torn at his flesh. Lee closed his eyes again, concentrating only on the sensations her hands created as they moved even lower. He groaned as her fingers tantalized him, one minute bestowing the most intimate of caresses, the next darting away again to move over his midriff or hips.

"I'm glad to see your entire body isn't paralysed," Amanda teased, noting his reaction.

The effect her touch had on him was maddening, intoxicating, and arousing. His body wasn't satisfied merely with the touch of her fingers, knowing from past experience how much more fulfilling it was to truly be with her.

"Amanda, please," he groaned. "I want you, I need you..." His voice died away as her fingers once again worked their magic.

"I need you too," she whispered. He opened his eyes and met her gaze, marveling how her eyes could look both tender and intense at the same time. Slowly Amanda lowered her head until their lips met again. They gave themselves up to the moment, forgetting the existence of anyone and anything outside of the room.



Afterwards, they lay back together on the bed for a time, wordlessly gazing into each other's eyes. Lee lifted his hand and slowly brushed his fingers along her cheek.

Amanda smiled at him. "Maybe we should get the Agency to add this little exercise to their manual. Seems to be a pretty effective way to get blood flowing to the extremities," she grinned.

Lee laughed. "You do that and Beaman will volunteer to assist Francine on every case from now until the next century. I'm just glad you were the one to find me."

"Me too, but what exactly am I supposed to write in my report?" she teased.

"Amanda, how you found me and what happened here was strictly on a need to know basis."

"But what about the picture?" she asked. "Isn't that evidence?"

Lee looked blank. "What picture?"

"Thorndyke took a Polaroid of you while you were unconscious," Amanda explained.

"What? Where is it? Francine hasn't seen it, has she?" Lee struggled to get up. "She'll be merciless - the damn thing will probably end up on her Christmas cards next December."

Amanda pulled him back down. "Relax, Lee. I've got it in the pocket of my jeans. No one else has seen it."

"And no one else needs to. I'll rip the thing to shreds myself."

Amanda smiled. "You're assuming I'm just going to hand it over to you. You've got to earn it, buster."

Lee's grin grew wider. "And how exactly am I supposed to do that?"

"We've still got a couple hours of anniversary left. Why don't we go over to your apartment and see if we can't come up with some ideas?"

**The End**