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Synopsis: Lee and Amanda have to deal with the repercussions of their hidden relationship.

"It's Not What You Think"

"Hi ... Yeah, it's me. Listen, I'm back in town... no, I went straight to the office." Lee Stetson wedged the phone between his shoulder and ear while he sorted through the stack of mail on his desk. Amanda had done a good job keeping the Q-Bureau organized during his three week absence but there were still too many things to deal with. "I was thinking that I could get the paperwork from my trip finished and maybe we could spend the evening together. Can you get away from the house for the whole night without causing too much suspicion?"

On the other end of the line Amanda replied, "Lee, I haven't seen or talked to you in almost a month. Nothing could stop me from seeing you tonight. Why didn't you call me earlier? I know we were under contact zero during your assignment, but you could have phoned before your plane took off. I would have met you at the airport."

"I was supposed to get my status report taken care of as soon as I got in. I didn't want to see you until I knew we could spend some quality time together." His voice dropped to an intimate whisper, "I missed you so much. It was driving me crazy."

"I know what you mean," she admitted. "I can't believe I haven't heard your voice for three weeks. Any longer and I would have gone into withdrawal."

Lee smiled and said, "You know, between our two schedules, it's a miracle we ever see each other at all. I guess that's what I get for being involved with a married woman." He chuckled, "Honestly, sometimes I don't know why you put up with your husband. He leaves you alone far too much. I don't think he deserves you. Are you sure you want to stay with him?"

Amanda laughed. "Despite everything you say I'm still desperately in love with the guy. So what can I do? I'll meet you at the apartment as soon as I can. Just hurry and finish up at the office."

"Sure. I love you, too." Lee hung up the phone. He picked up a file and walked over to the vault. Opening the door he found Francine Desmond standing there with a look of utter horror on her face.

"Francine," Lee stammered, "It's not what you think. I can.. I can explain." He stopped, realizing that as a point of fact he couldn't.

"Lee Stetson, have you lost your mind?" Francine finally exploded. "I thought it was bad enough that you're still dating Amanda. But you're cheating on her? And with a married woman? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

She stormed past Lee and out of the Q-Bureau.

"I'm going over to Lee's for the evening," Amanda called out to her mother as she put on her jacket. "Joe's already picked up the boys for the night so I might be a little late. Don't wait up."

Dotty walked into the hall with a look of concern on her face. "So that was Lee who called just now?"

"Yes," Amanda answered, heading towards the door.

"He finally decided to call you again after all this time?" Dotty asked acerbically.

Dotty's tone stopped Amanda and she turned around. "He just got back into town," she explained.

"And you're rushing right over to see him?" Dotty demanded sharply. "He ignores you for three weeks and you just run out the door the minute he's back? Not a single word from him, no phone calls, or letters and you drop everything for him? What about your self respect? Lee's never going to make a commitment to you if you just let him dictate the terms of your relationship."

"Mother, I've got to go. We'll talk about this later." Amanda disappeared out the door, not up to trying to explain things to her mother right then.

Dotty stared after her and said to herself, "I think this has gone on long enough."

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Lee opened the door to his apartment and walked inside. "Aman.." was all he managed to get out before she threw herself into his arms. He dropped his luggage to the floor and turned his attention to his wife. During the time he had been away he thought he had

remembered how good it felt to hold her in his arms, but obviously his memory was flawed. He revelled in the sensation of kissing her and welcomed her eager response.

"Wow," he sighed as they broke apart, "with a greeting like that I should go away more often."

Amanda cuddled against him, "I missed you so much. We've only been married for three months. It's not fair that Billy sends you on long term assignments."

"If he knew we were married, he probably wouldn't," Lee pointed out reasonably.

"Regardless, I'm never letting you out of my arms again," she vowed.

Lee sat down in a chair, pulling her into his lap. "Sounds good to me. But it'll make it a little difficult to give you your present. It's in my suitcase."

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Amanda stood before the mirror in Lee's bedroom admiring the gift he had brought her - a full length peach silk nightgown with a plunging neckline and backless to her waist. Lee walked up behind her, putting his hands on her shoulders. He lifted her hair to one side and gently brushed the nape of her neck with his lips. She shivered in anticipation.

His eyes met hers in the mirror. "I may have made a mistake when I picked out this nightgown."

"Really? I love it. Just don't tell me you saw it on someone else and thought it would look perfect on me," she teased playfully.

"Does a mannequin in a shop window on the Champs Elysées count?" he asked, smiling. "I did think you would look beautiful with it on. But now I think I'd prefer you with it off."

Lee slowly ran his hands down her back and up again, his fingertips tracing the thin straps that criss-crossed her back. Amanda leaned against him, luxuriating in his touch. Lee slowly slipped the straps off her shoulders and the garment fell into a silken heap at her feet.

As he bent to kiss her bare shoulder, she felt the warmth he always inspired in her spread through her body. Turning, she ran caressing fingers through his hair and pulled his face towards her for a deep lingering kiss.

Lee lifted her up in his arms and set her down on the bed. Unwilling to break their contact, Amanda kept her hands on the lapels of his robe and pulled him down with her.

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Lee woke up in the middle of the night and glanced over at the clock. Three am. Damn, his internal clock was still operating on European time. Knowing that trying to get back to sleep would be fruitless, he lay there watching Amanda sleep.

Now that he was happily married he regretted having shared his bed with so many women before her. But one thing he could honestly say, none of them had ever affected him the way she had. Amanda had changed the act of having sex for him to that of truly making love. He had had such a casual approach to most of his relationships before her. Although they had been physically stimulating, none of them had been very fulfilling. After a few weeks, he inevitably started looking for someone else.

The impact of their marriage vows had taken him by surprise. He had thought they had been close before, but now he was amazed to find how deep a commitment he had with Amanda. He had never realized what a gaping void there had been in his life until she came along to fill it.

The depth of their emotional bond made the physical aspect of their relationship that much more enjoyable. Years earlier he had joked with Francine about the "stamina and generosity of the American housewife". Lee smiled as he lay there in the dark; he hadn't known the half of it back then.

Although Amanda seldom discussed the intimate details of her first marriage, Lee felt sure that her sex life with Joe had never been like this either. It wasn't him and it wasn't her. It was the two of them together. It was as if they were two pieces of a puzzle, especially made to fit with each other and no one else.

Lee couldn't resist the impulse to lean over and gently kiss her. Amanda's eyes slowly opened. "Hi there," she greeted him sleepily.

"I couldn't sleep," he said apologetically.

"So I don't get to either?" she teased. "What time is it?"

"Three am."

"Oh," she yawned, blinking, "That's much too early to get up. Hmm .. but if you can't sleep, and it's not time to get up, I wonder what our other options are."

Lee moved closer, a devilish glint in his eyes. "I've got an idea, but I'll need a partner for this particular assignment."

"This wouldn't involve an in-depth interrogation by any chance, would it?" Amanda asked, eyes twinkling.

"As a matter of fact it would. And I've already been debriefed."

Amanda laughed "That's terrible. I can see I'll have to find some way to keep you from talking." She leaned in and kissed him.

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The next morning Amanda went home to change into work clothes. Then she met Lee for breakfast at a small café not far from the Agency. At the end of the meal he sighed, "We've got a meeting with Billy and the rest of the field section in half an hour. So it's back to being just partners."

She laughed, "You've obviously been out of the office gossip loop way too long. I don't think anyone at work still believes that we're just partners."

They walked into the Georgetown foyer together and greeted Mrs. Marsten. As they climbed the staircase and walked down the hall to the Q-Bureau, Francine exited their office.

"Good morning Amanda. I just needed a file from the vault," she explained. "I left in a bit of a rush yesterday." She walked by Lee without acknowledging his presence in any way.

Amanda stared after her for a few seconds, then turned to Lee in surprise. "Okay, what was that about? You would have gotten frostbite if she had stayed any longer."

"She was in the vault when I called you last night and overheard me joking about dating a married woman," he confessed reluctantly, following her into the Q-Bureau.

"So she thinks you're..." Amanda started to laugh as she put away her purse.

"She thinks I'm destroying someone's marriage," he concluded in disgust. "As well as cheating on you." He looked over and saw the expression on her face. "It's really not funny," he commented irritably.

"I know." She tried unsuccessfully to hide her smile.

"Knowing Francine she's probably going to do the same thing she did back in January. Corner us both and try to make us come to our senses," he sighed, not looking forward to the prospect.

"Only this time she's going to tell me all about this affair you're having." Amanda giggled. "I have a feeling that I'll be in for an uncharacteristic dose of sympathy."

"And I'm going to come off looking like the bad guy. This is so unfair," he complained. "I happen to know that you're involved with a married man."

"But she doesn't know that. I'm just the innocent wronged party." She laughed again and then walked back out into the hallway "Come on, we're going to be late for our meeting."

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Amanda found it difficult to concentrate during the meeting. Francine kept giving her looks which were a mixture of sympathy and pity, while avoiding direct eye contact with Lee. Amanda tried to focus her attention on Billy who was concluding the status reports on the various local assignments. "I'm sure you've all noticed that Lee Stetson has returned from Paris," he remarked.

Amanda tried to keep a straight face. She certainly had noticed. She caught Francine glaring in Lee's direction and stifled a laugh.

Billy continued, "The French government asked for our cooperation two months ago when a chemist at Severn Industries reported some suspicious transactions. Severn is based here in the States and I assigned Lee to the case."

Lee stood up, walked to the front of the room and began, "After our initial investigation here in DC revealed that several employees had been blackmailed into selling materials for chemical bombs, I went undercover as a sales rep with bad gambling debts. I managed to present a likely enough target to the blackmailers. It turned out they were part of Pierre La Croix's latest team."

One of the other agents interrupted at this point. "The terrorist? We just missed getting him last year in Rio."

"Exactly," Billy concurred. "And the year before that in Singapore."

"I monitored his group's activities for a few weeks," Lee resumed his account, "collecting evidence against them. In even that short a period of time they engineered two bomb attacks. We then set them up for a phony buy and the French authorities moved in. As a result, I'm pleased to say, La Croix and his associates are awaiting trial in Paris."

There was a short round of applause from everyone but Francine and the meeting broke up shortly thereafter. On their way out, Billy asked to speak to Lee in his office for a few minutes. Francine took the opportunity to corner Amanda. "I need to talk to you sometime today," she said. "Are you free for lunch?"

"Sure," Amanda said. She had wondered how long Francine could keep her knowledge of Lee's supposed infidelity to herself. Apparently not very long. "How about one o'clock at Nedlinger's?"

Francine noticed Lee exiting Billy's office and heading their way. "I'll meet you there," she replied and quickly walked away.

A few minutes earlier Billy had had some bad news for Lee. "We might have a problem. I didn't want to bring it up during the meeting because it might not turn out to be anything."

"What is it?" Lee asked. Just what he needed - something else to go wrong.

"I had a call from our senior agent in Paris this morning. They might have to release Pierre LaCroix."

Lee was stunned. "Release him? Why? Billy, I gave evidence of him being at the site of two bombings. He was the head of the whole operation."

"Well he's got a great lawyer. He was able to find at least five unimpeachable witnesses who swear LaCroix was in Orléans on the days of both bombings."

"There has to be something wrong here," Lee protested. "He couldn't have been. Billy, I had him dead to rights."

Billy sighed, "Maybe it's just a mixup in times. I'll keep you posted."

As Lee left Billy's office he noticed Francine talking to Amanda. Damn it, why couldn't she just mind her own business? As he walked towards them, Francine quickly left.

Watching her retreating figure, Lee remarked dubiously, "I think this is one of those things I don't want to know about, right?"

"Right. I'm meeting her for lunch."

They walked into the hallway and waited for the elevator.

"So what did Billy want?" Amanda asked curiously.

"The French authorities are having a problem holding Pierre LaCroix." Lee's mind was still on Francine. "Listen, I just had an idea about what do to about Francine."

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Amanda was the first to arrive at Nedlinger's for lunch. Figuring that they should have some privacy for their chat, she sat in one of the back boothes. A smile crept over her face as she thought back to her first visit to the bar - Lee had been so condescending. If only she could have seen into the future and known how it was all going to work out.

Her reminiscing was cut short by Francine's arrival. After they placed their orders Amanda decided to tackle the issue head on. "This must be pretty important," she began. "I don't think we've ever had lunch with just the two of us before."

"It is important, Amanda. Five months ago I tried to warn you about getting involved with Lee. I was aware that the two of you had gotten back together but I figured you were adults and knew what you were getting into. Besides, sooner or later, Lee would end up leaving you for someone else and you would realize I was right about him."

Amanda bit back a sharp retort. "Okay, you're right; we did start dating again. But if you were so sure it wouldn't last why did you ask me here today?"

"It would be one thing if Lee just got tired of you and moved on. But yesterday I found out..." She paused and then tried again. "You know, you think you know someone..."

They were interrupted by the arrival of their food. As soon as the waiter was out of earshot, Amanda asked, "So what happened, Francine?" She just wanted to get the discussion over with, knowing that Francine wouldn't be able to resist getting in a few more digs at her expense.

"I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but Lee is seeing someone else."

Amanda tried to look convincingly shocked and upset. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I overheard one of their phone conversations when I was in the vault yesterday." Francine leaned forward. "Amanda, it gets worse - she's a married woman."

"Do you really think Lee would get involved with someone who's married?" Amanda asked in a shocked voice, staring at the top of the table. She was afraid that if she made eye contact with Francine she would start laughing.

"No, but in this business you soon find out that things aren't always what they seem," Francine said smugly.

That's an understatement, Amanda thought, tempted to knock the smirk off Francine's face once and for all. "I can't believe this is happening," she said brokenly, hoping she wasn't laying it on too thick. "How could he betray me like this? Do you think he's in love with her?"

Francine said dismissively, "Undoubtedly she's some empty headed socialite whose husband doesn't pay her enough attention. She's probably got a great body that Lee can't keep his hands off of. I'm sure it's a purely physical attraction."

Amanda thought back to the previous evening - talk about purely physical. Unable to keep from smiling, she lifted her napkin to her face and pretended to be overcome.

"You really care about him don't you?" Francine softened her tone.

Amanda couldn't lie. "Yes, I do. But obviously I can't let things go on this way. He'll have to choose between the two of us. I just hope I'm doing the right thing."

"Of course it's the right thing. It's just going to be kind of rough for a few days." She leaned over and patted Amanda's hand sympathetically, obviously quite certain what Lee's decision would be.

Earlier Amanda had thought that Lee's plan was unnecessarily cruel but now... There was no doubt Francine was concerned about her, but it was just as certain that she enjoyed being the bearer of this particular bad news, seeing it as proof that she had been right all along. Lee might have been willing to date Amanda, but in the end she would just be one in a long succession of women in his life. Francine had never once considered that perhaps Lee and Amanda could make a go of it.

It was that smug, pitying attitude that Amanda hated most - that supercilious pose that was designed to make Amanda feel about two inches tall. Francine had always looked down on Amanda for harboring the illusion that Lee would ever really want her.

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Later that afternoon, Lee kept a watchful eye out the front window of the Q-Bureau, finally seeing Francine coming up the walk. "Okay," he said to Amanda, "Showtime. She'll be up here in a few minutes."

Amanda quickly went over and opened the door a fraction of an inch. As soon as she heard Francine's approaching footsteps she raised her voice, "You can't just walk away from this Lee Stetson. Is what Francine told me at lunch true?"

"Amanda, we never said we were exclusive," he retorted derisively. "You were free to date other people. It's not my fault you didn't."

"But a married woman, Lee! Why?" Amanda tried to sound as heartbroken as possible.

"Why not? It's not like I plan to get married myself." He winked at her.

"But I thought..." her voice trailed away.

He gave a short laugh. "What, that I would end up marrying you? Do you know how many other women have thought they could get me to settle down? What makes you think you're any different from them?"

Amanda flared up. "Well, you can't have it both ways. It's her or me."

"Are you giving me an ultimatum?" Lee tried to sound stern but Amanda could see the twinkle in his eyes.

"As a matter of fact I am. You can only have one of us."

"And if I decide that she's the sexiest woman I ever met?" Lee blew her a kiss, knowing Francine couldn't see them.

She raised her eyebrows and smiled back. "Fine... but you're kidding yourself if you think she'll leave her husband. That kind never does. She's probably just using you."

"You mean like I was using you?" Lee said in a mocking tone and headed out into the hallway. He couldn't wait to see the expression on Francine's face. Her reaction was exactly what he had expected - she shot him a contemptuous look, turned and walked away. This left Lee standing there with Billy, who unknown to Lee or Amanda had also come up to the Georgetown foyer.

"Oh no, not again," Lee groaned inwardly, "I just can't win." Aloud he said to Billy, "I.. we.. It's not what you think."

"Save it Scarecrow."

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Lee rang the doorbell of Amanda's house that evening and waited. He was enjoying becoming part of Amanda's family but sometimes he missed sneaking in the backdoor. It would be a relief to get away from the Agency and this would certainly take his mind off his troubles.

Dotty answered the door. "Lee," she greeted him in a rather cool tone, "It's nice to see you again. How was your trip?"

"Productive. And I'm glad to say, over." He followed her into the kitchen.

"Amanda's not home yet. She's picking up the boys at Joe's."

"I brought back a bottle of Beaujolais. Would you like a glass while we wait?" He indicated the bottle he was carrying.

"Sure," she agreed affably. Maybe the wine would make things a bit more relaxed. "You know where the glasses are. I'll just keep working on dinner."

"I also brought back a bottle of something just for you." Lee handed her a small package.

While Lee opened the wine Dotty unwrapped her present to find a flask of French perfume.

"Thank you, Lee, this was very thoughtful of you." The words were polite but he got the feeling that she had something on her mind.

When Lee turned to get two glasses out of the cupboard, Dotty said hesitantly, "Lee, can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Lee answered while pouring the wine. As he handed her a glass, he noticed the troubled expression on her face. "Is there something wrong?"

"Not exactly wrong, just something I want to discuss. I know this isn't really any of my business, but exactly where do you see your relationship with Amanda going?"

"What?" Lee nearly choked on his mouthful of wine.

"In some ways you're the best thing that ever happened to her," Dotty said slowly. "I don't think she's ever been so much in love. But because of that I think her judgement's a bit clouded. You've been dating for quite some time but don't seem to be ready to make a commitment to each other." She paused for a few seconds and then plunged ahead. "It isn't... is it the boys and me?"

"What?" Lee was startled.

"Amanda's told me about your background, how you never had much close family. So I thought maybe the boys and I made you uncomfortable."

Lee was dismayed. "That's really what you think?"

"No." Her expression softened a little, relieved that she was off base on that one. Lee seemed genuinely distressed by her words. "I think you're a very kind and thoughtful person. I'm just trying to understand what's going on. I thought the two of you were becoming quite serious, but then you disappeared for three weeks. No phone calls, nothing. It was like you dropped off the face of the Earth. Then yesterday you phone out of the blue and just expect Amanda to be at your beck and call."

Lee sighed and ran his fingers through his hair in frustration. How could he possibly explain the concept of contact zero to her. "I was in France on business," he started.

"Lee, I've been to France," Dotty cut him off sharply. "They have telephones there. You could have called. You should have called. Amanda really missed you. She loves you. She didn't say anything but it must have hurt her dreadfully that you just dropped her like that. You haven't found someone else, have you?"

"Someone else?" Lee couldn't believe how badly this was going. This just wasn't his week. "Of course not! I'm in love with Amanda."

"Then what's stopping the two of you from getting engaged?" she asked pointedly.

"It's a little more complicated than that." Lee's voice trailed off, unable to look her in the eye. He wished he could just come clean.

"If the two of you love each other, how complicated can it be?" she asked logically. "I just hope that someday you'll decide that you feel enough a part of our family to want to officially belong to it."

"I do," he protested quickly, "It's not what you think... It's just..." He had no idea what to say next. To his relief they were interrupted by the sound of Amanda and the boys returning.

The boys were excited to see Lee again, even before he gave them their presents of Swiss army knives. As they tried out the various tools and attachments, Lee asked Philip, "So, did your baseball team make the playoffs?"

"Of course," Philip nodded, as if there never had been any doubt. "The first game's on Saturday afternoon. Can you come?"

"I wouldn't miss it for anything," Lee promised, patting his stepson on the shoulder. "Afterwards I'll take all of us out for a victory dinner."

"Or a consolation party," Jamie pointed out. "You're assuming they can actually win."

Amanda noticed Lee was uncharacteristically quiet all through dinner. Afterwards she walked him to his car. "Are you okay?" she asked softly, reaching for his hand.

"I'm fine. I was just wondering, what do you think about making our marriage public?" he asked.

"Where did this suddenly come from?" Amanda was startled. "We've discussed this before and always end up with the same conclusion - our family would be safer for now if no one knew."

"Amanda, you say OUR family, but the truth is that only you and I know that I'm even part of it," he said bitterly. "Your mother thinks I'm just stringing you along."

"Did she say something to you earlier?" Amanda asked, eyes narrowing.

"We had a long talk while you were picking up the boys. Amanda, I don't want her or the boys to think I don't care about them."

"Well, let's not do anything rash, okay," she sighed. "At least sleep on it. We'll talk more about this later." She leaned up against him and put her arms around him.

"Are you coming over tonight?" he asked hopefully, resting his chin in her hair.

She smiled. "As soon as the boys are asleep. Be sure to wait up."

"Count on it."

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Lee was dozing on his couch when Amanda let herself into the apartment a few hours later. She looked down at him affectionately. He looked so peaceful, even vulnerable. It was a side he so rarely showed. "Hi," she said softly.

"Hi." He opened his eyes. "When did you get here?"

"Just a few minutes ago. No, don't get up." She sat on the end of the couch and Lee lay back down, resting his head in her lap.

She looked at the files scattered over the coffee table. "La Croix?" she asked.

"Yeah. I just don't get it," he said in a puzzled tone. "How could all those people say they saw him in Orléans? I was with him in Paris. It just doesn't make sense."

Amanda leaned over and picked up a picture. "Is this him?"

He nodded. "One of the few photographs of him in existence. He's a fanatic about privacy. That was taken with a hidden camera."

"He looks like a regular person," she mused. "You would never know he was an international terrorist."

"That's why he's been so successful. If he looked like a terrorist he'd never be able to get past security. Besides," he smiled, "some people might say you don't look like an agent."

"Francine, you mean?" Amanda laughed. "It's petty of me, I know, but I really enjoyed our little production for her this afternoon."

"If only Billy hadn't come in for the finale," Lee sighed. "I'll talk to him tomorrow and try to salvage our reputations. I wish things were that easy with your mother."

"She was pretty rough on you tonight, huh?" She gently ran her fingers through his hair.

"Amanda, I've been a field operative for over ten years. I've been interrogated by the KGB's best." He paused. "This was worse."

"She's just concerned about the boys and me. She doesn't know why you had to be away for so long." Her fingers felt cool and soothing against his forehead.

"You know what the best part of my trip was?"

She shook her head.

"The plane ride home. Before I met you I always knew I'd be returning to an empty apartment. Now all I could think of the entire flight was how much I had to come home to."

Amanda trailed her fingers down the side of his face and over his lips. "I missed you too," she whispered. She leaned down and brushed her lips against his.

Lee reached up to pull her closer. Unfortunately the couch was too narrow and as he shifted he slipped off the edge, ending up on the floor.

"Smooth move, Stetson," Amanda teased, looking down at him. "You try this with all your girlfriends?"

"Just the married ones."

"Oh, that's right. The one you think is the sexiest woman you ever met. I hear she thinks you're not bad yourself."

"Not bad! That's not exactly a ringing endorsement. Perhaps she needs a little more convincing." He reached for her hand and pulled her down onto the floor.

"I think she needs a lot of convincing," Amanda murmured as she stretched out beside him, "to make up for three weeks of neglect."

"I'm in no hurry." Lee ran a caressing hand down the length of her body. "We've got all night."

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The next morning when Lee met with Billy in his office, he received the unwelcome news that the French authorities had been unable to hold Pierre LaCroix. "He was released about an hour ago."

"Damn," Lee said, "I thought we had him. All that work for nothing."

"Not for nothing," Billy reminded him. "We have the rest of his terrorist group in custody. Apparently they could make the charges against them stick. So at the least you've put him out of business."

"For now," Lee said despondently. "Until he raises enough capital to recruit a new bunch."

"That may take him quite some time," Billy pointed out. "In the meantime, he's off the playing field." He was cut off by the ringing of the phone. Billy picked it up, listened for a moment and then held the receiver out to Lee. "It's Joe King. He's looking for either you or Amanda."

Lee took the phone. "Hi Joe, what's up?"

"Hello Lee, I'm trying to find Amanda but they said she was out."

"She left early to run some errands. I'm meeting her in an hour for lunch; can I give her a message for you?"

"No message, it's just that Philip left his baseball glove in the car the other night. I was supposed to bring it over tomorrow night in time for his practice but I just found out I have to go out of town over the weekend to take some depositions. I'm supposed to leave this afternoon."

Lee looked up at Billy. "I'm sorry, I'll take this outside. It'll just be a minute."

Billy began looking through some files on his desk. However since Lee had neglected to close the office door, he still overheard most of his side of the conversation.

"So, you're going to miss his playoff game on Saturday?" Lee asked.

"I'm afraid so. I'll call Philip tonight and explain. I'm sure he'll understand."

Right, Lee thought to himself. When is this guy going to catch on that Philip and Jamie need a father who's actually there for them once in a while? Thinking back to his conversation with Dotty the night before, he winced. He was a fine one to talk about being there. He had to convince Amanda that they should go public. Family life was difficult enough in their type of work, without adding the aggravation of a hidden relationship.

Joe interrupted his train of thought. "Can I stop by the restaurant where you're having lunch and drop off his glove?"

"Sure," Lee replied. "I'm meeting Amanda at Chez Nouvelle on 21st at noon."

"Could one of you be waiting out front? I'm really in a huge hurry. I've got to go home and throw a few things into a bag."

Lee sighed. Sometimes Joe was really pushing it. "Okay."

He hung up the phone and walked back into the office. Billy looked over at him with an inquisitive expression on his face. "Everything okay?"

"Everything's fine."

"You know," Billy hedged, "It's not always easy trying to fit into an existing family dynamic. But that doesn't mean you should just give up and start seeing other people."

Lee sighed, he had known Billy would bring up what he had overheard the previous day. "Look, I'm not cheating on Amanda, okay."

"That's not what I heard yesterday. That argument sounded pretty bad. You've got a good thing going with Amanda. She loves you. Don't be an idiot and throw it away."

Lee rolled his eyes. "Billy, it's not what you think. Francine was giving us a hard time about our relationship again and we were playing a trick on her."

"So you're not having an affair with a married woman?" Billy looked relieved. He hadn't liked the sound of the fight he had overheard at all. Unlike Francine, he had always thought that Lee and Amanda were made for each other.

"Trust me Billy, it would be impossible for me to be having an affair with this other woman."

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Amanda wasn't there yet when Lee arrived the restaurant. He stood by the curb, hoping Joe wouldn't be too late. He really wanted a chance to talk to Amanda at lunch about their marriage arrangement.

Everything seemed to happen at once in the next minute. Joe pulled up and Lee opened the passenger door, leaning in to pick up Philip's glove. At that instant a man came rushing towards Lee, simultaneously shoving him into the car and injecting him with a hypodermic needle. Lee collapsed, the man slammed the door shut, got into the back seat himself and pointed a gun at Joe. "Drive," he demanded harshly. Joe hit the accelerator and the car leapt away from the curb.

Amanda saw the whole thing as she pulled up from the opposite direction. Frantically she tried to execute a U-turn so she could follow Joe's vehicle but a sudden surge of traffic made it impossible. Within a few seconds she had managed to fight her way through the traffic snarl, but by then the car was out of sight. She quickly called Billy and reported what had happened.

"I'll put out an APB on Joe's car," he told her. "In the meantime you should come back here. You can look at some mug shots and try to ID the man you saw."

"I know who it is already," she replied. "It's Pierre La Croix."

"That's impossible. He was just released from prison this morning in Paris. There's no way he could be in DC already."

"I know what I saw," she insisted stubbornly. "It was him."

"Just come back to the office, okay?" Billy sighed.

Amanda had done some quick thinking on her drive back to the Agency. "We should check the surveillance tapes from Dulles," she said as soon as she saw Billy.

"Amanda I told you, there's no way he could have arrived this morning."

"No, not this morning," she said. "The past week, anytime after his arrest."

Francine looked at her patronizingly. "Amanda if you're in prison, you don't get to go on trans-Atlantic flights. It's a rule they have."

"I know that," Amanda shot back, losing her temper. "Lee said they had to release La Croix because he had been seen in another city at the same time as the bombings. So he was seen in two places at once, and it was Lee's word against numerous other witnesses."

"What are you getting at?" Billy asked Amanda.

"I think there are two of them. Look, just check the tapes and I'll dig through any personal records I can find."

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"Lee! Lee!"

Gradually Lee became aware that someone was calling his name. He opened his eyes and the room slowly came into focus. His arms felt stiff and he tried to stretch them. It was then that he realized that they were handcuffed behind his back and that he was tied to a chair. He looked around the room and saw Joe similarly bound.

"How long have we been here?" Lee asked.

"I'm not sure, he took my watch. I can't believe I'm sitting here tied to a chair. I was supposed to be on a flight to New York this afternoon." Joe seemed a bit overwhelmed by the whole situation. He asked hopefully, "Can you get us out of here?"

"That's easier said than done. Whoever this guy is he did a pretty thorough job of tying us up."

"So we should just sit back and wait for The Agency to find us?" There was thinly veiled animosity in Joe's voice.

"Do you have a problem with The Agency?" Lee asked.

"Oh no, just that last year they invaded my house, accused my ex-wife of treason and scared the hell out of my two sons."

"That was Amanda's house, not yours," Lee pointed out.

"Speaking of Amanda, who knows how many times you've put her life in danger. If anything ever happens to her, I'll never forgive myself. Her whole association with The Agency is my fault."

Lee looked over at him sharply. "Your fault? What do you mean?" If anything he would have expected Joe to throw blame in his direction.

"If it hadn't been for me Amanda would never have met you. After all you met her when you were investigating the troubles I had when I came back from Africa."

"Right," Lee agreed slowly.

"She's just a simple housewife - her college degree was in American Lit. She's not equipped to handle this sort of thing."

"Look, she's a grown woman. She makes her own decisions."

"Right, but you got her a job at the Agency after the two of you started dating. How clearly was she thinking then?"

Lee sighed, "You think I would just drag my girlfriend into this line of work?"

"Isn't that what you've done? You start dating her and the next thing I know she's working for The Agency. Quite frankly it seems more than a little irresponsible."

Lee managed to hold back a caustic reply. He would love to tell Joe just how offbase he was, but it wasn't really the time or place. They were interrupted by the sound of the door being unlocked.

A man walked in and looked over at Lee. "I see you've decided to join the party, Stetson."

"La Croix," Lee spat at him, "How the hell did you get here so fast?"

"Professional secret." He walked around Lee, carefully checking ropes and knots. "I wouldn't want you leaving too soon. Once I have you on the open market, I should be able to get a pretty penny for you. Enough to refinance my operations, which you so unceremoniously shut down."

He walked over to Joe, and put a hand under his chin, yanking his face upwards and appraising it. "Unfortunate that I didn't get your partner, would have been a nice bonus," he remarked, then turned and abruptly left the room.

Joe let out the breath he had been holding. "Is this a part of your everyday routine?"

"Not if I can help it."

"So is your partner any good? Do you think he'll be able to find us?"

"Hasn't let me down in over three and a half years. I'm not giving up yet." Lee wasn't about to correct Joe's misogynist assumption.

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Amanda looked up from the computer terminal as Francine walked into the Q-Bureau. "Anything?" she asked anxiously.

"Sorry Amanda, nothing yet. Ernie's still checking airport surveillance tapes from this past week." She paused but couldn't resist commenting on the situation. "You know it's kind of ironic when you think about it, La Croix kidnaps two men who have both dumped you."

Amanda closed her eyes. "Francine, please, not now..."

"I'm sorry. It's just that I heard you and Lee arguing yesterday. I know that he chose that other woman."

Amanda sighed. If, no, she quickly corrected herself, WHEN they found Lee she was going to give some serious consideration to the going public idea. The whole thing was getting out of hand. And she wanted to be the one to personally tell Francine the truth. She smiled as she pictured what Francine's reaction would be.

Noticing her expression, Francine asked, "Did you find something?"

"I'm not sure," Amanda replied. "Yesterday Lee went over all the case material with me, trying to figure out where things went wrong. One of the things he mentioned was that he thought La Croix wasn't really French, but French Canadian. Something in his accent."

"Any luck verifying that?"

"I've found his birth certificate in the Canadian government's database. He's originally from a small town in northern Quebec. At least I think he is. All the provincial records are in French of course, could you give me a hand?"

"Sure." Francine's idea of help was to brush Amanda aside and take over the keyboard. "It's a good thing one of us bothered to learn more than one language. Let's see what other records they have on his family." She started punching in keys for various searches. "Hmm... no brothers or sisters. Let's branch a little further out... Okay, he has some cousins, one of whom is almost the same age."

"He might be the one we're looking for."

"I don't think so. He died ten years ago."

"Ten years ago? That's when La Croix first became a major player. You don't suppose the two things are related. How did he die?"

"Doesn't say. I'll try to check the local paper." She continued keying in but frowned a few minutes later. "Their records aren't on computer. Don't these people know it's almost the 21st century? I'll have to telephone them. Look, why don't you go down and see how Ernie's doing with the video search."

Dejected, Amanda left the office. She wished there was something she could do. Without a task to occupy herself, her mind had time to think about what La Croix could be doing. At a time like this her experience as an agent worked against her - she knew exactly what could be happening. La Croix had undoubtedly kidnapped Lee for revenge. But what form would it take? Would he press him for information, trade him to someone else or worst of all, just kill him? Was Lee in fact already dead?

Amanda leaned against the wall and closed her eyes. No, she thought to herself, Lee couldn't be dead. Surely she would know, something inside of her would have died too. Logically she knew the idea was absurd but she thought back to a time when she had been the one captured. She concentrated, "Lee, this time I'm coming to get you. Please hold on, don't give up."

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"Hold that rope... No, not that one. The other one." Lee sighed in frustration. After maneuvering their chairs so they were now sitting back to back, Lee was trying to untie Joe. La Croix hadn't bothered using handcuffs on him. "This is a lot easier with Amanda," Lee muttered.

"What did you say?" Joe started to ask but was cut off by the terrorist's return.

"What have we here? I leave you two alone for a few minutes and you try to escape." He pulled their two chairs apart, left for a moment and returned with two more pairs of handcuffs. He used one to secure Lee to a pipe and the other to fasten Joe's chair to a hot water tank on the other side of the room. "I can't very well have the two of you gone when my partner gets here, can I?" he concluded.

"What partner?" Lee shot back. "All your associates are in prison in Paris."

La Croix gave a short laugh. "You're not as smart as you like to think Stetson. Your partner must be the brains of your team. Maybe you should have brought her with you to Paris. My sources tell me she's quite lovely as well as intelligent. I still think I should put you on the auction block as a package deal." As he spoke he crossed the room, ending up standing by Joe. "The difficulty of course is how to capture her too. Perhaps I should use the added incentive of her ex-husband to lure her here - father of her children and all that?"

"What are you talking about?" Joe said in confusion.

La Croix glanced down at him with a mocking grin. "You really don't know? Left out of the loop, were we? Our Mr. Stetson was something of a lone wolf before he hooked up with her. They've become quite a formidable team in the counterespionage game." He laughed again and walked out the door.

Joe just stared at Lee for a few minutes. "Unbelievable," he finally said. "Now he's going to go after Amanda. You've got him convinced that she's actually an agent."

Lee sighed. He'd had about all the misunderstandings he could take for a week. "That's because she is."

"That's impossible. You've known her for what, about a year and a half. I assume she didn't start working at the Agency right away. How far could she have come?"

Lee figured that at this point the only thing left for him was the truth. "You know, Joe, you've got whole thing backwards. Amanda didn't meet me because of you. I asked to be assigned to your case because I already knew her. In fact, by then I had known her for over two and a half years."

Joe's jaw dropped. "The two of you were dating all that time?"

"No," Lee shot him a look of disgust. "I didn't get Amanda a job at The Agency because I was involved with her. You should give her more credit than that. She didn't need me to help her get a job, she earned her place at The Agency every step of the way. And, not that it's any of your business, we didn't start dating until nine months ago, around the same time she started formal operative training. She's got great instincts and is a hell of a good agent."

"My Amanda?" Joe said in bewilderment.

"No, MY Amanda," Lee retorted. "When you got back from Africa you told her she wasn't the same woman you left behind. You were right. And you know what? I'm not the same person I was when I met her either."

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Amanda stood in the doorway of the video lab, watching as Ernie scanned frame after frame of surveillance tape. Trying to keep up with the rapidly moving images was enough to give anyone a headache.

"Got him." Ernie suddenly paused the machine.

"When?" Amanda asked impatiently.

"Five days ago, 5 pm flight, Air France, gate 21. I'd say it's a perfect match."

"What is?" Billy startled Amanda by walking up behind her.

"Sir, La Croix came into the country the same day he was arrested. He does have a double. One of them is arrested so the other leaves the country."

"But who is this doppelganger?"

"We think it might be his cousin." Amanda explained. "Francine's up in the Q-Bureau checking records."

They waited while Ernie made a printout of the video still and then headed for the elevator. When the doors opened, Francine got off, nearly running them down. "I was just coming to look for you," she said.

"Obviously," Billy observed dryly. "What did you find?"

"Amanda was right. I spoke to the mortician in La Croix's home town. He had a cousin named Jean Paul who looked a lot like him. This cousin was supposedly killed in a car accident ten years ago. The body was very badly burned in the wreckage and identified mainly because of the vehicle. It's a small town and no autopsy was ever done."

"So," Amanda continued for her, "they killed someone else and burned the body in the car. Every one thinks Jean Paul is dead, maybe he has some plastic surgery to accentuate their similarity and suddenly La Croix has the perfect alibi for all of his terrorist activities."

"No wonder Lee couldn't pin anything on him. No one could."

As the three of them headed upstairs, Amanda asked "Sir, what do we do now?"

"I've had extra men watching Dulles all day today. I expect La Croix made a beeline here as soon as he was released. He doesn't know we're on to him and since he'll have arrived hours after Lee was captured, he'll think he's in the clear. We'll follow him and hopefully he'll take us straight to Lee. Until he shows up though, there's not much we can do."

"I was afraid you were going to say that," Amanda sighed.

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Amanda was nervously waiting in the Q-Bureau when there was a knock on the door and Billy walked in. "Nothing yet," he answered her unspoken question. "I just came up to see how you were doing."

"I'm okay," she replied unconvincingly.

"We'll get them back," he said with a confidence he wished he actually had.

"It's just so hard to sit here and wait."

"I know. But believe me, you're better at it than Lee." He smiled. "I thought we'd have to sedate him the last time you were missing."

She smiled back and then looked down. "I just wish there was something I could do."

"It's never easy in this game, even more so when you're emotionally involved."

She glanced up at him. "You've always known haven't you?" It wasn't really a question.

"I think I figured it out about ten minutes after I first saw the two of you together. I knew you'd realize it for yourselves given enough time. This past year it's been pretty obvious that you finally did."

Amanda flushed slightly. "Sir, about yesterday and what you overheard..."

"It's all right, Lee explained already. I was glad to hear that everything was okay between the two of you. I know you've been keeping your personal life separate from work and I can appreciate your concerns. Just don't let The Agency keep the two of you apart."

Amanda jumped as the phone rang. She answered it and then handed the receiver to Billy. "It's Francine."

He listened intently for a few moments. "Okay, tell them to hold their positions until we arrive. We don't want to spook La Croix into doing anything stupid. Amanda and I will meet you at my car in five minutes."

He hung up the phone. "They followed him to a house across town. Let's go."

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Two other agents were waiting when Billy, Francine and Amanda pulled up. Their van, ostensibly labeled "Potomac Power and Light", contained a mobile command centre. "What's the status?" Billy asked as soon as they were inside.

"La Croix went into a house on the next block about half an hour ago. We've got the front and back exits covered. No one's gone in or out."

"So we don't know how many of them there are," Billy observed.

"Or if Lee and Joe are even there," Francine pointed out.

"We've got to get someone inside," Billy agreed. "But how? If we rush the house they're likely to shoot one of their hostages."

Amanda's breath caught in her throat. She had been so worried about Lee that she had almost forgotten that Joe was in just as much danger, perhaps even more. Lee had some value to La Croix, Joe didn't. Her sons could be left to grow up without their father just as they were starting to really get to know each other.

The car phone rang and Francine quickly picked up. "They're patching a call through from The Agency," she said.

Billy reached for the phone but she shook her head. "It's for Amanda."

Confused, Amanda took the phone and listened for a moment. "Joe?" she asked, her voice shaking. "Are you alright?" She heard the sound of a scuffle, followed by a different man's voice. "Of course he is. For now at any rate. If you want to make sure that he and

your partner remain that way, you'll meet me at the Tour Mobile stop on the east side of the Jefferson Memorial."

"When?" she asked, trying not to let her fear show.

"In twenty minutes. Come alone and don't get any foolish ideas. If I'm not back here in an hour my partner has instructions to cut our losses in a most dramatic fashion."

"I'll do exactly what you say." The line went dead and she hung up the phone. Turning to the others, she explained what she had to do.

"Amanda, you can't go alone," Billy protested.

"Sir, what choice do we have? He'll kill them if I don't."

"At least let us put a wire on you."

"NO," she protested adamantly. "They'll find it. There's no time. I have to be there in twenty minutes. Please let me go."

"Amanda, we don't even know for sure that he'll bring you back here. If he takes you somewhere else we'll have no way of finding you."

"They managed to get a partial trace on the call." Francine reported the results of her call to the Agency lab. "It definitely was from this neighborhood, so it looks like we've got the right house."

Amanda turned to Billy again, with a pleading look. "Sir, you have to let me do this. Lee would do the same for me if things were reversed."

Billy sighed; sometimes he really hated his job. "Okay," he said, "you can go. But once you're in the house you have one hour exactly before we kill the power lines and move in."

Amanda leaned over and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "Thank you," she said, "not just for this, for everything." She got back into Billy's car and quickly drove off.

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Billy sighed in relief as La Croix's car came back down the street. He could see Amanda sitting in the passenger seat, apparently unharmed. After the car had pulled into the driveway, he picked up the radio to contact the team of agents scattered throughout the

neighborhood. "Okay, they're back. Everyone keep your eyes and ears open. Let's give Amanda a chance, but be prepared to move in one hour, exactly."

Amanda tried to keep up as her captor shoved her roughly along. She glanced around, as he led her by the arm, trying to memorize the layout of the house. Desperately she looked for something, anything she could use to her advantage.

He pushed her down a flight of stairs and into the basement. With the part of her mind that wasn't busy being terrified, she hoped that he would put her in the same room as Joe and Lee. At least that would be one advantage, she thought, if I don't have to search for them.

La Croix unlocked a door, and thrust her ahead of him into a large unfinished room. She stumbled but managed to keep from falling. Looking up, she was relieved to see Joe and Lee sitting there, handcuffed but both alive and well.

La Croix pushed her into a chair and produced two more pairs of handcuffs. He snapped them around her wrists and secured the cuffs to a grate. Lee caught her eye and winked. He then rolled his eyes and shook his head slightly. Amanda suppressed a smile. They were both alright but the room might be bugged. So much for discussing a plan of action. It was all up to her.

As soon as La Croix left the room, she surreptitiously worked a tiny lock pick out of the cuff of her blouse. She steeled her mind to concentrate only on the locks, working on first one handcuff and then the other. She frowned as she realized each hand was bound to the grate with a separate pair of cuffs. La Croix had obviously planned to make escape as difficult as possible; she would have to open both of them before she could help Lee or Joe. She tried to visualize the tumblers and line up the gates in her mind, careful not to make any moves which would alert anyone who might be watching.

Before she was finished though, La Croix returned. As soon as he started to speak, she realized that this time it was the cousin, as he now had a totally different manner. "Quite the menage, n'est pas?" he gloated, his eyes roaming around the room. "The housewife turned spy, her crack agent partner and her ex-husband. Tell me, Amanda, which one do you think will be more jealous if I do this?"

He walked over to her, leaning in uncomfortably close. Reaching out a hand, he slowly stroked her cheek. Amanda pulled away as far as she could, but he followed. Out of the corner of her eye, Amanda could see a muscle in Lee's jaw twitch and mentally implored him not to react.

"You really are quite lovely," La Croix continued, moving in even closer. His breath was hot on her cheek. "Ever thought about switching sides?"

He kissed her, first on the cheek then a hard, cruel kiss on the mouth. She flinched backwards as he began fingering the buttons on the front of her blouse. He opened one and trailed a finger along her exposed skin. Amanda froze in fear for a moment, then forced her mind to concentrate on her task at hand. Just a few seconds more...

La Croix took a set of keys out of his pocket with one hand, simultaneously sliding the other beneath the material of her blouse. "Perhaps we should continue this interrogation in private."

From his vantage point, only a few feet away, Lee could take no more. "Get your hands off her, you filthy bastard!" he raged, pulling against his restraints with all his might.

La Croix spun around, his fist catching Lee full across the face. Still chained to the post and tied to the chair, Lee toppled over. He fell at an awkward angle, his head hitting the concrete floor with a dull crack. His eyes closed and a small pool of blood began to form, trickling from a cut on his head.

At last Amanda felt the snap of the last gate sliding into place and pulled loose from the grate. When La Croix turned back towards her, she was ready. She swung her hands at him and the dangling metal cuffs caught him squarely in the face. Crying out with the unexpected pain, he dropped his gun. Amanda leaped for it, exulting as her hands closed around the grip.

She pointed the gun at La Croix, then reached over and took his set of keys. "Now sit," she ordered, as she quickly undid the cuffs from her wrists and used them to secure him.

She knelt by Lee, relieved beyond words, when she was able to find a slow but steady pulse. Finally she straightened up and looked over at Joe. "Are you okay?"

Mutely he nodded, stunned by what he had just witnessed. Amanda walked over, unlocked his handcuffs, untied the ropes, then turned her attention back to their prisoner. She pointed the gun at him again and ordered firmly, "Now call for your partner."

"What partner?" he asked, with a look of innocence.

Her voice was like cold steel. "Don't play games with me. We know all about you and your cousin. There's a team of agents waiting outside, so I suggest you cooperate."

No response. She cocked the gun. "My partner needs medical attention. Don't make me trade your life for his."

Still he remained silent. Amanda carefully aimed the gun, pulled back the trigger and shot a neat hole in the wall, bare inches from La Croix's head. "Well, that should get his attention."

She quickly moved beside the door, anticipating the other man's entrance. Almost before La Croix was fully through the door, she put her gun to the back of his head. "What the hell?" he exclaimed.

"Put down your gun and move over there." She indicated the chair Joe had recently vacated. Once he, too, was handcuffed, Amanda turned back towards Joe. "There's a van parked about a block down the street. Billy Melrose is in it. Go and tell him to send in a team of agents and to get an ambulance here quickly."

As Joe ran out of the room, she glanced over at Lee again. Despite her worried concern about him, she didn't dare take her eyes off the prisoners long enough to check on him again.

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Joe walked over to where Amanda was waiting in a hospital corridor. "How's Lee?" he asked.

"The paramedics managed to stabilize him in the ambulance. They said he should be fine, but the Agency doctor is still going over him. How about you? You okay?"

"I'm fine. Just a bit shaken up. Not to mention, still in shock." He looked at his ex-wife with a bemused expression. "You're actually a spy. I had no idea. I just figured you had some type of office job at the Agency."

"I'm sorry, Joe. I meant to explain everything to you at some point. It just kept getting more and more complicated." She smiled. "How on earth did you get mixed up in all this, this afternoon?"

"Philip forgot his baseball glove and I was going to bring it to Lee. It sounded straightforward at the time, just meet him at the restaurant and hand him the glove. How could something so simple get so out of control?"

She gave a short laugh, knowing exactly how he felt. "Tell me about it."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Dr. Kelford exit Lee's room and walk towards the waiting room where Billy and Francine were sitting. "I've got to go."

"Right. I should find out when the next flight to New York is. We'll have to have a long talk when I get back."

"Sure."

She watched him leave, then turned and headed into the waiting room. "How is he?" Billy was asking.

Dr. Kelford smiled. "Lee's lucky he's got such a hard head. It's just a mild concussion."

Amanda smiled with relief, as the doctor continued, "Mind you, he's still a bit groggy. Unfortunately not enough to keep from giving the staff here a hard time. One of you should brief him about what happened this afternoon."

"You mean he doesn't remember?" Amanda asked anxiously, "Are you saying he has ..."

"Relax, Amanda. Some short term memory loss isn't unusual with a concussion. I'm sure all the important pieces are in place but we'll check to make sure."

Lee looked up as the four of them entered his room, asking, "Could someone please tell me what happened this afternoon? Did we get him?"

Billy was quick to reassure him. "Everything's under control. La Croix is back in custody. There shouldn't be any more trouble with the charges in France."

Francine broke in. "There were two of them, you know. His cousin was providing him with an alibi for all his operations."

"How are you feeling?" Amanda asked, still concerned. "How much of today do you remember?"

Dr. Kelford started fussing around, adjusting the bandage on Lee's forehead. "You do know who everyone is?" he said, half in jest.

Lee sighed, "Doc, I don't have amnesia. I just don't remember everything that happened today. Of course I know these people." He pointed to his visitors in turn. "That's Billy Melrose, my section chief, Francine Desmond, my co-worker and Amanda Stetson, my partner. Now are you satisfied?"

Francine stood motionless for a solid minute. "Amanda Stetson?" she finally managed to get out. "Okay, Lee, did you get hit on the head harder than we thought, or..."

Billy grinned. "Come on, Francine, let's leave these two alone so they can work this out."

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Lee was more than ready to leave when Amanda arrived at the hospital the next afternoon. She found him sitting on the bed, fully dressed and waiting for her.

"Where are you going?" She raised an eyebrow.

"Home. Dr. Kelford said I could rest there, just as well as here." He jumped up, ready to go.

She sighed. "Considering that you won't lie down and rest in either place, he's probably right."

He pulled her close and said in a suggestive tone, "I tell you what, we could go to my place and both lie down."

She laughed and gave him a quick kiss. "That doesn't sound very restful."

Lee took Amanda's hand in his as they walked out of room. He hesitated slightly and then asked, "So what was the reaction at the Agency when people heard we were married?"

"The grapevine has been working overtime." Amanda thought back to the steady stream of people who had 'just happened' to drop by the Q-Bureau during the day and smiled.

"Although, I think a lot of people weren't really that surprised. Billy, for one."

"How about Francine?"

Amanda grinned. "First she subjected me to a ten minute tirade on how she couldn't believe I let her go on and on about your affair with a married woman. Then she said to tell you that she's not speaking to either of us."

He laughed and put an arm around her waist, pulling her close. "We should be so lucky."

Lee waited until they were in the parking lot, getting into her car before saying, "You know, your mother phoned me this morning."

"My mother?" She looked over at him, confused.

"I guess you mentioned which hospital I was at. She was quite upset about my 'car accident'. I think she feels bad about giving me such a hard time the other night. Anyway, we're going to your place for dinner."

"Oh, we are, are we?" Amanda started up the engine and drove out of the lot.

"Yep. What do you say we make it a celebratory dinner? Since everyone at the Agency knows we're married now, I figure the least we can do is tell your family we're engaged."

"Okay," she replied.

"Okay? That's it? No argument? That was too easy," he protested. "I was sure I'd have to do a lot more work. I thought we'd swing by my place, get your ring and I'd wear down your resistance."

"Well if you put it that way," she smiled at him playfully. "Let's go to your apartment and you can try to convince me. I'm warning you, though, I can be pretty stubborn."

"Well, I can be pretty persuasive." He reached over and covered her hand with his.

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"Now a Type A interrogation is very different from a Class C," Lee explained as they got off the elevator by his apartment. "In a Class C, the subject isn't even aware that they are being questioned. A Type A isn't like Good Cop, Bad Cop either, since it requires only one interrogator."

"Why is it called Type A?" Amanda asked as he unlocked the door and they walked inside.

"A for Achilles, as in Achilles heel. It's only used when the interrogator has extensive knowledge of the subject and exploits it. The most effective knowledge of course, is some sort of weakness, something that makes the subject vulnerable. If there is a relationship of some kind between the two, so much the better."

He looked over at her and smiled. "Now, in your case, I'd say I have a variety of vulnerabilities to choose from."

"Oh really," she answered. "You think you could get me to break that easily?"

"Allow me to demonstrate." He indicated a chair. "You have a seat and do your best not to react to anything I say or do. Try to focus your mind on something else."

"Okay, but believe me, it's not going to work. Remember, I had a lot of practice resisting your charms when we first started dating." She sat down and looked up at him expectantly.

Lee crossed to the other side of the room. "So, you really don't think we should tell your family the truth about us?" he began.

Amanda just sat there.

He started to walk towards her. "Don't you think it actually would be safer if I lived with all of you and could keep a closer eye on things?"

She didn't so much as blink.

He closed the distance between them, standing right in front of her. "Plus, your mother wouldn't hassle you about your love life, if she knew you were married."

She looked right through him.

He knelt in front of her and leaned in. "Not to mention the fringe benefits of being with each other every night."

Amanda made a supreme effort and managed not to smile at the images that statement conjured up in her mind.

Lee chuckled. "You know, you're actually pretty good at this. I'll have to up the pressure a bit." He moved in closer, his face mere inches from hers. "Since verbal persuasion isn't getting me anywhere," he continued, "we move on to physical."

His lips brushed against hers. She sat there and thought of the Arctic, snow, icebergs, anything but the gentle pressure of his mouth. He moved his lips along her cheek and, ever so slowly, began to chart a course down her neck.

This is no good, she thought. Ice melts. She switched her mind to an image of a boulder, granite, impervious, unyielding.

"Now I happen to know," Lee whispered sensuously, "that you have a particularly sensitive spot at the base of your neck."

He pushed open the collar of her blouse and began a series of slow, teasing kisses.

Amanda's mind blurred. This wasn't working either. You could strike a match on a rock, creating a fire, hot, smouldering, intense. Her defenses crumbled and she reached up to pull his face back towards hers. "Okay, you win," she sighed, as their lips met in a breathless kiss.

Lee's lips smiled against hers. "Knew I was getting to you. And I didn't even have to resort to more intimate persuasions." He reached up and undid one of the buttons on her blouse. Suddenly he recoiled, as if doused with a bucket of cold water. His hands dropped and he moved back a few steps.

"What's wrong?" Amanda asked, confused.

"Yesterday afternoon," he choked out, as he struggled to fill in the gaps in his memory of the previous day. The remaining few pieces fell into place. "La Croix... he was..." Lee's mind could barely function. "Did he..."

"No, no! Lee, nothing happened, I'm okay." Amanda jumped up from the chair and put her arms around him.

"He was going to hurt you," Lee said in an anguished voice, "and I had to just sit there. I couldn't do anything to help you."

"Shh." Amanda tried to comfort him, running her hands down his face, forcing him to look her in the eyes. "Lee, everything is okay. I had a half rake hidden in my sleeve. I almost had those handcuffs undone when he came in. All I needed was a diversion, which you so thoughtfully provided."

She smiled but he refused to be pacified. "This isn't funny, Amanda. You really could have been hurt. You needed me and I couldn't do a damn thing to help you. Maybe you were right all along; maybe we should keep our marriage secret. I couldn't protect you, much less our whole family."

"Lee, I don't need you to protect me. I just need you. I need you to let the boys see what it's like for a man to be there for his family. I need you to show my Mother that I was right to wait all this time for you to come along. I need you beside me every night when I fall asleep and every morning when I wake up."

She could tell he still wasn't quite convinced. "Lee, we joked about you being involved with a married woman, but our marriage has been like an affair. I could have lost you yesterday

and all I would have been left with was memories of stolen moments. I don't want moments, I want you."

She slid her arms around his neck, and looked up at him, silently pleading with him to agree with her. He relaxed visibly, the expression of love in her eyes as effective a persuasion as any of her words. Despite all the risks, she was right. They belonged with each other.

"We should be building a life together, not sneaking around," she concluded, softly running her hands through his hair. "Now, let's go tell my family that we're getting married."

"Right after we share another moment." He picked her up in his arms and walked towards the bedroom.

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Dotty glared at them in mock annoyance when they walked in the back door. "You do realize that the two of you are an hour late for dinner," she pointed out to them.

"Sorry, Mother," Amanda apologized. "We had to stop by Lee's apartment."

"I needed to pick something up." Lee smiled at Amanda.

"Well, you're not the one who has had to fend off two starving teenagers."

Lee offered, "We'll make it up to you and do the dishes after dinner. And after our announcement."

"What kind of announcement?" Dotty began to smile. It appeared that the two of them had finally come to their senses.

Lee gave Amanda's left hand a squeeze, hiding her ring from view. "Let's just say, it's exactly what you think."

The End