

## False Start

**Disclaimer:** Scarecrow and Mrs. King is copyrighted to Warner Brothers and Shoot the Moon Production Company. The story, however, is copyrighted to the author. This story is for entertainment purposes only and cannot be redistributed, reproduced, archived, reposted, or forwarded without the permission of the author.

Situations have been used from the episodes "The First Time" (written by Eugenie Ross-Leming and Brad Buckner) and "Service Above and Beyond" (written by Peter Lefcourt). No infringement of copyright is intended.(and an apology offered to them for what I have done with their stories!)

**Date written :** January 2001

**Synopsis:** A totally AU story that changes the start of the series.

**Author's Note:** Quite a while back a few of my beta readers and I had a discussion about Alternate Universe stories and how some people take them to mean that the characters can do and be absolutely anything the author wants. One of us remarked that this argument, taken to an extreme, could result in a story where Lee and Amanda ended up having sex the day they met. Of course, we all agreed, this is an absolutely ludicrous idea. The first day indeed! Would never work! Not on the first day! Never in a million years! No one could make that believable. But then my twisted little mind started to think... what about the second day...

-----

"Well, well, well. Look who finally managed to remember the way back to DC." Francine Desmond smirked at Lee Stetson as he walked past her desk. "So how was Germany? Did you find out anything other than that fraulein's number you misplaced last time?"

"Actually yes," he replied. "Despite your lack of confidence in my skills, I think we might get this whole missile fiasco sorted out yet." He stopped dead in his tracks as he caught sight of a woman sitting at a desk on the far side of the bullpen. She had headphones on and was typing at a furious rate. "What is she doing here?" he asked in shock.

Francine rolled her eyes dramatically. "You'll have to ask Billy. Believe me, it wasn't my idea." She picked up a stack of folders from her desk and headed out. "Don't forget, you still owe me a dinner for sticking up for you in front of Dirk."

Lee nodded absently as she left, watching the other woman a few seconds longer. Shaking his head, he walked into Billy's office.

"Lee, I heard you were due in this morning," his boss greeted him. "Sounds like your time in Germany was well spent. At least now we have proof positive Hollander's involved."

"And ready to make a move from all appearances. I managed to catch the same flight over as he did. He was picked up by limousine and dropped off at the home of James Delano."

"Which makes sense." Billy indicated a file sitting on his desk. "I've had a team digging into Delano's finances ever since you alerted us two days ago."

Lee raised a curious eyebrow. "I take it he's not the simple fast food entrepreneur he'd like to have us think."

"Delano's company is in red ink, deep." Billy picked up the folder and handed it to Lee. "He's trying to expand and the East German market would be quite a coup - no other American fast food outlet has been allowed in there yet."

"Which would explain all the phone conversations with Hollander these past few days," Lee mused, skimming through the pages quickly. "If Delano's desperate enough for this deal, he might just use his contacts within Washington society to help obtain classified weapons information."

Billy indicated a paragraph on the top sheet. "We found out he's giving a party for his Quickie Chickie Snack Shack backers Friday night. I think you should be there."

Lee nodded. "It would be an ideal setting for an initial meeting. Francine available to come along?"

Billy shook his head. "She's up to her ears with aftermath of the ACM case. Besides at this point I don't think you need a full agent backup. Delano and Hollander still seem to be in the preliminary stages. They might have a meet with their contact but it'll take them time to iron out the terms."

Lee nodded again. "Okay. I'll use one of our low-level helpers." He walked to the closed blinds, raised one slat and peered out. "Speaking of low level, what's Amanda King doing here? And at a desk no less?" He tried to keep his tone nonchalant.

"I hired her." Billy said simply.

"You what?" Lee dropped the blind and turned to his boss with an incredulous look on his face. "When?"

"About a month ago - just after you left for Germany."

"But why?"

"I called her in for a debriefing about the Mrs. Welch incident," Billy explained. "She mentioned that she was looking for a part time job and it turned out she has excellent office skills. And of course the initial background check we ran after you gave her the package indicated she was clean. It all seemed to work out perfect."

"Perfect. Right," Lee mumbled. He had spent the better part of four weeks in Europe trying to forget Amanda King. And now here she was, working only a few desks away from him.

"Is there something I should know about Amanda?" Billy asked pointedly.

"What? No, nothing. I'm going to start working on wrangling an invite to that party." Lee headed out the door. He walked past his desk and out of the bullpen, pausing only to take one last look at Amanda who was still industriously typing away.

\*\*\*\*

Amanda's fingers came to a rest on her computer keyboard as Lee disappeared down the hallway. She had been expecting his arrival all morning. The previous afternoon she'd overheard a conversation in the coffee lounge between two members of the steno pool. Apparently one of them had transcribed a memo saying that Scarecrow was due back in town.

It wasn't the first time his name had come up in conversation, either. Almost every woman who worked for the Agency had a story to tell of a romantic entanglement with Lee Stetson - either involving herself or some other female agent. But surely not all those stories could be true. Lee seemed to have the air of an urban legend, the anecdotes about him taking on a life of their own and growing out of proportion. Amanda sighed. She could add her own tale to the list, if she wanted.

Lee's return had been the one thing she'd dreaded since accepting Mr. Melrose's job offer. She'd been so flattered when he hired her. The idea of working in the field of counter-espionage was more than a little intriguing. Of course none of the spy novels she'd read had ever mentioned the less than glamorous side of intelligence work - the thousands of hours put in behind the scenes by office staff.

On the other hand, Lee seemed to fit the stereotype of the womanizing agent to a T. And what must he think of her - some hormone crazed housewife, drooling over the "James Bond" who had so precipitously entered her life? No wonder he was avoiding her. She felt her cheeks redden as she thought back to the evening in his apartment. She was a grown woman with children of her own. Couldn't she have shown some self-control? Instead she had ended up making a fool of herself.

She might have known that once Lee returned, he wouldn't even notice her, or if he did, he would avoid her at all costs. She hadn't missed his glances in her direction or his pointed refusal to acknowledge her presence.

She looked around the Agency bullpen with a heavy sigh, her mind wandering back to her first visit there - the evening of the masquerade party. She'd been astonished to find out that the man who had approached her at the train station was, in fact, a government operative.

She'd sat in a mild state of shock, listening incredulously as he disclosed the significance of the package he'd given her. "Anyway, you can see why the package is so important," Lee concluded his explanation. "Whatever's in it may stop our leaks and these killings, too. We've lost four agents in the last two weeks alone."

"Four agents," she echoed. "Isn't that a lot?"

"Yeah." He sighed and ran a hand through his hair, mussing the perfectly groomed strands.

"Were they close friends of yours?" she asked hesitantly, not knowing how personal to get with her questions.

"I knew a couple of them." Catching the look of sympathy on her face he hurriedly said, "Look, it's not the kind of job where you make a lot of friends. You don't have to worry about me."

"So, never a Mrs. Spy, no little spies? No girlfriends, no buddies?"

"You've heard of the word 'loner'?" He pointed a quick finger at himself, then gulped down the remaining champagne from his glass.

"Well, I hope you don't go to those singles bars. You will never meet a nice girl there."

"Amanda, just drop it, okay. I happen to like being alone." Lee got up, indicating that the conversation was over, at least as far as he was concerned. "Just give me the package and you can get back to your life."

"There is one tiny little problem." She slowly stood up. "I don't exactly have it with me right here."

"You knew I wanted it! Why didn't you bring it with you?" he demanded incredulously.

"Insurance!" Amanda shot back. "I figured if you were a gangster, you couldn't kill me if you needed me to get to it!"

"That's how your mind works?! Most people would have been happy to get rid of something like that!" The volume of his voice increased with each word.

"Most people wouldn't have taken the damn thing in the first place! Most people wouldn't have called you up or met you at some dumb party, a party for which I am hideously underdressed, so would you mind not yelling at me?" She flared up, angry both at his tone and because of the discomfort she felt, dressed so casually in a room full of elegant people. "Besides, I didn't say I didn't bring it, I said I didn't have it with me. It's out in the car."

"Oh." Lee paused mid-tirade, the wind having been taken out of his sails. He looked at her rather sheepishly. "Then I guess we should go get it." As they walked out through the foyer, he continued, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, this is . . . it's just that this is very, very important to me and I am getting a lot of pressure."

"It hasn't been my best day, either," Amanda replied, accepting his apology. "Anyway, let's just be glad that we're finally going to get the whole thing straightened out."

They walked out the front door and waited for the valet to retrieve her car. She didn't miss the look of disgust on Lee's face as her station wagon was brought around. They got in and drove to a

secluded part of the parking lot. Amanda reached behind her seat and extracted the package from a pile of debris.

"I hid it in beneath the pile of Moby's Dock hamburger wrappers," she explained. "I didn't think anyone would look for it there."

As Lee eagerly reached out for the parcel, a sudden movement caught his eye. "Amanda, let's get out of here," he said abruptly.

"What?" she said, confused.

"Just drive," he snapped. "I think they're on to us."

"Who?" she asked in bewilderment as she started up the car.

"Never mind, just move!"

There was something in his voice that told her that now wasn't the time to ask questions. She gunned the engine and they shot out onto the street.

"Watch out," Lee shouted in alarm, grabbing the wheel and jerking it to one side. There was a squeal of brakes as an oncoming car narrowly missed them.

Amanda clutched the steering wheel in terror as they careened down the street. Lee leaned over the back of the seat, peering behind them. "Damn, they're following us," he muttered.

"Who?" She flinched as a sharp crack sounded behind them. "What was that?" she asked, her heart racing.

"They're shooting at us," he said, reaching for his own weapon. "Just try to hold the car steady." He rolled down his window and took aim.

"Hold it steady? Are you kidding?" She tried to scrunch as low as possible, but her posture made it almost impossible to see where they were going. Hearing a horn blare directly ahead, she looked up to see a limousine heading straight for them. Desperately, she turned the wheel to the right. The limo skidded by, missing them by mere inches. The station wagon spun around and its rear end collided with a fire hydrant, sending a geyser of water shooting into the air.

"My car!" Amanda wailed as she opened the door.

"Amanda, wait!" Lee reached out to restrain her but was too late. She was already out of the car and inspecting the damage. He jumped out after her, both of them soaked to the skin by the cascading water within a matter of seconds.

Half an hour later they were in the Agency bullpen, standing next to Francine Desmond, the three of them watching as Billy Melrose tore open the now sodden package. They leaned forward eagerly as the wrappings fell away and he pulled out... a music box.

"What the hell?" Lee said in surprise.

Billy shook the box and a small card fell out. Amanda bent to retrieve it. "Pilgrim's Peach Puff, Duck ala Nathan Hale, Valley Forge Flapjacks," she read. She looked up. "Does that mean anything to you?"

Lee and Billy both shook their heads. "Must be some new code. I'll get someone from crypto up here ASAP," Billy finally said.

Francine reached over and took the card from Amanda's hands. "Wait just a second. I've heard of a couple of these before. But it couldn't be..."

"What? Where did you hear them?" Lee eagerly demanded.

"At Mrs. Welch's," she said in a puzzled tone.

"The Colonial Cooking lady on TV?" Amanda asked in surprise. "My mother never misses her show."

"I don't watch her on TV, dear." Francine looked over at Amanda condescendingly. "I've been taking private lessons at her estate. It's the only way to really learn. You know, Nancy R. won't boil an egg without her."

"Francine, how long have you been taking these lessons?" Lee asked thoughtfully.

"About two months."

Lee nodded at Billy. "Right about the time our leaks started."

"What are you saying, Lee?" Francine asked indignantly. "That I'm the source of these leaks?"

"Not intentionally. But it can't just be a coincidence. Look, stranger things have happened, we all know that."

"Lee, there's no way I could be responsible for this mess," she protested angrily.

"Francine, think about it," he insisted. "As Billy's assistant, you've got access to all types of projects. Maybe they found some way to hypnotize you or slip you some sort of drug."

Billy interrupted them. "Okay, Francine get yourself down to the lab have get a blood test done. Who knows what they may have used on you. Plus we've got to get a team out to Mrs. Welch's right away. In the meantime, Lee, why don't you take Mrs. King home?"

"But I want to know how this all turns out," Amanda protested.

"I'll call you at your house tomorrow and tell you everything I can," Lee promised.

"That's not fair, without me, you wouldn't even have the package," she argued, shivering slightly. "Can't I wait here?"

"Amanda, you're soaking wet; you should go home," he persisted.

"Or you could just take her to your place and get cleaned up while you wait," Francine suggested cattily.

"Not a bad idea," Billy agreed. "You don't live too far from here. I'll call you there as soon as we know something."

Lee nodded his head slowly, reluctantly accepting the compromise. "Okay, okay, let's go."

Still smarting from the idea that she might be the source of the leaks, Francine whispered, "Just make sure you behave yourself. Maybe the two of you alone at your apartment isn't a very good idea."

"Stow it, Francine," he shot back.

"Hit a nerve did I?" she continued. "Slumming a bit aren't we, Scarecrow? Or is suburban frump a secret fantasy of yours?"

"Look, Francine, nothing's going to happen, okay. She's an ordinary housewife, not some strumpet." Lee glanced over at Amanda who was putting on her coat and seemed to have missed their exchange. He hastily escorted her out before Francine found something else to say.

\*\*\*

"Well, here we are, home, sweet home." Lee opened the door to his apartment and flicked on a switch, bathing the room in light.

"Umm.... it's very nice," Amanda said hesitantly. Actually it was rather hard to tell, mostly because of the state of disarray.

"Okay, okay, so I'm not the world's neatest housekeeper," he admitted with a sheepish grin.

Amanda shivered noticeably and wrapped her arms around herself.

"Look, we've got to get you out of those wet clothes." Lee didn't seem to notice when she tensed at his choice of words. Leading the way into the bedroom he opened a door. "The bathroom's in here. Why don't you take a hot shower and get warmed up? Just toss your clothes outside the door and I'll put them in the dryer. There's a robe on the back of the door you can wear." He frowned as he

sorted through a stack of towels, then handed her the one that seemed to be the cleanest. "I'll be right out in the living room if you need me, okay?"

"Okay." Amanda accepted the proffered towel, then closed the door behind him. She stood motionless for a moment, wondering how on earth she had managed to get herself into this particular situation. She shivered again violently, chilled to the bone. Deciding that she'd have to accept the inevitable or else end up with pneumonia, she clicked the lock on the bathroom door and stripped down, peeling off her wet garments one at a time. After carefully wrapping herself in the robe, she cracked the door open just far enough to deposit them in a sodden heap on the floor, keeping only her panties.

Closing the door again, she made sure the lock was engaged before starting up the shower. After checking the lock one last time, she discarded the robe and stepped under the steaming spray.

The hot water felt wonderful against her skin - creating a tingling sensation as it flowed over her chilled body. She picked up the bar of soap and inhaled its unfamiliar masculine scent. The musky aroma was so different from the delicately perfumed floral soaps she kept in the bathroom she shared with her mother. As she lathered up, her mind wandered to this bathroom's usual occupant, almost inadvertently picturing him standing there with her. She imagined his slender fingers covered in fragrant bubbles, reaching out to touch her, his hands cupping her breasts, then... With a gasp, she abruptly jerked her mind back from that train of thought. What was she thinking! She was dating Dean, if she fantasized about anyone, it should be him. She hurriedly reached to adjust the shower setting to a much cooler temperature.

Twenty minutes later she finally stepped out of the shower. Towelling off quickly, she reached again for the robe. Catching sight of some embroidery on the front pocket, she held it up for inspection. 'SHE' Amanda rolled her eyes in disgust, and checked the other robe hanging on the back of the door. 'LEE' Of course, what else would she have expected.

Amanda slipped her panties back on and shrugged into the robe. After tightening the sash around her waist she headed out of the bathroom. She paused hesitantly at the door to the living room. She could hardly hide in the bathroom all evening but again felt the awkwardness of the situation. Reminding herself once more that she was the one who hadn't wanted to go home, she walked into the room.

"Amanda, everything okay in there?" Lee called from the kitchen.

"Yes, everything's fine," she replied, trying to make herself believe it.

"Good. Your clothes are downstairs in the laundry room; they should be dry before too long." Lee's voice trailed off as he entered the room and caught sight of her in his robe.

She blushed under his scrutiny and self-consciously cinched her belt a bit tighter. She noticed that he had changed as well and was now wearing a sweatshirt and jeans.



"I, uh, made us some coffee." He nodded, indicating the tray he carried in his hands, then set it down on the now empty coffee table. In fact the whole room seemed to have undergone a transformation - newspapers stacked against one wall, books and albums placed back on the shelves, if rather haphazardly.

Amanda sat down on the far end of the couch. She added cream and sugar to one of the mugs of coffee, then took a welcome sip of the hot liquid. "Any word from your office yet?"

"No, nothing so far." Lee said absently, seeming to be a bit distracted.

Amanda followed his line of sight and realized that one of her bare legs was visible through the opening at the front of her robe. She blushed again and quickly drew the folds of material over herself.

Lee looked away and cleared his throat awkwardly. "I'm sure we'll hear from them soon."

As if on cue the phone rang, startling them both. "That could be them." He hurriedly picked up the phone. "Billy, hi, what's happened?" A huge smile broke out on his face. Amanda set down her coffee and walked over to him, trying in vain to overhear their conversation. "That's terrific! What about Francine... Unbelievable. Yes, I'll tell her." He listened for a few minutes longer then hung up and turned to Amanda.

"Well?" she questioned eagerly.

"I was right - they were using Francine. Our doctor found evidence of memory altering drugs."

"What about Mrs. Welch?" Amanda asked.

"There was enough evidence at her house to arrest her on the spot." His grin grew larger. "That should put a stop to Dirk saying our department's been falling down on the job."

"Lee, that's wonderful! Now you don't have to worry about any more of your friends getting killed." In her enthusiasm Amanda threw her arms around him.

Their eyes met and suddenly the euphoria of a moment before melted away, leaving behind a much different feeling.

Abruptly Lee pulled back. "I, uh.. we.. you know, your clothes should be dry right about now," he said in a rush, before turning and hurrying out the door.

\*\*\*

Amanda stood there for a moment, staring at the door. What had just happened? She was a responsible mother of two, she didn't just get caught up with a stranger like that. She had a station wagon and a mortgage; for heaven's sake, she still lived with her mother. "Oh, my gosh," she

said aloud, suddenly realizing that she hadn't phoned her mother to say she'd be late. She must be worried sick.

She reached for the phone and quickly dialed her home number. "Mother? Yes, it's me... Yes, I know it's late. I had a small problem with the car.. No, I'm fine. I just won't be home for a while... Yes, I know I missed Dean's call... Don't worry; if he said he'd call back tomorrow morning, I'm sure he will... I'll be home as soon as I can."

As she hung up the phone it occurred to her that perhaps calling Dean was what she really needed to do. Simply hearing his voice might help bring her back to reality.

She dug through her purse and found the detailed itinerary Dean had so thoughtfully given her. She quickly punched in her calling card number, then the number of his hotel. As she waited for the hotel operator to connect her call she thought again of Dean's marriage proposal. Maybe her attraction to Lee was just a panicked response to the idea of making a commitment to someone again. Maybe she was just frightened of taking another chance on marriage. Dean was dependable, responsible, and he loved her. She should just tell him yes right on the spot and stop thinking about spies who were too handsome for their own good.

"Hello?" An unfamiliar female voice answered, catching her off guard.

"I'm sorry," Amanda stammered in confusion. "I asked for Dean McGuire's room. The operator must have made a mistake."

"No, this is his room. Hang on a sec; he's in the shower." Amanda could hear her calling to someone. "Dean, honey, there's someone on the phone for you." The woman returned to the phone. "Who's this calling, anyway? It's kind of late, you know."

"Amanda," she said, her voice taking on an icy tone. "And who, may I ask, are you?"

"Oh, my God, you're not his wife, are you?" the woman answered in a panic. "He swore to me that he wasn't married."

"No, I'm not his wife. And you can give Dean the message that I'm never going to be." She slammed down the phone with vigour. How dare he?! Just because she hadn't immediately accepted his proposal, he went and jumped the first floozy could find. It would serve him right if she did the same thing and slept with the next man she laid eyes on.

"Amanda, your clothes are dry."

She whirled around, badly startled.

Lee walked through the door, carrying a laundry basket. "Well, all except your vest; I think that's going to take some time." He closed the door, then turned back to her. "Amanda?" he asked uncertainly, catching sight of the expression on her face. "Are you all right?"

\*\*\*

"I'm fine," Amanda lied, blinking back the sudden tears that had sprung to her eyes.

"No, you're not." He set down the basket and hurried over to her. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing," she replied acerbically. "Except that I just found out my boyfriend is cheating on me."

"What? How do you know?"

"I called his hotel room and some woman picked up."

"But that doesn't mean he's cheating on you," Lee said reasonably. "Maybe you misunderstood."

"Misunderstood what?! He was in the shower. And this other woman asked if I was his wife!" she said harshly, walking away from him. "I have to face the truth. Dean was lying to me when he said he respected my decision not to sleep with him until I knew whether or not I wanted to marry him."

"Amanda," Lee tried to break in.

"Apparently he was just interested in one thing," she concluded in a hurt voice. "Just not with me. He never wanted me. Not that way at least."

"Amanda, if that's the type of woman he's interested in, you're better off without him."

She looked away. "And besides, why would anyone want someone like me," she said in a tone that didn't even try to disguise her bitterness.

"That's not what I said," Lee protested. "You're putting words in my mouth."

"Am I?" She pinned him with a glare from across the room. "You said it yourself to Francine, back at your office. There's no chance of anything happening with someone as frumpy as me."

"You heard that?" He ran his hand through his hair, sighed and looked away from her. "Amanda, believe me, that had nothing to do with you. You could have been anyone."

"Oh, that makes me feel so much better," she retorted sarcastically.

"No, I mean, Francine and I are always sniping at each other. You're not a frumpy housewife; far from it."

"Right. Then how come Dean is off in New York sleeping with a trollop the first chance he gets? He told me he respected me wanting to wait until we were engaged before making love. When the truth is that he never wanted me. That no one would."

"How about, because he's an idiot?" Lee said. "Any man would be lucky to have you."

"Right," she scoffed. "I should just face the truth. I'm just some dull housewife that no one could find attractive."

She sank down on the couch and buried her face in her hands.

"Amanda." He sat down beside her and she could feel his hands on her shoulders, turning her back towards him.

"Amanda, believe me, you're wrong about this. What happened with... Dan? Dave?"

"Dean," she supplied in a choked voice.

He gently took her hands in his and continued, "What happened with Dean wasn't your fault. He's a fool if he loses you over this. You're dependable and smart and honest. When I needed your help yesterday at the train station you didn't let me down."

"Sure, good old reliable Amanda," she said with a touch of cynicism. "You can always count on her."

"You are all those things," Lee said, holding her hands firmly so she couldn't turn away from him again. "You are also very beautiful and sexy and desirable."

"Really?" she asked softly, staring into his eyes to see if he was telling the truth.

"Really." He smiled reassuringly at her.

"Thank you," she whispered, "I needed to hear that." She leaned over, intending to give him a quick thank you kiss on the cheek.

During the next few weeks, when Amanda thought things over clearly, she realized this moment had been her last chance. She should have pulled her hands away from his. She should have stood up, grabbed her clothes and left the room immediately.

But that wasn't the way it happened at all. Lee had turned his head towards her and the peck on the cheek suddenly became a peck on the lips. And then something more. Amanda felt a spark, a jolt of electricity the moment their lips met. Gasping in surprise, she pulled back slightly. And saw his eyes locked on hers as if he'd felt it too.

"Amanda," he whispered softly. His eyelids dropped, his eyes focussing on her lips. "Amanda," he whispered again, almost in supplication. She eagerly moved to close the distance between them, feeling his lips give way beneath hers, then push back as he took control of the kiss. She pulled her hands from his and moved them into his hair, slowly caressing him, encouraging him to continue. All thoughts of Dean had long since evaporated from her mind.

At first it was enough to merely feel his lips against hers. Then she ran her mouth over his chin, nuzzling and nipping at the underside of his neck, feeling soft prickles of hair against her cheeks.

She could feel Lee's hot breath in her ear as his lips began an unbearably slow journey back across her cheeks. She moved to intercept them, unable to wait until his mouth reached hers of its own volition. Eagerly she opened herself to him, welcoming him in, meshing her tongue against his. She gently bit his lower lip, before entering his mouth, tasting the sweetness of his breath as it mingled with hers.

Lee pulled back one last time. "Amanda, are you..."

She pressed her mouth to his again, cutting off his question. Pulling back slightly she answered breathlessly, "Yes." She brought her lips into contact with his again, slowly kissing him between each repetition of the word. "Yes... yes."

Her hands pushed up beneath his sweatshirt, fingers outstretched, caressing his chest. She ran her fingertips playfully over his nipples, lingering for a moment before trailing back down his torso. Lee straightened up and pulled his shirt over his head in one fluid motion. Bending towards her, he again caught her lips with his.

The kiss started off slowly and then intensified. Her hands slipped around him, feeling the strong lines of the muscles in his arms and back.

Lee gradually lowered her into a reclining position against the couch cushions. He ran a caressing hand down her neck, then slipped beneath the collar of her robe. His fingers gently traced the softness of her shoulder before moving lower. Their eyes met as his hand closed over her breast and he began a slow stroking motion. Her eyelids drifted closed as she lay back, sighing in pleasure.

"Amanda," Lee whispered and she opened her eyes again. Seeing the questioning look in his, she took his other hand in hers, guiding it to where the sash was knotted around her waist.

Maintaining their eye contact, he leisurely undid her belt. Amanda sat up slightly and let him slip the terrycloth over her shoulders and arms. She sank back down onto the couch, now only partially covered.

He tenderly ran a hand along the opening of her robe and moved the lapels aside, revealing her fully to him. "I was right," he breathed. "You are so beautiful." He leaned down and kissed the hollow between her breasts. "And sexy." Another soft wet kiss. "And desirable."

His hand continued stroking her right breast while his mouth charted a leisurely course over to her left nipple. Upon reaching his destination, he pulled back a fraction of an inch, just letting his breath flow over her exposed skin.

Amanda murmured his name for the first time. "Lee," she breathed. "Please, please..."

He lowered his lips to her waiting skin, his tongue darting out to warm her with his touch. She arched her back, pressing against him, the weight of her right breast filling his hand as his fingers brushed over her soft flesh. Her nipple stiffened further, pushing against his palm. He continued to kiss her left breast, pulling on the nipple, creating a sensation so exquisite she could hardly tell if it was pleasure or pain. She could feel the wetness build between her legs, echoing the moisture of his tongue as it moved slowly over her.

Her hands could be still no more than his, working their way down the muscles of his back, stroking and caressing him. She reached around to the front of his jeans, trying to undo the button at the top of his zipper. Just as her fingers closed around it, he ran his tongue over her nipple again and she arched her back, responding almost involuntarily to his touch.

"Lee," she gasped, putting both hands flat on his chest and pushing him away slightly.

"Was there something you wanted?" he asked in a voice thick with desire.

"As a matter of fact, yes." She swiftly undid his button, then pulled down on the zipper. She ran her hands around to his back, pushing his jeans and boxers over his hips so that her hands could grasp his buttocks.

Lee groaned and sat up, moving out of her reach. "Just hold that thought for a minute." He swiftly pushed his clothing down his legs and pulled it off, pausing only long enough to remove his socks and shoes.

Then he lay back down on the couch, settling his body in the valley between her legs. "Now, where were we?" he murmured, running his hands through her hair and pulling her face to his for another long slow kiss.

She ran her hands back down his body, no longer hampered by the layers of material. His warm flesh felt incredible under her fingers, soft and hard and wonderfully alive.

She could feel his hands moving down her sides, pausing momentarily as his thumbs brushed her nipples one more time. Then he continued lower, one hand stroking along her hips, pushing down the silk of her panties. The other settled over her soft patch of hair, his fingers curving themselves gently against her. He drew away just long enough to push her underwear completely off, then returned his hand to its former position.

She groaned with the pleasure of his touch. Again she pushed against him, forcing them into closer contact. His fingers slipped into her most intimate places, guided by her moans and sighs to the touches that gave her the most pleasure.

It had been awhile since her last physical encounter, but she knew it had never been anything like this. She never would have been able to forget something this good, this all consuming. She gasped and clung to him, her legs moving involuntarily against his body. She could feel the hardness of his body pressing against her thigh and ran her foot up the inside of his leg.

Lee entered her then. He pressed deeply into her, but it wasn't enough. She moved her hips, trying to open herself even further to him, wanting to hold him, to possess him, to have him be totally hers. He began to move against her body, thrusting into her again and again. She bent her knees and put her feet flat against the couch, trying to push back against him with equal force.

She gave herself up to him completely, letting wave after wave of pleasure wash over her body. She came then, a long drawn out series of sensations, so much more overwhelming than ever before. Gasping out his name, she held him fiercely to her, trying to prolong the feelings as long as possible.

Finally she felt his body stiffen in his own release, thrusting into her even deeper than before. In this moment of culmination she climaxed yet again, before collapsing back against the cushions, spent, yet feeling more fulfilled than ever before in her life.

"Amanda," Lee whispered softly. She opened her eyes to find him looking into hers with an expression she couldn't read. "Amanda," he said again.

"Yes," she replied uncertainly.

"I think we should take this into the bedroom."

She nodded, unable to speak. He stood up, then bent down to gather her into his arms. As he walked across the room she entwined her arms around his neck, pulling his head down for another kiss.

"Amanda? Amanda?" She looked up, startled back into the present. One of her co-workers stood there, looking at her with a puzzled expression. "I was just asking if you wanted to go to Nedlinger's for lunch. I'm meeting Lori and Kate there."

"What? No, not today. I think I need to get some fresh air." Amanda tried desperately to refocus her mind.

"Are you okay?" her friend asked in concern. "You look like you might be coming down with something - you're all flushed."

"No, I'm fine," Amanda said hastily. "I've just been sitting at this desk for too long. I think I'll take a quick walk. Thanks for asking though."

\*\*\*

Lee sat in one of the Agency's interrogation rooms, the Delano-Hollander file spread across the table in front of him. He knew it would be more convenient to work at his desk, but he just wasn't ready to face Amanda again quite yet. After an hour's worth of phone calls to procure an invite to Delano's party, his mind was unwilling to focus on anything but her.

It must be the jet lag, he rationalized to himself. That had to be the reason he was finding it so hard to concentrate. In Germany it was six hours later; his body was ready to call it a day, while here it was only lunch time.

He leaned back against his chair and sighed. Professionally speaking the trip had been very productive. But just seeing Amanda again made him realize how futile the last few weeks had been on a personal level. He had hoped that putting some physical distance between them would help him forget. Only that hadn't been the case at all.

Lise, an attache from the American embassy in Bonn, had been less than impressed with his behaviour the evening she had invited him to dinner in her flat. After a meal of oysters and Chateaubriand, her expectations were unambiguous.

But as soon as he had taken her in his arms, all he could think of was Amanda. How she had looked at him that evening. How she had felt pressed up against him. How her voice had caressed his name, drawing out the one syllable in a tender wash of breath. He had hurriedly given Lise some lame excuse about an early morning and left.

Once again his mind wandered back to Amanda and the night in his apartment. After their interlude on the couch he had been unwilling to let her just leave. Instead he had scooped her up in his arms and carried her into the bedroom.

He remembered so clearly the sensation as Amanda gently nuzzled the hollow between his neck and shoulder, her tongue tantalizing him as she ran it along his collarbone. She had been so soft and warm in his arms as he cradled her to him.

He set her down on the bed, the two of them moving swiftly to throw back the sheets and comforter. Amanda settled back against the pillows and he eagerly lowered himself to stretch out beside her. To his delight she hadn't reached for the sheet to cover them up.

They lay there for a short time, almost but not quite touching, drinking in the sight of each other. In the light that came through from the living room, Lee could see her clearly. He ran his eyes down her body, taking in its wonderful contradictions – the rounded fullness of her breasts, the smoothness of her toned curves, the darkness of her lips and nipples against her satin skin. She was delicate and feminine and yet possessed more strength than he would have thought possible. He could detect the scent of his own soap on her skin and found it wildly erotic.

He reached out and touched the tip of her nose. Slowly he moved his hand lower, pulling just a tiny bit on her lower lip, before continuing down her neck. He brushed against her nipples, across the flatness of her stomach and slid his hand around her small waist.

Unexpectedly Amanda tensed against him and gave a short laugh.

"You're not ticklish, are you?" He leaned over, his breath warm against her cheek.

"No." She laughed again and batted at his hand. "Well, maybe a little."

"Hmm... in the espionage game we call this a window of opportunity."



"Then aren't you worried I might try some type of counter-attack?" she asked playfully.

He shook his head. "Oh, that won't be a problem. I'm not ticklish at all." He teasingly ran his fingers over her again.

More swiftly than he would have thought possible, Amanda moved her hand lower. He gasped in astonishment at her touch.

"Doesn't this tickle?" she asked, her voice taking on a beguiling throaty tone.

"No," he groaned, "no."

"Then how about this?"

He shook his head.

"You mean I should stop?" she breathed into his ear.

He closed his eyes. "No, please, no. Don't stop." Her fingers felt incredible against him and it was an effort to get the words out at all.

The tiny recess of his mind that wasn't paralysed by her touch wondered dimly if perhaps there might not be some validity to the belief of reincarnation. The assurance with which Amanda moved over his body, the deftness of her touch, the almost palpable electric connection he felt with her, surely this could not be their first night together. They must have known each other in a past life, spent years of nights giving pleasure to each other, had countless mornings of waking up in each other's embrace.

Amanda pressed the length of her body against his, cutting off the last rational part of his mind. Swiftly he turned, caught her in his arms and rolled the two of them over. She kept hold of him, bestowing one final caress before guiding him into her. Their mouths meshed, tongues pressing together. He thrust himself deeply into her, her hands moving to his buttocks to pull him even closer.

They moved together as one, bodies and voices soothing and encouraging each other, until Lee could no longer distinguish his own sighs and groans of pleasure from hers. It was even more overwhelming than the first time. Amanda wrapped herself tightly around him in his moment of release, as if she never wanted to let him go. For that moment, only he and Amanda existed. There had been nothing else before, there could not be anything else. Just the two of them, exactly where they were supposed to be at this point in time.

Then they sank back, arms still wrapped around each other, resting quietly in the sense of the other's nearness, having moved beyond words for a time.

"Amanda," Lee whispered at last but there was no reply except her soft breathing. He realized she had fallen asleep. Tenderly he brushed back her hair from her face. Right then all he wanted was to know that she would be there in the morning, lying in his arms. It was insane, but it felt so right.

He dozed off himself, only to be pulled abruptly from sleep a few hours later by some unfamiliar noise. As the events of the evening ran through his head, he smiled and turned over. His expression dissolved into a frown as he put out his hand and touched the empty place where Amanda had been lying. The sheets were still warm against his fingertips.

Hearing a sound from the living room, he got up and quietly walked to the door. He opened it a crack and peered out. Amanda was sitting at his desk chair, bent over as she put on her shoes. She stood up, gathered up her purse and coat and looked around the room. "Good-bye," he heard her whisper softly before hurrying out the front door.

He took one step forward then stopped. She obviously didn't want to see to him again, sneaking out like this without a word. The rest of the night had been spent tossing and turning from side to side, futilely trying to get back to sleep.

The next day Lee drove past Amanda's house half a dozen times, unable to find the courage to face her. He'd gazed around in amazement at the suburban setting - it was like visiting another planet. Her well-kept house, ringed by its conventional white picket fence was nothing like his apartment. For a moment he wondered what it would be like to live in a place like that, to have somewhere that truly felt like home to go to at the end of each day.

Late in the afternoon he followed Amanda and her two sons to a nearby park. Standing behind a screening grove of trees, he watched as they practised pitching and hitting a baseball. The affection she and her boys had for each other was clearly evident.

They looked so normal. Something that he had never had. Something that up to now, he hadn't particularly wanted. And even if he did want it now, it wasn't as if it was within his grasp. Amanda had made her wishes quite clear, leaving his apartment as she had. He'd checked his messages every half hour through the day but she didn't call him once.

His cheeks burned with shame as he realized what her opinion of him must be. No doubt she considered him some type of office Lothario, a womanizer who seized any and all opportunities to seduce every female around him.

He hurried back to the Agency and scanned the overseas assignment board. The one that let him leave the soonest was a posting to West Germany. He immediately signed up, flying out the next afternoon.

He'd thrown himself into the investigation, investigating rumours of an East German plot to obtain information about American missile sites. In order to forestall his inevitable return to Washington, he had taken on as much of the investigation as he could himself. Only now Hollander had flown to the States, giving Lee no option but to head back.

During the plane ride he'd wondered how long he'd be able to go before checking up on Amanda. The last thing he had expected was to find her at work in the Agency bullpen. A quick perusal of her employment file indicated that she was doing exceptionally well in her new placement. Billy had even let her handle a courier assignment, strictly milk run, of course, just delivering some classified documents to one of the embassies on Massachusetts Avenue. Still, it showed that he had already come to place a great deal of trust in her.

She had sailed through her three week evaluation - earning commendations from several of her co-workers who spoke of her dedication to her work, the thoroughness and enthusiasm she brought to each task. Lee had to smile over the mention one had made of the homemade cookies she had baked for the office staff one Friday. Amanda King certainly brought her own personal stamp to the field of counter-espionage.

He sighed again, realizing that he wasn't getting much accomplished. Glancing at his watch, he decided to get some lunch before trying to focus on his next move with Hollander. He walked out into the hallway and punched the button for the elevator. Damn thing, what was taking it so long? He might just as well take the back way out through the parking garage.

Abruptly, he turned to head down the hallway and ran smack into Amanda. She fell to the floor, the folders she had been carrying scattering at his feet.

"Amanda, I'm so sorry. Let me help." He dropped to his knees and gathered up the files.

Their fingers touched for a moment before she swiftly pulled back. As they stood up, Lee said, almost against his will, "Amanda, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure," she said slowly. He just stood there staring at her for a moment and she prompted him, "Lee, did you want something?"

Yes, he thought. I want you. I want to get to know you. I want to find out everything about you. I want to know what it would be like to make love to you again, wake up in the morning and have you still in my arms. I want to meet your family...

"Lee," she said again, a note of uncertainty creeping into her voice.

"Uh, I, uh," he stuttered, pulling back from his reverie. "Would you like to have lunch?"

She met his gaze then looked away a bit uncomfortably as she considered his offer. "Sure, just let me get these to crypto."

\*\*\*

Amanda glanced nervously around L'Etoile as the maitre d' led them over to a corner booth. The ride to the restaurant had been rather quiet, neither of them apparently knowing exactly what to say. She hoped Lee couldn't hear the tension in her voice as she placed her drink order.

"The, uh, the veal scallopine here is excellent," he offered, sounding a bit unsettled himself.

"Thanks. I'm not really very hungry though. I think I'll just have a salad," she replied, surreptitiously watching him over the edge of her menu. Damn him anyway, why did he have to be so good looking? She'd spent the last month convincing herself that the night they spent together hadn't been that special, that he was just some ship that passed in the night. Well, a rather memorable ship, but still... she'd been reacting to her anger and disappointment with Dean, that was all.

Wasn't it?

After the waiter took their order and left, they busied themselves with the absorbing tasks of unfolding their napkins and straightening the silverware. Amanda caught Lee looking over at her and blushed self-consciously. Why had he asked her to lunch anyway? Was this his way of apologizing, to tell her he was sorry for what had happened? She wished he'd just say whatever it was that he thought he had to and get it over with. Then they could go back to the Agency and get on with their lives. They probably wouldn't see each other all that often anyway; he'd be busy out in the field most of the time.

Lee cleared his throat awkwardly. "Amanda," he said and she glanced over at him. "So, um, how are you enjoying your new job?"

In spite of herself, she started to relax. "It's exciting," she answered honestly. "Even routine things like going over expense reports. It must be all those code names. I know it's silly; I don't really do anything very important, but still, I feel as if in some small way I'm contributing to something important."

"Well, I haven't forgotten how you helped me out at the train station. You were right, you know; most people wouldn't have taken the package from a total stranger." He smiled at her and she felt her pulse jump a bit. "I was very lucky to have found you. And I don't think I even said thank you."

"You're welcome," she replied. "I'm just glad it all worked out in the end."

They lapsed into an uncomfortable silence again; both of them relieved when their orders arrived at the table. At least the routines of eating and drinking gave them something to distract their minds from what remained unsaid.

"That was delicious," Amanda said, having finished her meal in record time. "Do you eat here often?"

"No, I mean, yes," Lee apparently decided to stop stalling and jump right to the heart of the matter. "Look, Amanda, we need to talk about what happened."

Here it came. The apology to reassure her that he hadn't meant to sleep with her. That she shouldn't read anything into it. "Lee, you don't have to explain anything," she broke in.

"No, I want to." He paused and seemed to be choosing his words carefully. "Look, sometimes a person can get caught up in a situation and end up doing something they normally wouldn't. And then afterwards they naturally assume they made a mistake."

"Lee, it's okay." Amanda reached out and covered his hand with hers. "I don't think you're a terrible person. I know you weren't planning on sleeping with me when you took me to your apartment. And that my coming to work at the Agency wasn't something you were expecting either." She suddenly became aware of the warmth of his fingers beneath hers and quickly drew back her hand. "Anyway, you don't have to worry; your reputation is safe."

He looked at her quizzically. "What are you talking about?"

She lowered her voice. "When I went in for my debriefing, I didn't tell anyone what happened - that you let yourself be seduced by a housewife."

"That's what you think I'm concerned about?" he asked, a look of astonishment on his face. "Amanda, you needed a friend that night and I ended up taking advantage of you. I can understand why you left; of course you never wanted to see me again."

"Lee, you really don't need to explain. I was there too, remember? And it really is okay."

She thought back to what it had felt like to wake up in the middle of the night in his bed, wrapped in his arms. She'd wanted so badly to stay. But the thought that propelled her out the door was imagining Lee's face when he woke up the next morning and found her still there. After seeing such tenderness in his eyes as they held each other she didn't think she could handle seeing the aversion he would inevitably feel the next day. Sure, he'd probably try to hide it and say the right thing, just as he was doing now, but she'd know the truth.

Her eyes pricked with sudden tears and she concluded hastily, "You don't owe me anything. I wasn't expecting anything more than one night." She got up to leave. "I think I need to take a walk. I'll see you later, okay?"

"But what if you got more?" Lee said abruptly, stopping her in mid-stride.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, confused.

"You said you weren't expecting more than one night. But what if you got more?"

She looked down at him, still unsure of where he was headed.

"Amanda, I'd be the first to admit that I'm the last person who should be a poster boy for commitment. Okay, so we made a mistake. But does that mean we should just walk away, ignore the possibility that we could have so much more? We shouldn't even try?"

"Lee," she said uncertainly, a lump beginning to form in her throat.

He cut her off. "If you walk out that door, you're going to spend the rest of your life wondering what would have happened if you hadn't." Reaching out, he took her hand in his. "Amanda, I'm still in trouble. Please. Help me."

"Is it still a matter of life and death?" She couldn't help but start to smile.

His hazel eyes gazed intently into hers. "I think it is. Please. Don't leave."

Something in her responded to him, just as it had the day at the station. She'd taken a chance on him then, why not now? Slowly she sat back down. Her breath caught in her throat and she asked shakily, "So what do we do now?"

"I'm not sure. Slow things down? Get to know each other better?" A smile broke over his face. "This is crazy, right?"

"I know," Amanda agreed. "I mean, who bumps into a total stranger at the train station and finds..."

"The person they were looking for all their life?" he finished for her. "I think I might have. Amanda, I don't know what we have here. I'm not saying this is forever...but what I would like is another chance...a chance to get to know you better. Maybe even to get to know your family."

"Lee, I think..."

"Yes?" He seemed to be holding his breath as he waited for her answer.

"I think, I'd like that very much." A slow smile crept over her face again.

"Me, too."

He stood up, walked around the table and sat down beside her. With a sigh, she settled into his embrace. His hands moved over her back then up into her hair. Tilting her head slightly, he looked directly into her eyes. She curved her hands under his arms and pulled him even closer. As their lips met, she could feel the spark between them ignite again and eagerly responded to him.

As they broke apart, she said, "You realize we're from two different worlds. I mean, I take my boys for Gangplank Burgers at Moby's Dock; you eat veal scallopine here at L'Etoile. I've got a station wagon parked back at the Agency; your Porsche's sitting out front. I live in Arlington with my mother and two sons; you have an apartment in Georgetown."

"So, we're not exactly the most obvious match." Lee smiled, and traced one finger along her cheek. "Believe me, you're not pointing out anything I haven't said to myself a hundred times this past month."

"Was that why you left town so quickly?" she asked quietly, looking away. While she hadn't expected Lee to welcome her at the Agency with open arms, she'd been stunned to find out how soon he had gone.

"I'll admit it, I was running away." His face clouded. "I'm not very proud of that. But before I met you I thought I had my whole life figured out. Then suddenly everything was turned upside down. Besides, it didn't do any good. I found I had taken you to Germany with me."

"I always wanted to go to Europe," Amanda said. "So, did we have a good time?"

"Not really. You wouldn't leave me alone for a minute. All I could think of the whole time was you. I've never felt like this with anyone else." He cleared his throat. "So, what are you doing Friday night?"

"Well, the boys have a Little League game against the Swordfish. But I'm free after that." She rested her head on his shoulder.

"How'd you like to come with me on a job?" he asked.

"Really?" she replied enthusiastically.

"Hey, it's nothing exciting," he explained quickly. "Just a low level surveillance at a reception over at the Marriott. I'll pick you up at seven - we can have an early dinner before the party."

"Sounds wonderful. Should I think of this as on the job training?"

"Or you could think of it as a date." He leaned in again for another kiss. "But no sweater vest this time. It's strictly black tie. You do have a nice dress to wear?" he asked in a teasing tone.

"Of course I have a nice dress to wear," she replied, rolling her eyes. "It just helps if I know ahead of time what kind of event I'm going to. So who's giving this party?"

"James Delano. It's for the backers of his Quickie Chickie Snack Shack outlets."

"Quickie Chickie, huh," she murmured. "Is that supposed to be some kind of comment on our last encounter?"

He laughed. "Amanda King, I don't think anyone would ever call you a 'chickie'. And I have no intention of being quick."

Amanda blushed at the thought that involuntarily sprang to mind.

Lee laughed at her expression. "Why do I get the feeling I know exactly what you're thinking?" he teased. "You've got a face like an open book."

She reached up and ran her fingers over his lips. "Any idea what the next chapter holds?"

"No, but this time I'm not jumping ahead. I plan to take my time finding out where this story leads us."

The End (?)