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Synopsis: Lee and Amanda deal with a kidnapping.

Hide and Seek

Amanda awoke with a jolt as the frightening images of her nightmare chased away the last of her sleep. For a moment it had seemed so real - the hands reaching out for her, pushing her into a car, taking her away from her family and Lee. She closed her eyes and tried to steady her breathing and relax, reminding herself that it had only been a dream, nothing more.

Giving herself a final mental shake, she opened her eyes again and swung her feet over the edge of the bed. She stopped short as she took in her surroundings for the first time. This wasn't her bedroom at home, or even Lee's apartment. Her eyes focused on a small room, barely ten feet square, the walls painted a robin's egg blue and furnished only with a metal frame bed, a nightstand and a small dresser. The upper half of the door contained a small window, its glass reinforced with mesh. Apparently she was in some type of institution.

The impersonal fit and look of her nightgown along with the drab grey of the blanket reinforced her initial impression. Amanda noticed a laundry mark stamped onto the sheets and traced the letters with her fingers - HPH. She got out of bed and walked slowly over to the door, not really expecting to find it unlocked. Tentatively she knocked on the door, called out "Hello" and waited to see if anyone would respond.

At the sound of approaching footsteps, she retreated back towards the bed. The door swung open and two women entered, neither of whom looked at all familiar. The older one had a no nonsense look about her and wore a white nurse's uniform, pressed immaculately as if allowing even one wrinkle would be an unacceptable lapse of decorum. She greeted Amanda briskly, "Good morning, Mrs. McGuire. I trust we had a restful night."

Amanda looked at her in confusion, at the same time noticing both women wore security badges similar to those from the Agency. These carried the same HPH logo she had observed on the sheets. She replied warily, "There seems to be some mistake. My name is Amanda King."

The second woman glanced nervously at her companion. She was much younger and dressed more casually. Her name badge identified her as Gwen and a volunteer.

The older woman continued, "Now, let's try to get off to a good start. One thing we insist on is that you not argue with the staff. We're only here to help you."

"I'm not arguing with you. My name really is Amanda King. Where am I?"

The nurse brushed aside her question. "Mrs. McGuire, I'm disappointed. After what happened in the last hospital I had hoped you would be more cooperative for us."

"What other hospital?" Amanda asked. "I don't know what you are talking about. Please, I need to contact my family and tell them I'm all right."

In her desperation she grabbed the young woman by the arm. The girl pulled back, obviously frightened. Amanda looked her in the eyes, pleading, "Please, help me. I don't belong here."

Her words trailed away as her legs gave out from under her. The nurse grabbed her around the waist with her left arm, still holding a hypodermic in her right hand. With Gwen's help she hoisted Amanda's body back on to the bed.

Amanda could hear their voices as if from across a great distance. "This type of thing occurs all too often I'm afraid. The first few days can be the worst, some patients want to fight against what is happening to them."

"Was it necessary to give her that injection?" Gwen asked anxiously. "At the college they teach us that medication should only be used as a last resort. Do you really think she was going to hurt me?"
"You'll learn soon enough that there is a vast difference between your college training and the reality of working in overcrowded, under-staffed psychiatric hospital. Until Mrs. McGuire becomes more cooperative, she'll have to be sedated. If you read over her case history you'll see she was moved from her last placement when she started to react violently to the staff whenever they refused to listen to her ramblings. We'll not put up with that here."

"But she sounded so sure of herself, as if it was true."

"To her it is. Hopefully with the right treatment she'll come to accept that what seems real to her now is just a fantasy, nothing more."

Amanda sank deeper into the blackness, their voices fading off into an indistinguishable blur. Her last conscious thought was of Lee and how worried he must be.

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Lee eagerly opened the door to the Q-Bureau, his eyes darting about as he scanned the small room. His face fell as he realized it was empty. He and Amanda were scheduled to meet with Billy in half an hour. He had hoped to be able to welcome her with a slightly more intimate greeting than they could exchange in public.

He had been out of town the previous weekend working on a case, finally flying home on Monday morning. They had planned on spending the evening together but as happened all too often something had come up. This time it was Jamie - he had caught a bad cold and Amanda wanted to spend some time with him. "He just likes a little mothering when he's sick," she explained to Lee apologetically before leaving work that afternoon. "He didn't say anything when I left this morning, but I know he would rather have me home. It's funny how every male seems to turn back into a little boy when he's not feeling well."

Lee sighed, "I know, it's just been awhile since we've had any private time together."

Amanda looked so crushed he wished he could have bitten back his words.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Lee, you know I love you and if I could I would spend every night with you. But my family needs me too."

"I'm the one who's sorry," he said quickly. "I didn't mean it to sound that way. Of course your family needs you."

Amanda sighed and looked away from him. "I'm not sure this secret marriage was such a good idea. It seems that lately there just aren't enough hours in the day. It was bad enough when I only had a double life to contend with - home and the Agency. But now I also want to spend time with you."

Lee stepped in front of her and put a finger under her chin, forcing her to look him in the eye. "So we'll just have to combine two of your lives. And since I don't think telling your mother the truth about your job is a viable option, I'll have to make more of an effort to spend time with your family."

"Our family," she reminded him firmly. "You're part of it too, you know."

"I just don't want the boys to feel that I'm pressuring them. I know we're getting along much better but there's still a long way to go. Playing basketball with them and taking them out to ballgames isn't exactly the same as having me move into the house." He put his arms around her waist and pulled her close.

"Just promise me that someday we're going to be a regular family." She leaned against him and sighed.

"I promise." Lee bent down to quickly kiss her on the nose. "Maybe you could sneak out later after everyone is asleep?" he added hopefully.

"I'll give it my best shot," she said with a smile.

"Well if it's any incentive, I'll give you a sample of what will be waiting for you." Lee tightened his hold on her and kissed her thoroughly.

He had sat up waiting for her until late, turning on a movie to distract himself from how empty his apartment seemed without her. He awoke at two am, with a crick in his neck from his uncomfortable position on the couch. Regretfully he realized that Amanda wasn't going to show up and that it was too late to even call her to say goodnight.

He got ready for bed, trying to shake the vague feeling that something wasn't right. Even after a quick scan of his apartment and double checking the window and door locks, the sense of uneasiness persisted. He tossed and turned most of the night, finally getting up at six am.

Now as he stood alone in the Q Bureau, the feeling that something was wrong returned. Glancing at the clock, Lee reluctantly headed down to the bullpen. If Amanda was running late she might have gone there first. Maybe he could catch her before they went in to talk to Billy and make some plans for lunch. Maybe even lunch at his apartment. Lee smiled as he let his mind wander over the possibilities of that scenario.

He paused for a moment at the entrance to the bullpen, taking in the usual early morning hustle and bustle. Amanda was nowhere to be seen. A quick glance through the window of Billy's office showed his superior alone at his desk.

Billy looked up, caught Lee's eye and smiled. Picking up his mug, he headed out of his office and over to the coffee station. "Morning, Lee. What's the occasion - you're ten minutes early. And where's Amanda? Usually she's the one making sure you get to your meetings on time."

"I was hoping she was down here already," Lee said. "I haven't seen her yet. Jamie wasn't feeling very well yesterday - I'll call over to her house, see if something came up this morning."

He walked over to a nearby desk, picked up the phone and dialed Amanda's number. Hopefully she would be there and offer an explanation for her uncharacteristic lateness. Dotty, however, was the one who answered the phone.

"Lee, how are you?" she greeted him cheerfully. "Did the two of you get a lot accomplished in the editing room last night?"

Lee was thrown for a moment, but quickly recovered. "Um... yes, we did." There was something about the way that Dotty said 'editing room' that told him she knew exactly what he and Amanda were up to on their late night work sessions.

"Is Amanda around somewhere?" she continued.

"Uh, no, she just stepped out. I'm just calling to see how Jamie is feeling. She was worried about him this morning and I thought I would set her mind at ease."

"Wasn't that thoughtful of you. You can tell Amanda he went back to school this morning. I told her last night before she left to meet you that it was only a twenty four hour bug."

"Okay, I'll let her know. I'll talk to you later." He fought back the urge to panic as he hung up the phone and turned to Billy. "She left last night to come over to my place." His mind raced in a hundred directions, instantly conjuring up every sort of horrible incident that could have prevented Amanda from arriving at his apartment.

"Your place, huh?" Billy couldn't keep the smile off his face as he walked back into his office, Lee following closely behind.

"We were discussing a case," Lee said lamely, knowing he wasn't fooling his boss anymore than his mother-in-law. "The thing is she never showed up."

"That doesn't sound like her at all." Billy started to share some of Lee's anxiety. Dependability was one of Amanda's defining characteristics.

"What could have happened to her? I've got a bad feeling about this." As an agent, Lee knew he should try to remain objective and rational so he could figure out what had happened. But as Amanda's husband, he wanted nothing more than to slip into full panic mode.

Luckily Billy seemed to be of the same mind. "Ordinarily, I'd insist on waiting the requisite twenty four hours before sounding the alarm, but in this case I agree with you. Okay, I'll put out an eyes and ears alert on her car. You do a run through on the morgues and hospitals. We'll postpone our meeting until this afternoon. Hopefully she'll have turned up by then."

Lee went back to the Q Bureau, his heart feeling like a stone in his chest. Every one of his instincts as an agent told him that the situation was going to get much worse before it got better.



Amanda lay motionless in her bed. She had woken up hours before; the brief snatches of sleep her troubled mind allowed her had been anything but restful. In the corridor outside her room she could hear people walking, voices calling to each other, typical sounds of a large building gradually starting its morning routine.

She closed her eyes and tried to block it all out, concentrating on fitting together the puzzle pieces of exactly what taken place Monday night. She had left for Lee's apartment at eleven, the boys sound asleep and her mother watching television in her room. The afternoon and evening had been spent with Jamie, playing ATARI and watching space alien movies that seemed to have infinite appeal for young boys if not their middle aged mothers. By bedtime he seemed to be feeling much better and she had left for Lee's house with a light heart, eager to spend some time alone with her husband.

She frowned in concentration, what exactly had happened next? She remembered pulling into the parking lot, opening the door, and then.... Someone had come up behind her, abruptly shoving a cloth under her nose. The sweet scent of some type of chemical filled her nostrils, and she collapsed against the side of her Wagoneer. A hypodermic had been roughly injected into her arm, its contents sapping the last of her strength from her limbs.

The rest of her memories were fuzzy as if she was looking at the world through a pair of glasses filled with the wrong prescription. Her assailant had shoved her into the back seat, retrieved Amanda's keys and driven off. The sound of airplanes suddenly came to mind, had they flown somewhere? No, she was sure she remembered being taken from her car and lifted into a van or truck of some sort. Then nothing, until she awoke in the hospital.

Memories of an angry voice and sharp accusing words filled with hatred towards Lee and herself pricked at the corners of her mind. Had she just imagined them or had her attacker actually spoken to her? She vainly tried to come up with a face to go with the words. Apparently whoever it was had been careful never to reveal himself. Or herself, Amanda thought wryly. It could have been anyone. It could have been that nurse, she certainly was robust enough.

As if on cue, there was a knock on the door, followed by the entrance of the same two women as the day before.

"Good morning, Mrs. McGuire," Gwen greeted her tentatively. "Would you like some breakfast?"

Part of Amanda wanted to refuse any offer of help from them, to throw their food back in their faces.

However, her rumbling stomach reminded her that it had been many hours since her last meal. She also realized that she would have to keep up her strength if she had any hopes of escape.

"Yes, please," she acquiesced, hoping to avoid another confrontation.

Gwen broke out into a relieved smile. "I'll get your tray." She turned and left the room.

"I'm happy to see you've decided to co-operate," the nurse said approvingly. "We're only here to help you get better you know." Amanda listened closely to her speech patterns but didn't think they matched those in her memory. "After breakfast, you're scheduled for a physical exam. The psychiatrist assigned your case is out of town - you have your first appointment with her tomorrow morning. This afternoon you're free to join the others in the common room."

Gwen came back into the room, carrying a tray with typically bland looking institutional fare and set it down on the nightstand.

As the two women turned to leave, the nurse said, "Your clothes are in the closet. Eat your breakfast and get dressed, the doctor is expecting you at nine."

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Lee sighed, it was nine o'clock Wednesday morning and they seemed to be no closer to finding Amanda than they had been the previous day.

"Billy, this is insane. How could no one have heard anything by now? All of my snitches have come up dry, there's been no ransom note, no contact of any sort. It's like she just vanished from the face of the earth."

"Maybe there's been no ransom note because she wasn't kidnapped," Francine spoke up as she walked into Billy's office. Jonathan had just called to cancel their lunch date and she was in no mood to worry about Amanda and her domestic problems.

"What?" Lee turned on her. "Then what the hell happened to her?"

"I just got a call from one of the teams out at Dulles. They spotted Amanda's car in one of the long term parking lots. Maybe she decided to go on an impromptu vacation."

"She didn't decide to go anywhere. Someone had to have taken her," Lee protested vehemently.

Francine continued, "Sometimes things get to be too much for a person. Maybe she just decided to take some time off."

"That's ridiculous. We ran a check on the airports yesterday. Her name wasn't on any of the passenger lists."

"Could have taken a domestic flight and used a false name. Of course if I was going to run off somewhere I'd pick a more exotic locale."

"Then why isn't there any activity on her charge card? Her account's been red flagged; there hasn't been a transaction since Sunday afternoon."

"She could have paid cash. Of course, her entire bank balance probably wouldn't last me two hours, let alone two days, but hey, it's Amanda we're talking about here, her lifestyle is a bit more budget minded."

"Francine, you're being absurd. As you said, this is Amanda we are talking about. She wouldn't just leave her mother and her boys. She wouldn't just leave..." Lee cut himself off, and finished lamely, "her family."

Billy looked closely at Lee, then glanced over towards Francine. "Francine, could you excuse us please?"

"Sure." She walked out of Billy's office, closing the door behind her.

"Okay, Lee what aren't you telling me?" Billy looked him straight in the eye.

"What? There's nothing to tell. Amanda did not take a flight out of Dulles. There's no sign of her on any of the surveillance tapes."

"But can you think of a reason she might have wanted to leave? Was she upset about something the last time you saw her?"

"Not really," he said, but not very convincingly.

"Then there was something bothering her. May I ask what?"

"I'd rather not say. Billy, believe me it wasn't anything serious enough to make her leave town. I'm telling you, something has happened to her."

"Actually I'm inclined to agree with you. Amanda's not the type to just leave without a word to anyone. Now if it was you..." His attempt at humour fell flat as Lee continued to pace the area in front of Billy's desk. He continued, "You're certain she hasn't contacted her family at all?"

"Positive. I called Dotty yesterday afternoon and told her that Amanda and I were going on an extended location scout. But she's not going to believe that much longer. Damn it, we have to find Amanda."

"Well, it would be a big help if we had any clue as to who took her. But we've got nothing to work with, no witnesses, no ransom note, nothing."

"It's got to be someone from a past case. They're not making any demands so revenge has to be the motive."

"What have the two of you been working on recently?"

"Nothing big enough to warrant this. I'll go upstairs and start checking through old case files, see if anything rings a bell."

Lee turned to walk out the door, his shoulders slumped. He stopped and looked back when Billy called after him, "Lee... she's a fighter. If there is any way to survive, she'll make it."



"Good morning, Mrs. McGuire."

Amanda looked up as the door to her room opened and her psychiatrist entered. She was a striking woman, taller than average, with closely cropped auburn curls. Despite her irritation at being greeted with the unfamiliar name, Amanda had to smile back. "If you don't mind, I'd prefer to be called Amanda," she said.

"That's fine," her doctor replied, "and I'm Trish. We're going to be spending a lot of time together over the next few weeks."

"Not if I can help it," Amanda thought involuntarily. At the same time she couldn't help but be drawn by the other woman's friendly demeanor.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here for your first two days. I was out of state, visiting my younger brother. He hasn't been feeling very well lately."

"I always wished I had a brother," Amanda replied truthfully. "I was an only child."

"Well, it's a mixed blessing at times. My two brothers called me the Jolly Red Giant all through high school." They shared another smile before Trish continued, "So how are you adjusting to the routine around here?"

"Actually, not all that well," she admitted.

"I've been reading through your file and after what you went through at your last placement, it's not surprising. Sounds like things got pretty rough for you."

Amanda considered the doctor carefully, wondering if she had found an ally at last. "I don't remember anything about another hospital," she said.

"Don't worry about that. We'll stick to more pleasant topics for our first session. They shipped your belongings over here, including some pictures you might want to have for your room." She reached into her briefcase and extracted a few photographs.

She passed the first one to Amanda and asked, "Who are these two young men?"

Amanda smiled in relief at the sight of some familiar faces at last. "My sons," she said, indicating them in turn. "That's Phillip and the one with glasses is Jamie. They're twelve and fourteen." She blinked to force back the tears that suddenly sprang to her eyes. "I miss them so much."

"I'm sure you do," Trish said soothingly. "Now who's this?" She passed her another snapshot.

"My mother. She came to live with me when my husband accepted a job in Africa. My ex-husband really, we divorced back in 82."

"Which would explain how you ended up with this handsome fellow."

Amanda took the last picture and frowned. "That's Dean," she said in surprise. "Dean McGuire," she continued, with a flash of comprehension.

"And how long have the two of you been married?"

"We're not. I'm mean, sure, I dated Dean, but we never... we didn't," Amanda struggled to make sense of all of this. She took a deep breath and tried again. "I met Dean about a year after my divorce. We dated for a while but it didn't last."

"Are you sure?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, of course I'm sure. It didn't work out."

"Why not?" Trish gently prompted her.

"Nothing earth shattering, I just realized he wasn't the one for me." Until she had a more concrete idea of exactly what was going on, Amanda thought she had better not get too specific.

"What if I told you that you married Dean back in 1984?"

"That wouldn't be true. I don't know what's going on here, but I never married Dean. Some kind of terrible mistake seems to have been made. I don't belong here."

The doctor looked her straight in the eyes and paused as if considering her next words. "Amanda, This isn't some kind of plot against you. Lee Stetson won't be coming through the door to save you."

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Lee sat at his desk, doing nothing. He had spent the previous afternoon and evening in the Q-Bureau, desperately reading through file after file from the databank, until the computer screen became a blur. After snatching a few hours of sleep on the couch he had resumed his frantic search for information.

It was now ten o'clock Thursday morning, and he had finally been forced to give up the search as hopeless. Without some type of pattern to link the current situation to a prior case, there was nothing to go on.

His hands stretched out before him, without any task to keep them busy. He desperately wanted something to do, anything so that he could feel even a tiny bit of control over the situation. Amanda was

missing and he was helpless. He had no information, no clues, no leads, nothing. He had never felt so powerless in his entire life.

He thought back to the previous fall, when Addi Birol had kidnapped Amanda. Despite the nightmare quality to that instance, at least back then he had known who was involved. He had been able to take concrete action: go over his information about Birol, contact his source, devise a plan to trap the terrorist. All that frantic activity had given him an outlet to channel his energy into, instead of dwelling on what might be happening to Amanda.

Now he had nothing. And with nothing to do his mind was free to focus on the hideous prospect that perhaps that was all he would ever know - that he would never find out what had happened to her. The question Billy had posed to him during the earlier case now came back to haunt him: "Could you watch Amanda suffer?" At the time, it had seemed like a worst case scenario - to have to witness the pain of the woman who meant more to him than life itself.

But this, this was infinitely worse. She was gone and he had no idea what to do. There was nothing he could do. He might never see her again, never know what had happened to her. The rest of his life stretched out before him, unbearably bleak. She was gone. She was gone and he might never know where or why.

Was this the way it was going to end? The days would stretch into weeks - and nothing. The weeks into months - and nothing. The months... No! Lee shook his head and abruptly stood up. It couldn't end like this. What would he do without her? How could he carry on, not knowing what had become of her? What was he going to tell her family? He paced around the room, finally sinking down on the couch in despair. He closed his eyes and buried his face in his hands, hot tears welling up from under his eyelids.

The shrill sound of the phone ringing interrupted his anguished reflections. Lee quickly moved over to the desk and snatched up the receiver. Upon hearing Billy's voice he demanded, "Have you heard anything?"

"I'm afraid not. But we've got another problem to deal with at the moment."

"What?" Lee wondered impatiently how Billy could expect him to concentrate on anything other than Amanda's disappearance.

"Mrs. West is waiting for you in the Georgetown foyer."

"Amanda's mother?" Lee said in bewilderment. "What's she doing here? She thinks I'm on location with Amanda."

"Apparently not. She's adamant that she's not leaving until she talks to you and Amanda. I could have security escort her out of the building," he offered.

"No, I'll go down and see her."

Lee descended the stairs into the foyer with what he hoped was a convincing air of nonchalance. "Dotty, this is a surprise," he greeted her.

"Where is my daughter?" she demanded without any preamble. "I want to speak to her too."

Lee glanced over at Mrs. Marston who was watching the scene with a great deal of interest. "I think we should go up to my office," he said, reaching out for her arm.

Dotty headed up the stairs, making a deliberate show of avoiding his touch.

"Would you like some coffee?" he asked awkwardly as they entered the Film Library.

"What I would like is an explanation," she said, obviously in no mood to be put off.

"About?" Lee hedged.

"The last four years. Or however long you have known Amanda."

"I'm not sure what you are talking about."

"Stop it." Dotty's voice cracked like a whip. "Just stop it. I have been lied to enough."

"How did you find out?" he asked in resignation.

"I received a rather enlightening package in the mail today. This is just a sample." She reached into her purse and pulled out an envelope. She handed it to Lee who slowly extracted several photographs. As he examined the first one, Dotty said, "Now let's start at the beginning. Obviously Amanda has known you much longer than she ever let on."

He stared at an image of Amanda and himself deep in conversation. They stood on one of the bridges spanning the C&O canal in Georgetown on what appeared to be a fall day.

"Amanda's got a cast on her leg," Dotty pointed out. "She hurt her ankle way back in 1983. Now when exactly did the two of you meet?"

"A few months before this picture was taken."

"Or so you say. On to exhibit B." She gestured for him to look at the next photograph.

This time Lee and Amanda were sitting in a restaurant, dressed in evening clothes. Lee held Amanda's hand in his and was kissing her fingers.

"Amanda hasn't worn that outfit in years," Dotty pointed out. "You still want me to believe that you've been dating for less than a year?"

"No, that's the truth," Lee protested.

"Right, then explain that picture. Do you look like two people who are just friends?"

Lee's heart wrenched as he looked at the photo again. Dotty was right. Any one could have seen the attraction between them even at that early stage. Once again he cursed himself for his blind stupidity in

pushing Amanda away time and time again. He had wasted so many chances and now he might never see her again.

He quickly thumbed through the rest of the pictures. Amanda at a fund raiser, holding a puppy. The two of them standing on the embankment of the Thames River in London. Amanda at an embassy party, hugging Emily Farnsworth. Amanda outside of her house, chasing after a basketball that had fallen out of the back of the station wagon. The two of them again, this time outside his uncle's club.

"And now the coup de grace," Dotty said. She reached into her purse again and handed him one last picture. This was much less clear than the others, apparently being a still from a security camera. Despite the grainy quality it clearly showed Lee and another man approaching a building, both dressed in dark suits and carrying guns. "Don't tell me, you were filming a documentary on gun control," she said sarcastically. She looked him directly in the eyes. "After that run-in the two of you had with all those federal agents last fall, I had my suspicions. You don't work for a film company, do you." It wasn't even remotely a question.

"No."

"So, what do you do for a living?"

Lee figured there was nothing left but the truth. "I work for the government as an intelligence operative."

"And my daughter works with you," she said, comprehension dawning over her face.

"Yes," Lee answered reluctantly. "I'm sorry you had to find out like this."

"You mean you're sorry I had to find out at all," she shot back at him.

"No, we were going to tell you, I swear."

"When, on your tenth wedding anniversary?"

Lee closed his eyes, wondering how much worse this could possibly get. "You know about that too?"

"Whoever sent me all this was kind enough to enclose one of your wedding pictures." She anxiously paced around the room. "I can't believe my daughter is a spy." She paused by Amanda's desk as a framed picture of Jamie and Phillip caught her eye. "What on earth was she thinking? She has two children to consider." For a moment the expression on her face softened. Then she turned back to Lee with fire in her eyes. "You," she said accusingly. "You did this, you got her involved in all of this."

"No," Lee tried to defend himself. "Well, yes, I recruited her but believe me, this is something Amanda wanted. There's a lot more you don't know."

"Whose fault is that?" Dotty retorted. "Where is Amanda anyway? I have a few questions for her too."

Lee couldn't meet her gaze. "She's missing. She has been since Monday evening."

"Missing? Since Monday? What do you mean?" The colour drained out of Dotty's face. She sat down limply on the couch, as if her legs had given way beneath her.

"She never arrived at my apartment Monday night. We found her car at Dulles but there's no indication she actually got on a flight. Believe me, we're doing everything we can to find her."

"Believe you?" Dotty said incredulously. "Why should I do that?" A few tears rolled down her cheeks. "You have no idea what's happened to her?"

"I'm sorry, no," Lee said, sitting down beside her. He reached out and gently put his hand on her arm.

"Don't touch me," Dotty snapped, pulling back from him. She wrapped her arms around herself, as if trying to hold her emotions in check. "How could you do this to my daughter?" she whispered. "Amanda was happy before you came along; she had a good life. You got her to lie to me, to put herself in jeopardy, to put her family at risk. And now, you don't even know where she is. You may even have gotten her killed."

Lee felt her accusations plunge into his heart like daggers. "Dotty, please, I never meant for any of this to happen."

"But it did." She stood up and walked over to the door. "I'm going home. But I expect you to call me at least twice a day and tell me what's going on. And don't even think of lying to me again."

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Amanda tried to hold back her astonishment at the doctor's last statement.

"Lee Stetson?" she repeated. "I don't know who you are talking about."

"I'm talking about the fact that you have worked as a government operative for the last four years. Your partner is Lee Stetson, code named Scarecrow. The two of you work for a covert government organization called the Agency." Trish recited the litany of facts calmly.

Amanda's eyes widened. How on earth could she know about all of that? Realization dawned on her and she exploded, "You! You did this to me, you're the one responsible for all of this!" She started to get up.

Trish seemed remarkably undisturbed by her outburst. "Amanda, calm down," she said mildly. "No one has done anything to you. At least not in the way you think. All of this information is in your file. It's part of your medical record."

Amanda sank back down, completely bewildered. "I don't understand," she said slowly.

"I know this is hard for you to accept, but none of this is real. It's all an elaborate delusion your mind created to avoid problems in your own life. You're actually a housewife from Arlington, Virginia, who's been married to Dean McGuire for the past three years."

"No," Amanda whispered, shaking her head.

"Amanda, this is why you were moved from your last placement. Something in you just won't accept the reality of your own life. Until you stop clinging to this fantasy world of yours, you are never going to get better and be able to go home."

When Amanda continued to just sit there she said, "I think we've covered enough for one day. I'm going to prescribe some mild anti-depressants for you. But medication alone isn't going to solve anything. You have to decide yourself that you want to fight to get your life back. It has to be something you are willing to work for. Spend some time this afternoon thinking about all of this - see if anything starts to sound familiar. I'll see you again tomorrow."

The doctor picked up her briefcase and left. Amanda stared after her, not knowing what to think. Was Trish part of the conspiracy against her or just blindly following information planted in her file? Obviously whoever was responsible for her abduction had gone to great lengths to set all of this up. Amanda had no idea what to do next. She sat there, feeling more alone than she ever had before in her life.

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Lee stared after Dotty for a few moments, stunned. He waited to give her enough time to leave the building then stuffed the photos back into the envelope and hurried downstairs.

"What's this?" Billy asked when Lee tossed the packet onto his desk.

"The only thing close to a lead we have at the moment. Amanda's mother brought them to me. Apparently someone mailed her a bunch of pictures of Amanda and myself including these."

Billy scanned the contents of the envelope. "How much does she know?" he asked.

"Just about everything," Lee said. "This one was taken back in 83 so she knows how long we've known each other. And from this surveillance photo it was pretty apparent I don't work for a film company either." Off his boss' concerned look, he said, "Don't worry, I kept things pretty vague. But I did end up telling her what our jobs really are and that Amanda is missing."

"That must have gone over well," Billy said sympathetically. "Sounds like someone is really trying to tie you up in knots over this one."

"Agreed. Revenge has to be the motive. But what case? How far back?"

"It could even go back before you met Amanda," Billy mused aloud. "She might be the means of getting to you, and not a target in herself."

"I know," Lee said. "All we know is why they took her, we still have no idea how to find her."

Billy picked up the envelope and studied it closely. "This was postmarked at the main post office the same day Amanda disappeared."

"Which means it could have been dropped into any of hundreds of mail boxes."

"Well, I'll have the boys in analysis take a look at it, but don't expect any miracles. What about the photographs? Do you think we can get anything from them?"

Lee picked up the pictures again and thumbed through them. "As I said this one was taken back in 83 - when Amanda met the Princess of Zaquir. The rest are from a variety of times and places, some social, some work. There's even one from a case we handled over in England."

"They probably weren't even taken by the same person. Whoever has this vendetta against you may have spent months collecting information from a variety of sources. You said Mrs. West had other photographs? Maybe you could tell something more specific from one of them."

"Yes, she said she had one of" Lee mind suddenly leaped into focus. "Billy, that other picture - there's only one place anyone could have gotten it from." He headed towards the door.

"Not so fast, Lee," Billy called him back. "What are you talking about?"

Lee hesitated, but only for a moment. Amanda's life was at stake, it was hardly the time to withhold information. Besides, Dotty knew the truth about their relationship; it would probably all come out soon enough. "She said she had a picture from..." He paused, trying to figure out exactly how to drop this bombshell.

Billy wondered why Lee was making such a show of secrecy. He wasn't blind after all. Not to mention that he had been the one to insist that Lee and Amanda work together in the first place.

"A picture from what?" he prodded.

"From our wedding," Lee said in a rush.

"What?" Billy asked, stunned. Whatever he had been expecting, it wasn't this. "You got married and didn't tell anyone? Why?"

"We were afraid it would make her family far too vulnerable. Plus her sons didn't know me very well at the time." Lee broke off his explanation as he saw the expression on Billy's face.

"Lee, we've been friends for how long?" he asked quietly. "I can't believe you would keep something of this magnitude a secret from me."

"Billy, I'm sorry. I admit it wasn't one of my most brilliant ideas. We were also worried that you might be forced to split us up."

"We'll talk about it after we find Amanda. Now tell me about the photograph."

"Amanda and I were married by Justice of the Peace Tagsworth over in Marion County. His clerk took a few pictures at the wedding. She mailed us a set a week later but kept the negatives. I've got the pictures stowed away at my apartment. So the only way someone could have gotten a copy would be from the

clerk. And if we can find out who she gave them to, maybe we can trace them to whoever kidnapped Amanda."

"Well, considering it's the only thing we have that's even remotely a lead... go ahead."

Lee hurried out of his office and over to the outside elevator. His pulse was racing, at last there was something he could do.



Amanda stared miserably at the walls of her room. Three days. What must her mother and the boys be thinking? Lee had probably given them some excuse relating her absence to work. He of course would have no such comforting illusions. He had to be going out of his mind with worry.

After meeting with her psychiatrist, she had eaten lunch in the dining room with the other patients. There had been a depressing air about the room, as if most of them were on more than enough medication to keep them docile. She had been given her daily dose of pills after the meal. It had been a simple matter to hold them under her tongue while pretending to swallow them. As soon as possible she had returned to her room and disposed of them in the toilet. She'd have to keep her wits about her if she had any hope of escape.

The next few hours had been spent studying the area of the hospital where she was being held. It was a dishearteningly secure set up - the exit was through a set of double doors. The first one was accessed through use of an identity card. The second door would only open after the first one had snapped back into place. It held little promise of affording her a means of escape.

For a moment the helplessness of her situation threatened to overwhelm her, and tears filled Amanda's eyes. What if she never managed to find a way out? The despair that thought created was almost enough to make her go mad.

She smiled wryly at the irony of that possibility - entering a psychiatric hospital as a sane person only to lose her grip on reality. She resolutely stood up and walked over to the door. Staying in her room wasn't going to help her situation. There had to be something else she could do. There was no way she was going to spend the next few days of her life there, let alone the next few weeks.



As Lee followed the winding road out to Marion County his mind drifted back to the last time he had taken that journey. In his haste to follow up his only lead in finding Amanda, his driving was only slightly less erratic than hers had been on their wedding day. Spurred on by the thought that circumstances were conspiring against them yet again, she had driven like a woman possessed, determined they would make it to their ceremony on time.

Finally arriving at the courthouse, Lee walked into the small lobby outside the judge's office and took a seat. Periodic snatches of voices came from the next room. "Do you take.... for all the days of our lives.... now pronounce you man and wife."

His expression softened as he recalled how beautiful Amanda had looked as she had said her vows to him, the sparkle in her eyes, the expression on her face, the little tremor in her voice which betrayed the depth of emotion she felt. Had it only been six months since they had stood side by side and pledged their lives to each other? Funny, now that they were married he found it almost impossible to remember what life had been like without her.

A few minutes later Mrs. Bowman walked into the room, followed by a couple oblivious to anyone else around them. She artfully palmed a cheque into her pocket, while chirping her standard speech, "I don't think I've ever seen such a lovely ceremony. Send us a little note every now and then, so many of our newlyweds do." The young man and woman hardly seemed to take any notice of her as they hurried out the door.

Lee smiled in sympathy with their rush to be off. He wondered if they were headed for the Crystal Springs Inn and mentally wished them better luck in chambermaids than he and Amanda had had.

After they left, Mrs. Bowman turned to Lee. She wrinkled her forehead in concentration, obviously trying to remember who her was. "Mr..." she said vaguely.

"Stetson," he supplied. "Judge Tagsworth performed our ceremony last February."

"Of course." Her expression brightened. "And how is your lovely wife Amanda?"

Lee prided himself on being able to detect the usual signals indicating when someone was lying. Either Mrs. Bowman was more adept at it than the average person or she had no idea about the current situation.

"She's fine. I was hoping to give her another copy of our wedding picture for her birthday next month. You do keep all the negatives don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"By the way, you wouldn't happen to remember if anyone else had been asking for a copy of our pictures?" He kept his voice steady and his tone casual, betraying none of the icy fear he felt inside. What if this lead didn't pan out?

"No, I think I'd remember that. Most people just want their own photos not someone else's." She looked at him with clear eyes as if she hadn't a secret in the world.

"Where do you have the pictures developed?" he asked. Perhaps that had been the source of the picture Dotty had received.

"My husband's a retired photographer. He built a darkroom in our basement and does all of the developing himself."

"Would you mind giving him a call? I'd like to take care of this right away."

She made a quick phone call while jotting down her address on a piece of paper. "You can head right over, Ira's at home."

Lee took a step towards the door, then turned back. "Thanks for all your help."

"You're quite welcome. And say hello to Amanda for me." Again she seemed to be utterly sincere. Lee hurried out the door, not sure what to make of the whole situation.

He made a quick call on his car phone during the drive over to the Bowmans' home. "Billy, I just left the judge's office. His clerk claims no one has been asking for a copy of our picture. Either she's involved in all of this and a damn good liar or somehow someone got our picture without her knowledge."

"What about the photolab?"

"I'm ahead of you there. Her husband does all the developing himself. I'm going to see him right now. As a precautionary measure, why don't we get a tap on their office and home phone lines? If the Bowmans are involved, they'll be making some calls to warn whoever is behind all of this about my visit."

"You really think that's possible?"

"I don't know what to think anymore," he sighed. "Maybe we should put them under surveillance too. And run a check on their phone records for the last year, you never know what'll turn up."

"It might not be that simple, Lee. We're talking about an office belonging to a Justice of the Peace."

"Damn it, Billy, I don't care whose toes we step on. Right now, the Bowmans are all we have to go on." He pulled up in front of a modest ranch style home. "Okay, I'll call you later."

Mr. Bowman met him at the door. "You the young buck that wants to buy some pictures?"

"Yes, please. I'm Lee Stetson."

"Ira Bowman. Pleased to meet you." He held out a gnarled hand, his grip steady despite his apparent age. He led the way down a steep flight of stairs. "I don't usually get the chance to meet any of the folks I develop pictures for. The missus just brings the films back home." He opened a door at the bottom of the stairs. "I keep all the negatives filed away in here."

Lee followed him into a small room. One side was lined with filing cabinets, while assorted cameras and photography equipment were scattered across counters and tables.

"Built this darkroom myself after I retired," Ira said proudly. "They could make me retire but they couldn't make me stop thinking. Got to keep your mind busy or they'll cart you off to the old folks' home before you can say incontinence pads." He barked out a hoarse laugh.

Lee looked around the meticulously organized room. "Very impressive," he said. "You've got some expensive equipment here. Aren't you worried about possible burglaries?" His mind raced, could

someone have broken in and stolen the negatives without the Bowmans' knowledge? He'd have his answer soon enough, if their pictures were missing from the files.

"Tell me about it. Our neighbours across the street have been robbed three times in the last six months. Young punks just give them enough time to buy a new television and stereo equipment and then hit 'em again." He rooted through the file cabinet, flicking through folder after folder, in no particular hurry. Apparently having a visitor was a welcome break in his day and not something to be rushed.

Lee tried to hold his anxiety in check, although it seemed to require extraordinary effort not to scream at the man that this was a matter of life and death. He felt as if he would fly into a thousand pieces. He took a deep breath and managed to calmly continue their conversation. "But you've never had a problem?" he asked.

"Had a state of the art security system installed after my neighbour's first break-in. Young punks know better than to try coming here." He straightened up with a triumphant smile. "Here we go, Mr. and Mrs. Lee Stetson, February 13, 1987. Now which one are you interested in?"

"Actually I was hoping to purchase the entire set of negatives from you."

"We don't usually do that," Mr. Bowman began.

"For say, \$300," Lee cut him off.

"As I was saying, we don't usually do that, but there are exceptional circumstances." A smile broke over his face as he held out the folder to Lee.

Lee phoned Billy again on his way back to the Agency. "Damn it, Billy, one or both of them have to be lying. There's no other way anyone could have gotten that picture. I even went back to my apartment - my copy is right where it's always been, hidden away with our rings."

"Speaking of your rings, the whole bullpen is buzzing about your marriage. Apparently Beaman was walking past your office when Dotty was there and heard her yelling something about a wedding. I know it's not your first priority right now, but I thought you should know before you came back in."

"Well, it wouldn't have remained a secret much longer. And as long as Amanda's okay, I don't care who knows about us."

"The surveillance teams should be in place by now. Hopefully one of the Bowmans will make a move and we'll be able to find Amanda." Billy hoped he sounded considerably more confident than he felt. This whole thing was a shot in the dark at best.

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The television lounge was one of the more cheerful rooms in the ward. Amanda stood in the doorway, taking in the large open space filled with a variety of couches and chairs. There were few people about,

except for a cluster of patients around the television at the far end. A mid-day showing of "The People's Court" seem to be holding their attention.

Amanda glanced around the room again, reflecting that someone had gone to considerable effort to make it look less like an institution and more like someone's family room. The bright floral prints used to cover the furniture should have been comforting and homey. Instead she realized grimly that while the room might be more comfortable than the dank quarters Addi Birol had confined her in, the end result was no different.

"Mrs. McGuire, how are you feeling this afternoon?" Amanda glanced up as Gwen walked up behind her.

"I'm fine," she replied, completing the thought in her mind, fine for someone who is being held against their will. She schooled her expression to show none of her hostility though. Gwen was young and inexperienced; perhaps she could be used to find some way out of this mess.

"I just wanted to talk to you for a few minutes," the girl asked. "Is that okay?"

"Sure."

As they sat down on one of the couches, Amanda mentally steeled herself for Gwen's interrogation. Looking over at the petite blonde sitting beside her, she almost had to laugh. Not exactly a formidable opponent. She was reasonably sure that whatever was going on, Gwen wasn't a part of it.

"How are you adjusting to the hospital? Feeling better than that first morning?"

"Actually no. I just want to go home."

"I know you do." She patted Amanda's hand sympathetically. "And that's what we're here for. You just have to be patient and let us help you."

Amanda sighed in frustration. She could almost hear Lee's voice telling her, "Amanda, fight the battles you can win. Don't get caught up in incidentals."

"I know, it's just hard to accept that my life is so different than I think. I want to believe that you are telling the truth. I remember my husband so clearly." She smiled as an image of Lee leapt to mind. "But I really don't know about the rest of it."

"That's a start anyway." She smiled.

"I think it might be easier if I could talk to my husband."

"I don't think they'll allow you to have visitors for a while." Gwen fidgeted nervously with her name tag.

"What about a phone call?" Amanda tried not to sound too eager. This could be her chance.

"Your doctor would have to approve that. Maybe in a week or so, if you continue to get better," she said brightly. She patted Amanda's hand again and stood up. "Just remember that we're all here to help you."

Amanda sighed and sank back down on the couch. Why couldn't she had been captured by one of those television criminals who always did something foolish to expose their entire plan and make it easy enough for six year old child to outwit them? Instead she still had no idea who was responsible for her predicament, much less how she was going to get out of it.



Despite all of Lee's protests, Billy had refused to let him take a surveillance shift, finally pulling rank on him and forcing him to go home. Lee leaned back against his couch cushions and sighed wearily, as his superior's parting words echoed in his mind. "Go home, have something to eat and get some sleep. You're not going to do Amanda any good if you push yourself to the breaking point."

The problem was those orders were much easier to give than follow. Every mouthful of food he ate felt as if it would choke him. His comfortable bed mocked him, reminding him that Amanda was probably being denied even these simple necessities. The guilt at not being in pain while she suffered who knew what indignities was overwhelming.

Against his will, his eyelids closed and he fell into an exhausted sleep. Almost immediately he could feel Amanda beside him, her gentle hands brushing the hair off his forehead. "Lee," she whispered softly into his ear, "What are you doing out here?"

"Waiting for you," he murmured drowsily. "You were gone and I couldn't find you."

"Shh..." She covered his face with tiny kisses. "I know, but I'm back now and you need to get some rest. Now, come to bed." She tugged at his arms until he stood up and moved towards the bedroom. He discarded his robe and got into bed. Amanda slipped beneath the sheets with him and nestled her body against his.

He gazed into her beautiful, trusting eyes. "Amanda, please don't leave."

"I'm not going anywhere ever again," she soothed him. "We belong together. I love you so much."

"I love you, too," he sighed, sinking into a deep restful sleep.



"I love you, too." Amanda smiled in her sleep, hearing Lee's reassuring words. She reached out to embrace him but her hands encountered only empty space. She woke up and the reality of her surroundings crashed in on her again. She was alone, Lee wasn't there at all; it had only been her imagination. And according to the doctor and staff at the hospital, that was the only place he had ever existed.

Tears spilled down her face as she sat up in bed. She pulled her knees to her chest and rested her head down despairingly. Her nightgown slipped off one shoulder and she absently reached to pull it back up. Her hand stopped in midair as she caught sight of a scar running across the top of her chest. She ran her fingers lightly along it, tracing the physical reminder of what they had endured on their honeymoon.

While recovering from the bullet wound, she had worried that perhaps Lee would no longer find her desirable. Her fears had proven unfounded as he took every opportunity in the months that followed to demonstrate the love and passion he felt for her. As her fingers lightly brushed against the scar tissue, she could almost feel the pressure of his lips and tongue, gently kissing their way down her injured flesh before continuing lower.

She shouldn't have been surprised at his ardent dismissal that any type of physical imperfection could change the way he felt about her. After all, she thought reflectively, physical attraction was only one tiny facet of her love for him.

Certainly he was one of the best looking men she had ever met, but that was hardly the cornerstone of their relationship. In fact during the first few months after they had met, she had even found his looks to be a bit off putting, dismissing him as a handsome but shallow playboy. She smiled, remembering his expression as he had descended the stairs at the costume party so long ago - it was as if he expected her to swoon at his feet like some adolescent schoolgirl.

It wasn't until she really got to know him that she saw the vulnerable man beneath the polished exterior. It was that inner man she loved so fiercely, his thoughtfulness, integrity and unwillingness to compromise his beliefs even when he had to pay a price personally. He was the most caring man she had ever known and she couldn't bear the thought that perhaps she would never see him again.

She sighed, there had to be some way to prove to the people around her that she wasn't imagining things. She looked down at the scar again and a smile slowly crept across her face. Perhaps she did have a convincing argument in her favour after all.



Francine stood at the door to the Q Bureau, unsure of whether or not she should knock. Upon hearing a sudden crash from within, she opened the door and hurried inside. Lee stood beside his desk, his arm still raised in the air.

"Are you okay?" she asked him anxiously. "What happened?"

"I dropped my coffee mug," he said without much conviction in his voice.

She looked at the shards of pottery lying on the far side of the room. "Well, that happens," she said uncertainly. She picked up the broken pieces and deposited them in the wastebasket, pretending not to notice as Lee brushed an uncharacteristic wetness from his eyes.

"Is there something you wanted, Francine?" he said.

"I just got back from the six to noon shift on the Bowman surveillance. I thought I would stop by and see how you were doing before heading home."

"Did you find anything?" he asked eagerly.

"Unfortunately, no. I really don't think she knows anymore than she told you. This woman's life is even duller than Amanda's." Off his sour look, she hastily added, "I'm sorry, old habit." She hesitated for a moment, then continued, "Lee, I'd like to apologize for what I said earlier this week too. I really didn't think that anything serious had happened to Amanda. And I had no idea that the two of you were..."

"Married," he finished for her with a small smile. "It kind of took me by surprise too. But in the best possible way. A couple of years ago I wouldn't have predicted this either."

"Well, a year ago if you had told me that Jonathan would be back in my life and that I would get engaged to him again, I would have laughed in your face."

"It's funny how life has a way of turning out in ways you least expect it to." He sighed, "I have to find her. It can't just end this way."

"You'll find her," she said confidently. "You have to keep believing that."

"But what if I don't?" Her heart wrenched at the look of despair in his eyes. Instinctively she moved over to him and enveloped him in a hug.

"Lee, you can't talk like that. Amanda is waiting for you to come for her." She pulled back and looked him in the eye. "Two years ago, when Amanda and I were locked in the freezer at that fast food warehouse, I was sure it was all over. But Amanda never gave up on you for a second. When we couldn't find our own way out, she knew you would find us in time. She never doubted you for a moment. And she was right. Something's going to turn up this time too. You just have to wait a bit longer."

"Waiting isn't exactly my strong suit," he said unevenly. He picked up a picture from his desk and held it out to her. "I couldn't even wait to marry Amanda. Instead I thought up that brilliantly idiotic idea of a mystery marriage."

She looked down at an image of Amanda and Lee smiling at each other. "Your wedding picture," she remarked quietly.

"Best day of my life. We were so happy. Who knew it was all going to turn out like this? I've really messed things up." As he ran a tired hand through his hair, Francine saw a flash of gold on his left hand. "How angry do you think Billy is?"

"You mean do I think he'll split the two of you up?"

He nodded.

"I honestly couldn't say. But we all knew that the two of you were involved and he let you work together." She laughed at the surprised look on Lee's face. "Come on, Scarecrow. That had to be the

worst kept secret in the Agency, other than where Beaman goes on Friday nights. Did you really think you were fooling anyone?"

"I guess not." He smiled sheepishly. "And it's all out in the open now. Only it may be too late."

"Don't talk like that." She looked around the room. "You know, Amanda's going to kill you when she gets back if you let your office go to hell."

"I know." He smiled at her. "Thanks for the pep talk. I really needed to hear that."

"No problem. Just make sure you take care of yourself too. You're not going to be in any shape to find her if you run yourself ragged."

"Yes, mother." He pulled a face and continued, "Don't worry; Billy made me go home last night and get some sleep. I'll be fine."

"You'd better be." She gave him another quick hug and headed out the door.

Lee stood there for a moment, looking down at Amanda's desk. He took in the picture of her sons, the neatly arranged pens and other office paraphernalia, the vase that stood there waiting, as if Amanda would breeze in at any moment with a handful of fresh garden flowers. His fingers tightened convulsively around the delicate porcelain and for a moment it seemed as if the vase would suffer the same fate as his coffee mug. Then he set it back down on the desk, touched it lightly with his fingertips and whispered, "Amanda, I'm not giving up either."



The following morning Amanda sat in the doctor's office, a small smile playing about her lips. "You said I was just an ordinary housewife," she began without any preamble.

Trish nodded.

"Well then, how do you explain this?" she asked, unbuttoning the top of her shirt. She drew back the collar, revealing the thick line of her scar. "That's a bullet wound," she said confidently. "Now where would a normal housewife get that?"

Her doctor met her eyes with a quiet steady gaze. "Amanda, that's the whole reason you are here."

"What are you talking about?" she asked in bewilderment.

"Last winter your husband took your sons out one evening. You stayed home and surprised an armed intruder breaking into your house."

"No," she whispered. "I was shot out in California. I remember it happening."

"Amanda, this is the crux of your problem - your feelings of safety and security were violated in the most horrible way. You became depressed and turned to alcohol. Your family doctor prescribed anti-depressants but you over used them."

"No!" she said again, more vehemently this time. "None of this is true."

"Amanda, it is true. Your husband checked you into another hospital before this one, but you resisted any attempts to help you. You have to let go of this fantasy life and admit what really happened. I'm going to get us some coffee while you take a look at this." She pulled a sheet of paper from her briefcase and held it out.

Amanda reached for it with trembling fingers. It was a photocopy of a newspaper article, dated ten months earlier. The headlines fairly leapt off the paper at her: Arlington Woman Shot in Burglary Attempt. She read through the short article with disbelief, but every sentence confirmed what Trish had been telling her.

Through the open doors of the lounge next door she could hear the sounds of the television blaring out some inane soap opera. Could that be the source of all her suppositions about her life? On the surface it did sound like the plot to some contrived television movie - housewife meets spy, housewife becomes a spy, housewife and spy fall in love and the two of them live happily ever after. Could Lee possibly be just a figment of her imagination? There had to be some way she could find out the truth.

Trish returned a few minutes later to find her still deep in thought. "So what do you think?" she asked as she set a steaming cup of coffee next to Amanda.

"I'm so confused I don't know what to think anymore," Amanda whispered.

"I know all of this must be very difficult for you. But together we're going to find a way to put the pieces back together. You just have to trust me."

"I want to but..." Amanda sighed. "It would help so much if I could talk to someone who really knows me."

Trish paused and seemed to be considering her request carefully. Finally she said, "It's a bit soon for this but okay. Tomorrow you get to make a call."

"Really?" Amanda brightened up immediately.

"Really. Right after our morning session. I just hope you get the answers you think you will."

Amanda smiled as Trish left. By the next afternoon her nightmare would finally be over.

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Lee rang the doorbell to 4247 Maplewood Drive with no small amount of trepidation. Dotty answered the door, looking at him apprehensively. Her voice shook as she asked, "Is it Amanda? Did you find out what happened to her? Is she.."

"No, no!" Lee was quick to reassure her. "As I said on the phone yesterday, we're checking out a few leads. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you, I just thought I'd stop by and see how you were doing."

"I'm holding up okay." She stood there, blocking the doorway. "Still in shock though. It's not every day you find out your only child is a spy."

"May I come in?" Lee asked uncertainly.

"Of course." She led the way to the den. "Would you like some coffee?"

"Yes, please." Lee was grateful for the social amenities that helped fill the awkward void. At least the ritual of adding sugar and cream to his coffee gave him something to do, besides noticing how the emptiness of his own feelings was mirrored back in Dotty's eyes. He sat down on the couch and sipped at the beverage, wishing that he actually liked either cream or sugar.

Dotty took a seat in the chair across from him, both of them still ill at ease, neither knowing quite where to start. It occurred to Lee that this was the first time they were meeting as their true selves - Dotty as his mother-in-law, he as the spy who had disrupted the even tenor of her family's life. His mind drifted back to the first time he had officially met Dotty. Amanda had been missing then too. He only hoped that he would be as successful in finding her this time.

"How are the boys?" Lee finally asked.

"Fine. They're over at Joe's right now. I think they suspect something is up, but for the moment they seem to accept that their mother is off on another work related trip. I don't know how much longer they'll believe that though." She sighed. "I feel so guilty, lying to them this way. But I don't want to upset them unnecessarily." She caught Lee's eye and smiled faintly. "I imagine this is how Amanda has felt all these years."

"She always hated lying to you," Lee said earnestly. "But in the beginning, neither of us had any idea how all of this was going to work out. She just helped out at the office from time to time, very low key stuff. She couldn't tell you because of security reasons. It just kind of snowballed from there - a tiny bit at a time, until one day we realized we were in love. Believe me, the last thing we wanted to do was to hurt you or the boys."

"I've been alternating all week between being furious at you both for deceiving me and being worried to death about Amanda." She cleared her throat and smiled. "I have to ask, exactly how did my daughter get mixed up in the spy business anyway? I don't imagine you take out Help Wanted ads in the Post."

"No, nothing like that." Lee leaned back against the couch, beginning to relax. "She was just in the right place at the right time. Or the wrong time, depending on how you look at it. I was at the train station trying to deliver a package to one of my contacts but couldn't shake some Russians agents tailing me. I looked around for someone to take it onto the train for me and saw Amanda."

"And she just agreed to do this for a total stranger? What on earth was she thinking?"

"I have no idea." He smiled awkwardly. "Part of me agrees with what you said the other day - I should

never have dragged her into all of this. But another part of me wakes up every morning grateful that she is in my life."

"I shouldn't have said that. I was just so angry I couldn't see straight," Dotty said contritely. "I told you that Amanda was happy before you came along. That wasn't entirely true. When Joe left for Africa, she had no choice but to put any thoughts of a career on hold. She had two small children to take care of and she's always put their welfare in front of her own. She was happy, but not the way she's been for the last couple of years."

Lee interrupted her. "You know, Amanda and I really did start dating a year ago. It's not as if she took this job just because of me. In fact, I did my best to get her to quit on more than one occasion. But you know, I've never seen anyone take to the job so naturally. Amanda always had such enthusiasm for every case. She told me once that she felt as if she was contributing something important, like she was making the world a safer place for Phillip and Jamie."

Dotty smiled. "I've been doing a lot of thinking in the past couple of days. I always wondered what there could be in a job at a film company to get her so... wrapped up in her work. She's really a government agent?" her voice trailed off in disbelief.

"She's a terrific agent, best partner I've ever had. She's got great instincts, must get them from you." He looked over at her with his most ingratiating smile.

"Don't try to suck up, Mr. Stetson. I'm still mad at the two of you."

"Sorry. But yes, Amanda loves her job and she's really good at it too."

Dotty sat there, mulling over what he said with mixed emotions - doubt, incredulity, disbelief and the acceptance that came with finally hearing the truth. So many strange incidents over the past few years suddenly made perfect sense. Not to mention all those ridiculous excuses Amanda would give for her unexpected absences - Dotty laughed aloud as a particular incident came to mind.

"What is it?" Lee asked with a smile.

"I've been so angry at Amanda for not being honest with me. I just remembered something that happened a couple of years ago. She was rushing the boys and me out the door early one morning, trying to get us to visit relatives in Vermont. I asked her what the hurry was and she told me this ludicrous story about being a spy and having to help some other spies find a bomb planted somewhere in DC. She was telling the truth, wasn't she?"

Lee nodded.

"I should have known I could trust her. It just sounded so melodramatic - my daughter, a spy. And now it turns out she's married to another spy. The two of you could have told me about that at least." She pinned Lee to the couch with a stern glare. "I still can't believe she got married without telling her own mother."

"I'd be the first to admit that our secret marriage was one of the dumbest ideas I ever had," he confessed.

"Well, as long as you find Amanda, I'll find it in my heart to forgive the two of you. When did you get married anyway?"

"This past February 13th."

Dotty thought for a moment. "That's when Amanda was shot out west. You were on your..."

"Honeymoon." Lee nodded.

"How terrible for you both. But now that I think back it all fits, the two of you planning separate vacations, but taking them at the same time - you were going out there to be married." She frowned at Lee again. "You know, I would have gladly flown out to California for the wedding. Besides, I ended up making the trip anyway so you might just as well have invited me to the ceremony."

Lee shook his head. "No, we were married here."

She looked puzzled for a moment. "But your wedding picture looks so tropical for February. All the greenery and flowers. Where did you get married?"

"Over in Marion County," Lee said slowly, his mind racing. "Dotty, can I see the picture you were sent?" Alarm bells started going off in his head as she left the room and went upstairs. His suspicions were confirmed when she returned and placed a picture in his hands. He tried to fight down the feeling of panic that suddenly threatened to overwhelm him.

"Lee, are you okay?" Dotty asked anxiously.

"We've been trying to track down Amanda's abductors through the Justice of the Peace," he said in agitation. "But this isn't our wedding picture. It's from a cruise we took almost three years ago. We were posing as an engaged couple and ended up having to go through with the ceremony." He got to his feet. "I've got to get back to the office. We've been headed in the wrong direction all this time."

Dotty walked with him into the front hall. He paused at the door and the two of them stared at each other for a heartbeat. Abruptly, Dotty pulled him into her arms and hugged him tightly. "I'm not saying I'm not still angry with you and I've got a few things I want to say to my daughter. But you have to find her first." She looked at him with tears in her eyes. "Promise me you'll find her and bring her back."

"I will," he said fervently.

For a brief moment, they clung to each other again, two of the people who loved Amanda most, each taking comfort from the other. Then Lee turned and hurried out the door.

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Amanda's heart was beating like a trip hammer as she sat in the small office. She picked up the phone with trembling fingers and punched in the familiar numbers for the Q Bureau's direct line. Unexpectedly,

she was greeted with a monotone message. "I'm sorry the number you are trying to reach is not in service."

She blinked in confusion, then realized she must have misdialed. She tried again, only to hear the same information. Attempts to call IFF's main switchboard or Billy's office met with no more success. Mindful of the swiftly passing time she called the operator and asked for the number of IFF in Washington DC.

"Just one moment, I'll put you through to directory assistance."

Upon being connected, Amanda repeated her request. Precious minutes slipped by as she anxiously waited for a reply.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, I can't find any such listing."

"No, wait," Amanda said hastily, but the connection was broken.

In desperation she started to dial her home number. Her mother could pass a message on to Lee. Before she was finished the door opened and the nurse walked in. "Mrs. McGuire, your time is up."

She sighed in frustration, wondering if by chance the nurse's last name was Desmond. She certainly shared a most inopportune sense of timing with Francine. "But I didn't get through to anyone," Amanda protested.

"I'm sorry, your doctor was very particular. Ten minutes, no more." She took the receiver out of Amanda's hands and set it back down. "Now it's time for lunch," she said briskly. Remembering the incident with the hypodermic needle from her first day in the hospital, Amanda gave in and reluctantly followed her out of the room.

After lunch, Amanda sat in an isolated corner of the TV lounge, mulling over the events of the morning for the hundredth time. A small corner of her mind argued that perhaps the simplest explanation was the correct one - perhaps her doctor and everyone around her was in fact telling her the truth.

No! Another part of her mind quickly rebelled against this blatant heresy. She'd always had a vivid imagination as a child, but there was no way she could have imagined anyone as wonderful as Lee. She looked into the depth of her being and found him there. In her uncertain world of lying to her family and the danger she faced at work, he was the one fixed point she knew she could count on.

But how to contact him? If she asked her doctor to arrange for the opportunity to place more calls, she would undoubtedly meet with no more success than she had earlier in the day. She didn't care if it seemed like raving paranoia, someone was carefully manipulating the events around her.

Her contemplations were interrupted by Gwen's cheery greeting. "Hi, Amanda! I'm heading home so I thought I'd say goodbye." She frowned as she took in Amanda's perplexed expression and quickly sat down. "Are you okay?" she asked anxiously. "Did talking to your family this morning upset you?"

Amanda looked into Gwen's innocent eyes and decided at some point she had to trust someone. "No, that went fine. But I didn't get to speak to my husband."

"Oh, that's too bad. Maybe you can talk to him next week."

Amanda chose her words carefully, wondering how much of her file the volunteer had been allowed to read. "That's the problem, he works for a film company and he's scheduled to go out of town this week. I really wish I had thought to leave a message for him. I would feel so much better. Do you think you could make a call for me?" she asked.

"I don't know about that," Gwen looked around nervously.

"But my doctor already okay'd it for me to make calls. Surely it wouldn't hurt for you to just leave a message for me."

"That's true," the girl said, obviously weakening.

Amanda pressed her advantage. "Just a short message, I promise. Something personal so he knows I how much I miss him."

"Okay," Gwen gave in at last. "What do you want me to tell him?"

Amanda thought quickly. She didn't dare mention Lee by name, Gwen would most likely have been informed of her 'delusions'. There had to be some way she could convey information to him without causing too much suspicion. She smiled as the perfect message came to mind.

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Lee anxiously paced around Billy's office. "I can't believe they won't release that information."

"Lee, the pictures were mailed to a private mailbox," his supervisor pointed out. "Those companies pride themselves on their discretion."

"I don't care. Surely someone who works there is open to persuasion. What if we get the IRS to take a sudden interest in their tax returns, going back say twenty years?"

"Given enough time, I'm sure we can find out everything we need. But it's Sunday morning, people just aren't available. We might have to wait until tomorrow."

"Well, I'm sure that whoever is holding Amanda isn't taking the weekend off," Lee remarked caustically.

Billy tried to pacify him. "Keep in mind that we are making progress. At least the cruise line was anxious to co-operate. Well, once I reminded them how we helped them avoid an international incident three years ago."

"But all we know is the town where the pictures were sent. The post office box could have been rented by anyone in Hanover. I can't believe they didn't keep a record of who signed the money order paying for the order."

"They didn't know this was going to happen," Billy interjected.

Lee ranted on, seeming not to have heard him. "And did you see what research managed to come up with on Hanover?"

Billy sighed. Of course he had seen the report, he had been the one who authorized it. He realized however that Lee needed some type of outlet for his anxiety. He didn't like to think of what would become of his best agent if Amanda was never found. To lose a partner to death was a terrible thing. And in Lee's case, Amanda was much more than simply his partner, she was his wife. Still, if he knew that she was dead, Lee could grieve and try to piece his life back together. To remain ignorant of her fate would be a torture that never ceased.

Lee picked up the folder from Billy's desk and began to read aloud derisively. "Small town in southern Pennsylvania. 14,000 residents. Main industries are factories for furniture, machine tools and potato chips. Has a large psychiatric hospital. Home to one of the largest standard bred horse farms in the world. Site of the first Civil War Battle north of the Mason Dixon line!" He began to raise his voice again. "THIS is what we pay research for? Who the hell cares about the Civil War!!"

Billy watched as Lee flung the folder back down in disgust. He observed mildly, "Lee, if you keep flying off the handle like this, you're going to end up in that psychiatric hospital yourself."

Catching Billy's eye, he stopped his tirade mid-stride. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "I know this isn't your fault, I shouldn't be taking it out on you."

"That's okay. I just happened to get in the line of fire. Look, I've got a helicopter on standby at National. But flying up there won't do us any good if we don't know what our target is."

Their discussion was cut short by a knock on the door. One of the office staff opened the door, saying, "Mr. Melrose, I hate to interrupt, but I was going through the overnight tape from the IFF line and there was a message I think might be for Mr. Stetson."

"Might be? What are you talking about?" Lee glowered at him.

"Well, the caller mentioned someone named Amanda, and since Mrs. King is missing I thought you should know."

Lee leapt forward, in one motion grabbing the tape out of his hands, then turning to jam it into Billy's tape player. The three of them stood there listening, as a woman's voice said, "I'm leaving a message for Dean McGuire, from his wife Amanda. She wants you to know that she's alright, she misses you and hopes to be home soon. She said to tell you that she's been working hard to get better. She asked me to tell you that she's thinking of your past together, especially what you said on your family vacation to Williamsburg four years ago. Oh, and she hopes you got your grant for the documentary on Guatemala."

The tape ended and Billy sat down, bewildered. "Did you recognize the voice at all?"

"No." Lee shook his head. "But Dean McGuire was the guy Amanda was dating back when we first met. How on earth could he be involved in all of this? He came up clean when we did Amanda's first security check."

"I'll have someone check and see what he's been up for the last while. This might be the break we've been waiting for." Billy picked up the phone and made a quick call.

Lee couldn't shake the nagging suspicion that they were once again about to set off after a red herring. He reached down to take the tape out of the machine, frowning as something tugged at his memory, just out of reach. Williamsburg and Guatemala - what a strange juxtaposition of locales. He had been to Guatemala on several occasions but never Williamsburg. That place was strictly for tourists, the kind of place Amanda would take the boys...

"Wait a minute," he said, comprehension breaking through. "It is from Amanda - she's trying to tell me something."

"What?" Billy asked. "Lee, that wasn't her voice."

"No, she must have gotten someone to relay a message for her. Listen to this... Four years ago she was going to take the boys to Williamsburg for a weekend. Dotty went with them instead. Amanda stayed home because she thought I had just been killed. I had faked my death for a case, remember?" He broke out into a huge grin. "Billy, it means she's okay."

"Scarecrow, I think you're really reaching here. I know you want to believe that she's all right..."

"No, Billy, it has to be from her," Lee insisted. "I stayed at Amanda's house that weekend, because I had nowhere else to go. We had an argument about it, and when I asked her where I should put my things, she said..."

"Guatemala," Billy finished for him.

"No one else would know about that argument. The message has to be from her. She's afraid I think she's dead."

Billy turned to the agent listening to their exchange from the doorway. "Did we get a trace on the call?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well don't just stand there. Find out!"

"Yes, sir." He turned and hurried across the bullpen. He returned a few minutes later. "I'm afraid we only managed a partial trace. It's within the 717 area code - part of Pennsylvania."

"Which just happens to include the town of Hanover," Lee said excitedly.

"Lee, we're still talking about looking for a needle in a haystack," Billy cautioned him.

"I don't think so. Remember what the caller said about Amanda working hard to get better? I've got a hunch about this. What's that number of the psychiatric hospital?" He picked up the computer printout in one hand and the phone receiver in the other.

"Lee, they're not going to give you their patient list."

"Normally no, but I think I can convince them," Lee said as he dialed the number. "Hello, yes, this is Dean McGuire. My wife is a patient of yours. I was just wondering if her doctor was in today - I'd like an update on how Amanda's first week went." He listened for a few minutes before continuing, "No, no message. I'll try back again tomorrow." He hung up the phone with a triumphant look on his face. "Dr. Redding won't be in until tomorrow morning."

"Redding?" Billy said slowly. "You don't think?"

"Can't be a coincidence. Let's see what Francine can pull on the computer about the good doctor." He exited the office and went over to his co-worker's desk.

Billy made a quick phone call of his own, watching through the window as Francine quickly punched in a series of key strokes, narrowing down her search. "Pay dirt," she was saying a few minutes later as he came out of his office.

"What did you find?" Billy asked.

"Dr. Patricia Redding, 50 Pinevalley Drive, Hanover, Pennsylvania. According to the IRS, she's worked at the Hanover Psychiatric Hospital for the last ten years. She has two brothers, Gregory - deceased and Gordon, who's still serving time in the federal penitentiary."

"Looks like Patricia decided to finish what her brothers started. Gordon succeed in killing two of the agents he held responsible for Gregory's death, leaving only you," Billy said.

"I'm beginning to wish we had never busted their technology selling ring," Lee said ruefully. "First Gordon tries to kill me by replacing Amanda with a look-alike and now it seems his sister has kidnapped Amanda."

"Well, that explains the photographs Mrs. West was sent - Gordon had to have done extensive research when he substituted Karen Brinkman for Amanda. We never did find his headquarters or the money he and his brother made selling classified technology."

"It's a safe bet that their sister fell heir to the whole lot. And now it looks like she's out for revenge. Well, what are we waiting for?" Lee asked. "Let's get up there."

"Not so fast, Lee," Billy interrupted. "I just placed a call down to the fabrication shop. We don't know who is involved at the psych hospital. And we can hardly go charging in there and pull out our guns. I've got them doing a rush job on some state health board identifications for you and me."

"You're coming?" Lee asked in surprise.

"Well, Amanda's one of my agents. Besides, I think someone needs to keep a close eye on you. Francine, I've got Davis checking out Dean McGuire, Amanda's old boyfriend. There's a chance he's somehow connected to this whole mess. Give him a hand; I'll phone you as soon as we get to Hanover. I think the hospital is due for a spot inspection."

"Sounds like a good idea to me." Lee grinned.



Trish Redding paused at the door to Hanover Psychiatric Hospital, glancing at her surroundings with satisfaction. It was a beautiful sunshine filled day, the trees were beginning to show their autumn colours, Amanda King was being held against her will and Lee Stetson was undoubtedly growing more and more frantic as every day passed. Life didn't get much better. She smiled, thinking of how pleased Gordon would be when she visited him again the next weekend and shared the success of her plans with him.

She breezed through the hospital corridors, exchanging greetings with various co-workers and patients. As she checked her mailbox one of the office staff called out to her, "Dr. Redding, I didn't think you were scheduled to come in today."

"I'm not," she reassured her. "I just needed to pick up something from my office." And maybe get in a few more digs at Amanda King's expense, she smirked inwardly. That bit with the intercepted phone calls had been particularly satisfying.

"It's just the husband of one of your new patients called about an hour ago. I told him you wouldn't be in until tomorrow."

Trish jerked her head up, suddenly alert. "Did he leave a name?" she asked. "Maybe I should call him back."

"Umm..." The woman paused for a moment. "Dean McGuire."

"Who?" The sheaf of papers in her hands trembled noticeably.

"Amanda McGuire's husband. I wouldn't worry about it, he said he'd call back again tomorrow." Her last words were said to empty air as Trish hurried down the hallway.

After a quick stop in her office she located Amanda in the TV lounge. She poured two cups of coffee, handing one to Amanda as she sat down beside her.

"Trish," Amanda said in surprise. "I wasn't expecting to see you today."

"Just thought I'd stop by and see how you were doing," her doctor said. "I was worried about you."

Amanda sipped at the coffee. "That was very nice of you, but I'm feeling much better."

Trish watched closely as Amanda swayed slightly. "Are you sure you're okay?" she asked, a malicious smile forming on her face.

"I don't know," Amanda said uncertainly. "All of a sudden, I feel kind of dizzy."

"Why don't we get you back to your room and you can lie down." Trish stood up and offered her an arm.

Amanda stood up unsteadily. By the time they reached her room, she was slurring her words badly. "I don't know what's wrong," she said. "I felt fine this morning."

"Well, so did I. Funny how things change." Trish's voice took on a hard edge as they entered Amanda's room. She pushed Amanda towards the bed, letting her fall roughly onto the mattress. "I just found out that someone has been making inquiries about you. No doubt Stetson is on his way here right now."

"Lee... he's coming for me?" Amanda struggled to sit up.

Slap! The force of the blow pushed her back against the mattress. "Not if I can help it."

Amanda recognized the hate filled voice immediately. Trish was the one who had accosted her outside Lee's apartment. Trish was the one who had kept her from her family and Lee. She tried to get to her feet but found her arms and legs were no longer hers to command.

The doctor darted out into the hallway for a moment, returning with a gurney. "Sorry, Amanda, but I can't let you stay here any longer. I had planned to leave you here for a couple of months, then have you die from an accidental overdose." She roughly pulled Amanda's body onto the cart and began to strap her down. "Stetson of course was to know none of this. As much as I would enjoy seeing his torment first hand, I'm sure he would have found a way to pay me back. I wanted him to spend the rest of his life wondering what had happened to you and if you were even alive."

As Trish moved the stretcher out into the hallway, Amanda tried to protest but found herself once more sinking into a black void.



"Mr. Montrose, I assure you, we run a very tight ship here. Our staff is careful to observe all of the state ordinances." The assistant administrator of Hanover Psychiatric Hospital glared at her visitors over the rims of her glasses.

Billy sighed. The woman seemed to take it as a personal insult that he and Lee had shown up. "Ms. Charron, there's been no specific complaint," he tried to mollify her. "This is just a spot check to see how new patients are being integrated into your facility. We have a release signed by the family of one of your new patients, Amanda McGuire..."

"That's wonderful," she snapped back. "But the patients' families don't make the rules around here, we do. I can't let you speak to a patient without their doctor's consent - you could undermine all of their treatment efforts."

Lee spoke up for the first time since they had entered her office. "I promise this won't take long. We just want a quick look around the ward."

"You really need to speak to our administrator. If you hadn't simply dropped in without so much as a phone call, much less an appointment, she would have been here herself."

"That's why they're called spot checks, Ms. Charron!" Lee began to lose his temper. "We'd hate to have to come back later for a full scale investigation. All that paper work, full background checks on your staff, a complete audit of your accounting department..."

"Are you threatening me?" She got to her feet.

"Not at all," Billy tried to diffuse the situation. He knew Lee was at the breaking point, but getting into irrelevant arguments would hardly be helpful. "What Mr. Stenton means is that if we could just have a quick look around, I'm sure we can hand in a favourable report and nip all of this in the bud."

"All right," she agreed reluctantly. "Just a quick tour."

She led the way through the double doors and into the ward. After greeting the nurse at the desk, she introduced their visitors. "This is William Montrose and Lee Stenton from the State Psychiatric Board. They just want to have a quick look around - absolutely no patient contact without a doctor's approval." She turned to glare at Billy and Lee as if she expected them to break away and start interrogating patients at any minute.

"Lee Stenton?" the nurse said in an uncertain voice, as if trying to remember where she had heard that name before. "Well, Dr. Redding just came in about a half hour ago, if they want to ask her about her patients."

"Dr. Redding?" Billy repeated, "Are you sure?"

"Yes. She asked where Mrs. McGuire was. A little while later I saw the two of them going into Mrs. McGuire's room."

"Where is that?" Lee asked anxiously.

The nurse led the way down the hall. Lee eagerly opened the door but was disappointed to find it empty. "Where could they have gone?" he asked.

"I have no idea," the nurse answered in bewilderment.

Billy took out his federal ID. "Okay, I want you to seal this building off. No one goes in or out without my permission." He turned to Lee. "I'm telling the back up team to move in now."

As he took out a small hand held device and began barking orders into it, the nurse looked at Lee in astonishment. "You're federal agents?"

He nodded.

"Then she was telling the truth? She really does work with you? Mrs. McGuire's file said that she was delusional - she had made up this elaborate fantasy life in which she worked for a government agency."

Lee groaned. Poor Amanda, being held as a prisoner and having the truth flung in her face.

The nurse flagged down an orderly passing them in the hallway. "Have you seen Dr. Redding?"

"Sure, she was heading out of the parking lot a few minutes ago when I came in."

Billy turned back to Ms. Charron. "I need to know what kind of vehicle the doctor drives so we can put out an APB on it. NOW!" He raised his voice and she hurried over to the phones.

"She gave me a ride home once," the young man spoke up. "She drives a red Chevy Blazer."

Billy got back in touch with the backup team and relayed the information. He turned to Lee. "She can't have gotten far, we'll find her, I promise you."



Amanda fought her way through a medicated fog, like a diver desperately trying to reach the surface before depleting her supply of oxygen. This was becoming something of a morning ritual, she reflected grimly, and one she could certainly do without.

Trish must have been successful in moving her, she realized in dismay, taking in what appeared to be another hospital room. She might be in another wing of the same hospital. Or perhaps she had been moved somewhere else entirely. There was no way to tell.

A surge of anger coursed through her body, propelling her to her feet. Trish had apparently won another battle, but the war was far from over. With a resolute look in her eyes, she picked up the metal bedpan lying next to her bed.

As far as she was concerned, this game was OVER. Subtlety and playing along had gotten her nowhere, the time had come for direct action. She took up position beside the door, waiting for someone to come along. A couple of well-placed blows to the head and she should be able to knock them out, retrieve their ID tag and use it to get out of the building. As she waited, she glanced down at the hospital gown she wore - hardly inconspicuous street wear. She'd have to take their clothing as well.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps. She held up the bedpan, waited for the door to open and hit the newcomer's head a resounding blow, carrying behind it all her pent up frustration from the past week.

Her would be tormentor let out a cry of pain, dropped to the floor and rolled over, hands held up to ward off the barrage of blows Amanda continued to rain down.

Gradually Amanda became aware that her victim was yelling out her name. "Amanda, Amanda, stop! It's me!"

She froze. "Lee?" she asked in disbelief, the bedpan slipping from her fingers and clattering to the floor.

He lowered his arms. "Yeah, it's me." He reached up and rubbed his head, grimacing as his fingers encountered the beginnings of a large lump. "I think I should have Billy issue you a bedpan instead of a gun." He started to get up, but found himself knocked to the floor again, this time by the force of Amanda's body pressing against his.

"Lee, I thought I'd never see you again." She punctuated her words with kisses. He eagerly responded, both of them welcoming the physical reassurance that the other was actually there.

Breaking apart from her at last, Lee reached up and brushed the hair back from her face, gazing intently into her eyes. "I was so worried about you," he whispered.

"I don't remember anything since Sunday afternoon. What happened?" she asked him.

"Dr. Redding drugged you and was trying to move you to who knows where. Billy and I arrived at the hospital about the same time she loaded you into her vehicle and drove off."

"The coffee," Amanda supplied. "One of the last things I remember was Trish giving me a cup of coffee."

"She hit you with something pretty potent - you've been asleep for almost eighteen hours. Our back up team intercepted the doctor about two miles from the hospital. Luckily for her, they had already arrested her by the time I arrived. I'm not sure I would have been all that restrained after what she put the two of us through this week." His eyes clouded as he thought back. "I really thought I might never see you again."

Their lips met again in a fervent kiss. All of the sensations were familiar and yet new - the thought that they might never have the chance to be together again had heightened all their senses.

After a few moments, Lee unwillingly pulled away. "I think we'd better get up before someone comes in. That's not exactly the most discreet outfit you have on. Pretty sexy though. Could be a whole new look for you." He brushed his hand down the open back of her hospital gown.

They disentangled their limbs and Lee got to his feet. As he reached down to help her up, Amanda looked at his extended hand in surprise. "You're wearing your wedding ring," she observed. "What exactly has been going on this past week?"

"Let's just say our mystery marriage isn't much of a mystery anymore. Everyone at the Agency knows, not to mention your mother." Lee reached into his jacket's breast pocket and extracted her rings. "I've been carrying these with me the past few days, close to my heart. Every time I wanted to give up, I'd reach for them and remind myself that I was going to find you and put them on your finger again one last time."

Amanda smiled. "Close to your heart. Can't think of anywhere else I'd rather be."

Lee shook his head. "Amanda, you're not close to my heart. You are my heart." He gently took her left hand in his and slowly slipped the rings onto her finger. Then he bent and brushed his lips across her fingertips.

Amanda moved her fingers slowly across his cheek, cupping his face in her hands and pulling him towards her. Time stood still as they gazed into each other's eyes.

"I love you, Lee," Amanda whispered. "I was so afraid I'd never get the chance to tell you that again."

"I know. And I thought I had lost you. I love you, too."

"They told me you didn't even exist, that you were just a fantasy I had dreamed up."

"Does this seem like a dream?" Lee gently touched his lips to her face, slowly moving from her forehead, to her nose, to her cheeks, finally brushing his lips against hers again.

She closed her eyes and sighed, basking in his nearness. "Actually, yes. Just promise you'll never wake me up."

His arms tightened around her and they kissed again. She eagerly pressed her lips to his and her body against his. Lee slid his hands around her slim form, crushing her to him. One hand slipped beneath the open back of her hospital gown. He ran his hand along her bare back, pulling her even closer.

Lee's last remaining bit of logic intruded through the red haze of hormones. Reluctantly he pulled back from their embrace. Although the time was certainly right, this was hardly the place for a romantic reunion. Someone could walk through the door at any moment and he couldn't exactly hang a 'Do Not Disturb' sign from the outside doorknob.

"I think we should postpone this for a bit," he sighed. "Once the Agency doctor gives you a clean bill of health, we're heading back to DC. Your mother's been pretty worried about you. I was just on the phone with her giving her an update."

Amanda walked over to the bed and sat down. Unwilling to totally sever their physical contact, she kept a tight hold of his hand, pulling him down beside her. As she snuggled her body next to his, she asked again, "What happened this week?"

Lee sighed. "Let me tell you a story called 'The Worst Week of my Life'." He tightened his arm around her.

She rested her head against his shoulder. "I don't care much for the title. Does it at least have a happy ending?" She laced the fingers of her left hand with his, holding them up so their rings caught the light.

Lee looked into her smiling face and said, "Yeah, it does. The best kind."

Now that their relationship was public knowledge, he knew they'd have to deal with major changes over the next few weeks - both at home and at work. But right now, in this moment, the only thing that mattered was that she was back where she belonged, in his arms.



"Mother?" Amanda called as she walked through the back door.

"Amanda!" Dotty came running down the stairs and into the kitchen. She threw her arms around her daughter and hugged her tightly. Pulling back, she said, "If I wasn't so happy you're safe, I'd shake you."

"Mother, I am so sorry for all the lies and deceit. I never meant to hurt you."

"I know, but you did." They hugged again, both of them breaking away to wipe at their eyes.

Amanda turned towards the doorway, where Lee stood watching the two of them. "Mother, there's someone I want you to meet. This is my husband, Lee Stetson," she said proudly.

Dotty smiled. "Yes, we've met. Welcome to the family, Lee."

"Where are the boys?" Amanda looked around. The house was far too quiet.

"Joe's picking them up after school. They've been staying with him the last few days. When your 'location scouting trip' kept getting extended, I didn't want to keep lying to them. I don't know how you managed to do it for so long."

"Unfortunately it's something that does get easier with practice," Amanda said regretfully.

The three of them went into the den and sat down. Dotty looked over at Lee and Amanda sitting next to each other on the couch. "Do you have any idea how hard it is for me to be angry with the two of you when you look so happy? So what happens now? Are you going to tell the boys everything?"

Lee glanced over at Amanda. "They're still kind of young to know about our jobs. Part of the reason we kept our marriage a secret was to protect them. If no one knew we were married, our family couldn't be a target."

"But look what happened this week," Dotty argued. "They could have ended up learning the truth in the most painful of ways. Would that have been any better?"

Lee smiled. "Funny how you could figure that out so quickly."

Amanda said, "But I don't think we should just spring it on them that we're married either. They're pretty young to forgive this level of deceit."

"So why don't you just tell them you're engaged and have another ceremony?" Dotty asked. "One that I can come to this time."

Lee smiled and took Amanda's hand in his. "Sounds like a good idea to me."

"Something simple, maybe in the backyard," Dotty deliberated aloud. "We can have an afternoon tea reception - the Abingdon Tea Room does catering. And we'll get a beautiful floral archway for the two of you to be married under. The boys can be the ushers and..."

Amanda cut her off. "Mother, slow down a bit."

"Amanda, I didn't get to do anything for your other ceremony. I think letting me plan this one would be a good way to make it up to me."

Amanda surrendered to the inevitable. "Okay, but nothing too extravagant, promise?"

"I promise." Dotty stood up. "Well, I think I'll spend the rest of the day checking out florists and photographers. Not to mention that as mother of the bride, I'll need a new dress." She picked up her purse and headed for the door. "I'll stop by Joe's after school and bring the boys home."

Amanda walked with Dotty to the car. "Mother, I just wanted to tell you again how sorry I am for deceiving you all this time."

Dotty gave her a quick hug. "I know, darling. I'm glad I finally know the truth. Except now I'm going to worry every time you're ten minutes late for dinner. Of course, I imagine Lee's going to keep a pretty close eye on you for a while."

Amanda blushed. "I love him so much. I can't imagine being without him."

"And he loves you too. You should have seen him this past week. He's been run off his feet trying to find you."

"I know, I tried to make him go home and get some rest but he wanted to come with me to see you. He really likes you, Mother, and he feels terrible about all of this."

"I'm just happy you found someone who cares about you so much. Not that I would have minded if he had been in a little safer line of work."

"Mother!" Amanda protested as Dotty got in the car and drove off.

She had to smile at the sight that met her eyes when she walked back into the house. Lee was stretched out on the couch asleep, apparently having succumbed to exhaustion. She wondered how much rest he had gotten during the whole ordeal.

She knelt down beside him, gently stroked his face and touched her lips to his. Lee reacted immediately, his eyes flying open as he bolted into an upright position.

"Ouch," Amanda yelped as their heads collided. She sat down on the coffee table and rubbed her forehead. Behind her closed eyelids, stars danced across her field of vision.

"Amanda, I'm sorry," Lee apologized. "Are you okay?"

She opened her eyes to find him looking at her in concern.

"I'm fine. Just remind me never to sneak up on you again. I guess this is payback for this morning."

He reached out and took one of her hands in his. "You just startled me, that's all. For a moment I thought..." His eyes pieced into hers. "You really are here," he said with a slight catch in his voice, as if he could hardly believe the truth of that statement.

"I really am," she said, reaching out with her free hand to touch his cheek with her fingertips. She moved to sit next to him on the couch, swinging her legs over his lap so they could be closer.

Lee felt that he had never loved her more than in that moment, when the fear of losing her was still fresh in his memory. Despite his reassuring words and displays of bravado, he had had too many moments when he had been frightened to his very core that she would never be there again. But now she was.

It was almost too much to take in. He buried his head in the hollow between her neck and shoulder, inhaling the scent of her freshly washed hair. His hands moved slowly down her back, caressing every inch, reassuring him of her nearness. He choked out her name and opened his eyes. The depth of emotion that swept over him would have been overwhelming, if he hadn't seen it reflected back in Amanda's eyes.

"I love you," she whispered.

"And I love you, so much."

"So will you marry me?" she asked.

"What?" Lee said.

"Lee Stetson, you are the best, the bravest, the smartest, most handsome man I have ever known. So will you marry me?" Amanda repeated with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Oh yeah, I'll marry you." He leaned in and kissed her again.

Amanda sighed, "Why don't we go upstairs and clean out half of my closet for you?"

"Amanda, there's no rush. I won't be moving in for a few weeks." His words died away as her lips moved down his neck and she nuzzled the collar of his shirt open.

"Mrs. Stetson, are you trying to seduce me?" he said, a slow smile spreading over his face.

"If you have to ask, I must not be doing a very good job."

Lee got to his feet, pulling her with him. "No, you're doing just fine. So when do you want to be married?"

Amanda thought for a moment. "How about the third of October?"

Lee looked at her blankly. "Should that day ring a bell?"

Amanda glared at him. "It's only the day we met."

"Exactly three years, eleven months and four days ago." He smiled at her as they headed for the stairs. "Sounds like a perfect day for making new beginnings."

The End