

Title: Tropical Espionage

Author: Aunt Minnie

Notes: A big thank you to my predecessors for getting me into this mess, and to Uncle Iggy and my long-lost cousin for the beta read.

Part Twelve

"Well, Mr. Stimpson," chortled Loki, his rifle aimed at Lee's heart. "Or should I say 'Scarecrow'? Looks like you and your pretty, little partner, here, are all dressed up with nowhere to go." He called over his shoulder. "Mr. Drake, c'mon out. You have guests."

"Well done, Lipschultz," the black-haired man said with a smile as he emerged from the cabin. "Keep them covered while I get their guns."

He patted Lee down, finding and confiscating the pistol tucked into the waistband of his tuxedo pants, then turned to Amanda.

"Oh, but I don't have a gun," Amanda told the good-looking businessman as he approached her. "I don't like guns. I had a cucumber earlier, but I ate it . . ." She trailed off when he stopped directly in front of her and glared down at her. "I, uh . . . I guess you want my purse, huh?" she finished, offering him her white evening bag, then snatching it away from his grasp and retrieving her shoes before extending it toward him again.

Drake glanced inside the bag and then tossed it into the open door of the cabin. "Let's get you two tucked away for the night." He gestured with Lee's pistol and the two agents walked toward the stern.



A short time later, they were alone in an old fish locker, locked in an embrace. Lee sighed, thinking of a recurrent dream he'd been having lately, in which he had his arms wrapped around Amanda, savoring the sensation of her slim body nestled up against his. But this reality was nothing like his fantasies. His hands weren't caressing her back; they were securely handcuffed to one of the uprights supporting the shelves behind her. And her arms weren't wrapped around his shoulders; they were similarly manacled to a support behind him. The chains allowed only a few inches of slack, and her breasts were nearly brushing against his chest. He shifted nervously, trying to keep a decent distance between them despite the demands of his subconscious mind to move closer.



"Ouch! Lee, be careful," Amanda squeaked. "That was my foot."

"I'm trying to be careful, Amanda," he responded curtly, "but there's not much room to move. I have to find a way to get us out of these cuffs."

"Don't you have a lock pick with you?" she asked, leaning back to look up at him.

He followed her lead, leaning back slightly to a safer distance. "Yeah, but it's in my lapel, and there's no way I can reach it."

"Oh," came the disappointed reply. "Well, do you see anything useful that you can reach?"

He looked past her to the shelf near his hands. "Nah," he said. "I don't see anything but a few jars of olives, and I'm not even sure that I could get to them." He eyed the post to which he was shackled. "These shelves are metal, and the supports are bolted to the floor and ceiling. There's no way I can get them loose."

She abruptly leaned to her right and strained to look behind him, oblivious to his sudden intake of breath as she leaned into him. "Amanda, what are you doing?"

"I'm looking for something that I can use to pick the lock," she replied, as though there could be no other answer. "Oh, look!" Amanda exclaimed. "I think I see something. Step back a little, Lee," she said, moving herself closer to him as she stretched to reach something on the shelf behind him. "Just a little more, and I think I can reach it."

"Amanda," he hissed through clenched teeth, making a mental note that being in a closet with his partner could bring hazards beyond his expectations, "I'm as far back as I can get. What are you trying to reach?"

Her outstretched fingers finally found their target. "Got it," she said triumphantly as she took a half step back.

"Got what?" he asked after drawing a ragged breath.

"Hang on a minute," she responded, still a little too close for him to think straight. His delight and unease rose as one when she started to wiggle against him. "There!" she exclaimed, stepping back and rubbing her arms. The handcuffs dangled from her right wrist.

"Amanda, how did you get loose?" he asked, as she worked to free her other hand.



"I used this," she told him, holding up a slightly battered miniature umbrella, its hot pink plastic frame topped by a gaudy turquoise, green, and orange paper cover. "It was stuck under the lip at the edge of the shelf. I thought I'd never get it loose. Now, give me your wrists."

"Come on, Amanda," Lee whispered a few moments later, as he led the way through the locker door and down a short hallway to the galley. "Let's see what's going on topside." He stopped at the corner of the room, flattening himself against the wall and motioning for Amanda to do the same.

"Lee. Did you hear that?"

"Yeah, I did," he replied. "I'm going to take a look." He turned and looked her in the eye. "You stay here, understand?"

"Sure, Lee," she agreed. She waited until he had started up the steps before heading out after him, muttering under her breath. "Just like I always do."

She stayed just far enough back that he wouldn't notice her behind him. He'd reached the top of the steps and was looking around the corner. She heard his soft "What the . . ." only moments before she heard the barks and saw him back quickly down the stairs, followed closely by a hairless blur.

"Howard!" she exclaimed, kneeling and holding her arms out in the hopes that the little dog would recognize and remember her. But Howard already had a firm grip on the left leg of Lee's tuxedo pants, shaking his head back and forth vigorously. "Lee, be still so you don't scare him."



"Amanda," Lee ground out, "does he look scared to you?" Lee stood with his back to the wall, shaking his foot in a fruitless attempt to dislodge the determined attacker.

"Howard! Howard, stop that this instant," Amanda called to the canine. Keeping a firm grip on the trouser leg, Howard looked toward her voice. Recognizing her from their brief encounter in the kitchen only a short time before, he immediately left Lee and ran to her waiting arms, tail wagging furiously. "Where did you come from?" she asked the little dog. "The last time we saw you, you were on the dock. You must have come up the gangplank while we were climbing the ladder."

"Amanda," Lee interrupted again. "Leave the dog alone. We've got to go find Loki and Drake."

From Amanda's arms, Howard growled softly. "Lee! Stop it. You're scaring him again." She stroked the hairless little head soothingly, whispering to him until he quieted again. "We can't just leave him here. Maybe he can help us."

"How on earth can he help? He'll only get in the way. Or he'll bark at the wrong time and let them know that we're coming." Howard growled again, and Lee eyed him with distaste. "Besides, the mangy little mutt hates me. I'd just as soon --"

He broke off at the sound of approaching footsteps. "Amanda! Someone's coming. Get back." Looking around for a weapon, he seized the first likely object he saw. He felt somewhat foolish as he crouched at the bottom of the steps, out of sight, a cast-iron skillet gripped securely in one hand. The footsteps neared the bottom of the steps, and Lee watched as a flip-flop clad foot stepped into the galley.

The foot was attached to a tall, lanky, boy, about 20 years old, dressed in loudly flowered shorts and a t-shirt promoting Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA." His freckled face was topped by flaming red hair, and he was humming a tune, his head bobbing in time to the music.

Lee rose quietly and slipped up behind the lad, feeling even more foolish as he stuck the handle of the skillet into his ribs and said, in as threatening a voice as he could muster under the circumstances, "Don't make a sound."

The boy stiffened and slowly began to raise his hands. "Don't worry, mister," he whispered. "I can be as quiet as a church mouse."

A snicker from behind him cut through the tension. "If I only had a camera . . . no one's gonna believe this." Amanda walked into the room, Howard in her arms. "And you had the nerve to make fun of my cucumber."

Lee lowered his frying pan and glared at Amanda as he turned the boy around. One hand held menacingly at the boy's throat, he demanded, "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Take . . . take it easy, mister," the terrified boy managed to get out between trembling lips. "I didn't mean to scare you, I was just trying to get dinner ready for the boss and his friend."

"Who are you?" Lee repeated.

"My . . . my . . . my name's Dwayne," he replied, his eyes wide behind black plastic frames. "Dwayne Dwingledorfer. I'm just the cook, mister, honest. Please don't hurt me."

Amanda stepped in and placed a hand on Lee's outstretched arm, moving him back a step. "It's all right, Dwayne," she said, leaning down to put Howard on the floor. Lee eased around behind her, one eye trained on his hairless nemesis.

"Tell me, Dwayne," she continued, "what on earth are you doing on Grand Bahama?"

"Well, ma'am," he replied, glancing nervously toward Lee as he spoke, "this is my summer job. I wanted to get something working in a chemistry lab -- you see, chemistry's my major back at the university, and I was hoping to get some good experience -- but then my mother's best friend's cousin's husband's barber told him about someone who needed a cook for the summer season, and Mom wouldn't hear of me doing anything else." Amanda saw the glint of braces as he smiled, obviously embarrassed. "She said that I could spend the rest of my life being a chemist, and that I should have a little adventure while I still could."

"Well, you certainly came to the right place for that," she said with a wide grin.

"Amanda, wait a minute," Lee interrupted, "how do you know we can trust him? He might be in with Drake and Loki."

"Lee," she insisted. "Of course we can trust him. Look at Howard." The little dog sat happily at Dwayne's feet, looking up at him adoringly. "He'd let us know if Dwayne were lying. Now, what's our plan?"

The next lucky contributor is Mrs. McMurdy, who must include the following in her segment:

Person: A local deputy sheriff named Carlos

Place: A Port-A-Potty

Thing: A necklace made of fossilized shark's teeth

Phrase: "How on earth did you get it stuck there?"

