

**Title:** Tropical Espionage

**Author:** Mrs. McMurty

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**Setting:** Season 3

**Rating:** PG

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"The first thing we have to do is get you off this yacht," Lee replied as he began searching the cramped galley for weapons. Pulling open a drawer, he found several

knives, but he didn't particularly relish the idea of sneaking up on and subduing the bad guys, one by one, with only a knife or his bare hands. Particularly the tailor, Rufus, if he was in the vicinity: the guy looked as strong as an ox.

Amanda put her hands on her hips and glared at Lee. "You're not getting rid of me that easily, buster. I'm not leaving you here alone," she retorted. "Besides which --"

"A-m-a-n-d-a . . ." Lee interrupted. "I'm not trying to get rid of you. One of us has to get off this boat and find reinforcements."



"Oh." Amanda shrugged her shoulders, her expression thoughtful. "I guess we do need reinforcements," she agreed. "But I'm still not leaving."

"A-M-A-N-D-A . . . don't be so stubborn," Lee growled, becoming increasingly annoyed at her habit of challenging his orders. He was the senior agent. And, technically, she wasn't an agent at all. Why didn't she ever --

"I'm not being stubborn, Lee," Amanda's voice broke into his brooding. "I'm being realistic. In case you've forgotten, this \*boat\* was launched at least twenty minutes ago. I'm not going to jump overboard and swim to shore dressed like this." She swept her hands down her already rumpled white gown.

"Damn," Lee mumbled, abashed. He \*had\* forgotten; they were probably a mile from shore. "Then I don't know what we're gonna do. We're outnumbered and practically unarmed. I guess my best move would be to sneak into the cabin and find a radio."

"Or you could find Carlos," Dwayne interjected helpfully. He looked from Lee to Amanda and back, apparently fascinated by their debate. "You know," he added in a pensive voice, "you two remind me of my parents. When they argue, it's like watching a tennis match."

Lee and Amanda both pivoted to face him.

"Your parents!" Lee barked, appalled at the idea he reminded anyone of a parent.

Amanda shook her head and rolled her eyes at her partner. "Who's Carlos?" she inquired, returning her attention to Dwayne.

After a long, puzzled look at Lee, Dwayne turned to answer Amanda's question. "Carlos is with the native dancers up on deck. Mr. Drake's having a private party here on the yacht to celebrate some important business deal, and the dancers are part of the entertainment."

"And how's this Carlos character supposed to help us?" Lee asked sarcastically, a ridiculous image of the native dance troupe, surrounding Loki and his cohorts with spears, forming in his mind.

"Carlos just moonlights with 'The Bahama-rama,' " Dwayne replied. "He's really a deputy sheriff, and he has a two-way radio packed in his gear." Dwayne lowered his voice conspiratorially. "He said it's in case the sheriff needs to reach him, but I think he's afraid of the water. Or maybe he's just a little weird," he added with a shrug when he saw Lee's disdainful expression.

"This should be easy, then." Amanda turned to Lee with a relieved smile. "All we have to do is find Carlos, have him radio the authorities, and wait for help to arrive."

Lee nodded. "Right," he agreed slowly, not quite believing that, after the crazy contretemps of the past day and a half, they might actually get a lucky break. "Okay," he said, pointing a finger at Dwayne. "You go up on deck and bring Carlos down here."

The young cook shook his head emphatically. "No way, man. I'm supposed to be making dinner for Mr. Drake and that foreign dude he's talking to in his office. Plus, I have to put together a couple of platters of food for the other guests. If I go strolling around on deck lookin' for Carlos, somebody'll know I'm up to something."

"Then how are we supposed to contact him?" Lee grumbled in frustration.

Dwayne's entire face scrunched as he appeared to consider this dilemma. "I've got it!" he exclaimed suddenly with a huge grin. "There are a couple of spare costumes down here for the dancers. If you put one on, no one will recognize you. You can go up on deck."

Before Lee had time to protest this scheme, Dwayne moved toward a large box beside the wall, kneeling to rummage through its contents. As the boy rose and turned to face him again, Lee's face melted from skepticism to shock. He stared at

the items in Dwayne's hands: the carved wooden mask would easily obscure Lee's entire head, but the remainder of the costume -- an unbelievably small, suede loincloth -- would obscure very little else. "I'm not wearing that," Lee protested in horror.

"You've gotta wear it if you're going to look for Carlos. All the other guests know each other, and I'll bet some of them know you," Dwayne stated reasonably.

Hearing a sound suspiciously like a giggle, Lee turned to glare at Amanda. Her eyes were glued to the offensive costume. "The . . . line . . . of . . . duty," were the only words he could make out as she giggled behind her hand.



Five minutes later, Lee emerged from the fish locker a second time -- wearing nothing but the loincloth, the wooden mask, and a pair of leather sandals. Amanda seemed to have recovered her composure and was helping Dwayne arrange sandwiches and fruit on large, silver platters.



"Well, I'm sure no one will recognize you," Amanda squeaked as she turned toward him. Her eyes roved appreciatively up and down Lee's well-muscled frame, causing him to flush behind the mask. He wondered if this was how she felt earlier in the day when he had stared at her slender bikini-clad form.

"Oh, I almost forgot; there's one more piece to the costume," Dwayne said, dropping a sandwich on the platter and returning to the box.

"Thank God!" Lee murmured -- before he saw the necklace of fossilized shark teeth hanging from Dwayne's hand. "You've got to be kidding," he groaned.

"Here, let me help you," Amanda soothed, taking the necklace from Dwayne's outstretched hand and stepping behind Lee. He felt her fingers lightly graze over the skin of his neck as she deftly swung the necklace into place and fastened the clasp. Given his present, very skimpy, attire, he was immensely relieved when she completed her task and stepped away.

Trying to ignore the sensations Amanda's gentle touch had elicited throughout his torso, Lee turned again to Dwayne. "Okay, I assume all of the dancers are, uh . . ." he looked down and back up again, "dressed like this. How do I spot Carlos?"

"That'll be easy," Dwayne answered without hesitation. "Just mill around with the dancers until the music starts, then go to the port-a-potty by the steps to the galley. Carlos will be inside."

"Huh?" Lee sputtered in confusion. "I thought you said he was one of the dancers. Why will he be in the port-a-potty during the performance?"



"I said he was *\*with\** the dancers," Dwayne corrected. "See, Carlos is just window dressing. He looks good in the costume, but he isn't a trained dancer, so during the show he has to wait in the can."



A short time later, Lee crept into the shadows at the edge of the deck and began a mental count of his adversaries. Loki and Yuwanna Lipschlitt were standing near a makeshift stage, apparently involved in a heated argument. Phyllis Scheinkman was strolling among the native dancers, ogling each in turn, to the obvious annoyance of the beefy, middle-aged man at her side. Rufus DiMartinez and three frowning men -- probably Russians -- were standing, arms crossed, beside the deck railing.

After wondering for a few moments how Yuwanna and Phyllis had managed to escape the belfry and board the yacht -- and watching the last group for several minutes in an effort to lip-read their monosyllabic conversation -- Lee turned and found himself face-to-face with Mrs. Scheinkman and her beefy companion. The former was staring at him with a lascivious smile he found revolting, while the latter was muttering something under his breath that sounded like ". . . should've left ya with the other bats."

"Mmmm, mmmm. What a good lookin' specimen," Phyllis drawled, continuing to ogle him in a way that made his skin crawl. "I think we should get to know each other better," she added with an exaggerated wink.



At that moment, Lee heard the sound of drums resonating from the stage. Grunting several times at his admirer, he stepped away, and -- as soon as her attention was diverted toward another unlucky 'native' -- he turned and backtracked to the port-a-potty by the galley stairs. There he found a large, well-built man in native garb -- his right index finger inserted through a hole in the commode's metal door.

"Are you Carlos?" Lee hissed as he approached the man.

"Yeah," the man answered, turning to look at him suspiciously. "Who're you?"

"My name is Lee Stetson," Lee whispered urgently. "I'm a United States federal agent, and I need your help. I understand you have a radio on board."

"It's in there," Carlos replied, motioning to the port-a-potty with his left hand. "But I'm kinda stuck at the moment," he added, jiggling his right hand to illustrate his predicament.



"How on earth did you get it stuck in there?" Lee asked, kneeling down to examine spot here Carlos' finger disappeared.

"The door's locked. There was a hole by the handle, so I thought, if I put my finger in, I might be able to work it open." As he spoke, Carlos braced his left hand against the metal doorframe and yanked. For a moment, it seemed that the entire flimsy structure would fall over, but finally Carlos' hand pulled free, the door swung open, and a bound and gagged blonde woman tumbled out into his arms. "What the hell?" Carlos exclaimed in surprise as he helped the woman regain her balance.

"We'll figure it out after we get off deck," Lee stated, his tone authoritative. "Grab your radio and follow us to the galley," he ordered as he took the woman's arm and pulled her with him down the stairs.

Within moments, Lee reached the galley door with the woman stumbling beside him. He pushed her toward a startled Amanda and turned to help Carlos, who had set a

large, canvas backpack on the floor and was already pulling out an antiquated radio. Together, the two men began fiddling with the dials as Lee barked out settings and frequencies.

"Well, I never," the blonde woman gasped as Amanda removed her gag and began untying the rope binding her hands. Staring at the two 'natives,' she almost shouted, "What is going on here?"

"Don't worry," Amanda reassured her as she loosened the last knot and dropped the rope on the floor. "The man on the left is a deputy sheriff, and the man on the right is a United States federal agent. They're calling for help now. By the way," she added, taking a closer look at the blonde, "who are you, and how did you get mixed up in this?"

The recent captive rubbed her chapped wrists and flexed her fingers. "My name is Virginia Vargarden," she answered. "I'm an investigator for the United States Department of Wildlife. I'm here on a tip that Christopher Drake is trying to smuggle an illegal animal into the States."

Before Amanda had time to respond, Lee stood up and threw his mask toward the box of spare costumes. "We made contact," he said. "A cruiser with a full Agency team will be along side in about 15 minutes." Noticing the blonde woman staring at him, open-mouthed, he immediately hurried toward the fish locker. "And I'm going to change out of this ludicrous get-up before anyone else sees me in it," he tossed back over his shoulder before stepping into the locker and slamming the door.



TAG

It was mid-morning when Lee and Amanda tramped wearily through the door of their hotel suite. Christopher Drake and all his accomplices were securely locked in the Grand Bahama jail, and paperwork had been completed to hold them until Billy was able to arrange extradition to the United States. Virginia Vargarden had contacted her superiors at the Department of Wildlife, and those officials had been more than willing to cede the entire matter to the Agency.

Amanda yawned as she gently set a sleeping Howard onto the bed. "We have," she glanced down at her watch, "not quite two hours before our flight back to the States."

"I still can't believe Drake was willing to trade ten years worth of satellite technology for . . . that," Lee commented derisively, waving one hand toward the snoring dog.



"You have to admit it was a pretty ingenious plan, though," Amanda responded. "The Russians pay the Lipschlitts a quarter of a million dollars, and Mr. Drake gives the satellite plans to the Russians. Then Loki gives Howard to the Scheinkmans, and they smuggle him into the States for Mr. Drake. And it's a good thing we managed to get aboard the yacht," she continued, her words coming faster and faster, "because if we hadn't, we would've missed the entire exchange, and the Russians would have the satellite plans, and poor Howard would probably be stuffed in Phyllis Scheinkman's suitcase on his way to Miami. And I think he's sweet," she added softly, reaching out to stroke Howard's smooth belly.

Lee blinked and shook his head. "Well, don't get too attached. Remember, he's evidence. He has to be quarantined until the trial, and then . . ." He shrugged expressively.

"Then what?" Amanda gasped. "The authorities won't hurt him or something . . ."

"No, I'm sure they'll find him a good home -- somewhere where his, ah, talent, won't be used for nefarious purposes."

Apparently satisfied with this response, Amanda walked gracefully across the room, opened the sliding door to the balcony, and stepped outside. Breathing in the fresh sea air, she sighed with regret. "It's too bad we didn't have time to explore. We didn't get to see much of the island."

"I offered to take you for a walk on the beach before we came up to the room," Lee reminded her as he stepped out to join her.

"Dressed like this?" Amanda snorted, indicating her stained and rumpled gown.

"I think you look beautiful," Lee replied, his voice dropping to a husky whisper.



A tinge of pink flushed Amanda's cheeks at the compliment. Glancing down at her tattered shoes, she smiled shyly. "Oh, look, Lee. I think Howard's starting to like you," she exclaimed, pointing to where Howard now sat by Lee's feet, his tail wagging gently.

Lee cast a suspicious look at the small dog. "I'd prefer he stay away from me," he said firmly. Returning his gaze to his lovely partner, he smiled seductively. "It *\*is\** a pity we don't have time to explore the island, though," he murmured as he stepped closer. "I know there are some . . . sights . . . I'd really enjoy."

Amanda's blush deepened, and she glanced over the balcony railing to an area crowded with sunbathers. "I suppose we should get packed," she responded in a raspy whisper before turning to gaze into his eyes.

Lee shook his head. "We're supposed to be honeymooners. We don't want to seem like we're in a hurry to leave." After a wary glance at Howard, who was still sitting contentedly at his side, he leaned slowly toward Amanda, intent on stealing the kiss he had been fantasizing about since they had left D.C.

"We don't?" Amanda breathed.

"No," Lee affirmed, his lips closing in on their goal. "It's part of our cover. We have to AUGHHHHHHH!!!!!" he howled as Howard's teeth sank firmly into the back of his leg.

The End

