

Author: Ann

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Synopsis: short filler for the time between third and fourth seasons.

Archive: will be at IFF Film Library site

Two Steps Forward

"Amanda, I just don't think this is going to work." Lee looked over at her in concern. "Maybe we should think this over."

"Lee, it's a little late for that. At this point I think we're committed."

With a thump, Lee set down his end of the desk they were carrying. "When I said you could have any desk you wanted, I thought you'd pick out something from Agency requisitions, and we'd get Leatherneck to haul it upstairs."

Amanda shook her head. "No way. I've wanted this one ever since Mother and I saw it in a used furniture shop last month. It's fifty years old." She caressed the smooth woodgrain with her fingertips.

"Obviously they were less concerned with back problems then," Lee groaned. "This thing weighs a ton. I think I may have ruptured a disk."

"Look, it's not my fault the Agency has such strict rules about who's authorized to make deliveries."

"Well, it's a good thing you picked up your new Jeep last week. We'd never have been able to fit it into the station wagon."

"Stop stalling, Stetson, and pick up your end!"

Carefully they eased the desk down the hallway to the Q-Bureau. After a bit of strategic angling, they managed to fit it through the door.

"So where should we put it?" Amanda asked.

"Umm." Lee scanned the small room. "Not directly across from my desk. Every time I look up, I'll see you, and I'll never get any work done." She shook her head at him with a smile. "Okay, how about beside the door?" he continued. "We can move the film cart next to the vault."

They manoeuvred the desk into place and wheeled the chair they'd carried up earlier behind it. Amanda sat down and once again ran her hand over its highly polished surface. "It's beautiful. Thank you, Lee. This is much nicer than a cubicle down in the bullpen."

He sat down at his desk and grinned over at her. "I'll admit, this setup does have its advantages. We can sit at our desks and when we're in the mood to work we can look straight ahead. But at other times we can glance off to the side..."

She smiled back at him. "You'd be amazed what you can find when you do that."

Lee got up and walked over to her. "And if I'm not in the mood to work, I'll come over to visit you." Taking her hands in his, he helped her to her feet. "Next, we get rid of all the extraneous clutter." He demonstrated, sweeping his hands across the already empty desk. "And then..." He leaned in and their lips met. As they kissed, Lee gently lowered Amanda to the desktop, so she ended up leaning back on her elbows looking up at him.

"And then?" she asked, running her tongue lightly over her lips.

He sat next to her and bent down. They kissed again, a soft, slow meshing of their lips. Amanda put her arms around him, drawing him closer at the same time as she pressed her body upwards against his.

The phone rang, causing them both to tense and draw away from each other. "I don't believe this," Lee groaned. "It's Saturday. No one is even supposed to know we're here."

Amanda sighed as he stood up, crossed over to his desk and answered the phone. She eased herself up, smoothing her clothing back into place.

"It's Billy," Lee mouthed over to her, before continuing his conversation. "Saw us on the monitor, huh?" He rolled his eyes. "We were just bringing Amanda's new desk in...Yeah, I've used him as a source before...Okay, give me ten minutes and I'll be down. I'm sure we can set up a meet for Monday." He grabbed a pen and paper and began transcribing Billy's instructions.

As Lee spoke on the phone, Amanda sat back down at her desk. Opening her box of office supplies and personal items, she began to unpack. A porcelain flower vase and a picture of Phillip and Jamie were the first items to be placed on the desktop. Next she sorted files, paper, and pens into the various drawers.

Lee hung up the phone and watched closely as she reached for the bottom drawer. She opened it and looked up at him. "What's this?" she asked, pulling out a small parcel tastefully wrapped in blue paper and adorned with a silver ribbon.

"Maybe the previous owner left something?" he offered innocently.

"Sure, right," she said skeptically. "Maybe I should call the store and report this."

"Or you could just open it," he suggested.

Amanda met his eyes with a curious glance, but his expression gave nothing away. She undid the bow and tore at the paper. Upon opening the box, she looked up at him. "I love it," she said, a slow smile working its way across her face.

"They just finished with it last night. Let's see how it looks on you." Lee walked over and took the box from her hands. Removing the small item, he held it up. "I think it suits you."

He moved in closer and took hold of the Visitor's Pass she had affixed to her collar. "Guess you won't be needing this anymore." He tossed it off to the side and clipped her new personalized ID card to her sweater. "It looks beautiful," he said, drawing back just far enough to be able to look in her eyes. Gently he moved his hands upward to cup her chin. "You are beautiful." Their lips met yet again.

"Lee, thank you so much."

"Amanda, it's something I should have taken care of a long time ago. Believe me, you've earned this."

"So what did the review board have to say?"

"You passed with flying colours. Just like I told you the day they interviewed me."

"I still don't like the idea of someone poking around in my personal life." She frowned slightly and glanced down. "I know, it's a necessity but still..."

Lee reached out and captured both her hands in his, pulling her up beside him again. "Amanda, relax. They just wanted to know what you're up to when you're not at work." He leaned in and began to nibble her neck.

"Hmm... I wonder if they found out about this guy I plan on seeing a lot more of." Her expression changed to a more playful one.

"Is he a good security risk?"

"Well, he's a risk all right," she laughed softly. "Took me three years to pin him down enough to kiss me."

"Three years, huh? He must be pretty special if you waited all that time."

"Worth every minute." She ran her hands over his chest, then slipped her arms around him.

"But now you've got him all figured out?" He locked his hands around her waist.

"Not yet. But as someone once said to me, 'I'm sure going to enjoy trying to find out.'" She leaned in closer, her lips almost touching his as she asked, "So exactly how much more access am I going to get with this new clearance?"

"That depends on exactly what you want access to." His eyes darkened as his mouth took possession of hers again in an intense kiss.

"Lee?" Amanda said hesitantly as they broke apart.

"What?"

"It's nothing." She tried to step back, but his arms held her tightly against him.

"No, it is something." He met her gaze, not letting her look away. "What?"

"Well, I just..." She hesitated again for a moment before continuing, "You know how people here at the Agency talk."

"Yeah," he said ruefully. "Some of them seem to have made finding out secrets their hobby as well as their profession."

"I'm just worried that they might say that all this," she motioned towards the desk and reached up to touch her new ID card, "is just because we started dating."

"Amanda, you know that's not true," he began hotly.

"Lee," she interjected, putting up a finger to his lips, "I know that. After spending three years working with you, I know that what we have goes much deeper than this."

"I suppose, we could keep our relationship a secret for a little while," he offered. "Get you settled into your new status in the Q-Bureau before we unleash this on the office grapevine."

"Would you mind?"

"Not at all. It just means I get you all to myself for a while longer," he smiled. His expression turned serious as he looked into her eyes. "Amanda, I know there's going to be some talk when people find out we're dating. Someone's bound to say that you're just one in a long line of women in my life."

"Lee, it's okay, I understand."

"No, it's not okay," he insisted. "I'm sorry that because of my past, people are going to think less of you. You're not like any of the women I've dated before, you know that. How you make me feel, how I feel about you, it's all different. I..." He stopped abruptly, almost as if afraid of what he might say next.

Amanda could sense the words poised on his lips but knew he just wasn't quite ready to say them. She let him off the hook. Reaching up to brush his hair back from his forehead, she reminded him, "Isn't Billy waiting for you downstairs?"

"Yeah." He reluctantly released his hold on her. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Sure. I'll be right here."

After one last quick kiss, he headed out the door. Amanda smiled as she continued to place her belongings in her desk. She knew in her heart that Lee cared for her deeply. It was evident in his every touch, tone, glance. She knew as well that it was just a matter of time before he was able to verbalize his feelings. She'd just have to be patient for a little bit longer.

She reminded herself that this relationship was largely uncharted waters for him. It had been years since he had allowed anyone to get this close to him. And having suffered so many losses in the past, it was only natural that he would be wary about opening himself up to someone else. Love was an emotion with which he'd had so little experience.

She closed her eyes briefly as she imagined how those three words would sound coming from Lee. She was sure that whenever she first heard them, it would be a moment she'd never forget.

Smiling softly, she reached up to straighten her new badge. Along with her desk, it was a visible reminder to all that she was no longer a visitor - not only at the Agency but also in Lee's life. She was now someone who belonged in both places by right and who would be staying for quite some time.

The End

