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Synopsis: An attempt to answer the question: When did Lee and Amanda fall in love with each other?

Waiting Games

Part One - 1984

*(Takes place immediately after the episode
"I am Not Now, Nor Have I Ever Been... A Spy")*

"Mrs. King, I really appreciate you coming in to see me today. My colleague at the hospital where you were treated told me about your case. As I explained over the phone I'm doing research in the field of memory, specifically amnesia."

Amanda sat in a soft leather chair facing the doctor's desk. She nervously glanced around the office taking in the diplomas on the walls, pictures of family and other mementos, not entirely sure she had made the right decision in agreeing to meet with her.

"I don't know how much I can help you," she replied. "I might not be able to answer all of your questions."

"Fair enough. You don't have to tell me anything of course, so if something makes you uncomfortable just say so." Amanda nodded and Dr. Cardew continued, "Now, I understand that your memory has been fully restored."

"As far as I know." Amanda smiled for the first time since entering the office. "If I don't remember something, I wouldn't know. If that makes any sense."

"I know what you mean." The doctor smiled back.

"All the big pieces do seem to be in place though." Amanda paused. "How personal is this going to get?"

"Whatever level you are comfortable with," Dr. Cardew reassured her again. "I know I'm not officially your therapist, but the doctor-patient confidentiality rules still apply. You can be as forthright as you wish; I can't use any of this information without your permission. In any published article, your name and circumstances would be altered to protect your privacy."

Amanda seemed to relax. "Sounds fair. What do you want to know?"

"It's not unusual for a person to forget the circumstances immediately surrounding a head injury, just as you couldn't initially remember the car accident. When did you first realize there were larger gaps in your memory?"

"A friend from work stopped by to see me in the hospital. I didn't even remember that I had a job."

"Why do you think that happened?"

Amanda hesitated and Dr. Cardew continued, "I'm not trying to pry. This is part of the focus of my research, why a specific aspect of person's life is blocked but not others. In your case, the memory of your job was the only thing affected?"

Amanda glanced down at her lap and realized she was nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. "I also forgot Dean."

"Who is he?"

"My boyfriend."

"Is he connected with your job in some way?"

"Not really." Amanda briefly considered getting up and leaving right then and there. When Dr. Cardew had phoned her, her first instinct had been to refuse to come in at all. But another part of her longed to be able to open up to someone. She wasn't sure if the Agency would approve of this meeting, but she didn't think she could bottle up everything inside much longer.

Since starting to work at the Agency, she had felt isolated. There was no one she could really confide in. Security measures meant that she couldn't talk to any of her old friends and there wasn't anyone at work she felt comfortable enough with either. Although she had been at the Agency for half a year, she still didn't feel entirely as if she belonged there. She wasn't a full agent but she wasn't just a civilian any more either. At times Amanda felt as if she had come to a place where she didn't fully belong in either part of her life.

She sighed and turned her attention back to Dr. Cardew. "I'm sorry, you were asking?"

"Do you think that the loss of memory about your boyfriend is related to something in your job?"

Amanda flushed. "Not something." She took a deep breath. "Someone." There. She had finally said it aloud.

"You're involved with someone at work?"

"No. Not really. Not at all actually. I'm not dating anyone else, if that's what you mean."

"But you're attracted to someone at work?"

Amanda looked up, met the doctor's eyes and then looked away. "I'm not cheating on Dean, but part of me feels guilty anyway."

Amanda had to smile as she realized she was just rephrasing her answers. During an interrogation, Lee had pointed out to her that this was a classic response when the subject had something to hide. The doctor seemed to be aware of this too, because her next question approached the same topic but from another angle. Standard interviewing technique.

"How does this other person feel? Do you think there is a possibility that he's interested in you too? That maybe you could have a relationship with him?"

Amanda laughed. "Doctor, have you been attracted to someone completely wrong for you? Who is so totally out of your league, you might as well wish for the moon?"

Dr. Cardew smiled back. "Sure, in high school. I was one of those brainy science geeks in glasses. I had a crush on someone on the basketball team. Although I was always the one he borrowed bio notes from, I'm sure he never once considered asking me out. But things are different when you're an adult."

Amanda sighed again and said thoughtfully, "Are they? I'm not so sure."

"What's Dean like?"

"Dependable, responsible, great with my kids, we have fun together. In fact he wants to get married."

"But."

"But, I just wonder if there isn't something more. If I'm not just settling for what I have."

"You think this person at work might be the something more."

"Doesn't really matter actually. He'd never consider me that way." Amanda sounded very sure of herself.

"It seems like you're pretty conflicted between what you think you should want and what you actually want."

"I've tried not to think about it. I didn't realize I was so worried about all of this, until I was in that accident."

"Amanda, the fact that your mind chose to block all of this out is fairly significant. You didn't know which direction to go in, so your subconscious just pushed it out of the way." She looked at her watch. "I'm sorry to say, I have another appointment in ten minutes. This has been fascinating. I might use your story in an article on amnesia as an avoidance technique. I hope you don't mind if I call you again."

Amanda nodded. "That would be alright." She got up and turned to leave.

Dr. Cardew called after her, "If you need someone to talk to, please don't hesitate to call."

Amanda turned back. "Thank you."

Amanda left the clinic but didn't immediately get into her car. She walked down the pathway leading through the grounds surrounding the building and sat down on a bench beside a small flower bed. Sighing, she closed her eyes and leaned back, enjoying the feel of the late March sunshine on her cheeks. She thought back to the words she had said to the doctor. Out of her league. What an appropriate way to classify Lee Stetson.

She opened her eyes again and her gaze fell on some tulips, boldly pushing their way through the dark soil of the flower bed. One blossom was already open, its delicate petals a vivid shade of red. She loved springtime, everything fresh and new, everything making a new beginning.

Maybe that's what she needed to do. Maybe that's what her mind had been trying to tell her with this whole amnesia thing. It was time to make a new start. She needed to make a decision about Dean; she couldn't leave him in limbo forever. She thought of the tulip bulbs lying in the frozen ground all winter. Sooner or later, they had to come up. They couldn't stay hidden away forever.

She knew Dean wanted her to give him an answer. He had been very patient but there was a limit. At times during the past six months he had made a few comments about how she seemed to be changing, but had never pressed her. She sighed again. Could it really only be six months since she had met Lee and he turned her world upside down?

The excitement of her job and the feeling that she was doing something important were all well and good, but did they have to mean that she had to close Dean out? Amanda thought back to the breakup of her marriage. Wasn't Dean all the things she had wanted back then - a man who was willing to stay in one place, had a regular job, cared about her, wanted to be there for the boys.

If it hadn't been for that chance encounter at the train station, she might even have been married to him by now. She forced herself to confront the crux of her problem - Lee. How did she really feel about him?

Why was she so drawn to him? Certainly he was handsome, but she had met other good looking men who hadn't had this effect on her. Cosmopolitan, sophisticated... no, that wasn't it either. In fact beneath the urbane exterior, she saw a man who was lonely. Who tried so hard to convince others that he didn't need anyone, that he had come to believe it himself.

When she looked in his eyes, she could see the pain of all his losses. She could see him as a little boy, left alone by the death of his parents. Then later, Eva rejecting him, choosing to marry someone else. More recently, the death of his partner. Lee had only mentioned him once, but plainly he blamed himself.

No wonder Lee didn't trust his feelings, everyone he had cared for had either abandoned him or been taken away. She wanted so badly to comfort him, to make him see that he had the right to demand more from life, that he was entitled to love and happiness. She had to admit it, she cared about him a great deal.

But was that even the point, another part of her mind argued. So what if she did care for him? It didn't change the way he felt about her. Lee had made it abundantly clear on more than one occasion that there was no emotional attachment between them. Every time Amanda thought she was getting closer to him, that he was opening up to her, he slammed the door in her face.

Of course Lee wasn't the only one who thought they didn't belong together. Amanda recalled that horrible morning in the Agency safe house. Eva had stood there, wrapping Lee's sweater around herself as if it was a physical caress. She had looked at Amanda so disdainfully, as if to say, I know how you feel about him, and you'll never get him.

Amanda stood up. I have to face reality, she thought. Lee belongs to a different world than I do. Dean and I make much more sense together.

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Lee parked his Porsche around the corner from Amanda's house and got out. An hour earlier, he had been at home reading over a transcript Amanda had typed up and needed some clarification about one of the points. Of course he could have simply telephoned her, but he immediately thought of another errand that would take him across the river into Arlington. So he was just stopping by on his way home, right? It wasn't like he was going out of his way to see her.

Lee frowned as he turned the corner and saw Dean's car parked in front. "What the hell is he doing here?" was the thought that immediately came to mind. When he had asked Amanda the previous week if she was still seeing

Dean, her answer had been a very noncommittal "I guess so." Somehow Lee had taken it to mean that Dean was no longer a big part of the picture.

The door opened and Dean came out. Lee smiled, maybe he was leaving. The smile dropped from his face as Amanda appeared beside him, calling back, "Don't wait up, Mother." She was wearing a dress he had never seen on her before, something dark blue and shimmery, that clung to her slender figure in all the right places. Apparently they were going somewhere special.

As Amanda turned to Dean, her shawl slipped off her shoulder. He picked it up and moved it back into place, first bending down and lightly kissing her bare shoulder. She smiled at him and Lee turned away, his hands involuntarily forming into fists.

Not really sure why, he hurried back to his car and followed them. Actually, this wasn't all that unfamiliar a scenario. When Amanda had first started working for the Agency, Lee had made a point of doing some personal surveillance of her life and checking up on her closest friends. After all, he reasoned with himself, if he was going to be forced to work with her, he should double check for security leaks. Of course that didn't explain why he had never filed a single report on these excursions.

Lee smiled as he followed Dean's car into DC, picturing what Amanda's reaction would be if she knew what he was doing. Despite his pretense with her of never quite being able to remember her boyfriend's name, Lee could have rattled off any number of facts about Dean, from the doctor who signed his birth certificate to the largest deduction on his last tax return.

Dean parked the car in front of L'Etoile, a restaurant known for its intimate atmosphere. Lee frowned, he was getting a bad feeling about this. He waited fifteen minutes, judging it enough time for them to be seated, then entered the restaurant himself. He had a seat at the bar, taking care to keep a screen of large hanging plants between him and their table.

As the evening wore on, Lee glanced over at their table more and more frequently. He had a clear view of Dean's face, he seemed to be pleased about something. Amanda he could see less clearly, but Lee thought she looked a bit distracted, as if part of her was thinking of something else.

After their dinner plates had been cleared away, Dean reached over, and took one of Amanda's hands in his. Lee couldn't hear what he said to her, but she placed her other hand on top of his, looked into his eyes, smiled and nodded. As Dean leaned forward and kissed Amanda, their waiter walked up to the bar, asking for a bottle of champagne. "The guy at table six said he was going to propose to his girlfriend right before dessert and it looks like she just said yes."

Lee grimaced. He knew exactly where table six was. Suddenly the room seemed unbearably stuffy. He abruptly got up, tossed some bills onto the bar and headed out the door. He stood out on the sidewalk for a few minutes, taking a couple of deep breaths. He hadn't seen this coming at all. He had been certain that Dean had been slowly disappearing from Amanda's life.

His mind leapt back to the previous week, when she had been struggling with amnesia. He recalled the hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach when he realized she didn't remember him at all. Then the next day, in his apartment, how it had felt to hold her in his arms, comforting her as she tried to work through her frustration and confusion.

Lee shook his head. This was ridiculous. Amanda King meant nothing to him, they just happened to work together from time to time. She could marry anyone she wanted; it didn't make the slightest bit of difference to him.

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Lee looked across the bullpen to where Amanda was seated at her desk, busily typing. As he walked over to her, he glanced down at her left hand - no ring. Somehow it made him feel a little better.

"Amanda, I was reading this transcript and need some clarification on page six. I tried to call you about it last night, but you weren't home," he concluded with an air of innocence.

"I was out," she replied absently, taking the report from him. She looked over the page in question and frowned. "I remember that part of the tape was pretty garbled. I can go back over it again, if you think it's something important. When do you need it?"

"Well, I really needed it last night, but before you leave today will be fine. You don't have anywhere you have to go rushing off to, do you?" It was his tone as much as the words that made her look up.

"No, I can stay a bit late. Mother's going out tonight, but she doesn't leave until seven. Lee, is everything alright?"

"With me?" he asked. "Everything's just fine. And you?"

"Fine," she said slowly, not sure what to make of the mocking tone in his voice. He seemed to be trying to provoke her, although she couldn't imagine why. "Lee, what's going on?"

"Nothing. There is absolutely nothing going on. With me anyway," he said shortly. He walked back to his desk, feeling peevisly glad that he had upset her. He glanced back over at Amanda and saw that she had picked up the phone.

Although far from fluent in lip reading, Lee didn't do too badly. He caught the gist of her conversation, she would be a bit late getting home from work, but they should go ahead and order pizza without waiting for her. Lee saw her clearly finish with the words, "I'll see you later... I love you too." He hoped she had been speaking to her mother, then reminded himself that it didn't matter to him who she called.

He managed to resist the temptation for almost ten minutes. Then, hating himself, Lee punched up the computer log of outside phone calls placed that day. As he suspected, the last phone call made from Amanda's phone had been to the weather bureau where Dean worked.

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Amanda and Dean sat in front of the fire, both watching the flames, lost in their thoughts. Dean reached for her hand to get her attention and smiled. "I brought you something."

He got up and walked over to where his jacket lay on a chair. He took a small velvet box out of the pocket and turned back towards her. "I'm sorry this wasn't ready yesterday." Kneeling down beside her, he opened the box and took out a diamond solitaire. Taking her left hand in his, he slowly slipped the ring on her finger. "Amanda, you've made me so happy."

He leaned in and kissed her. His mouth pressed against hers, as his hands cupped her face. Amanda closed her eyes and surrendered herself to the moment; it felt so good to be held by someone who loved her, who needed her, who wasn't going to push her away the next minute, and tell her, "We're not emotionally involved."

She put her arms around him, and intensified the kiss. Dean's hands caressed her, his body pressing against hers, lowering both of them to the floor. "Amanda, I love you so much," he breathed into her ear.

"I love you, too," she sighed, "Oh, Lee, I've wanted this for so long."

Dean bolted upright, as if he was a marionette being pulled up by a string. "What did you say?" he asked, his voice full of pain.

Amanda's eyes flew open as she realized what she had said. She sat up and looked over at him, intending to offer him some reassurance. She opened her mouth to say, "It was a mistake, I didn't mean it." but the words wouldn't

come out. It wasn't a mistake. She did mean it. She wasn't in love with Dean; she loved Lee.

Some of this must have shown in her expression. Dean looked at her with a steadfast look of reproach, as if to say, how could you?

Amanda hung her head, unable to meet his gaze any longer. "Dean, I am so desperately sorry."

He said quietly, "So there is someone else. The last month or so, I had the feeling that there might be. I had to try one more time though. Last night, why did you say you'd marry me?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I did want to marry you. I thought I could. I never meant for this to happen."

"I'd like to be able to believe that." He looked away, back into the fire. "Have the two of you been going out?" he asked in a tight, controlled tone.

"No, no! Dean, I would never have done that to you. It's just...." her voice died away. She didn't understand it herself, how could she explain it to him?

"Then who is this... Lee?"

"Someone I met at work."

"And you fell in love with him," he said bitterly.

"I didn't mean to. I didn't want this to happen. I'm so sorry Dean, believe me, I never wanted to hurt you."

"Well you did," Dean lashed out. "So what's the problem? He's not in love with you? I was supposed to be the consolation prize?"

Amanda knew she deserved that. "You're entitled to a lot better than that."

"Yes, I am." Dean stood up and put on his jacket. "Well, it looks like neither of us ends up with the person we want."

"You should take this back." Amanda held out the ring to him, with shaking fingers. "I really am sorry."

"Amanda, you keep saying that, but right now it doesn't really mean very much. Good bye." Dean turned and walked out the door, closing it behind him not with a bang, but with an air of quiet finality.

She sat there for a while, thinking things through. What a mess she had made of it all. She had hurt Dean so badly, and for what? Why did she have to be in love with Lee, he didn't want her, Dean did. Why couldn't things work out logically?

And now what? Did she really expect that Lee was going to suddenly walk up to her one day and say that he loved her, that he wanted to marry her? She smiled through her tears, right, and he'd end up meeting her mother, and playing basketball with the boys. What an absurd thought. Lee lived an entirely different kind of life, he could never fit into hers, and he wouldn't want to. She might be in love with him, but the reality was that she had better get over it.

She heard the sound of the front door opening and looked up to see her mother walking in. "Why did Dean leave so early?" Dotty asked as she took off her coat. She caught sight of Amanda's tear stained face. "What's wrong? Did you have a fight?"

Amanda didn't feel up to attempting an explanation that night. "Mother, I'll tell you about it in the morning. Right now I'm going to get some air."

She walked out onto her back patio, the cool air drying the tears on her cheeks. She took a deep breath and looked up at the night sky, as if she might find an answer to her problem there. Among the myriad of stars

twinkling against the deep black background, she traced the outline of Orion and found the North Star. It was nice to know that some things never changed, that they stayed the way they always were.

Lee stood by the garage for a few minutes, just watching her. He had seen Dean hurriedly drive away from the house, and didn't quite know what to do. He thought back to when Amanda had been there for him, when Eva had come back into his life and he had struggled to find some resolution for his feelings for her. Amanda had been a good friend and a good listener, he should try to do the same for her.

He cleared his throat and stepped out of the shadows. "Hi."

She didn't startle at all when she heard his voice. Somehow she had almost expected him to be there. "Hi," she returned his greeting.

"You okay?" Lee asked.

She shook her head. "Not really."

"Would you like to go for a drive?"

She nodded.

They didn't say anything as they got into his car and drove to a point overlooking the river. Despite the chill of the evening, they got out and sat on a bench. The silence accumulated between them, but neither one felt much like conversation.

"Want to talk about it?" Lee asked, finally.

"Dean broke up with me," Amanda said simply. "I was just using him because he was always around, and I hurt him terribly. I'm a horrible person."

"No you're not," he protested. He paused, thinking about what she had just said. Even though Dean apparently was the one who had called off the relationship, it appeared that Amanda hadn't been in love with him after all. A heavy weight seemed to lift off his shoulders with that thought.

He searched for the right words. "He just wasn't the right person for you. Just like Eva wasn't right for me. You helped me through all of that."

A few tears rolled down her cheeks and Lee slipped his arm around her shoulders. Amanda leaned against him and once again, he was amazed at how natural it felt to hold her. He continued, "You just have to wait for the right one to come along."

"You want to do me a favour and tell him to hurry up?"

Lee smiled. "If I ever see him, I'll be sure to pass on the message."

Part Two - 1985

(takes place during the episode "Burn Out")

It was Billy's remark that got Lee thinking. They had been in the middle of another late night strategy meeting, held far from the Agency, when Billy said, "The key here is going to be your success in convincing everyone at the Agency that you really have burned out." He frowned. "You've worked with some of these people for years, you sure you're going to be able to pull this off?"

"No problem," Lee replied, "It might even be kind of fun. You do realize, once all this is over, Francine will kill us for keeping her out of the loop."

"I know, but we need everyone's reactions to be authentic. So not a word to anyone, not even Amanda."

"What are you talking about?" Lee asked.

"You and Amanda." Billy said, almost absently. "I know the two of you have developed a very close relationship." Billy thought back to the previous month when Amanda had inadvertently eaten a poisoned sandwich intended for Lee. To him at least, Lee's feelings for Amanda were crystal clear.

Apparently though Lee was still in denial. "Not that close," he protested in an annoyed tone.

Driving home an hour later, Lee thought over the implications of Billy's off hand remark. It wasn't the first time someone from work had made a comment in that vein. He sighed. He'd be the first to admit that he and Amanda worked well together and had in fact become much closer friends than he had first thought. But that was it.

Lately though, he had been surprised to find himself confiding in and depending on her more and more often, both professionally and personally. Their comfort level with each other was quite frankly, beginning to make him uncomfortable. What if Amanda started to expect that he and she... Lee shook his head. This was ridiculous.

He had known from the start that Amanda had somewhat of a crush on him. At times he found it annoying, other times amusing, especially when he brought up one of his girlfriends and she feigned utter indifference. As long as she didn't make a big issue of it, it was fine with him, even a bit flattering. And Amanda knew of course that nothing would ever come of it. There was no way he would ever seriously consider getting involved with her.

He liked his relationships light and sensual, while Amanda was the kind of person who would require a major commitment - the kind of commitment he was beginning to suspect he was incapable of making. He had long since given up the idea of settling down. That was one lesson he had learned the hard way as a child - don't want things you can't have. Little Lee Stetson might have spent many sleepless nights crying for his lost parents and home life but that didn't bring them back.

Then in his twenties as Lee gravitated towards a career in counter espionage, he realized he was building himself a life with the same kind of solitary existence. While his college classmates were busy buying homes and having children, he was drifting around the globe, his career further isolating him from forming close relationships.

Ultimately he decided that was just the type of person he was. Some people were cut out for the suburban family life and some people weren't. He definitely fell into the latter category. There was no point in rehashing it over and over, it was just the way things were.

Oh sure, he had from time to time realized that there was much more to Amanda than he had allowed in his initial assessment, and she was objectively speaking a very beautiful woman, but he would never fit into her lifestyle, or she into his, and that was that. After all, he reminded himself, she was a mother and housewife, nothing like the exotic and alluring women who filled the pages of his black books. The whole idea of getting involved with her was ludicrous and he wasn't going to give it another thought. If only he could get that point across to the rest of the Agency.

Maybe this burnout case was his opportunity. He would be deliberately messing up assignments and alienating most of his co-workers, Amanda included. He could predict what her response would be, her mothering instincts would come to the forefront and she would try to help him through his troubles. Well, this was his chance to show everyone, Amanda included, that he didn't want or need her help. It should go a long way to convincing the rest of the Agency that he didn't care about her and maybe even get Amanda to take a few steps back in their relationship.

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Lee sat on a barstool in Nedlinger's, carefully nursing his third drink of the morning. He was walking a fine line, drinking enough to merit his appearance of drunkenness, while actually remaining sober. Too much was at stake for him to lose his edge on this assignment.

He had been playing his cover for two weeks now, with marked success. Rumors were rife throughout the Agency concerning his deterioration. Three botched cases in a row, mixed with just the right amount of insolence, drunkenness and lack of personal grooming had caused Billy to very publically assign him to desk duty.

Amanda was acting according to form, she was terribly upset and concerned about him. Once or twice Lee caught himself feeling sorry for her, she was so genuinely distressed. He hardened his heart every time though. It was, he reminded himself, exactly what he wanted - a noticeable distancing in their relationship.

Lee's reverie was cut short by the approach of Jack Harris. The situation looked promising; earlier in the day Harris had seemed on the verge of telling him about some type of scheme. Now he had again made a point of coming over to talk to Lee. This had to be what had happened to the other burnt out agents: a new 'friend' offered a helping hand when they were most vulnerable.

As he had hoped, Jack picked up his story where he had left off, suggesting that he set up a meeting between Lee and his new boss. "I tell you," he said in a persuasive tone, "the guy has got an eye for people. I think you can work something out. What do you say?"

This was it! The break Lee had been waiting for. Every case had a moment like this one, when he knew everything was coming together. He'd show guarded enthusiasm, let himself be convinced, meet with Harris' boss and they'd finally discover the identity of the man responsible for the betrayal of three agents.

Outwardly Lee maintained his pose of drunken indifference, deliberately slurring his words. "Ah, why not? Bits.. beats sitting around here waiting to get fired."

"All right." Harris seemed pleased. "I'll get a hold of him. We can set something up right away." As he looked over Lee's shoulder, a small frown crossed his face.

Lee turned to see what the distraction was. He was dismayed to see Amanda walking in the front door, obviously in search of him.

"Uh oh, looks like we've got company. Let's talk about this later." Harris made a move to slip away as Amanda walked up to them.

"Oh, uh, Amanda," Lee greeted her, inwardly groaning. Her timing could not have been worse.

"Hi."

"Amanda, I want you to meet a friend of mine - this is Jack Harris. Jack, this is Amanda."

"Hello," Amanda greeted Jack in a cool tone, then turned her attention to Lee. "Lee, I came to talk to you about that report for Mr. Melrose."

"Yeah, well, I'll do that later." Lee hoped to be able to get rid of her quickly. He didn't want to lose this opportunity.

He should have known that Amanda wouldn't give up that easily. "No, you really need to do it now, it needs to be turned in on time, you know that."

"Time? Time?" Lee glanced over at Jack who was watching the exchange with a great deal of interest. He'd better be convincing. He began patting her cheek for emphasis. "Amanda, I've got nothing but time."

Carried away with playing his cover, each successive pat was a bit harder, culminating in a full slap. The world stood still for a moment, as Lee realized what he had done. He had hit Amanda. He had HIT Amanda. All thoughts of the case left his mind as Amanda looked at him with an expression he had

never seen before on her face. She put a hand up to her cheek covering the place where he had struck her.

Her expression registered a combination of shock, hurt and confusion. Clearly, she had never expected him to do something like this. Her liquescent brown eyes, which normally sparkled up at him with a mixture of trust and devotion, were clouded over. As Lee forced himself to maintain eye contact with her, the betrayal and loss he saw there were like a knife through his heart.

Instinctively he reached out for her, putting his hand on her arm as he had done so many times in the past. "I'm sorry," he began.

"That's okay. It didn't hurt."

"No, I'm sorry." Lee desperately tried to apologize.

"You can move your hand." Her voice was quiet but her intention unmistakable. She didn't want him touching her, not now, not ever. She nodded to Jack, turned and started to walk towards the exit.

Lee panicked. She couldn't leave, not like this. He had to make things right. He had to tell her... He wasn't sure exactly what he was going to say but he knew that if he let her just walk out the door, their relationship would be irretrievably broken. He rushed after her, calling back, "Look, Jack, I'll talk to you about your friend later."

"Amanda, no, Amanda..." he called after her, "No, no." He reached the door just in time, barely able to hold it closed as she reached for the handle.

She sighed and turned back towards him. "It's all right, it didn't hurt."

"I hit you," Lee could barely make himself say the words. "You've just got to stay away from me. You've seen what I've been doing lately; you've seen what I've been going through. I'm poison at the Agency."

"I was just trying to help," she said in a small voice.

"Then let me make it easy for you," Lee said harshly. "Just, don't help." He turned and walked away from her with a heavy heart. Damn it! He didn't care what Francine and the rest of the Agency thought of him, why was this so hard?

Amanda looked down as he left, her heart breaking. How could things have gone so badly? As her eyes began to fill with tears, she hurriedly pulled open the door and walked out, not wanting to break down completely in front of Lee.

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Amanda sat in her car in the Agency parking lot not yet ready to see anyone. For a few minutes she gave into the luxury of a good cry, tears silently rolling down her face as she thought about what had just happened in Nedlinger's.

She still couldn't believe that Lee had actually struck her. She knew he had been going through a difficult time but she never would have thought he would physically hurt her. The mental anguish was much worse than the slight physical shock had been. Apparently she didn't know Lee nearly as well as she thought.

After almost two years of working together, she considered Lee a close friend and had hoped he saw her the same way. She had even dared to think ... She quickly put a stop to that train of thought. Obviously she had been deluding herself. He meant it when he said he didn't want her help. His actions had reinforced his words. She was nothing to him.

Amanda smiled through her tears, a deprecatory smirk at her own expense. "You're a fool, Amanda King," she said to herself. "I can't believe you honestly thought he was starting to care for you."

Her mind wandered back to a case they had been on only a few months earlier - that day in San Angelo and their 'wedding ceremony'. When the minister had cued Lee to kiss the bride, she had expected a quick peck on the lips. Besides, he had kissed her once before on a case, no big deal, right.

But this time had been so different. She lingered over the memory of how his lips had tasted as they had gently brushed against hers. And it wasn't just her imagination, she argued with herself, he hadn't stopped after one quick kiss. Their lips had met again as if he too, wanted to prolong the unexpectedly pleasurable sensation. Unconsciously she brought her hand up to her mouth, gently tracing her bottom lip with the tip of a finger.

She stopped suddenly, mentally shaking herself. So Lee had kissed her a few months back. It obviously had meant nothing to him. And not only had she been wrong about him on the personal level, but if the events around the Agency this week were any indication, she wouldn't be working with him again either. No one seemed to expect that he would return to active field duty.

Amanda sighed. A great deal of her life had come crashing down on her today and apparently she'd have to rebuild it without Lee. She sighed again, dried her eyes, got out of the car and walked into the Agency.

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Billy was at his desk, battling the never ending pile of paperwork that was the downside of being section chief, when there was a knock on his door. After waiting for his acknowledgment, Amanda entered and walked over to his desk.

"Lee's report, sir," she said handing him a document.

"Thank you, Amanda."

"Sir." She turned and headed towards the door.

He glanced at the thick folder and asked, "Did Lee do this himself? It's pretty complete for a man who considers 12:00 to 12:05 a full working day."

Amanda stopped and turned back. She flushed slightly, not wanting to lie to him. "Well sir, they're... they're done aren't they?"

He nodded.

"Sir. I'd just like to say one thing.. um.." She took a deep breath and plunged on, struggling to find the right words. She knew it was against all odds but she still clung to a faint hope that everything would somehow come out right. "Even though Lee's been going through a pretty rough time, I think we should all remember that he's really a very... well, a dedicated, a caring, and a... well, a good person."

"I'll keep that in mind, Amanda." Billy wished she wasn't taking this all so hard. Hopefully Lee's lead would pan out and it would be over soon.

"Yes, sir. Well, I'd better go. I've got to go out to Reston and pick up some flowers from Peterson's Nursery."

Billy looked at her with an expression she couldn't quite decipher. It almost seemed to have an element of pity in it. He must feel very badly too about what was happening to Lee, they had worked together for many years. Or, her breath caught in her throat, was his pity directed towards her? Did he suspect her folly in falling for a man who would never care for her even at the best of times, and certainly not now. She quickly exited the door, afraid that if she stayed any longer she would betray her feelings.

Billy stared after her, wondering just what the situation was between her and Lee.

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An hour later Lee was startled to find Harris' car heading in the direction of IFF. He wondered if Harris was possibly checking up on him. He parked his

car at a cautious distance and got out. Hidden from view in a doorway, he watched as Harris sat in his car, scanning the parking lot.

A few minutes later Amanda came out of the door of IFF's Georgetown entrance and headed towards them. Lee saw Harris duck his head, carefully keeping out of her line of sight. As she walked to her station wagon, Amanda brought a tissue up to her face and quickly dabbed at her eyes. Lee's heart wrenched as he realized she had been crying. For the thousandth time, he cursed himself for his little stunt in Nedlinger's.

Hurrying back to his car, he kept one eye on Harris while punching in a number on the car phone. "Billy," he asked quickly, "can we talk?"

"Sure, there's no one in my office right now. What's your status?"

"I really think I'm on to something. That nibble I mentioned earlier, I might just have hooked a big one. A man named Jack Harris approached me again, and this time he offered me a job. He's going to arrange a meeting with his boss. Now I think he's trying to keep me under surveillance. This might just be what we've been waiting for."

"That's great. Let me know what develops." Billy smiled. Maybe the end of this whole charade was in sight. "You're doing a great job around the Agency, you know. Everyone is buying your act hook, line and sinker. Amanda's still trying to cover for you. She dropped off your report earlier and it's actually coherent."

"Did she..." Lee hesitated for a moment. "Did she say anything about me?"

Billy broke out into a grin, but kept his voice neutral. "As a matter of fact she was defending you, pointing out what a good person you are. She really cares about you, you know." Thinking back to Amanda's woebegone expression as she had left his office, he wondered just what had gone on earlier that day.

Lee groaned. After everything that had happened, she still stuck up for him. He felt like the world's biggest heel. How could she still believe in him?

He briefly considered asking Billy permission to explain everything to Amanda. Since everyone at the Agency seemed to be convinced of the authenticity of his downslide, what harm could it do? He paused, then reconsidered. Billy would want to know why he had suddenly changed his attitude towards Amanda, and what could he say?

Besides, maybe he wouldn't need to explain anything to Amanda. Once the case was over and the truth came out, she would understand. He sighed again, of course she wouldn't understand and he couldn't blame her. He knew he had really hurt her this time.

"Lee," Billy's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Is everything okay?"

"What?" he responded, startled. "Sure, everything's fine. I'll call you later when I know more."

Lee hung up the phone as Amanda drove out of the parking lot. Startled, he noticed Harris start up his car and follow at a distance. Apparently it was she who was the target of his stakeout. But why?

He was even more surprised by what happened not long after they left the city limits. As soon as they reached a secluded stretch of the highway, Harris pulled out a gun, took careful aim and shot out one of Amanda's rear tires. Lee was relieved when he saw Amanda manage to safely bring the car to a halt.

He parked his own car out of sight around a curve and crept up to see what exactly was going on.

Harris had gotten out of his car and was holding the gun on Amanda. He motioned for her to step into the woods and Lee suddenly realized what his intentions must be. He wasn't going to abduct Amanda, he was going to kill

her. Desperately he tried to think of a course of action which would save her life yet preserve his cover.

At the very least he could start with a diversion to get Harris' attention. Hopefully he could then blind side him, so he wouldn't actually know Lee had been there. Lee picked up a rock and threw it. As he had hoped, Harris turned towards the unexpected sound.

Before Lee could take advantage of the situation, Amanda reacted. She grabbed a tree branch and hit Harris with all of her might. Knocked off his feet, he went rolling down a steep incline, his body coming to rest at the bottom of the ravine. Amanda picked up his gun and started to run back towards the cars.

"Good shot." Amanda was startled to see Lee approach her from behind the trees. He took the gun from her. "You alright?"

"Do you think I killed him?" she asked anxiously.

"No, no. But he'll be asleep for a while. Now look, I'm going to throw the spare onto your car. Then I want you to meet me downtown at Chez Nouvelle on 21st Street."

"Right." She headed for her car.

"Okay." Lee took one last look back at Jack before following her, and laughed. He should have known that despite everything, Amanda could still take care of herself.

•••

"Thank you." Amanda said as the waiter put a glass of ice water and a coffee on the table. She grabbed for the water, taking a long, cool drink to steady her nerves.

"Amanda, you were really terrific. He never knew what hit him." Lee smiled, thinking of how she had defended herself.

"Well, I just acted out of instinct, fear mostly." She brushed aside the complement, her mind full of questions. "How did you know where I was?"

"I've been following Harris since you left us earlier at Nedlinger's. But I've got to tell you, I was really surprised to find him tailing you."

"Well, why was he following me, and why did he try to kill me, and why were you following him?"

Lee glanced around the restaurant, making sure no other patrons were within earshot. "Jack Harris is trying to recruit me for something."

"What?"

"I don't know. That's why I didn't bring him in. I want to see what he's after."

"Why don't you just bring him in and question him?"

Lee wished that things could be that simple. "Harris is a hired punk. Somebody else is pulling the strings. That's why I have to let him run, see who he'll lead me to."

"Lee, how did I get involved in all this?" Amanda asked, confused.

"See, Harris is tapped in somehow. Now I am sure that he knows I'm Agency. He must have thought you were an agent through your association with me."

"Well, yeah, but," Amanda glanced around the restaurant and lowered her voice. "But why did he try to kill me?"

"Well, you have been awfully protective of me lately, a lot of public shows of trying to, you know, help me through my troubles and all, and uh... Maybe he thought you were going to get in the way." Lee gestured with his hands, and looked anywhere but at Amanda. He didn't want to think about what his response to her offers to help had been.

"Hmm," she said thoughtfully.

"What?" Lee looked back at her, startled.

"You sound like your old self."

Lee sighed. "Yeah." He put his hand up and ran it through his hair. "I guess you have the right to know about my.."

She interrupted him, "No, that's okay, you don't have to tell me, I already know."

"No, you have the right to know..." He decided that he might as well explain it all to her now.

Amanda though was ahead of him. "I already know, it's a cover, it's all a cover because of this Harris stuff."

"Shh," he cut off her rambling. "Now you listen to me. Nobody else knows. Just Billy and I. Not even Francine."

"I won't tell a soul," she reassured him.

"Good." He took a deep breath, knowing what he had to do, but finding it one of the most difficult tasks he had ever faced. "Amanda... There's something else I've got to talk to you about."

"No, that's alright." She looked down, not wanting to think about what had happened earlier.

"No, no," Lee tried to break in. He couldn't let her just let him get away without a full apology. Maybe it was unrealistic to expect that she could possibly forgive him. He knew he'd never be able to forgive himself. But he had to try to make her understand how he felt.

"No, no, really," she began to protest, but he cut her off.

He spoke slowly, pausing as he tried to phrase things exactly right. "There's some things that I...Back there at Nedlinger's... what I did, and you know, and what I said... It was just to keep you away from me, that's all."

"It's alright. I understand," she said quickly, and glanced down.

He sighed, she still didn't get it - he wasn't just offering up some trite apology.

"No, it's not," he insisted then paused for a moment, until she looked up at him. "Amanda," he started again. He looked her straight in the eyes and tried to put everything he was feeling into his next words, as if they were the most important thing he had ever said in his entire life. "I really am sorry."

Amanda stared at him for a moment, her mind leaping back again to that day in San Angelo. The first kiss, all that was required, and all that she had really expected from him. But then, taking her by surprise, the second little kiss, unnecessary, tender and so sweet, the kiss he had given her because he had wanted to, not because he had to.

It was like that now, he had started by making a short but sincere apology. She had interrupted him, accepted it and given him a way out. He could have stopped there, nothing more was required and everything would have been okay.

But he didn't stop, he had brushed aside her quick acceptance, insisting on making her understand how much he regretted what he had done. He really was sorry. She could see that she wasn't the only one who had suffered because of what he had done. He wanted her to realize just how badly he felt about hurting her.

Amanda sat back, her mind in turmoil. Lee wasn't someone who let other people see his emotions. For almost two years he had tried to keep her at arms length, to shut her out, telling her at every opportunity that they were just two people who happened to work together. Now he sat there, desperately pouring out his heart, trying to make her understand. If she thought she had loved him before, it was nothing compared to the depth of emotion that swept over her now.

"That's okay," she told him. "I really do understand."

And she did understand, he could see that. The forgiveness that he had hardly dared hoped for was apparent in her eyes. He felt as if something had been decided between them in that moment. He knew he'd need some time to sort out all of his feelings about this day, but it was as if they had crossed over some invisible barrier and begun to move toward a shared goal.

The important thing for now was that the old familiar expression was back in her beautifully expressive eyes. The look that told him that she would always believe in him, care about him, trust in him. No one else had ever looked at him with such purity of emotion.

He sat there for a long moment, a slow smile spreading over his face. He shook his head slightly, as if he could hardly believe that she had really forgiven him. Amanda smiled back, and this time it was she who thought the world stood still. Because for that moment, Lee had looked back at her in exactly the same way.

Part Three - 1986

(takes place at the end of the episode "All the World's a Stage")

"Will they give Tony some therapy or something before they try him?" Amanda asked Lee as they walked down the hallway to his office. She felt so sorry for Tony Martinet; he hadn't seemed like a bad person, just someone manipulated by forces beyond his control.

"Yeah, they will," Lee reassured her. "Krutiov really messed up his mind." He followed Amanda into the Q-Bureau.

Amanda's mind was still focused on their case. Hopefully Maria would understand and be able to forgive Tony. "People who care that much about each other should be together," she mused to herself. "And now that the case is over maybe Lee and I can finally figure out if we belong together."

"Amanda?" Lee interrupted her train of thought.

"Yeah?" she replied, turning to see what he wanted. He probably wanted to discuss further aspects of their case.

He still stood by the door, his eyes fixed upon her. "You know... you and I do have a lot to talk about." He seemed to be searching for just the right words to say.

"Yeah?" she said again, quietly, trying not to smile. Her heart began to beat a bit faster as she realized that his thoughts had in fact been going in the same direction as hers.

"Yeah." He looked so serious as he walked towards her, slowly, deliberately as if he had planned every step. "We have been... getting to know each other for what..."

"Three years," they said simultaneously.

"And uh... and I think..." Lee took a deep breath and hesitated again.

Amanda gave in to her smile. After all this time, after everything they had gone through, Lee still seemed unsure of himself, as if he couldn't quite bring himself to believe that it could be true, that he had a right to reach out to her. She cared for him so much, and hoped that today, finally, she would be able to make it clear to him.

Lee's eyes met hers again and he smiled softly at her. "There's a lot about you that I don't know. But I'm sure going to enjoy trying to find out," he said in a low, deliberate tone.

Amanda thought back to the other day they when they had been "rehearsing" for her play. They had been playing around with the script and ended up in each other's arms. Amanda sighed, recalling how they had been forced to push each other away when Francine had unexpectedly walked in. She wondered what it would be like to hold Lee in her arms and never have to let go.

Lee's current attitude was in total contrast to their previous encounter. It was as if he wanted her to know how much she meant to him, that it wasn't a game.

They moved towards each other, leaning forward, their lips almost touching. Right on cue, they heard the bang of the door leading from the Georgetown foyer. Let it be someone just passing our office, Amanda pleaded silently, let it be Henderson on the way to his office, or Mrs. Marsten getting a cup of coffee from the upstairs kitchen. Was it asking too much, that they wanted one tiny piece of time for themselves, to figure out exactly where they stood with each other?

Apparently it was. Amanda recognized Billy and Francine's voices out in the hallway and sighed. She knew exactly what was about to happen. They would come in and discuss the Martinet case or more likely pass on information about a new assignment.

Lee moved away from her, as she knew he would, and crossed over to the door. Amanda sighed as she watched him put out his hand to open the door, to let Billy and Francine in, to let the moment slip away from them, as so many others had. They would never get their timing right.

Except that wasn't the way things happened at all. Lee reached, not for the doorknob, but for the lock, snapping it into place with a decisive click. He ignored the voice of his section chief out in the hallway. Instead he turned towards her, saying, "No, not this time," as if he too was tired of fitting their personal life around their jobs.

He walked back over to her but again seemed to hesitate. There was an air of uncertainty as if he didn't quite know what to do next. Amanda reached up, slowly sliding her hands along the lapels of his jacket, letting them come to rest on his shoulders. He put his hands around her waist, pulling her closer.

They stood there for a moment, just looking at each other. Three years of hoping and wishing and waiting and suddenly it all came down to this. It was really happening. It wasn't a case, wasn't a cover, wasn't them being caught up in the emotions of a moment. This was a deliberate choice on their parts. It might have taken them three years to reach this place but they were finally there.

Lee gave a little laugh and shook his head as if he couldn't quite believe what was happening. Amanda smiled back. She leaned towards him and their lips met at last in a soft, tender kiss.

After all their near misses during the past few months, she had thought that she was prepared for this. But the reality of having his arms around her and the gentle pressure of his lips on hers was so much better than she had remembered. Without having to worry about interruptions or other distractions, she could relax and enjoy the sensations he was awakening in her.

Much too soon, Amanda felt Lee pull back from her slightly, breaking the kiss. For a second she panicked and opened her eyes. Maybe he didn't feel the same as she did. She glanced up at him. He looked at her briefly, then closed his eyes and leaned in for another kiss.

Amanda tightened her hands on his lapels and pulled him towards her, trying to put everything she was feeling into this second kiss. She slid her hands around the back of his neck and up into his hair, slowly caressing him.

Lee pulled back again. "Amanda, are you sure?" he asked in a whisper.

She could see a small trace of the old fears in his eyes, fear of abandonment, of letting himself open up to someone else. She understood, as she herself carried the remnants of her own anxieties. The thought of becoming involved with someone like Lee Stetson was more than a little intimidating. What if she didn't measure up to his previous girl friends? What if it didn't work out; could they still be friends, still work together?

Lee voiced some of his concerns. "I've never been very good at long term relationships. And what about your mother, Philip, Jamie, even our jobs? Amanda, this is going to change everything."

"Shh." Amanda laid a gentle finger against his lips, and pushed aside her own doubts. "That can all wait. Lee, we don't need to figure out everything right away. There's nothing that can't wait until later. Except this."

She reached up for him and their lips met again. She parted her lips slightly, and Lee eagerly responded. His hands moved up into her hair, pulling her even closer. Her mouth yielded to the steady pressure of his, his tongue sliding over hers. All of Amanda's senses were attuned to him, the eagerness in his eyes as he leaned down to kiss her, the scent of his cologne, the smoothness of his lips and cheeks against her face, the taste of his mouth on hers.

For that moment, only she and Lee existed, the rest of the world around them fading away. This time as they pulled away from each other all doubts had vanished. They stood there, looking into each other's eyes, and knew, despite all their differences, that they were exactly where they were meant to be.

Lee took both her hands in his. He gently traced his fingers over her right palm, then brought her hand up to his face. His lips moved slowly over the tips of her fingers, softly kissing them.

Amanda sighed and said, "I can't believe we're really here together. I was beginning to think this would never happen."

"I know." Lee smiled. "Francine should be phoning up here any minute now to find out what's going on. Why don't we get out of here and continue this conversation over dinner?"

"Dinner? Pretty sure of yourself aren't you, asking at the last minute?" she smiled, brushing her fingers against his lips. "Maybe I already have plans for the evening. I'll have to go downstairs and check my day book." She made a move towards the door, but Lee held her tightly, a slight frown crossing his face.

"What?" she asked. "I was only teasing, Lee, you know that." She pulled her hand from his, and ran her fingers down the side of his face.

"No, I was just thinking. Your desk in the bullpen suddenly seems so far away."

"Lee, I'm going to have to go back down there sometime," she pointed out.

His response was to hold her even closer. "Maybe not. There's plenty of room up here for another desk, you know."

"Will Billy okay that? I'm still only part time." Amanda looked doubtful.

He smiled at her. "I'll just tell him I need you more than they do downstairs." He leaned down and kissed her quickly. "Besides you could still help out with the odd job down there. We'll have to upgrade your security clearance a bit, though. That visitor's pass won't be enough."

"My own ID? And sharing an office with you? If I had known about all of the fringe benefits I would have done this a long time ago."

"We should have." Once again their lips met, this time in a kiss full of the promise of things to come.

She pulled away from him at last, and headed towards the door. "I'll go get my purse from downstairs and be right back."

"Sure."

She watched him walk towards his desk, missing the feeling of having his arms around her already.

"Lee." Her voice made him stop and turn around.

Amanda held out her hand. "Just walk with me?"

Lee smiled, remembering that day at the train station and his first words to her. "Anywhere you want."

The End