

X is for Xanadu

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Rating: G

Disclaimer: The lines from "Kubla Khan" that follow were written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As for Scarecrow and Mrs. King — nope, these characters do not belong to me. I am just borrowing them for a few minutes and then I'll gladly put them back. But if I win the lottery some day — well, you never know...

Feedback: Yes, please

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Xanadu (n) - an idyllically beautiful place

— Encarta World English Dictionary (North American Edition)

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man...

It had become a place Lee Stetson knew as well as he knew his old apartment: Amanda King's yard. He had an intimate relationship with the roses; their careless thorns had drawn his blood more often than a KGB bullet. For several years he had crushed its poor, hapless tulips in their beds. His shoes had left their size twelve imprints in the soft earth beneath her kitchen window more times than he could count.

He had stood — or stooped, as the case may be — in her yard in the rain, in the sunshine, and in the dark of night. He had gone there to talk to Amanda as a friend, and then later as something more; to ask her for her help on a case, both under protest and on his own; and to assure the safety of both Amanda and her family on so many different occasions. Their first kiss, a touch of the lips so brief it almost didn't really happen, occurred in that yard.

He had stood in her yard — just a few yards away from an unsuspecting Dotty — with an autographed football, a bottle of champagne, and two glasses to celebrate wrapping up the Ernst Lazlo case. After picking up his brand new 'Vette, Lee had somehow found himself on Amanda's patio, knocking on her back door and asking her to come for a ride. He stood on that same slab of concrete and told her of the pain of seeing Dorothy again, all but begging her to say she had seen the specter too.

He had stood in her yard and watched through the window as Amanda led a dozen small boys through a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday". He had waited by the back door in an outrageous outfit courtesy of Sixties 'R' Us while she changed into her dress for the reunion. And Lee had listened with a swelling heart as she told him in that same yard that though she would always love Joe, she was in love with him.

So twice five miles of fertile ground

With walls and towers were girded round:

And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills

Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery...

Lee had stood in her yard moments before climbing her trellis to warn her of Franco Necci's involvement in a seemingly innocuous case. He had run through that yard hand in hand with Amanda, Agency men in hot pursuit during the Stemwinder fiasco. He had stolen countless precious moments alone with her in the safety of the gazebo there. It was in her yard that they made the fateful decision that their

marriage must remain a secret, and it was in that same yard that they decided that it could no longer remain so.

Flowers from Amanda's yard had brightened and perfumed their office in the Q Bureau with their delicate beauty. Small boys, and later a frightened Soviet defector, had found solace in the safety of the tree house at the back of her property. The yard had been home to innumerable barbecues and touch football games, and when the time came to decide upon a location to hold their second, public wedding, Amanda's yard was their first and only choice.

Amanda and Dotty had gardened the beds here; Lee and the boys had cared for the lawn. Painting the fences and gazebo had been a daylong family affair on a sunny Saturday. Wash had hung out here in the summer sun, to return to the house fragrant and dry. Unsuspecting rugs came out to the yard during spring cleaning to have a year's worth of dirt beat out of them.

Stray dogs, cats, and the occasional wayward human had come to the yard looking for shelter and a kind word. Momentous and ordinary conversations took place at its picnic table. The surrounding trees witnessed lazy afternoons in the hammock; the occasional romantic waltz; and tender, sweet kisses that seemed to go on forever.

Could I revive within me

Her symphony and song,

To such deep delight 't would win me

That with music loud and long,

I would build that dome in air,

That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

And all who heard should see them there...

Now that yard would belong to someone else; a new family would make their own memories in it. Different hands would lovingly weed the garden and other voices would laughingly accept sheepish apologies for accidentally trampled flora. The Stetson-King household was moving; another bigger house with room for horses was

waiting for them in Rockville. Lee was excited about the move, yet now that the time was at hand he found himself suddenly surrounded by memories, unable to leave.

Deep in thought, he didn't realize that he wasn't alone until he felt her gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Lee? Is everything okay? The boys are waiting for us in the car."

"Hmmm? Uh, sure, Amanda, I'm coming." He wrapped his left arm around her waist as she came up to stand beside him, resting her head on his shoulder.

"A lot of memories here."

"Yes," she agreed softly, "but we'll make new ones at the new house."

"I know, but . . ."

"But they won't be of you hiding in my bushes and flattening mother's flowers," she finished for him teasingly.

Lee laughed and turned to kiss her on the cheek. "That's true."

"Come on, big fella. Those boxes aren't going to unpack themselves, and I don't think Billy will find 'we aren't done yet because we were mesmerized by our old yard' to be a valid reason to give us more time off."

Chuckling quietly, he turned and reached for his wife. Hand in hand, they made their way out of their old yard, toward their new future together.

The End