

From Here to Paternity - Prologue (In The Beginning)

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Archiving: This story will be archived on the smkfanfic site and at Blue Boxers and Beyond (www.geocities.com/blueboxersandbeyond)

Notes: Thanks to eman for the expert beta and the insight into Lee's mind. As always, thanks to Pam, my faithful beta and good friend.

A sequel to *Great Expectations*, this is the first story in a series. You don't need to read *Great Expectations* to follow this story, and each story in this series can stand alone, on its own.

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Slowly, Lee Stetson eased into bed, the crisp, cool sheets welcoming him and relaxing the tension from his tired body. It had been a long day — an eventful day. Today he'd become a father.

A father.

The enormity of that thought caused Lee's stomach to flip-flop and pulled him from the comfort of his bed. Realizing that sleep was not in the cards, he pulled a robe over his boxer shorts and padded downstairs.

The stairs creaked softly under his feet, and the soft glow of the small light above the oven beckoned him into the kitchen. As if on cue his stomach growled. Quietly, he tugged open the refrigerator door, poking through its meager contents. With two teenaged boys around, there was usually no such thing as leftovers. Tonight, however, the remains of a half-eaten cherry pie that Doty had dropped by the day before stood proudly on the top shelf.

Pouring himself a glass of milk and grabbing a fork from the utensil drawer, he padded out to the family room and sank onto the sofa. He propped his feet on the coffee table and placed the glass of milk between the armrest and the sofa cushion. Lee wasted no time in appeasing his hunger pangs, shoveling the pie directly from the pan into his mouth. He scraped the pie pan clean, then tossed it onto the coffee table before turning his attention to the ice-cold milk, which he gulped down in two swallows.

Placing the empty glass next to the pie pan, Lee leaned back into the soft sofa cushions and was suddenly aware of the stillness of the night. He couldn't remember the Stetson-King household ever being this quiet before. Only the chirp of crickets and the rustling of some left-over winter

leaves broke the silence. Leaves. One more job that hadn't been finished before the arrival of his daughter.

His daughter.

Lee smiled, remembering what it felt like to hold her for the first time — just a few hours ago. Closing his eyes, he drew a deep breath. He knew it wasn't possible, but he swore he could still smell the soft, clean, warmth of her skin. Perhaps it was just that all his senses were heightened right now. Everything seemed so much more... well, so much MORE.

He remembered feeling this way when his relationship with Amanda had first begun to change. How the Agency, suddenly, became a place he rushed to in the morning, hoping to see her. How he found reason after reason to be in that quiet Arlington suburb, excuse after excuse for tapping on her kitchen window so that he could spend just a few more minutes with her. The time he spent with her seemed so much more real than the rest of his life. It was like her presence completed something in him.

Now, with his daughter, it was that feeling all over again. Like something he hadn't even realized was missing, was now found. The very best had, miraculously, become even better. . . perfect.

And everything was perfect. The cafeteria coffee he'd shared with Billy had been the best coffee he'd ever tasted. The gift-shop flowers he'd picked up to adorn Amanda's bedside table, the most beautiful arrangement he'd ever seen. He'd just eaten the most incredible cherry pie with the coldest, most delicious milk ever produced.

Certainly, no man, anywhere in the entire world, was as lucky as he. No one else could possibly feel like this. . . this sense of love and completion and wonder. He knew, logically, that he was not the first man to become a father... the first man to feel the intensity of love and connection with his newborn child. But logic flew out the window when he thought of his tiny daughter. . . and her mother.

It had taken him a long time to realize his feelings for Amanda. However, once he'd wised up, he'd loved her with a depth and passion that, at times, overwhelmed him. She was his life. He'd thought he'd never know another love as great as the one he felt for his wife. Then, this morning, his daughter had arrived. Two weeks late, red and wrinkled and squalling, and simply the most beautiful creature he'd ever laid eyes on.

With one blink of her dark blue eyes his heart had been captured. He'd watched her later that day, in the hospital nursery. He'd wanted so badly to go in and ask to hold her again. . . to feel her, safe in his arms once more before he headed home with the boys. But she was fast asleep and he settled for watching her and memorizing every feature — relishing every time her nose wrinkled, smiling at every grimace or purse of her lips, and thanking god for every tiny rise and fall of her chest under the pink cotton blanket.

"You okay?"

The voice startled Lee, his eyes flying open to find his oldest standing beside the sofa, wearing gym shorts, a ratty t-shirt, and a sleep-filled expression.

"Oh, yeah. I'm fine," Lee smiled up at Phillip. "What are you doing up?"

"I thought I heard a noise down here, then I saw the light."

Lee shrugged. "I got hungry."

Phillip glanced into the kitchen and then at the empty pie tin on the coffee table. "Oh, no... you hoovered down the last of grandma's pie? You dog. I had dibs on that for breakfast."

Lee chuckled, pulling his tall frame from the sofa. "Well, Chief, you snooze you lose. Isn't that what you're always telling me when I find the fridge empty? Besides, I'm taking you and your brother out to breakfast tomorrow before we go see you're mom and sister. They'll be coming home day after tomorrow."

Phillip smiled in reference to his youngest sibling. "They're coming home so soon? Guess I'd better get back up stairs and get to sleep. Won't be doing much of that once the munchkin takes up residence down the hall."

"Munchkin." Lee laughed, sure that Phillip was unaware of the irony of the nickname he'd just bestowed on his little sister. He pushed Phillip towards the stairs, still chuckling. "Yes, let's go rest up for the upcoming adventures in Oz."

**TBC**