

Unforgettable

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This story is based on the situations created by Peter Lefcourt in the episode "I Am Not Now, Nor Have I Ever Been . . . A Spy". I hope he would approve of the way I expanded his story.

Feedback: Absolutely! On-list or off. Please tell me what you think.

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For all I could remember, the day started when I woke up in the hospital, aching all over, with my head pounding as though someone was using it for an anvil. They said that I'd been in an accident, but I couldn't remember anything about it.

I was so glad when Mother arrived; I really needed to see a familiar face. She panicked when I told her about my partial amnesia — in a movie she'd seen, the woman regained her memory and remembered that she'd married a man in Brooklyn — but I quickly reassured her that I didn't have a double life to forget.

That seemed to calm her a little. "Can you remember anything?"

I sighed with frustration. "Nothing since this morning."

"Lunch with Dean's mother?"

She looked hopeful, as though the question would bring everything back to me, but I had no idea what she was talking about. "Dean who?"

I knew it wasn't the response she wanted, but it was the best I could do. Shaking her head, she left a few minutes later to talk to the doctor about taking me home.

I had just fallen asleep when I heard someone call my name.

"Amanda. Amanda, are you okay?"

I was still pretty groggy, and it took me a minute to wake up. I rubbed my eyes and saw him standing just inside the door, talking as though he knew me.

"I mean, you look okay. Thank God." With a relieved smile, he started to walk toward me, and I pulled the blanket up in front of me like a shield. Who was this man? He looked harmless, but I didn't know him from Adam.

"Look, we were . . . we were so relieved when we got word of where you were." He stopped at the foot of the bed, then continued, earnestly — something about a "drop" and some man named "Martinez" and "the men who grabbed you".

All I could do was stare, but he didn't seem to notice my confusion. He was good looking -- nice hair, tall, a straight nose, gorgeous eyes. He gave new meaning to the phrase "perfect stranger". Okay, maybe not "perfect", but at that moment I couldn't think of a single thing that I'd change. It was just that I had no idea what he was talking about, and I told him so.

His face went blank. It was evident that my reaction had surprised him. After a moment's hesitation, he chuckled nervously. "Amanda, I said I was sorry."

When I asked him to leave, he looked so shocked and disappointed that I almost wished that I did know him. I finally had to call a nurse, who had him escorted out of the hospital.

I was still thinking about him when Mother returned. There was something about his eyes . . . He was wrong about my knowing him; I was sure of that. No matter how hard I'd hit my head, I couldn't imagine forgetting those beautiful hazel eyes.

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Coming home helped, even though I was still confused — "vague" was the word the doctor had used -- about a lot of things. I felt safe the moment I entered the front door, and being in familiar surroundings helped me relax. But I hadn't been home long before I started having some strange snatches of what I assumed were memories.

Like when I saw the football on a shelf in the den. I picked it up and read what was written across one side — "To a heck of a good reporter. Best wishes, Sandy Newcomb". Reporter? It must have been something I'd saved from college. Had Sandy been an old college beau? Then, as clearly as if it had happened yesterday, I remembered a man leaning out of a window to kiss me. It wasn't Dean — Mother had shown me a picture of him — but I felt like I should recognize him. I reached up to put the football back on the shelf, and nearly dropped it when I realized that the man who'd kissed me had looked an awful lot like the mystery man in my hospital room.

I decided not to say anything to Mother. She hadn't seemed to believe me when I'd mentioned my visitor before, and to be honest, I was starting to wonder whether I hadn't just dreamed him up. I was finding that there was a fine line between what I knew and what I thought I knew, and thinking about it only made my confusion worse.

I did know one thing for sure, though. My favorite dinner was pot roast with succotash. A few minutes later, Mother left for the market to get the ingredients, and I busied myself around the kitchen. The security of the routine gave me the feeling that things were

going to be just fine. I might not have been sure whether or not I drank coffee, but there, in familiar surroundings, I could forget about everything I couldn't remember. Life would soon be back to normal; I could just feel it.

But then the man who'd been in my room at the hospital re-appeared, nearly scaring me out of what was left of my wits. It was just plain spooky, having him turn up in my kitchen like that.

He kept insisting I knew him, but that I didn't remember him because of the amnesia. When I asked him how he knew about that, he told me he knew a lot of things about me and that he'd tell me all about myself before my mother got back.

I looked at him suspiciously. "Why does it have to be before my mother gets back?"

"Because no one is supposed to know that you know," he paused and licked his lips nervously, "... me. It may make things very difficult for you."

I closed my eyes. Oh, great! This was getting stranger by the second... I began to wonder whether "normal", for me, was quite what I had expected.

He told me that his name was Lee Stetson, and that he worked for the government, as an "intelligence operative". A spy. A secret agent. It was almost too much for my overtaxed brain to take in, and for a moment, I wondered if he wasn't just taking advantage of my memory problems to tell me some outlandish fairy tale. Then I thought about how he'd "gotten word" that I'd been in the hospital and had appeared in my room. And now he'd found me again, and he'd even managed to sneak up on me in my own kitchen. Spies know all sorts of things you don't expect them to, don't they? And they're really good at being sneaky, aren't they?

I was speechless for a moment, and when I found my voice, it quavered. "You're a spy." I didn't want to believe it, but I couldn't think of any explanation that made better sense. I was just getting used to the idea, but he wasn't finished.

"Guess what."

"What?" What could be more unbelievable than having a spy in my kitchen? He didn't leave me in suspense for very long.

"You are, too."

The room started to spin. I turned quickly and leaned up against the counter.

I used to have fantasies about secret agents. I was always the glamorous heroine, meeting the handsome spy in shadowy places, late at night when no one else was around. We'd help each other through all sorts of adventures and in the end, we'd outsmart the bad guys and save the world. Then he would spirit me away to some exotic hideaway for nights of mindless passion.

My imaginary life was fun and exciting when I was a teenager, but I was all grown up now. I pushed myself away from the counter and started to pace the kitchen. "Oh, my gosh."

"Will you please stop saying that?" he asked. He seemed nearly as upset as I was, and I almost felt sorry for him. Up until now, the man had exuded confidence and capability. I could tell that he must be very good at his job, but it was obvious that he didn't have a clue how to deal with this particular situation.

"Would it help to tell you that you're only a trainee spy?"

He said it hopefully, as though he thought it would help make me feel better. It didn't, of course. But he was so sincere. And when he asked me to trust him and go with him to his office, to see if the surroundings and people would jog my memory, I had the strangest feeling of *déjà vu*. I was ready to refuse him outright, but then I looked into his eyes . . .

It seemed that I remembered him asking me to trust him once before, and when I told him so, he gave me a smile that warmed me right down to my toes. It was that warm feeling, and the something indefinable that I saw in his eyes, that convinced me to go with him to his office.

We'd barely gotten into his car before I started doubting the wisdom of that decision. We hadn't even pulled away from the curb when he started acting strangely, insisting that I "get down", as though I had to sneak out of my own neighborhood. It seemed pretty silly to me, but he had said that no one was supposed to know that I knew him, so I played along. And besides, I could tell from the exaggerated patience in his voice that he was starting to get frustrated with all of my questions.

As we drove, I tried to make sense of what was happening. Me — a spy. What a laugh! I was a single mom from the suburbs; my life was normal and predictable. There was no place in it for spies or secrets. Was there?

When he pulled up in front of a row of townhouses in a quiet Georgetown neighborhood, I was more than a little relieved that the office looked so normal -- my James Bond expectations had me half afraid that we'd find ourselves in the middle of a high-tech stronghold.

Mr. Stetson escorted me inside and across the entry hall, where he opened a closet door and held the coats to one side, looking at me expectantly. I had no idea what was going on, but apparently we were going to be staying for a while. I slipped off my coat and reached for a hanger.

"Amanda, what are you doing?" he asked with exasperation, guiding me into the closet with a hand at the small of my back. "Come on. We're going to see Billy."

I was beyond protesting. Nothing about this day made any sense, least of all this man. I shook my head and entered the closet, glancing over my shoulder as I did so, hoping there were no passers-by on the sidewalk outside to see my bizarre behavior.

He followed me in, pulling the door closed behind him, and the closet, which I suddenly understood to be an elevator, began to move downward. A few moments later, another set of doors opened behind me. I hesitated as I looked out into what appeared to be one level

of a busy, modern office building, much larger than the townhouse we had entered from the street.

I reached up and rubbed my right temple with the fingers of one hand. Surely this whole day was just a bad dream . . . But if it was, it didn't seem to be time for me to wake up yet. Mr. Stetson's hand on my elbow propelled me out of the elevator.

Heads turned as we walked down the hall -- all of them female, and each of them eyeing my companion with expressions ranging from wistful longing to barely concealed lust. One, a redhead in a sweater that did nothing to disguise her ample curves, stepped in front of Mr. Stetson with a 500-megawatt smile.

"Hey there, Scarecrow," she crooned, batting her fake eyelashes at him, "you've been making yourself scarce lately. You know, if want to do some undercover work," she glanced at me with thinly veiled disdain, "you shouldn't depend on amateurs." She ran a crimson-nailed forefinger along his jaw line and down the front of his jacket. "You need to partner with an experienced agent."

The corners of his mouth turned up in a seductive smile. "Don't worry, Tammi, I know all of your qualifications. When I need a specialist, I'll be sure to look you up." His voice had dropped half an octave and flowed like warm molasses. He gave the redhead a slow wink as he maneuvered me around her.

I looked at him quizzically. "Scarecrow?"

His smile faded. "It's my code name," he said, in a tone usually reserved for responding yet again to a small child who's asking too many questions. "I'll explain later."

I sneaked a peek over my shoulder. Tammi's eyes were fixed on Mr. Stetson's derriere, and I saw the tip of her tongue run across her lips, wetting them. She looked for all the world like a cat about to pounce on an unsuspecting mouse.

As we rounded the corner, I glanced up at him from the corner of my eye. It was true that he had quite an effect on the ladies, myself included. But I was a single mother from Arlington. Thank heaven I wasn't the type to succumb to the charms of an office Lothario. At least the "clandestine lover" part of my fantasies hadn't come true.

We headed toward a glassed-in area with armed guards flanking the double doors. With a nod to Mr. Stetson, one of them opened the doors as we approached.

When we entered the room, a stocky black man called to me. Mr. Stetson introduced him as Billy Melrose, and said he was our section chief. His assistant, the blonde woman -- I think it was . . . umm . . . Francine? -- didn't seem very friendly, but that was probably because she was so busy, keeping everything and everyone organized. There was one thing for sure, though -- if I **had** worked here, I probably wouldn't any more. Forgetting everything about the two most important people in the office seemed like the sort of faux pas that would get a person fired. I'd have to start looking for a new job . . . as soon as I remembered just what it was that I did . . .

There wasn't much time to dwell on that, however. Mr. Stetson was right about the familiar surroundings and people jogging my memory, because little bits and pieces of things started coming back to me. Chili dogs . . . napkins . . . They didn't seem all that important, but then I remembered one more thing . . .

"Oh, but there's a note in the napkin."

Mr. Stetson looked up, the expression on his face a curious mixture of anticipation and apprehension. "Yeah, yeah . . . What does it say?"

The next thing I knew, I was seated next to the blonde woman as she used her computer to display a list of code words.

"Keep trying, Mrs. King," Mr. Melrose urged. "A lot depends on it."

"Well, it's just that the words don't make any sense — they're just a jumble of letters." I rubbed my forehead. It was really hard to think with him and Mr. Stetson hovering over me. I tried to ignore them as I directed my next comment to Francine. "Could you try the 'S' combinations again, please?"

She complied, and a few moments later, there it was. "Hold it! That's it."

It was a strange word -- SLYMPH -- total nonsense as far as I could tell, but they had a program to decipher it. While it might not have been the whole message, surely it would give them a start in solving their mystery. And now I could go home knowing that I'd done what I could. It was exciting to have been a part of it all.

"What the hell is 'Alabam'?"

Mr. Stetson's incredulous voice triggered another flash of déjà vu. This time, I saw myself excitedly telling him about another note. What had it said? Something about Nathan Hale, and pilgrims, and peaches . . . I'd been sure that I'd unlocked a mystery that time, too, but his only response to that revelation had been a less-than-enthusiastic "That's it?" I felt the same letdown now. I just didn't seem to be cut out for this kind of work.

I was so disappointed that I thought I was going to cry. Mr. Melrose must have seen that I'd had enough. He called Mr. Stetson to one side, and soon we were back in the little silver sports car, heading away from the Agency.

But he didn't take me home - he said that it wouldn't be "safe". Honestly! How could going home, to my nice suburban neighborhood, possibly be dangerous? If this was what being a spy was like, I wasn't sure I **wanted** to remember it. Still, I had to admit that it had a certain appeal -- danger . . . excitement . . . intrigue. Even a bit of romance, I thought with a blush, turning my eyes from a surreptitious study of Mr. Stetson's profile back to the road before us. It reminded me of those teenage fantasies about secret agents.

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A few minutes later, he pulled up in front of his building. I took a deep breath before getting out of the car, hoping that this wasn't a mistake. Going home with a strange man, even in the middle of the day, didn't seem like the kind of thing that I'd do.

Or maybe it was. The doorman greeted me with a big smile and a "Hello, again," as though I were a frequent visitor. And when we got off of the elevator, I turned to the left without a second thought. Maybe I **had** been here before. But when? And why?

He had just put his key in the lock when the door across the hall opened and a middle-aged woman peered out at us. "Hello, Mr. Stetson. Hello, dear," she said, looking at me with a slightly patronizing smile. "How nice to see you again."

For a moment, it was as though time stood still. I had a sudden picture of the woman asking me if I'd be seeing Mr. Stetson again, or if my visit was a "one-night sort of thing". I heard myself assuring her that I'd be seeing him again, and then she was giving me something — a present? -- and telling me how much women seemed to like Mr. Stetson. Well, that certainly fit in with what I'd seen at the office earlier.

The moment passed, and I realized with a start that I was staring at her. I smiled at her with as much sincerity as I could muster and said something that I hoped was appropriate. My flashback, if that's what it had been, seemed so real that I wasn't sure whether I was responding to her current greeting or to something she'd said to me at an earlier time.

We went into the living room, and I knew that I had been here before. Even without the greetings from the doorman and the neighbor, I'd have been sure of it. The coffee table was stacked high with magazines, and I found myself wondering if his comb was at the bottom of the heap again. On a table behind the sofa was an aquarium. I looked on a nearby shelf, and found the container of fish food that I knew would be there.

I swallowed as I realized that I must know him even better than I'd thought. If we were just co-workers, why did his apartment seem so familiar to me? Did spies ever take their work home with them? I looked frantically around the living room, trying to picture myself working there — taking notes or going through file folders — but the image wouldn't come. Instead, I remembered moving about the apartment, straightening things. My eyes landed on a door across the room, and I knew without a doubt that it was the bedroom. A tingle ran the length of my spine and I felt my pulse race. Who was I kidding? Would I react that way if all I'd done here was work?

"Amanda?" His voice brought me back to the present. I was still standing just inside the door, and he was looking at me with a puzzled expression. "Why don't you come on in and try to relax? I'll be right back."

He disappeared into the kitchen, and I found myself wondering if he had anything in his refrigerator besides moldy cheese and frozen pizzas. I made my way to the couch and sat, shaking my head in an attempt to rid myself of yet another reminder of past visits to this man's home.

I sat there for a moment, fidgeting with my rings, before picking up one of the throw pillows to give my hands something else to do. Taking a deep breath, I looked around the room again. Near the window was a statue of a cowboy on a horse, like one of the Remington bronzes I'd seen at the art museum. As I looked at the piece, not really seeing it, I again felt myself transported to another time and place. The sun was shining down brightly, and a gentle breeze was blowing. I was walking through a field with a woman about my own age, and we were leading our horses by the reins.

Horses? Wasn't I allergic to horses?

I was telling the woman -- Patti? Peggy? No . . . Penny, that was it, Penny — about my "relationship with Mr. Stetson", saying that it was hard to explain, that it was a secret, even from my family. The other woman was laughing. "Here I am encouraging you to get something going with Mr. Stetson, and you've been having an affair with him all along."

My breath caught in my throat and I felt all the blood drain from my face. Could it be true? No wonder my mother didn't know anything about him. What was it he had said to me when he appeared in my kitchen? That no one, not even my mother, was supposed to know that I knew him. That it would make things difficult for me. I'd say that was an understatement.

He came back into the living room, carrying a plate of cookies and a glass of milk. It hardly seemed like the kind of food he'd have handy, but I was too tired to think much of it. I didn't want milk and cookies; I wanted to go home, and I reminded him that he had promised to take me there.

He sighed. "I told you, I can't. It would be very dangerous for you."

"I'm beginning to believe that you're making this whole thing up, you know." I wasn't, not really, but I wished I could think that. After the trip to the office, and the things that I'd begun remembering there, I had little doubt left that he'd been telling the truth about our being spies. Who but a spy would serve me milk and cookies while wearing a shoulder holster and gun?

He sat next to me, and I felt myself flush. Why was the room suddenly so warm?

"Amanda."

The sound of his voice cut through my thoughts like a warm knife through butter, and I had a sudden urge to wrap my arms around him and snuggle into his chest. Instead, I eased back toward my end of the sofa, wishing the throw pillow were big enough to hide behind while I tried to deal with the unsettling feelings that were spreading through me. When it came to Mr. Stetson, it seemed that my brain and my emotions were in opposite camps. Distracted, I answered him. "Hmm?"

"Are you absolutely sure you don't remember anything about me?"

On this I was clear, in spite of my increasing conviction that I **should** know and remember him. "Yes. The doctor said that I might forget certain things that were emotionally complicated. Now, I can understand how I might forget the crash, but I don't know what could be so emotionally complicated about you that would make me not . . ."

My words trailed off as it all fell into place — those strange memories of the kiss, the encounter with his neighbor, the conversation with Penny. What could be more emotionally complicated than remembering a secret lover when, according to my mother, I was practically engaged to Dean? It seemed that my secret agent fantasies had come true -- every last detail of them. I stared up at him, and our eyes locked for a long moment before I looked down, my cheeks crimson with embarrassment.

"Well . . ." At the sound of his deep voice, something inside me began to tremble. I'm not sure what I was anticipating, but I was almost certain that I wasn't ready for it. "We have worked fairly closely together, you know."

Didn't he get it? That was the problem — I **didn't** know. "How closely?" My voice was pitched higher than normal and quavered. I hugged the pillow closely and slid my ring up and down my finger.

"Well, we've worked hours together, days together . . ."

"And?" This time the word sounded as though it had been drawn across a rasp. Did I really want to know the answer to this question?

"And what?"

"Well, did we have . . . are we . . .uh, have . . . are we in- involved in any way?"

He looked at me, and it seemed that he didn't know how to answer my question. I wasn't even sure that he understood what I meant. "You mean did we ever . . ."

Oh, thank goodness! He did know what I was trying to ask. "Yes, that's what I mean."

A tender smile crossed his face. I could see the concern in his eyes, and that warm feeling rushed through me again. "No. We never . . ."

I was relieved, yet somehow disappointed at the same time. "Never did. We never did."

There was an awkward pause, interrupted a moment later, when I started to remember another one of those words.

It was right on the edge of my memory, but it wouldn't come. I tried my best, with him encouraging me all the way, but it was no use. It was gone.

It was more than I could take; suddenly all my frustrations came spilling out. "I'm so confused. I'm beginning to think that I dreamed the whole thing. Maybe I made the whole thing up about the hot dogs and the chili dogs and the napkins and the notes and the whole . . . I'm confused. I just want to go home. I want to see my boys. I want my

mother." I turned toward him, as if somehow I expected him to have some answers for me.

He pulled me close and gave me a hug. "I know." This time, my need to be comforted outweighed my hesitations and I relaxed into his embrace, resting my head against his shoulder.

I closed my eyes, and there it was again — my whole life was becoming one big feeling of *déjà vu*. This time, I was sitting, not in his living room, but outdoors -- in a golf cart? — with his arms around me, with his voice comforting me. A moment later, I was back on his sofa, with the same strong arms around me and the same warm voice rumbling in my ear.

This jumping back and forth from past to present was disorienting, to say the least. I sniffed and nestled my head under his chin, not wanting him to see just how upset I was. I said the first thing that came to my mind. "She's making me a pot roast."

"I know, I know." He patted my shoulder and gave me another gentle squeeze. "Look, why don't you lie down and rest? You can use my bedroom, and when you're calmer, you can call home, all right?"

I stiffened slightly and my eyes flew open. I straightened and looked at him, my uncertainty showing on my face. "In your bedroom?"

"Right."

"To lie down?"

He nodded. "To lie down."

I paused for a few seconds. I wasn't sure that he was telling the truth when he said we weren't involved. With all the things I'd remembered, I was almost certain that we were. I'd seen the strangest look move across his face after he denied any involvement, and I wondered if it was because I'd asked him whether we were involved or whether it was because I'd **had** to ask. What if he was just trying to keep from upsetting me any more until my memory returned? Still, my head was aching again, and I really wanted to rest. "For a nap."

"Yeah." His smile, an apparent attempt to reassure me, had the opposite effect.

"Then I can call home."

The smile broadened. I didn't dare meet his eyes. "Absolutely." He stood and looked at me. "Come on."

As I followed him to the bedroom, another memory rose to the surface, of another time. We were getting ready for bed . . .

When he came out of the bathroom after brushing his teeth, he was unbuttoning his shirt. Oh, he had a nice chest -- smooth and well-muscled and tan . . .

"What are you doing?" I heard myself ask.

"Well, I'm going to bed . . . Are you coming?"

I was shocked. "No! I can't sleep here. How would I explain it? I'd feel like I was lying and sneaking."

That didn't seem to phase him. He turned and headed down the hall. "Do you like a window open at night?"

The memory faded, and I was back in his living room. He had opened the door and was standing just inside the bedroom.

I stopped in my tracks, shaking my head. I didn't remember what I did that other time, but I knew that today, until I figured out what was between us, I couldn't go into his bedroom with him standing there. My hesitation must have been obvious, because he stepped back into the living room with an exasperated shake of his head.

"Thank you very much," I murmured as I slipped past him, taking care to avoid any physical contact, and closed the door.

He called to me from the other side. "Oh, uh, if you need anything, I'll be right out here, so let me know, huh?"

I leaned back against the door and took a deep breath. "I'll remember that."

What was it about Mr. Stetson? I had to admit that I felt . . . something . . . when he was near. He was easily the most attractive man that my flawed memory could imagine. And his eyes . . . sometimes they'd catch mine, and I could feel myself being pulled in. It would be hard to say no to anything he asked if he was looking at me like that. I could almost imagine myself agreeing to an affair with him.

I walked to the bed and sat as the implications began to sink in. An affair with Lee Stetson. It would explain some things. When Mother had told me about Dean . . . surely if he meant as much to me as she implied, I'd have remembered something, but no matter how hard I tried, there was nothing there. Maybe he'd have more of an effect on me in person, but for some reason, I doubted it. The man in the living room, on the other hand, affected me in ways that I didn't want to think too much about.

Exhaustion caught up with me; I was suddenly too tired to think. I pulled a pillow out from under the spread and punched it into shape before laying my head on it and closing my eyes. The scent of soap and aftershave wafted up from the pillowcase, and as I drifted off to sleep, I could almost feel his strong arms encircling me.

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In my dream, the bedroom's tasteful decorations faded, to be replaced by the dirty walls and unsteady furniture of a seedy hotel room. The firm mattress upon which I lay seemed to sag in the middle, and the crisp linens turned worn and dingy. I pulled the covers up to my chin and glanced to my right, realizing with a shock that I wasn't alone. Mr. Stetson

was in the bed with me. And someone was pounding on the door to the room, demanding to know what was going on in there . . .

I awoke with a start and sat bolt upright, my breath coming in panicked gasps, my mind protesting the idea of myself in such a place. The images in my head were so vivid that I cast a frantic glance at the other side of the bed, more than halfway expecting to find him there beside me.

Flushing deep red, I sank back onto the bed and fought to bring my rampaging emotions under control. Maybe it was just a bad dream. If it was a memory, it was one I wished had remained buried. I rubbed absently at the knot on my head, wishing I had an aspirin.

I couldn't stay here any longer. I had to go home, where I could relax and think and start to put the pieces of my life back together. I'd just call my mother to tell her I was all right, and then I'd insist that Mr. Stetson take me home.

I picked up the receiver and heard voices. Darn! I'd have to wait. I started to hang up, but Mr. Melrose's words caught my attention. "Lee, this is a serious matter."

Oh! They were talking business; I'd better not listen. I didn't even know if I had a security clearance. On the other hand, maybe it was something about the case, and maybe I'd be able to help.

Lee seemed to agree with Mr. Melrose. "I don't know what I'm going to do with her." Well, that made two of us. I didn't know what I was going to do, either. And I certainly didn't know what to do about him.

"Well, we just might have to terminate her." I pulled the phone away from my ear and stared at it in shock, but I could hear Mr. Melrose continue. "In her present condition, she's of no value to us and you know what we have to do!"

My hand was shaking, but I managed to silently return the receiver to its cradle. Terminate me? I knew that I hadn't been much help that afternoon, but wasn't killing me a little extreme? I should have realized that I couldn't just quit the spy business, but I never imagined that they'd go to such extreme lengths to keep their secrets safe, especially considering that I didn't remember any of them.

I wondered how they'd explain my disappearance, or if they'd even try. After all, it wouldn't be unheard of for someone in my present mental state to just wander off and never be heard from again. Oh, poor Mother! I couldn't do that to her. And what would the boys do without me?

I couldn't let this happen. I had to get away. I thought about Mr. Stetson, out in the living room. It was hard to believe that he was going along with Mr. Melrose's plans after I'd been so sure that we had . . . I had trusted him. What a disappointment.

A disappointment . . . Suddenly I remembered being in a seedy cowboy bar. Mr. Stetson was there, too, and we were arguing, but for some reason, I didn't feel like I was really

angry with him. I must have been, though — I threw my drink in his face, and I heard myself take a long shot. "Frankly, Ricky Joe, sex with you has always been a major disappointment!"

I squinched my eyes shut as tightly as I could and the image faded, bringing me back to the present with a jolt. As strange as the other memories had seemed to me, they'd been . . . real. This one was different -- as though I had been playing a part. And maybe I had been. Spies do that kind of thing, at least in the movies. After all, I'd called him "Ricky Joe", not "Lee". And I couldn't imagine saying such a thing to him and meaning it. In the few hours since he'd appeared in my hospital room, I'd learned that just a look from him could cause my heart to race and my breathing to grow shallow. And when he'd held me in his arms, I'd thought that I would melt. Even that small contact had surpassed any fantasy that my teenaged imagination had been able to devise.

It didn't matter, though. There were just too many disjointed pieces for me to make any sense of what I was remembering. And now they wanted to kill me.

I couldn't let them know that I'd overheard their plans. I had to sneak out. After all, if I were a spy, I'd know how to do things like that, right? My purse was in the living room, but I had a couple of dollars in my pocket -- that'd have to do. I tiptoed across the room, eased the window open, and crept out onto the fire escape. Ten minutes later, I was sitting on a bus, headed for Arlington.

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But I never made it home. Instead, I was kidnapped and taken to an airport. What had made me think that I'd be all right on my own? Mr. Stetson had told me that I was only a trainee spy; I obviously wasn't ready to go solo yet. If only he were here, he'd know what to do.

Then he had arrived, but I didn't think he'd really planned for the bad guys to take him prisoner. I mean, I know that the other man had a gun, but shouldn't Mr. Stetson have kicked it out of his hand or something? Some things about the spy business just weren't the way I'd imagined them. At any rate, he did know what to do, and when a noise from outside distracted the man with the gun enough for Mr. Stetson to punch him, it was my opportunity to escape. I managed to get aboard the plane just before it started down the runway.

Those were a few minutes that I wished I **could** forget. There was no good way to tell a pilot prone to fainting spells when he got excited that he was about to release nerve gas over Arlington. I guess it was just pure luck that he came around again in time to stop the plane before we ran off the end of the runway.

But all's well that ends well, I suppose. At least the excitement had brought my memory back to me - first the last two days, then my entire life, had flashed before my eyes as the plane headed down the runway, its pilot out cold. I could remember everything again.

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Well, of course Mr. Melrose hadn't meant to have me terminated in the ultimate sense -- he'd only been afraid that he'd have to fire me. Under more normal circumstances, I suppose I'd have known that, but he seemed to understand that I hadn't been thinking clearly when I'd jumped to the wrong conclusion. He congratulated Lee and me on a job well done, and I was reminded of why I liked helping out when I could.

The elevator doors were closing, and I stifled a laugh as I listened to Lee's suggestions for things I could tell my mother about my latest disappearance. At least he was getting an idea of what I had to go through, coming up with excuses on an increasingly routine basis.

"An incredibly handsome man . . ." Oh, he was that, and more . . . I ducked my head, hoping he wouldn't notice the blush that came to my cheeks as I thought again about how I'd convinced myself that I was having an affair with him. It was no wonder that I'd been confused by the things I'd remembered about him, but now they made a strange sort of sense.

Sneaking a glance at the man standing next to me, I allowed myself a moment of regret. While getting my memory back was wonderful, and realizing that I hadn't been having a secret affair with one man while publicly dating another had to be considered a relief, I had to admit to a little disappointment that my relationship with Lee wasn't quite what I had thought.

On the other hand, I drew a wistful satisfaction in knowing that something like that hadn't been chased from my memory so easily. I was sure I'd remember my imaginary "affair" with Lee Stetson for a long time, and I had a feeling that the real thing would be absolutely unforgettable. Maybe someday . . .

Well, why not? After all, I never thought that I'd really be a spy, and look at me now. Even a grown woman can have her fantasies, can't she?

The End

This story includes reference to the following episodes: *The First Time*, *There Goes the Neighborhood*, and *If Thoughts Could Kill* (all by Eugenie Ross-Leming and Brad Buckner), *The ACM Kid* (Gregory S. Dinallo), *Always Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth* (Peter Lefcourt), *Saved By the Bells* (Joel Steiger and Stu Krisman), *Sudden Death* (Tom Sawyer), and *Remembrance of Things Past* (Brad Buckner and Eugenie Ross-Leming).