

The Real Test

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Timeframe: This story takes place mid-fourth season, after "No Thanks for the Memory" but before "Do You Take This Spy." I don't believe cannon is broken.

THANKS to Kara and Tricia for reviewing this for me!

Amanda King walked slowly down the narrow corridor toward the Chem Lab, a slight frown furrowing her normally smooth brow. Something wasn't quite right. She didn't know why, but warning bells were peeling through her brain like shock waves. Something was definitely not right.

As she walked, Amanda reviewed the events of the day, trying to determine when this strange feeling had started. Not before she arrived at the Agency. It had actually been an unusually calm morning: Phillip had sat at the breakfast table daydreaming about his new girlfriend and, for once, Jamie had been too wrapped up in the book he was reading to taunt his brother. She left early, while the boys were still eating; Mother had promised to get them off to school so that Amanda could get ahead of the rush hour traffic. She smiled as she recalled Phillip's shocked face when she explained the reason for her early departure. "You still have to take tests?" he had gasped in disbelief. "At **your** age?" She almost wished she could have stayed to listen to the lecture she was sure had followed Phillip's comment. Since Mother had started flight school, she had been particularly eager to point out — to anyone who would listen — that a person was never too old to learn. Amanda was sure Mother had used her IFF "film making" classes to good advantage this morning.

The trip into DC had been uneventful. She had used the quiet drive to review her Agency training tapes, as last minute preparation for today's test. Lee always laughed at her when she crammed for tests; he said she already knew more about being a field agent than Effram Beaman ever would. But she enjoyed her classes,

and she really wanted to do well. It was important to her to prove she was more than the great Scarecrow's protégé.

After arriving at work, she had spent a few minutes upstairs in the Q Bureau, proof reading the report on the Korchak case. Lee hadn't been there, of course. She knew he was spending the entire morning at State, going over security details for an upcoming conference. She had barely started reviewing her paperwork when the phone rang, and Mrs. Marsten patched Billy Melrose through. She had given him a cheery "Good Morning, Sir" and had assured him that the Korchak report would be on his desk by 9am, before she went to downstairs for her test. Surprisingly, Billy had told her not to worry about the report, she could finish it later this afternoon.

Amanda's brow furrowed a little further. Yesterday, Mr. Melrose had seemed quite put out about the Korchak report, and this morning he had acted as though it was no big deal. Knowing how Mr. Melrose felt about timely reports, his attitude this morning had been a little odd. Still, Amanda hadn't actually heard the warning bells until she arrived at the classroom to see a hand-written sign on the door, informing the agency candidates that their test had been canceled and that they should report to the Chem Lab for a lecture and demonstration on Russian nerve gases. Beaman hated postponing tests even more than Mr. Melrose hated late reports. And wouldn't Mr. Melrose know that the test was canceled, since the lecture was going to involve a guest speaker - who would have been cleared through Mr. Melrose? Further, she had had quite a bit of first-hand experience with nerve gas. Certainly enough experience for Mr. Melrose to suggest that she skip the beginning of the lecture in favor of the report, under normal circumstances. *More* than a little odd, Amanda thought to herself as she made the final turn toward the Chem Lab.

As she rounded the corner, another irregularity struck Amanda. Jim Fisher and Dave Russert, two senior field agents, were loitering at the end of the hall, just outside a men's restroom. 'What are Fisher and Russert doing all the way down here?' Amanda wondered. There was no reason they should be participating in the nerve gas lecture. There was no reason, in fact, that they should be on this floor at all on a Wednesday morning before 9 am.

The warning bells pealed a little louder as Amanda pushed open the door to the Chem Lab and looked around. Her gaze immediately settled on Beaman, who was standing near the front of the room, looking extremely irate. It obviously hadn't been his idea to cancel the test. Of course, he also hadn't gotten over fact that he and two of his students had been the "element of surprise" in an Agency invasion drill yesterday. Especially the part where no one had warned him in advance before they had been called up to the bullpen to walk in on the mock terrorist attack. The

word at the water cooler was that Beaman had been upset that both students had been “killed” — and even more frustrated that he couldn’t give them any kind of negative mark since he had been “killed” as well. Poor Beaman, thought Amanda compassionately. He was given the position of training supervisor because of his teaching background, but sometimes his lack of field experience made things tough for him. It had to be embarrassing to be killed in front of two young men he was supposed to be teaching to stay alive.

Suddenly, something clicked in Amanda’s mind. The canceled test. The unfamiliar class setting. Fisher and Russert. The invasion drill. It only made sense to try a mock attack on the agency candidates, to see how they would react in an emergency situation. And what better time than when they were feeling relieved about the canceled test — and bored by a chemistry lecture.

Amanda eyes swept the room to determine the best position in case of a surprise attack. There were several heavy lab benches around the perimeter, and about two dozen folding chairs set up in the middle. Beaman was standing at the front of the room by a rather rickety looking wooden desk. There was only one door, about fifteen feet to Beaman’s right. The room’s light switches and an emergency alarm were just inside the door, only about a foot away from one of the lab benches.

Amanda nonchalantly chose a folding chair as close as possible to the light switches. As Beaman began calling the class to order and the other agent candidates began sitting down, she surreptitiously slid her chair closer to the cover of the heavy bench. Then she opened her purse and felt around for a possible weapon. After a brief search, she settled on a small perfume atomizer. She remembered using a can of hair spray pretty effectively against an adversary on one of her first cases with Lee. Perfume might work just as well if she could turn the lights out. As long as there was more than one assailant, pitch darkness would work to her advantage, since the intruders wouldn’t be able to fire their weapons without the risk of shooting each other. It was a good thing that none of the trainees carried guns; a sneak attack could get kind of dangerous if everyone in the room was armed. Fishing around in her purse again, she pulled out a pencil- sized flashlight. There was no sense breaking her leg tripping over something in the dark, if she could prevent it.

The room quieted down and Beaman started into a brief introduction of Russian nerve gases, explaining that a world renowned chemist would be along shortly to fill in the details. As Beaman droned on, Amanda wondered with a slight smile if she was getting paranoid. She would feel a little silly if she spent the entire lecture half hidden in the shadows and nothing unusual happened.

As if on cue, the door to the Chem Lab burst open and two masked figures charged into the room brandishing automatic weapons. Beaman jumped, scattering the handful of papers he had been holding as one of the gunmen grabbed him. From Beaman's eyes, it was apparent that he had not been forewarned about today's attack any more than he had been forewarned about yesterday's.

As Amanda ducked behind the lab bench, the second intruder ordered the class to remain seated. There were gasps and even a few shrieks, before the gunman ordered everyone to be silent. The man's words were cut off as the room plunged into darkness. "What the hell?" he growled; then he gave a strangled "arrghhh" as he was enveloped in a cloud of perfume that caused him to choke and drop his weapon. Ten seconds later, a wide eyed Beaman was caught in the beam of Amanda's flashlight, as she placed the muzzle of Russert's gun against Fisher's exposed back. Ten seconds after that, the drill ended with an Agency security team pouring through the door. "They weren't supposed to actually have nerve gas in here, you know," Russert coughed as one of the security guards helped him through the door. "I think I've been blinded." The guard chuckled good-naturedly. "Maybe, but you sure do smell nice," he quipped.

Beaman was picking up his scattered papers and glaring at Amanda when Billy Melrose entered the room a few moments later. "Someone got to the alarm really fast," Billy said as he smiled at the occupants of the room. "How many casualties do we have?"

"None, sir" reported one of the security guards with a wide smile. "Unless you count Russert. His wife will probably kill him unless he finds someplace to take a shower before he goes home tonight. Neither of our terrorists got a shot off, though. Mrs King disarmed them both."

Billy turned a warm smile on Amanda, as Beaman erupted. "In my opinion," he ranted, "it was totally unfair both to myself and to the other candidates to inform Mrs King about this drill in advance — especially since you didn't see fit to inform me."

"Just calm down. We didn't inform Amanda of anything," Billy stated placatingly.

"Well then Stetson told her," argued Beaman sullenly.

"He couldn't have. He didn't know about it. Fisher, Russert and I just made the plans this morning, and Scarecrow hasn't even been in the building today," Billy replied.

"Oh, well, in that case, Mrs King dealt with the situation quite, ah, adequately," Beaman conceded, but he continued to scowl at Amanda.

Billy gave Amanda a conspiratorial wink before turning back to Beaman with a barely suppressed smile. "This drill has put me in a bind. Russert is supposed to go out on assignment with Francine this morning, but I don't think he's going to be up to it. It's just a milk run, but I don't want to send her out alone, and I'm really short-handed. Do you think you could go? I'm afraid it will take most of the day."

Beaman's eyes brightened. "Well, since I assume we aren't going to have a speaker today, I suppose I could clear my schedule," he replied in a serious tone belied by the inane grin on his face. Turning to his students, he added "You ladies and gentlemen can spend the rest of the day reviewing for your Security Procedures test. Since you have an extra day to prepare, I will expect high marks. I'll see you tomorrow, 9am, classroom A."

As Beaman happily trotted out the door behind Billy, he turned back to Amanda. "Actually, that wasn't bad work Mrs King. Not bad at all," he said with a patronizing smile.

Amanda bit her lip and choked back a chuckle. She was back on Beaman's good side, but Francine was going to kill her. She decided to go out over her lunch hour and buy a big box of gourmet chocolate.

The End