

## Lost In The Sun

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The song 'Lost in the Sun' is by Dan Fogelberg from his album, "The Innocent Age." (1980-81; Full Moon Productions; Asylum Records; CBS, Inc..)

**Timing:** This story is set in early third season, just prior to "Over The Limit."

**Feedback:** Certainly. Any constructive comments are welcome, either on or off list.

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Lee Stetson guided his silver Corvette out of the late afternoon traffic and eased it into a parking spot. As he turned off the ignition, he glanced at the dashboard clock and grimaced. He was almost forty minutes late. 'Maybe she didn't wait,' he thought to himself, in an effort to assuage the twinge of guilt he felt over leaving her sitting, alone and unprotected, in a second rate bar. Surely she realized, after fifteen or twenty minutes, that he was unavoidably delayed, and she went home.

But even as the reassuring thought formed, Lee knew it was a fantasy. She wouldn't leave, \*especially\* if he was late. She would be worried, and she would wait. That was Amanda's problem: she never reacted like a normal female. Any other woman would get pissed at him for keeping her waiting and abandon him to his fate, but not Amanda. No, Amanda would wait. And more than likely, after she'd waited for half an hour, she would have called Billy . . .

A stronger twinge, partially of guilt and partially of irritation, coursed through him as he slid his long frame out of the low-slung sports car. What if she had called Billy? That was all he needed, when the entire purpose of meeting her here was to avoid Billy until he could get those overdue reports ready to hand in. Of course, if he was fair, he would admit that — if she had called to check on him — it was his own damn fault. When he had asked her to meet him here, he made the situation

sound more urgent than it really was. But then again, who ever said life was fair, right?

Slamming the car door with unnecessary force, Lee stalked toward the painted glass door of Kelsey's Bar. Pulling it open, he stepped into the dimly lit lounge and paused briefly to allow his eyes to adjust. Business was light, the usual happy hour crowd only beginning to straggle in. He didn't think it would be difficult to spot his quarry, even if she was moving around to avoid the power suits and barflies. He knew from experience that Amanda didn't enjoy the bar scene, but in a place like this it was almost impossible to escape unwanted company. Another twinge of guilt assailed him.

His eyes began methodically scanning tables, but he saw no sign of his partner. Just when he began to think that perhaps she \*had\* given up and gone home, he spotted her. But she wasn't alone, and she wasn't making any visible effort to escape. She was sitting in a cozy booth along the far wall, engaged in animated conversation with a dark-haired man Lee had never seen before. Amanda was smiling cheerfully at her admirer. One of her hands held a glass of white wine; the other absently twirled a strand of her soft brown hair. She didn't appear worried at all. In fact, she appeared to be enjoying herself, he realized with a flash of annoyance. Had she even noticed the time? Christ! He was almost forty minutes late; he could be lying dead in an alley somewhere, for all she knew! And here she sat, flirting with some bar room Lothario, acting like she didn't have a care in the world!

With a scowl, Lee strode purposefully across the bar toward the lovely brunette. He had almost reached her when she turned, almost as though she had sensed his approach. Her eyes lit up for a moment, but her welcoming smile quickly faded. She tilted her head to one side, a slight frown creasing her brow as she scrutinized his grim expression. "Lee," she finally greeted him, her voice slightly puzzled. "I was beginning to think you weren't going to show."

"My last, uh, meeting took a little longer than I anticipated," Lee responded, nodding faintly toward her companion to convey that he didn't want to discuss the meeting in front of unfamiliar eyes and ears. Then he added disapprovingly. "You didn't have to wait. You have a family to get home to." He emphasized "family" as though that one word alone would send her companion running. Turning his head slightly, he stared at the man.

For a long moment, two pairs of male eyes met each other challengingly. Then the other man rose slowly and turned to smile at Amanda with practiced charm. Removing a small, white card and a pen from his pocket, he jotted a note on the

back of the card and slid it across the table. "I'll talk to you later," he murmured. He directed a self-confident look at Lee before sauntering casually between the tables and out the door to the street.

Lee glared after him until he disappeared from view, then turned to Amanda. "You're not going to call that guy, are you?" he asked incredulously as he watched her slip the card into her purse.

Amanda shrugged lightly as she lowered her eyes to her wineglass. "I don't know," she answered nonchalantly, picking up the glass and gently swirling the remains of the pale amber liquid. "I might. He seemed like a nice man." She raised the glass to her lips and took a dainty sip, without looking at Lee.

"A—m—a—n—d—a," Lee drew her name out in exasperation. Placing both hands on the table, he leaned toward her as he spoke. "He picked you up in a bar."

She turned to face him. "He did not pick me up," she stated evenly, her eyes daring him to contradict her. "I haven't left this booth."

"Okay," Lee conceded, a hint of sarcasm creeping into his voice. "He tried to pick you up in a bar."

"And?" she prompted, arching a delicate brow.

Lee stared at her as he grasped for an adequate response. Did he really have to spell it out for her? "And," he ground out, "you should know that's not a safe way to meet men. The only guys you'll meet in a place like this are losers and low-lives."

"Oh, I see," she intoned slowly, appearing to consider his words. "And I suppose you met all the women in your little black books at the library. Or maybe at a church social . . ."

Lee's jaw worked in growing frustration. "That's different," he stated gruffly.

She blinked innocently, looking at him like an inquisitive child. "In what way is it different?"

Lee's temper flared, and he struggled to hold it in check. Amanda King was the most stubborn, infuriating female he had ever met; why couldn't she ever listen to reason? "It's just different," he gritted out through clenched teeth.

"Right." Amanda rolled her eyes; instead of looking properly chagrined, she looked slightly amused. "So, now that you've cleared that up, are you going to tell me why I'm here?"

Lee hesitated. At the moment, those overdue reports had fallen several notches down his priority list, far behind talking some sense into his obstinate partner and having a good stiff drink. "It's nothing important," he grumbled petulantly.

Anger flickered in Amanda's coffee brown eyes. "So I've been sitting here for . . . , " she looked pointedly down at her wrist and up again, ". . . forty-five minutes because of nothing important?"

Lee took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Okay, he had been late, but that wasn't the issue. "It *was* important, when I asked you to come. It isn't important now."

"Oh." Her look faded into one of mild confusion. Setting her wine glass on the table, she laid her left hand gently across his right one, causing a familiar warmth to spread up his arm and almost causing him to lose his train of thought. "Well, if you're sure you don't need me, I'd better head home," she suggested hesitantly.

"Fine," he muttered, turning his gaze away. When she looked like that, he had an almost overwhelming urge to apologize — and he was right, dammit!

"Fine," she echoed softly. After studying him for several seconds, she rose gracefully from her seat and picked up her purse. After another short pause, she sighed and walked away.

Lee swallowed the impulse to follow her as he watched her slim back depart through the outside door. "Fine," he repeated to the now empty booth. Running one hand through his hair, he made his way back to the bar and ordered a double Scotch, straight up. Damn! Why did he let Amanda do this to him? He was being perfectly reasonable, and suddenly he felt like a jerk. And what was he going to do about those reports? He would just have to go into the Agency tomorrow and risk Billy's wrath.

Settling onto a barstool, he glanced at his watch. He had a date in less than an hour. Ten minutes ago, he had been looking forward to it. Why had it suddenly lost some of its appeal?

*Every night I ask myself that same old question: why?  
And every day the answer seems more distant.*

Lee raised his glass and downed half the contents in one swallow. As the fiery liquid burned its way down his throat, he pondered the unexpected turn of the afternoon. 'Why do I let Amanda King get under my skin like that?' he chided himself angrily. 'And why does it matter to me if she calls that guy?' Sure, he felt responsible for Amanda on the job — he had gotten her into the espionage game, after all. But there was absolutely no reason for him to involve himself in her love life. They were friends . . . good friends . . . very good friends, but even very good friends knew where to draw the line.

*I always knew the final truths lay just beneath the lies  
But I never thought they'd be this hard to find.  
I never thought they'd be this hard to find.*

That comment Amanda had made about his black books was really low, he thought sourly. He worked hard; he put his butt on the line every day — he deserved a little fun after he set aside his gun for the night. He had to admit, though, that he had met many of the women listed in those books in places exactly like this. In the early stages of their acquaintance, each of them had seemed alluring and exciting; however, most of them had turned out to be shallow and boring. But not Leslie, his date for tonight, he reminded himself firmly. Leslie was beautiful. Leslie was intelligent. Leslie was sweet and warm and thoughtful. In fact, Leslie was almost perfect. Almost . . . .

*Every time I try to put this puzzle into place  
There always seems to be a piece that's missing.*

Downing the remainder of his drink, Lee concentrated on summoning a mental picture of Leslie. It was more difficult than he expected; the eyes that sparkled back at him didn't seem quite right. He wasn't certain, but he didn't think Leslie's eyes were brown. Or perhaps it was her attire that was a little "off." The last time he had seen her, she had been wearing a conservative suit more appropriate for her duties as a high-level interpreter than for a night on the town. He wondered absently how she would look in something black and slinky, something like . . . He closed his eyes and determinedly pushed the memory of a particular black, slinky evening dress from his mind.

Lee looked at his right hand, which for some reason felt oddly cold. Flexing his fingers, he tried to imagine Leslie's hand nestled within his. It was odd, now that he considered it, but he didn't recall ever holding Leslie's hand. Not that it really

mattered, of course. Holding hands might be integral to junior high school romance, but it wasn't necessary to an adult liaison.

*And through the eyes of someone else I look into my face  
And can't believe the sorrow there I see.  
I can't believe this lonely man is me.*

Again shaking his head, Lee glanced up and stared at his own image in the mirror above the bar. This was the image he projected to the world and, for the most part, he was satisfied with it. Lee Stetson: cool, suave, sophisticated. No one saw beneath the polished exterior. Well, almost no one. Unbidden, another image intruded. Amanda, sitting with him outside a small cafe, reading the inner man so clearly, telling him that he was special . . . How was it that she saw the sorrow and loneliness he hid so well from the rest of the world?

*The faster we run  
The further away the dreams that we chase become.  
Lost in the sun  
Spinning and turning, blind in the burning  
Light of day, we have to turn away.*

Slamming his empty glass onto the smooth surface of the bar, Lee got up and moved swiftly out into the late afternoon sunshine. Almost blinded by the sudden glare, he shielded his eyes with his hand as he hurried toward his car. Only when he reached its side did he realize he had left his keys dangling in the ignition. "Good Lord," he muttered to himself. "How could I be so careless?"

Even before the question had fully formed in his mind, Lee knew the answer. He'd started letting Amanda remove the keys for him, just as he'd started depending on Amanda in so many little, inconsequential ways. But that had to stop, he told himself firmly. He didn't want to depend on anyone. He was perfectly satisfied with his solitary life. He had adventure; he had excitement; he had Leslie to provide a little romance.

As he opened the car door and slid into the driver's seat, Lee glanced at the dashboard clock and grimaced. He might \*not\* have Leslie to provide a little romance, he realized with a groan. He was going to be late — and she was going to be really pissed . . .

**The End**