

Give Me Wings

Author: Vikki

Disclaimer: The usual disclaimers apply. The SMK characters and the Agency belong to Warner Brothers, Shoot the Moon Productions, and a bunch of other lucky folks. I am borrowing them for my own enjoyment, and I'm not profiting from doing so. References are made to "The Triumvirate," "Photo Finish," and "Mission of Gold." Credit for those episodes belongs to the individual writers.

The song, 'Give Me Wings,' is by Rhonda Fleming & Don Schlitz (Irving Music, Inc./Eaglewood Music (BMI)/MCA Music, A Division of MCA Inc./Don Schlitz Music) Song lyrics are in italics. This story, exclusive of the aforementioned, is mine. Please don't reproduce or distribute it without my permission.

Archiving: Emily Ann and Merel have blanket permission to archive any story I post. Anyone else, please ask first.

Timing: Late fourth season. Amanda has recovered from the gunshot wound she sustained in "Mission of Gold" and has been released for active field duty.

Feedback: Yes, definitely. All comments are welcome.

Special Thanks to Pam, who rescued this story from my "hopeless" file and gently pushed and prodded me until I completed it - and to Dix, who laughed with me, not at me, when she asked "What the heck does this passage mean?" and I said "I don't have a clue."

*He asked her, what gifts can I bring you
To prove that my love for you is true
I want to make you mine forever
There's nothing on this earth I would not do*

It was exquisite.

The fine, etched crystal seemed almost weightless in her grasp, reminding her of the old-fashioned spun sugar candy her grandmother had been fond of crafting more than thirty years ago. As she held the vase toward the window and rotated it to view the intricate engraving, the sun's rays reflected the movement, sending

dozens of tiny rainbows shimmering onto the wall to her left. Even the slight motion resulting from her shallow breathing caused the colors to shift and dance, and for a moment she was mesmerized by undulating hues and patterns. Absently, she wondered how it was possible for human hands to create something so delicate and perfect yet with obvious function.

As she turned to meet her husband's expectant gaze, her initial wonderment yielded to a fleeting surge of pique followed by a perverse wave of melancholy. For one bitter moment, she longed for a marriage free of the subterfuge that seemed to permeate every aspect of her relationship with Lee Stetson, and she coveted the normalcy which would allow her to accept a token of her spouse's affection without worrying about someone else's reaction or suspecting an ulterior motive.

Even before her customary cheerfulness began to reassert itself, she couldn't help being touched by the tenderness evident in Lee's hazel orbs. She was certain there was more than one incentive behind his generosity, but she knew he didn't bring her gifts merely to tie her to her desk. He had a sincere desire to surround the woman he loved with beautiful things.

Lowering her eyes, she took a visual inventory of his most recent offerings. On her first day back in the office, he had presented her with an elegant day-planner bound in rich, burgundy leather. A few days later, a pewter paperweight, molded into a miniature replica of a train engine, had appeared on a stack of memos. Then, a classic gold pen and pencil set, inscribed "AMANDA'S" had found its way into her desk drawer. She smiled as she recalled his conspiratorial grin when he held the two writing implements up to a magnifying glass, revealing that each apostrophe was actually a tiny heart. Her own heart had melted when he playfully explained it would be their secret that the inscription actually stood for 'Amanda Stetson.'

She set the crystal vase onto the desk and folded her hands on the smooth, wooden surface, searching for words to open a discussion Lee had been avoiding since she had returned to work. "It's beautiful, Lee," she began, "but-"

"The flowers you bring from your garden . . ." he interrupted, shoving his hands into his pockets as he shifted restlessly from foot to foot, "deserve something nicer than that." He nodded toward the dime store vase on the corner of her desk before focusing on a spot somewhere over her head.

"Lee . . ." she repeated, drawing his name out in a patient attempt to gain his attention without losing her own composure. "This is beautiful, and I love it . . ." she paused, deciding to try an indirect approach, "but don't you think something

this expensive is going to lead to a lot of questions?"

He met her eyes then, apparently baffled by her reference to the value of his gift. He clearly hadn't anticipated an argument over money. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," she continued in measured tones, "that most of the people who come into this office have a very good idea of the salary earned by a trainee agent. And the cost of this . . ." she gestured toward the vase, "could pay for my groceries for a couple of months."

Realization dawned in his eyes, but a moment later they narrowed, and Amanda recognized the determination in his expression. "Anyone who wastes time evaluating your desk accessories doesn't have enough work to do," he stated gruffly.

"Maybe not," she agreed mildly. "But this is inviting speculation."

"I want you to have it," he said, a note of pleading in his forceful tone. Claspng his hands behind his back, he paced a path from her desk to the vault, then returned to lean toward her, both palms flat on her desk. "I want to be able to show my wife how much I love her."

"You do that every day." At his derisive snort, she offered a dainty shrug and a wan smile. "At least . . . every day that we see each other," she amended.

She saw the shadow of pain that passed over his features at her open acknowledgement of the limits imposed by their mystery marriage, and she wished she could take back the unintentionally hurtful words.

"I want to do more," he responded in a husky whisper.

*She said, anything I've wanted
You have given willingly
So now there's only one more thing I need
If you love me, give me wings
Don't be afraid if I fly
A bird in a cage will forget how to sing
If you love me, give me wings*

What he wanted was to keep her in the office, out of harm's way.

And part of her wanted to stay.

Her life had been in danger dozens of times during the past four years, but she had managed to avoid dwelling on the risks inherent in her job until she was wounded in California. During her long and painful recovery, she had far too much time to contemplate her own mortality, and she had been forced to consider how her death might impact her mother and her sons.

But she had been unprepared for the reaction of the man who was her partner, best friend and husband. At least Mother and the boys felt a certain security in knowing that her being shot had been a chance occurrence and the belief, however unfounded, that it wasn't likely to be repeated. Despite all logical arguments to the contrary, Lee held himself personally responsible for her injury, and he seemed to consider it an omen of worse things to come. His natural protectiveness toward her, evident from the beginning of their working relationship, had grown over the course of the past few weeks into a nearly frantic need to keep her safe, at any cost.

Did he even see what he was doing? She couldn't be sure. He was too skillful in evading her efforts to discuss the matter. Amanda realized that she was more attuned to his fears and feelings than he was himself. He probably didn't even recognize that so many of his gifts were chosen to make her hours spent in the office more attractive.

In the week since Dr. Kelford had stamped "Return to Active Duty" on her medical file, he had become even more evasive, and they had managed to avoid a confrontation on the issue only because of an unexpected lull in the work flow. Billy hadn't assigned any new cases to the Q Bureau - so the two of them had spent most of their working hours finishing old reports, filing, and completing mundane busywork. But this morning they had a new assignment, and Amanda knew intuitively that it was the kind of case where she should be with Lee, watching his back. Anytime he felt a personal stake, he was apt to become so focused on his goal that he ignored the risks along the way.

So what would she do? It was difficult enough to conquer her own demons. How could she overcome his fears, too?

She reached out and trailed her fingers gently across his cheek before laying them across his left hand. Lightly, she touched the place where his wedding band should have been. "You've given me more than I ever dreamed possible," she said softly. "But the one thing I need the most, you won't even talk about."

The hand Amanda was caressing balled into a fist; Lee looked almost panicked when she grasped his wrist to prevent him from backing away.

"I've been approved for field duty." She spoke evenly, meeting his eyes with a calmness she didn't feel. "And I need your help."

"You don't have to go back until you're ready," he said, his gaze dropping to the smoky gray train engine. She wondered whether he had purposely misunderstood her. "You don't ever have to go back," he added in a voice so low she had to strain to make out his words.

Amanda gave Lee's hand a gentle squeeze before releasing it. "I don't need you to hold me back, Lee. I need you to help me move forward. And I can't move past . . . what happened in California . . . until you do, too."

Lee straightened abruptly and paced across the office a second time. "I'm not trying to hold you back," he said, ignoring her reference to the trauma they had endured on their California honeymoon.

"You're trying to keep me out of the field. When the Security Review Board pulled my badge last fall, you were on my side. Now you're the one trying to clip my wings."

His look told her he remembered the time, not many months previously, when he fought for her right to work with him. "It's not that simple. You haven't watched someone you love gunned down before your eyes."

"No," she conceded. "But I've watched someone I love accused of treason and hunted down like a dangerous animal. I've watched someone I love come within a few hours of dying of a Russian virus and within a few seconds of being poisoned by a dead man's watch." She stopped to let her words sink in before continuing. "And I never stopped believing in you."

Amanda watched his jaw work silently, and she knew much more needed to be said. "You know I have good instincts," she pressed, "and I'm almost half way through my formal training. I need you to believe in me again."

*He walked over to the window
Silently stared into space
He said, I just want to protect you*

'Cause this world is a dangerous place

Lee ceased his pacing and stood stiffly beside the window, staring out into the street below. Amanda watched as he took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "Sometimes instincts and training aren't enough." The words were low, with a sharp edge of rancor, and as he spoke, Lee turned toward his desk. Amanda followed his gaze to the manila folder Billy had given him that morning. The file was unmarked, but she knew it was Dan Pearson's, and she knew the scenario it described: highly skilled, well-respected agent - on his way to a routine meeting with a contact - killed in an ambush by assailants unknown. "Even the best die."

"So do Arlington housewives," she responded quietly, glancing briefly at the sympathy card she had been writing when Lee entered the office.

He turned to her then, meeting her eyes in understanding. "Yeah," he said, his voice almost inaudible. Closing his eyes for a moment, he shook his head slightly. She watched his throat muscles contract as he swallowed.

Amanda blinked back the moisture that threatened to obscure her vision. Crying never solved anything, she reminded herself resolutely as the image of her neighbor, Mary Beth Watson, flashed across her memory. They had been friends for more than a dozen years, and her death had been all the more painful for being completely unexpected and totally senseless. Like Amanda, Mary Beth had been in the wrong place at the wrong time: struck by a drunk driver while loading groceries into her car in the parking lot of the Jiffy Market. The shock had helped Amanda focus on getting back into life - but it had the opposite effect on Lee. In the few days since Mary Beth's funeral, he had become even more entrenched in his efforts to shield her from every peril.

She wasn't surprised when Lee suddenly began moving again, pacing briskly a few times across the office before stopping at his desk. He rubbed his hands together and then looked down at his wristwatch. "Look," he stated with a false air of cheerfulness, as he grabbed his car keys from the bookcase behind his desk, "I need to track down Jimmy Davis before we're going to have any solid leads. We can discuss this later."

"I'm going with you," she said calmly, reaching into her desk drawer to remove her purse.

"I can handle it."

She arched a sculpted brow as she waited for him to realize the absurdity of claiming he didn't need backup while meeting with the same contact Pearson had planned to meet the day he was ambushed. She didn't have to wait long. His eyes widened almost imperceptibly before he began to shift his gaze around the office in a distracted manner.

"I think there could be a clue in this." He picked up a slim black notebook embossed with the initials "DP" and shook it slightly, his words quick and agitated. "Crypto's been through it already, looking for clues, but you might be able to find something . . ."

"I'm going with you," she repeated. "You need backup, and I'm not letting you go alone."

"Amanda . . ." He drew her name out in the way he always did when he was frustrated. After a moment, however, his shoulders slumped, as though he knew his position was indefensible. "It's dangerous," he mumbled, "and . . ."

*She put her arms around him
She said, I know you mean well
But there are lessons I must learn for myself
If you love me, give me wings
Don't be afraid if I fly
A bird in a cage will forget how to sing
You can trust me, give me wings*

Rising gracefully, Amanda walked across the room until she stood behind him. Encircling his waist with both arms, she laid her head against his back. She could feel the tension in his muscles through the coarse fabric of his jacket. After a long moment, he turned within her embrace, his own arms coming around her. He brushed a light kiss across her forehead before resting his head against hers. "And what?" she questioned gently.

"And I don't want to lose you." His words were muffled against her hair.

"There's more than one way to lose someone," she whispered, her voice unsteady. Raising her head to look at him, she took a deep breath. "I'm not going to stay behind this time."

Understanding flickered in his eyes. "I 'm not trying to leave you behind," he said, his tone hesitant and uncertain.

"But that's exactly what you're doing." She removed her arms from around him and took a step back. "I know you mean well, Lee, but you have to trust me to be beside you."

*She said, up above the clouds, you can see forever
And I know you and I can learn to fly together
If you love me, give me wings
Don't be afraid if I fly
A bird in a cage will forget how to sing
You can trust me, give me wings*

"I do trust you, Amanda. More than I've ever trusted anyone." He picked up the Pearson file and slapped it with his open palm. "It's this I don't trust." He waved one arm in a wide arc. "You shouldn't be involved in this."

How many times over the years had he expressed the same vexation over getting her involved with the Agency? She'd lost count long ago. But she knew he wasn't ready to walk away yet. And she wasn't ready to walk away either. "It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it," she offered with a crooked smile.

His eyes brightened as his lips formed into a faint pout. "I should have known those words would come back to haunt me," he complained, and she knew he remembered their discussion the previous Spring during her brief stay at the Hotel Cumberland. They both had compelling reasons for facing the risks inherent to their job.

"Yeah, you should have." Amanda's eyes sparkled teasingly for a moment before her expression turned serious again. "Lee, this **is** a dangerous job." She glanced down to the floor and back up again. "But there **are** parts I like a lot . . ."

"So I guess we're stuck with it," he finished for her. "So," he asked with a resigned sigh, "what are we gonna do now?"

"Now we're going find out who killed Dan Pearson."

"Yeah. We'd better hit the streets." He reached out and took her hand, squeezing her fingers. "Partners?"

"Partners," she echoed softly as she returned the gentle pressure. "Forever."

*If you really love me
Give me wings*

The End