

Special Disclaimer: The author has used some of the original dialogue from "We're Off to See the Wizard," written by Whitney Wherrett Roberson.

Author's Notes: Due to the fact that it doesn't flow with the rest of the episodes in the order they were presented on CBS, I have taken "Welcome to America, Mr. Brand" out of the mix. Just assume that the episode did happen, but prior to "A Lovely Little Affair." Also, some of the scenes which are referenced were cut from PAX's syndicated versions. For this, I do apologize and hope that it is not too confusing.

This story is combination of "the present," journal entries and memories surrounding the third season. **Journal entries appear in bold type, memories appear in italics.**

The Long Journey

Amanda Stetson sat heavily on the bed, racking her brain. Now, where on earth had she put that brooch? Aunt Lillian would be arriving that evening and Amanda wanted to be sure that she wore it at least once during her visit. Amanda thought back. The brooch really hadn't been the kind of jewelry that she normally wore, but she obviously didn't want to get rid of it. So, she must have...

Amanda's brain suddenly snapped to attention. Of course, the box! Amanda went to her closet and carefully pulled down the large cardboard box that sat on the top shelf. She placed the box on the queen-sized bed and pulled the top off. She glanced in and saw the green velvet case that held the brooch lying amongst the scrapbooks and high school mementos. Opening it, she realized why she had put the brooch away in the first place. It wasn't exactly unattractive. But it was rather large. Amanda's taste was a more simple and understated. The only jewelry she usually wore was her wedding set, her heart pendant, a watch and a pair of simple earrings. She sighed and then smiled as she thought of how Lee would react when he saw her wearing this huge, gold cat!

She was just about to close the cardboard box when she spotted something. Oh, my gosh! She had completely forgotten that she had put it in here. She carefully pulled out the soft, brown leather-bound journal that sat unobtrusively with the other items. The journal. She had completely forgotten about it. She opened it up to the first page--September 19,1985.

A smile crept to Amanda's lips as she recalled that period in their lives five years ago. My goodness, all they had gone through. Well, at least their marriage was no longer a secret. She closed the book and ran her fingers over its smooth cover and began to replace it carefully in the box. She looked at it again and stopped. Why not? She had some time. She walked over to the chair next to bedroom window. Warm afternoon sunlight filtered in. She sat down and opened the book again.

September 19, 1985--

It's after 1:00 a.m. and I can't sleep. Lee left almost a half an hour ago and I can't get my mind to slow down enough to drift off again. I can't believe he came into my bedroom! That was a first. And when I think about how must have looked...

I wish he'd just realize that I can do this job. He's always so certain that I'm going to screw everything up. Well, at least he's going to let me meet Alan for breakfast. Alan... It felt nice to be kissed. It felt nice to be wanted, but... Something was missing. He wasn't... No, I can't

let myself think that way. Lee is just my partner and my friend. So, why couldn't I tell him that Alan kissed me? It was just part of my cover... I just couldn't tell him.

But Lee... in my bedroom, somehow that felt... Stop it, Amanda!

Was it my imagination or did he hold my hand a little longer than necessary? Not that I minded, of course.

Amanda smiled to herself. No she hadn't minded. The Alan Chamberlain case had showed her that her feelings for Lee had been more than just an idle crush or infatuation. Her feelings for Lee couldn't be replaced by another man. She thought back to the opera that Lee had invited her to in the guise of a tactile demonstration of how a trained operative establishes contact.

The music was intoxicating. Amanda smiled and slyly looked over at Lee. The music wasn't the only thing that was intoxicating. He looked so handsome in his tuxedo. She looked back at the stage, not wanting to be caught staring. This invitation was

just a friendly gesture. Nothing more than that. But still, he had looked at her rather appreciatively when he saw her in the long black evening gown. She smiled again and tried very hard to concentrate on the music and not on who was sitting beside her.

"Thanks for the invitation, Lee," Amanda said after he had driven her home. "The Verdi festival was wonderful. I'm sorry that I couldn't do coffee afterwards, but I have to get up early in the morning. Mr. Melrose asked me to come in and work on some expense reports."

Lee grinned. "At least you don't need to worry about mine. We'll do coffee some other time."

They looked at each other. She couldn't seem to make herself get out of the car. Some inexplicable force held her in place. The moonlight fell across his face and she had to hold herself back from stroking it. Lee looked as if he was about to say something, but a car passing by interrupted him. The moment was gone.

Force or no force, she had to get out of there. She cleared her throat, in search of her voice. "Well, it's getting late. I should... probably get inside."

Lee hopped out of the car and went around to open her door. As she stepped out, Lee took her hands. "Amanda, thanks for coming with me tonight. I had a good time."

She looked up into his hazel eyes and grinned. "Me, too."

He still held her hands and looked as if he were considering asking her a question. He looked down, she knew he was deciding how to approach a difficult subject.

"Lee? Is something wrong?" she asked, scanning his features.

"Well, not exactly," he said a little cautiously. He looked as if he was going to change his mind and not ask whatever it was that was on his mind, but at the last minute chose to forge ahead. "Last week, after we saved Alan's sister and I left you and Alan alone to talk... "

Amanda wasn't exactly sure where this was going, but she knew that she was uneasy about the direction.

"Yeah?"

"Well, I ... I..." Lee stumbled. "I saw him kiss you."

Amanda paled. He saw Alan kiss her!

"Is there... I mean, are you... ?" Lee didn't seem to know how to finish his thought.

Amanda looked at him pointedly. "Why do you want to know?"

A strange look crossed Lee's face and then he dropped her hands. The "wall" emerged and he became detached. He cleared his throat and continued, "Well, I only bring it up, because it's important for you to remember to keep professional and personal feelings separate when you're on a case and I wouldn't want you to get them confused."

This was unbelievable! Once again he was implying that she couldn't handle a simple assignment. But instead of getting defensive and ruining a perfectly nice evening, she decided that the best course of action was to keep it light. "Hey, Scarecrow, are you saying that I don't know how to do my job?" she chuckled. "As someone once told me, 'It was all part of my cover. Nothing more to it.'" Was it her imagination or did a wave of relief pass through Lee's eyes? "Look, I gotta get into the house. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Yeah. Okay. See you tomorrow." Lee smiled slightly.

She walked around the corner and up the path to her front door. Lee could be so infuriating!

September 30, 1985--

I think some of Lee's demons have finally been put to rest. I was so worried about him. But in the office this morning he really seemed to be acting like his old self. The gleam was back in his eye.

I think he's really beginning to trust me with his past. I know how difficult it is for him to open up to anyone about the pain he's experienced. The fact that he came to me... I can't seem to find a word to describe how that makes me feel. Words don't seem satisfactory. All I know is that I've never felt closer to Lee Stetson than I do right now.

And the roses! That was so incredibly sweet and I was immensely touched. I wonder if he was going to ask me what I think he was going to ask me? Darn phone! It always seems to ring at exactly the wrong moment.

"Oh, Amanda..."

"Hmmm?"

"Something for you..." Lee reached down, brought up a small bunch of red roses and presented them to her. They were so lovely. She accepted them tenderly, knowing what a huge gesture this was. Not just that he was giving her flowers, but that they were red roses, the same roses that had covered Dorothy that fateful day ten years ago. Was this a sign that he was now ready to move on? The look in his eyes told her that he had begun the journey to close that chapter in his life. Amanda knew at this point that he truly did view their friendship as something very special. His hand still held the roses as well. Their hands were nearly touching.

Amanda found herself at a loss for words. "Oh."

Lee looked at her and smiled. "Thanks."

Instinctively, she leaned over and softly kissed his cheek. As she pulled back, she smiled at him warmly. He smiled back. Their eyes met and held for a few moments.

"Amanda, would you--"

The phone rang, interrupting him. Lee's eyes voiced his apology. "I should get that. Excuse me." He released his hold on the roses, severing the connection. He picked up the receiver. "Lee Stetson..." A look that Amanda couldn't place crossed his face. His voice became soft, yet slightly uncomfortable, "Oh, hi..."

Amanda decided to get off her perch on the corner of Lee's desk. Wanting to appear busy, so she went to the cabinet to file the folder he had just given her. She recognized the tone of his voice. He was talking to a woman. Amanda wondered who it was. She knew that he hadn't been seeing anyone recently. At least, he hadn't mentioned anyone.

"When did you get into town?... Uh-huh... Yeah , that would be fine... Okay, I'm finished here, so I'll come and get you. All right... See you soon... Bye." He hung up the phone. Amanda looked over her shoulder at him. He caught her eye and smiled uncomfortably. "Uh... I have to go. Can you finish filing those things for me?"

Amanda smiled. "Sure." Before she could stop herself the words were out of her mouth. "Where are you going?"

Lee cleared his throat as he stood up. "Um... A friend of mine is in town from Paris. I'm going to go over and say, 'hi.'"

Amanda smiled knowingly. "Oh."

Lee ignored her comment and headed for the office door. "Well, I'll see you on Monday." He paused briefly and looked at her before he left. He smiled warmly. "Thanks again. For everything."

"No problem. I'll see you Monday."

Amanda watched Lee as he left. She had this feeling that he was going to ask her to dinner, if only that phone hadn't rung. She shook her head ruefully as she finished her filing and headed for the door herself.

October 12, 1985---

Just got back from the firing range. I really hate the idea of having to shoot anyone. But Lee is right, if I'm really going to be his backup, I need to be able to protect him. I just hope I never have to actually use it. It felt amazing when he stood behind me, showing me the correct stance, how to take aim, how not to get knocked over by the "kick." It was actually a little bit of a distraction having him there. Did he really have to wear that aftershave I love so much?!

I still don't know what to make from his total change in behavior. We had dinner last night. Spent this afternoon together and he didn't bring up Leslie's name once. Not that I really wanted to talk about her, but I'm curious... Is he still seeing her? I know that she shouldn't bother me. He's dated so many women, but she was different from all the others. She could have been... Then again, maybe her normalcy bored him? Maybe that's why he decided not to go to the embassy party last night. Maybe it had absolutely nothing to do with me. But when he smiled at me last night, it almost felt like... I simply cannot think about it. I have to put Lee Stetson out of my mind. He is my partner and my friend.

Amanda rushed in the door to get ready for her dinner with Lee. They were supposed to meet at The Manor House at seven. She had an hour and a half to spend with Mother and the boys. She went into the kitchen to find her mother sweeping up sand and broken glass from the linoleum. "What happened here? Jamie's worm farm?"

Dotty looked up at Amanda, annoyance clearly written across her features. "Your sons! Hunter Conrad is picking me up in twenty minutes and they do this! I sent them to neutral corners to forgo any blood-letting."

"Mother, slow down. What happened to Jamie's worm farm?" Did she see something wiggling around in the sand?

"Well, Phillip decided that Jamie was doing it all wrong and tried to take over. Jamie wanted to do it on his own. They fought and you see what's left." Dotty pulled out the dustpan.

"Please, tell me, they didn't get the worms in yet." Amanda looked desperately at her mother and then looked back down at the floor. Oh no, she definitely saw movement.

"Yes, they did." Dotty handed the broom and dustpan to Amanda. "Dear, could you finish cleaning this up? I really have to get ready for my weekend." Dotty went upstairs, not waiting for an answer.

As Amanda cleaned up the mess, she realized that she would have to find a place for the boys to spend the night. She had completely forgotten about her mother's

weekend plans. An uncomfortable shiver claimed her body. She shook her head to keep undesirable images at bay. After she deposited the debris in a garbage bag, she leaned the broom against the wall and went to the telephone.

She arrived ten minutes late. It couldn't be helped. She had tried to call Lee, but he had already left. She entered the restaurant and was guided to "Mr. Stetson's" table. Lee stood up, as he saw Amanda approach. "Hi, sorry I'm late. You wouldn't believe the mess I got home to! The worm farm was all over the floor and then I had to talk to the boys about fighting and responsibility. And then I had to find a place for them to spend the night, since Mother is going to the coast with Hunter Conrad, my father's old fishing buddy and you really don't want to get me started on that--"

"Amanda," Lee interrupted her. Amusement danced in his eyes. "It's all right. You're here now. Just take a breath, have a seat and relax." He held out the chair for her.

Amanda sat down, smiling up at him weakly. "I'm sorry. I've just been in such a rush. This has been quite a week--personally and professionally." She saw a strange look pass over Lee's face at the mention of the word "personally." Why did things tumble out of her mouth like that? Why couldn't she think about what she said, before she said it. She looked around the dining room. "This is a lovely restaurant. I've heard that the food is delicious."

"Yes it is," Lee agreed.

The waiter came to their table with a bottle of wine. Lee had obviously ordered it before she had arrived. She watched him as he tested the red elixir and deemed it satisfactory. The waiter poured them each a glass and set down the bottle. Lee and Amanda gave the waiter their orders and he left as unobtrusively as he'd arrived.

Lee held up his glass. "To an evening with no 'shop talk.'"

Amanda raised her glass in agreement and smiled. "To no 'shop talk.'"

They both sipped and silence enveloped the table. Amanda searched her mind for something interesting to say. The one thing they had in common was the Agency.

What would they find to talk about? She looked at Lee uncertainly, silently pleading for help. He looked almost as lost as she felt.

Lee cleared his throat. "So the boys were having a problem this afternoon?"

Amanda released her breath. "Well, it was nothing really. Jaime's science project is a worm farm and Phillip decided to help in his own special way. I'll just have to spend this weekend helping to repair the damage. The bad news is, we lost the worms. The good news is, they were pretty easy to contain. The only saving grace is that it wasn't an ant farm. Although, if it had been and memory serves me, I know the ant exterminator personally."

"Actually, it is lucky that wasn't an ant farm, because I have it on good authority that he's changed professions. The pressure got to be too much." he quipped.

They both chuckled at the memory.

Conversation began to flow easily after this point. They skirted the issues of work and really began to talk about themselves. Throughout dinner they talked about Lee's travels and Amanda's current charity work. They updated each other on the Colonel, Emily Farnsworth, Conrad Barnhill and others they both knew. All in all, it was a very pleasant meal.

"So, tell me about this new guy your mother's seeing," Lee probed when their coffee and dessert arrived.

"Hunter Conrad?" Amanda grimaced. She was still very uncomfortable with the idea of her mother going away for the weekend with Rebecca's Fantasies lingerie in her suitcase. It brought to mind images she really didn't want to face, even as an adult with children of her own. "Well, he was my father's fishing buddy. He and his wife spent a lot of summer vacations with us. Mr. Conrad used to call me Stringbean, just to tease me." Lee grinned at this. Amanda went on, "His wife died a few years ago and I guess he looked Mother up. I know that it shouldn't bother me. My mother is an adult. But Lee," she looked at him with a slightly pained expression, "it's my mother!"

"This is a new side to Dotty," he mused. "Isn't she the one who was giving you a bad time about your 'clandestine love affairs?' She's full of surprises."

"Yeah. A lot of people seem to be this week," Amanda said softly. She found that she couldn't meet Lee's eyes. "Actually, it's kind of funny. When I think about the fuss she made when all of us Kappas wanted to go to Florida for Spring Break my junior year of college. She absolutely refused to let me go. She was adamant that the boys down there had only one thing on their minds."

"Well, she was right. Man, the Kappa house... My fraternity brothers called me Lockpick Lee, because I could get in the back door of that house in ten seconds flat." Lee recalled, smiling.

"So, that's where you developed your talent," Amanda laughed.

"Hey, a guy's gotta start somewhere."

Lee walked Amanda to her car. The cool night air made her shiver slightly. She pulled her coat tightly around her. "Well, thanks for dinner. This was fun. And can you believe we didn't bring up work once?"

"Yeah, I know." Lee smiled and then shifted uncomfortably. "Actually, I do have one work thing I do need to bring up. I just didn't want to spoil dinner."

"Oh, no. Did something happen? O'Keefe didn't get off or anything, did he?"

"No. No. Nothing like that. It's actually about..." he hesitated.

"What?" she probed.

"Well, you did great the other day. And I'm glad you hit the pulley. But there might be a situation where you actually have to... well, just in case I need backup, I need to know that you can handle the situation. So, I've made an appointment for both of us tomorrow morning at the firing range. I'll be there to help you every step of the way. I have a feeling, as soon as you get used to the idea, you'll be terrific. Face it, you've got great aim. We already know, you throw a pretty mean pool ball."

Amanda laughed softly. "Yes, I do. You're right. I can't say that I'll like it. But if it came down to you or..." That was a thought she definitely did not want to finish. "What time tomorrow?"

"Ten o'clock?"

Amanda swallowed hard and tried to smile through her apprehension. "Sounds great. I'll see you there." She leaned up quickly and kissed him on the cheek. "Thanks again for dinner. See you tomorrow."

Lee smiled. "Yeah, I'll see you tomorrow." He touched her arm before she got into the car. The familiar electric jolt surged through her. She had to pause for a moment before she turned around to face him. "I really had a great time tonight. I'm glad we did this," Lee said softly.

Their eyes locked for a brief moment. Amanda's lips curved into a small smile. "Yeah, me too." She got into her station wagon and drove off, the smile still playing on her lips.

Amanda gazed out the window, admiring the summer blossoms in the tree in front of the house. She'd always considered that their first date. It had been the first time that they actually spent really getting to know one another. She cherished the memory of that evening. It wasn't until later that Lee had told her that he'd never seen Leslie again after that night. She grinned as she remembered how Lee had shyly told her of his slip of the tongue in calling Leslie by her name. That was when he knew that he could never replace her with anyone else, no matter how hard tried. Funny, how she was always a couple steps ahead of him.

October 15, 1985--

Right decision? How could Mr. Thornton ask me to do this? Spy on Lee? And what if I don't? Could he really get in as much trouble as Mr. Thornton said? I am just not comfortable with this. I want to do the right thing, but how could spying on Lee be the right thing?

Think, Amanda. Think. What would Lee do? How would he handle this? He would say that I have to distance myself. Personal feelings shouldn't get in the way of my job. The founder of the Agency has given me an assignment. And it is in Lee's best interest. He wants me to look out for Lee. Isn't that what I try to do anyway?

"Every bit as pretty as Lee says you are?" Lee told Mr. Thornton about me? He talks about me? I'm not sure how to react to that. It has me confused. I can't believe that he said that he'd follow me "blind through a blizzard at midnight." Mr. Thornton must have been exaggerating. But what if he wasn't? Does Lee really trust me that much?

And if he does... How can I betray that?

"To your retirement." Lee raised his glass of Scotch.

"To your retirement," Amanda repeated as she and Harry followed suit. They all drank, Amanda taking a small sip. Scotch was not her drink of choice and the amber liquid burned slightly as it made its way down her throat. She resisted the urge to cough.

"Well, I have to get dinner started. Lee, why don't you take our girl out back and show her the pond?" Harry winked conspiratorially at Amanda. What was he up to?

"Sure, Harry. Whatever you say. We'll be back soon." Lee stood and reached for Amanda's hand. An electric thrill touched to her core. She glanced up at Lee, but he wouldn't meet her gaze. She took the offered hand and followed him out the door.

They walked along the path in silence, listening to the birds chirping and leaves that crunched as they shuffled through them. When they finally reached their destination, Lee released her hand and settled himself on a log that acted as a bench. Amanda looked out over the pond, trying to ignore how cold her hand felt when it was no longer entwined in his.

"It's beautiful," Amanda admired.

"Uh-huh."

Amanda looked over her shoulder at Lee. He was still upset with her. That was obvious. On the surface they seemed to have gotten back into their normal rhythm. They'd even laughed and joked around with each other, but his still refused to truly meet her eyes. And that alone spoke volumes. She had to try and make him

understand. Her earlier explanation hadn't repaired the damage that her deceit had caused. "Lee... "

"Harry loves this place."

"Lee," Amanda looked at him, "I really am sorry. About everything."

Lee sighed. "I just can't believe that you would spy on me, Amanda. After everything we've been through. I trusted you."

"I know," Amanda said softly. The hurt in those beautiful green eyes nearly killed her. They had been through so much together. "I do know what you're going through. I felt the same way last year."

"Last year?" Suddenly, recognition spread across Lee's face, as his gaze dropped to the ground. "But Amanda, that was completely different."

"How?" she asked adamantly. "I was ordered to spy on you, just like you were ordered to spy on me. I didn't want to do it anymore than you did. It was part of our jobs." She knelt down in front of him and took his hand, forcing him to look in her eyes. "Lee, you know that I would never do anything intentionally that would hurt you. Harry asked me to keep an eye on you and keep you safe. That's what I do. I watch your back."

Amanda relaxed, releasing a held breath as she saw Lee's expression soften. "Why did he choose you anyway?"

Amanda felt the color rise to her cheeks. "Well, he said that you trusted my instincts and that was good enough for him. So, really, it's your own fault."

"Oh?" he replied skeptically.

"Uh-huh." There was still one thing she had to know. Had Lee really said it? Or had Harry simply told her that he had in order to get her to help. She really hoped it was the former. But if it was the former, how much damage had she done to the trust that Lee seemed to have in her? "That reminds me, I do have a question that's been nagging at me. Did you really say that you would follow me 'blind through a blizzard at midnight?'"

"Um... well..." he stammered, averting his eyes and focusing on the pond. "I guess, I may have said something to that effect. You know, with all your Trailblazer experience and all..."

Same old Scarecrow. "I see."

"Yeah, you know what I mean."

"Absolutely." She gave his hand a gentle squeeze. "So, are we okay?"

"Yeah, we're okay." He smiled at her and winked. "Just no more spying on me."

"I'll do my best."

Their eyes met and held. The air was still around them. This felt so right. Just being here with Lee.

Lee cleared his throat and broke the connection. "You know, dinner has got to be ready by now. Coming?" He quickly stood and headed back toward the cabin, leaving Amanda kneeling in front of the vacant log, shaking her head.

November 4, 1985--

Has it really been three weeks since my last entry? I'd like to be able to say that it's because things have been hectic at the Agency, but just the opposite is true. It was actually pretty slow until the whole Congressman McNeil mess happened. The break was actually rather nice. I got the chance to spend a lot of time with Mother and the boys. I haven't been able to do that much lately. Jamie is going to be in "Rip Van Winkle" in two weeks, so I had the opportunity to get his costume made and help him with his lines. He's so excited. I can't wait to see him on stage.

Was Lee really going to kiss me? It sure seemed like it. But then again, he simply could have planned to kiss me on the cheek. That's probably what he was going to do. I shouldn't think he meant anything more than that. He was just going to give me kiss on the cheek from Penny. That's all there was to it.

Mother seemed to buy my excuse for "W.C. Fields" being on the patio attempting to kiss me and has stopped giving me strange looks. Luckily, when she went to the party it was obvious that Buck had been drinking and his mask had been returned. So, she was none the wiser. Sometimes I wonder how I get away with these excuses I make up?

After Dotty had gone back inside, Amanda hung her head and shook it back and forth. "This is terrible. How in the world am I going to explain what I was doing out here with Buck?"

Lee took her hand. "I'm sorry. It looks like I've complicated things once again."

Amanda looked up at him. He still wore that ridiculous mask. How was it possible that Lee could look so utterly silly and unbelievably sexy at the same time? She couldn't resist the chuckle that sat in her throat. "It's not your fault. Don't worry about it. I'll think of something."

"Can I do anything?" Lee's muffled voice asked.

"Well, you could return that mask to our apple-bobbing friend, while I go inside and try to patch this up. I think I have an idea." She walked to the back door and turned around. "Thanks for stopping by Mr. Fields. Maybe you can give me Penny's message another time?"

"We'll try and arrange that, my little chickadee."

Amanda laughed. "I'll see you later."

"Bye." Lee slipped into the darkness.

"Mother! Nothing was going on. You have to believe me!" Amanda pleaded, zipping up her mother's costume.

"I know what I saw, Missy." Dotty turned and adjusted Amanda's "Katharine Hepburn" pantsuit. "I just cannot believe that you would kiss Buck!"

"Honestly, Mother, it's not what you think. I would never even think of kissing Buck." That was true, absolutely true. Now, unfortunately, this is where the lying came in. This was the part she hated. "Look, Mother, Buck is having a really good time and has had a little too much to drink. He came over to make sure we were coming to the party. I said we were on our way and he was leaning over to kiss me on the cheek. That's all."

"That's all?" Her mother raised an eyebrow in disbelief. She was not buying the explanation. "Darling, Buck is interested in you. A mother can tell these things."

"Oh, Mother!" Amanda said in exasperation. "There is nothing going on between me and Buck. Now, look, he may be a little embarrassed, so please don't bring it up."

"Why shouldn't I?" Dotty's voice rose an octave.

"Mother, please! He felt very bad about the whole thing. Could you please just let it go?"

"All right, dear," Dotty relented. "But I'm not going to say that I'm happy about it." Amanda, relieved, finally let out the breath she'd been holding. "Okay, now you go finish getting ready. Then we'll head over to the party and see your new boyfriend."

Amanda whirled around and faced Dotty. "Mother!"

November 5, 1985--

I can't deny it anymore. How can I deny it to myself when I came so close to admitting it to him?

I am in love with Lee Stetson.

Just writing the words is almost a relief. I haven't even allowed myself to let the thought take hold before. But I am. So, the question remains, what does he feel for me? I know he feels something, but what?

Did I actually say "not exactly?" What was I thinking? Never mind, I know exactly what I was thinking. I was just so tired. Not just physically. I was

tired of hearing the same old line. "It was just business, Amanda. Nothing more to it." Well, this time I guess it was a variation on a theme. This time it was, "Just two people seeking a little warmth."

I was there. I know there was more to it than just business or staying warm. We almost kissed! We would have if we hadn't been interrupted by the gunfire. Why can't he just admit there was something more going on?

But why did I have to say that? How am I going to be able to face him tomorrow? Do I just act as if nothing happened? Why can't I think before I open my big mouth? Oh, well, can't take it back now.

I have to admit, the look on his face was almost worth it!

Amanda laughed at the memory of her husband's face that afternoon. It had been absolutely priceless. She still didn't know what exactly had possessed her to utter that phrase, but she was sure glad that she had. She thought of that night in the woods they had spent together. It was a strange combination of fear and comfort that had enveloped her. They were being hunted like animals, but she felt incredibly safe and protected knowing that Lee was with her.

Amanda was in that wonderful place between sleep and consciousness. She was aware of her surroundings, but she couldn't acknowledge them. She heard a distant voice. "You're shivering. Are you cold?" She tried to answer, but the only thing that made it past her lips was a soft grunt. She felt something shift behind her. The chain was moved and was now lying diagonally across her back. Something encircled her waist. It must be Lee's arm. She fell back against him. She felt so incredibly content right now. She drifted into blissful sleep.

"Amanda?" she heard a warm voice whisper in her ear. She wasn't ready to wake up. Sure, the bed was impossibly hard and there was something poking her in the side, but she was having a wonderful dream.

"Shh. Sweetheart, I'm not ready to get up yet." She shifted her body around. Something on her wrist was pulling uncomfortably, but she tried to ignore it as she turned over and found her head leaning into a warm chest. Yes, this was an incredible dream. She let out a contented sigh and buried her face deeper into the soft denim.

"Amanda?" the voice called again, sounding a little strangled.

"Hmm?"

"Come on. We have to get up. Sacker's men will be out looking for us soon. It's almost daybreak."

Sacker's men? She jolted awake. Her eyes flew open. Oh my gosh! She had snuggled herself into Lee's chest. She pulled back and looked at him fearfully. Had she called him "Sweetheart?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... I mean, I was dreaming and..." She suddenly realized that his arm was still around her waist.

Lee looked at her with a mixture of apprehension and confusion. His gaze followed hers down to his arm. He seemed a little surprised to find it there as well. He quickly removed it and sat up. "We better get moving. We've got to find a way out of here."

"Yeah." She sat up as well, trying desperately to sound professional. "No offense, but I'd like to get these

manacles off as soon as possible."

He reached over and pulled a leaf out of her hair. The tender gesture did nothing to relax her rattled nerves. "I agree. No matter how good the company is, the things are driving me crazy." He stood up and reached down to help her to her feet. "Are you ready, partner?"

Still feeling flustered, Amanda stretched a little to wake herself up and attempted to push away the memory of Lee's warm body around her. She shook her head, trying to regain focus. She couldn't let herself think about what had just happened. Time to start thinking like an agent. Amanda took a deep breath. "You

bet. Let's go."

November 15, 1985--

Well, everything is back to normal at the Agency. Billy's back where he belongs and all the mistakes that occurred while Francine was in charge have been fixed. If only things were that easy at home. Just had a long talk with Jamie. I apologized the best way I knew how, but the disappointment in his eyes broke my heart. I don't know how I'll be able to make it up to him. I did tell him that we would spend the whole day together tomorrow. Just the two of us.

Sometimes it seems so hard to make it all work. I love my job at the Agency. I feel like I'm really good at what I do and that I make a difference, but at what cost? I'd like to think that the work that I do is making the world a safer place for the boys, but sometimes I feel like I'm missing out on the major events in their lives. Sometimes I feel like the worst mother in the world. I don't want to quit, but...

A light tapping on the back door interrupted Amanda's journaling. There was no question as to who it could be, but what was he doing here? She closed the journal and put it on the coffee table.

"Hi," Amanda said, closing the door carefully behind her.

Lee smiled. "Hi."

"What's up? Do you need something?"

"No. I... I just came by to see how you were doing, I know you were pretty upset about missing Jamie's play and I wanted to make sure everything was okay." Concern shone in his eyes. Her heart fluttered slightly. He'd often come over to check up on her after a case, but now he was making a point to make sure her personal life was all right. He truly was an amazing man.

"Oh, everything's fine," she lied.

"Amanda..." Lee could obviously tell that she wasn't being completely honest.

"Okay, so it didn't go all that well. Jamie says he's okay and it wasn't a big deal, but I know that wasn't true. He was so hurt. It killed me to look in his eyes and know that I'd let him down, yet again," Amanda admitted, remorse tugging at her heart. "We're going to spend the day together. Just me and him. So, if a matter of 'national security' comes up, you'll have to find someone else."

"I understand." Lee nodded. "Amanda, don't be so tough on yourself. Those boys love you. They're lucky to have a mother that cares as much as you do."

"I don't know." Amanda sat down at the picnic bench. The past few days had been exhausting. "Sometimes I feel like I'm falling down on the job. When I think back to when I was in school... My mother was there for every event that I participated in."

"Every event?" Lee questioned skeptically. He sat beside her and put his arm around her shoulders comfortingly.

She leaned into him, grateful for the warmth and support. "Well, almost every. You know what I mean."

"What I know is that you're being incredibly hard on yourself. You would do anything in your power to keep those boys safe. And have, if I recall. Jamie will get over this. There will be other plays." Lee paused for a moment and looked at her intently. "Can I tell you something?"

Tears were threatening to escape her eyes, but she risked looking up at him. "Sure."

"I've always envied the boys. I have a feeling that my mother would have been a lot like you. And I wish I could have experienced what they get to every day." The soft whisper of his voice caressed her ear.

Amanda couldn't believe what he was saying. Lee rarely talked about his parents and now he was opening up to her to make her feel better. The significance of this fact was not lost on her. "Really?"

"Yeah. Really." He smiled down at her. "I don't remember all that much about her. My father met her at the NATO pact signing, while she was working for the British

Embassy. I remember that she was beautiful and smart. I couldn't get anything past her. There were a lot of times when I would have rather gotten a 'dressing down' by my father than her. One of the last memories I have of her was her giving me a lecture because I'd decided to defend my fort in kindergarten."

A smile tugged at her lips. "Well, that doesn't sound so bad."

Lee grinned sheepishly. "I made a slingshot and used graham crackers as ammunition. I think her exact words were, 'Brilliant strategy, but very bad behavior.'"

Amanda chuckled softly, imagining a young Lee protecting what was his. "Well, she was right."

"Yeah." Lee replied reflectively. Amanda watched silently as the man she cared so deeply for relived the memory, of that time with his mother. It was so rare that he allowed himself to do that in front of her. After a moment, he turned back to her. "So, are you feeling a little better?"

She smiled up at him gratefully, "Yes, I am." How was it possible to feel any other way when Lee's arm was around her protectively, telling her everything was going to be all right? "Thanks."

"No problem."

"Well, I should probably head inside. I've got a busy day tomorrow." She stood up. "I'll see you Monday."

"Okay. Don't let him tire you out. Chances are we're going to need you next week."

"Hey, if I can keep up with you, I have a feeling I can hold my own with Jamie." Amanda smiled. "Good night."

"Good night, Amanda."

November 22, 1985--

I called to check on Agnes tonight. I really wish there was something I could do for her. I almost felt guilty for having such a good time last night. I definitely chose the right restaurant. The food was amazing. And let's face it, the company wasn't too bad either. Which reminds me, I have to make sure I get up early and bake those brownies. I might even make Francine two batches for her assistance.

Amanda approached Francine's desk cautiously. She hadn't necessarily planned on apologizing again for her comment the other morning, but she had a plan and Francine was the only one who would have precisely what she needed to make it work. Francine looked up and coolly regarded her. Amanda tried to sound chipper. "Good morning, Francine."

Francine's tone was detached. "Good morning."

She was not going to make this easy. "Look, Francine, I just wanted to apologize again for what I said the other morning. It just slipped out. I didn't even realize what I'd said until it was out of my mouth. And... "

"Amanda! If it will make you shut up, I will accept your apology." Amanda breathed a sigh of relief. Francine, however, was not finished. "With one proviso, of course."

"What?" Amanda asked curiously.

Francine looked around and lowered her voice. "I have a friend, who has been having a rather rough couple of weeks. And since cooking is your forte, I thought you could whip up a batch of your famous brownies."

Amanda considered the proposition. This was going to be easier than she thought. "Okay, apology and brownies in exchange for... some dirt."

Francine's left eyebrow arched. Amanda could tell that she'd piqued her interest. "Dirt? What kind of dirt?"

"Well, I'm playing a little joke on Lee. And since you are the one who knows all the office gossip, I figured you may have something I could use."

"Oh, Amanda," Francine grinned as she reached into her filing cabinet, "I have something much better than gossip!"

Amanda glanced around the restaurant and then back at Lee. Yes, her choice of blackmail payment had been perfect.

"What are you grinning at?" Lee asked curiously.

Amanda decided to evade the question and raised her wine glass. "To reaping the rewards of blackmail."

He raised his glass to meet hers, his eyes narrowing. "When do I get those negatives back anyway?"

"All in good time, Stetson." Amanda grinned and looked at him pointedly. "You know, you should actually be thanking me."

"Oh, really?" he replied skeptically. "How do you figure?"

"Well, I got that picture away from Francine, didn't I? And who knows what she'd have made you do?" She smiled teasingly. "But then again, I have a feeling that she still has a couple tricks up her sleeve."

Lee grimaced. "I wouldn't doubt it. The only difference is, I have stuff on her that I can retaliate with. But don't worry, I'm still working on finding something on you."

Amanda looked at him innocently. "On me?"

"Yes, you." Lee's eyes danced. "I'm sure even squeaky clean Amanda King has a skeleton or two in her closet. It's just going to require a little digging, that's all."

"Go ahead, Scarecrow. Dig away. You're not gonna find anything," Amanda said confidently. The truth, however, was that there were a couple of things about her past that she hoped he wouldn't be able to find. One in particular. But there was no way he would ever...

"What are you thinking about?" Lee interrupted her musing. His eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"Oh, nothing," she smiled evasively, taking a slow sip of wine.

Unfortunately, Lee had discovered the one thing she was hoping he wouldn't. It took him a year, but he finally got his chance for retaliation. That's the trouble with being involved with a spy. There really is no such thing as a secret. Well, at least not keeping one hidden.

November 27, 1985--

Where does the time go? With this whole Harcourt case, it completely slipped my mind that tomorrow is Thanksgiving! It occurred to me as Lee and I were taking the Mata Hari II back to her slip. We were going to have a nice meal and relax, but I had to cut the evening short. There was just too much to do here at the house. Thank goodness Mother had done the shopping, so I just had to help with the preparations for the big feast.

Colleen and Bart sure have a lot to be thankful for this year. I'm just so glad that everything turned out okay. Bart's going to testify against Harcourt and Colleen is going to recover her sight. And most importantly, they've been reunited. I'm just so happy for them.

I can't help thinking about Lee. I feel so bad that he has to spend tomorrow alone. He tried to play it off, as usual. The same old line he uses every year, "It's just a day. No big deal." But I can tell that it is. I'll drop by tomorrow evening with some leftovers. He'll act annoyed, but I know secretly he appreciates it. I just wish there was a way that I could invite him over here. Unfortunately, it's just not possible.

I can't believe that I never knew about the light thing. Then again, we've never actually slept in the same room before. I don't count the woods, because that wasn't a "room."

A light on, huh? I think that's a habit he's going to have to break.

Amanda had finally managed to fall asleep, though how, she wasn't quite sure. Maybe it had helped that she'd covered her head with the blanket and turned over to face the back of the couch. Exhaustion must have set in. The sleep had not been peaceful though. She was fully aware that Lee was in the room with her and she did not want a repeat of her mistake in the woods, calling him "Sweetheart." No, she wouldn't do that again.

She stirred around four in the morning and rolled over to face Lee. She slowly opened her eyes, adjusting to the light the half-burned out candle let off. Squinting cautiously, she noticed Lee watching her. "Hi," she said groggily.

"Hey there." He smiled.

"Is it my turn?" she asked, looking at her watch.

"Sure, unless you need more sleep?"

Amanda stretched and sat up, rubbing her eyes. She tried to focus on him but she was still pretty tired. "No. No," she yawned. "It's my turn. Why don't you lie down and get some rest?"

"Okay, but leave the candle lit," his voice was firm.

"All right. All right," she smiled, "I promise. I won't blow it out. At least, not until you fall asleep."

Giving her a little glare, Lee laid down. He regarded her thoughtfully for a moment, his eyes softened and a boyish grin appeared. "You know, you're kinda cute when you sleep?"

Her cheeks suddenly felt very hot. "What?"

Lee closed his eyes, but the smile remained. "Well, you make these little noises... "

"Noises?" She was becoming disconcerted, praying that she hadn't said anything embarrassing.

"Yeah, noises... " He yawned, sleep was overtaking him. "Like little sighs. Cute... Soft... " His breathing became deep and even. He was fading off to sleep.

She quietly watched him as he dozed off. He looked so peaceful. The smile remained. She desperately wished she was lying in his arms right now. She remembered how protected and warm she had felt there only a few weeks ago. She wished there was a way that she could experience that sensation again, but it wasn't in the cards. Or was it?

She pushed those thoughts from her head. They were on a case and that's what she had to concentrate on. She stood up and went over to the window. Still no movement on the Sea Chance. She didn't expect there would be. Lee was definitely asleep now. She moved to blow out the candle, but at the last moment decided against it. If he needed this comfort, she'd leave it alone. Rats? No, she definitely didn't want to think about the details surrounding that.

She looked back over at the sleeping figure on the couch. He had experienced so much. So many nightmares, yet there he lay, peacefully slumbering. A lock of hair had fallen into his eyes and she fought the urge to brush it back. She cared about him so much. Would she ever have the nerve to tell him?

December 7, 1985--

I honestly don't know where to begin. This whole week has me confused. It's been extremely surreal. My past and present have collided and I'm still unsure of how I feel about that.

On the one hand, Joe's back. It all felt so familiar and comfortable. He's moving back to Washington. He really wants to make up for lost time and get to know the boys. And I can see in his eyes that he wouldn't mind getting to know me again. It would be so easy. So simple.

And then, there's Lee. I sit here, trying to put into words how this week has affected our relationship. I know that I started to pull away from him. It hurt him. I could see it in his eyes. But how in the world could I explain to him that I didn't want him to see that I'd failed. Sounds crazy, I know. I just didn't want him to see that Amanda King, "queen of getting people to open up and relate," couldn't make her marriage work. I guess it was a part of me that I'd always hoped that I could have kept hidden, which of course, is impossible.

The funny thing is, with all the uncertainty of this week, I knew there was one thing I could count on. Lee. I knew that I could count on him to be there, if I needed him. And he was. Lee has been there for me and my family in ways that Joe never attempted. And yesterday, he saved my sons' lives. I almost lost them. You know, I always assumed that it would have been my job that put them in jeopardy and it was my job that saved them. What would have happened if Lee hadn't been there to save them? My stomach is in knots just thinking about what might have happened.

I couldn't even thank Lee in the way I wanted to. I wasn't supposed to know him. If only Phillip and Jamie could know all the things he has done for them over the years. I need to let Lee know how much it meant to me that he was there. I hope I get the chance. I just really need to talk to him.

Amanda looked past Joe, she had the feeling they were being observed. There he was. Standing across the bar watching them... or her, she couldn't be sure. Her eyes met Lee's and locked. Somehow she wasn't surprised to see him there. She had come to expect the unexpected with Lee. A strange combination of emotions flowed through her at that moment. On the one hand, she could physically feel Joe's protective arms around her, yet the emotional and spiritual connection she felt with Lee was palpable in every fiber of her being. A smile spread across her face and she saw Lee smile in return.

"What are you looking at?" she heard Joe ask. "I wonder what he's doing here? Amanda?"

She turned back to Joe, feeling herself flush, "Huh?"

Joe dark eyes delved into hers, searching for answers. "So, are you going to tell me what's really going on?"

"Really going on?" she hedged.

"Come on, Amanda, we've known each other too long for that." He took both of his hands in hers and gave them a tender squeeze. "There's something going on between you and Mr. Stetson. If I didn't know better, I'd say that you've known each other for more than a few days." Joe pulled her in again to continue their

dance. "That's crazy I know. I just think you need to be careful. I worry about you. Getting involved with a man like that could be dangerous."

Amanda winced. Joe, on some level, had figured out her secret. Actually, it didn't surprise her one bit that he'd picked up on the looks that she and Lee had exchanged during the case. He'd known her for fifteen years. He was the first man she'd ever shared a connection with. He knew her almost as well as...

She quickly looked back to where Lee had been standing. He was now sitting at the bar, covertly watching them. She chuckled softly. Did he really think that she wouldn't notice him? He was the one who had taught her how to spot a tail.

"Amanda?" Joe tried once more to gain her attention.

"I'm sorry, Sweetheart. Let's go find a quiet table where we can talk. This could take a little while." Glancing back at Lee one more time, she took Joe's hand and led him to a booth in the back.

Amanda silently slid onto the barstool next to Lee an hour later. She had been thrilled and more than a little surprised that he was still there. She silently watched him for a moment as he scanned the bar. Was he looking for her? She smiled at the possibility. "So, you gonna buy me a drink?" Lee jumped and turned around to face her. She had to chuckle at the surprised look on his face. "Or better yet, how about telling me what you're doing here?"

"Well, you know..." he fumbled. "I was, um, in the neighborhood..."

"Uh-huh," Amanda replied knowingly.

"So, where's Joe?" Lee looked around curiously.

"He went back to the boarding house. I told him that I needed to talk to you." Amanda said quietly, wringing her hands underneath the bar. She really hoped Lee wouldn't be upset with her for telling Joe the truth.

"Oh, what about?" he asked, his eyes brightening.

There were too many people around and this conversation required a little discretion. It had been difficult enough trying to keep Joe calm earlier when she made her confession about her profession. "Why don't you give me a lift home? I'll tell you on the way."

Lee nodded, laid a ten on the bar and led Amanda out of Dooley's. His hand found its way to the familiar position at the small of her back. She smiled reveling in the warmth of his touch. It felt so good to have it there again.

"So, what did you and Joe talk about?" Lee's eyes were fixed on the Georgetown streets.

Amanda took a deep breath. In the process, she inhaled the intoxicating scent of his cologne. She shook her head to refocus. She had to remain clear-headed. She honestly wasn't sure how Lee would react to this and wanted to be prepared to diffuse any hostility. "I told Joe the truth."

"About what?" Amanda noticed there was a slight edge to his voice, but his eyes were unreadable. Well, at least he didn't seem angry.

"About what I do for a living." Lee looked at her curiously. Now it was time for the explanation. The words tumbled out. "Lee, I had to. He'd already started putting the pieces together. First, he brought up the fact that I'd changed. That I was a 'different woman now.' And then, when you came into Dooley's and he saw the way we... He said that he'd gotten the distinct impression that we'd known each other for a long time. What was I supposed to say? He's known me for almost fifteen years. I had to tell him. He would have figured it out on his own in a matter of time and I didn't want him to find out that way."

"Relax, Amanda, I understand," Lee said softly. His hand gently patted hers, which had more of a calming affect than his reassuring words. "How did he take it?"

"Well, he was shocked, amazed, concerned, angry and now, finally, reluctantly accepting. He's worried about the boys. And me." She turned her gaze to Lee, hoping to catch his eye. "But I assured him that I have the best partner in the business." Lee looked at her and gave her a small smile. She continued, "And that I would never intentionally do anything that would put the boys in danger."

Lee cleared his throat. "So, how much did you tell him?" he asked, his voice professional and even.

"Don't worry. Just enough to prove to him that I wasn't making it up, but nothing regarding 'national security.' I just gave him a little outline. That I'd worked with you for almost two and a half years. How you recruited me. That I was really proud of the work that I do. That's about it."

Amanda searched his face for a sign that she had done the right thing and was rewarded by the warm sensation of his hand taking hers. "You did what you had to do. I trust your judgment." The glow that enveloped her body at Lee's compliment was heady. After a brief silence, Lee cleared his throat again. "When is he heading back to Estocia?" There was something in his voice that she couldn't place. She hadn't heard those inflections in a long time. Was it jealousy?

"He's not." Amanda noticed Lee's jaw clench slightly. "He wants to stay and work for the EAO here in Washington for a while." She suddenly realized that they were on her street.

Lee parked the Corvette down the block from her house. "Well, here we are."

"Yeah." Amanda sat there for a moment. She had more to say and she knew that he would try and brush it off as "no big deal." But it had to be said. "Lee?"

"What?" He turned to face her.

"I never got the chance to say..." She momentarily lost herself in his warm hazel eyes. She took a breath and looked down. If she continued looking at him, she would never get this out. "I wanted to say, thank you. Thank you for helping Joe. Thank you for saving the boys. If you hadn't been there..." She swallowed hard and closed her eyes tightly, not wanting to think about what could have happened. She looked up at him, blinking back the threatening tears. The thought that she almost lost her children was almost more than she could bear. "Thank you for being my friend. Um... I know that I've... Well, I know that I've seemed a little distant lately, and I just want you to know that I'm sorry. This whole week had me a little rattled. I mean," she chuckled nervously, "You have to admit, it was a little strange."

"Yeah." He laughed along with her. She loved that sound. It was funny, she could actually feel it, an electrical current running up and down her spine.

"Anyway, I just want you to know how much it meant to me... means to me... that you were there. That you're my... friend." She smiled at him gratefully. "Thank you."

His face softly beamed as he took her hand tenderly in his. "You're welcome." The light had returned to his eyes. He didn't look away. He made no move to pretend that it was no big deal. He just continued to look at her with those warm eyes and smile. And she knew in that moment of simple, perfect silence that the connection they shared had been reestablished. The bond actually seemed to be stronger than ever.

Her smile grew wider. She pulled her eyes from his, not trusting herself to contain her feelings. She cleared her throat to allow her words passage. "I better go inside. I'm sure the boys want to tell me all about the game." Lee began to get out and although she appreciated the gesture, she needed a few moments alone before she went into the house. "No, that's okay. You don't have to get out. I'll be fine."

"Okay," his voice held a twinge of disappointment. "I'll see you later."

"Good night." She smiled before exiting the car.

She walked to the house. The gentle breeze of the evening, filled her lungs and cooled her blood. This had been quite a night.

She still felt guilty about that week, long ago. It wasn't until a year later, that she had discovered how much she had really hurt Lee. The fact that she had pushed him away and hadn't confided in him, made Lee question the direction their relationship had seemed to be heading.

The close bond she shared with Joe was something that Lee hadn't understood. Joe was the man she had married, that she had at one time been in love with. He was the father of her children. And it had taken her over a year to convince Lee that the bond she shared with Joe was rooted in her past. Lee was her present and future.

She closed the journal and took it with her downstairs. She needed a cup of tea. As the water boiled she thought of the look she and Lee had shared that night in Dooley's. Energy began coursing through her veins, setting her nerve endings on fire. How was it possible that just thinking of his eyes could make her body react?

Their connection was so strong, it sometimes scared her. The ringing telephone brought her out of her reverie.

"Hello," she answered, half-expecting it to be her husband.

"Amanda?" She could barely hear her mother's voice over the airport traffic. She grinned. Okay, maybe their connection wasn't THAT strong. "Lillian's plane is delayed, so we probably won't make it home for dinner. Just start without us. We'll stop someplace on the way home."

"Okay, Mother. Give Aunt Lillian a big kiss from me."

"I will. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, Mother." She placed the receiver back in its cradle, just as the kettle began to whistle.

She prepared her tea and decided to finish reading her journal on the patio.

December 18, 1985--

Once again, Lee and I were interrupted. You know, if I didn't know any better, I would swear that the universe was conspiring against us. Just when it seems as if we're going to take a step forward, someone shows up or the phone rings or... It's all very frustrating!

Wouldn't you know it? The only available room in this entire hotel would have to be right next to mine! I really want to like Francine, but she has this habit of showing up just at the wrong moment. And it just makes me want to strangle her.

Brother and sister? I'm not quite sure why he decided on that cover. I can safely say that he doesn't think of me as his sister.

We were so close. We could have taken it to the next level. Tonight could have been the night he kissed me. But then again, how many times has that happened this year?! Just thinking about what might have been makes my whole body tingle. I know that it will happen when the time is right. I made it

pretty clear tonight that I was interested. The question is will Lee back off again? I have to admit, I'm getting a little tired of that. But I know that Lee needs to be ready.

"Field experience?" What a line! Is that the best he could come up with? I mean, you'd think with all his experience he could come up with something better than that! Gosh, I love teasing him.

Amanda smiled ruefully at the page in front of her. What an innocuous entry for the events that would follow that week. She had been virtually carefree that evening. Flushed with the excitement of flirting with Lee and frustrated at the shattered moment when Francine appeared.

Then she had that close call in the freezer and her world turned upside-down. She'd been able to put on a smile and cheery disposition at work, but inside she was a mass of confusion. She had told Lee that thinking about the incident made her feel a little "cold." The truth was, "cold" didn't scratch the surface of what she was experiencing. She hadn't even written her feelings in her journal. They were fears that she couldn't face alone. Luckily, she had someone to whom she could turn.

Amanda was trying very hard to concentrate on the tall tale that Lee was relating to her as they sat on his couch after dinner drinking their wine. She caught a few words here and there--Phillips, poker, inside straight. Her mind kept drifting. Francine's words still rung in her ears and her eyes drifted to her purse hanging in the entryway.

She had to talk to Lee, but had absolutely no idea how to broach the subject. How could she explain to him the turmoil that had enveloped her since the freezer incident. How could she get through the conversation without breaking down the way she had last night?

Lee's arm found its way to the back of the couch. It wasn't touching her, but his closeness calmed her anxious nerves. It was almost as if the space between his arm and her shoulder combined their energies and created a whole.

"Amanda?" Lee's voice broke in. She jumped at the sound and looked up at him. "You haven't heard a word I've said, have you?"

Amanda bowed her head guiltily, her hands knotted in her lap. "No, I'm sorry. I guess, I'm just a little distracted."

She heard the clink of his wine glass being placed on the coffee table. His finger was on her chin, guiding her face so their eyes could meet. Their firm, yet gentle pressure quickened her pulse. "Yeah, I've noticed. You've been a million miles away most of the evening. Do you want to talk about it?"

The tenderness in his voice had caused tears to prick at her eyes. Her emotions were so close to the surface, but she had to try and stay calm. She blinked them back. She knew that she was going to end up crying by the time this conversation was over, but there were things that she needed to get out. Could she make him understand how important this was to her? Would he even take her seriously? How could she explain to him what she was feeling? She was still having trouble deciphering it all herself.

She nodded and swallowed hard. "Yes."

"Okay," Lee said, sitting back against the couch, maintaining eye contact. "What's wrong?"

Amanda paused, searching her mind for a way to begin. Lee took her hand in his, the comforting act giving her strength. "It's just something Francine said to me in the freezer."

She saw Lee's body tense and his jaw clench. "What did she say to you?" he demanded, his voice tight.

She gave his hand a squeeze to calm him. "Nothing that I didn't need to hear." She felt him relax a little and steeled herself to continue. "Gosh, this is hard."

"Amanda, you know that I'm here for you, but if you're not ready we can talk about this later. We don't have to do it right now."

"Yes, I do." She drew a deep breath. "When Francine and I were in the freezer, she said that I shouldn't expect you to come in on a white horse to save me." She could see that Lee was making a move to interject. She placed her free hand on his

chest, her fingers sinking into the soft wool of his ivory sweater. "Wait. Let me finish. I realized that she was right. I do. I always believe, without question, that you'll be there to save me. That's not fair to you and it's not fair to me." Lee's arm moved from the back of the couch to lay protectively on her shoulder. How was it that he always knew what she needed?

She continued, tears began to fill her eyes and her nose became congested. "I couldn't sleep last night, thinking about it. There may be a time that you won't be there, can't be there. I haven't thought about that possibility in an awful long time. I pushed it to the back of my mind. I take for granted that I'm going to make it. But the truth is, I might..." She choked, the final word sitting in her throat. She forced it out, the whisper a shotgun in her ears, "die."

"Amanda, I'm not going to let anything happen to you," Lee's voice was strained. His hand gripped hers tightly.

She looked at him carefully, his handsome face blurry through the unshed tears. "You can't promise me that and you know it. We have to deal with the possibility. It's strange. In the beginning, when I thought of this job as an exciting game, I think I did understand the risks. But as time wore on and you were always there saving me, I just got used to it. Expected it. You can't be there every time. It's not possible. I could die." Even though the word was easier to say this time, the tears began to slide down her face

Lee reached up and gently brushed away a tear that was trailing down her cheek. He took her into his arms and held her as she cried. She allowed herself to sink into the warmth of his embrace. "Hey, it's going to be okay. We all go through this once in awhile. You can't face the danger we do every day and not acknowledge the risk factor."

"But at what cost?" She pulled back up to look at him. The concern in his eyes was evident as he brushed a damp strand of hair from her cheek. Her heart was already so full of emotions and now the man she loved was desperately trying to comfort her. Could she ever express to him how much that meant to her? She tried to catch her breath. "It isn't just a risk for me. I have other people to consider. And I feel like a terrible person for not wanting to quit. I love my job. I love the work that I do. But the thought of leaving Phillip and Jamie without a mother... When I think about what they'll go through..." She wiped some of the tears from her face and tried to regain control.

Lee's body had tensed again. Amanda suddenly realized what she had said. Lee's eyes had become distant. She hadn't made the connection until this very instant how closely related her fears and Lee's reality were. She squeezed his hand, trying to convey in that simple gesture, her understanding of the pain he felt. Lee closed his eyes tightly. She knew that was his way of keeping his emotions at bay. He wouldn't shed any tears in front of her. When he opened them again, she could see the light watery film that covered his normally clear eyes. He needed her to keep going. This conversation was going to be harder on both of them than she'd anticipated.

Considering the circumstances, this next question was going to be tough on him, but she needed to hear the answer. And she needed to hear it from Lee. "What will they be told if something happens to me?"

Lee dropped his gaze from hers. His shoulders slumped and he gripped her hand tightly. "They'll be told there was an accident..." He was obviously attempting to sound professional, but the hoarseness in his low voice betrayed his emotions.

Amanda bowed her head in resignation. She knew that would be his answer, but had hoped against hope that there was another option. "So, the lies will continue. I can't let that happen, Lee."

"What do you want me to do?" Lee asked, a slight shake in his voice.

"Could you get my purse?"

Lee slowly released his hold on her and got up to retrieve her purse from the hallway. She felt cold and alone, the fear once again beginning to take hold. It was short lived. As soon as he returned and handed Amanda her purse, he sat down and gently massaged her shoulder with his left hand. She looked up at him, he'd regained his composure, probably for her benefit.

Amanda reached in the purse and pulled out an envelope and stared at it intently. Her fingers gently ran across the smooth surface of the white, bulky 4 x 9 1/2-inch envelope. It was amazing to her that something which weighed only a few ounces could feel as heavy as a ton of bricks. "I wrote this last night. Mother and the boys will need to hear the truth. And they will need to hear it from me." She looked back up at Lee. "I need you to promise to do something for me," her raspy voice was full of resolve.

"Anything. You know that." His hand gripped her shoulder.

"I can't let the lies continue. There's been too much of that already. I wrote each of them a letter. I need for you to promise me that if something happens, you'll take the envelope to them. Stay with them while they read the letters. They're going to have questions. I need for you to answer them in the best way you can. I know this is asking a lot and I know you won't be able to tell them everything, but you're the only person I trust to do this." She did her best keep her voice steady, but the higher pitch it had taken on belied the emotional strain she felt.

"Amanda, I... "

"Please, Lee," her voice cracked. "I know that it goes against policy. I know that the Agency wouldn't approve. But I can't... It isn't fair to them... "

"What about Joe?"

Amanda shook her head. She had to make him understand. "Joe knows what I do, but he doesn't understand. He doesn't know me. Lee, you're the person I trust and rely on more than anybody." Amanda took a deep breath. She briefly considered stopping there, but their connection went deeper than that. It was stronger than any connection she'd ever experienced before. "You're the only one who knows not only the person I was, but who I've become. The person you've helped me become." Amanda looked up and saw the stunned expression on Lee's face. Their eyes locked for a moment. Not giving him time to respond, she plunged forward. "Everyone else only gets bits and pieces. Please, Lee. This is really important. I need you to tell Mother and the boys the truth. You're the only one who can do it. You're the only one who knows the whole me." The last words of her speech were no more than a strangled whisper.

Lee took a deep breath and looked at her for a moment. He gently took the letter out of her hands. "I'll do what I can. I promise," he said softly, tenderly cupping her cheek with his right hand. "Don't worry. I'll take care of it."

He truly was amazing. An overpowering sense of peace and calm flowed through her. She knew she could count on him. How was it possible that she was lucky enough to have this wonderful man in her life? Amanda smiled through the remnants of her tears. "Thank you." Lee took her in his arms again and held her

close. She noticed that his heart was racing. What a great dinner companion she'd turned out to be! "I'm sorry that I ruined the evening."

"Shh... You didn't ruin anything." He gently rocked her. Feeling his heartbeat slowing, her body relaxed in his strong frame.

Guilt washed over her. How could she have put him through this? She knew she was asking a lot. She knew that it wasn't fair. But he was the only person she could rely on to do this for her. This was the man she loved and she trusted him completely. She needed for him to do this, but could she put him in an awkward position? "Lee?" Her head was still on his chest, but she tilted her face so she could look at him. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked you to do that. That was... "

"Hey, stop." His soothing voice was firm. His arms tightened around her. "I said I'd take care of it. I meant it. Tell you what. I'll make you a deal."

"What?"

"If it will make you feel better. I have a safety deposit box that contains all my instructions if something was to happen to me. My attorney has the key right now, but it would mean a lot to me if I could give it to you." His gentle hand stroked her arm up and down. "Fair trade?"

His safety deposit box key! She knew he trusted her, but this... She softly smiled up at him and then laid her head back down on his chest. "Fair trade."

Lee held her until she calmed down, gently stroking her arm and murmuring words of reassurance. She felt so safe and warm in his protective arms. He never knew until much later how much that night had meant to her. They really didn't talk much more that evening. Words weren't necessary. Just being together, that was the important part. Later, when she insisted that she was okay to drive home, he walked her down to her car and tightly embraced her, pulling back to gently kiss her forehead. Even now, closing her eyes, she could almost feel the soft, satiny texture of his lips on her cool skin.

They didn't discuss that night again until their six month wedding anniversary, when Lee returned the letter to her, unopened. And here it sat, in her journal, still

untouched. It was a symbol to her. A symbol of the fragility of life. A symbol of the faith and trust she had in her husband, her partner, her best friend. She remembered the tears that welled up in her eyes when he handed her the sealed envelope. His respect for her privacy was overwhelming. What she hadn't told him that night was that the envelope had contained a letter to him, as well, confessing her true feelings for him.

It was on that anniversary they decided to end the lies and secrecy, and tell her family and the Agency the truth, no matter what the consequences. Leading a double life was hard enough, but a triple life... That was nearly impossible. It hadn't been easy. There were a lot of hurt feelings and they had to fight to retain their partnership at work, but it was all worth it in the end. The weight that had been lifted off them was immense and they were finally able to live as "normal" people. Well, as "normal" as married spies can live.

January 12, 1986--

It is now two in the morning and I have spent the past three hours re-cleaning my clean house. There aren't even any dust bunnies left behind my refrigerator. Now, there's nothing left to do and I still can't sleep. Not with Mother missing. How in the world does she keep getting involved in my secret life? How could I let her get involved this time?

But then again, that's my mother for you. She never listens to me. She has this knack for getting into trouble. I know that Lee's response to this would be "Just like someone else I know."

We've just got to find her. Thank goodness, the boys are with Mr. Doyle. I have no idea how I would explain all of this to them.

Where in the world could she be?

Lee had something on his mind. Amanda could always tell. All the signs were there. He had run his hand absently through his hair about five times and was currently staring out the coffee shop window, mindlessly drumming his fingers on his cup.

She wished he would just talk to her. The silence between them that usually comforted her, now closed in on her, making her feel claustrophobic.

They had left the Agency about ten minutes ago. Her mother was being led out of the building and Amanda didn't want to take any chances at being caught. She had suggested that they go for a cup of coffee. Now she wondered if that had been such a good idea. Her mind raced, trying to decipher what had him so preoccupied.

It just didn't make any sense. Before they left the debriefing room he had kissed her cheek. He told her, she was "special." What could have changed in the course of ten minutes? What could be bothering him? She knew that he was upset that she had tried to rescue her mother without back-up, but she had tried to let him know where she was going. It wasn't her fault that the receptionist had thought she was a crackpot. Was it their conversation last week? Was he having second thoughts about his promise to handle things "just in case... "

"Amanda?" Lee's voice broke in. Her eyes refocused, steadily meeting his gaze. He looked down, clearing his throat. "I was, um, curious about something."

Finally, the silence had been killing her. "Yeah?" Amanda prompted.

"You don't have to answer, if you don't want to."

She grinned. Typical Stetson stalling technique. "Lee, what do you want to know?"

"It was actually your mother who got me thinking of it." Her mother. Amanda thought back to yesterday. The park. The car. Oh, gosh, he was going to ask about... "Why didn't you ever tell me that you were engaged to Dean?" Amanda's jaw dropped. She had the feeling that Lee was going to ask her about Dean, but this was not the question she was expecting. "I mean, I knew that you were dating and then all of sudden you never mentioned his name again. So, I just assumed that it wasn't very serious."

"Now, wait a minute. I was never engaged to Dean." Her words tumbled out quickly. She looked at Lee, willing him to meet her eyes. He wouldn't. This must have really been bothering him.

"But your mother said... "

"Whoa." Amanda paused, choosing her words purposefully. She made a concerted effort to keep her voice calm and slow. "Dean asked me to marry him on a few different occasions and Mother was pushing very hard for me to accept. I just wasn't ready. I had just gotten through my divorce and I wanted to be sure that if I ever got married again, it was to the right person." What was he finding so interesting in that coffee cup?

"And Dean wasn't the right person?" Lee asked tensely.

Amanda looked at Lee again, searching for a clue as to what he was thinking. He still wasn't looking at her and he had his "poker" face on. The one he usually wore when he was jealous. How could he possibly be jealous of Dean? He hadn't been in her life in two years!

She considered her answer carefully, not ready to reveal the real reason it hadn't worked out. Not ready to tell Lee that her breakup with Dean was due in large part to his entrance into her life. "Well, it became pretty obvious to me that if I could constantly put Agency assignments in front of my time with him, something was wrong. Do you have any idea how many dates I canceled? Or how many I just plain missed because I was kidnapped or had amnesia or was held at gun point?" She took in a gulp of air. She needed to get across to him how little Dean had really meant to her. "I just realized that if Dean had been the 'right one,' I would never have gotten so involved with the Agency. I wouldn't have looked forward to those last minute phone calls from that guy that never introduced himself when I answered," she teased, a slight smile playing on her lips.

"I never did like that guy," Lee muttered. His jaw was clenched and he gripped the coffee cup tightly.

Amanda was desperate to lighten the mood. "Yeah, I picked up on that. Actually, I don't think you've ever liked any of the men that I've dated?" she goaded. That got him. His hazel eyes met her challenge.

"Oh, you're one to talk, Mrs. King."

"Hey, if any of those girls had the mental capacity to conjugate a verb, I'm sure I would have liked them just fine," she retorted, her expression innocent.

"What about Leslie? What was it that you didn't like about her?" Amanda's head jerked up in shock. There was a humorous glint in Lee's eyes that dissolved when

their eyes met. They now held a hint of regret. He broke their eye contact and looked out the window again.

Wow! Her hand involuntarily went to her stomach. That was a pretty powerful punch. She hoped that Lee hadn't heard that sharp intake of breath she had to take in order to steady herself. She blinked and swallowed . The lump in her throat wouldn't budge. She didn't want to answer that question. When Lee finally looked back at her, his eyes pleaded for forgiveness. She knew that she should let it go. She knew that she should move on to a new topic, but she'd always wondered... "Talk about ending things abruptly. What ever happened with her?"

"Nice redirection." Lee countered.

"Thank you. I learned from the best. Spill it, Stetson." Her voice sounded a lot lighter than her heart felt.

"Oh, I don't know. Something just didn't click Something was missing. She wasn't..." He paused. His eyes locked onto her. "Maybe you were right. Maybe she was just too 'normal.'"

"Well, you know us 'normal' girls..." Amanda smiled. She knew exactly what Leslie was missing.

"Hold it, right there." Lee took Amanda's hand in his. Did the heating system in the restaurant suddenly kick in? "Amanda, I think we can safely say that you are far from 'normal.'" His index finger lightly traced hers as they again drifted into silence. This time, however, it was comfortable and soothing. He cleared his throat after a moment, "Why don't we take a walk before we head back to the office to finish our reports?"

She glanced down at their entwined fingers. It was amazing to her how easily they fit together. She smiled back up at Lee. "Sounds great."

They walked through the park, Lee's arm around her waist. She covertly looked up at him, marveling at the way the bright sun brought out the warm golden highlights in his hair. She settled her cheek on the soft leather of his coat and breathed in the crisp, cool January air. She wished they didn't have to go back to work. It was

Sunday after all. She watched the other couples walking hand-in-hand, whispering to one another and knew that she and Lee fit into the mix.

A cloud passed over the sun, darkening the sky and causing the temperature to drop suddenly. Even though she didn't want to move from her current position in Lee's arm, cool air invaded her open coat, causing her to shiver. "Just a second."

She pulled slightly away from Lee and started to zip up her wool jacket. She couldn't get the darn thing to ascend more than a quarter of the way up. Great, it was stuck. Just her luck. She struggled, jiggling the zipper up and down vainly, trying to get it to release.

"Here, let me." Lee was now in front of her. He removed her fingers gently. He then slowly began extricating the zipper from its death grip. She dared to look up at him. The warmth from his body was blocking any chill she had previously experienced. His fingers were millimeters from touching her. Breathing was very difficult. Every time she inhaled, a musky scent invaded her nostrils. She was amazed that she was still standing.

The pulling at her jacket stopped. Lee's eyes found hers. The gleam in them was unmistakable. That sparkle she loved so much. A slow, deliberate grin emerged on his lips. He released a slow breath, which greeted her cheek like a whisper. She felt hands encircling her waist pulling her closer. Nothing existed right now, but the two of them. She moved her hands up his arms, her fingers melting into the soft leather. Lee lowered his face to hers...

A ringing came from Lee's pocket. Not again. Amanda's eyes closed in vexation. Lee groaned, releasing his hold on her and reached into his pocket. He pulled out the bulky mobile phone. "Stetson... Yeah, Francine, we're on our way back now..."

Amanda silently groaned. Francine would be receiving no chocolates from her this week. She watched Lee with barely concealed amusement as he answered Francine's questions in a short, clipped tone. He ran his hand roughly through his hair and looked up at the sky. He was so cute when he was frustrated.

Lee replaced the phone in his pocket. "Your mother has been taken home. Billy needs to see us," he explained.

Amanda nodded, regaining her composure. "Okay. Well, I guess we'd better..."

Lee joined her halfway through her sentence. "Yeah, we'd better head back." Lee tenderly entwined Amanda's right hand in his left and they walked back to the Agency in silence.

Amanda shook her head, thinking back to all the times she and Lee had been interrupted that year. If she had a nickel for every time Francine busted in on them, she would now own a couple of those infamous designer originals.

January 17, 1986--

I feel absolutely miserable. This couch is like a prison cell. I hate being sick. And if that weren't bad enough, the fact that Lee is on a case without me makes it ten times worse. I should be there to back him up.

Why did Francine have to be so nasty on the phone? There was no reason for that!

I know that she wasn't his first choice, but the fact that she's at that country club with him really bothers me. My sole consolation is they're not posing as a married couple. I don't think I'd be able to sleep at all if that was the case.

There's got to be a way that I can help. Maybe if I watch the tournament tomorrow...

Amanda snuggled into her "nest" on the couch. That hot bath had been just what she needed. She had changed into a fresh T-shirt and pair of sweats, and was beginning to feel somewhat human. Now if her stuffy nose and sore throat would go away, everything would be perfect. Mother had taken the boys out to a late afternoon movie, so the house was peaceful and quiet. Perfect time for a nap. She hadn't gotten a lot of rest since Lee had called saying he was going on a case.

There was a light tapping at the back door. Amanda smiled. What in the world was he doing here? He'd just spoken to her a few hours ago from the country club. She sat up, pulling the blankets around her. "Yes?"

Lee cautiously poked his head in. "Is the coast clear?"

"Yes, the boys convinced Mother to take them to a movie. They'll be gone for at least another hour." She ran her hands through her damp hair, hoping she looked presentable. "Come on in."

Lee entered the house carrying a large basket. His warm smile triggered that familiar glow to spread throughout her body. "I just wanted to come by and see how you were feeling."

"Oh, I'm getting better." Amanda sniffled, holding a tissue to her nose. She regarded the basket he held with curiosity. "What's that?"

"It's a picnic basket." he stated simply.

Amanda suppressed the chuckle that begged for release. "Well, I can see that. And it's a very sweet thought, but I'm really not up to a picnic, right now."

He shook his head, amusement in his beautiful hazel eyes as he placed the basket on the coffee table. He sat down at the other end of the couch. "It's actually a kind of 'get well basket.'"

This was one of the sweetest things he'd ever done for her. Wasn't this kind of thing her job? "Oh, really? This I have to see. What's in it?"

Smiling proudly, he opened one side of the wicker basket and began pulling items out, placing them on the coffee table. "Well, let's see. We have a box of tissues. Lozenges. A few different types of tea, I didn't know what kind you drink. Crossword puzzles. Chicken soup..."

At this point, Amanda could no longer hold back the soft laugh. "Don't tell me you cooked that."

"No." He said the word slowly and deliberately. "I didn't have time for that. I know a chef. He made up a special batch for me."

Amanda couldn't stop smiling. Maybe there were benefits to being sick.

"And even though you people in the suburbs think that chicken soup is the cure for the common cold, I know otherwise. So, I brought you, my own personal remedy." He pulled out a bottle from the basket and closed the lid. "Brandy."

She looked at all the items piled on the table and glanced up at Lee. He looked like a young boy asking to be told that he'd done the right thing. "This is so sweet, Lee." She took his hand. How had she gone the past few days without being able to do that? "Thank you."

"Oh," his eyes moved to the back door, "I almost forgot the most important thing." He squeezed her hand before releasing it. He went out the door and returned with a bunch of fresh wildflowers.

"They're beautiful." She accepted them, grinning broadly. She felt lighter and cheerier than she had in days.

"Okay, that settles it. I'm getting sick more often."

Lee quickly sat down again, closer to her this time. There was a hypnotic intensity in his eyes as he tucked an errant strand of hair behind her ear. His voice was low and emphatic, "Uh-uh. No more getting sick. Francine isn't that bad to work with, but a person can only take so much. And she's not my partner. So I expect to see you back at the office at one hundred percent very soon."

Amanda could only nod, she was overwhelmed by the feeling of his right hand resting just behind her ear.

"I should go. You need your rest." He rose slowly and leaned down. She closed her eyes reveling in the soft, lingering sensation of his lips on her forehead. Gosh, she could get used to this. Who was she kidding? She was getting used to this. He picked up the picnic basket and went to the back door. His hand on the doorknob, he turned to face her again. "I have to get back to the office. Francine makes me do my own paperwork."

How she found her voice, she wasn't quite sure. "Thanks again for... everything."

"My pleasure. I'll see you soon, partner."

Amanda beamed as he smiled, closing the door behind him. Even though she'd gotten used to him calling her "partner," it still thrilled her every time he said it. She once again looked at the "remedies" on the table, her fingertips gently caressing where Lee's lips had been. She reached down under the couch and retrieved her journal. Plucking a flower from the bouquet she placed it between the pages of the entry she had written the night before.

Amanda gently fingered the dried petals, recalling the wonderfully sweet memory. She suddenly felt the urge to hear her husband's voice. With a little effort, she eased herself from the lounge chair and went into the kitchen.

"Q-Department. Lee Stetson's desk."

Even after three years, it was still strange for Amanda to hear that greeting. For so long the Q-Bureau had been their haven, but with the large influx of cases Billy had decided an expansion was necessary. The entire upper floor was revamped to accommodate the new offices and Lee had been placed in charge with Amanda as his assistant. At least it had brought them in out of the field. It was a difficult transition for Lee in the beginning, but he soon assimilated to his new duties. Amanda secretly thought Billy was preparing Lee to take over for him when he retired.

"Hello Alicia," Amanda greeted their newest agent. "Is my husband around?"

"No, I'm sorry, Amanda. He's been in a meeting with Billy all afternoon. I was just trying to find the Harrison file. He said it was on his desk, but I can't find it anywhere. I can't wait until you get back. You always know where everything is."

Amanda laughed, imagining the mess that Alicia was attempting to sort through. "I'm sure it's there somewhere."

"Do you want me to leave him a message?" Alicia asked.

"Yes, just tell him to call if he's going to be late for dinner," Amanda said cheerfully, a plan starting to form in her brain.

"Okay. I'll tell him as soon as I see him."

"Thanks. I'll talk to you soon. Bye, Alicia. Good luck finding that file," she laughed.

"Thanks, I'm going to need it. Bye, Amanda."

Since her mother and Aunt Lillian would be late it would be the perfect opportunity for a quiet romantic dinner. Time alone was a rare event. After she completed the prep work for the meal, she put together a light snack of cheese and crackers and went back out to the shade to continue her journey into the past.

January 27, 1986--

I can't stop thinking about the look in Lee's eyes tonight. I haven't seen "that look" in a long time. That combination of frustration, disappointment, embarrassment. That look that tells me, I let him down. But I know what Rupert and I saw. I understand why he may have a problem believing Rupert, but how can not believe me! He's always trusted in my instincts before! So, why not now?!

How in the world did Lois Mendelson get back into her room without us seeing her? Who took her and what did they want with her? I mean, she wasn't gone for very long. I'll have to do some digging tomorrow morning and see if I can find something that will make sense out of this.

He was so angry when he left, he wouldn't even speak to me. It hurt so much that he just walked away. I tried to explain, but he didn't want to hear it. We seemed so close last week. What changed?

It's not just tonight. Lee's been pulling away from me again. Distancing himself. I just don't get it. Last week he couldn't wait for me to get back to the office and now he doesn't seem to want me around. I'm not doing anything differently and yet, I seem to be getting on his nerves. The one thing I don't understand is that with all the distance he seems to want to put between us, he asked me to go with him to Birchwood. That doesn't make any sense to me at all. If he doesn't want me around, why invite me along?

Maybe I need to spend a little more time in the bullpen. Maybe he just needs some space.

Is he scared? Did we get too close? Does it even occur to him that I'm scared too? That it's just as difficult for me to open up myself to another man? Yes, I think space is exactly what we need. Maybe it will give us both a little perspective.

If he's trying to confuse me, he's doing a bang up job!

She had been right on target. Space had been exactly what Lee had needed. She had worked in the bullpen exclusively for two days, only seeing Lee when absolutely necessary. It had been hard, but she knew that was the only way. He'd needed a subtle reminder of how much he valued having her around.

The space had been good for her as well. She had realized how much she had taken their relationship for granted. How much she missed seeing the way his eyes would light up when a case started to make sense. The way he would run his fingers through his thick sandy hair when it didn't. The way he would smile at her broadly when she saw an angle that he hadn't even considered. Even the way he would reproach her when, once again, she hadn't "waited in the car." All the little things that she had come to depend on.

It's amazing what two days can do. By the third morning, Lee had called down to the bullpen asking Amanda to come help with some filing that "had" to get done. He'd greeted her with a warm smile. That smile immediately let her know that they were back on track. They spent the morning working in comfortable silence and when she was just about ready to leave for lunch, he asked her to accompany him to Birchwood again.

Amanda walked along the Birchwood path, her arm linked through Rupert's. They had spent half an hour walking together and talking. She proudly told him about her mother and the boys, while he listened with great interest. He regaled her with stories of his "adventures" in the early days of the Agency. They eventually reached the spot where she was supposed to meet Lee and sat on a bench to wait.

"Well, I got my wish," Rupert stated simply.

"Wish?" Amanda asked a little confused.

"My birthday wish." Rupert's eyes gleamed with mischief. "You came to visit me again. A fella always likes to have a pretty girl call on him."

Amanda beamed. There was something incredibly special about Rupert. "Thank you. I'm glad Lee asked me to join him."

She smiled broadly thinking of the boyish look on Lee's face as soon as they had arrived. This community had afforded him the "family" that he so desperately needed. Here he was given unconditional love and support. It was here that he felt "special." And they needed him as much as he needed them. She wondered if Lee realized that.

Seeing Lee open himself up to become part of a "family" filled her with a warm glow. Maybe one day she could provide him with that as well.

"You know I heard the scuttlebutt a year ago. Our boy with a partner. Didn't think I'd see that day come. I asked him about you. Know what he said?"

"No, what?" Amanda asked softly.

"'Terrific instincts. Good listener. Great legs.' " Amanda's eyes widened and Rupert chuckled heartily. "He was a hundred percent right. Our boy has great taste."

"Rupert!" Amanda felt herself blushing fiercely. First Lee told Harry that she was pretty and now Rupert. She wondered who else he had talked to about her and what he'd said.

Amanda looked down the path and saw a funicular approaching. A wave of pleasure washed over her as she watched Lee exit the vehicle carrying two overstuffed baskets of goodies. He somehow managed to balance both of the them and assist Lois Mendelson down. They walked together to where Amanda and Rupert were sitting and Lee smiled playfully at Amanda as he raised a basket. "One of these is for you. Lois and Glynnis have truly outdone themselves." He turned his attention to Rupert. "Hello, sir."

"Hello, nephew. It's good of you to come by. Next time I expect a proper visit." Rupert stood up and reached for Lois's hand. "How about that walk you promised me, Lois? These two young folks need to get on their way."

"Of course," Lois replied with a warm smile. "It was good to see you again, Amanda. Glynnis sends her best. She had to run off to volleyball practice."

Amanda grinned warmly. "I understand. Tell her I said goodbye."

"I will. Maybe next time you can spend some time with us. We have such wonderful stories we could tell you." Amanda watched Lee shift his weight uncomfortably. "We'll see you next week, Lee. Make sure to bring your appetite."

"Yes, ma'am." Lee replied teasingly and then nodded to the older gentleman. "Good-bye, Rupert."

"Niece, you come by real soon. With or without him, remember?" Rupert took Amanda's right hand, bent down and gently kissed her knuckles. Before standing upright he winked at her conspiratorially. "Pretty as a picture."

"Thank you, sir," Amanda smiled broadly. "I'll see you very soon."

She watched Rupert and Lois walk down the path together arm in arm. Their heads close together, whispering companionably. She shook her head, laughing softly. Why hadn't she noticed their connection before?

"What's so funny?"

"I'm not sure," Amanda answered evasively. Maybe she was wrong. Only time and more visits would get her the answer. She stood up. "Come on, let's head back."

As they walked toward the car, Lee's voice broke the silence. "So, what did Rupert have to say? And what was that wink about?" Lee asked curiously.

She grinned, knowing how much he hated being out of the loop. "Not much really. He's a very sweet man. I can see why you enjoy spending time with him. He brought something very interesting to my attention right before you arrived. Actually, I think he may have let a piece of confidential information slip out." She glowed remembering Rupert's words.

Lee stopped short. "Oh really? What?" Was that a hint of nervousness in his voice?

"Well..." Amanda turned around, taking one of the baskets from Lee. She leaned in close and whispered, "The information I gathered is need-to-know and you don't

need-to-know." She let out a hearty laugh at the bemused expression on his handsome face and continued to the car.

February 15, 1986--

"Things I like a lot." That phrase keeps playing itself over and over again in my mind. His warm voice went right into my very core. It was absolutely electrifying. With everything that happened this week that is the one thing I keep coming back to, what Lee said and how he looked at me in that hotel room. It took every ounce of strength I had not to kiss him right then and there. Does

Lee know how much it affects me when he looks at me like that? I bet he does. That Stetson smile gets me every time. And he knows it. But there was something different in it this time. I can't put my finger on it.

I wonder what he meant by "deal with the devil?" I mean, I know he's risked his life and his career for me on a number of occasions, but how far did he go this time? What kind of a deal could he have possibly made? I'll have to remember to ask him later.

I visited Francine in the hospital this afternoon. I can't believe she got shot while protecting me! When I thanked her, she said she was just "doing her job." But the look of understanding and friendship that passed between us meant more than any words I could have given. And I don't think the flowers and chocolate I brought didn't hurt

any either.

And now, I have to go to that stupid reunion! That is the last thing I want to do tonight. It's bad enough that I have to go, but I really don't want to show up there alone. Maybe there's a way I can get out of it. Okay, I'll make a deal with myself. If I don't like the dress Mother found, I just won't go.

"You know, Lee, it's not too late," Amanda said apprehensively as they walked hand in hand to the hotel ballroom. "We could go somewhere else. Grab a pizza or something?"

Lee stopped, cocked his head and gave her a crooked smile. "Dressed like this?" He gestured to their sixties attire. "Come on, it'll be fun."

"You don't know these people." She forced a smile in return as they entered the ballroom. "Heck, I don't even know these people."

"Amanda!" an overly chipper voice shrieked from the table next to the door.

"Well, they obviously know you," Lee whispered teasingly in her ear.

Before Amanda could process who the voice belonged to, she found herself enveloped in tight embrace. Her hand was torn from Lee's. She hugged the stranger back and pulled away to see who was so excited to see her. "Patricia?"

"Yes, it's me!" the perky blond exclaimed with a wide grin. Patricia's expression transformed into mock reproach, "We missed you at the picnic today. Everyone was wondering where you were."

"Well," Amanda looked at Lee with a small smile. "I was a little tied up with work." She watched in amusement as he tried desperately to keep a straight face.

"Uh-huh," Patricia smirked. She extended her hand to Lee. "Patricia Evans."

Lee flashed a charming smile and shook her hand. "Lee Stetson."

"You always did know how to pick 'em, Amanda." Patricia nudged her playfully. Amanda winced, wishing the floor would open up and swallow her. Patricia handed them two nametags. "Write your names on these and go mingle. Amanda, you and I will catch up later."

As they walked into the fray, Lee put his arm around her waist and leaned down to her ear, "Good friend of yours?"

"Not particularly. She was on student council with me," Amanda grimaced. "This is going to be a long night."

Lee laughed, pulling her closer to him. "Come on, let's get you a drink."

Amanda smiled up at him gratefully. "I thought you'd never ask."

"Wow!"

"What?" Amanda asked curiously as she brought the glass of wine from her lips. She followed Lee's gaze. Oh my gosh! She set the glass on the bar with a loud clink. She'd been so busy admiring the beautifully decorated red and white tables that she hadn't noticed the large blown-up pictures which adorned the walls of the ballroom. Lee's eyes were fixated on one in particular. One of Amanda in her cheerleading outfit, smiling brightly. A blush rose to her cheeks. "Oh. Yeah, that was from my senior year."

Lee looked down at her, grinning mischievously. "I think that's the shortest skirt I've ever seen you in. It's a good look on you."

The heat in her cheeks was becoming almost unbearable. Before she could respond, she sensed someone standing behind her. "What did I say last year, 'Never could trust a cheerleader?' You know I didn't mean it, don't you?"

"Connie!" Amanda whirled around and gave her old friend a warm hug. She stepped away, smiling warmly at Conrad Walter Barnhill. "It's so good to see you! How are you?"

"I'm fine. Back in the States." A large smile spread across Conrad's features as he gazed at her. "You look wonderful, Amanda."

"Oh, Connie." Amanda averted her eyes self-consciously. "You remember Mr. Stetson?"

"Yes, of course." Conrad extended his hand. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"Barnhill," Lee greeted tersely, shaking the offered hand. "Staying out of trouble I hope."

Conrad smiled nervously. "Uh, yeah." Amanda could sense the growing tension between the two men. Conrad's eyes found her again. "Amanda, uh, would you... . do you... . want to dance?" he asked nervously.

Amanda looked uncertainly over at Lee and then back at Conrad, "Well, uh... "

"Actually," Lee jumped in, placing his arm around her waist. "Amanda has promised me the first dance."

Disappointment shone in Conrad's eyes. "You will save at least one for me, won't you, Amanda?" he asked hopefully.

How could she say "no" to him? "Of course, Connie. We'll talk a little later, okay?"

Conrad beamed. "All right."

Lee's hand tightened slightly on her waist. "Come on, I think they're playing our song."

Amanda smiled up at Lee and nodded her agreement.

They finally reached the dance floor, after being stopped several times by Amanda's classmates. Some had been friends. Some had not. She'd actually gotten great pleasure at watching the women's eyes wander over Lee and look back at her with thinly veiled envy. "Making it from the bar to here was trickier than Dodge City maneuvers," Lee laughed, shaking his head. Lee pulled her into arms and they began moving to the music with comfortable ease.

Amanda finally allowed herself to relax, resting her chin against Lee's shoulder. Closing her eyes, she forgot everything but the man who was holding her and the soothing ballad that swelled from the band playing on the stage. The scent of his cologne, the warmth that emanated from his body, the softness of his suede coat, and the feel of each finger that held her close. They danced without speaking for what seemed a blissful eternity and she felt, rather than heard, Lee humming along to the music. The vibration from his chest made her heart race.

She looked up at Lee, and found him gazing at her with darkening eyes. The strong hand on her back held her close. Her entire body felt warm and tingled with

anticipation. Her eyes wandered from his hypnotic eyes, to his strong jawline and finally settled on his soft lips.

She suddenly felt Lee's body tense. She looked over his shoulder and saw Conrad behind Lee. Interrupted once again. Yes, the universe was definitely conspiring against them. "Excuse me, may I cut in?"

Lee glared back at Conrad and then looked at Amanda with resignation. "Of course," he answered tightly. Before leaving Amanda to dance with Conrad, he leaned down and whispered hoarsely in her ear. "Maybe we should have gone for pizza, after all?"

Amanda shook her head at the memory. It didn't seem to matter where they were, interruptions were inevitable. She turned the page of the journal and a folded piece of paper fell out. She froze. She didn't even need to open it to know what it contained. That day still haunted her. She gingerly picked up the folded paper from her lap. The thick hospital stationary was heavy in her hands. With slightly shaking fingers, she opened the paper and read her anxious penmanship.

February 20, 1986--

He looks so helpless lying there. It's almost painful to simply watch him sleeping. This man who has been strong and vital, now lies here weak and pale. His hand felt so heavy in mine, so lifeless. It just doesn't seem real somehow. I've seen him shot and I've seen him beat up pretty badly, but this... All those other times, I've been able to do something. And now, I'm barely able to hold myself together.

I'm hanging on by a thread. I can't seem to get rid of the lump in my throat and my stomach has been in knots since I saved him in the parking garage. What would have happened if I hadn't gotten there? Oh, I really don't want to think about that. I just wish I could stop shaking.

I know the doctor said the CAT scan didn't show any complications, but I won't be able to relax until Lee wakes up.

I can't focus. Nothing seems to be making any sense. I've done everything I possibly can to keep my mind occupied. I've wandered the hospital corridors, I've read almost every available magazine in the building, and I talked to Lee until I was hoarse. I can't sleep. I'm exhausted, but I'm afraid to close my eyes. This is what I have left. Writing my feelings on paper. Feelings that I should be expressing to him.

This is the man I love and trust more than any man I've ever met and the only time I have been able to tell him is when he's unconscious. He HAS to be okay. I HAVE to have the opportunity to tell him how much he means to me.

That night in the hospital had been one of the hardest things she'd had to experience. Watching Lee lying there, helpless to do anything, but hold his hand and keep her private vigil. The relief she felt when he woke was indescribable. Nights like that one was of the main reasons she had been so glad they had made the decision to come in from the field. Their time at the Agency had produced way too many hospital visits. And face it, their medical expenses had greatly diminished as soon as they'd take on their desk jobs, well, at least until recently.

"Is the popcorn almost ready?" Lee called from the living room of his apartment.

"My gosh, you certainly are impatient." Amanda stuck her head out of the kitchen, with a bright grin on her face. "Do you have a pressing engagement that I don't know about?"

"No, I just want to start celebrating the end of my convalescence. I can't believe you have taken Billy's assignment so seriously," he teased.

Amanda was actually not only taking Billy's assignment seriously, she was having a lot of fun. She enjoyed watching him grumble when she reminded him of her higher status. There was something incredibly satisfying about Lee having to take orders from her. Too bad it would all be over tomorrow. She was going to miss him.

Amanda emerged with the bowl of popcorn in her hands. "Oh, come on, it hasn't been that bad. Admit it. You're going to miss me nagging you."

Lee smiled, shaking his head. "Get over here with that bowl. I'm starved. This is the only junk food you've allowed me to have all week."

"You make me sound like a drill sergeant," Amanda smirked.

"Well, you're pretty close. For the past five days, you haven't let me do anything. You won't let me get caught up on any work. You make me take naps. You won't even let me have a glass of wine tonight."

"Lee, stop whining. It's not very attractive. Besides, no matter what you say, I know you love it." Amanda smiled at the silly pout on Lee's face. She sat down beside him on the couch, handing him the popcorn. Noticing what was on the television screen, she shook her head and frowned. "Uh-uh. We are not watching this!"

"What's wrong with this?" he challenged.

"Three women, running down the beach, chasing the bad guys in platform heels! I can't believe anybody ever bought that show! You don't really want to watch this, do you?" Amanda looked at Lee incredulously.

"Well, I don't know. The dark-haired one in the halter top is kinda cute." Lee looked at her, a mischievous smile playing on his lips. "Reminds me a little of someone else I know."

She gave him her best "oh, please" look, but the veiled compliment made it very difficult not to beam with

pleasure. "Nice try. Give me the remote."

"Wait a minute," he laughed, holding the remote out of her reach. "It's my apartment. My remote."

"Scarecrow," Amanda said in mock sternness, placing her hands on her hips. "I'm your superior for one more day. This is a direct order." She made another attempt for the elusive item, getting on her knees and reaching across his body for his left hand. "Give... me... the... remote."

"Okay. Okay. I'll change the channel," he laughed as her hand closed around the remote. Time stopped for a brief moment as their eyes locked. Amanda suddenly

found it very difficult to breathe and her heart began to pound wildly. How was it possible that this man could look as sexy in sweats and a T-shirt as he did in a tux? No, this was not the time. He was still recuperating. She exhaled softly and returned to her sitting position. Lee gave her an amused smile and cleared his throat. "I'm sure there's something on we can agree on." After a couple moments of searching, "Casablanca" flashed on the screen. "Is this acceptable, Mrs. King?"

Amanda's eyes were glued to the television. Why did this seem so familiar? Of course, she'd seen "Casablanca," but there was something else. Something in the back of her mind was nagging at her. It had to do with this movie and this apartment. She slowly turned to face Lee. No, she hadn't watched the movie with him before... or had she? Whatever was sitting in her mind, just out of reach, involved him. Of that, she was sure.

"Amanda is something wrong?" Lee asked, looking at her intently.

Amanda shook her head, trying to clear it. "No, I'm sorry. This is fine." The odd feeling just wouldn't go away. "Lee, we've never watched this movie together before, have we?"

"No, why?" he asked curiously.

"I don't know. I just have the weirdest feeling of *deja vu*." She searched his eyes, hoping to find the answer in their brilliant hazel depths. Oh, well, it was probably nothing. She had seen the movie about twenty times. That's probably all it was. "Never mind."

Lee chuckled. That wonderful, hearty sound that made her feel so full. He wrapped his right arm around her and pulled her close. "Come here. We've only missed the first ten minutes." The husky quality of his voice caused a shiver to run through her body. Focusing hard to breath normally, she nestled herself into the crook of his arm. Lying her head on his shoulder, she reveled in the simple intimacy of the moment.

As the screen faded from black to an advertisement for the next feature, Amanda let out a soft yawn. "I love the ending of that movie. Don't you?" Receiving no response, she looked up at Lee. His head was nodded forward and his eyes were closed. She chuckled softly at the small smile that rested on his lips. She hated to

wake him. She allowed her hand to gently rest on his solid chest, feeling the even and deep rise and fall. Pulling herself up, she removed the empty bowl from his lap. "Lee," she whispered, softly touching his cheek. "Lee, we need to get you into bed."

His eyes opened reluctantly. "Hmm?"

She gently lifted his arm, extricating herself from the warmth of his embrace and stood up, taking his hand. "Come on, you'll have a terrible neck-ache if you sleep on this couch. Time for you to go to bed."

Half-asleep, he allowed her to guide him to the bedroom and into bed. She pulled the covers up over his body. "Go back to sleep," she murmured in a lulling voice. "I'll clean and lock up before I leave."

"Mmm-hmmm." He was already fading.

She gazed down at his peaceful slumbering form. She smiled, knowing that someday she would be lying there beside him. "Someday," she breathed. Leaning down, she brushed a strand of golden hair away and gently kissed his forehead.

March 6, 1986--

What an exhausting day! Sometimes it amazes me how much can happen in such a short period of time. At least Lee and I made up. Well, we didn't talk everything through or anything, but he DID admit that I was right. And before I left he DID apologize for his behavior.

I really hate fighting with him, but his constant need to be right can be so infuriating at times. He can make me so angry.

And I can't believe we fought like that in front of Billy. What must he have thought?! It was completely unprofessional of us to argue like THAT in front of him.

There was something more to our fight than just the case. I know it. Can it be chalked up to frustration? My frustration that we seem to be right on the threshold of taking the next step and never quite getting there? Is Lee as frustrated as I am? Does it bother him that Billy's giving me my own

assignments? Is he upset that I don't need him as much? I understand that he feels responsible for me, but I've been doing this for a while. He needs to accept that I can handle some things without him. I mean, don't get me wrong, I love working with him, but it's time I began to prove myself. And I think I did that today.

I only hope that we can come up with some way to save Francine. I know Lee says not to get let your personal feeling get in the way of obtaining your objective, but I can't let go of the feeling that Francine is my friend and she's in trouble.

Sure, we haven't always gotten along and we've had our differences, but our relationship has grown over the past couple of years. I think it's safe to say (even though I know she'd deny it publicly) that we've come to respect each other. When push comes to shove, I know that I could count on her to be there for me. And I hope she knows that I'd do the same for her.

And Lee... I saw the look on his face. I know this is tough on him. I sure hope his plan works, because I know hard it would be for him if anything happened to her.

"Oh boy," Amanda said as she scanned the table cluttered with empty Chinese takeout containers and used paper plates.

"I'll help you clean it up," Lee offered.

"No that's okay. I've got it," Amanda reasoned. "Why don't you get started on that report for Billy?"

"Well, now that I have my desk back, I guess I should get some work done," he teased lightly.

"Well, you know, if I had a desk of my own up here, that wouldn't be an issue," Amanda retorted. It was a risky thing to say, but she was getting a little tired of running up and down from the bullpen. Especially since she usually ended up spending most of her day up in the Q-Bureau.

Lee looked over at her a little startled. She could see the wheels turning in his head, but she couldn't figure out what exactly was going through his mind. "Uh-huh," he muttered noncommittally.

Nope, he wasn't ready for that. She decided to let him off the hook. "Relax, Scarecrow, I was only kidding." She winked.

Seeing his tense posture relax, Amanda went to get a trash bag. She surreptitiously watched Lee walk to his desk out of the corner of her eye. With a small smile on her face she began cleaning up the mess while she waited for Lee to discover the "gift" she'd left for him.

"Amanda?"

"There's a little chow mien left over," she informed him nonchalantly. "Would you like me to put it in the fridge for you?"

"What's this?" he asked suspiciously. She turned around to face him. He was holding up the file she had left on his chair.

"It's your security assessment," she stated simply, trying to hide her amusement. "You asked me the other day how I would rate you. I put that together last night."

"Really?" he asked brightly, eagerly opening the file. As he began to read, lines of confusion and then

disappointment creased his forehead. "1147. That's not even an 'A' rating."

"I know," Amanda said as she casually tossed a cup in the trash bag. "I assembled the dossier."

"This is ridiculous!" Lee's voice rose. He stared at her in disbelief. "How did you come up with that number?"

"It's all delineated in the report." She nodded for him to keep reading. She was having entirely too much fun with this. In fact, she was having a very difficult time keeping her laughter in check while she watched his eyes widen over the file's contents.

"You took off twenty points for organizational skills?!" he looked at her in amazement.

She looked at his cluttered desk and then back at him. "Need I say more?"

Rubbing his temples with his right hand as if trying to relieve an impending headache, he sat heavily in his chair. "This is unbelievable. 'Agent Stetson has a habit of bending the rules to suit his needs.' " He dropped the file on his desk, "What's that about?"

"Come on, Lee," she grinned. "You have to give me that one."

He stared at her pointedly. "You do realize that if I didn't 'bend the rules' you wouldn't be here."

She couldn't deny the truth is that statement. "Okay, maybe I can adjust that part of the report," she conceded.

He shook his head and continued reading. "Hold on a second," he stood up and walked to where Amanda was standing. "'The agent's constant need to be right often makes him deaf to his colleagues' points of view.' You took off thirty-five points!" He looked at her incredulously.

"Mn-hmm." Her smile broadened. His reaction was even better than she'd hoped for.

"I admitted that you were right!" he challenged.

"Yes, you did." She moved to stand beside him and pointed at the report. "And if you kept reading, you would see that I gave you an extra twenty points for good judgment." He was taking this entirely too seriously. "Lee, you're focusing on all the negatives. You're not even paying attention to all the wonderful things I said about you. Look right there. 'Agent Stetson has great taste in partners.'" She couldn't stop grinning.

Lee looked down at her, his eyebrow raised in mock annoyance. Slowly, a small smile appeared on his lips. He tossed his file on his desk and turned back to Amanda, crossing his arms. "So, as the agent of record, do you have any suggestions as to how I might raise my score?" His voice was low and inviting.

Amanda could almost feel her eyes sparkling. "Well, I'm sure we can think of something."

Lee's hands moved to her waist. She moved closer to him. Staring into his eyes, losing herself in their polished jade depths. She stood mesmerized as she watched his eyes search hers and roam her face, finally settling on her lips.

The sharp clicking of heels in the hallway alerted them to someone's impending arrival. They both jumped back. Amanda almost tripped backward over her own feet but quickly regained her balance. She lowered her eyes and let out a small sigh. For some reason, she could not bring herself to look at Lee. Once again, they'd been intruded upon. She should have known. It was par for the course.

When Francine entered without knocking, Lee was walking back to his desk and Amanda had resumed her cleaning efforts.

"Forgot my purse," Francine smiled brightly. "Amanda, Billy gave me the rest of the day off. If you're finished here, I was wondering if you wanted to join me for dessert?"

Amanda looked at her with a raised eyebrow. Time in captivity had obviously made her desperate for company. Francine may have lousy timing, but if she needed a friend... "Sure, Francine," she said throwing the last plate in the bag. She looked over at Lee, who was busying himself with his report. "Unless you need me for anything else?" she asked, trying to signal an apology with her eyes.

"No, no," Lee answered distractedly, "you two go ahead. I have to finish this for Billy. I'll see you both tomorrow."

Amanda went over to the coat-rack to retrieve her own purse. "Okay," she looked at Lee, who met her gaze for a brief moment. He glanced briefly toward Francine and almost imperceptibly shook his head in annoyance. His eyes moved back to Amanda and he gave her a soft smile. One of these days they'd find the right moment. "See ya later," she smiled softly, closing the door behind her.

March 14, 1986--

Lee had better be in some pretty major trouble right now. Because if he isn't, he will be when I get my hands on him! He was supposed to pick me up

thirty minutes ago! Where in the world could he be? He's never this late without calling. I phoned the Agency, but Mr. Melrose wasn't available and the operator said that Lee hadn't checked in yet.

I really hate when he goes on assignments and I'm not there to back him up. Realistically, I know that I can't be there all the time. And even if I was, something could go wrong anyway. But I just feel helpless knowing that he could be in danger and I'm just sitting here. It's the not knowing that drives me crazy!

And if he's not in trouble... He knew how important this was. He knew that I really needed him to be here. Okay, so maybe I didn't go into detail, but he promised that he would help me out this morning. Well, I can't sit here just stewing. I'll call a cab and get to the Agency, so I can find out what's going on.

"Well, here we are," Lee's voice broke into her thoughts.

"Hmm?" Amanda answered distractedly. "Umm, yeah." She had been replaying the day in her head. Remembering his arms around her. His hand in hers. The warmth and tenderness that had enveloped her as they sat and listened to Billy and the King play out their set. They had been surrounded by people and yet it felt as if the music was solely for them. And now, after the car ride which had passed in comfortable silence, she had been delivered back to her other life.

She wasn't sure she was ready for it to end. She knew that she didn't want to leave Lee's company. When she looked into his firm, steady gaze, she knew that he was as reluctant to let her go as she was to leave. She groped for a conversation that would keep her in the car. "Billy was amazing today. I had no idea he could play the sax. It's too bad that Jeannie couldn't have been there to hear him."

"I know. I think he missed his true calling. And I wouldn't worry about Jeannie. I think she's been privy to a few private sessions." He smirked.

Amanda let out a low chuckle. "You're probably right."

"It's amazing how big they're getting." Amanda followed Lee's gaze down the block to where the boys were playing a game of touch football with the some of the other kids from the neighborhood.

"Yeah," she answered wistfully. The interest and care he felt for her children constantly awed her. She could no longer put off the inevitable. "Well, I should probably go and help Mother clean up. The whole house was a mess when I left this morning." Her normally cheerful voice was tinged with regret.

Lee nodded and got out to open the passenger door for her. Amanda smiled, thrilling in the sensation that this chivalrous act always evoked. It wasn't something he had to do. That's what made it so special. He helped her out, and they stood silently holding hands. Parting was becoming more and more difficult each time they had to do it. The early spring breeze gently ruffled his hair, and she felt a deep desire to brush it back into place.

All of a sudden Lee's face brightened with recognition. "Oh, I almost forgot, we have an appointment tomorrow morning."

"We do?" Amanda asked in confusion. She'd checked the schedule before they'd left the office this afternoon and couldn't remember seeing anything.

"Yes, we do." Lee's smile radiated with boyish enthusiasm. "Ten o'clock at the Agency Credit Union. We have some loan papers to sign."

Amanda, though touched that he not only remembered, but set up the appointment, suddenly felt incredibly apprehensive. This was a very big deal! Lee trusted her. That she knew. But he was willing to put that trust in writing. He was willing to sign his name next to hers as tangible proof of it. What was he saying to her with this gesture? "Lee, you know, you really don't have to do this. We could just go down to my bank tomorrow. It really--"

"Amanda, I want to do this," he stated firmly, gripping her hand in emphasis. "So, I'll pick you up at eight and we'll get a cup of coffee before we head into the office. And I promise, this time I'll be here."

"Okay." Warmth flooded her being, extinguishing all doubt. She leaned up and kissed him softly on the cheek. "Thank you."

Walking down the block to her family, she marveled at how lucky she truly was.

April 3, 1986--

On the drive home tonight I couldn't get my mind off of Millicent's diary. I spent the day immersed in her life, trying to pick out any possible clues that might help us nail down where Sallee could be. And I have to ask myself, how different from her am I? I mean, here I sit and as I look back over my journal, most of the entries are focused on Lee. If someone found my journal, would they feel as sorry for me as I feel for Millicent?

Am I just clinging on to some false hope? Clinging to any possible indication that Lee is interested, no matter how minute? Sallee bought her chocolates, sheet music, flowers. Any woman would take those as signs of interest. Am I doing the same thing? Maybe I'm just seeing something that isn't there.

I want to trust in what my instincts tell me, but in the back of my mind there is this annoying voice that keeps telling me that I'm just seeing something that isn't really there.

I can't let myself doubt. I have to believe in Lee. I HAVE to believe in us.

She watched, smiling, as Lee disappeared into the night. Slowly she reached up to gently trace her lips. He had kissed her! It was quick, fleeting. Anyone standing on the sidelines would have missed it if they'd blinked. It was also incredibly tender and sweet. A brief promise of things to come.

"Amanda!" Dotty called impatiently from inside the house. "Where are you?"

Back to reality. She cleared throat and tried to calm her racing heart. She opened the back door. "I'm right here, Mother."

"Mom!" both boys screamed simultaneously as they tackled her.

"Welcome home, guys!" She hugged and kissed both of them. "How was the Science Fair?" Standing next to the couch, she could still smell the lingering scent of Lee's cologne. He'd kissed her! She looked down and saw Jamie's face shining with pride.

"I won first place!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Oh, Sweetheart, that's wonderful!" she gushed, giving him an extra hug for good measure. "Why don't go get yourselves unpacked and then you can tell me all about it."

"Okay." Both boys grabbed their bags and bounded up the stairs.

Amanda looked after them wistfully, "I wish I could have been there to see him win."

"Darling, he understood," Dotty reassured her. "You had to work. He was so excited to tell you about it that we decided to come home early."

"Oh." She felt torn. She was so proud of her son. He had put so much into that project. But if they hadn't come home... When she thought about what might have happened. Then again, Lee hadn't let the interruption stop him this time. He kissed her! Her lips were still tingling.

"Amanda?"

"Yes, Mother?" Amanda sighed, pulled back to the here and now.

"Why is this cake sitting in the sink? It hasn't even been touched." Dotty looked at her daughter and then at the coffee table where the other piece of cake sat. "Did you have company?" she asked hopefully.

"Umm..." Amanda searched her mind for some explanation. "No, I, um... Well, you see, I was going to have a piece of cake but then I got called into work at the last second. When I got home I forgot that I had already cut a piece, and... You know, I really want to hear all about that Science Fair. I think I'll go upstairs and see if the boys are unpacked yet."

Amanda dashed upstairs, leaving her mother to try and fathom out another one of her lame excuses.

Lee has just left with Petrovich and Chang, and I'm here "baby-sitting" their counterparts. Billy's worried about Lee, and I have to admit I can understand why. I don't think Lee would do anything to compromise the mission, but it's obvious that this is affecting him. At least he's glad that I'm here. That means a lot to me.

It should bother me that he hasn't acknowledged the kiss we shared the other night, but it doesn't. I understand. He's focused on the case, focused on remaining professional. We have a job to do. I know that we'll deal with our personal relationship later.

Mother looked so sad this morning before I left. I really need to make sure that I spend some time with her. It's been a while since we've had time for just the two of us. I miss that.

There was a light tapping on her airplane bedroom door. "Amanda?"

A wide grin spread across her face. She snapped her suitcase shut and turned around. Lee stood in the doorway, gazing at her. After a tense week, his softened features were a welcome sight. "Well, I'm packed up and ready to go."

"Good. Our 'friends' have left and are on their way home and back to being our 'enemies.'" There was a slight note of regret in his voice. She could tell that the line between "us" and "them" had been blurred for him once again. He'd been forced to put his trust in people that he normally would not and found that when faced a common enemy, they could be depended on. Also, seeing them interact with each other as just ordinary people had made them that much more human and real for him. Amanda knew the next time he had to work against them would prove that much harder because of this experience. They were more like them than he would want to admit.

"I wish it didn't have to be that way." Letting her eyes fall to the ground, her brow wrinkled in consternation.

"It's the nature of our business. It's a rare privilege when you find someone you can completely trust." Lee strode over to her and brought her chin up so her soft brown eyes met his. "I count myself extremely privileged."

Everything else melted away. Lee was back. Whatever barriers he had erected to survive this case had slipped away. His hand moved from her chin and he enveloped her hands in his. "It really meant a lot to me that you were here."

The simple honesty of his words caused a smile to spread across her features. Her mind wandered to the

wonderful sensation of his lips on hers last week. Would he kiss her again?

She could hear the sound of the computer equipment being dismantled in the front of the plane. Lee glanced over his shoulder briefly and slowly brought his gaze back to hers, looking at her intently. "I've arranged for one of the guys to take you home. I have to head back to the Agency with Billy. He needs me to fill him in on what happened this week."

"I understand." She had hoped for some more time alone with him, but reports needed to be filed. "Are you sure you don't need me to help?"

"I appreciate the offer, but there really isn't that much to do and you need to spend some time with your family," his reassuring voice was soft and low.

"Okay." She knew that he was right and she did want to spend some time with the boys and her mother, but she wasn't ready to leave him yet either. There was so much between them that was still unresolved.

Lee cleared his throat as his eyes fell to his hands holding hers. "Um... Amanda?"

Her heart began to beat a little faster and her stomach suddenly felt tight with anticipation. "Yes?"

"Well, a lot of things have happened recently and well, I... I thought it would nice if we had dinner, so we could have a chance to talk. If you're not busy, that is." He stumbled over his words. It amazed her that he sounded so unsure of himself. Did he honestly think that she'd say 'no?'

"I think that would be wonderful." Her warm tone seemed to ease any uncertainty that he'd felt. He met her eyes with a glowing smile.

"Scarecrow!" Billy's voice bellowed from the front room of the craft.

"I'll be right there," Lee called back over his shoulder. "So, I'll pick you up tomorrow at seven, okay?"

"Seven sounds perfect."

"Good." Lee paused for a moment, his eyes drinking her in. "I'll see you tomorrow." He bent down and quickly kissed the tip of her nose. Before she could process what had happened, he'd released her hands and was out the door.

Taking a sip of lukewarm tea, Amanda shook her head and let out a small sigh. Life never turns out exactly as planned. When Lee got back to the Agency with Billy, he found another case waiting for him. An international terrorist was on the loose, and Lee was assigned as a team leader to track the criminal down. Unfortunately, the trail seemed to be leading them to Europe. Lee called her that night and apologized for having to cancel their plans. When she'd offered to help out, he adamantly refused, explaining that he had no idea how long this was going to take and there was no way he was going to let her leave her family in that position.

Though it took them three weeks, the Scarecrow, as he always does, eventually got his man. It was one of the longest three weeks Amanda had ever experienced. She had no direct contact at all with Lee. Billy kept her updated and she was able to monitor the progress of the case, but even those assurances felt empty when she couldn't "see" him to "know" that he was safe. How she survived those torturous weeks, she wasn't exactly sure, but she made it. And the rewards she found at the other side almost made the long wait worthwhile.

May 11, 1986--

I can't sleep. And it isn't the case that's keeping me awake. You'd think with all the things that happened today, my mind would be focused on the case. But that's not even close to the truth.

"Rehearsing" with Lee. That's what is consuming my thoughts. The feeling of Lee's arms around me. His strong arms pulling me close. It was so incredibly intense. All my senses were on fire. We were simply in the moment.

When Lee first came back from his assignment, I wondered if we could ever get back to where we had been. He wasn't exactly distant, but there was an uncertainty as if he was trying to figure out where we stood. But there in the Q-Bureau... it was as if he had never left.

And even though Francine interrupted us (yet again), I still feel confident that we are moving forward. I do have to say, if she just keeps barging into the office without knocking, I'm going to have to tie her up in a closet or something.

If this wasn't heaven, it was the closet she was going to come to it in the near future. His soft, supple lips were covering hers and the sensation was absolutely intoxicating. They'd kissed before, but those kisses had been staged for the benefits of others, a means to an end, cover for a case. This kiss was different. It was just her and just him. They were finally where they belonged.

His gentle tongue begged for entrance, and she opened her mouth accepting it readily. Air was becoming necessary, and at the same time, the last thing in the world she desired. Breaking the kiss would mean leaving the blissful paradise that existed at the point where their lips met. She no longer felt human, every bone in her body seemed to have disintegrated and was replaced by warm helium. The only thing keeping her from floating off the ground was Lee's strong arms encircling her waist.

Breathlessly, she pulled back, gazing into his flushed face. His eyes slowly opened, revealing a wonder and desire that she'd never seen before. He brought his hand up to her face and reverently traced her jawline, her eyebrows, and slowly slid down her nose. "There is just something about your nose," he whispered huskily. Amanda cocked her eyebrow quizzically. "It just says so much about you."

"Oh really?"

"Yes," he affirmed, returning his arm around her waist. "It's perky, stubborn, beautiful, intelligent..."

"You get all that from my nose?" she interrupted with a small laugh.

"And most importantly," he continued, his eyes darkening as he leaned down and captured the tip between his lips. "Incredibly sweet."

She was gaining a new appreciation for Lee's playful side. This combination of sincerity and teasing was enough to make her insteps melt. "Stetson, are you trying to score points?"

He smiled devilishly, wiggling his eyebrows, "Is it working?"

She placed her hands behind his head, letting her fingers settle in the softness of his hair. Drawing his face down to hers, she captured his lips passionately.

His head slid down, burying his nose in the crook of her neck. "Wow," his warm breath caressed her skin. "Amanda, can we move to the couch? I don't know how much longer my legs are going to hold me up."

A throaty laugh escaped from deep in her chest and she held him close. "I think that can be arranged."

She took his hand, not wanting to be separated from him just yet, and led him to the couch. She leaned her back gently against him, sighing contentedly. "This is nice."

He pulled her closer, eliminating any remaining space. "This is better."

They sat there, silently enjoying their peaceful little haven. It was amazing how comfortable and right it felt just being. They didn't have to speak. It wasn't necessary. They were where they belonged.

"Yeah, I think there's just enough room," Lee mused as he tenderly kissed the top of her head.

"Just enough room for what?" Amanda asked absently playing with the fingers of right hand that lay on her arm.

"Well, I was thinking that it might be a good idea for you to have a desk up here."

"You were thinking?" Amanda turned her head. Was he joking? Hadn't she made the same suggestion a couple of months ago? And now it was 'his' idea!

"Yeah," he replied, seemingly oblivious to her incredulity. "What do you think?"

She shook her head, reminding herself to pick and choose her battles. Let him have this one. "Sure, if you're sure that there's enough room. I'll let you clear it with Billy."

"Billy!" Lee suddenly sat up straight. "Oh, no! I should probably go down and see what he wanted earlier."

"Oh, yeah." She tried to hide the disappointment in her voice, but she knew he was right. After all, they still were on the clock. National security issues didn't disappear just because they'd finally kissed each other.

Lee grasped her hands and he gently pulled her to a standing position, "I'll tell you what. I'll go down and see what's going on. You go home and check on your family. And then maybe you could come over to the apartment, and we can continue this conversation over a bottle of wine?"

"Sounds great." Her hand grazed his cheek, as she watched him watching her, her chest tightening in anticipation of their next kiss. She didn't have to wait for long. His lips captured hers again. The world melted away into the darkness and flashes of color that played behind her eyelids. She pulled back breathlessly, hating to be the voice of reason, "If you don't get out of here now, I'm not going to let you go."

A growl of frustration rumbled from deep in his throat. "You're right." He reluctantly let her hand go and headed for the door, turning to gaze at her once more. "I'll see you tonight."

"You bet," she laughed as she watched him fumbling to unlock the door.

Amanda closed the journal and softly moved her fingers across the cover. Yes, it had been a long journey from Alan Chamberlain to Tony Martinet, but every step had been worth it. There were more pages in the diary to be read, but she'd save that for later. It was getting late and her husband would be home soon. She picked up her dishes from the patio, went back into the kitchen and turned on some music to keep her company as she finished dinner.

She was at the stove when she heard the door being opened surreptitiously. The sound of muffled footsteps on the carpet slowly approached. "Scarecrow, after all this time, do you actually think you can still sneak up on me?"

Lee's laughter filled the kitchen as he wrapped his arms around her waist, kissing her cheek and laying his head on her shoulder. "Well, you can't blame a guy for trying. How are my girls doing?" He tenderly rubbed her swollen abdomen.

"We're doing just fine." She swiveled around to face him. "So, are you hungry? I made steaks and there's a bottle of red wine on the table for you."

Recognition shone in his eyes. "Darling," he teased lovingly. "Are we playing 'normal people' tonight?"

"I thought it might be a good idea since we have the place to ourselves for a couple of hours." A warm smile played on her lips as she placed her arms around his neck.

"We do? What about Dotty and Lillian?" he asked pulling her toward him.

"Plane's delayed."

"Well, we should put this time to good use." She closed her eyes, feeling deft fingers drawing enticing circles on the small of her back. "Can we put dinner on hold for a little while? I have a craving for something sweet."

"Well, we usually don't allow for substitutions, but for a valuable customer, such as yourself, I think we can make an exception." She brought her husband's head down to meet hers.

"I knew there was a reason I frequented this establishment." Their lips were inches apart. Only a breath away.

"Amanda! We're home. Lillian's flight got in sooner than expected!"

Amanda buried her face in Lee's chest, her body shaking with laughter. Some things never changed.

The End