

## Straight A's

**Author:** Kim C.

**Disclaimer:** 'Scarecrow and Mrs. King' belongs to Warner Brothers and Shoot the Moon Productions. I am simply borrowing them, with due respect to their creators, for a short duration. I am not making a profit from this story.

**Timeline:** Early third season.

**Author's Note:** Thank you to my awesome team of betas; your help, as always, was invaluable.



Amanda sighed deeply after dropping onto the sofa in her family room. The boys were in bed, and her mother had just gone upstairs with a glass of milk-and-Galliano, to soak in Strawberry Splendor and read her new romance novel.

Grateful to have a few rare and quiet moments, Amanda allowed herself to savor the time alone. Her thoughts were focused solely on one thing . . . or more accurately, on one man, Lee Stetson.

She simply couldn't figure out where she stood with him. It used to be so easy; never before had she felt such . . . displacement. Yes, displacement was the perfect word. She knew she belonged in his life, she just wasn't sure anymore where or how.

Hiding her growing feelings was becoming more and more difficult, but she was managing. In fact, she was content to have his friendship, because she was still uncertain about taking such a potentially life-altering step with him. She had been perfectly prepared to conceal the attraction she felt for him, until he started sending her mixed signals.

In an attempt to pinpoint those signals, she thought back upon the last few weeks. Whenever they were close together, she could tell that he was as affected as she herself.

On one occasion, she had leaned next to him at his desk, and he had been unable to speak clearly. He'd become jittery and distracted, and finally he'd gotten up and proclaimed it 'quitting time' at only four in the afternoon.

Then, shortly after that incident, he'd asked her to work with him at an embassy party. While dancing, he'd held her remarkably close, telling her that he was just being cautious. When other men had asked her to dance, Lee had possessively tightened his hold on her

and glared at them, explaining to her that he thought he'd seen a suspicious character eyeing her all evening.

When she'd visited him in the hospital, just a couple of weeks ago, he had virtually clung to her hand, staring at her and muttering incoherently. Then, when she'd given him a ride home, he'd chattered uncharacteristically, talking about everything and nothing, and that he was anxious to get back to work with her.

At that time, Amanda had realized that she'd taken his odd behavior as proof that he wanted their relationship to move forward. Then she'd found out, in the midst of the Sullivan case, that he had a new girlfriend, Leslie. She had been surprised, to say the least, to see a woman in Lee's apartment, making herself at home as if she belonged there.

Amanda had never considered herself a jealous person until that day. Perhaps, she reasoned, that was because she'd never had cause to be jealous . . . until that day.

Her state of envy, however, was short-lived. After wrapping up their case, Lee had suddenly invited her over for dinner, dismissing Leslie like yesterday's newspaper. Hope had risen in Amanda's heart again, and she felt that finally things might be heading in the right direction.

They'd had a nice dinner. Yes, it had been very nice. They'd talked easily, not about work but about things friends talked about. She shared humorous glimpses of her family life with him, and he regaled her with stories of his early days with the Agency.

Friends. Amanda sighed again. Would they ever be anything more? Was she even sure she wanted more? Sometimes she thought so. She couldn't live her life in this uncertain way. Not that she'd expected roses and romance that night, but a hint of . . . of what?

Maybe she was reading too much into his gesture in inviting her over for dinner that night. Was it possible that he'd sensed her jealousy and believed her to be jealous of losing his friendship? Or worse, did he realize that she harbored feelings for him – feelings that he didn't reciprocate?

Her befuddled confusion aside, she couldn't see Lee as a family man. As far as she knew, none of the women he'd ever dated had children. Even if he were attracted to her physically, he would probably never do anything about it. Besides, she knew that if she became involved with him, eventually she'd have to introduce him to her mother, Phillip and Jamie. She could risk her own heart being broken, but not the hearts of her family.

Amanda sighed again and leaned forward. Glancing at the coffee table, she spied one of her mother's many magazines and decided to try reading for a while. It was the latest

issue of 'La Femme.' The cover boasted several articles, a few of which dealt with what seemed to Amanda to be deeply personal subjects. She opened to the index page and skimmed titles.

She had no need to 'Turn Him Into a Love Slave,' not that it wouldn't be nice. Nor did she really need to 'Trim the Pounds and Shape the Mounds.' Laughing, she also passed up 'Healthy & Happy Hair' and didn't want the answer to the article that asked 'Just How Hot Are You?'

As she was about to discard the magazine, she spotted a foreboding title: 'Are You Afraid You're in Love with Him?' Turning to the indicated page, she groaned. It was a quiz.

"I'm not taking a quiz," she indignantly said aloud. Rolling her eyes, she threw the offending journal back down on the table, then immediately picked it up and thumbed to the quiz page again.

Sifting through the books and newspapers and deck of cards on the table, she finally found a ballpoint pen and scratch pad. If she was going to take a quiz, she definitely wasn't going to mark her answers in the magazine, thereby giving her mother further reason to grill her about her love life.

Amanda read the opening paragraph with annoyance. It claimed:

'You may say you're not in love with him, but you probably are. You know the guy we're talking about. He may be 'just a friend,' or you may 'just work with him,' but deep down you know there's more to it than that. How can you be sure? Take the following quiz, answering as honestly as possible. You'll probably be surprised at what your responses reveal.'

"Oh, these things are ridiculous," Amanda scoffed. She read the first question and noted that the answers were multiple choice, consisting of 'A. True,' 'B. Somewhat True,' 'C. Somewhat False,' and 'D. False.'

She uncapped the pen and numbered the page from one to thirty, then reread the first question with trepidation.

*1. Someone specific immediately came to my mind as I read the opening paragraph.*

Amanda closed her eyes. Yes, it was true that she had thought of Lee. But that wasn't because she was in love with him; it was because she'd been thinking about him before picking up the magazine. Reluctantly, she wrote an 'A' next to number one. She couldn't lie to herself, after all, could she?

2. *I often wonder if he has any feelings for me.*

"Ohhh!" She was annoyed. Yes, she did wonder if Lee had feelings for her. It was exactly what she'd been wondering before she'd seen this cursed magazine. That didn't mean that she \*often\* wondered if he had feelings for her, did it? Then again, there had been other times when she'd pondered the subject. 'A.'

3. *When he's near me, I wonder if he's going to kiss me, and am tempted to make the first move myself.*

"Who wrote this stuff?" Amanda complained. The quiz seemed awfully reaching. Each question was phrased in such a way that she was forced to deem it 'True.' She reminded herself that this was a generic test, but couldn't help feeling personally affronted.

After completing ten more statements, she was truly frustrated. Many of them were specific to an embarrassing degree, probing her about dreams and fantasies. She almost threw the magazine across the room in her annoyance, but was fascinated with it at the same time.

14. *I find myself declining or backing out of dates with other men when he's present.*

Well, it was true that she'd cancelled a few dates for the sake of work, but that was work. She didn't cancel them just to spend time with Lee - that would be ridiculous. Still . . . if it were any other agent, she'd . . . she'd . . . have found it much easier to refuse the job. So in actuality, she did rearrange her life in order to be with him. Another 'A' was angrily scribbled on the defenseless page.

Each succeeding question raised Amanda's ire. She glared at the line of 'A's,' and started rereading the earlier questions to see whether she could change at least a couple of them to a 'B' or 'C' answer. But in all honesty, she had to leave them as they were.

Infuriated now, not with herself or the quiz, but rather with Lee, she began finding words starting with 'A' to describe him. 'Arrogant. Argumentative. Aggravating. Adorable . . . alluring . . .' "Enough," she said aloud. "Focus, Amanda."

She hurriedly went through the remaining questions, her hand quickly marking her answers, the vast majority of which were 'A', with only three exceptions where she could justify a 'B.' Looking at the following page, she noted the tally explanations and knew without adding her score that the highest sum would hold the applicable advice.

'See? You knew exactly who we were talking about. That's right, you're in love. Head over heels, no questions asked, no doubt about it. Chances are he's in love with you, too. Test the waters and see if he dives in with you. What've you got to lose? Live dangerously, take a risk; kiss him!'

"What have I got to lose?" she questioned the air. Plenty, she thought. If it didn't work out, she'd most likely lose his friendship. It would be impossible to continue working with him.

And if her mother and, more importantly, her sons became attached to Lee, they'd lose out as well. Having missed out on having Joe in their lives on a regular basis, she knew they'd have a hard enough time accepting someone new.

Amanda snorted in derision, shook her head, and began tearing her answer sheet into tiny pieces. It wasn't that simple. She would be risking far more than the article indicated. "Take a risk," she muttered mutinously. "Kiss him. It's so simple. Just plant a big wet one right on his lips, Amanda."

"Plant a big wet one right on whose lips, darling?" Dotty asked, walking past with a load of towels in her arms.

Startled, Amanda turned. "N-no one, Mother," she stammered, cursing her mother's timing.

"Uh-huh," her mother responded, then headed into the laundry room to place the towels in the laundry basket for tomorrow's wash. "Well, at least you're talking about kissing someone," she said drolly.

"Moth-er," Amanda intoned.

"Goodnight, darling," Dotty sang, ignoring her daughter's annoyed tone.

Left alone once again, Amanda debated whether she should turn on the television and watch a movie or go to bed. Standing there undecided and still flustered over the results of that . . . that . . . fixed, manipulative test, she jumped when a knock sounded at her back door.

Blushing because the subject of her deep thoughts was standing at her back door, she walked over and opened it. The sight of him helped to ease her doubts and fears, and she couldn't help the surge of elation that filled her. Her delight was quickly subdued, however, as she recalled her recent ruminations. Feeling like a yo-yo, she stepped outside and she hesitantly smiled her greeting.

"Hi," Lee said.

"Hi, yourself," she replied, averting her eyes.

Lee ducked slightly, trying to look into her eyes. "I, uh, just wanted to come over and see how you're doing; I barely saw you at all today," he explained.

She smiled again, resolved to put aside her personal dilemma for the moment. "I'm glad you did. How . . . how are you?"

"Good." He nodded, raising his eyebrows and glancing around as if uneasy. "I'm glad you're still up. I thought maybe it might be too late. But then I saw the light on, and . . ."

"Yeah, well, I was doing some reading, and then some thinking, and . . ." She trailed off, catching herself and feeling her face redden.

"Thinking? About what?" he asked.

"Oh, you know," she faltered. "Just . . . nothing really important. I mean to you. It's important to me, but wouldn't be important to you. You know, just, uh, thinking."

"Is everything okay?" Lee asked, his concern evident. "You seem kind of . . . distracted. Besides, if something's important to you, it's important to me. Maybe I could help."

Amanda laughed softly, embarrassed even though there was no way he could know the cause of her discomfiture. "Lee . . . I'm fine. A little distracted, maybe, sure. But nothing for you to worry about."

"Worry about? Should I worry?" A light frown creased Lee's forehead, and he took her by the elbows and drew her closer.

'Test the waters,' a voice whispered inside her head. "No!" she answered loudly.

Lee's surprised look brought her back into the moment. Feeling her heartbeat accelerate and her breath coming fast, she shook her head. "No, no. It's nothing for you to worry about, really. Please don't worry about anything."

She glanced up, her brown eyes meeting his hazel ones. His eyes widened and she heard his breath catch in his throat. "But I do . . . worry about you."

"You do?" she asked. A small part of her suffered immense disappointment, and she hoped it didn't show. Though it touched her that he worried about her, she'd hoped he would have said he just wanted to see her.

Lee's mouth widened as he took in her expression. He must have sensed her mood, because he hastily amended. "I mean, I worry, and I also like to just see you . . . spend a few minutes with you."

"Oh," she replied, feeling like she was an open book.

"Amanda." His tone had deepened and his grip on her arms tightened.

"Yes?" Holding her breath, she could scarcely believe her eyes when his fluttered and closed and he began to draw closer to her, his lips slightly parted.

A terrible shriek cut through the quiet of the night, followed by vicious hissing as two cats raced through the back yard. Startled, Amanda sprang forward into Lee, and he reflexively put his arms around her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, finding herself pinned tightly to Lee's body. Daring to look into his eyes, she was surprised at the smoky intensity she saw in them. She drew a sharp breath and held it.

"Cats," Lee said inanely, not releasing her.

She nodded, her eyes widen. "Cat fight," she agreed in a whisper.

Nervously, she licked her lips and saw him start forward, then step away, putting plenty of distance between them, and put his hands into his jacket pockets. "I'd better go," he told her with a tremor in his voice.

"Yeah . . . Okay, well, I'll see you tomorrow, Lee," she replied, aware that her voice betrayed her tumultuous emotions.

He exhaled roughly and gave her a crooked smile. "Yeah. And, Amanda, if you change your mind and want to do something about what's worrying you . . ." he trailed off, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Oh, trust me, Lee." She drew a deep breath. "If I decide to do something about it, you'll be the first to know."

**The End**