

Wienerlicious

Sarah
vs.
Covers, Lies,
and
Ticking
Time Bombs

Kate McK

SARAH VS COVERS, LIES AND TICKING TIME BOMBS

Chapter 1

Sarah Walker did not cry. Rebecca Franco did. Katie O'Connell, definitely. Jenny Burton, yes. Sarah Walker? Never.

Rebecca missed her old bedroom. She missed her mom. She missed her friends. She missed her name.

Katie couldn't forget the disenchanted faces of the homeless crowd that was not going to get their Christmas meal this year. Or the excitement that faded from the seven year old when he couldn't take a new toy truck home because his dad's wallet was safely tucked away in her backpack. She should really talk to her dad about his choice of marks.

Jenny watched her dad being led away in handcuffs. She had to endure endless snickers, looks and snide remarks from that jerk, Dick Duffy. All she had was a knife, a trunk full of cash and an uncertain future. She was all alone.

Sarah Walker was a spy. She had no emotions. She was cold, detached, focused. Sarah Walker was the master of deception. And no one was more deceived than the person in the mirror.

"Oh, hey, I...I didn't know you were coming by." *I'm surprised to see you. I thought after yesterday you would avoid me. At least for a little while. But you're here. There's no mission, no one around to sell the cover to. You came to see me. No covers, no lies.*

"Um...Sarah, you know when you think you're gonna die...and your whole life is supposed to flash in front of you?" *Yeah, Chuck, I know. I was poisoned too, remember?*

"That didn't exactly happen for me yesterday." *Me neither. All I could think about was the future. The things I still wanted to do. Wanted to have. The person I wanted to have those things with.*

"In fact, mostly it was...just a list...that I saw. A list of stuff that I haven't done...and things that I haven't had a chance to say." *That makes sense. You've been working on that five year plan forever. Maybe this was the nudge you needed.*

"So today...today I wanna start crossing things off my list." *Good idea. Who knows if we'll still be here tomorrow? Especially in this line of work.*

"And this is the first thing that I promised myself that I'd do." *Breathe, Sarah. This is it. He didn't buy the lie, despite the truth serum. He knows. He feels it too. He's going to kiss me. What are you waiting for? Make the first move. I'm not allowed. Don't ask. I can't give permission. Just make a move and we'll take it from there. Kiss me, Chuck.*

"We need to break up." *No. This can't be happening.*

"What?" That's not how this supposed to go. I was supposed to tell you no. You were not supposed to believe me.

"You know, you know, like, fake break up our pretend relationship." But if we do that, what are we going to do about the thing under the undercover thing? Please don't do this.

"I just can't do this anymore, you know?" I know. I want more too. But this is better than having nothing, isn't it? It's not enough, but at least it's not nothing.

"The longer we go, the longer we keep trying to fool people into believing that we're a real couple..." We are a real couple. What we feel is real. The looks are real. The hand holding is real. The kisses would have been real too, if you just weren't so averse to PDA.

"...the person I keep fooling the most...is me." Yeah well, you did a pretty good job of fooling me too.

Sarah Walker did not cry. But then again, Sarah Walker never had her heart broken before.

He. Punch. Was. Punch. Not. Punch. Your. Kick. Boy. Punch. Friend. Punch. It. Kick. Was. Punch. Just Punch. A. Kick. Cover. Punch. Punch.

Sarah grabbed the heavy bag with both hands, resting the forehead against it. She let out a shaky breath. This was bad. And not just for cover. Screw the cover. She grabbed a tissue from the vanity table, wiped her eyes and let it flutter to the growing pile on the floor. This is not working. Neither did the pint of rocky road. Or watching The Notebook. Twice.

She took off her boxing gloves and threw them on the nearest chair. Sitting cross legged on the middle of the bed, she pulled her laptop closer.

'User name' -Sarah Walker-

'Password' -19118181215235193822311- Enter

'Personal'. Open folder. Click.

'People who need a good ass kicking'. Open file. Click.

-4. Dick Duffy-

'3. Dick Duffy'. Delete

- 3. Heather Chandler-

'2. Heather Chandler' .Delete

-2. Lou, the sandwich maker-

'1. Jill Roberts'. Save. Close file.

'Mission objectives – 3822311/919/2185/15145'. Open file. Click.

-5. Don't get myself reassigned -

'4. Don't get myself reassigned' .Delete

-4. Don't let Casey find out that I'm compromised -

'3. Don't let Casey find out that I'm compromised'. Delete

-3. Keep Chuck out of the bunker -

'2. Keep Chuck out of the bunker'. Delete

-2. Get my guy back-

'1. Protect Chuck by any means necessary'. Save. Close file.

Tomorrow. Zero nine hundred. Time to start ticking things off my list.

Chapter 2

Sarah parked in her usual spot on the farthest side of the parking lot. It would look suspicious for the Wienerlicious girl to drive a Porsche, but it was a small price to pay. She usually loved the brisk walk, but today the Buy More was too far. Yet, at the same time it wasn't far enough. What if her plan didn't work? How did they get to this point in the first place? Oh yeah, she lied again. The one moment she was straddling him in the closet of the Wienerlicious to preserve the cover and now she had to convince him not to break up with her. Or fake breakup their pretend relationship. It was a little hard to compartmentalize at the moment. She thought back over the past couple of days.

Sarah's eyes narrowed when she spotted the brunette hanging around Chuck's neck. She felt an unfamiliar pang in her chest. It couldn't be. Was she jealous? That's ridiculous. She couldn't be jealous unless...damn it, she was jealous. Maybe she was overreacting. Maybe she was just a happy customer...who brought him lunch? Sarah couldn't decide what upset her the most. The fact that another woman was clearly making a move on her boyfr...asset or his reaction. Or her own reaction. She had to get to the bottom of this, but they had a mission, that's why she was here in the first place. Sarah quietly slipped around the side of the store so she could come up to Chuck from behind and in full view of the skank trying to chat him up. No harm in marking her territory.

"...I'd love that, Lou. This is kind of the biggest honor...Sarah." Step one, the element of surprise, piece of cake.

"Hi. I'm Sarah." She gave the brunette the biggest smile she could muster. Women felt worse about taking guys from girls who were nice.

"Lou. Lou is her name. This is Lou. I was fixing Lou's phone for her, Lou." Chuck always babbled when he was nervous. If Sarah didn't know him so well she would have thought that it was because he was caught in the act. But then again, he couldn't look at either of them. "Who's that? That's Sarah."

"Yeah, she said that. Uh, who's Sarah?"

"Sarah is, hmm... What's the best way to describe? Sarah is my..." Now Sarah was getting a little worried. If nothing was going on, surely he wouldn't struggle to tell Lou who she was? Or supposed to be? His girlfriend. Hang on, his cover girlfriend. She wasn't supposed to be...man this was screwed up. She needed to focus.

"Girlfriend," Sarah supplied. It was the right answer, but she wasn't all that sure what it meant at this point. Cover girlfriends were not supposed to get jealous.

"Mm-hm." Chuck was clearly very uncomfortable.

"Nice to meet you." Sarah extended a hand to Lou. It wasn't her fault Chuck didn't tell her. Maybe it just didn't come up or maybe...no, she wasn't going to go there.

"Nice to meet you, Sarah. Uh, you should refrigerate that. It'd be a shame for the Chuck to make you sick." Lou left and Sarah felt relieved. No need to worry about the competition. Lou bowed out gracefully.

"Yes, absolutely, I... Great idea." Sarah's relief was short lived. Chuck didn't look too happy about what just happened. She glanced at the package in his hands again and made a mental note to bring him

lunch tomorrow. That's something a girlfriend would do. It would reinforce the cover too. Speaking of the cover, they had a mission to take off.

"Uh, there's more to the Mason Whitney incident than we thought. Let's go Chuck."

XXXXXXX

Sarah grabbed Chuck's hand and with a "come here" let him to one of the tables outside the Wienerlicious. This little side mission couldn't have come at a better time, but she knew Chuck was nervous about it, so she had to talk him down. She couldn't take the chance of letting him back out of it. The earlier incident with Lou made her realize that she needed to reinforce the relationship with him too and not just for the cover. As much as she could anyway.

"I just wanted to make sure we're all set for tonight's mission."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it's been a while since I've slept with someone. Not, not, not slept with someone, but slept with...it's actually been a while since I've done either one, so..." He was babbling again and she found it adorable. At the same time it made her a little nervous too.

"Chuck, listen, I know this is kind of uncomfortable."

"I'm fine. It's fine." Chuck couldn't quite look her in the eyes though. She remembered how he choked on his coffee when she suggested it was time for them to make love. She took a calm sip of hers to disguise the fact that she slipped up with her phrasing.

"It's just that we have to do it. I mean, not, not do it..." Why do words always have double meanings when they're not supposed too?

"I got it."

"...so we don't blow..." O God, this conversation was a Freudian minefield.

"I got it."

"...our cover." Maybe she should just stop talking now.

"I got it, I got it."

"Okay." Sensing the end of their little discussion, Chuck left for the Buy More, but then he spotted Lou in the parking lot.

Sarah watched as they shared a somewhat tense conversation. Lou was clearly still upset that Chuck didn't tell her about his girlfriend, but it seemed like they came to some sort of understanding. Surely Chuck didn't tell Lou that their relationship wasn't real? No, he wouldn't. But when he closed Lou's car door for her, she did a quick scan of the parking lot to make sure their cover wasn't compromised by Chuck's actions. It didn't take her mind of the jealousy that flared up again. Taking care of a girl who was after Chuck was easy, but what was she supposed to do when he was the one who was clearly interested in someone else?

Chapter 3

Sarah opened the closet and pulled out her suitcase. She sighed. If this was a normal seduction, it would be easy, but when it comes to Chuck, things hardly ever were. She had to keep him interested enough to take his mind off Lou, but not so interested that he'd want something more and force her to rebuff him again. It was already hard enough to keep her walls up as it was. Simply because she didn't want to anymore. But she had to. He was her asset. It would be unprofessional to be together. She would be reassigned.

The easier course of action would be to investigate Lou and if her motives were true, give Chuck the go-ahead to date her. To have a real relationship. It could help secure his cover in the event that someone ID's her and it wouldn't complicate the mission that much. Instead of using the cover as his girlfriend to stay close and protect him, she'd have her turns to keep him, and most possibly Lou, under surveillance. But then not only would she have to deal with the knowledge that he was with someone else, she'll actually have to witness it. Call her selfish, but the thought almost made her sick. She sighed again and pulled out the purple negligee.

Sarah paused in the doorway, smiling at Chuck's little sexy dance. He was so engrossed he didn't notice her at first. When she closed the door behind her, he froze, clearly embarrassed. "Ellie let me in," she explained. Taking in the atmosphere he created, she continued, "Wow, Chuck. What do you think was gonna happen here tonight?" Truth be told, no man had ever done something like that for her before.

"Why? What do you think I think?" His attempt at flirting was endearing.

"Well, I don't know. The candles and the music. I mean, you do know we're just spending the night together for cover, right?" She said it more for her own benefit than for his.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Why would I possibly think anything else? By now I'd say I'm pretty familiar with the concept of faking it, so..." Sarah's heart twisted a little like it always did when Chuck pretended he wasn't hurt by her actions.

"We've gotta take this assignment seriously." If they both thought of this as a mission, it might be easier to deal with.

"Okay, I'll lose the music," Chuck conceded. Turning off the iPod, he moved over to the bed and slipped between the covers. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling. "You can change in the bathroom."

"That's okay." Sarah wasn't as calm as she sounded. Nonetheless she took off her jacket and folded it. Chuck caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and bolted upright when he noticed what she was wearing.

"What? You give me crap about lighting some candles and you come in wearing that?"

"What, this? This is part of my cover." It was only half true.

"Well it doesn't cover a thing." Of all the reactions she had imagined, that was definitely not one, but she had her 'excuse' ready.

"What if Ellie or Awesome were to walk in? This is exactly what a girlfriend would wear to seduce her boyfriend. I'm just being professional."

"Yeah, the world's oldest profession." Sarah's mouth nearly fell open. Did he just call her...

"Oh, right. Well, that's real nice, Chuck. What is the matter with you tonight, anyway?" Chuck ignored her question and turned his back to her, lying as close to the edge of the mattress as humanly possible without falling out of bed. Sarah followed suit, stretching the covers between them. Neither spoke for a while or attempted to go to sleep. Not that it was possible with the raised voice coming from the next room. They couldn't make out what Devon was saying, but from Ellie side of it, it sounded like a pretty stupid argument about porno shorts and awesome being mediocre, but it was her 'when's the last time you did something nice for me' that really got to them.

"We're starting to sound like them, aren't we?" Chuck asked quietly.

"A little." Sarah turned around to face him. "Are you okay? Is there anything you wanna talk about?" She knew there was and as his friend, she should listen, but she was also the girl who liked him, *liked* him...more than *liked* him actually and she really didn't want to hear about his interest in another girl.

"What exactly are the rules with our...like, you know, our thing?"

"What do you mean?" Sarah knew she was stalling.

"What I mean... Hypothetically speaking, are we allowed to see other people?"

"Well, uh, our cover is boyfriend-girlfriend so tactically that would be challenging. Plus any prospective date would have to endure a rigorous vetting process to determine her motivation."

"Wouldn't her motivation be love?" Most likely, Sarah thought, and that's what she was afraid of.

"Ideally, but you're a very important piece on intelligence and you have to be handled with extreme care." *Well, that's real nice, Sarah*, she thought to herself, *you just called him a computer. Guess we're even.*

"Well, that sounds very nice." Sarah couldn't help feeling sorry for Chuck. He didn't ask for this, for his entire life to be turned upside down. At the same time she couldn't help wondering why now. For five years he was free to pursue a relationship, but he was too hung up on his ex-girlfriend.

"Chuck, I don't have to be a spy to piece together the clues here. You're interested in that Lou girl, aren't you?" Sarah held her breath, knowing what the answer would be, though secretly hoping for a different outcome.

Chuck didn't respond to the question directly. He just looked at her for a moment and sat up. "Well, I, uh...you know what, I think I'm just gonna sleep on the floor."

Sarah sat up too and grabbed his arm to prevent him from getting out of bed. "Chuck, you can't compromise our cover." It came out a bit more harshly than she intended, but this whole situation was rather frustrating.

"Well, you know what? I feel compromised already." *Yeah*, Sarah thought, *that makes two of us.*

Sarah was high on adrenaline. In the past couple of hours, she, Chuck, Casey and Ellie have been poisoned, Chuck gave Ellie the antidote instead of taking it himself and then he found the tracking device that led them here, to Reardon Paine's apartment, where they're hoping to find more of the antidote to

save the rest of them. Casey just admitted that she was better at picking locks. Truth serum did have its perks. Especially when Chuck turned to her while they were waiting for the elevator.

“God, you’re so pretty.” Sarah smiled widely, her breathing becoming even more erratic as her heart rate sped up. That’s what he was supposed to say last night, but it was probably a good thing he didn’t. She was too busy remembering how good it felt lying next to him, despite the fight slash talk, that she barely registered his “And Casey, you’re jaw was chiseled by Michelangelo himself.”

They found the codes and the antidote. Before she and Chuck could take theirs, he stopped her and asked the one question she had been dreading for a long time.

“I know you’re just doing your job here, but sometimes it feels so real, you know? So tell me...you and me, us...our thing under the undercover thing, is this ever going anywhere?” He looked so vulnerable that Sarah found herself swallowing a lump that suddenly formed in her throat and looked away for a moment.

“I’m sorry, Chuck.” She truly was. She broke eye contact again and concentrated on shaking her head slightly and formed the word “No” before looking up at him.

It was Chuck’s turn to swallow. “Got it. Got it. Thank you for being honest.” He tried to crack a joke and failed. “Even though I guess you didn’t really have a choice in the matter.” Sarah walked off before she could give into the temptation to tell him that she was trained to withstand Pentothal. Now she knew that he would choose her over Lou if he knew he had a choice.

But he didn’t, so he chose Lou.

Chapter 4

Sarah entered the Buy More and spotted Chuck. She took a deep breath and motioned him with her head to the home theatre room.

"Look, Chuck, I've been thinking about our breakup, and I'm not so sure it's the best idea." Truth is, she couldn't think about much else and she knew it was a bad idea. And not just for the cover.

"Miss me already, huh?" Sarcasm really didn't suit Chuck.

"Well, just, you know, for the cover. It makes things easier." One lie, one truth.

"Then I guess your job's gonna be a little bit harder." The job wasn't her major concern. If she could only tell him that, things will be a lot easier. And even more complicated.

"Look, I'm sorry if you thought there was something between us. It's very common in these situations to perceive a connection that isn't there." Three lies in two sentences. That was a new record.

"Of course. I get it. It's the old story, you know. Guy gets supercomputer in his brain...beautiful CIA agent is sent to protect him. Then she tells him while under the spell of truth serum that's she's not interested. I get it. But for me, the emotional rollercoaster is a little much. So I think I'd rather find something a little less common...like say, I don't know, a, uh...a real relationship." Sarah's heart skipped a beat. It was the first time Chuck called her beautiful. Sure he told her she was pretty under the spell of the truth serum, but like he said, he kinda didn't have a choice. This time he said it without even realizing. And he had no motives other than...oh yeah, breaking up with her.

"Okay, Chuck, if that's what you want, then I'm gonna have to sell it." Tears were the second best thing a woman could use to manipulate a man. Part of her hoped it would be that easy, part of her hoped it wouldn't. She expected more from Chuck. It wasn't too hard faking it, mainly because she didn't.

"You okay?" He was immediately concerned. This was working. Without a word she turned and left. Chuck followed.

"Sarah?" She didn't stop. That would make it way too easy. He would follow soon enough.

Sarah felt like ripping out Casey's throat. She had a hard enough time standing up for Chuck to the General and all Casey could say was "She got dumped". Several times. The worst part was – she got dumped. And it wasn't just her pride that got hurt. After her display this morning she really thought Chuck would come after her, but he didn't. It's been nearly thirteen hours. Not that she was counting. Lie.

It was twenty six hours, give or take, when the bell over the Wienerlicious' door rang. She didn't want to get her hopes up, but she put an extra swing in her hips before turning around. It was Larry. No, Lester, with a really sleazy come-on. She scared the crap out of him, just because she could. The morning went from bad to worse when she spotted the brunette heading for the Buy More. Well, seeing as she was already wearing her fake smile...

"Hey Lou!" She cautiously entered the store. "Hi."

"Hi. Nice to see you again." Lou was being nice. She probably was nice. Sarah spent the night going through her file. Would it kill her to get the occasional parking ticket?

"You know he's a great guy." Sarah got straight to the point.

"Yeah, um, I've had the same opinion so far too."

"It's not an opinion. It's a fact." If Lou couldn't see that, she didn't deserve Chuck. She doesn't deserve him. "Don't hurt him."

"Okay. Wasn't planning on it." Sarah gave her another fake smile. "Thanks for the heads up though."

"We're only on our second official date and already I'm lying to her."

"Relax, it's dating in L.A. Everyone lies." Casey was fiddling with the computer. "We're gonna be tapped into the club's surveillance feed. All we need is audio."

Sarah had her game face on. She focused on the mission, trying to forget that this was an actual date for Chuck. The operative word was trying.

"This has an RK-7 mini-mike that works up to twenty feet. I want you to keep it as close to Stavros as possible."

"Are you kidding? Are you kidding me with this? I can't wear this. This looks ridiculous." She knew that. It was a little mean on her part, but all is fair in love and war. Lester was right about that.

"The alternative is we join you on your date," Casey responded. Sarah was hoping it wouldn't come to that. She wasn't sure if she could fake being Casey's date for the evening or being that close to Chuck and Lou and seem okay with it.

"Fine," Chuck conceded and stuck the guitar pin on his jacket.

"Earwig."

"It never stops with you people, does it?" She didn't appreciate his tone. She get that he was upset about the intrusion on his date, but was it really necessary to be an almost jerk about it?

"Aren't you forgetting something, Romeo?" Casey handed Chuck a red rose.

"Oh, of course. Let me guess, this is equipped with some kind of microscopic, infrared tracking device that determines her mother's communist affiliations?" Sarah frowned. Casey didn't brief her on what the rose was for.

"No, idiot. It's so you can get laid." Sarah was shocked. She wasn't expecting Casey's help in this, but she didn't think he would actually work against her. She also hadn't considered that Chuck would actually...not after only two dates. Would he?

For the first time since she landed in Burbank, Sarah actually hated this assignment. If Chuck was with a mark, it might have been easier to listen in on the date. But he wasn't. He actually liked Lou. At least they were now having drinks with Stavros. Three is always a crowd.

Things got progressively worse. Casey called her on falling for the guys she worked with. Bryce was a mistake. Granted, she hadn't realized that until she met Chuck. And even though she had fallen for Chuck, she wouldn't admit it to Casey. She couldn't risk be reassigned. All the lying to Chuck would have been for nothing. She ignored Casey's comment that he wasn't interested. Stavros just threatened Chuck.

The minute Sarah entered the club, she knew she was overreacting. As she made her way towards him she tried to come up with a reason for explaining her presence, but then he met her half way and she suddenly got an idea. Leaning in close to hear him over the music, she placed a hand on his shoulder. Though the conversation wasn't exactly a friendly one, she knew what it looked like to Lou. Especially when she felt Chuck's hand on her shoulder. It had the desired effect. Fate was on her side too. Just as Lou left, Stavros' father showed up, preventing Chuck from rushing after her.

Sarah felt a little stab of guilt when she saw Lou's taxi sped off, so she congratulated Chuck for successfully completing the mission. He was not thrilled. She quickly turned her head away when Casey asked him how the date went, afraid that he would realize just how jealous she was. Chuck's response caught her off guard.

"Is it me or does our government never want me to have sex again." She cleared her throat involuntarily. The government didn't care as long as it was with someone besides her. She on the other hand cared very, very much.

Chapter 5

Sarah didn't sleep well. She knew she was being selfish. Chuck wanted a real relationship and she wasn't in a position to give him one. Right now she wasn't so sure anymore that he would actually choose her if he had the option. If she really cared about him his happiness should come first, no matter how hard it was for her. She had sacrificed a lot for the greater good. She just never thought she would have to give up someone she loved. She never even thought she would actually fall in love in the first place. Or that the situation would be so hopeless when she did.

It took her a while to locate Chuck. He was kneeling in one of the isles talking on his cell phone. She caught the last part of it.

"...maybe you're calling me right now. I don't know. Maybe I should hang up and just give you the chance to..." He spotted her and wrapped it up. "Okay, okay. Um, so you know, if you get a sec, you can call me back. Okay, bye-bye." He snapped the phone shut.

"Won't call you back?"

"I, uh...yeah, I think her voicemail's broken. It's very, very common."

"I wanted to apologize for last night. I suppose I jumped the gun a little and I didn't mean to interfere with your date." Though she lied about her intentions, the apology was sincere. She never meant to hurt him.

"Yeah, I'm not sure it qualifies as a date when you're bugged with CIA microphones and infiltrating an arms importer, buy, hey, I'm new at this." Sarah knew it was Chuck's way of accepting her apology. His forgiving nature was just one of the qualities she admired in him.

"Well, it's hard to have a real relationship in this line of work." She hoped that he would interpret it as her way to make him feel better, which it was in a way, and not a confession that she wanted a real relationship too.

"Apparently it's hard to have a fake one as well." He was trying to return the gesture.

"Well, if it's any consolation, I never felt like our time together was work." She didn't plan on that admission, so she decided to go before he had time to process what she said. She took two steps before remembering why she was there in the first place. She turned back to him. "Oh, uh, Gerber daisies. Lou's favorite."

"How do you know that?" Chuck was surprised.

"CIA. I had them check flower deliveries to her addresses from the last five years." Her background check was thorough after all.

"Good tip." Sarah didn't acknowledge his response. She had a mission and was glad Chuck wouldn't have to tag along. She needed a little time away from him, but more importantly, if he wasn't around the possible bomb they're looking for, it meant he was safe.

Sarah was now running on three days with barely any rest. Last night she didn't even make it back to her hotel. The intel was compromised and they raided a cargo freighter filled with nothing but air and a surveillance camera. Not only didn't they intercept the package, but whoever they were investigating knew they were coming. She and Casey spent the entire night trying to explain to the bosses what went wrong. Right now their only clue was that Stavros and his father was involved. As was Lou apparently. Sarah had the photos to prove it. This brought up two concerns. They must have missed something in Lou's background check which could put Chuck in danger. And he's going to get hurt.

When they decided it was a reasonable hour, she and Casey paid Chuck a visit. She let Casey take point. Of course he used it to goad Chuck when they found him in the bathroom talking to the mirror. She would have thought it was quite adorable, but she tried to focus her tired mind on the mission.

Chuck didn't take the news about Lou very well. He blamed the government for not wanting him to date. And he blamed her. He called it pathetic and beneath her. Sarah couldn't believe he sided with Lou despite the evidence. Then again, Chuck wasn't a spy, so he wasn't used to not letting his emotions get in the way of a mission. The thought wasn't a comfort. He had no right to treat her that way.

Exhaustion finally took over and Sarah got a few hours' sleep before the stakeout. It didn't do much to improve her mood though. The atmosphere in the car was tense and Chuck's sarcasm wasn't helping. Lou showed up as she and Casey suspected. Chuck still could face the fact that Lou might not be what she seemed. He took off after her and Sarah couldn't follow. They were on tape and could be made. All she could do was to listen to the mike in his watch. In the middle of Chuck and Lou's fight, they lost sound. Sarah couldn't just sit by and do nothing. She went after Chuck despite Casey's protest. He knew better than to go up against a cranky Sarah Walker. She found Chuck alone, but that soon changed as Stavros had doubled back and caught them by surprise.

Sarah kept many secrets. Not only those that could compromise her cover, but also the things that would make her seem weak. She was claustrophobic. She took a deep breath before Stavros closed the trunk. To make matters worse, she wasn't alone in the small space. Oddly enough though, Chuck's close presence set her at ease. At least until he opened his mouth.

"Why did you come in? I had the situation entirely under control."

"Yeah. I could see that," she snapped at him. She was trying to suppress her anxiety and anger. And the stirrings caused by his hot breath on the back of her neck. It was too much to deal with all at once.

"So I assume you have a plan to get us out of this mess?"

"Right now Casey's tracking your GPS device in your watch. A SWAT team will be here any minute."

"Yeah. About the watch..."

It was a good thing she was tied up. Strangling the Intersect would probably kill her career. She maneuvered herself around to face him. Chuck had some serious explaining to do.

"Lou was incriminating herself and I didn't want to get her into trouble."

"Always the romantic, huh, Chuck?"

"Jealous?"

"It was foolish. Do you really think the CIA is interested in a deli-meat smuggler?"

"Well, excuse me if I'm not Mr. Perfect Spy. We can't all be Bryce Larkin, now can we?"

"Oh, who's jealous now?"

"Me jealous of you and Bryce? Never." That hit a nerve. Sarah couldn't take any more. Fighting with Chuck was exhausting.

"Said everything you want to say?"

"More or less."

"Good. Now shut up. You're sucking up all the air." Sarah turned her back on Chuck. It took all she had to ignore him and everything that was just said. She had to think of something to get them out of this.

The fight was forgotten as soon as Yari picked up the electric drill and Chuck begged him not to torture her. The next few minutes passed in a blur of threats, guns being pointed, Casey showing up to rescue them and Sarah taking out Margos before literally kicking Chuck to safety. She took off after the bomb with Chuck in tow. Actually she was the one in tow as he refused to let her go in alone and took off running before she could convince him to get out of there.

Sarah started to panic. She couldn't defuse the bomb and Chuck didn't flash. She ordered him to leave. He disobeyed. For the second time since they met, she pointed her gun at him. This time she wanted him to freak out and run. Instead he called her on her stupid plan. Tempers flared again, but this time for different reasons. Sarah needed Chuck to get out of there. His safety was her top priority. And the Intersect was important too.

"Why are you so stubborn?"

"Actually I consider this a moment of courage. I don't know where it's coming from. I guess you just bring out the worst in me." She put the gun away and took a step closer.

"And you in me." She glanced at the bomb. Ten seconds left. Then she looked back at Chuck. There wasn't enough time left to get him to safety. She expected him to panic, but he didn't.

"It was nice knowing ya."

Chuck closed his eyes and resigned himself to his fate. Sarah knew she should probably do the same, but there was so much she still wanted to say, to do. It was now or never. She reached up, grabbed his face with both hands and crushed her lips to his. Chuck didn't respond at first, but Sarah didn't back down. She brushed her lips against his again and then her legs nearly gave out when Chuck's lips parted and his tongue swept the inside of her mouth. She tightened her fingers that were tangled in his curls and grabbed onto his shirt to steady herself. It wasn't really necessary as Chuck's hand between her shoulders pulled her body flush against his. Sarah flicked her tongue against his causing Chuck to return the kiss even more passionately. He must have come to his senses first. His lips stilled, but were still firmly pressed against hers. Then they both pulled away reluctantly. Sarah opened her eyes slowly, locking gazes with him. She was breathing hard. Being kissed by Chuck Bartowski was so much better than the fantasies she harbored since the moment he told a little girl real ballerinas were tall. Their faces were inches apart and his hand was still cupping her cheek. Her eyes darted to his lips, but then she

remembered the bomb. She took a small step back, releasing her grip on his shirt. Their heads turned simultaneously.

Sarah found her voice first. "Well, the good news is we're alive." She hesitated a moment. *Oh God, I just kissed my asset. I kissed Chuck. Thoroughly. And I want to do it again. If only there wasn't so much at stake.* She took a quick breath. "And the bad news is that this is kind of an uncomfortable moment right now."

His sudden confidence took her by surprise. "It's totally comfortable on my end. Just sayin'."

Chapter 6

Sarah groaned and pulled the duvet over her head. She could still hear a faint ping from the knife that impaled the alarm clock seconds earlier. She didn't go back to sleep. There were too many 'damn him's running around in her head. Damn him for being so charming. And so funny. And smart. Damn him for being so tall. And damn him for having those eyes. But most of all, damn him for being such a good kisser. She turned her head and took a deep breath. She should have left. She should have taken her suitcase and got the hell out of the Dodge. Sarah ground her face into her pillow and let out a scream of frustration. Her throat hurt, probably because she hasn't used her voice in nearly three days. She spent the entire weekend under the duvet, hiding from the world. What else was she supposed to do after the most complicated week of her life?

Monday

She kissed Chuck. She had him in a proper lip lock and the world didn't end. The bomb didn't explode. For a brief second she actually wondered if their kiss did that. Sarah was looking at Chuck, trying to control her breathing. She didn't know what to tell him. How to tell him. If she should tell him. Her phone chose that moment to ring. Casey wanted to know if she managed to defuse the bomb. She almost told him she thinks she activated it before realizing he was referring to the other bomb.

Tuesday

Sarah and Casey spent the whole night in briefings again. Then they joined the cleaner team in the warehouse. The pod slid open. Sarah's world shifted. Her rogue-spy-not-so-dead-ex boyfriend took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

She spent the entire day watching Bryce through the one-way glass. He was tied up and refused to talk to the CIA. Her phone rang again. She ignored it again. She hasn't spoken to Chuck since sending him home the night before. She hasn't stopped thinking about him since listening to his message asking her out on a real date. But she could only deal with one guy at a time.

Wednesday

Bryce was still not talking. He asked for Chuck and Sarah was sent to go fetch him. Of course Chuck brought up the kiss and then asked her if they were going to get back together. Or fake back together. Two days ago that was all she wanted. Now things were even more complicated. She buried her emotions until Bryce took Chuck hostage to help him escape.

Thursday

Ellie invited Sarah to her first Thanksgiving dinner since her mom left. She could breathe a little easier. Bryce was gone. She should have known better than expecting him to stay gone. When she confronted Bryce in Chuck's bedroom, she knew what to do. About Bryce at least. She had to find out if he was rogue or not and bring him in if need be. She still had a job to do. So she kissed the mark back. Unfortunately she didn't know it was in full view of Chuck. Before she could explain, Chuck simply stated that they were not getting back together and stomped off. And then they had a mission.

Friday

Handing Bryce over to the CIA went smoothly. Sarah escorted him to the airport just to be sure. Bryce asked her to join him on his mission. She told him she had her assignment. She didn't tell him her assignment had her heart. She doesn't like to talk much. Especially when it came to her feelings.

She and Bryce still worked well together. They took out the Fulcrum agents. All but one. Sarah's heart started pounding hard when Chuck was taken hostage for the second time in three days. Then it stopped altogether when Bryce shot him. She watched in horror as his body hit the ground. She rushed to him after Casey detained Tommy. Helping Chuck up and out of the bullet proof vest, Sarah had a disturbing thought. She turned to the two men. She had to choose. She knew what she wanted to do and she knew what she had to do. Without a word she walked past both of them.

The sun was setting. Sarah didn't notice. She was too busy trying to keep her mind occupied. She folded all her clothes neatly. Set out her passport. Her gun. She was done earlier than she hoped. There was nothing left to do but stare out over the city and wait. She couldn't protect Chuck anymore. She wanted to, but her feelings got in the way. This was for the best. She was doing it for Chuck. Hopefully he'll realize that one day. The phone finally rang. On her way to answer it she stopped when her cell phone started to vibrate. Chuck's face appeared on the screen. She sighed. She was back at that cross road.

Saturday

Sarah had a duvet day.

Sunday

Sarah had a duvet day.

Monday (again)

Sarah kicked the duvet off the bed. Damn him for being so Chuck. She was probably late. She didn't care. Her job was the one thing she was good at. Now she wasn't even sure about that anymore. She was too compromised to do her job properly. And she was too in love to leave. But her first mission objective hasn't changed. Protect Chuck by any means necessary.

Sarah had hoped to make a quick getaway. The sideways glances Chuck gave her all through the debriefing made her uncomfortable. He knew. He knew she had the choice to leave with Bryce and she didn't. Knowing Chuck, he'd probably want to talk about it. She just wanted to run. Chuck followed her to the courtyard.

"Hey, hey, Sarah. Wait."

"What's up?" She was in full agent mode. It felt oddly comfortable. Simple. She belonged. Her demeanor caught Chuck off guard.

"Uh...nothing. Nothing, really just... You know, good to see you. I thought you'd be halfway to Bryce by now."

"Why would you think that?" She was not going to admit that she came close and definitely not why.

"I don't know, because he offers a pretty exciting life, I guess. Sipping mai tais in Jakarta, or assassinating Afghani warlords or whatever it is that you kids do for fun." He was being the old Chuck again. The one before all the madness with Lou and the kiss and Bryce returning. Right now she can't

deal with that Chuck. She needed the one she was constantly fighting with the past weeks. It would be easier to push him away.

"I'm here because I have a job to do." She had to focus on her assignment. She could only do her job properly if her emotions didn't get in the way.

"Right. Right. Of course, the job." There was a moment of awkward silence. "I better...uh, I better be going as well. I gotta punch in." Sarah was glad to escape, but Chuck stopped her again.

"Sarah?"

She turned around. "Yeah?"

He didn't respond immediately. They stared at each other for several seconds. The friendly camaraderie wasn't there anymore. One stupid, wonderful kiss ruined everything. As much as she knew it would help her focus, she had to admit that she missed it more than she ever could have imagined. Then Chuck found his voice.

"Should we carpool on our stay tonight?" Sarah knew it wasn't what he wanted to ask.

"Be at my place at eight," she simply answered and made sure she got away this time.

She heard him pacing in the hallway. When the footsteps stopped she called "It's open." Chuck let himself in and she spared him a glance before putting the finishing touches to her make-up.

"Not a morning person, I see," Chuck quipped.

"It depends on the morning. So we're clear on everything? Eyes and ears on anything that can trigger a flash." She caught him in her peripheral vision checking her out. She focused on the mission. "Our cover is we're a couple, you're..."

"Charles Carmichael. Yeah, I got it." He gave her his trademark grin. "It should be pretty fun, right?" Sarah stepped closer.

"It's work." She reached out to straighten his tie like she always does. She didn't realize what she was doing until her pushed her hand away.

"It's okay. I got it." His rejection caused her to slip a little. It hurt, but she got what she gave. She covered.

"Okay. Well, uh, ready to go to work?"

The evening went well as far as the mission was concerned. She managed to get close to Lon Kirk. Of course using seduction she hoped to push Chuck even further away. It worked. They didn't talk much on the way home. Sarah pulled up in front of the apartment complex.

"So, uh, what did you and Kirk talk about?"

"He invited me to his yacht tomorrow afternoon."

"Okay. What time should I be ready?"

"No. Just me," she explained. She didn't miss the look that crossed his face.

"Oh, just you, alone on his yacht. Kind of disrespectful to your boyfriend, don't you think?"

"Chuck, Bryce is not my boyfriend, and even if he was he would understand this kind of work." That was the biggest difference between Chuck and Bryce. Bryce never put her wellbeing ahead of the job the way Chuck did. And although she was keeping Chuck at arm's length, she didn't want him to think there was still something between her and Bryce.

"I meant Carmichael, actually." He looked dejected. Sarah's breath hitched. Shit. She hated hurting him, even more so when she did it subconsciously. "But don't worry. Carmichael's booked up tomorrow, anyway," Chuck continued when she didn't respond. "Very, very busy schedule," he unfastened his seat belt, "so good luck and good night." He didn't spare her as much as a glance when he got out and shut the door.

Sarah floored the gas pedal. She wondered if she would feel less miserable if she had left.

Sarah was fuming. Chuck screwed up the mission. He wasn't even supposed to be at the yacht club. All she had was the job and this was not going to look good on her record. Mostly she was just angry that all she had was the job. She rang the doorbell.

"Ellie or Awesome home?" she asked as she walked in without a polite greeting. She didn't want to be here and the sooner she got it over with, the sooner she could go back to her hotel and continue her duvet bonding.

"No." Chuck closed the door. "They're at work and hello to you too."

"What the hell happened today?"

"I don't know, I don't get it. I had a flash."

"Right when I went below deck with Kirk. It's pretty convenient timing I would say."

"What are you talking about?"

"Just when you thought I was getting intimate with Kirk, you decided to have a flash."

"What exactly are you implying? That I faked a flash? That I'm a flash faker?"

"I think we need to discuss the fact that you let your emotions get in the way today." If she had to suppress her emotions, he had to learn to do the same. It will make things easier in the long run.

"My emotions?"

"Things have been a little off since the incident, Chuck."

"Really? And what incident are you referring to, Agent Walker? Could it be the incident where you planted a kiss on me right before a bomb was supposed to go off, ending our lives? That same kiss right before your boyfriend Bryce came back from the dead? That kiss?"

"Stop saying kiss. It happened, okay. What's done is done. Can we just not talk about it, please?" If the conversation continued in that direction, she would have to tell him it didn't mean anything. That was one lie she didn't want to tell. She didn't want to taint the memory. It was the only thing that would get her through the rest of this assignment.

"Okay, fine. Absolutely. Just answer me one little thing."

"Chuck..."

"Did you kiss me that night because you thought we were gonna die and mine were the most convenient lips around, or was it actually about me?" All she could do was stare at him. Her heart sank. He was going to make her say it.

"What happened was a mistake." She stomped off. "One I will not make again." She had to get away from him.

Sarah lost her grip on the door handle when Chuck suddenly grabbed her arm and spun her around. He pinned her body against the door with his. She barely had time to react before his mouth was on hers. The kiss was different from their first. She could feel his anger and frustration. That she returned in kind. Then his hands travelled up her arms and gently cradled her face as he pulled back slightly. Afraid of losing contact Sarah leaned closer and grabbed hold of his curls. But Chuck wasn't about to let her take the lead again. His tongue sweeping over her bottom lip caught her by surprise. Her lips parted and he swallowed the moan that escaped her throat when he deepened the kiss.

She had no idea how long they remained like that. Her mind only started working again when Chuck's lips stilled. Like the previous time, he kept his mouth pressed firmly against hers for a moment. It drove her crazy. Then he pulled away slowly. With her eyes still closed Sarah sensed his face moving closer again. She felt his breath against her ear and shivered. He had her with one word.

"Liar."

Chapter 7

Sarah had no fight left. She dropped her head onto his shoulder and inhaled his scent. It was comforting. As was his hand that was running up and down her back. For a moment she forgot she was supposed to fight this.

"Are you okay?" Chuck asked when the silence stretched too long. Instead of answering she just tightened her arms around his waist. "Sarah?" His voice brought her back to the present. Her eyes shot open. The bugs. She forgot about the damn bugs. Not only did Casey probably get an eye-full, but she confronted Chuck about their other kiss in full view of the surveillance. She made a rookie mistake and it could cost her dearly. Sarah pushed Chuck away forcefully. He gave her a puzzled look, but didn't notice when she lifted her hand. The slap echoed through the room. Her hand flew to her mouth when he went down.

"Oh my God," she gasped and knelt beside him. She watched the video feeds often enough to know where the cameras were positioned, so she was fairly certain she blocked his face from view. "Chuck, you're bleeding," she stated and helped him up. With her hand on the side of his mouth she led a dazed Chuck to the bathroom. It was the only room in the apartment that wasn't under surveillance. She convinced Casey at the beginning of this assignment that Chuck would need some privacy. He reluctantly agreed, but she swept the room twice a month just to be sure. Sarah pushed Chuck down on the edge of the bathtub and removed her hand. His hand instinctively replaced hers. Then he moved his fingers away and studied them for a moment.

"Did it stop?"

"What?" Sarah asked confused. She wasn't looking at Chuck. Instead she pacing as best she could in the small space. She had to fix this.

"The blood. Did it stop?" Sarah caught on. She halted and turned to him.

"Oh, no Chuck, you weren't...I had to get you in here away from the surveillance and..." Sarah noticed the bruise starting to form on his left cheek. She didn't mean to hit him that hard. "Wait here," she ordered and went to the kitchen for some ice. She returned minutes later with a bag of frozen peas. "You're out of ice," she explained and stepped closer. Before pressing the peas against his face she suddenly bent down and touched the spot lightly with her lips. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

"It's okay." Chuck took the bag from her and winced slightly when it made contact with his skin. "I had that coming. I shouldn't have grabbed you like that."

"It's okay, Chuck." She didn't know what else to say.

"If it's that okay, why are you wearing a hole in my tiles?" Sarah didn't realize she was pacing again.

"Sorry." She faced him again. "Chuck," she began. She didn't know what to do with her hands. She folded her arms and then unfolded them. "Chuck, we can't do this. We shouldn't."

"Okay," he shrugged. Sarah's mouth fell open. Okay? He's going to kiss her like that and just dismiss her like it didn't matter? Then she closed her mouth and eyes simultaneously. He was following her lead. He just treated her like she had been treating him these past few weeks. She had no choice, but maybe she should have explained it better. Before she could say anything, Chuck continued. "I mean, it's always the

same dance, you now? I want something more, you push me away, I fight it, you fight me, you win, I retreat. This way I eliminate steps three, four and five and save us both a lot of energy." Chuck wasn't mad anymore. He just sounded so defeated.

Sarah sighed and sank down next to him. "Chuck, I'm sorry. I really am." She wondered if he had any idea how long her list of regrets was, especially when it came to him.

"Sarah, don't apologize. You can't help the way you feel. Or not feel. I get it. I mean, you're you and I..."

Something inside Sarah snapped. "Don't you dare tell me how I feel. You have no idea..." Her cell phone started to ring and she almost cursed. She pressed the answer button harder than necessary.

"What is it, Casey?"

"Just checking to make sure you didn't kill the asset. You two have been in there an awfully long time."

"Don't you have a bonsai that needs butchering?"

"Touchy. Hope I'm not interrupting anything." She recognized the grunt. Number seven. Sarcasm.

"Was there a reason you called?" She would not let herself be baited, but she made a mental note to get a few extra kicks in next time they sparred.

"I need to speak to you. Once the nerd is done bleeding, stop by my place."

"Can't, I'm busy. I'll see you tomorrow." Without waiting for a response, she ended the call. She'd probably pay for that in the morning, but she couldn't face him in the state she was in.

"He saw, didn't he?" Chuck removed the bag of peas, dropping it on the floor.

"Don't worry, I'll handle Casey." She leaned closer to inspect the bruise. "It shouldn't be that bad. I'll leave some concealer so Ellie won't notice."

"You want me to wear make-up?" he teased, breaking the tension between them. Sarah gave him a small smile.

"Are you going all macho on me again, Chuck?"

"Again? Oh, you mean earlier...I was trying to prove a point."

"Well, point proven." The words slipped out and Sarah shot up. "I should go before Casey storms in here to see if you've bled out."

"Sarah," Chuck called as she reached the door.

"Yeah?" She turned around, meeting his eyes. It always amazes her that she can see exactly what he's feeling.

"Are you joining us for Christmas? I mean are we...the cover...?"

"Well, Ellie doesn't know we're supposed to be broken up, so yeah, I guess so." She didn't have the heart to tell him she didn't really celebrate the festive season, not after everything that had just happened. And it would lead to a lot of uncomfortable questions.

"Okay, good." She just smiled in return.

Sarah was alone in her room wrapping gifts for the Bartowskis. She listened to Christmas carols to try and get into the holiday spirit, but it wasn't really working. Her mind kept drifting back. She can't believe she actually asked Casey if he ever wondered about a different life. Of having a family. Kids. He was quick to remind her why they'd chosen this life. It might have been his choice, but she didn't exactly have one. Not that she wasn't proud of serving the greater good. At least she managed to fix things with Chuck in a way. He was right about the crates and she was relieved. She really didn't want to follow through on her promise to ask for reassignment if she couldn't resolve things between them. Casey suspected that she was compromised and she had to be more careful in the future not to let on. She just hoped that Chuck would understand.

Things seemed to be back to normal after the Buy More holiday party, but that didn't last long. Sarah expected a cover sleepover on Christmas Eve. What she didn't expect was Chuck suggesting that they go to her place. Ellie protested, but Chuck insisted that they needed a little more privacy. Of course what privacy meant to Ellie was worlds apart what it meant to her. Now she was in the bathroom getting ready for bed, trying to stall as best she can. Chuck wanted to talk. That much was obvious. When she decided it would be ridiculous to floss for a third time, she quietly opened the door, hoping against hope that Chuck had fallen asleep. No such luck.

"I was about to come in there and rescue you from some evil loofah or something," Chuck quipped, the sheets pulled up to under his chin.

"Sorry," she shrugged. Trying to keep the mood light she waved a hand down her body, "this doesn't happen on its own, you know." She was rewarded with a Bartowski grin.

"Well, it's worth it." His attempts at flirting were a little clumsy sometimes, but she always found it endearing. She switched off the light and slipped into bed, carefully avoiding touching him. They both stared at the ceiling in silence for a while.

"Sarah?" he started hesitantly. She suppressed a sigh and turned on her side, propping her head up on one hand. Chuck did the same. "We never finished our conversation the other day. You didn't tell me how you really feel." His fingers were playing with the corner of the pillow.

"My feelings aren't important, Chuck," she couldn't meet his eyes. "What is important is to keep you safe. I can't do that if I'm compromised."

"So if we...uhm...if this relationship was real, you'd be compromised?" Sarah sighed. Did she have to spell it out for him?

"Yes," she answered simply.

Chuck nodded slowly, his brows furrowed like he was trying to figure out something. "So having feelings for me doesn't compromise you, but only acting on them?" Sarah could only stare at him. She hoped that

her lack of response would discourage him, but he was relentless. "And because care about me, you would be less inclined to protect me?"

"The agency doesn't see it that way."

"Then maybe they should rethink the 'Intelligence' in Central Intelligence Agency."

"That's not what's meant by..."

"Sarah," Chuck interrupted, "I don't mean to brag, but in case you haven't noticed, I am a pretty smart guy."

Sarah couldn't help but smile. "I've noticed."

"Okay, now tell me again why we can't do this?"

"Best case scenario, the agency will reassign me as far away from here as possible."

"That's best case? I'm scared to ask what the worst case scenario is."

She didn't want to tell him, but he needed to understand. "The government is building another Intersect. Once it's complete...there will be a burn order, Chuck. To either throw you in a bunker or eliminate you. If Graham or Beckman so much as suspect that there's more between us...they won't tell me. How am I supposed to protect you then?" She expected him to freak out, but he didn't.

"Sarah, you can't protect me against that even if you know. That would be treason." She couldn't believe it. Here she was telling him that he might die and soon and all he was worried about was her going to prison. "You're not seriously considering that, are you?"

Without answering she got out of bed and retrieved a lockbox from the closet. Then she placed it between them, opened it and handed him one of the fake passports. "I have enough cash saved up and an escape route all figured out. All we have to do is make it to the train station in one piece."

"You did all this?" Chuck asked when he got over the initial shock.

"Yeah. Do you get it now, Chuck?" She put the passports back in the box. When he didn't answer she looked up at him. He was simply staring at her. "What?"

Chuck reached a hand out and tucked a few blond locks behind her ear. "I love you too, Sarah."

Awareness seeped slowly into her brain. Keeping her eyes shut against the offending bright glare of the early morning sun, Sarah let out an even breath. She knew instinctively what day it was. She couldn't help but wonder which unlucky branch of the Salvation Army would be scammed this year. Of course she will find out in a couple of days and make amends in her own way, but the thought still made her stomach churn. Everyone deserved a nice Christmas. Well, almost everyone. But unfortunately she couldn't do anything about that right this moment. So instead she let her mind wander in a different direction. The dreams were becoming more frequent and intense. It was starting to drive her insane. In last night's Chuck even came up with a plan for them to be together for real. It was crazy and it was brilliant. But then again, she wasn't one to let herself be guided by dreams.

The slight chill in the air caused her to shiver. Groggily she pulled the covers tighter around her. That's when she felt it. Something wasn't quite right. She was comfortable. Very comfortable in fact, but also... She didn't need to check, but she lifted the covers slightly anyway and peeked. Then she dropped the duvet, her mind suddenly wide awake. The memories of the previous night came flooding back. Her first thought was of director Graham, the man she spent her entire adult life trying to impress. He was going to kill her and then reassign her. She just...she just...

"Sarah, don't freak out." Chuck's words confirmed it. This was definitely not a dream.

Her hotel room was not wide enough to burn off the nervous energy by pacing. She longingly eyed the punching bag in the corner, but abandoned the idea. That would just add to the amused grin Chuck was sporting. Last night he dismissed every argument with five words. Sarah huffed and turned to him. She gave him a pointed look. He wasn't fazed. She gestured wildly. "Could you please put a shirt on?"

Chuck's smile grew. "It's really hot in here and," he gestured back, "you're currently in it." Once again Sarah did an unnecessary recon. Looking down she saw the word DREN written across her chest. Chuck cleared his throat and pulled the sheet tighter around his waist. "Was it really that bad?"

Sarah's head snapped up. She tried to form the word 'yes', but failed. She was trained to withstand the influence of every thinkable truth serum out there, but she wasn't immune to the look in Chuck's eyes. Or the memory of his hands. He had very talented hands and not just for fixing computers. With a groan she fell backwards onto the bed, her legs dangling off the side. Chuck scooted down to lay beside her.

"The stakes are too high. I'm not going to gamble with your life," she spoke to the ceiling.

"You can do anything. And I'm still going to follow you around like a lovesick puppy as Casey put it. No one is gonna know the difference." Chuck propped himself up on one elbow. She could feel him studying her face.

"You're crazy, you know that?" She turned her head towards him and he leaned closer.

"Mmm hmm," he whispered, rubbing his nose against hers, "crazy about you." Sarah could barely make out the words over the pounding of her heart. She dropped her gaze to his mouth, but seeing as he was so close she went a little cross-eyed so she met his eyes again.

"Damn you," she whispered in surrender. With a smile Chuck captured her lips, only to release them after a brief, teasing taste. Her arms slipped around his neck of their own accord. With a hand on his neck and the other fisting his curls, she pulled his head back down. His mouth closed over hers more securely this time, his tongue tracing her bottom lip. Hers met his, inviting him into her mouth. An involuntary moan escaped from the back of her throat when he complied. His free hand moved down her side and came to rest on her hip, angling her towards him before slipping down to the back of her thigh. He pulled her leg up and hooked it around his waist. She broke off the kiss, took a quick breath and attacked his lips again. Rolling onto her back, she pulled him with her. His lips left hers and he started tracing up her jaw with his lips and tongue. She arched her head to the side, giving him better access. When he stopped at the pulse point in her neck, she inhaled sharply and breathed, "You can have your shirt back now."

Chapter 8

Sarah fell across the bed with one arm over her eyes. It had been almost seven weeks since Christmas and frustration was starting to win out over excitement. Aside from a few heavy make-out sessions in the Wienerlicious' storeroom, only on the days Scooter was not scheduled to work, which seemed to be quite too few, she and Chuck hardly had any alone time. Between the Awesomes and Casey's bugs, they felt like they were being watched twenty four seven, making sneaking around nearly impossible. Ellie and Devon's presence didn't bother her that much, they had a cover to sell as far as the CIA was concerned, but some days she resented Team Intersect's thoroughness in protecting the asset. She wondered why Casey didn't just plant a camera on Chuck's forehead and be done with it. So for now they had to settle for small consolations. An extra squeeze of a hand or accidental brush when passing one another. But even though it was nice to know that every gesture meant something, it didn't do much in terms of relieving...well, things that needed relieving.

Sarah pulled her phone out of her jeans' pocket and sent a text. 'My laptop's on the blink.' After a few seconds the message alert sounded.

'What's wrong with it?'

'Don't know. I need a service call.' She smiled wickedly as she pressed the send button.

'Jeff and Lester are on the roster today. Can it wait until my shift ends?' The smile turned into a frown. Damn him and his clean mind.

'No, I guess they'll do.' She waited.

'Okay, I'll see if they're available.' Sarah had barely time to raise an eyebrow when her phone beeped again. *'Wait, what? NO!'* Her smirk returned. Before she had time to reply another text came through. *'Movie night at the Bartowski's? I promise lots of non-fake snuggling.'*

'Depends. Will the hands be behaving?'

'Can't promise that. You're too touchable.'

'Cute. Permission to tranq the audience?' Chuck would know she was kidding. Sort of.

'Tempting, but no.'

'This is worse than torture.'

'I know. Stay over?'

'Thought you'd never ask. My place?'

'If you can convince Ellie to pick a short movie. Gotta go, Jeff's got Tara Reid's phone number.'

'Who hasn't? Don't be late.'

Sarah's heart gave a little jolt when Chuck entered the Wienerlicious an hour later. He must have missed her too. Pity Scooter was working today.

"Hey, try this. It's the new breakfast corn dog with country sausage and syrup wrapped in pancake." With a smile she handed him the latest concoction Harry Wienerlicious had her cook up. It was probably terrible, but Chuck always complimented the wieners she fried, because that's what good boyfriends do.

"Thank you, but maybe a bit later." She frowned when he casted it aside and then her heart dropped when he said "I have some serious business to discuss. Matter of national security." Great, she thought, another mission to derail their plans. "Casey's ex-girlfriend is in town."

Sarah did a double take. "How do you know?"

"I flashed. Her name is Ilsa Trinchina, super-hot, super-sexy, and staying at the Grand Saville as we speak."

"Does Casey know?" The response was automatic. Her brain was still stuck on the 'super-hot, super-sexy'. Was it fair to get jealous over a woman he saw in a flash?

"Oh yeah. Almost ripped my head off. It must've been a pretty bad break-up. I mean, for the longest time I always imagined Casey was built like a Ken doll. You know, downstairs?"

"I don't know what kind of woman would go for a guy like Casey." She tried to keep her mind on the conversation. Chuck's gesturing added to the frustration she had to live with for the past weeks.

"I was, ahh, kind of hoping you'd help me find out. Ilsa is a civilian, she's a foreign national. The Intersect has like nothing on her except for some love letters I'll never be able to scrub out of my brain."

"You want me to go behind Casey's back, re-allocate CIA resources and violate this woman's privacy so you can find out what their story is?" She could think of so many better ways to spend a specific resource or two.

"Tell me you're not curious." Okay, she'll admit she was a little curious. Plus if this Ilsa could distract Casey for a couple of hours... Of course then Chuck mentioned that he flashed on a really long list of bad guys too.

General Beckman ordered them to infiltrate the Russian's party to see who Chuck flashed on. They almost blew the mission twice. Once when Chuck was mistaken for someone's fourth cousin, Sasha, and the second time when she broke some pig's thumb for touching what only Chuck was allowed to. And then there was Casey's ex who was not so dead and engaged to the head of the Russian mafia. Deciding that it would be best if Chuck and Casey got out of there, Sarah had to stay behind to set up surveillance. She sighed. There goes movie night.

Chuck and Casey turned up again later that evening. She didn't buy Chuck volunteering to take part in the all night stake-out. If he came alone, she might have been less suspicious of his motives, but she knew him. He was up to something and it most likely involved Casey's love life. Bad idea. She ordered them to stay in the storage room where she sat up base. It was about as effective as telling Chuck to stay in the car. After taking care of one of the security detail, she returned to the room only to find it empty. She pulled out her phone and hit speed dial. Chuck's rang a few times before he disconnected the call. Getting really worried Sarah checked the monitors. She spotted Casey sliding under Ilsa's bed while she hid her gun away. Seconds later Victor Federov entered the room. What the hell? Then she saw it. A mop

of curls was sticking out from under the bed. At least Casey was with him, but Sarah still considered getting an extra pair of handcuffs for Chuck to make sure he stays put in future.

The next day passed in a blur of briefings and paperwork. Ilsa turned out to be an agent with the French Secret Service. General Beckman decided that Team Bartowski didn't need to get involved after all. Grateful for having the night off, Sarah headed over to Chuck's apartment only to find a distressed Ellie and no Chuck. Though she was anxious to find her undercover cover boyfriend, she couldn't leave Ellie by herself in the state she was in. Listening patiently to Ellie's woes about taking care of three feet on her own, a part of Sarah was oddly envious of their 'real couple problems'. At least Ellie didn't have to fear being sent to the other side of the planet if anyone found out the truth. She was about to take Ellie up on her offer for some wine when her phone rang.

Sarah felt a little guilty for leaving Ellie with Morgan, but she was more worried about Chuck. He rushed off with Casey to save Ilsa, who was walking into a trap. She knew Casey was not thinking straight which meant he could get Chuck in real danger. She scanned the wedding guest for her partners. Failing to spot them, she dialed Chuck's number. She turned in the direction of the Mexican Hat Dance and felt anger boil to the surface when Mr. Pig got up. Ambushing him, she sent him flying into a wall with a single kick. With a foot on his throat, pushing her heel slightly into his flesh, she shoved her gun in his face. "Where is Chuck Bartowski?"

Before he had the chance to answer, she heard a familiar girlish scream. Spinning around she saw Chuck and Casey fall from a really high window. Her heart stopped. Time seemed to slow down as she watched them descend. All she could think was that they had to be okay. She only started breathing again when they emerged from the water, Casey dragging Chuck out of the pool by his collar. Her relieve didn't last long. Several Russian mobsters had their guns aimed directly at them. Snapping into agent mode, Sarah raised her gun and approached the gang. Victor verbally confirmed her fear that one little girl with one little gun was not going to stop him. Then she caught Ilsa's eye. They were in the same boat. Their guys were in trouble. Sarah knew what Ilsa wanted her to do and nodded slightly. Making a move to put her weapon down, Sarah kicked it through the air and grabbed another from a surprised gunman to her right. Ilsa caught the gun perfectly and aimed it at Victor's head, forcing his men to surrender.

The ride home was quiet. Sarah was still mad. At Chuck for always getting himself into trouble and nearly causing her to have a heart attack. And at Casey for acting unprofessional and nearly getting Chuck killed. She got that he had to save Ilsa, but he should have asked her for help, not Chuck.

"You know," Chuck was the first to break the silence in the car, "Casey's taking Ilsa to his place, so..." Sarah shot him a look. Then she glanced up in her rearview mirror and made a dangerous U-turn. "On second thought, I might be safer with surveillance around." His joke didn't have the desired effect. Sarah's eyes were still shooting daggers and he sighed. He placed a hand on her knee and gave it a squeeze. "Look, I'm really sorry, but how about you yell at me tomorrow?" Without responding, she parked the car in front of her hotel. Sarah didn't need to look at Chuck to know he was giving her big puppy dog eyes. She ran a hand through her hair and let out a breath, wondering if she'd ever get used to all these emotions coursing through her. After years of being detached from everyone around her it was rather exhausting.

"Okay," she finally turned to Chuck, "unless I don't feel like yelling tomorrow." Chuck quirked an eyebrow and then a smile spread across his face. She smiled back. "Come on," she said softly as she got out of the car.

They made it to the elevator before Sarah shoved him against one of the walls and almost surrounded him with her body. It was her way of making sure he was really still in one piece. When the doors slid open, she reversed out of the cart, dragging Chuck with her. Without their lips breaking contact, she

managed to locate her key, but after several failed attempts to get the door open, Chuck pulled back. He took the key from her shaking hand and unlocked the door. He barely kicked it closed behind him when she attacked his lips again. Chuck pushed her away gently. "Wait," he breathed. "I forgot something."

Sarah reached up to unbutton his shirt. "I have some in the bathroom," she replied shyly. Looking up she met Chuck's confused gaze.

"You have flowers and chocolates in your bathroom?"

It was Sarah's turn to be confused. "What are you talking about?"

"Valentine's day." He gave her a sheepish look. "I forgot to get you flowers and chocolates. I screwed up our first Valentine's day." Sarah's fingers stilled. She forgot too and she knew how important these things were to him. Reaching up she placed a soft kiss against his lips.

"It's okay, Chuck, don't worry about it. All I need is you."

He pulled her closer and her arms circled his neck. "That's very gracious of you, but I still wanted to make you feel special."

"Nothing's stopping you," she replied seductively. "I'm here, you're here, there are no bugs..."

Chuck's pout turned into a brilliant smile. "Tomorrow I'm buying you the biggest bunch of gardenias a Buy More salary can afford."

Sarah was surprised. "How did you know?"

"Hey, I'm not a totally incompetent boyfriend."

Chapter 9

Sarah awoke with an all too familiar knot in her gut, the kind that always warned her when there was trouble lurking. It saved her life on many a mission. Only now, she wasn't exactly on a mission. She wasn't in some foreign country trying to quell a revolution with any type of kitchen utensil. In fact, she was in one of her favorite places. In bed. More specifically in bed in Chuck's arms. That's what made it even more ominous. Chuck sighed contently against the back of her neck, but that did little to comfort her. She laced her fingers through his residing against her stomach and pulled herself tighter into his embrace. That didn't help either.

"Good morning," he breathed against her ear, sending an involuntary shiver down her spine.

"Morning," she replied, turning her head and attempting to smile. She must have failed miserably as she was met with a concerned frown.

"Honey, what's wrong?"

Sarah briefly considered lying and telling him everything was fine, but he'd see right through that. And telling him the truth would sound silly. She's a spy. She shouldn't let a bad feeling freak her out. Yet, she couldn't shake it, so she turned all the way around to face him. Chuck propped his head up on one elbow, his other arm still securely around her waist. Sarah brought her hand up and ran her fingers over the stubble on his cheek. Her eyes searched his face, as if committing every feature to memory. Another shiver ran through her, but this time it wasn't a pleasant one. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Instead of responding to his question, she decided to tell him something else. Not to distract him, or manipulate him, but purely because she needed to.

"I love you."

It came out in a whisper, partly because saying the words were unfamiliar and partly due to the nagging feeling that she might not get the chance to say it again. She had no idea where the thought had come from, but it scared her.

Judging by the look on Chuck's face she had surprised him, but his shock was quickly replaced by a big Bartowski grin. He leaned forward and captured her lips in a slow, sweet kiss. Then he pulled back and rested his forehead against hers. "I love you too."

Sarah tilted her chin upwards to meet his lips again and pulled him down on top of her. She pushed her anxiety aside to concentrate on the feel of his comforting weight pressing her deeper into the mattress. Her hands fisted his curls as she deepened the kiss, tracing his lips with her tongue before entering his mouth, seeking out his. Chuck responded eagerly. His hands already found their way under her shirt, his fingers tracing a path from her hips to her waist and back. The need for air couldn't be denied any longer and they pulled apart slightly. Before Sarah could move in for another kiss, Chuck pushed himself up onto his elbows, just out of her reach.

"I never thought I'd say this," he spoke in between gasps of breath, "but we need to stop."

"I know," Sarah sighed in resignation. They had to work the early shift and if they both showed up late, they ran the risk of blowing their cover under the cover. And with that thought, Sarah's earlier unease returned.

"But," Chuck responded, rolling over onto his back and taking her with him, "we have ten more minutes to cuddle, which is enough time for you to tell me what's on your mind." She should have known he was not

going to let it go. Sarah nestled her head under his chin to avoid eye contact. His arm around her shoulders tightened. For a brief moment she just reveled in the feeling of being held.

“Chuck, I need you to promise me something.” She managed to keep her voice even.

“Anything.”

“Be extra careful today. Stay close to Casey and keep your eyes open for anything that looks suspicious.”

“Sarah, you’re freaking me out. What’s going on?”

“Nothing’s going on. Just...just promise me.”

Chuck placed a kiss in her hair. “Okay. I promise.” She tightened her hold on him, hoping that for once, he’ll do as he was told.

Sarah recited the compulsory German greeting as she handed the unsuspecting customer a sample of her cooking. Her fake smile faltered when the woman left and Casey entered, looking worried.

“We have a problem.” That was the last thing she wanted to hear today. For a second she wondered if Chuck kept his word.

“What do you mean?”

“Chuck found that in the Buy More.” She immediately grabbed the object Casey placed on the counter and examined it. Neither of them bugged the store.

“We have a problem.”

The briefing confirmed Sarah’s fear. The listening device belonged to Fulcrum. If they didn’t know who and what he was by now, they were very close. Graham and Beckman gave them 48 hours to identify the enemy operative. If they failed, Chuck would be thrown in a bunker. His life as a civilian would be over. Their secret relationship would be over. Sarah was determined to complete the mission. If she didn’t, she would face the toughest decision she’d ever had to make. Sarah the girlfriend would take him and run, but Sarah the spy knew that it would be the worst course of action. Running from the CIA was one thing. Trying to keep Chuck safe from the enemy all on her own was a whole different ballgame. As much as she hated to admit it, being in a bunker was the best for him. The safest. But it was still unthinkable. She couldn’t let that happen. She couldn’t fail.

Casey secured a warehouse while Sarah oversaw the CIA team moving the entire contents of the Buy More. She made sure they were thorough. They went over every inch of the merchandise. Twenty four hours later they’ve managed to locate twenty nine bugs, but no receiver. Casey brought Chuck in to see if he flashed on anything that could give them a clue as to where it was hidden. Sarah was trying to be nonchalant about Chuck’s reaction as to who was really behind the Buy More “robbery”. She didn’t want to let on just how serious the situation was, given that they still had time, but Casey forced her hand. All she wanted to do was reassure Chuck that she’d do whatever it took to keep him with his family and with her, but with all the agents around, she had to act professional. Casey already brought up her lady feelings once in the past five minutes. Chuck took the news better than she expected. She suspected it was because he trusted her, which only fueled her determination.

They caught a break when the surveillance revealed that the receiver was hidden in Big Mike's marlin. The only problem was that the CIA was not in possession of the fish as Jeff and Lester had stolen it before the Buy More was cleaned out. Chuck and Casey went back to the store to try and find it while Sarah stayed behind to phone Beckman with an update.

"We're pursuing the receiver. We've got the location and it shouldn't be long before recovery."

"Stay with the receiver. In the meantime, we've decided to extract Chuck." Sarah felt the world stop. There it was, the reason she'd been feeling antsy for the past day and a half. She was not going to lose Chuck to some enemy organization, but to her own.

"What? But we don't know he's in danger."

"There's a change the identity of the Intersect has been compromised. We have to err on the side of caution."

"But you promised we had 48 hours." She knew it was futile to even try and argue. The CIA and NSA operated under their own set of rules. And keeping promises to agents wasn't exactly high on their list of priorities.

"You know the game, Agent Walker. The order has gone out. Chuck is coming in."

Sarah pushed the disconnect button a little harder than necessary. This was not supposed to happen, but if she was complete honest, she should have expected it. She did know the game, but Chuck had changed the rules. One thing was for certain though, she was not about to give him up without a fight.

Chapter 10

Sarah couldn't believe she had to work a bloody hotdog shift. When her phone rang she hoped it was Casey, informing her that they found the marlin and the receiver. Something they could use to get the order to bring Chuck in revoked. No such luck. She had the irritating voice of Scooter in her ear, threatening termination if she didn't walk through the Wienerlicious door in twenty minutes. That put her in the mood to eliminate a few things, if not people, herself. She considered ignoring him. She wouldn't need that cover job much longer anyway, but her rational side prevailed. If she was to pull off her plan, she couldn't raise any alarm bells.

Sarah, with her phone practically glued to her hand, was waiting for any news. She decided to give it another thirty minutes before making that call. Sarah Walker the girlfriend won the internal battle and Sarah Walker the spy would just have to deal with it.

There were no customers in the Wienerlicious, allowing Sarah time to run over her checklist in her mind. She nearly jumped when the email came through on her phone. She breathed a sigh of relief when she opened the attachment. Chuck had just identified the enemy operative. It was the break she was hoping for. The video clip had barely finished when Lizzy walked through the door. At least that saved Sarah the trouble to track her down.

But things did not go as planned. Ten minutes later Sarah found herself locked in the walk-in freezer, wondering how she let the pita girl get the upper hand. Lizzy got away with the receiver. She tried really hard not to think about the consequences of what just happened. She failed and Chuck was out there, defenseless against Fulcrum and the CIA. A noise from the front of the store snapped her back to the present. She heard Chuck's voice and yelled for help. Seconds later he appeared. She'd never been so relieved to see him in her life. That was until she realized Chuck could barely hold onto a gun.

Another fifteen minutes passed before Sarah stiffly walked out of the freezer. Chuck was arrested before he could free her, but Casey finally showed up. She informed him through a nearly frozen jaw that Lizzy was the mole. If they could track her down, all that remained was to bail Chuck out of jail and they'd be home free. Then she was going to have a chat with Scooter about the length of her skirt. She wondered how long it would take for her legs to thaw.

Sarah had barely lost that human popsicle feeling when she went cold again, this time from the inside. They briefed Director Graham and General Beckman on the status of the situation. The order was expected. Track down the enemy agent and take her out. It was Beckman's response to her suggestion that someone needed to go fetch Chuck that pulled the rug from under her.

"The Intersect is no longer your concern, Agent Walker."

"I...I don't understand." Surely her superiors realized that they were close to ensuring Chuck's identity had been contained.

"Detective Conway is CIA," General Beckman explained.

"Chuck is on his way to the extraction point right now. We've decided to transfer him to lockdown immediately." Sarah could almost feel Director Graham's stare through the monitor. "Is there a problem?"

"Uh, no. No. I just thought I would handle his transfer." She had counted on that should they ever need to run. Chuck was her asset. It was her job to burn him. Or at least to receive the order.

"Forget about Chuck, Agent Walker. Focus on catching that Fulcrum agent."

"We're on it," Casey responded when Sarah didn't. He terminated the link before continuing. "And 'we' meaning I go get Lizzy while you find Chuck." That was the second last thing Sarah expected. She shot him a questioning look. Then she realized. He knew. Before she could verify that, Casey preempted her. "Don't make me change my mind."

For the first time in two days things went Sarah's way. Detective Conway, slash Agent Longshore according to the CIA database, hadn't removed Chuck's watch. The GPS signal led her straight to them.

Sarah ran up the stairs, praying she wasn't too late. That was her first concern. It was laid to rest when she spotted them making their way across the roof. "Longshore!"

"Is there a problem, Agent Walker?" Now she had to face her second dilemma. She didn't exactly have a plan.

"Sarah, thank god you're here. I don't want to go yet. I can't." Sarah understood some of the fear Chuck must be feeling. He was about to lose his freedom, but more importantly, he was being taken away from the people he loved. The CIA was taking away the man she loved. She had to act and fast.

"Agent Casey is tracking the Fulcrum mole and he should have her in custody soon, so we can hold off on the Chuck transfer for the time being."

"If there was a change in the operation I would have been contacted. I have my orders." Sarah could practically recite the words before they even left Longshore's mouth. They had the same training after all, but she was not about to give up.

"We don't have to do this. It's a judgment call, okay. We can just hold Chuck here until we know for sure."

"His cover was blown. He's gone." She knew that one too.

"No. I will take full responsibility. Chuck is my asset. He's my guy. Just give us some more time, please?" Sarah knew her professionalism just slipped, but she didn't care.

"I'd appreciate it. I really would."

"Please don't do this."

Longshore seemed unmoved. Sarah slipped her hand behind her back, gripping her weapon. Bargaining and begging didn't work. She had only one option left. Longshore looked from her to Chuck and conceded. "Okay, you've got one minute. One minute." He stepped away, giving them some privacy, but not much.

Sarah made her way over to Chuck, keeping an eye on Longshore to make sure he didn't pull the move she almost did. Then she met Chuck's eyes and it broke her heart. "I'm not ready, Sarah. I'm not ready to disappear."

"I know." She wasn't ready for this either. She couldn't tell him words, not with Longshore watching.

"I need you to talk to Ellie and to Morgan and my friends and...and tell them...I don't know. Look, if I'm supposed to be dead just say something that will make it okay. That will make them feel alright. Just make sure they know how much I love them. You can do that, right? Of course you can. You're Sarah. You can do anything." Somewhere in the middle of his speech she felt her tears threatening to spill over. Chuck was innocent, he didn't deserve this. None of it. But it was his last words that were her undoing. His voice dropped to a whisper. "And you know how much I love you, right?"

Sarah couldn't hold back any longer. Closing the distance, she wrapped her arms around Chuck's neck. "I'm going to shoot Longshore and then we get out of here, okay?"

Chuck, still handcuffed, grabbed hold of her shirt to keep her close. "No. I can't let you do that. I'm already going into lockdown. They can't get you too. My family and friends are going to need you. And you are going to need them."

"I need you, Chuck." She pulled back, grabbed his hands and begged him with her eyes not to sacrifice himself for her. Before Chuck could respond, Longshore interrupted.

"Time's up."

Chuck squeezed her hands. "Goodbye Sarah." A tear escaped when he turned away from her. It wasn't supposed to end this way. It wasn't supposed to end at all.

"Chuck," she called him back. "Save you later?" When he gave her a lopsided smile and slight nod, she knew she would find a way.

Sarah paused in the bathroom door, watching Chuck who was standing by the window, gazing out over the city. This time last night they were on that rooftop.

She was battling to keep it together when she heard the silenced gunshot and saw Longshore go down. She snapped into agent mode. With Chuck's help, she managed to take Lizzy down. Sarah never felt the satisfaction before that she got from lifting her by the collar and delivering the final punch. It was payback for putting her and Chuck through this and it was not only directed at Fulcrum. Then she and Chuck spend the night digging through the dumpster for Ellie's engagement ring. Sarah tried to persuade Chuck to let the CIA replace it. All she wanted to do was to take him back to her hotel, crawl into bed and fall asleep holding him close. But even though she didn't get her way, she was relieved just being with him. Their efforts were rewarded a little while later when she and Chuck spied through the window as Devon proposed to Ellie.

Sarah walked quietly up behind Chuck, wrapping her arms around his torso. He stiffened momentarily, but then relaxed just as quickly. He tried to turn around, but stopped him with a soft "don't". Bringing her hands to his waist, she pulled his t-shirt out of his jeans and slipped it up and over his head. She tossed it somewhere behind her and curled her arms around his, grabbing hold of his shoulders. Starting at the back of his neck, she trailed soft kisses across to his shoulder. She paused. Her head dropped and she pressed her body flush against his. She didn't know how it happened, but all the feelings she had suppressed for the past few days rose to the surface. Chuck must have felt the moisture on his skin, because he tried to turn around again. Sarah tightened her grip to prevent him from doing so.

"I couldn't leave them yet." Sarah wasn't ready to relive what happened, so she steered the conversation in a different direction.

"Don't you think you should go in and congratulate them?"

Chuck glanced at her over his shoulder. "You coming?"

"In a minute." She spotted Casey making his way towards them and she knew she had to deal with him sooner or later. Sooner was probably better. Casey hovered in the background until Chuck disappeared into the apartment. Sarah didn't take her eyes off the scene inside.

"You know you can't keep him here forever." She didn't acknowledge his statement. Nor did she turn to face him.

"How long have you known?" She caught a glimpse of Casey's reflection in the window. His expression gave nothing away.

"A while. The amount of cover sleepovers at your place seemed a little excessive."

"Have you informed Beckman and Graham?" Sarah didn't have the energy to beat about the bush.

"And babysit a moping nerd by myself when you get reassigned? I'll pass. But I'm not going to cover for you when they find out." She suspected Casey might actually do just that, given that he encouraged her to defy a direct order the day before, but decided not to press the issue.

"Sarah?" When she didn't answer, Chuck's hands came up and rubbed soothingly up and down her forearms. That only caused her to sob harder. They stood like that for a while before Chuck spoke again. "I'm sorry I did this."

His unexpected apology forced her to regain some composure before she spoke against his shoulder. "Did what?"

"Pushed you into a real relationship. This would not be so hard for you if I hadn't done that." Sarah released her grip and grabbed his forearm so he would turn and face her.

She shook her head. "You're wrong, Chuck. It would have been harder." She took a shaky breath. "If the CIA took you last night and we never had the chance to...regrets are worse." She was never good at expressing her emotions, but Chuck always seemed to understand what she meant. "And you didn't push me into anything."

"So you don't regret what happened between us?" Chuck brought his hands up to frame her face, wiping the remnants of her tears away with her thumbs. Sarah's hands rested against his chest, but her eyes never left his.

"Not for a second. I just...I don't want to come that close to losing you ever again." Deep down she knew it was a promise he couldn't make. Neither of them could. So before he had the chance to say anything, her hand moved to the back of his neck, guiding his lips down to hers. She kissed him like it was the first time and the last time. One of Chuck's hands ended up on her hip, steering her backwards towards the bed. When the back of her knees hit the mattress, she pulled him down with her.

Chuck broke off the kiss and propped himself up on one elbow. His eyes roamed her face and she waited for them to settle back on hers. Her earlier words kept echoing through her mind. She didn't want any regrets. Her hand curled around his bicep and when they locked gazes, she wiped a stray curl from his forehead, tracing her finger down his jaw. The sincerity of Chuck's smile caused her last wall to crumble.

"It's Sam. My real name is Sam."

A look of awe crossed Chuck's face before he captured her mouth in a short, intense kiss. When he pulled back he gave her a full-fledged Bartowski grin, the one that made her heart flutter since the day they met.

"It's nice to meet you, Sam."