

## Legacy of Spies: Episode 12: Through the Looking Glass

Darien Wolfe slipped on a pair of dark aviator glasses and watched as Theresa entered the Looking Glass Cafe. He had been following her for the past two hours. The brass continued to be suspicious of her actions, especially after getting Raphael involved in her mission. Rafe was a thief, pure and simple. The higher ups in the Foundation frowned upon relationships between their agents and riffraff.

Darien wouldn't call Theresa's interaction with Rafe a relationship, but he had to follow orders. That was why he stood across the courtyard in the afternoon shadows. Pedestrians shuffled across cobblestones, darting in and out of stores. No one looked twice at Darien. He was dressed in a sharp tan leather duster and a chocolate brown turtleneck, a few shades deeper than his own skin color. He was the picture of a preppy urban professional.

After the object of his attention sat down at a table near the window, Darien crossed the courtyard. His even steps never hurried. He seemed to be a normal guy, just like anyone else shopping downtown stopping by to get a quick bite to eat. He took a seat at the end of the bar where he would have a good view of Theresa's table.

She appeared poised and relaxed as a blond man near her age sat down opposite her. His rumpled trench coat was slightly too bulky for a man of his size. He quickly shrugged out of it and folded it onto the seat next to him.

"You wanted to meet me here?" the man asked. "We have to make this quick. I have an article to finish."

"Still the newshound, I see." Theresa Shea said, her smile widening.

"Yeah. A man has to have a secret identity. It passes the time between missions." He popped a tortilla chip into his mouth. "You still have that thing going with Mac? I'll bet he's a hard one to pin down."

"I'm not sure I'm the domestic type, James," Theresa said staring outside at mothers and children roaming around on an early Saturday morning.

"Nah, you're too busy saving the world to do the June Cleaver thing." He popped another chip into his mouth and leaned back. "So why the sudden meeting?"

"There's something going on at the Foundation. I'm not sure exactly what. I've just..."

James smiled. "Your spider-sense is tingling?"

Theresa returned the smile. She seemed younger than her thirty-two years. "Yeah, something like that. Randall Redcliffe told me he was sending me undercover and they set up this elaborate death scene for me in front of Mackenzie. It's been bothering me."

"Too over the top?" James Carpenter asked. "Not exactly standard operating procedure."

"Do you still have the contacts," she asked. "You know, the ones who know things. The ones who could find out why Paul Thomas and Redcliffe were sending me deep?"

James pulled a reporter's notebook out of his breast pocket and scribbled a few lines. "Let me see what I can find out." His bright blue eyes regarded her with a friendly intensity. "It's always nice to see you, Shea," he said as he slipped his trench coat back on.

"You too, Carpenter. And thanks."

"Happy to do it."

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Theresa Shea was usually eagle-eyed when it came to meeting informants. Darien was surprised she hadn't spotted him. He threw a few dollars onto the bar, took a last slug of coffee and followed her outside.

Theresa had vanished by the time he exited the Looking Glass Cafe.

Darien smiled.

She may not have spotted him in the cafe, but she definitely knew how to play the game.

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Harry Jackson shuffled down the sidewalk toward the loft district yet keeping his eye on the dark-skinned man who had been following Theresa.

"Darien Wolfe doesn't usually do his own surveillance work," Harry said to his friend via the carefully concealed micro-communicator hidden in his ear. It resembled a hearing aid, but was quite a technological wonder.

James Carpenter was at least a hundred and fifty feet north of Harry's position. He was across the street grabbing a bite to eat at a hot dog vendor.

"Something is definitely going on," James said walking a short distance and sitting alone on a nearby park bench. "Theresa wants to know why Redcliffe and Thomas sent her into deep cover. And Mitchell Keller, the head from the London Foundation house wants to know what's going on in America."

"It seems like one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing," Harry said.

"That's right. And it's making Keller crazy. I just received word from him that Raven Martinez is safe. She's been on the missing list for three weeks."

"What about her brother," Harry asked. "Wasn't he supposed to be some kind of computer genius?"

"Yeah, he's a real wiz with computer code. Mitchell says Angel is still missing."

"Something fishy is definitely going on around these parts," Harry said with a smooth whistle. "Paul Thomas sent Mackenzie in to find out who was hacking into the Foundation's mainframe. If the hack is coming from Europe, why didn't Keller and his team handle it?"

"If someone is hacking the mainframe, it hasn't thrown up any red flags. Keller definitely would have mentioned it. It's one of those systems where you have to be on-site to access. I'm not sure it's even hooked up to a network." James downed the last bit of his hot dog and wiped the crumbs from his trench coat.

"Maybe they're not accessing the Foundation's computer. Maybe it's something else. Something even Keller doesn't know about."

"Yeah, something worth killing for," Harry said. "Mackenzie bit off more than he could chew on this one."

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Nikki Carpenter lay in the darkened cab next to the man she loved, the one she thought lost to her. He was so different now. As she gazed at his sleeping form in the backseat, light from a street lamp cut strangely across his face casting him in variations of light and shadow.

Something on his chin, near his ear caught her attention. She reached over and fingered the area. Her nails found at edge and she pulled slightly. It was the edge of a very convincing mask!

She pulled away from the man. He wasn't James.

The happiness that had so recently filled her heart sunk to the pit of her stomach. She felt sick. She'd given her body to him and he wasn't James. Tears gathered at the edge of her lashes as she grabbed her clothes from the floorboards and quickly re-dressed.

This had all been a ruse to lure her away from Mac! The determination she'd all but lost came back to her. She crawled into the driver's seat and found a loaded gun in the glovebox.

The agent in the backseat must have decided to have a little fun at her expense. First have sex with her and then kill her. That made her angry. Damn angry.

She started up the car and the man in the backseat woke up with a start. His intent was clear. He rubbed the edge of his jaw and a hard glint came into his eyes.

"Found out my little deception, eh?" said the look-a-like. "Isn't technology amazing nowadays? It can make an ugly bum like me into the man of your dreams."

He lunged for the glove box but Nikki pressed the cold nose of the gun into his cheek.

"Looking for this?" Nikki asked, her voice like venom. "Where is James?"

"Dead for all I know. He was a convenient face for just another job."

"What was your plan? Sex and then murder?"

"Something like that," he said. "My job can get a bit messy at times. I come in and clean up the loose ends. It does have its perks, though, like tonight. You were quite, how shall I put it? Enthusiastic? I was hoping for another go round before I had to kill you."

Nikki hit him upside the head with the cold steel drawing blood from his lip. "I'm afraid the only one who is going to die tonight is you."

The man fingered his lip leaning against the backseat. His hard on was easily visible. He was enjoying toying with her. Got off on it even.

"Look your fill, sweetheart. Right after I put a bullet in your brain, I'm going to have you again. A little rougher the next time."

Nikki's dark eyes were cold as ice. Every word he spoke only made her angrier. "Maybe I'll make my first shot in your family jewels. You so obviously cherish them."

She pointed the gun lower.

The man flinched bringing his legs together as Nikki fired. The bullet hit some part of his lower anatomy, but she couldn't tell where. He grabbed the door handle and exited the cab before she could get off another shot.

It was exactly the opportunity she was looking for. She fired up the engine and drove away in a squeal of rubber.

The look-a-like stood naked on the dark street as a pack of wild dogs circled him, growling and licking their chops.

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Nigel Bennett had never been one to jump into the unknown without some type of parachute, but tonight he had to get away from Teryl. He took a huge leap and missed the next balcony by a mile. Somehow Nigel managed to knock his head on a slab of concrete flooring on the way down.

The ground came up fast, faster than he would have liked. He fell atop section of shrubbery below the window almost as if he were aiming for them. He yelped in pain as the bushes scratched his torso. A bellman standing nearby ran over to help calling out to a maintenance man for assistance.

Twigs poked out of Nigel's brown hair and scratches lined his arms and legs. The bellman said nothing about Nigel's state of undress and instead offered him a clean robe straight off the housekeeping cart.

He muttered a quick "thank you" as he donned the item.

"Are you all right, sir?" the Hispanic manager asked after the bellman caught his attention.

"I'm having a rather bad day," Nigel replied as he brushed the dirt off his arms and shook the leaves out of his hair.

"I see that, sir."

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James and Theresa had been friends for years. She was one of the few he still kept in contact with even after he fell off the grid. Nikki didn't know he was working in the same city as she. He wrote for the Herald under the name J.C. Clarke. James wasn't sure why he hadn't reconnected with Nikki. Maybe something had changed for him, he wasn't sure. But approaching her was a concept he wasn't yet ready to attempt. Instead he met with Harlan Lloyd, a disgruntled ex-employee of the Foundation.

"Are you planning on publishing this, Carpenter? I know you're all about scooping the competition." Harlan Lloyd said rubbing his hands in front of the fire. The two of them were meeting on his estate on the west side. James figured Harlan must have stocked away quite a bit of bling in order to afford something so elaborate.

"Yes, I am, but you know better than anyone that I can keep secrets."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. You did freelance for me for years," the elderly man said. He lit a pipe and puffed a few white smoke circles in the air. "I know you're here for a reason other than my excellent company. What do you want to know, James?"

"The Foundation has been employing some rather bizarre techniques as of late. Theresa was sent deep under cover without an assignment. Mackenzie was sent into Keller's territory for a computer breach no one has detected. What's going on over there, Harlan?"

Harlan chuckled. "You know I don't have access to that type of intel any more. They don't trust me as far as they can throw me. Why do you think they put me out to pasture?"

"But you can tell me where I need to look to find such information, can't you?"

Harlan regarded him with wary eyes. If it hadn't been for their earlier working relationship, James was sure Harlan would have never agreed to such an arrangement.

"There's a hole in the wall down on the Landing. The building is abandoned now but Redcliffe keeps some duplicates out there. That bastard doesn't trust anyone."

"I can see why." James shook Harlan's hand. "Thanks. I owe you."

"I'm planning on running for City Council maybe even mayor sometime in the future. I'll let you know if I need a glowing human interest story written about me."

James nodded and winked. "You got it."

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The building that housed the Looking Glass Cafe was large. The cafe itself only took up a small part of the space. The rest was filled with cubicles and computers, a secret operation right under the nose of everyone.

Harry Jackson thanked the waitress for his latte and sat in the back near the large wall-sized mirror. The glass was etched with an ancient map that was mirrored on the wallpaper in varying tones of coffee brown and cream. The interior decorating gave the entire place a rather ancient, yet inviting look.

Harry sipped his drink as he walked over to an old phone. It looked like it was merely a wall decoration. He dialed three numbers and pushed the toggle switch down twice. A small square on the panel beneath the dialing apparatus lit up. Harry placed a finger on the area.

No one paid attention to him as he returned to his table, laid down his cup and then walked straight through the glass. It was a holographic image.

"I have a whole new appreciation for Alice In Wonderland," Harry mumbled as he walked down a long corridor. It resembled the inside of a sewer pipe. He approached the breaker box and flipped two switches and then twisted a valve on the other side of the hall. A door at the end of the corridor slowly opened revealing the secret headquarters of TTLG, an off-the-books covert branch of the CIA.

Workers milled around like bees. The first person he recognized was Theresa. She waved him over. She was speaking in hushed tones with another man. He was tall, gruff-looking with a pocked-marked face.

"Glad you could join us, Mr. Jackson. Your espionage career is legendary." The man puffed on a cigar and blew smoke away from the group.

"This is Philip Lancaster. He runs this division of TTLG," Theresa said.

"Lancaster, huh? Criminy. I thought you were dead." Harry shook Philip's hand.

"Feels that way sometimes. Let's move to the conference room"

They all sat down around a large table. James entered the glass walled room at a jog and slid into a seat next to Theresa.

"Glad you could join us, Mr. Carpenter. Why don't you give us your report first," Philip said.

"I just met with Harlan Lloyd. Strictly off-the-books," James said. He connected a flash drive into the computer console and displayed a few photos of an abandoned club. "He led me to a warehouse, a storage

facility down on the Landing owned by Redcliffe. He seems to believe Redcliffe keeps duplicate intel on everything going on in the Foundation down there."

"Theresa, you and James get a team together. I want to know what in the hell is going on over at the Foundation," Philip said.

"Sure thing." Theresa walked out of the room followed by James.

"Harry, would you mind working as their controller? You're already up to date on the happenings in Europe and have a direct line to Mackenzie. I think your assistance would be invaluable."

"You talk a sweet line, Phil. It's no wonder you've worked your way up to director," Harry said.

"You're pretty smooth yourself, old-timer," Philip said with a chuckle.

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James followed Theresa into an office down the hall and spread out a map onto the surface of her desk.

"There is a temperature controlled area under the club. But there is one problem."

"Let me guess," she said. "Rats?"

"In a manner of speaking. Local gang-banger Too Large has set up the abandoned club as his new turf. Raves rage all night. It's making the local scene down there pretty grim."

"Looks like we need to take drastic measures if we want to get in there undetected," she said.

"What do you suggest? James asked.

"How do you feel about a makeover?" Theresa asked, with a raised eyebrow and a smile on her face.

Ten minutes later Harry could hardly believe his eyes. He gazed upon the two young people with disbelief.

"Where do you think you're going looking like that?" Harry asked with an elderly glare in his eyes.

Theresa turned around revealing James and his new hairdo. His once blond hair was now a combination of black and yellow streaks. Theresa's get-up was of a similar creation but her hair was a medium blue bob.

"This stuff better wash out," James grumbled.

"If we want to get past Too Large and his gang, we have to blend in," Theresa said.

"You young'ens and your strange ideas. You stick out like a sore thumb to me," Harry mumbled.

"Trust them, Harry," Philip said coming up behind them. "They know what they're doing."

"I'll take your word for it," Harry said. "Things sure have changed since my day."

Harry handed James gadgets the tech people had dropped by.

"If any photos of me in this outfit show up on the internet, you're a dead woman, Shea." James pocketed a few items and handed the rest to Theresa.

Theresa had never seen James without his shirt and the leather vest left little to the imagination. He was one hell of a good-looking man.

Her own outfit was straight from European Vogue, maybe grunged down a bit for effect. Philip would have a cow if he knew exactly how much their get-ups cost. She knew better than anyone that a sacrifice had to be made to do anything in life.

“Let’s go.”

Theresa and James headed for the underground garage and Harry followed after them. The drive downtown was uneventful. Theresa knew enough back roads to miss a majority of the construction. They pulled the van onto a side street away from prying eyes. Then waited for darkness to fall before putting their plan into motion.

Getting in was the easy part. Theresa knew exactly who to shimmy up to but the bouncer seemed to have his eye on James. Theresa picked up on the subtle glances the bouncer threw toward James. Her smile widened.

“He’s into you,” Theresa whispered in James’ ear. “Use that to your advantage.”

James tried not to let the fear shine in his eyes. He knew if this little charade went wrong it would crash and burn in a glorious display of fireworks. And he just might end up in the Mississippi.

The bouncer was a well-muscled man and probably did some fitness modeling on the side. James had no idea how to attract the male of the species; after all, he’d spent his youth chasing after girls.

“I’m not very good at this,” James said in a stage whisper. “I don’t know what to say.” He gave a few hurried glances in the general direction of the bouncer but couldn’t bring himself to approach the man.

Theresa, however, had no fear. She was ready to throw James straight into the fire. She leaned in close to the bouncer and whispered, “My friend is shy. But he thinks you’re the hottest thing he’s ever seen.”

The expression on the bouncer’s face lit up. He looked over his shoulder and grabbed the attention of a co-worker. “Vinnie, I’m going on break.” The bouncer placed all his focus on James. “Let’s take this inside.” He escorted the two of them past security and into the VIP area.

When the bouncer disappeared into the darkness James pulled Theresa aside. “What in the hell was that? Did you just auction me off to that piece of meat?”

“Hey, we got in, didn’t we? But you need to maintain our cover. You hang out with Hot Lips and I’ll search for the storage area.”

Before James could protest, Theresa was gone and the bouncer was back with a pink drink in each hand. James accepted the offering and downed it in one gulp. “Thanks,” he mumbled. “I needed that.”

“There’s no need to worry Sweet Cheeks,” the bouncer said with a smile. “I’m a sure thing.”

The man grabbed James’ hand and pulled him onto the dance floor. He hoped Theresa would find the stash of documents quickly. He wasn’t sure how long he could keep the bouncer’s hands off his ass.

“She so owes me,” James whispered to himself grateful the pulsing light display inside the club and the loud music masked his comments.

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Mackenzie Gray stood at the door of the room adjacent to Teryl's and picked the lock. He hoped to gain access to her room via the balcony. But the one thing he didn't expect was to see Nigel jump the second he opened the door.

"What is that lunatic doing? Nigel!" Mac shouted, running toward the sliding doors. He stared over the balcony and saw his friend and colleague sprawled over a bush. "Is he trying to kill himself?"

Mac abandoned his mission to trap Teryl and made his way back down to the first level. By the time he trekked around the exterior of the building Nigel was gone.

"Sir?" Mac approached the well-dressed Hispanic manager. "Have you seen my friend?" He pointed toward the balcony where Nigel had fallen only minutes earlier.

"He was disoriented. Didn't even recognize his own wife," the manager said. "She took him to the hospital." He pointed toward the parking lot. "There they are now."

Nigel's face was contorted in a silent scream as the car he was trapped inside of drove away. Teryl wasn't driving but she was inside as well. She blew him a kiss as the car disappeared around the corner.

"Damn!" Mackenzie was tired of Teryl getting the best of him. He'd spent more time putting out fires than tracking the actual case Paul had sent him to crack.

A cab came to a screeching halt next to him. He peered into the window. It was Nikki.

"What is going on around here?" Mac muttered. He opened the passenger door, sat down and pointed to a side street. "Follow that car. Teryl has Nigel."

"Again?" Nikki remarked sarcastically. "She really is trying to get your attention." Nikki pressed the accelerator and the cab lunged forward awkwardly. "Sorry. I'm not very good at driving stick."

"Just keep them in sight," Mac growled.

"You got it."

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"You really are quite cute," Teryl said playfully patting Nigel's nose with her finger.

"Why me?" Nigel asked with a high-pitched squeak.

"Why not," John answered, his Irish brogue seeping through. The longer we play cat and mouse with Mac, the longer..." He abruptly stopped talking knowing he was divulging too much information.

"This is about... the code." Nigel paused. "You're playing a waiting game until the code has been completely breached."

John swerved, then pulled the car back onto a straight course. Nigel's revelation had definitely spooked him.

"That's it, isn't it? That young kid, what was his name? Angel? He was just a ruse, a way to distract Mac and me from finding out the truth. You don't want us to find the real culprit."

Teryl gave him a pointed look. "You really are quite bright, brighter than your macho cohort, Mackenzie. He's like a horse following after a carefully placed carrot. He'll follow us anywhere — as long as we have you."