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Small and Ordinary

by Mia Sundby

I've always had a fear of being small and ordinary. I suppose it's why I've always worked so hard at what I do, why I've always tried to pour my passions into my work. I'm sure that this relentless dedication has cost me things... Like Linda. We divorced four years ago and although I know it was for the best, and that she's doing better without me, I still catch myself wondering how she is.

I should have prepared for the difficulties of marrying someone within the game. I should have known that once she left it, she would want different things.
A family.

A permanent home in a picket-fence neighbourhood. Not this semi-permanent roadside lifestyle.

But it's this lifestyle that truly makes me feel... *Alive*.

I've had many close shaves in my time; nine years ago, I thought my career would end in Rome. I'd been sat in the restaurant's warm interior, taking in every detail of the high-quality decor to the excellent meals placed before me. It was the note-taking that really caught the staffs' eyes. Nearly broke my cover.

I should have been more careful. I haven't dared to return yet, though I still dream of the flavours of true Italian foods and the twisting sun-baked side streets, but for now... For now I'm here.

"What are you doing?" The voice of Markus Jones shakes me from my careful note-

taking. I don't know if Markus Jones is his real name, but then Clay West isn't mine.

Hurriedly, I slide the notebook and pen into my pocket. "Just my memoirs." I say with a wry smile.

Jones seems intrigued. "John Le Carré style?" He jests from where he lounges on the other side of the circular table between us, which plays host to coffees and a really exemplary cake from the patisserie behind us.

I laugh lightly, lifting my coffee to my lips. "Something like that." I say.

Jones and I met two weeks ago.

Seated in the shady corner of an intriguing little Indian restaurant, I noticed him entering in a dark leather jacket, no doubt designed for him to blend in, but in the province of France it's rare to see such a fashionably dressed gentleman.

Still, fifteen minutes later when he was shooting the place down after being attacked by a sleazy-looking fellow, these things didn't really matter.

He grabbed me by accident. He mistook me, quite innocently, for a fellow agent.

I live a secretive life, as there are only one hundred and twenty of my people left anonymously in the world, and those of us left are determined to keep it that way; we take our job more seriously than most can imagine. Perhaps that's what Markus Jones recognised in me, what drew him to me like a child to a stack of macaroons.

I spend three weeks of every month on the road, much as he does, I've learned. We are wandering souls, always with purpose but never with the end in sight. Perhaps this called to him, like soup calls for salt.

Jones drags me out of my stupor once again as he murmurs, "They're here."

Following his subtle gesture, I throw a glance at a trio of serious-looking men strolling through the shopper-filled square. I see Jones surreptitiously reach for the gun in his belt.

He flicks his eyes to me. "You stay on lookout. Get these people to safety if it calls for it. You got that, West?"

I nod, brows drawn together in grim determination.

As my new companion walks away, MI6-manufactured weapon in his hand, I

wonder how on earth I'm going to tell him that I'm really a Michelin restaurant critic.