

Breaking the Static

by Fervesco

Short, one shot romance.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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It was only two layers of glass that separated them, parted by a sound proof vacuum, but that vacuum might as well have been as vast as that of the entire universe. Amanda hated to think how much time she had spent watching him through that almost invisible barrier, so close, yet so far away: his long fingers expertly pressing buttons, the microphone poised just far enough from his mouth to catch his deep, enigmatic voice in precisely the right tone, the way he dealt so wonderfully with callers, laughing loudly with those that needed it, consoling those who needed it more. He had a love for life, but Amanda knew she would never be the love of his life. With the switchboards packed every night by women competing for his attention, how could she ever be?

He had yet to notice her arrival, and she lived for these moments when she saw the real Daniel, alive and uninhibited, not knowing he was being watched, one hand running through his dishevelled dark hair as he dealt with what appeared to be a particularly irritating caller. How he managed them without losing his temper she would never know. Amanda was never comfortable with confrontations. She would stick to reading the weather.

"Amanda, you're practically drooling. For heaven's sake, just ask him out before you short out the equipment!" The voice startled her, causing her to jump and spill her coffee down her top. Looking up she found Henry, the station manager, standing in the doorway to her studio. With words eluding her, she could do nothing but smile nervously in reply as she mopped up the remnants of her latte with a tissue. Ever increasingly her mind would become vacant and her fingers would inexplicably fumble whenever Daniel was near.

Her boss laughed. "I don't believe the insurance covers equipment faults due to excessive salivation of one employee lusting over another."

"I'm not..." Amanda's words drifted as she turned to watch Daniel again, now lifting his water bottle to his lips. Her breath hitched in her throat, as he looked up in her direction mid-sip, grinned and stopped to raise the plastic bottle to her in silent salute. He hadn't stopped to shave that morning, and the stubble made him all the more alluring to her. Her heart pounded, her mind blocking out all but that perfect white smile produced for her alone. She found herself doing the only thing she could manage: smiling weakly back at him.

The station manager coughed loudly, waving a piece of paper before her face, interrupting her view. For a moment, Amanda was confused, until she heard her name in Daniel's voice.

"And now, Amanda Riley with the weather."

Fumbling with her microphone, Amanda rushed through the daily report, having no idea at the end what the day's weather would behold. She sighed in relief as she turned off her microphone and leant back in her chair, once again focused solely on Daniel.

Henry coughed again. She reluctantly tore her eyes away from Daniel and endeavoured to give her boss her undivided attention, waging an internal war with herself not to look back.

Henry was leaning in the doorway, one eyebrow arched at her and looking thoroughly amused. Amanda's face flushed as she realised the manager had caught her staring at Daniel once more, twice in as many minutes.

"You do realise," Henry said, folding his arms across his ample belly, "that men are not particularly perceptive creatures. No matter how long you drool over our dear Daniel, he is not going to get the message."

"There is no message," Amanda insisted, but she knew it was a hopeless lie, one anyone with half a brain could see through, and Henry was not stupid by any stretch of the imagination.

"Honestly, Amanda, you couldn't hide it from a blind begonia," Henry said exasperatedly. "Do me a favour...heck, do yourself a favour! For the safety of this station, you have until the beginning of your shift to ask him, or I'll do it. And I don't believe middle-aged men with a spare tyre," he patted his overly large belly, "quickly approaching retirement are his type."

Amanda smiled at his joke, all the while her insides flip-flopping at the ultimatum. Not for one moment did she doubt her boss's threat. He wasn't one to mince words. But she couldn't do it. Daniel had become her life she envisaged him from the moment she woke in the morning, wondering what it would be like to wake up to him, to find his toothbrush next to hers on the vanity, to ride home from work with Daniel there, and then as she dozed off at night she thought about how wonderful it would be to be curled up in her arms. And sleep didn't bring relief from him either, her subconscious would take over and fill her dreams with images of him. If he were to say no, to laugh at her, she would be mortally wounded. She could never live up to the women Daniel dated; she'd only met two of his girlfriends, and both had left her feeling like the comical kid sister. With her heart pounding, she made the only remark she could think of to discourage Henry. "I'm sure if I die of embarrassment when he rejects me, you won't be so keen on the murder charge."

"Well, it will give us something to put on the midday news, won't it?" her boss said, turning to leave her studio. He paused for a moment just in the hall, and called back over his shoulder in a softened voice, "You never know, Amanda, you might be pleasantly surprised."

Amanda allowed herself to wonder at his words. She turned back to the window to watch Daniel again as the ad break finished and he went to answer another call. Part of her desperately wished she had the guts to ask him; she could always laugh it off as a joke. Then again, maybe he would say yes. Maybe, she contemplated for a moment, just maybe.

Daniel caught her looking at him again, and with a grin he pointed with his finger, gesturing towards the corner of her studio, and there were the usual daily tokens from her listeners: letters, cards and, once again, a massive bunch of red roses. Amanda rolled her eyes back at Daniel. He shrugged and looked back at his console. Two weeks now, without fail, the flowers arrived, no name, no address, just little notes attached with messages such as "Thinking of you," and, "Perhaps one day." Their daily arrival had become more than a joke in the cafeteria where she and Daniel shared coffee and Amanda lost her heart to him a little more each day. Today she didn't even bother to glance at it. Only once had she been foolish enough to attempt to date someone who had contacted her at the station. After an evening spent half-listening to the man prattle on about his ex-wife and then not batting an eyelid when she paid for the entire outing, Amanda had learnt her lesson. The flowers held for her a pathetic reminder of the sort of men she attracted.

I just want one shot, she thought, at happiness. Just one evening with Daniel....

She held her breath as she listened to him respond to the caller with kindness but due caution, trying to hear him over her pounding heart, to block out the butterflies doing the tango in her stomach.

"The right one will come along, I believe that implicitly." His dark eyes suddenly flicked back up to the window, fixing on Amanda's face for a moment before looking quickly away. "Just don't let them slip through your fingers when they do. You only live once."

As he looked at her once more, Amanda could hardly dare to believe he might be thinking of her. The silence lingered, and though the dead air must have only lasted a few seconds, Amanda was already reaching for the phone on her desk to call through to the room next door. If she did this on-air, he'd have no choice than to at least be polite. And she'd have the opportunity to flee when he said no. Not 'when', she chided herself, 'if'. The plan seemed perfect, that was, until Daniel's laughter filled her ears. "Do I have a love in my life? Yes." Amanda's fingers hovered over the telephone, his words stopping her from making the fateful call. "She's blonde," Amanda's resolve began to dissipate, as she fingered her dark locks, wishing she'd let her stylist friend bleach them after all, "beautiful," she sucked in a wavering breath, daring her heart not to break, "ever so faithful and answers to the name of Fifi."

She let out a breath she hadn't realised she'd been holding, and felt herself smiling with relief.

"You know, Daniel," the caller replied, somewhat more intimately than Amanda would have liked. "We've all heard about your Golden Retriever before. Perhaps you could start looking for a slightly more meaningful relationship?"

"Meaningful? What could be more meaningful than a woman who hangs on my every word and lives for every second we spend together?" Daniel said, a smirk curling at his lips. He was entertaining himself, laying out the bait. Amanda watched him do it every night, and every night there would be a taker. It used to be highly amusing, but nowadays Amanda had trouble concentrating on anything he was saying, too wrapped up in watching him and floating off into her own fantasyland.

"Perhaps one where you could take her out to dinner and not worry about her putting her paws on the table?" the caller pressed on, then in a lower voice spoke, "I'd be more than happy to make you a decent meal, Daniel."

Daniel rolled his eyes at Amanda, but his voice was nothing but polite as he looked away again, his face suddenly serious. "Thanks, Nina, but I already have my eyes elsewhere." Did she imagine it? Did he really steal a glance at her as he said that? It was hard to tell, that fleeting moment could well have been her ever-hopeful imagination. He was now staring intently at the console before him.

It's now or never, she told herself.

Amanda sucked in a deep breath, placed her headset over her ears, and nervously punched at the phone for an outside line. The dial tone thundered through her ears like the call of a firing squad. Visibly shaking, she dialled the station's phone number. It rang twice, then she heard the receptionist put her on hold. Never once did she breathe a word.

Nervously, she fingered the card on the roses as she waited for him to answer. She ran one nail over the silver daisy design embossed on the front before idly flicking it open.

Amanda, Maybe today? Daniel.

Her eyes widened, and she looked from the card quivering in her hand up through the plate of glass. Daniel's voice hitched and he stopped mid-sentence, staring back at her.

The moments passed like silent centuries.

"Daniel? Are you there?" the caller asked, a hint of concern in her voice.

"Yeah...." Daniel's eyes never left Amanda's stunned face.

"Is everything all right?"

He'd been the one who'd sent them. That thought was almost too much to comprehend. Her face was frozen as her mind worked over time. For the longest time she just gaped back at him. She felt like she'd won the lottery a hundred times over.

Finally, Amanda felt herself smiling at him, one that lit up her entire face.

He watched her hesitantly for a moment, looking as scared as she had felt a few moments ago. Slowly he returned her smile until his grin mirrored her own.

"Yes," Daniel replied, his eyes never leaving Amanda's, "everything is just perfect."

"Are you sure you won't take me up on that dinner date?" the caller persisted.

"I think," Daniel said, cocking an eyebrow at Amanda, "that I already have one."

A silent thrill rushed through Amanda as she nodded back at him. She could have leapt from her seat and danced for joy had she not been so stunned.

Daniel was right: everything was just perfect.

AN: I wrote this for a magazine competition (which I didn't win, but hey, you live and learn) so I thought I'd post it here. Feedback would be much appreciated!