

# WALTZ IN SYNCOPATED Time

**Author:** EmilyAnn

**Summary:** Post Season 4: Shortly after Amanda resumes full-time duty at the Agency, an assignment in Vienna goes fatally awry.

**Rating:** NC-17

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**Notes:** For some time now, I've wanted to write a story set in Vienna. I spent a semester at University there, and the city is very dear to me. Further, the comments in LodG about it being a wonderful city for a couple in love seemed to me to be an open invitation to send L&A there. Later, listening to Linda Eder's beautiful song about the city, I was more determined than ever to create a story therein. However, the story I want to write and the story that eventually winds up needing to be told can sometimes be quite different . . .

**Thanks:** To Merel for telling me this was a good idea in the first place, persuading me to change the title, and for being an AMAZING friend and sounding board (even if you thought I would never finish this). To Pam for humoring my questions about decomposition and poking holes in my earliest plot outline. To Kim for being both editor and cheerleader and for asking every so often, "is the Vienna story done yet?" To two other members of 'da gang' for actually indulging me as I read this out loud one night. And finally to Sophie, for having some of the most incredible personality quirks - it was so much fun to be able to put you in a story.

**Written:** June 2001 - May 2002

**Warnings:** This story contains character death; please heed the rating.

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*We can't surrender to a feeling  
That dance belongs to yesterday  
Yet, I still hear Vienna's song  
Take me back again*

-- Linda Eder, "Vienna"

*The last dance belongs to me alone*

-- Death, "Elisabeth"\*

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*Vienna - August 10, 1987*

"Pardon me, madam; have you a cigarette?"

Amanda looked away from the tall, marble Pestsäule statue and over to the young man addressing her. He couldn't have been more than nineteen years old. Dressed in a pea coat, combat boots, and ripped jeans, his spiked blond hair and the safety pin through his earlobe made him look more like a member of an underground punk band than her contact. Was the request for a cigarette merely a coincidence?

She couldn't take that chance. "No, I'm sorry. I don't smoke, but there's a Tabak around the corner."

"Come!" He grabbed her by the forearm and took off in a sprint, explaining, "We must go! It is not safe here."

Being dragged along after him through crowded streets and deserted alleys, Amanda struggled to remain upright. Her pumps caught in the cracks between the cobbles, and more than once, she found herself wildly flailing her free arm to regain her balance. "Where're we going?" she called to him as they ducked into yet another winding alley.

"Quiet, bitte. Do not ask questions now," he responded in a harsh whisper. "I will tell you what you need to know when we get there."

Reaching what seemed to be a dead end, Amanda saw her companion lift away a sewer grate. "Go," he whispered again, gesturing in the direction of the open hole. "Quickly;

hurry."

"Down there?" Amanda asked and then, seeing the impatient look on her mysterious contact's face, cut any further questions short.

Having scrambled down the ladder, she found herself ankle-deep in wastewater and mire. She stepped closer to one wall where the sewage ran shallower and was quickly rejoined by the young man. "Come. Hurry. We must keep going."

He ran through the labyrinthine system with ease, and she wondered how he had come to be so well acquainted with it. She could feel the water seeping in through her shoes, but for now, chose to leave them on, figuring any protection was better than none at all.

Around another corner, they stopped again. He withdrew a screwdriver from one of the inner pockets of his coat and used it to jimmy a lock on a door that seemed to have been built into the wall. "Inside, and into the room on the left," he ordered, holding the door for her.

She complied, ducking through yet another dark passage and feeling as though she were stuck in a bad remake of 'The Third Man.' She felt her way along the cold, dank wall until she reached the room. It was cool, dry, and smelled oddly earthy.

"Do you have a flashlight?" she questioned the young man as she saw his shadow pass through the doorway. "I can hardly see a thing."

"One moment," he answered. He reached behind him, procuring a bottle and a large shot-glass. "Drink this first."

"What is it?" She held the glass under her nose, smelling a pungent, anise-laden liquor.

"Jägermeister. Drink it; then we will talk." His tone left little room for argument, and eager for answers, she quickly swallowed the licorice-flavored, fiery liquid, coughing reflexively as it burned its way down her throat.

After a moment, he struck a match and touched it to the wick of a lantern. She winced as her pupils adjusted to the light and then recoiled when she realized that her right hand was not resting on a stone, but on a well-bleached femur. Looking around, she slowly began to notice that the entire room was full of literally hundreds of bones.

"I think it's time you told me where we are." She looked him in the eye and brushed her hands off on her skirt.

"We're in the catacombs, under Stephansdom." He poured her another shot of

Jägermeister, which she gratefully accepted.

Amanda asked the next logical question, "Why?"

"The KGB found out about the operation." A tall, well-dressed older man walked into the room, and, her senses still dulled by the alcohol, she barely reacted to the newest surprise. "Frau King, I'm Colonel Peter Winkel of Austrian Intelligence. This is one of our operatives, Hermann Matt. Danke sehr, Hermann. Wart auf mir ins Buro," he ordered the young man back to the office and nodded curtly in dismissal.

"I'm sorry we had to bring you here, but it's one of our only safe meeting places," he apologized after Hermann had left.

Amanda shook her head in disbelief, again studying the piles of bones. This was supposed to have been a simple assignment, a way to get her feet wet again after being out of the field for several months. In coordination with Austrian Intelligence, she was to have met three high-level Russian defectors in Vienna and escorted them back to the United States. Instead, she was on the run from the KGB and trapped deep within the catacombs under St. Stephen's Cathedral. She resolved never again to belittle her husband's fear of the dark.

"What are we going to do?" she finally asked.

"That's easy, Frau King." Winkel reached into his holster and pulled out a gun, cocking it. "We're going to kill you."

## **END PART I**

\*Translation from the German, "der lätzte Tanz gehört allein nur mir," from the Austrian musical "Elisabeth," about the last Empress of the Austro-Hungarian regime.