

# *Waltz in Syncopated Time*

## *Part 11*

He was wandering along the banks of the river when his pager vibrated. He looked at the number and was unsurprised to the summons was from Austrian Intelligence. Finding a pay phone, he dropped what change he had into the slot, dialed the number, and waited to be connected.

"Winkel's in jail," Billy offered without preamble. "AIHQ wants to thank you when you get back."

"As soon as I find Amanda," Lee said in return. "As soon as I know she's safe."

"If I know Amanda," Lee could almost hear a smile in Billy's voice on the other end of the line, "she's probably working just as hard to get back to you."

Lee smiled in response - surprised again at how natural that reaction felt. "You're right," he agreed. As he held the phone to his ear, his mind's eye wandered over memories of his wife - inventively and then conventionally finding ways out of jams. Would she be the one to rescue him?

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"I have no money," Sophie offered, putting her teacup down, "but there is some jewelry - old family things. It's not doing me any good; perhaps it will be enough of a bribe." The old woman disappeared to her bedroom and returned with a small, satin-wrapped bundle.

Amanda undid it - Baltic amber, diamonds, and other small baubles glittered against the smooth fabric. "Sophie, these are beautiful! I can't accept them."

"Remember the chicken story?" Sophie asked. "They are doing me no good; it's time they were put to use."

"Are you. . . what can I?" Amanda was so overwhelmed, that she couldn't complete the questions.

Sophie merely smiled and rewrapped the bundle of jewelry. "It will be worth it to see the look on Peter's face when he realizes he's not as powerful as he thought. Now go." She placed the package firmly in Amanda's hands. "Get your life back."

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He walked along the river's edge, following its circuitous route through the center of the old city. Walking along the banks, he once again wondered whether the answer would be provided to him by the waters.

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She felt out of place among the warehouses, barges, and longshoremen of the shipyards. She reached down unconsciously and smoothed the line of her skirt. Then she searched the crowd. She wasn't sure what she was looking for - only that when she found it she'd know.

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"Lee!"

Her voice. Throaty and breathy at the same time. It could only be her voice.

He spun in her direction - it was just as he'd imagined it, and entirely different. Her hair had been cut and dyed bright red, but her eyes were the same - bright, inviting, and sparkling with recognition.

"Amanda . . ." he whispered, walking toward her slowly, almost disbelievingly.

She didn't share his reticence, but broke into a run in his direction. "Lee!" she called again, and then stopped,

realizing where she was.

"It's okay," he answered, closing the distance between them. "Winkel's in jail; it's over."

"It's over?" Her voice shook with disbelief as she buried her head in his chest.

He planted his lips in her hair, and then tilted her head up toward his. Oblivious to the workers around them, he kissed her. His lips lingered on hers, as though reassuring both him and her of their present reality. "It's over," he confirmed, once the kiss had been broken. "Let's go home."

**END PART XI**