

Waltz in Syncopated Time

Part 4

August 15, 1987

The small café was crowded. Amanda sat alone at a sidewalk table, sipping a bitter, dark espresso and watching the rest of Vienna pass her by. She scratched at her scalp, still itchy from the two dye treatments she'd received a few days earlier, and then ran her fingers through her hair to straighten it. She was startled, yet again, to find that it ended so much sooner than she expected.

"Come, we're going to be late," her companion spoke for the first time that morning and nodded at her curtly.

Leaving seventy-five schillings on the table, she walked away, knowing that her escort followed only a few steps behind. As she passed a group of people, she paused, catching the scent of Lee's cologne. It was gone by the time she turned the corner. She didn't bother to look back, scolding herself for the self-indulgent flight of fancy. She had to get to her meeting with Winkel.

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From a distance, he thought, *everyone looks like Amanda*. He found himself scanning the crowd for her face. Every tall brunette caught his eye. Every woman who walked with a self-confident air, or her chin tilted 'just so,' warranted a second glance.

From behind, he heard the staccato click of high heels across the cobbles -- the rhythm hauntingly familiar, and he turned, just in time to see a redhead disappear into the Bundesbank building.

Driving his fist down into the air at his side in frustration, he turned on his heel and began the long walk back to his hotel.

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"Good afternoon, Frau King. I must say Georg has done an excellent job with your hair. I would not have recognized you." Winkel greeted her and gestured to a chair in his lavishly decorated banker's office. "Sit down, bitte."

Amanda sat in one fluid movement and crossed her legs at the ankles, but did not otherwise respond to Winkel's pleasantries.

He continued, "Here is your new passport." Amanda took it, studying the photo and Cyrillic writing on the inside. "You are Galina Redetsky with the KGB. I trust your Russian is as good as other US agents?"

"Yes." She answered tonelessly. "I've had two years of training."

"Gut," he responded in German. "Tomorrow morning at nine, you will board the train for Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. You will have a reserved seat in the passenger compartment of car fifteen." He reached behind him on the desk and handed her the ticket. "Someone will contact you with further instructions after you cross the border."

As she listened to him talk, she thought of the irony of her situation. Once again, her life was going to come down to what happened on a train.

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He entered the glistening, marble hotel lobby and walked listlessly toward the iron-gated paternoster. Like an amputee experiencing the phantom pain of a limb no longer there, Lee's soul ached for his absent wife.

"Fünfte Stock, bitte," he asked for the sixth story and leaned against the back of the cart, watching the levels pass in front of him. The contraption slowed and creaked to a halt on Lee's floor, and the elevator operator opened the gate to allow him passage.

He walked the few meters to his room, and was about to slide his key into the lock when he realized the door was already ajar. He took two short steps back and reached down under his pant leg for the gun he'd stowed in an ankle holster.

He released the safety and took it into his left hand. With his foot, he eased the door open.

"Put your gun away and come in, Lee," Billy's stentorian baritone beckoned him.

He stepped through the door and found his boss sitting on his bed. Without preamble, Billy started, "So how long have the two of you been together?"

"Been together or been married?" Lee threw his jacket over a chair back and stepped out of his shoes. The secret no longer mattered; he only wanted to get her back.

Billy shifted his weight awkwardly but remained seated. "Been married, I suppose," he answered with a sigh. "I've known the two of you were together for a while now."

Lee nodded. "Six months, yesterday." He slumped into an armchair facing the bed. "Billy, I have to find her."

"I don't know if that's such a good idea," Billy answered slowly and handed Lee a white parchment card already encased in an evidence bag. "This was waiting under your door."

Through the transparent plastic, Lee read the message – a simple and direct warning that had been carefully calligraphed in old school Fraktur letters - and then returned it to the other man. "What the hell is going on here, Billy? You can't expect me to just give up looking for Amanda because of an anonymous threat. How many times have jokers like this threatened to kill me before?"

"No, of course not." Billy answered. "But I *do* expect you to use your head. Whatever's going on is bigger than I figured. I'm gonna send this," he gestured with the card, "back to Georgetown for full analysis. I want *you* to lay low."

Lee opened his mouth to protest, but Billy cut him off. "For God's sake, man, be thankful I'm not grounding you altogether." He stood to leave and then added, "Which I will if I have to; don't push me."

"Billy, she's my *wife*," Lee appealed again.

"I know," Billy answered from the doorway with a bit more compassion. "All the more reason for you to back off."

After the chief had left, Lee slumped forward in his chair, resting his head on his palms. "Where *are* you, Amanda?"

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As Winkel continued to talk, she stared at the deep brown wood of his Biedermeier desk. In its grain, she could see faces -- John Lennon, Reagan, Lee.

"So we understand one another, Frau King?" She looked up, relieved that the conversation was coming to a close.

"Yes," she answered tightlipped, "I think so."

She stood, and began to leave, but he called her back. "Oh, Frau King, one more thing. Your friend, Herr Stetson, arrived in town yesterday. If you try to cross me, I will have him killed."

END PART IV