

Frankie and Johnny

Summary: Francine finds herself falling for an unlikely East German "informant." Meanwhile, Amanda and Lee discuss their future, and the iron curtain starts to crumble.

Timeline: May 1989 (Two years after the end of the series) Presumes everyone knows about Lee and Amanda's marriage, but not their careers.

Brief History Lesson: Gorbachev visited West Germany for the first time in May of '89. Shortly thereafter Hungary lowered the iron curtain, and in September opened it's border w/ Austria, thereby allowing East Germans to get to the West. The Berlin Wall then fell on November 9, 1989. The reunification took place on October 3, 1990, and Hungary became a full member of NATO in March of 1999.

Disclaimer: This is a work of fiction; I dare not claim to rewrite history, just put a little SMK spin on things. Of course, I can't claim ownership of any public or historical figures, but they do make for nice backgrounds. Francine, Lee, Amanda, Billy, and everyone else are property of Shoot the Moon and Warner Brothers. I'm just taking them out for a little apocryphal spin. Johann (Johnny) Findling is my own. If I were making money from this I wouldn't need to count heads for a living. Finally, please have your insulin handy, this could get a little too sweet for some of you.

Notes: Thank you to my two beta readers. You did an awesome job of keeping me honest. And thank you Amber, who gave me the idea to make Johnny a guy, and the line about Francine's skill with men. As always, any feedback you feel led to send in my direction would be great. Please let me know if you like it, you hate it, or any other suggestions or ideas on how to improve my writing.

Part I

*Sunday, April 30, 1989
Dulles Airport
9:45 pm*

The Lufthansa ticket clerk watched the slender blond pacing in front of her counter. "Are you sure there's nothing I can do for you?"

"No. No. I'm fine. I'm just waiting for someone. Thanks for asking." Francine checked her watch, and then moved to sit in the one of the padded vinyl chairs omnipresent in Dulles' many waiting areas. He was late. Didn't he know that no one kept her waiting?

"Miz Desmond?" A tall man dressed as a luggage handler approached her.

"Yes. . ." She raised a perfectly arched eyebrow at him.

"You are Miz Francine Desmond?" He spoke with a thick, but unidentifiable Eastern European accent.

"Yes . . ." She eyed the man cautiously, waiting to hear what he would say.

"I have a delivery for you."

"Oh, of course." She had been expecting a person, not a package, but she shook off her confusion and quickly returned to business.

"You will need to sign the forms first." Without looking, she took the proffered clipboard and affixed her signature to three sheets of paper.

"There." She handed the clipboard back to him, and was surprised to see him quickly, and efficiently affix a seal to each page. He then removed the bottom two and handed the top page and a large wicker basket to Francine.

"Danke Schön, Frau Desmond. Have a nice evening."

"No, wait. There must be some mistake." She looked down at the basket, aghast.

"No mistake. You signed for it." The man turned on his heel and started to briskly walk away.

"But this isn't what I was expecting. What am I supposed to do?" Her voice was growing shrill.

"Guten Abend, Frau Desmond. Viel Glück."

"That's Fräulein Desmond!" She felt obligated to get in the last word. Then, looking down at the contents of the basket, muttered, "Great. Just great!"

* * * *

Sunday, April 30, 1989

The Agency
10:45 pm

"You had better have a good reason for dragging me out of our warm bed, on a Sunday night." Amanda protested, but her husband simply smiled. He had been extremely secretive since receiving a phone call from Francine half an hour ago.

"You'll see."

As they rounded the corner, and could see the activity in the bullpen through the glass, Amanda stopped short. "That . . . that's Francine."

Lee held in a laugh. "M-hmm."

"And that's . . ." Amanda was stunned speechless.

"A baby." Francine was standing next to the coffee maker holding her tiny bundle as though it were a suitcase full of plastique explosive. Her make-up was smudged and her hair pulled into a hasty pony-tail. Although, Amanda noted, her clothing was still impeccable.

"Maybe I should offer to help her." Amanda felt guilty watching Francine struggle with the child, who was currently screaming at the top of its lungs.

Lee shook his head. "This is probably good for her. It will help her get in touch with her maternal instinct."

"Some mothers eat their young."

"Maybe you should . . ." Lee suggested as they watched Francine continue to hold the child at arm's length.

"I'll just go in, and . . ." Amanda was already walking through the door.

"Oh, Amanda thank God you're here!" Francine rushed up to her, and thrust the baby into her arms. "You know what to do with these things, right?"

Amanda shot Lee a look over her shoulder, but he only shrugged. Better not to question the workings of Francine's mind.

"What's his name?" Lee asked as Amanda soothed the distressed infant.

"Johann Findling," Francine scowled in the direction of Amanda and the child. "And no, before you ask, I don't think that's his real name." She shot another glare at the baby, as though the predicament she found herself in were its fault.

"Why wouldn't that be its name?" Amanda momentarily diverted her attention from the child to the agents.

"Findling is German for foundling, and Johann just means John. In other words, this baby is the German equivalent of a John Doe."

"Oh." Amanda paused. "Well, we'll just call him Johnny." She looked back down at the tiny bundle in her arms, and cooed, "do you like that? Hmm?"

"Fine." Lee smiled gently at his wife; she looked so natural with the baby. Now was not the time for such thoughts, however, and he swiftly returned to business. "Francine what happened?" He was still trying to figure out how a woman who considered children to be a curse worse than a Biblical plague of locusts had found herself in possession of an infant.

She sighed and sat down on the edge of the desk. It was going to be a long story. "About a week ago I got a call from a woman who said she represented an East German named Johann Findling. She said he had information, but that I couldn't have it unless I got him into the country. I told her that I couldn't just arrange something like that on her say-so. I needed proof." She looked back at Lee as though waiting for his approval.

"And," he prodded as Francine trailed off.

"She gave me the frequencies for Project Nietzsche," Francine admitted reluctantly.

"So it wasn't just luck that led you to crack their operation?" He was ebullient. "I KNEW it."

"Anyway," Francine cut his victory short. "She told me that the information Findling had would be better. I believed her. So, I made the arrangements, and I was to meet him at Dulles tonight. And instead . . ." She gestured to the child who was currently enthusiastically enjoying the contents of a bottle Amanda was feeding him.

"We'll just have to take him to the Agency Children's Home." Lee attempted to keep his tone matter-of-fact, but it belied an underlying reluctance. The home was not known its warmth.

"We can't do that," Francine stated glumly.

"Why not?"

"I signed papers agreeing to take custody of him." She handed Lee the sheet of paper bearing her signature and the official stamp of the East German Judicial Branch.

"You what?" Lee didn't know whether to be shocked or amused, as he scanned the document. "Francine! You can't raise a baby. You don't know the first thing about them."

"I didn't know what I was signing for. The man at the airport told me I had to sign before I could have the package. I thought it was just a formality, and I didn't read them." She glumly anticipated his next question, "Yes, it's binding. Legal looked it over just before you got here."

"Excuse me," Amanda interrupted the conversation. "Sorry to butt in, but you didn't happen to get any diapers with this baby, did you? Johnny needs to be changed."

"I think there were some in his basket." Francine waved her hand in the general direction of the wicker basket that had been used to transport Johnny, and then resumed her discussion with Lee. "What am I going to do?"

"What if Amanda and I take him home with us tonight? And then tomorrow, you can come over, and Amanda will give you some pointers on babies." He didn't have to ask. He already knew his wife would leap at the opportunity. For once, Amanda would be the one with more expertise.

"Lee. . ." Amanda broke in again.

"What?"

"I think I might have something here." She crooked her finger to call him over.

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, I know it's been a long time since I've changed diapers. And I never really used disposable diapers on the boys, anyway. Cloth is so much healthier, but I know that. . ."

"Where are you going with this?" Even after six years at the agency, he had not been able to break her habit of rambling when she got excited.

"I think they've put microdots in the diaper," she said in a rush.

"You have got to be kidding me." Francine had joined the conversation.

"No, look." She pointed to the diaper she had been preparing to place on Johnny. Inside were a score of black specks. "There aren't any in the one he was wearing, because, well, because they would have been ruined. But the other two have them."

"I'll be darned." Lee waved to a young recruit, and handed him the two diapers. "Get these down to crypto right away."

The junior agent shot him a puzzled glance, but only said, "Right away, Mr. Stetson."

"Lee . . ." Amanda spoke up again, "we still don't have any diapers for Johnny."

"Oh, and see if supply has any spare Pampers." He called after the young man.

"Of course, Mr. Stetson."

* * * *

Monday, May 1, 1989

4247 Maplewood

7:00 am

"Amanda, dear, I think it's wonderful that you and Lee have offered to baby-sit for Francine's nephew, but you're still avoiding the question." Dotty sipped her coffee as she watched Amanda test Johnny's bottle.

"I am NOT avoiding the question, Mother. Lee and I just haven't discussed it. We're happy with our life the way it is."

"Good morning. Where'd our kitchen go?" Lee surveyed the room with a mixture of shock and amusement. Amanda had been busy. A bottle warmer sat on the stove, and a high chair was stationed in the corner next to the table. Baby formula and cases of diapers lined the counter.

"I just brought some of the boys' old things down from the attic, and then called the grocery store to have the rest of this stuff delivered this morning. Francine can take it with her later today." She lifted the baby carefully out of his basket, and then turned to Lee. "You want to try feeding him?"

"Uh, no! I've got to get in to IFF. You sure you and Francine will be okay today?" He looked at the child in her arms with apprehension.

"We'll be fine. I'm actually kind of enjoying it."

"Okay." Lee hurried out the back door.

Dotty looked up from the paper. "He doesn't usually leave this early."

"Mother . . ."

* * * *

Monday, May 1, 1989
The Agency -- Billy's Office
8:45 am

"What've you got Billy?" Lee sat on the couch across from his boss' desk.

"Crypto is having a field day with those microdots, but the news is good." Billy grinned. "The information on that child could lead to the end of Communism as we know it."

"Aren't you overstating things just a little?" Lee found it hard to believe that an infant could hold the key to something as big as Billy was alluding.

"Not in the least. Lee, Gorbachev has been talking glasnost and peristroyka for years. Government media controls are relaxing throughout Eastern Europe. Even Honecker's been talking some about improving ties with West Germany. The time for democracy is right; we've just lacked the key to unlock it."

"And Johnny has it?" Lee still looked doubtful.

"Johnny?"

"That's what Amanda's calling him." Lee suddenly felt compelled to study his shoes.

"Well, yes. According to the information Johnny had on him, the Hungarians are thinking of suspending the travel restrictions between Hungary and Austria."

"That would mean . . ." Lee snatched the paper from Billy's hands. "What do we need to do to make sure this happens?"

"We need to give Niklos Németh an incentive." Billy looked serious while referring to Hungary's current Prime Minister.

"What sort of an incentive?"

"Dr. Smyth has Bush's authorization to put NATO on the table." Billy spoke as though he were repeating the scores to the Oriole's game.

Lee sat back in the couch. "Let me get this straight. We offer Budapest full membership in NATO, and in exchange they let East Germans travel over their borders into Austria. How do we even know this is going to work?"

"We don't, but it's the best shot we've got. Since Kadar stepped down things have started changing in Hungary -- they've even started a Hungarian branch of the Junior Trailblazers. They're ready for democracy, and we're going to help them make that change." Billy changed the subject. "How are Francine and Johnny getting along?"

"I haven't heard, but I'm sure Amanda's handling everything just fine." A slight chuckle escaped Lee's lips. "What I wouldn't give to be a fly on the wall."

* * * *

Still Monday
4247 Maplewood
11:00 am

"You just have to hold his head up a little more," Amanda moved to adjust Francine's arm, as they were trying to give the baby a bottle. It was slow going. She'd convinced Francine to change into a pair of her old jeans and a T-shirt after explaining that no matter how good the dry cleaner, regurgitated baby formula was not going to come out of a silk blouse. The intricacies of rocking had come next. Amanda showed Francine how to hold a baby, and after a while, the tiny boy and the blonde looked almost comfortable with one another.

"I think he likes you," Amanda smiled at them.

"Of course," Francine was glib, "no man can resist the Desmond charm for too long." She adjusted the child in her arms to offer him better access to the bottle.

Amanda laughed.

"What?" Francine looked hurt, "I may not have been a candidate for Mother-of-the-Year, but I do know a thing or two about the male gender."

"Come on. He needs to be burped, and then I'll teach you how to change a diaper." She handed Francine a rag. The other woman sighed and rolled her eyes, but her respect for Amanda King was growing.

Same place, same date, a few hours later

Amanda dunked her elbow into the bath water to check its temperature, then held out her arms for the Johnny, so that Francine could do the same. "Can I ask you something?" Francine asked as Amanda squeezed a dollop of baby wash onto a soft cloth.

"Sure?"

"Why did you choose this?" Francine gestured to the child, the baby tub, and the other accoutrements of motherhood throughout the bathroom.

"Why did you choose the Agency?" Amanda asked, rather than answering Francine's question.

"I didn't," Francine picked up the washcloth, and began to mimic Amanda's gentle washing motions. Johnny cooed in delight and splashed his hands in the water.

"I wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I was fresh out of Sarah Lawrence, holding a newly minted International Relations degree, and a precocious ability with languages. I thought the State Department would be more than happy to have me, and I would be able to charm my way through the world."

Amanda smirked at the image, but quickly brushed it away, recognizing Francine's seriousness. "What happened?"

"Well, they didn't need anybody, but they told me they'd keep my resume on file, and give me a call if anything opened up. Then a few days later someone from the Agency contacted me. They'd just gone through a nasty audit and Jimmy Carter told them they'd better start putting women in positions of greater responsibility. It seems they were in violation of the Equal Opportunity Employment Bill. So, I was hired. I wasn't hired because of my ability. I was hired because I was a woman, just to fill a quota and I've spent all my time there proving that I could do my job just as well or better than any man." She wrung the wash cloth out enthusiastically, her frustration present in the energy she put into the task.

Amanda watched her companion sympathetically, it was clear that the information she was sharing was personal. She doubted even Lee knew. "Here," Amanda lifted Johnny out of the water, and wrapped him in a soft towel before handing him to Francine. "Why don't you get him ready for a nap, and then come downstairs. I've got some chocolate cake, and we should be able to talk for about an hour or so before Philip and Jamie get home from school."

"That sounds nice." Francine said, sounding almost wistful, and looked down at the baby in her arms, "doesn't it Johnny?"

Part II

Amanda had set the coffee to perk and was slicing the cake, when a frantic voice called from upstairs. "Amanda! I need your help!" Dropping the knife, she took the stairs two at a time, and arrived in the bathroom ready to avert whatever disaster was awaiting her. What she found was Francine and Johnny in the bathroom. Francine was vigorously wiping her T-shirt off with a towel, and on her face she bore an expression of utter disgust.

"How can something that little have such deadly aim?"

Amanda really had not intended to laugh. It started as a small smile, but that slowly grew into a grin, and before she knew it, she was bracing herself against the bathroom door frame, as she indulged in the luxury of a fell fledged belly laugh at Francine's expense.

"Well I'm glad you find this funny!" Francine pouted. "These things should really come with a warning label."

"I'm sorry, Francine." Amanda brushed stray tears away from the corners of her eyes. "It's just . . . you're right. I should have warned you about little boys. They can get a little . . . trigger happy." She stifled another chuckle, and then picked up a clean diaper from the pile on the counter. "You have to do it like this."

With Johnny diapered and down for his nap, the two women were finally free to enjoy their coffee and cake. "Amanda this is wonderful." Francine slid another slice off her fork into her mouth. "Do you think you could show me how to make it?"

"If I remember correctly, the last time you took cooking lessons, the results were a little less than . . ."

"Touché." Francine offered a half-hearted smile. "You never did say why you chose all this."

Amanda opened her mouth to answer when the phone rang. "Hello?" She cringed when she realized that the ring had disturbed Johnny, who was announcing his frustration to the world as only babies can. With her free hand, she attempted to send Francine upstairs to calm him.

After Francine got the message, Amanda spoke again, "Hello?"

She was greeted by the warm sound of her husband's laughter, "Hi Beautiful! How's the baby training going?"

"It's going well, very well." She smiled as she attempted to push the image of the earlier diaper changing fiasco from her mind. "What's up?"

"Billy would like you both to come in. The microdots Johnny brought with him have proved to be a gold mine. He also wants Doctor Kelfer to examine Johnny -- see if there are any other secrets he's hiding."

"Okay, I'll let Francine know." Amanda paused. "I love you."

"I love you too."

* * * *

Still Monday

The Agency

Doctor Kelfer's Office

4:30 pm

"Well, I'd say you have a healthy six month old boy," Doctor Kelfer handed the child back to Francine. "I want to catch him up on his shots, though. You said he's from East Germany, right?"

Francine nodded, and steadied Johnny while Kelfer inoculated him. The infant protested vehemently, and she winced at the sound of his angry wails. "Shh, it's okay. That's a big boy. There you go." She whispered soothingly, as his cries of protest faded into soft hiccoughs.

Kelfer smiled, and in his country doctor drawl, said, "Well, I never thought I'd see the day."

"What?" Francine was holding Johnny close and stroking his back gently.

"Our Francine Desmond -- a mother."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm just protecting my source." She pulled the baby closer, and left the office.

* * * *

Tuesday, May 2, 1989
The Agency -- Billy's Office
8:30 am

"The Hungarians bit." Billy announced to the trio gathered in his office. "Németh is going to be speaking today, and from what we can gather, he will be announcing a relaxation of government controls. The iron curtain is coming down."

"What do you need from us?" Lee questioned the older man.

"Magda Petrak."

"Magda?" Amanda was shocked.

"The Hungarian Ambassador wants to meet with her. I want you two to arrange that meeting -- convince her that it's for the best. And arrange for her to drop some prearranged information on NATO."

"In other words, keep the carrot dangled just a few inches in front of the donkey?"

"Exactly," Billy confirmed.

"But, sir," Amanda was still confused. "I don't understand what this has to do with Magda."

"She was widely respected within the Hungarian government. A lot of those who are still in power don't see her as a traitor, but rather, they envy her as the 'one who got out.' They respect her, and what's more, as a Hungarian they trust her."

Billy then turned his attention to Francine. "I want to see your phone logs for the past month. We need to find out where Johnny came from."

"Is that wise, Billy? Whoever sent him to me did a pretty good job of covering his background; why tamper?"

"For your sake, Desmond, I'm going to pretend you didn't just say that. This child holds the key to democracy in Eastern Europe. Your feelings are not to get in the way. Understood?"

"Yes."

"Where is he, by the way?" Billy asked in curiosity.

"Amanda's mother is watching him."

* * * *

Still Tuesday

3:00 pm

A dress shop in Georgetown

Walking into Magda's dress shop, Amanda had to contain her initial urge to do a double take. She was constantly startled by the woman's uncanny resemblance to Francine.

"Lee, Amanda. How can I help you?"

"You heard about Németh's speech today?" Lee broached the subject in an indirect manner.

"Of course."

"Ambassador Torgyan wants to meet with you." He paused, letting her absorb the information.

"I have expected as much; I will go." Amanda studied her. Like Francine, her exterior may have been severe, but there was a warm inner core which she shared with those she trusted.

"Tomorrow at three o'clock. We need you to drop some information on NATO. This will explain it." He slid a few sheets of paper across the counter to her. "And thank you, Magda. For everything." Lee reached for Amanda's hand, possessively.

"I owe you much, as well."

* * * *

Tuesday

7:00 pm
4247 Maplewood

"What's this?" Lee asked, as he, Philip, and Jamie came back from basketball to find Amanda sitting in the living room surrounded by dozens of fabric scraps. Her mouth was full of pins, and she removed them before answering.

"Hi fellas! I thought I'd make a quilt for Johnny."

"Amanda, I'm sure Francine has bought Johnny more than he could ever need -- and probably found a way to charge it to her expense account. He doesn't need a quilt."

"I know. I just thought it might be nice for him to have something personal. It makes it special, and it's been a long time since I've had a chance to do something like this. It's nice."

Lee carefully considered her words, and then called out to his stepsons. "Hey guys, why don't you go wash up and start your homework? We'll be up to check later."

"Okay. Later, Lee. Later, Mom!" They called in unison and raced up the stairs.

"You know, Amanda. We never really discussed this."

"I didn't think we had to discuss quilt making." She reached for her scissors to snip a stray thread.

"That's not what I meant."

"What did you mean then?"

"You. Me. Us. Babies." He picked up one of the squares and fingered it absently.

She set down the pieces she was basting and turned to him. "I never realized there was anything to talk about. When we decided to keep the marriage a secret, I figured that ruled out that contingency. I guess I never thought things had changed."

"Do you want them to change?" His eyes drilled directly into her heart.

"I . . . I . . ." She stuttered ineffectively.

"Amanda." He reached out and gently lifted her chin up to look at him. "Do you want children?"

"I never really allowed myself to consider the possibility," she whispered shakily. Lee's intensity still stole her breath.

"And now that you have," he pressed.

"I think that's a decision that can't be made in one night. There's a lot of things to consider." She evaded his question as only she could.

"What sort of things?" He wasn't going to be off put so easily.

"Our jobs, money, and well, neither of us are exactly young anymore." She looked at him. "Lee, part of me wants this so much it hurts. A baby, our baby, it would be wonderful, but part of me is scared to death. It's been a long time."

"Hey," he drew her into a strong embrace. "You are the best mother I know. If anyone can do this, you can." He kissed the top of her head. "Let's go check on the boys, and then maybe you and I can get a head start on some homework of our own."

* * * *

Tuesday

Francine's Apartment

11:15 pm

Johnny let out a soft yawn and stretched his tiny fists out, as he sucked the last of the formula from his bottle. Francine looked down at the figure in her arms in awe. This little person was so perfect, so unspoiled and full of potential, and, for now, he was her's. "Come on, little one. Time for bed."

Part III

Wednesday, May 3, 1989

9 am

Billy's Office

Billy Melrose prided himself on the breadth and depth of his concentration. However, he was finding it difficult to remain on task this morning. Instead, his focus kept returning to the infant carrier at the feet of one of his senior agents, and the fact that this particular agent would every so often raise one of her size seven Ferragamo clad feet, and ever-so-gently rock said infant carrier. Finally, he could take it no longer, "Was Amanda's mother busy this morning, Francine?"

"No, I just thought that maybe it would be better for Johnny if I kept him with me -- develop a routine. I read that was good for babies -- routine."

"Right . . ." Billy glanced again at the child at Francine's feet . "You know, the Agency isn't exactly the best place for children."

"He's not a child, Billy." Francine looked at her boss, and with unflappable logic explained, "he's a baby. When he gets a little older, I'll find him a nanny . . . or something."

"Francine," Billy looked at her gently. "What makes you so sure that you're going to have him when he's older."

"Of course, I'll have him. I'm his legal guardian." She picked up the carrier. "Now, if you don't mind. I'm going to give him his bottle, and finish reviewing my incoming phone log." Billy sighed as she left. The face of the Agency was changing.

* * * *

Wednesday

11 am

The Q Bureau

Lee ran a hand through his hair as he looked up from the report he was reading to his wife sitting across the room. She was still studying the computer screen, seemingly oblivious to his restlessness.

He looked back down, and tried to make sense of the information before him. As expected, the East German reaction to Németh's announcement had been swift and dramatic. Students had filled the streets of Berlin, Potsdam, and other major University towns throughout the German Democratic Republic in protest. The STASI had worked overtime collecting the names of those involved, and now Western intelligence was working overtime trying to collect the same information from the STASI.

As the names and dates again began to swim together, he pushed the folder away with a sigh, walked to the water cooler in the corner, and filled one of the conical cups. Drinking its contents swiftly, he crumpled the paper, and threw it into the trash can. "Something's bothering you." Amanda turned away from the computer.

"Nothing's bothering me. What makes you think something's bothering me?"

"That's your fifth cup of water today." She smiled. "Want to talk about it?"

"How can I talk about it, when there's nothing bothering me?" He walked back over to the desk and picked up the folder he'd been studying earlier.

"Okay, how about if I talk then?" When he didn't dissent, she continued. "Francine asked me Monday why I chose motherhood, and it was funny, because, I never really saw it as a choice." Lee had put down the folder and was watching her. "From the time I was tiny, I knew I was going to be a mother. I had the best cared for baby-dolls on the block." She smiled at the memory before continuing. "The day Philip was born, and I held him, my first child, in my arms, it was amazing. And then, when Jamie came two years later, I didn't even realize I could feel that happy twice. I mean, I was exhausted, and Joe was gone a lot of the time, but it was worth it."

While she was talking Lee had made his way to kneel at her side. He took her hands in his, and looked up at her, forcing her to meet his eyes. "If we do this, you won't be alone, you know that?"

She nodded sincerely, but there was still something she had to know, "And if we don't? Will you be disappointed?"

"Oh, Amanda!" He released her hand to gently trace the arch of her cheek bone, "I could never be disappointed.

Meeting you was the best thing that ever happened to me. Getting a family with your mother and the boys was the greatest gift in the world. Anything else would just be a bonus." He thought for a moment, and asked, "If we do decide to do this, how do you think your mother and the boys would handle it?"

"Are you kidding?" Amanda laughed. "Mother's been dropping hints since she found out we were married. She'd be thrilled."

"And Philip and Jamie?" he pressed.

"Philip would probably find a way to use it to pick up girls at the mall. I heard him tell Jamie that he planned to ask Francine if he could watch Johnny, since babies are, 'chick magnets.'" She thought out loud, "Jamie wouldn't be the baby any more. He might like that, or . . . he might hate it. I know he's come to love his step dad though, so he'd probably come to love a little half brother or sister just as much."

"Is that a yes?" he asked, every muscle tight in anticipation.

"Yeah . . ." She nodded shyly. "That's a yes. I hope you know what you're getting yourself into; babies aren't. . ." He cut the rest of the sentence off with a deep kiss.

"You were saying?"

"It wasn't important." She brought her lips back down to his.

* * * *

Wednesday May 3, 1989

Hungarian Embassy

3:30 pm

"More coffee, Ms. Petrak?" Ambassador Lajos Torgyan, held the decanter out to his guest.

"No, thank you, Mr. Ambassador." Magda crossed and uncrossed her legs, trying not to appear as nervous as she felt.

"Very well then. Let's get down to business. You know why I have asked you here?"

"You want to know whether it will be good for Budapest to accept Washington's offer." She stated simply, "but what makes you think I will give you an honest answer?"

"You are Hungarian." Torgyan was blunt. "You want what's best for your country. Kadar is gone; politics no longer matter. Things are different." He said the last part sadly, as though in mourning both for the way of life he'd known, and for the former head of state.

"You're wrong. Politics always matter." Magda corrected him. "Politics is a power game. You are trying to recapture some of that power before you lose it all completely. But," she continued, "you're also right. I cannot turn my back on my homeland." She looked at him, and said decisively, "You should make the deal."

Torgyan studied the brunette carefully. If she was lying, she was doing a good job of it. Nothing in her demeanor revealed anything but honesty. "What do you know about it?"

"I know you'd be getting a lot more than you'd have to give. You would have the protection and co-operation of the world's major democratic powers, and in exchange all you must do is open your borders."

"We would also have to reform to a free market economy."

"That, too, would be a benefit. I have seen the reports, Ambassador. I know that Communism is failing the Magyars. I also know that Németh has already relaxed a

number of government economic controls. It would not be that difficult to relax them further." She spoke with a graceful authority.

"You know a great deal for someone who has not seen her homeland in more than five years, my dear. I can see that what I have heard of you is true; you're a very resourceful woman."

"I know what it is beneficial to know." Magda remained noncommittal.

"What else do you know?" Torgyan searched her face for a clue.

"I know about Starbird."

The Ambassador set his coffee cup down hard on the table. "Tell me."

Magda recounted the information on the pages Lee had given her the previous day. She understood very little of what she was telling him -- a co-operative project with the British in developing an advanced missile detection and targeting system. The majority of the information was general, but there were enough specific details to pique the Ambassador's interest. When she concluded, he wiped his mouth hastily with a napkin.

"Thank you for an enchanting afternoon, Ms. Petrak. Please, keep in touch." He showed her the door. When it had been secured behind her, he picked up the phone. "Yes, this is Lajos, let the Prime Minister know it's a go. I will contact him with the details later."

* * * *

Wednesday

7 pm

4247 Maplewood

"Amanda, dear, is there something wrong? You haven't touched your chicken." Dotty gave her daughter a concerned glance from the other side of the kitchen table.

"What? Oh, no, Mother, I guess I'm just not hungry tonight." She pushed her plate away. It was quieter than usual. Jamie and Philip were at rehearsal for the spring play, and Lee was meeting with Magda. "I think I'll just go work on Johnny's quilt for a little while." She scraped her plate in the sink, and made her way into the family room.

"Amanda?" Dotty called after her

"Yes, Mother."

"You'd tell me if you were pregnant, wouldn't you. I mean, you can't hide that like you can a marriage."

"Mother . . ."

* * * *

Lee arrived home to find his wife asleep amidst a pile of scraps. Carefully putting scissors and needle away, he kissed her on the forehead.

"Oh," she stirred under his tender ministrations, "What time is it?"

"A little after nine. Philip and Jamie are already upstairs arguing over the remote."

"Well," Amanda stood. "No one gets the remote until I see their homework. Come on!" She nodded at him, "You can check Philip's geometry."

"What makes you think I'd understand it any better than you will?"

* * * *

Wednesday

10 PM

Francine's Apartment

Sitting at her kitchen table, Francine balanced Johnny in her lap while she gave him his bottle. Spread out in front of her were the individual pages her incoming call log. Keeping one eye on the baby, she studied them again, wondering if what she discovered relieved or terrified her. She would be able to honestly tell Billy tomorrow that the information he wanted was not there. "Well, little one, it looks like you and I are stuck with each other a little longer." She propped Johnny against her shoulder to burp him. "How does that sound?" In response, he offered a deep belch, and then yawned, burrowing sleepily into her arms.

She stood slowly, so as not to disturb the sleeping infant, and began to walk to her bedroom. She stopped suddenly at the mirror in her hallway, startled. She didn't recognize the reflection. Whereas a week ago, she would have seen a polished professional in a neatly tailored suit, today she saw a face devoid of makeup, a figure clad in blue jeans and an cotton oxford. More surprising to Francine was the realization that a week ago she would have lamented spending the night at home

catching up on office work, rather than in the company of one of Washington's eligible bachelors, but today, the quiet was welcome.

"What are you doing to me?" she whispered to the sleeping child.

Part IV

Thursday, May 4, 1989

The Bullpen

10 am

Lee was beginning to feel a little guilty. Francine stood at the door to Billy's office holding an infant carrier in one hand, a diaper bag in the other, and had a stack of file folders tucked under her chin. She was currently juggling all in an unsuccessful attempt to free a hand with which to open the door to Billy's office. Rather than assist her, the rest of the agents in the bullpen merely watched her with barely concealed amusement. Lissome Francine, rendered clumsy by a seventeen pound infant, was greater than any comedy show. Finally, his conscience got the better of him. "Here," he held the door for her.

"Thank you." She nodded to him, and then shot the rest of the bullpen a look which could freeze the Sahara.

"Francine," Billy greeted her warmly. "Scarecrow, why don't you stay too?"

"Francine sat on the couch and lifted Johnny out of the carrier explaining, "he's been fussy today. I think it would be better if I held him." She then turned to her boss, "Billy, I've gone over the phone logs. There's nothing in them."

"That's okay. I've got another lead."

"What do you mean, you've got another lead?" She drew the infant almost imperceptibly closer.

"I sent a facsimile copy of the custody agreement to one of our East German operatives on a hunch. She got back to me this morning with a name."

"Well, don't keep us in the dark, Billy." Lee glanced at Francine with a dose of concern. Her face had lost all color and she sat completely still.

"Her name is Amalia Goetz. She's the seventeen year old daughter of Richard Goetz .
.."

"The head of the STASI," Lee finished Billy's sentence for him as realization began to dawn on his face.

"Bingo."

"So, who's the father?" he asked the next logical question.

"Amalia never said. From what we've been able to ascertain, she has been a rather 'spirited' young lady since her mother passed away a few years ago. Smuggling her son out of the country was a last act of rebellion."

"What do you mean 'a last act of rebellion?'" Lee asked as Francine still sat mute.

"Goetz, when he learned of his daughter's 'condition,' ordered that the child be put up for adoption. When he discovered that she'd coordinated this instead, he turned her in himself. Amalia's now in prison awaiting execution for treason."

Lee blanched. "She's seventeen!"

"In their eyes, she's a traitor." Billy responded with an air of resignation to the inevitable.

"She wasn't acting alone; she had to have had help."

"She refuses to give any names."

Lee scowled, unconsciously drawing left hand into a fist. "Dammit, Billy! We've got to be able to do something. What kind of a father is he? What sort of a man would send his own daughter to death??!"

"Scarecrow!" Billy responded sharply. "You've never met the girl. Stop personalizing this." He looked at his agent sternly, before continuing. "We are doing something. We are taking care of her child, and we are doing everything to ensure the Hungarian deal goes through. Amalia's sacrifice will not be for naught." As Lee relaxed, Billy continued, "Has Magda heard anything from Torgyan?"

"Nothing recently."

"See if you and Amanda can get this into circulation." Billy took a manila folder from the stack on his desk and handed it to Lee.

"Stand-by loans, Billy?" Lee asked after reading its contents.

"Smyth's orders -- direct from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue." Billy's method of referring to the president varied widely and seemed to be logarithmically linked to an inner political barometer. When he used 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, it meant that he thought the Head of State was not alone in making the decision, thus, the orders came from the building, rather than the person.

"Regular locations?"

"Yes, I've already set up Amanda's appointment for three o'clock today."

"She'll like that." Lee smiled as he pictured his wife receiving her assignment.

"Billy?" Francine's voice, soft and cultured, nevertheless seemed to have a startling effect on the two men in the room. She traced absent circles on Johnny's back as she continued. "If Amalia's in jail, and Johnny's father is nowhere to be found, does that mean . . ." She stopped, as though finishing the question would somehow bring the answer she was afraid of. However, what that answer was, Francine was not sure.

"Lee." Billy nodded at him brusquely and he took the signal to leave.

"Right." Lee gave gently squeezed Francine's shoulder in encouragement before leaving the pair alone in Billy's office.

* * * * *

Thursday
The Q Bureau
10:45 am

"What'd Billy want?"

"We get to start a rumor." He handed her the file that Billy had given him earlier, and waited while she, too, had the opportunity to acquaint herself with it's contents.

"Is this true?" She looked up from the folder.

"Yes."

"What are stand-by loans?" Amanda's brow was knit with confusion.

"The money's already been set aside," Lee explained as Amanda returned the folder to him. "As soon as the UN and the IMF feel the conditions are right, it will be given to them."

"And President Bush?" Amanda asked regarding the second bit of information in the folder.

"Will pay Budapest a visit in July."

"So our job is to plant this information and let Hungary run with it?"

"Basically."

"Sounds good to me. Where do we plant it?"

"There's a day spa in Herndon -- called Hungarian Skin. You're scheduled to receive the full treatment."

"I get to be pampered and the government picks up the tab? I can deal with that." She grinned "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to have a very off-the-record lunch with a reporter for the Hungarian News Organization."

"Ahh, I see." Amanda reached out to smooth his lapels, a gently intimate gesture he'd come to appreciate over the years.

"There's something else," he swallowed hard.

"What?" Her husband's eyes had gone from green to gray in a matter of seconds. She knew whatever he was going to tell her was unpleasant.

"We found Johnny's mother. She's most likely going to be executed for treason. She's just a teenager, and her father sent her to death."

"Oh," Amanda bit her lower lip, and struggled to hold onto the professional detachment she had cultivated over the years. "How's Francine handling it?"

"Hard to tell," Lee stated honestly. "I'm not sure she knows what to think right now."

* * * * *

Thursday

Billy's Office

Noon

Billy decided that the secrets of the universe lay in Dr. Smyth's cigarette holder. Not least among these was the mystery of how a man who smoked as much as he did managed to have such perfect teeth with government subsidized dental insurance.

"It don't like this Billy-Boy. I don't like this one bit. We've already lost Scarecrow to the cult of domesticity, and not it looks as though Desmond is wandering down that same dangerous path."

"Look, Austin. You trusted me when I asked you not to split Lee and Amanda, and it worked. They're the best team I've got. Trust me now. As soon as the initial adjustment wears off, Francine will be as good an agent as she ever was -- maybe better."

"And if she's not?" Smyth flicked an ash deliberately onto the carpet.

"I'll bring her in."

"Yes. You will." Smyth turned to leave, "because if you don't, I will. And my way's not nearly as gentle."

* * * * *

Thursday

3 PM

Hungarian Skin

Herndon, VA in Fairfax County

"Mrs. Stetson, this is your first time at Hungarian Skin?" The receptionist greeted Amanda with cheerful professionalism, and Amanda nodded. "Then you will fill this out please? We like to have a complete profile of our guests." She spoke in a lilting accent.

"Of course." Amanda took the clip board and sat down amazed at the opulence around her. A symphony by Bartok was playing softly in the background. She looked down at the questionnaire, quickly answering the questions about general health, diet, and skin condition, until she came to the last, "Are you now or are you planning to become pregnant?" She paused, her pen hovering only millimeters above the paper, and finally checked, "yes."

"Mrs. Stetson?" A gray-haired woman in a lab coat called her name. "This way, please." She took Amanda's questionnaire and skimmed it as they walked to the back room. "Ah, yes, you are pregnant, I should have guessed. Your skin has such a glow."

"Actually . . ." Amanda tried to explain, but the Hungarian cut her off.

"We will skip the steam room then. Not good for the baby. You can leave your clothes in here." She was led to a small changing facility, where she shed her skirt and blouse for a plush terry-cloth robe.

Amanda mentally composed a thank you note to Billy as she was treated to mineral scrubs, a massage, and a facial. While getting her final rub down, she casually struck up a conversation about Hungary, and let it slip that she worked for the government. That was followed by a rumor she'd heard that Bush was planning a visit, and that the IMF had money set aside for the Hungarian government. "Really?" The woman's hands stopped working.

"That's what I heard." Amanda then feigned surprise at her slip of tongue, "Oh my gosh! I wasn't supposed to say anything." She rolled over halfway to face her masseuse. "You won't tell anyone, will you?"

"Of course not." The older woman, unable to meet her eyes, went back to work on Amanda's back, and Amanda relaxed, her mission accomplished.

* * * * *

Thursday
4247 Maplewood
7 pm

"Hello?" Amanda picked up the phone.

"Amanda? It's Francine. There's something wrong with Johnny. He won't stop crying, and he won't take his bottle. Can you come over?" Francine's voice had an edge, and Amanda realized that it would be easier to visit her in person than to try to settle anything over the phone.

"I'll be right there."

* * * * *

Still Thursday

Francine's Apartment
7:30 pm

"How's my big boy?" Amanda took Johnny from Francine's arms, and planted a gentle kiss on his forehead. He was warm, but not feverish.

"Well, he doesn't have a temperature. You said he's been fussy."

"All day!" Exhausted, dark circles were beginning to show under Francine's blue eyes.

"Let's see." She stroked the side of Johnny's mouth with an index finger, and he opened it reflexively. She then expertly ran a finger along his gum line. "I thought so."

"What?" Francine anxiously watched Amanda.

"He's teething." Amanda smiled gently. "He's just uncomfortable. I think there should be a teething ring in one of those bags, why don't you see if you can find it."

"Sure." Francine dug into one of the many shopping bags, and pulled it out a liquid filled ring.

"This would be better in the freezer, but it'll do for now. And if he gets to be too uncomfortable, you can give him some drops of baby pain medicine, or some Ambejel from the drug store. And Francine," Amanda looked at her, her deep brown eyes dancing, "he's gonna start drooling a lot more."

"Oh," she responded tonelessly. She looked back at Amanda with apprehension. Johnny, who was chewing vigorously on the teething ring, seemed to be in baby Nirvana.

* * * * *

Thursday
4247 Maplewood
10 pm

"Everything okay at Francine's?" Lee asked as Amanda pulled the bedspread aside to climb in next to him.

"Yeah. Johnny's teething." Amanda smiled, "I remember when Philip was that age. I think I was more nervous than Francine is now. I couldn't have done it without my mother." She yawned, and nuzzled into his arms falling asleep almost instantly.

Part V

Friday, May 5, 1989
4247 Maplewood
7 am

Amanda sat up with the alarm, and immediately lay back down. "Hey sleepyhead. Time to get up." Lee laid a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Ugh. Lee, I'm gonna sleep a little longer. Jamie's dinner last night didn't agree with me. What was it supposed to be anyway?" She covered her head a pillow.

"Tuna casserole, I think."

"With potato chips mixed in?" Her voice was muffled by the pillow.

"You sure you're okay? I thought all mothers were supposed to have cast iron stomachs." Lee sat on the edge of the bed and pulled her pillow away. She was pallid, but didn't seem too ill.

"I'm fine. Will you tell Mr. Melrose I'll miss the meeting?" She fought another wave of dizziness to kiss him good-bye.

* * * * *

Friday
Billy's Office
10 am

"Where's Amanda?"

"She wasn't feeling well this morning, Billy. She's going to try to make it in later," Lee answered his boss' question, just as Francine walked in wearing a baby carrier with Johnny nestled inside.

"Francine, I love the new look." Lee smiled at her.

"This is a Baby Bjorn. It's only best quality, and it comes direct from Sweden. Anyway, it's a lot more practical. This way my hands are free." She demonstrated by holding both hands out.

"That's fine, Francine. Can we get to business please." Billy sometimes felt more like a high school teacher trying to keep order in an unruly classroom than an Agency section chief.

"Of course, Billy, I'm sorry." Lee responded.

"First, I'd like to congratulate you and Amanda. Word in the pipeline is that the Hungarians are responding to the information you let slip yesterday. The White House finalized the president's travel plans this morning. He'll be out there in July, the first US President to set foot on Hungarian soil in American history."

Lee and Francine were both quiet as they absorbed the implication of Billy's message.

"On, a related note," Billy continued somberly. "Amalia Goetz was executed last night." Francine blanched and Lee stiffened. "At that time, it was discovered that Johnny's father was one of Richard Goetz's chief advisors. He's married, and he wants nothing to do with the boy. Francine, legal has drawn up the papers if that's what you want." He trained his chocolate eyes warmly on the agent and child. Just as Amanda had caused Lee to become a better agent, he knew Johnny would do the same for Francine.

"Thank you, Billy." Francine's gently smoothed Johnny's downy hair.

* * * * *

Friday
The Q Bureau
2 pm

Amanda still looked too pale, Lee thought, as he signed off on another report and added it to the stack to be sent down to Billy's office. She'd come in after lunch, and thrown herself into the paperwork that had stacked up since Johnny's arrival, assuring Lee that she'd seen a doctor, and was "fine, just fine."

"Lee? Amanda?" Francine was standing in the doorway. Johnny nestled in the carrier in front of her, cast his deep blue eyes on the group solemnly.

"Francine. Come on in!" Lee welcomed the diversion in his paperwork.

"I'm on my way down to legal. Billy's made the arrangements to speed up the adoption process. I just need two witnesses. Would you . . ."

"We'd be happy to." Lee smiled. "So you're really going through with this?"

"Yeah. I figure I have fourteen or fifteen more years before he starts taking me for granted and fighting with me. That's a darned sight better than most of the men I get involved with."

"And he's certainly a lot cuter," Amanda added, extending her index finger for Johnny to grasp.

* * * * *

Friday
4247 Maplewood
8 pm

"Amanda what are you doing?" She had suddenly risen from the couch to jot something on the notepad in the kitchen, and was now back at her seat casting yarn onto a pair of knitting needles.

"Oh, I just wanted to remind myself to get Francine a Mothers' Day card. It all happened so suddenly I didn't want to forget."

"So, it's really official," he spoke with a mixture of awe and amusement. "Hard to believe."

"She called me earlier," Amanda said, as her knitting needles continued to fly, "wanted to know if I knew anyone who would be a good nanny. Mr. Melrose said she can't bring Johnny to the office anymore."

"Can you imagine?" Lee smiled, "her interview process will probably be tougher than the Agency's. She'll order full background checks on every candidate."

"I don't think so." Amanda replied. "She's already hired someone."

"Really? Who?" Lee was stunned.

"Philip," Amanda answered matter of factly.

"What?"

"He'll be out of school for the summer starting next week, and he's trying to save money for a car. Besides, I thought it would be good for him to get used to being around a baby. When he goes back to school in the fall, Johnny will be old enough to go to day-care."

"Makes sense," Lee agreed, and then looked over at her knitting. "What's that you're working on?"

"A bonnet."

"It looks a little small for Johnny," He studied the tiny white garment that was slowly taking shape.

"It's not for Johnny." She put a marker in the last stitch, and returned the yarn and needles to her bag.

"It's not?" Lee was confused. "Who's it for then?"

"Well," Amanda answered unable to conceal the smile spreading across her face. "In a little more than seven months, it will be for our baby."

"Ours?" Lee sat back against the couch.

"Ours," Amanda confirmed moving to sit in his lap, and drawing his lips into a tender kiss.

Epilogue

November 9, 1989

Francine's Apartment

6 pm

"Happy Birthday, dear Johnny, Happy Birthday too you!" The cherubic toddler grinned happily from his high chair, as the three adults in the room finished their song. Like his adoptive mother, he relished being the center of attention. Amanda, awkward in her final trimester, moved slowly around the table serving the cake as Francine sliced it.

"So, do you know what you're having?" Francine questioned when they were all seated again.

"A girl," Lee answered without hesitation.

"Sweetheart . . ." Amanda looked at him pointedly, and then turned to Francine. "Lee wants a girl, but we don't know. We've decided to wait until it's born."

Francine nodded. "Have you picked. . ." Before she could finish her question, her phone rang. "I'd better get that." She excused herself to the next room.

* * * * *

"That was Billy." She emerged from her bedroom, a stunned expression on her face, and wordlessly picked up the remote.

With the TV on, the room grew silent. The anchor was broadcasting from Berlin. There, illuminated by floodlights, fireworks, and flashbulbs, crowds had gathered around the wall as Germans from both sides attacked the concrete curtain with sledge hammers, crow bars, and pickaxes. Champagne was flowing freely as an impromptu celebration poured into the streets. The Berlin Wall was coming down.

End