

Waltz in Syncopated Time

Part 12

(Epilogue)

He'd been strangely silent during the train ride back from Bratislava, and later on the cab ride to the hotel. His arm had been around her the entire time, as though he were afraid to let go. Every so often, she would catch him staring, and she wondered whether he was disturbed by her haircut.

"It'll grow, Lee," she'd volunteered, "And first thing tomorrow, I'm gonna dye it back."

His only response had been to tighten his embrace.

Now, they stood in the hotel lobby waiting for the ancient elevator to reach them, and she took the opportunity to study him.

He, too, had changed in the mere weeks they'd been separated. He'd lost weight, and there were fine lines in his forehead that hadn't been there when she left. How was it, she wondered, this job managed to age people so?

The elevator arrived and he stood aside to let her on first. As he stepped in behind her, she looked up, and in his eyes she saw, not the exhaustion that had been there before, but a hunger. Recognizing it, she felt her heart speed up, and she wondered just how long it would be before they reached the sixth story.

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His door was ajar. Stepping in front of Amanda instinctively, he pushed the door open, and was neither surprised nor pleased to see his boss waiting for them.

"Lee . . ." Billy nodded. "Welcome back, Amanda. I must say, you're looking a lot better than the last time I saw you."

Amanda smiled, but stepped closer to Lee. "Thank you, sir." Shifting her weight awkwardly, she added, "Umm, sir, I'll be happy to give you my report tomorrow, but if you don't mind. . ."

"Of course, you probably want to . . . rest." Billy stood and headed toward the door. Before he stepped through, he turned back to Amanda. "By the way, Mrs. Stetson, congratulations. I couldn't be happier for the two of you." He grinned at her, and closed the door on them.

"He . . ." Amanda began.

"Knows," Lee finished for her. "Yeah. I'll tell you about it later. Right now, there's something else we need to talk about."

"Hmm, shoot . . ." She smiled and sat on the edge of the bed in anticipation.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the jewelry box with her wedding set. "I think this is yours."

"Yeah, I kinda had to leave those behind. I didn't want them to wind up with the rest of my things." She ran her finger over the rings in the box. "I'm glad you found them."

"Who was she?" he asked as he slid the rings from the box and onto her finger. "The woman who died instead of you."

The disconnect between the question and Lee's actions made Amanda's head spin, and she pushed off from bed to

complete a circuit of the room. She stopped and turned to face him. Meeting his eyes, she answered, "I don't really know. Winkel said she was a prostitute; he picked her just because of her resemblance to me."

She paused, and took a breath. "Lee, she died because she looked like me."

"No," Lee corrected, "she died because a ruthless, bastard shot her. Don't blame yourself."

"I can't help but think, that maybe I should've known . . . should've been able to see that something would happen - maybe . . ." She trailed off.

He stood and walked to her side, taking both of her hands in his. "Amanda, you're one of the best agents there is. Your intuition is . . . amazing."

"Why do I feel like there's a 'but' in there somewhere?" She took a step back to look at him, narrowing her eyes in mock threat.

"But . . ." he said with a soft smile, "I don't want to go through this again. I'm not going to lose you."

She leaned into him, pressing her head against his chest as though listening to his heartbeat. "I know," she finally answered. "I've been thinking the same thing." Then, after a beat, she looked up at him. "What are we going to do?"

"Talk to Billy when we get back, I guess," he said, running a gentle finger along the line of her cheekbone. "Not tonight though - my wife came back, and there's some catching up we have to do."

Amanda smiled, sliding her hands up his chest, and gripping his shirtfront to draw him closer. "I thought you'd never ask."

He slipped his arms around her waist and then moved them lower, cupping her rear. At the same time, he lowered his mouth to hers.

As their lips met, she felt the tension and frustration of the weeks begin to melt away. She relaxed into his embrace, and began to pull at his shirt eager to divest him of his clothing.

"Oh, I've missed you!" she exclaimed in a breathy sigh, stepping back only long enough to quickly undress.

She watched, mesmerized as he did the same. Though she was well acquainted with his body, it seemed, now, as though she was seeing it for the first time. So often, during their separation, had she sought to summon it in her memory, that now she longed to touch it - to prove to herself that it was real.

Tentatively she reached out, trailing a single finger through the hollow between his pectoral muscles and down his belly - drawing away just before she reached his penis. Under her touch, she could feel his breathing grow shallower, more rapid.

He grasped her hand, coaxing it in the direction of his erection, but she pulled gently away - preferring to tease him for the moment. "Not yet."

He seemed to understand. Leaning in, he kissed her again. His tongue traced the contours of her lips, suckling her lower lip, before pushing more deeply.

She responded eagerly, opening her mouth and arching her back, thrusting her chest against him. Her nipples were stiff and grew stiffer as they brushed against his bare skin.

"Amanda . . ." He slid his hands down her back and down her thighs, then gently lifted her. She followed his lead, wrapping her legs around him and letting him carry her the few steps to the bed.

He lay her down parallel to the headboard and then playfully collapsed atop her. Seeing his grin, she smiled in response. "I know . . ." she whispered, and he nodded in agreement, though not entirely sure what knowledge it

was that she was confirming.

His expression turned serious, and she felt his fingers running gently over her chest, tracing the line of her scar. "So beautiful." Then, his attention moved to the underside of her breast to run gently over her tiny mole. Though it was warm in the room, she shivered.

He ran his hands down over the curve of her waist, and then placed a fleeting kiss on her stomach, letting his tongue swirl briefly around the hollow of her navel.

She felt his hand on her delta, coaxing her legs apart, and let out a primal gasp when his mouth followed only moments later. She ran her fingers through his hair as his tongue continued to tease, tantalize, and torment her.

Her legs stiffened and she writhed beneath him. "Lee . . . I . . . "

"Shhhh . . ." he ceased his attentions long enough to whisper, and then began again. She reached climax, the warm waves washing over her from within, and then relaxed, limp and spent, in his arms.

"Are you . . ." she began.

"I'm wonderful," he answered her incomplete question. "You're alive - and I got to see you, feel you. That's all I wanted."

She rolled to her side, snuggling more closely against his chest. "You know, things are going to change when we get back."

"Yeah, I know." He lay a whisper soft kiss against her forehead. "And I can't wait."

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