

On a sunless morning in the fall of 1989, Jenna Swenson gazed out the window of a café near the American embassy in Prague at a ragged teenager who shivered on the sidewalk outside. They had spoken twice at the embassy, where she worked. He'd said little that would help his case. A waitress set coffee on Jenna's table. The boy hunched his shoulders against the cold as he watched. The embassy could be so impersonal. Jenna motioned for him to join her.

She peered at the crowds. After forty years of communist rule, East Germans were pouring across the border and into the West German embassy up the street, demanding entry to the West. The prospect would have been unthinkable a few months earlier. But Hungary had opened its Austrian border and called for free parliamentary elections. Anything was possible.

There was something wild about the boy, too, an anger held in check. He claimed to be an American who had never set foot on American soil. Jenna suspected he was an East German who, tired of sleeping at the West German embassy, was attempting to enter the United States by deceit. But no one picked up English that well.

The lanky teen made his way through the bustling café. His eyes were heavy with fatigue. Dealing with him firmly was going to be difficult.

"Still no passport?" Jenna said.

"I can't get it."

"You've managed to cross two borders. No birth certificate either, I suppose."

"I told you. They won't let me have them."

"You've told me a lot of things, David." His eyes strayed to her steaming coffee. "It is David today, isn't it? You couldn't get your name straight at the embassy." His jaw tightened. "I give you credit for speaking English like a native. It won't get you into the States. I can help you if you don't have a passport, but I can't help you if you lie to me."