



*The Big Adventure
in Little Bosnia.*

Kenneth R. Szulczyk

The Big Adventure in Little Bosnia
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Prologue

Veronika Ibragovic was sipping her coffee as she watched the message menu slide upward from the bottom of the computer screen. An important email she had been waiting for had just arrived from a prospective employee.

Veronika clicked on the menu to read the message.

Her computer temporarily froze, as the ancient, second hand computer retrieved the email. The computer was overwhelmed running a hacked version of Windows XP. In Bosnia, companies never pay legally for software. Everything was pilfered and copied and stolen. Second hand machines and computers drifted from Europe to the computer stores in Bosnia, a means for a poor war-torn country like Bosnia to adapt and acquire technology.

Veronika was the new employment director at the Bosnian University of Management or otherwise known as BUM University. She stood at five-feet five, and had long wavy blond hair and brown eyes. Although Veronika was an attractive woman, her body started to thicken from middle age.

Veronika's office was sparse with few personal belongings. She was recently divorced with no children. The pictures on her desk reflected her empty life. One picture was her college graduation ceremony, and the other was Veronika sitting on a park bench on a beautiful spring day in Bosnia, the very same day she walked away a free woman from a divorce court.

Veronika worked for the university, which was located in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Archeologists believe Tuzla was settled around 6,000 years ago and the name means the City of Salt. The city was important to the Roman Empire, supplying the Empire with salt from its rich salt deposits mined from caves below the city. In fact, so much salt has been extracted that the city actually sinks a couple of inches every year. Citizens of Tuzla go along with the hustle and bustle of their city every day, oblivious to their sinking city. Just recently, the tallest building in Tuzla, Hotel Tuzla, started leaning off kilter a couple of inches from its tilting foundation.

BUM University started in 1995 after the Bosnian War, when a truce was struck among the Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs. These three ethnic groups hated each other, and they fought wars and battles among themselves since the Middle Ages.

The Bosnian War during the early 1990s was one of the worst ones yet. Unfortunately, turbulence and war usually erupted in the Balkan state every fifty years, plus or minus five years. The next Bosnian War should begin around 2040, as their harboring grudges and grievances erupt into violence again.

Unfortunately, BUM University was plagued with management troubles, professor and student strikes, and an occasional cash flow crisis. Veronika's job was to attract some talented professors for rock bottom salaries.

The 2008 Financial Crisis was a blessing to the university. Many U.S. universities stopped hiring, creating a surplus of talent in the market; cheap talent whom the university could scoop up and employ. The lure of a decent salary in a war-ravaged country attracted some very qualified applicants, applicants who would never look at Bosnia during good economic times.

After a minute, the important email message appeared on her screen.

Veronika's face brightened as she read the message. Dr. Keith Swanson accepted the contract. He agreed to teach finance at the university. Keith Swanson was a phenomenal researcher and publisher. He was a person who could put the fledging university on the map.

The university president, Damir Kovacev, became furious when he heard cruel jokes about his beloved university. Like did you hear that BUM University is so poor, one month the professors were paid in cabbage and potatoes! Although the joke was true, organizations had no money after the Bosnian War. They had to barter goods to survive. However, these lingering jokes became an embarrassment to the university. Why must the best university in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and possibly Eastern Europe be plagued with these tasteless, pernicious jokes?

Veronika quickly stood up and made her way to the president's office.

The university president's office was located at the end of the hall in an administrative wing of the university. A person did

not have to be a rocket scientist to figure which office door was the president's. The door to the president's office was a dark, mahogany door that was twice as wide as the other office doors. The door was imported directly from Italy, and the door handle was made from a highly polished brass. The doors to the other offices appeared to be salvaged from abandoned buildings after the war and painted a luster white. Many of the doors had mismatched door handles.

As Veronika walked down the corridor, she became a light headed from the pungent aroma of the freshly painted doors.

Next to the president's door, was the driver, Adnan Hadzipetrovic.

Adnan glanced up at Veronica, and then glanced back down to his newspaper.

Adnan towered at six-feet two and was quite muscular. He packed 230 pounds of muscle onto his large frame. Although Adnan appeared to be stupid, like an ole country boy with several generations of inbreeding, he was quite intelligent. Adnan spoke Bosnian, English, and Spanish fluently. Adnan was Bosnian and was 15 years old when the Bosnian War erupted. He joined the Bosnian Army, and quickly rose to the rank of Sergeant. He became an ice-cold killer and received his first medal of honor after he had 100 confirmed kills of Serbian soldiers. Nobody knows exactly how many people Adnan killed during the war. Only god and Adnan knew. His commanding officer was the university president, Damir Kovacev.

The university president hired his best soldiers to serve as drivers to the university. The drivers also doubled as bodyguards and security. When the university first started, the president even allowed the drivers to carry concealed pistols. However, the Board of Trustees was aghast and flabbergasted, and one of the few times, the president caved in, partially caved in to the board's demands.

The drivers still had access to weapons. In Adnan's case, the desk, where he was sitting had a concealed compartment, and he had access to a CZ-99 pistol within hand's reach. The CZ-99 was produced by the Yugoslavian company, Zastava Arms. *Zastava* means 'Flag' in Bosnian. It also means a flag in Croatian and Serbian since they are essentially the same language. The three

main languages of the Balkans differ similarly to English spoken in America, Britain, and Australia. The three ethnic groups have such a dislike and hatred of each other; they took their common language and called it their own. Then they sneered and looked down upon the other ethnic groups.

Veronika paused outside the university door. She pulled her dress down, removing the creases and wrinkles from it. She remembered the one occasion when the president fired a staff member, because her clothes were wrinkled.

Unfortunately, the president had an explosive temper, erupting like a violent volcano. On some occasions, the president would turn beet red, as the rage and adrenaline flowed angrily through his veins. On his good days, an employee would sit quietly in his chair as the president stood behind the employee, screaming as loud as he could at the employee. On his bad days, Damir could be quite mercilessly cruel.

Veronica bobbed her head up and down, making sure all the hairs from her head flowed in one direction. Then she wove her hand through her long blond hair, making sure she was presentable.

Veronika was recently divorced and badly needed this job.

Unfortunately, jobs were extremely hard to find in Bosnia. The unemployment rate hovered around 40%, as half the working population were permanently out of work. Poverty was also rampant coupled with rampant alcohol and drug abuse. The employers knew the dire state of the economy, and they knew they could be cruel and severe with their employees, treating their employees worse than the numerous stray dogs and cats that meandered around the city streets of Tuzla. The employees' options were severely limited, and they had to eat like shit their daily abuse from their managers.

Veronika was still an attractive woman, a little on the heavy side. Although her waist was slim, her hips protruded out from her sides. However, she was still a good catch, if any man with a job wanted to catch her.

A single man with a job in Bosnia was like catching a shark in the salt pond located on the other side of the city. It was not going to happen. The available young women quickly snatched the good men. The competition was fierce.

Veronika reached for the door handle. The handle was cool to the touch.

She paused for a moment. Then she entered Damir's office.

The air in Damir's office smelled stale, because Damir rarely opened the windows in his office. He practically lived in his office, always there, invariably hunched over at his desk examining documents or scheming up to no good.

The president glanced up and glared at Veronika.

The president had several financial documents of the university sprawled over the desk. The president was heavy set and stood at five feet four. Damir was at least 50 pounds overweight with his stomach protruding from the center of his torso. He hunched over his desk like a large scarab beetle when he examined his documents lying on the desk. The president was completely bald and a perpetual sweat caused his forehead to glisten slickly under the fluorescent lights. The president had dark eyebrows and brown eyes. He looked like a chubbier, bald version of Napoleon, but possessed a more explosive temper.

Veronika started nervously, "Sir, Professor Swanson accepted the contract. He is coming to Bosnia."

"Good, very good. This is indeed very good news," the president smiled, and then he glanced down at his documents again.

This was Veronika's cue to leave silently the office.

Today, the president did not fire her. Of course, Veronika was not out of his sight yet. She carefully traced her steps back to the office door. She was afraid of stepping on a creaking floorboard. A slight screech from the floorboard may cause the living volcano to explode.

Then Veronika left the office, quietly shutting the door behind her.

The president glanced up at Veronika, as she left the office. The president mumbled to himself, "That stupid bitch; I should fire her!" The president noticed Veronika had a strand of thread sticking out of the seam in her dress. "The dumb bitch cannot even dress right!" As the president muttered to himself, his blood began to simmer a little with rage and adrenaline.

The president was very strict with the dress code. He made all male employees wear dress shirts and ties, and all the women

had to wear business attire, suits, and conservative dresses. He even made sure all his employees had straight teeth. As part of the hiring process, the president required a recent photograph as part of the interview process. Then he hunched over his desk with a magnifying glass to inspect all the applicant's teeth on the photograph. He would utter, "Which student could learn from a professor who has crooked ass teeth?"

The president quickly glanced down at the financial statements.

The university was in financial trouble. Nobody had access to the university finances except the president. Everything was hushed and low key. Only the president knew the true financial picture. However, the president told everyone that the university was growing. Everything was okay. The money continued to pour in. Nevertheless, Damir had a worried look upon his face.

Nobody knew how dire straits the university was. All the staff, professors, and students could show up for class one morning, and all the doors would be padlocked. The university sign on the marquee would still be there, advertising an empty, vacated university.

Of all the bad things, the president did in his life, this university was his baby, a legacy of his hard work. Damir wanted the university to grow and prosper. Then he could proudly reflect back on his achievements, his real achievements.

Damir's awards and degrees decorated the wall behind his desk. Any visitor to his office could never miss them, and any visitor would be impressed. However, people did not really know the president's actual achievements. The certificate of valor and honor from the Bosnian government was real. Damir showed true bravery during the Bosnian War. Nevertheless, the president never finished college. Damir became furious with a professor in the United States and actually threatened to kill the professor. He told the professor that he would bash his brains in with a baseball bat, if the professor did not change his grade from a C to a B. The Polytechnic University of Rochester immediately expelled Damir.

Damir returned home humiliated until the first shots of the Bosnian War in 1992. Damir Kovacev immediately enlisted in the army and he quickly rose to the rank of captain as heavy casualties decimated the Bosnian army.

After the war, Damir found a degree mill, an underground Bosnian printing company that produced authentic-looking degrees. In Bosnia, nobody could verify or authenticate degrees from any university. The Bosnian War disrupted all the country's institutions. If the degree looked legitimate, then it was official. Of course, for an extra 5,000 euros, the company knew several Bosnian students studying in the United States. Some of these students worked for a college administration. They could easily slip fraudulent transcripts into the university's mail. For 15,000 euros, the president had both a Bachelor's and MBA from U.S. universities; all backed up with authentic-looking transcripts mailed from these institutions.

The president on the surfaced appeared to be an educated man. All his documents looked genuine and legit.

After an hour after Veronika left, Jasmin Ademovich popped into the president's office.

The president glanced up and started to frown. He would immediately fire any loud, disruptive employee. Then the president began to smile as he saw his old war buddy, Jasmin.

The president never could fire his drivers, his bodyguards, his war buddies. He had a special bond with them. They covered his back during a bad war.

Jasmin was 55 and stood about 5 feet 11 inches. He was a muscular guy and former soldier of the Bosnian army, another soldier under the command of Damir. He slicked his grey hair back fifties style like the Fonz, and left the top two buttons of his driver's uniform unbuttoned. He was a typical Bosnian male chauvinist. Whenever he was driving and spotted an attractive woman walking down the street, he would not hesitate to roll the window down and holler catcalls at her, even if he was driving female professors to class. If the blond was particularly cute, then he may even circle the block to get another shot at her.

Nobody knew, but Damir's old platoon still met once a month in the countryside for war drills. During the Bosnian War, the Serbs almost won, if NATO did not intervene. When the next conflict erupted, the Bosnians were going to strike back at the Serbs. Then the Serbs will pay for the atrocities of the Bosnian War, and the Bosnians will be victorious. Then the Serbs will pay

for their war crimes. Their freshly splattered Serbian blood will pay for the reparations and retribution.

Jasmin brought in a brown leather suitcase and plopped it on the desk on top of the financial documents. The latches were facing the president.

The president eagerly opened the briefcase, and a wide grimace spread across his face, as if a boy was rewarded with his favorite ice cream dessert.

In the brief case were two bundles of euro currency. Each bundle was 10,000 euros. Then to the side was a small ziplock bag of a white powdery substance.

The president eagerly snatched that packet and pulled out a tiny mirror with a razor blade laying on it from the top left drawer of his desk. The president spread some of the white powder on the mirror and used the razor blade to create three narrow lines. Then he slipped a hundred euro bill from one of the money stacks and rolled it into a straw.

The three lines of coke quickly disappeared up the president's nose as he snorted it. Once the cocaine hit his brain receptors, the president's rage began to subside. His mind focused and cleared, while his rage began to melt away like icicles in a spring thaw.

Jasmin asked jovially, "So how is the stuff, boss?"

"The stuff is great!" Damir shook his head in ecstasy, and asked, "Did Vladimir give you any trouble today?"

"He started to give me some shit about expenses. As I reached for my gun, then he stopped his shit. He pulled the money out and used a counting machine. You should have exactly 20,000 euros there. I saw him count the money. You can count it if you like?"

"No, I trust you. You covered my back during the war. I know my friends would never disappoint me. Just make sure the chemist keeps busy. Without him, our whole operation would fall apart."

"I will go and check up on him now." Jasmin started to turn, but Damir interrupted him.

"I have good news my friend. Professor Swanson accepted the position. He is coming to teach at our university."

"That is great! I hope it works out for him. He can help give the university the recognition that it deserves."

"You know the drill. Before you check up on the chemist, make sure Veronika gets an extra set of keys to his apartment. Whenever he teaches in another city, I want either you or Adnan to search his apartment. I am tired of these alcoholic and drug addicted professors. For some reason, we seem to attract the real crazy ones here."

"Yes'em. It seems the university has attracted some real losers in the past."

"I do not want these messed up professors to taint the image of our university, to teach our students. One bad professor can taint the image and reputation of our university. Remember, when the government shut down the University of Tuzla Law School, because the professors started a prostitution ring with several students?"

"I remember very well, boss" Jasmin displayed his poker face as he uttered these words. He knew more about the Law School than the president did. He remembered a few sorties to their female dormitory, but this is not something you tell your boss about, even if boss was your war buddy, someone who covered your back during a nasty war, except a few prurient indiscretions at a women's dormitory.

Jasmin sighed. He had a full day ahead of him, and he already needed to go outside for a smoke. "I will see you later," he blurted out.

Then Jasmin turned and headed for the door.

Damir looked down at the packet of coke.

Maybe another line would boost his spirits. He was happy to see the money. At least the Bosnian University of Management could meet its payroll this month, hire some more top talent from the United States.

Jasmin headed for Veronika's office. He wanted to make sure he got the extra set of keys to Keith's apartment. He detested drug addicts and alcoholics. He wanted BUM University to become the best university in Eastern Europe. This cannot happen with professors with questionable ethics and drug abuse problems.

Although he did not like his boss using cocaine, he understood and forgave him. If people only knew the pain and

suffer Damir Kovacev went through during the Bosnian War. He was with Damir when he found his wife, Emina, on July 15, 1995, at Srebrenica.

Srebrenica was a small Bosnian village close to the border with Serbia. The United Nations declared Srebrenica a safe haven for the Bosnians. Dutch peacekeepers ran the camp and segregated the men from the women. Then the Dutch peacekeepers started to rape the Bosnian women. Unfortunately, a paramilitary unit, the Scorpions of the Serbian Armed Forces, raided the camp in July 1995. They forced 8,000 Bosnian men and boys to the countryside, where they were systematically executed and buried in mass, unmarked graves. Then the Serbs continued to rape the Bosnian women.

The Srebrenica Massacre shocked the world. Then NATO started the air raids against Serbia and Serbian troops. NATO had to put a stop to the atrocities of the Bosnian War, and the massacre and slaughter of the Bosnian people.

The three ethnic groups signed the Dayton Peace Accord on December 14, 1995, and the Bosnian War came to a grisly close.

Jasmin was there that night when Damir found his wife in the camp after the Scorpions pulled out. The stench of death clung to the countryside around Srebrenica, like a dense impenetrable fog.

Emina's death was particularly horrific and unjust. She was badly raped and beaten. She died on the floor in one of the huts, leaning against the wall. Her long straight brunette hair was disheveled and matted with dirt and grime. Numerous flies hovered around Emina's body. Her olive smooth skin darkened from decomposition, and her petite slim body was covered with bruises and cuts. After the Serbian soldiers were done with her, they tossed her to the side as if she was yesterday's garbage.

Jasmin helped Damir bury her body in the foothills overlooking Srebrenica.

Every year on her birthday, October 25th, Damir visited her grave and placed a bouquet of red roses across the flat grave stone.

Since that night, part of Damir died. He lost his spark of life for the world. He turned violent and cruel, and his violent temper became worse. Before Emina's death, Damir's temper could

be rated as a Category 3 hurricane. After her death, his temper soared into an insanely violent Category 8. Those types of hurricanes were never recorded in human history.

Then Damir began to use cocaine. Cocaine helped the pain melt away. He felt half way human again, and he could almost function normally in society.

Damir also became a ferocious soldier. Anyone who looked Serbian would meet a quick, violent death. He would execute the Serbs at a point-blank range. When Damir ran out of bullets, he would use his black leather belt to strangle the Serbian soldiers with his bare hands. He proudly wears that belt to this very day. He meticulously cleaned off all the splotches of blood.

Even after the Bosnians, Serbs, and Croatians signed the peace agreement, occasionally a Serbian male would be found brutally murdered usually with a bullet wound to the back of the head or his throat was crushed with a thick leather belt. The police never identified the culprits. The culprits were careful to hide their tracks.

Jasmin understood Damir and wanted Damir to succeed in creating the best business school in Eastern Europe. He was going to help Damir run a tight ship and keep those whining spoiled American professors in line.

If those whining American professors could only understand how tough life can be. If only those spoiled American professors could experience the tragedies of war or smell death from a thousand decaying, bullet-riddled bodies. Then they would begin to understand.

As Jasmin approached Veronika's door, he ran his hand smoothly through his hair, making sure he slicked back all the strands in his grey hair. He was going to put the Bosnian charm on her. The Bosnian charm usually started with a pack of cigarettes and two beers.

Chapter 1

Keith Swanson sat in the armchair in his apartment watching the swirling snow blow outside his large picture frame window.

Keith had light brown hair and dark-blue eyes. He stood at five-foot ten. Although Keith was a nerdy professor, he had the physique of a football player. He packed a lean 200 pounds onto his frame. Keith abhorred sports and never picked up a football in his life, let alone played the game. Those hours spent at the library carrying heavy books around put some meat on his bones.

It was Friday, January 14, and Keith just completed his first semester of teaching at the Bosnian University of Management.

The university used the European calendar system. The fall semester started on October 1 and ended around mid-January. Keith lived in part of the country where the Bosnians lived and the Bosnians were Muslim. Consequently, the university scheduled no breaks for Christmas, and Keith taught classes on Christmas Eve. Luckily, Christmas fell on a Saturday, and Keith had no classes on that day. He celebrated Christmas with his Serbian girlfriend, Yelena. Of course, he had to celebrate Christmas twice with her, on his Christmas day and then on hers.

Religious holidays varied around the Bosnian countryside. The Serbs lived in northern Bosnia and the Serbs occupied an entire country to the east, which was Serbia. They were Orthodox Christians and celebrated Christmas on January 7 on the old calendar, while the Croatians lived in the Western Bosnia and had a full country Croatia that surrounded northern Bosnia like a crescent moon. The Croatians were Catholics and celebrated Christmas on December 25.

Keith should be happy that the semester was over. He had a month off before the arrival of spring semester. However, Keith just sat in his chair, lost in deep thought. He was drinking his fourth beer. The beer was Tuzla's Pilsner; a local beer that was made three blocks from his apartment.

Keith rarely drank beer, but his troubled mind needed to be inebriated and sedated. He needed to suppress his rage and think clearly.

Keith was extremely upset. A Smith and Wesson .38 lay next to him on his chair. The gun's barrel leaned against his left leg. He could feel the coolness of the gun's metal penetrate through his khakis. He never owned a gun before nor actually shot a gun before. However, Keith needed to seek revenge against the university. He planned to kill Damir and Adnan and Jasmin, maybe not in that exact order, but he knew the world would be a better place without those three in it.

Keith glanced down at the gun.

The gun had several nicks and scratches, and the handle was cracked.

Keith trace the crack in the gun handle with his index finger, and wondered if that gun was a relic of the Bosnian War. What was the body count on this instrument of death? How many innocent people did this very object gun down and kill?

Keith picked up the gun and practice several pretend shots at the opposite wall. Under his breath, he mumbled, "Bang! Bang!" Nevertheless, he never pulled the trigger.

Keith never killed anyone before. Then he heard many stories how Damir and his drivers were war heroes. They knew how to use guns and kill people.

Of course, Keith was frightened of the gun. The gun's metal was cool to the touch. Keith abhorred the coldness. He was afraid of death. If an instrument of death was cold, then does it imply that death itself must also be cold, as one's warmth of life drained out of him? Keith did not want to be condemned to eternity in a cold hell, a freezing cold hell, but he had no choice. Damir, Adnan, and Jasmin had to die.

Keith kept that gun hidden well behind the radiator under the window. Keith knew someone from the university was searching his apartment weekly when he was away, while he was teaching in another city.

At first, Keith was confused and thought his mind was playing tricks on him from the exhaustive hours teaching, and the long hours spent in the car between cities. His mind refused to accept the obvious. A bottle of soda or a bag of chips would become missing here and there.

Then one cool day in November, when he returned to the apartment, he saw a cigarette butt right outside his apartment door

and the faint stench of cigarette smoke in his apartment. Keith noticed the brand name, *Bosna*. *Bosna* was produced by the Sarajevo Cigarette company and was a favorite of both Adnan and Jasmin. Only proud Bosnians smoked their brand, *Bosna*.

Keith sat quietly in his chair, occasionally sipping his beer.

Outside, the snow was falling and temperatures hovered below the freezing mark. Keith was oblivious to the falling snow outside. He began to recollect the time when he first came to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the time when he first met his friend Karl and first set his eyes on his soon to be serious girlfriend, Yelena.

Keith remembered the first day he saw the university.

The president, Damir Kovacev, bought an old cinema. The cinema was four blocks away from the center of town. The cinema had originally three large halls. Two halls were converted to six classrooms while the third hall was left intact, and used for special events such as university ceremonies and graduation. The back of the building had a string of offices, and this was where Damir placed the administrative wing of his university. Damir Kovacev copied his business plan and also opened similar campuses in Banja Luka and Mostar. Ironically, Banja Luka was located in Serbian country, while Mostar was located in Croatian country. When it came to making money, the Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs could put their hatred of each other to the side. Greed even surpassed hatred on the emotion scale.

The old cinema marquee was still out front. It was painted a fresh white with a bright red trim. Large red letters spelled out Bosnian University of Management across the marquee. The marquee was outlined with incandescent light bulbs, and the light bulbs would flash and flicker during the night, advertising the university. Smaller signs were posted along the front of the building, 'Now accepting students, please inquire inside. The university has 3 million euros in scholarship money to award to top students.'

The university was small and had an enrollment of 1,000 students for all three campuses. However, the president remained aloof and distant from the faculty. The president leased office space for the faculty across the street at the television station, and all faculty members shared a large community office. The university president deliberately placed the faculty as far away

from him as possible, but they were close enough to come to campus and teach their courses.

All faculty members had never seen the university president. They could only recognize him by the portrait of him that decorated the main hall when students and professors first walk into the building's foyer. In the portrait, the president wore his Armani suit, smiling at the camera. He sat behind a mahogany desk and held a pen in his right hand, giving the appearance that he just signed some important document for the university. If one could study the picture closely, the president's smile appeared slightly contorted, like the president forced himself to smile. Something the president never did at least since Emina's death. The president's life was devoid of joy and happiness.

Keith found it odd that he not at any time met the university president, and yet, he planned to kill someone he had never met. Keith actually thought the President Damir Kovacev was doing well for his country. Then during the semester, he discovered the president's skeleton closet. That closet was full of bodies and human misery. Damir Kovacev was an extremely evil man, a wicked man who owned a university. That immoral man was educating the next generation of Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs.

In the beginning, Keith was ignorant of all of this. He was eager to start teaching. He thought he could help teach the future leaders of Bosnia. However, Keith found it odd that the cinema had a stench to it. The stench was not a smell or a decomposing body buried beneath the foundation. The old cinema was clean and every wall, door, and ceiling had a fresh coat of paint. It was like when someone walked into a haunted house, and the place does not feel right. Everything feels wrong, dead wrong. Something evil lurked in there, but one cannot ascribe it with an odor or touch it like an object, but it slapped you in the face when you walked in through the front door. On a hot day, Keith occasionally felt a cold tingle crept up his spine when he walked into the old cinema, and glanced at the president's constrained smile on the portrait.

Something was wrong with BUM University. Something was not right.

Then Keith met Karl Carlson. Karl was a sex-crazed political science professor from Oklahoma. Karl was nearing 60 years old, and he was chasing young women in their 20s and 30s.

Karl still had a full head with white hair and a clean-shaven face. Although Karl was slim, age was leaving its mark on his body. His face had several large deep wrinkles pulling his face down in flaps, as gravity pulled and tugged at his loosening skin.

Keith met Karl for the first time at the faculty office. As Keith walked through the door, Karl turned around in his swivel chair, and said, "How'd you doing partner?" extending his hand for a handshake.

Keith grabbed Karl's hand, and vigorously shook it. Keith answered, "I am doing well. My name is Keith. I am going to teach finance here."

"My name is Karl Carlson. I am a political science professor. As you can see, this is a community office. Just grab a vacant desk, and write your name on a piece of paper and claim it. By the way, these computers are ancient. I hope you brought a laptop with you."

"Alright, thanks for the info. My laptop is right here," Keith stated, as Keith patted the black laptop case for emphasis.

Keith sat at a corner desk with a window view of the courtyard. Then he moved the computer mouse.

After two minutes, the screen saver switched to the desktop. These ancient computers were really slow.

Veronika walked quickly into the office.

Karl begin his harassment, and bellowed, "Did I ever tell you Veronika that you are the most beautiful woman in this room?"

Veronica stopped and turned to face Karl, and replied in jest, "Well Karl, I am the only woman in this room," Then she walked by him out of reach of Karl's pinching fingers.

Karl continued, "How about I take you out for dinner tonight?"

"Karl, I know you are married. You have a Ukrainian wife living in Oklahoma."

"I will not tell if you don't," Then Karl winked at her, and added, "I can keep a secret, if you can?"

Veronika shook her head no and a large grin swept across her face.

Bosnian women were very traditional and enjoyed attention from the men, as long as the men admired them from a distance.

Veronika approached Keith, and said, "Hi, Professor Swanson. I am glad you could make it here. Is everything okay?"

"Thank you Veronika. I am doing well. I am still getting used to my surroundings."

"Great! I just wanted to welcome you to the university. I would also like to schedule a meeting with you. The Bosnian government requires many documents. I need your passport, your original college degrees, and official transcripts. Could we meet in my office on Friday at 10 o'clock?"

"That should not be a problem. I will be there."

"Thank you, Professor Swanson," then Veronika turned to leave the faculty office.

As Veronika was walking out the door, Karl was studying her ass, watching the apple shape bob up and down as she walked out the office. Karl was salivating a little.

"Could you make it a little more obvious?" Keith joked.

"You know me; I enjoy fishing. I try to cast as many lines as I can. Then I sit back and reel them in," Karl retorted.

"How good are you at fishing?"

"I would say if I cast ten times, I get about eight slaps to the face and two prizes."

Both Keith and Karl exchanged chuckles, and then Keith added, "In statistics, we call this the Law of Large Numbers. As the number of propositions you ask a women approach infinity, you are bound to get several yes's."

Then both Keith and Karl burst into laughter again.

"So, how are you adjusting to the place?" Karl asked more seriously.

"Bosnia is different. I think I will adjust just fine. I do not think I can learn Bosnian. It is a Slavic language and Slavic languages are always difficult. I tried a semester of Russian in college and failed miserably."

"Don't worry about learning Bosnian. If another university gives you an offer, just take it. Don't ask questions. Just take the offer and go."

Keith began to frown, and his voice wavered in confusion, "I do not understand? What is so bad about this place?"

"Not here! They may be listening in," Karl whispered in hushed tones. He pointed at the ceiling as if listening devices were relaying critical information back to the university president.

Then at a normal tone, "If you are thirsty, we can go out for coffee? I know this great little coffee shop in the center of town. The waitresses are cute there too. As if you have not noticed, Bosnian women are beautiful."

"That sounds great. Let's go."

Karl and Keith walked the four blocks to the center of town.

Tuzla was a beautiful European city and the center of the city was striking. The city's center was constructed 300 years ago, way before the introduction of cars. The city's center was meant for pedestrians. It had sidewalks, a large water fountain, and outdoor cafes. To see any cars, one had to walk at least two blocks away from the center to the north or to the south. The buildings were constructed with the Hungarian architectural style when Bosnia was part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. Towards the evening and on weekends, Bosnians would stroll up and down these sidewalks. Their eyes wandered along the endless stretch of storefronts and scanned the meandering crowds for friends and family on a nightly stroll.

Karl and Keith sat outside the White Palace at a little coffee shop, enjoying the cool September air.

Storm clouds gathered in the distance on the other side of the mountains, but on their side, the sun's rays bathed everything with a soft glow.

Bosnians were prolific coffee drinkers, and Tuzla had a coffee shop on every street corner. Most coffee shops, like the one at the White Palace, had the simple name Coffee Shop. Bosnians did not worry about the names. Once they found a good spot, Bosnians would plant themselves there with no care in the world. They could sit for hours drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes and gossiping rampantly about everyone they knew.

In front of the White Palace was the Grand Fountain. It shot a spray of water six feet up into the air. That coffee shop was where Keith first noticed the waitress, Yelena.

Yelena had dark hair that went halfway down her back. Her face was creamy, smooth and youthful, and she had the brightest

blue eyes. Her body was petite and probably weighed less than 100 pounds. She had a bright radiant smile, which reflected her enthusiasm for the world. The onslaughts of the long road of life had not worn her down yet.

Karl began, "I see that you are enjoying the view." Then he glanced at Yelena, and added, "Like I said, Bosnian women are beautiful. Unfortunately, the war messed them up a little."

"What do you mean?"

"The Bosnian War was particular nasty. Every Bosnian has a relative or friend who was killed during the war. Bosnian women tend to be distant and a little neurotic. However, I heard if you do marry one, she would stick with you until your last breath. Just remember, you are never to talk about the war during your lectures. The topic of war is taboo, especially for outsiders like us."

"That is so odd. When I walk around the city, I see no evidence of a war that occurred here. The Bosnians seem to be peaceful people."

"Tuzla did not get hit that hard. In 1995, a Serbian platoon made it to the northern edge of the city. They launched an artillery shell that landed a block over there. The artillery shell killed 79 people, including children who were walking to school."

Then Karl pointed east and added, "The memorial for the people who were killed that morning is two blocks that way. The memorial is called *Kapija*. You cannot miss it. Furthermore, the north is also the slums of Tuzla. You can still see the bullet holes in the buildings there, where snipers shot down at the city. Of course, if you need some drugs or a little female companionship, then that is where you go. I also know this great brothel there."

"Please, like I am going to pick up a prostitute," Keith whispered, so patrons at the neighboring tables could not hear.

"It was only a suggestion. I probably could get you a first-time discount."

"No thanks," Keith started to blush. Then he noticed Yelena started to approach their table." Subsequently Keith added, "Let's change the topic. So what were you saying about the university?"

Yelena appeared, "Hi guys, what would you like to drink?" Her English was punctuated with a slight Slavic accent.

Karl began, "I'll take a light beer from the tap."

Keith glanced up at Yelena, and fumbled his words. The words became glued at the back of his throat. Then in a quick succession, the words tumbled out clumsily, "I'llllll taaake a-a-a cappuccino."

Yelena cracked a smile and went back inside the cafe to prepare their orders.

"You got a smile out of her. Nice!"

"Will you grow up! What were you saying about the university?"

"The university is fucked up. You will never meet the president of the university. He has a wicked temper. He fires his employees at will .Like you met Veronika today, I bet you \$20 that she will not be working at the university by the end of the semester. She will be fired!"

"Really? Why does he do that?"

"I really do not know. Lucky for us, he never talks to us. We either intimidate him, or if he gets angry and fires us, then we are very difficult to replace. Twenty Bosnians are not lined up to take our job, or at least not yet."

"WOW! I will keep that in mind."

"Also," Karl stopped.

Yelena returned with their drinks. Then Yelena placed the receipt near Karl and placed the ashtray on top of it, so the breeze would not blow it away. Next Yelena disappeared into the interior of the cafe.

Karl picked up the receipt and uttered "See, I told you. She likes you. I was charged my beer, but your cappuccino is not on the receipt."

Keith snatched the receipt and read it. Sure enough, the waitress did not charge Keith for that cappuccino.

Keith replied guiltily, "It must be a mistake. I will flag her down and ask her. What were you going to say?"

Karl took a swig from his beer, and placed it back on the table, and added, "Also, like I was saying, the president is a control freak. He has his drivers and employees monitor the professors. Whatever you say gets back to him."

"Oh come on! You mean the president at the university has so much free time, that he has his employees spy on the professors?" Keith's voice wavered with skepticism.

"Yes that is exactly what I am saying. Last year, we had an English professor. She was in the car complaining about the computer information system. We have to put all the attendance and grades into their system. She said the database was stupid. That it was designed by a fourth grader. The driver was Adnan and the next day; the employment director fired her. It was not Veronika. Last year, it was Selma. Like I said, the university goes through employees, like a baby who goes through clean diapers."

"Damn!" Then Keith sipped his cappuccino.

The outdoor breeze cooled his coffee down, so Keith raised his cup again and gulped half the contents down. Keith winced a little, because the coffee was strong and a little bitter. Bosnians do like their coffee strong.

Keith glanced at the water fountain and noticed two little boys playing in the water.

Karl continued, "I do not know if the president installed electronic bugs in our office, but I do know he reads our emails. So at work, you should never log into your private email account. You should not at any time use the university's email system for personal emails."

"I will keep that in mind."

Then Keith saw Yelena again. Keith waved at Yelena and said, "Miss! Oh miss!" Keith's voice resonated with more confidence.

As Yelena quickly approached the table, her smile deepened.

Keith picked up the receipt and showed it to Yelena, "I noticed you did not charge me for the cappuccino."

"Oh I apologize. The machine is broken, sir. So please do not worry about it."

Yelena started to turn and Keith added, "May I ask what your name is?"

Yelena turned to look at Keith, and she started to blush a little, as if this stranger had just asked a taboo question, like how old are you? How much do you weigh? Will you run away with me to Mexico?

Yelena quickly replied, "Yelena," then she completely turned and returned to the interior of the café.

"Congrats buddy. Just as a side note, Bosnian women are very conservative. You got her name today. It will probably take you another two months to get her phone number, and then a year for the first kiss."

In the distance, they saw Yelena place another receipt on the table surrounded by young Bosnians.

Then Karl blurted, "Yeah, I see the machine is busted. I think she likes you. It looks like you have a challenge facing you."

Then Keith and Karl exchanged chuckles again.

"Well, I do like challenges. Anyway, I may be in Bosnia for a while. The U.S. job market is so bad; I may be stuck in Bosnia for a couple of years. I have plenty of time."

"If a challenge is what you want, then a challenge is what you'll get. If you want to speed things up, I know this great little brothel on the northern part of the city. You can condense a night of passion into 60 minutes. It will only set you back a hundred euros."

"Karl, seriously I don't go to places like that. I have never been to one. I do not know if I could take my clothes off in front of a strange woman, a woman whom I do not know,"

Keith became embarrassed again. His fair complexion turned a reddish hue. Finally, Keith finished his cappuccino, and asked, "What is it like inside one of those places?"

"I've been to many of them around the world. My favorite is the Russian brothel in Yekaterinburg. They are always the same. You are led into a large room and the Madam lines up all the available women. Then you choose which one you want and how long you want her. Make sure you bring plenty of money."

"How do you even find those places?"

"You ask a taxi driver or a hotel bellhop. They always know where they are. Of course, you have to tip them. I liked Yekaterinburg because she was good, and it was cheap. I bought a woman for two hours, rented the room, and had a taxi driver wait outside for me. The whole adventure only set me back by \$40."

"Damn! That does sound cheap. That poor girl! Aren't you worried about diseases?"

"Oh please, at my age. Of course, I always use protection. Protection significantly reduces an unwanted infection or

pregnancy. Besides, that poor girl I was helping to pay for her college tuition. She was very appreciative of my financial aid."

"Ah yeah! \$40 really pays a lot. She probably got \$10 from it."

Keith paused a minute to collect his thoughts, then he asked, "What is the wildest time you ever had at a brothel?"

"That is really hard to say. The Middle East is the wildest. The Muslims are very strict in following the Koran. A rich sheik will walk into a brothel and enter into a marriage contract with a prostitute. Then he can make love to her. After an hour or two, he divorces her, and she is free to marry the next man. This is all legal under Sharia Law."

Both Karl and Keith erupted in laughter again.

Then Keith continued, "That seems so unnecessary. Go through all that ritual to comply with a religious decree. Besides, I thought Muslims could have multiple wives. Why do they need to waste their time with prostitutes?"

Karl raised his eyebrow in confusion, and uttered, "I don't know. You got me? I guess the sheiks get bored with their wives too!"

Keith continued his probing, "What is the weirdest time you had with a prostitute?"

"The weirdest time I had with a prostitute was in Dubai. As I was making love to her, she reached over to the bed stand and grabbed an apple. Then she started eating ..."

"In the future, you probably want to keep that one to yourself. She was so bored with you that she decided to eat during.."

Karl interrupted, "Or maybe she was really hungry, because it was taking too long."

Both Karl and Keith exchanged laughter again.

Several Bosnian males who were sitting at the next table turned their questioning gazes upon Karl and Keith.

"Okay, let's change the topic."

Keith started to blush a little. Unfortunately, Keith spent much of his free time studying finance in the library. He rarely thought about the opposite sex. Although Keith was interested in a woman, he was not completely sure what to do with one. Unfortunately, a woman does not come with instructions or could

be entered into calculations on his financial calculator. However, Keith was really attractive to Yelena. Although Keith was 30 and she had to be around 22, Keith truly wanted Yelena.

Karl glanced at his watch, and muttered in surprise, "Oh, I got to go. I have a seminar that I am planning for."

"Okay. I probably should work on my lecture notes."

Karl and Keith finished their drinks, and Yelena came out again to serve a new table of customers. The customers were young Bosnian men who were loud and obnoxious.

Keith was staring at Yelena again, and Karl asked, "So, how do you like this coffee shop?"

"This was a pretty good cappuccino. I think I will be back." Then Keith slapped a five-euro note onto the table, placing an ashtray over it, so it would not blow away.

"Wow! That is a good tip. Just to let you know, this is a poor country. Bosnians never leave a tip. The waitress may think that you like her."

"Well then I will let you in a secret. I do like her. Besides, if she doesn't want to charge me for coffee, then I will give her the money as a tip. It looks like this will be my favorite coffee shop. Of course, this is the only coffee shop I have been to, but this one is at the top on my list."

As Keith walked away from the cafe, he glanced back at Yelena and noticed she turned to look at him with a slight smile pursed on her lips.

Keith had plenty of time to nurture his wild Balkan orchid.

Keith came out of his daydream

A cold wind started to howl outside, and he could feel a cold draft penetrate the cracks and crevices around the window.

Keith almost shed a tear for his new friend. Karl Carlson was found with a gunshot wound to the back of the head within one block of his apartment late November. The police had no suspects. Although the Bosnians fought a brutal war, violent crime tends to be very rare in Bosnia. Tuzla has almost 200,000 inhabitants, and the city see one murder maybe once every couple of years.

Of course, Keith suspected who the culprits were. The culprits were his boss and his henchmen.

Chapter 2

Yelena awakened in a dark, dank closet. A line of light illuminated the gap at the bottom of the door.

Yelena reached her hand into empty space. Her hand trembled as it fumbled clumsily in the air searching blindly for that door knob. Then her hand lightly brushed against it, and subsequently, she clenched it firmly. She tried to turn the knob slowly, but it would not bulge. It remained frozen. Yelena was helplessly locked inside the closet.

Yelena heard a couple of Bosnian men talking outside. She could not understand what they were saying, because the door muffled their loud baritone voices.

Then Yelena began to weep. She knew what it meant for a poor girl in Bosnia to be kidnapped. She was going to be sold in the sex trade. She heard many girls from the village would disappear, especially after the Bosnian War. Some families were so poor; they would even hock their own daughters to the traffickers.

Yelena remembered her last thoughts before awakening in the closet. She was going to meet Keith at the large water fountain at the center of the city at 9 o'clock after work.

The date was Thursday, January 13. Her boss let her leave early, and she sat down on a bench to wait for him.

It was 8:50 PM. The night was cold. Her cheeks and nose turned a rosy red. Then two large Bosnian men approached her. One man was old with grey hair and the other one was younger and larger, and appeared to be a dumb country boy.

The younger stranger started talking first, stating convincingly, "We have bad news for you. Keith has been hurt. He is in the hospital."

Yelena leaped up from the bench, as she became extremely worried. Her voice trembled, "Is he al-"

Then before Yelena realized what happened, the older man slipped behind her and placed a towel over her open mouth. The towel was drenched with chloroform, and she lost consciousness immediately.

Once Yelena awakened, she found herself locked in this dark closet. She did not even know what time of day it was, or how

long she was passed out. The two men stole her cell phone and ladies' watch.

Then Yelena began to cry, softly at first, but the stream of tears began to gush as she thought about her predicament. She wished Keith could rescue her.

Then Yelena remembered the first time she met Keith and had their first conversation. Yelena had a day off from work on a Thursday night.

It was late September, and the nights were becoming cooler and longer. The tree leaves began to turn a plethora of brown, red, and yellow, filling the surrounding mountain sides with vibrant bright colors. Winter was silently approaching Bosnia and soon; everything would be covered by a blanket of whiteness.

Yelena usually went to her work to socialize. Her boss would give her a discount. That discount was a lifesaver and helped stretch her meager 200 euro per month salary.

That Thursday night was typical. Patrons and their cigarette smoke filled the coffee shop. Bosnians were prolific smokers .At least 90% of Bosnians smoked. So much smoke filled the café; the smoke appeared to be like a thick, dense fog .A nonsmoker could easily develop lung cancer in there after several hours of exposure ,or at least a serious case of bronchitis.

Yelena was sitting across from her friend, Teah. Teah had long, blond curly hair and a thick body. Her Slavic features attracted many male suitors.

Then Keith walk into the cafe with his old friend, Karl. They sat on the other side of the cafe near the front window. Keith's chair almost blocked the path for patrons stumbling out the front door.

Teah noticed Yelena's sly eye movement, and Teah turned to look at the new guests, and subsequently, stated loudly, "They are definitely not from around here. They are certainly not Bosnian!"

Her voice shrieked across the room, so everyone in the café knew Teah was present. Unfortunately, Teah could sometimes be too loud and boisterous.

Several Bosnian men sitting at the next table turned to glance at Teah. Their glances were at first curious, but then turned to desire as they probed Teah's feminine features.

"No, I think they are American. They come to the café quite regularly. They speak English," Yelena said timidly.

Teah glanced at Karl and Keith again, and seriously asked, "Are you interested in one of them?"

Yelena began to blush and then sheepishly replied, "No, I am just curious."

"Curious, heh!"

"Well, I don't know!"

"Aren't you going to find yourself a good Bosnian man?"

Yelena's face contorted in a surge of angst, "Are you serious? I am Serbian. Bosnians do not marry Serbian women. Besides, I do not like Bosnian men. The men do not like to work; they are lazy. They are always bumming cigarettes and money. What would I do with a Bosnian man? I would become his personal servant and have to work twice as hard in this café to support his broke ass."

Teah began to laugh. That one comment struck an accord with her. She did not like Bosnian men too. Then she added, "If he is an American, you can always get yourself a green card. Then you could go to America."

Yelena's face wrenched into a shocked expression, and she sharply replied, "Teah! I would never marry a man for a green card! I would have to love him first."

Then the women began to exchange giggles.

Afterwards Teah picked up her pack of cigarettes and tapped the pack lightly to cause several cigarettes to pop partially out. Their brand of cigarette was '*drina jedina zlatna*,' the 'Drina River is the one of the gold.' This brand was for the sophisticated Bosnian lady.

Yelena quickly snatched one and lit it up.

As they were smoking, the ladies were also sipping their espressos. This was another Bosnian tradition, to drink copious amounts of coffee, even before bedtime.

"Well, I would marry any man if he could take me to Florida!" Teah said with a beaming mischievous smile.

"Teah! You're bad," Yelena said in an exaggerated scolding voice.

"Well. What can I say? I know what I want. I love the pure white sandy beaches around Miami and Tampa. The warm winters with no snow. Plus; I would not be in Bosnia!"

"Well, he has a friend, an older friend," Yelena said with a cunning smile. She tilted her head towards Karl to emphasize her point.

Teah glanced at Karl again. Then a shocked look erupted onto her face, "Yelena! Pleeese! He is old enough to be my grandfather!"

The ladies began to giggle again.

Then Teah added, "Well, if he has a nice mansion on Miami Beach, then it may be a possibility. It looks like he only has another 10 years left on him."

"If he did have a mansion on Miami Beach, why would he be here in Bosnia?" Yelena added poignantly.

The ladies smoked another cigarette and ordered another round of espressos.

Teah took another sip of her espresso and followed it with another drag of her cigarette. Then she stated seriously, "Well, I will tell you what I will do. When I finish this cigarette and coffee, I will leave. Then maybe your boyfriend will come over and sit down. I will even bump into his chair when I walk out. Then I will wait outside by the fountain for you for fifteen minutes. If I do not see you in fifteen minutes, I'm going home."

And true to her word, Teah did exactly that. On the way out the door, she bumped into Keith's chair.

Keith first glanced at Teah, and then at Yelena.

Yelena was sitting alone. Yelena crossed her legs, tilted her arm that held the cigarette, so she could look sophisticated, and smiled when Keith looked in her direction.

After several minutes, Yelena could see Karl give Keith a pep talk, like a coach inspiring his team to win the game. After an eternity, Keith rose out of his chair and slowly walked to Yelena's table. Keith had a dazed confused look upon his face, like a deer caught in a car's headlights.

Of course, if Keith were Bosnian, she would have fun toying with his emotions, but Keith wasn't. Keith was different; Keith was interesting.

Keith approached her table. "Is this seat taken," Keith asked softly, politely?

"No." Yelena took another puff from her cigarette. She turned her head away from Keith and exhaled her plumb of smoke. She knew Keith did not smoke, and she did not want to blow her pollution into his face.

Keith gracefully sat down and scooted his chair closer to the table.

Yelena was directly across from him.

Keith asked in jest, "Do you come here often?" Keith knew she worked here, so he was trying to be clever with an icebreaker.

"Sometimes," Yelena giggled a little.

It was a corny pickup line, but usually much better than what the Bosnian men throw out. The usual Bosnian icebreaker was, 'Could you spare a cigarette?'

"I come here regularly and wanted to say hi. You make a good cup of cappuccino."

"Thank you." Then Yelena asked kindly, "What do you do for a living?"

"I am a professor. I teach finance at the university here."

Yelena raised her eyebrows. Keith became even more interesting.

Educated men were another hard find in Bosnia. Many Bosnian men skip school and refuse to do their homework. The Bosnian War was so tragic and dramatic; the schools would pass these truant kids anyway. Once the men reached college, they dropped out. Their soft undisciplined minds could not handle the challenge.

Yelena was the right age to be in college, so Keith asked earnestly, eagerly, "Where do you go to college?"

"I am not in college yet. I have to work hard in this café to pay the bills. Some day, I would like to go to college."

"I can relate. The university where I teach is very expensive."

"How expensive?"

"I think they charge around 7,000 euros each year for tuition, but some students get scholarships."

Yelena's jaw almost dropped to the surface of the table.

Seven thousand euros were a godly sum of money; seven thousand euros were a king's ransom in Bosnia. Yelena felt a little sick to her stomach to be talking about a large sum of money. During Yelena's lifetime, she rarely saw any money. She doubted her long hours toiling at the café would add up to 1,000 euros per year.

Yelena's stomach began to churn with acid about talking about a large sum of money, so she quickly changed the topic, "So what do you think of Bosnia?"

"Bosnia is a little different. The Bosnians seem a little distant. They are polite, but they do not form friendship very easily. That is why I am so surprised that you are friendly."

"Maybe I am not Bosnian," Yelena uttered softly, raising her eyebrows for emphasis.

"Huh?" Keith muttered in confusion.

"I am Serbian." Yelena studied Keith's face to see if his expression changed.

Keith did not care about her nationality.

Many Bosnian males would be disgusted to discover a truth like this. That was the irony of dating in Bosnia. The Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs had the same ethnic origin, but they did not like to mix their races. They wanted to keep their races pure and pristine. Even if a Bosnian man were attracted to a Serbian woman, the Bosnian and Serbian families would object. Bosnians and Serbians do not mix.

Then Yelena asked, "What is your race?"

"I am American. If you want my ethnic background, then I am half German and half Polish with a splash of Irish, but we do not care about this in America. I am a plain ole white guy in America. I imagine I would have problems if I went to Poland or Germany. I probably would be hated in both countries," Keith said in jest.

"Which university do you teach at?" Yelena asked curiously.

She took the last drag on her cigarette and then smashed the cigarette butt into the ashtray. Red ashes of tobacco flickered momentarily as the cigarette was extinguished.

"I teach at the Bosnian University of Management."

Yelena knew exactly where the university was located. Sometimes she walked by it on the way to work.

Yelena knew the more affluent Bosnians went to study there. Then, she noticed Teah stuck her face in the front window, and stuck her tongue out at Yelena.

Yelena said hastily, "It was good talking to you, but I have to go."

Yelena started to get up and put her jacket on.

"May I call you? Sometime!" Keith had a confused look on his face as if he accidentally verbalized his inner thoughts, thoughts that should not be verbalized so quickly.

Yelena paused with her jacket halfway on.

Normally Yelena would never give her number out so quickly, but this was not any occasion. A foreign man showed some interest in her. She did not love him nor would she marry him, at least not at his time, but he seemed interesting. Her life was dull, so she needed something interesting in it, something that was different, something that was not Bosnian.

After Yelena slipped her coat all the way on, she grabbed a pen and a small piece of paper from her purse, and quickly wrote her phone number on it. She tried to raise her head and look at Keith as she slid the paper across the table to him, but she couldn't.

Yelena was blushing, and her face was completely red. This was unorthodox to give out her number so quickly. She hastily turned and fled out the front door.

"Bye," Keith said in a loud and confident voice.

Yelena was not sure why she gave out her phone number so quickly. However, she knew she was a poor woman.

Before the Bosnian War, the Serbs and Bosnians lived together peacefully. They were all citizens of Yugoslavia. Then the Bosnian War drove a wedge between these two people. The Serbs were the aggressors. The Bosnians wanted to break away from Yugoslavia and form their own country, but the Serbs wanted to keep Yugoslavia together. Then the Serbs were going to make the Bosnians pay for their treachery. They were going to try to exterminate the Bosnians.

Unfortunately, the war claimed her father's life. Then after the war, her mother and Yelena were trapped in Tuzla, Bosnian country. They lived in a small apartment on the west side of town.

They did not have the money to move to Banja Luka or across the border to Serbia, and be with their own people. They were trapped here, mired in poverty and low wages with a race that frowned down upon them. Maybe she could fall in love with Keith, and Keith could take her away from here, far away from Bosnia.

A large slamming door brought Yelena out of her dream. Her tears soaked the front of her dress. She heard a new voice speak to the Bosnians outside her door. She wished she knew what they were saying. What they were scheming? She wished she could be with Keith one last time. She wished Keith would hold and caress her, and make hot passionate love to her one last time. Then she could leave the world with no regrets. She will be at peace with herself, and she could run to her father's outstretched hands.

Chapter 3

It was Saturday, January 15 at 9:30 in the morning. Damir sat behind the director's desk at the Bosnian University of Management in Banja Luka. He was temporarily in Serbian country to do a little evil.

Damir sat quietly, thumbing through a Bosnian newspaper. He scanned the headlines for any interesting story. He intentionally sent the director out on an errand, and freed his office for the morning.

All the staff was away, and they were spending winter vacation at home with their families. Damir and Jasmin had the whole campus to themselves. They were the only two in this desolate, empty building.

Jasmin sat quiet in a chair across from Damir. He was reading a magazine. The outside cover was a Bosnian fashion magazine. However, Jasmin carefully removed the cover and glued it to a Playboy magazine. Occasionally, Jasmin's right brow would rise in excitement, as he found a good page to study, and drool a little.

Around 10 o'clock, they heard a soft rap at the door.

Jasmin sprang from his chair and quickly opened it.

Branko, a straight-A student from the business program, was standing there. Branko was tall, skinny with wavy brown hair. He always wore eyeglasses with the typical European sleek frame. The glasses were a Serbian copy of the Giorgio Armani glasses. He was the quiet, observant type, and he stood at the door with a worried look pasted across his face.

"Please come in, Branko. I am glad you could make it to this meeting," Damir said politely, oozing with kindness and understanding.

Damir continued, "Please hang up your coat and have a seat. Jasmin, could you please get us some coffee from the pastry shop down the street. You know the one that has the flirtatious server girls."

"Yes'em," Jasmin said, and left the office, slowly closing the door behind him. His smile was wide and beaming. Jasmin

really liked that pastry shop, even if they were flirtatious Serbian women working there.

"Good morning sir," Branko said timidly, apologetically.

"Good morning Branko. How are you this morning?" Damir asked with sincerity.

"I am doing well. I had a great semester. I earned all A's in all my courses."

"Great. That is really good news. I heard you were a brilliant student. You are at the top of your class."

"Yes sir. I do not like to brag, but I am the smartest," Branko said confidently. A large arrogant grin crept across his face.

"As you probably guessed, I wanted to talk to you in person. The finance department has brought it to my attention that you are behind in tuition payments. You owe the university 4,000 euros. May I ask what the problem is?"

Branko became nervous, timid. That smile quickly disappeared from his face, "I am sorry sir. Well, you see; I know I am behind. I plan to pay you back as soon as I can. My family is having financial problems. Once the problems smooth out; I will pay you."

Damir continued in a soft gentle voice, "You understand it costs me money to pay for the staff, the professors, this building."

Damir swept his arms out in a semi-circle to emphasis everything in the university, and continued, "Unfortunately, we are a small university, and this tuition money is very important for the university. That money is vital. Those excellent American professors cost a lot of money too."

"I know sir. If you please let me continue the next semester, I will pay you back. I will even take a summer job and pay you every penny I owe you," Branko pleaded.

"I can be a very understanding person," Damir said. He grinned, showing his front teeth, and continued, "I can understand your situation. I can be quite a generous person. You're such a brilliant student. Maybe I can find a scholarship for you. The university needs good students like you. Excellent students reflect the reputation of the university."

Branko started to smile and stared at Mr. Damir Kovacev. Branko heard all the vicious rumors circulate about Damir and his

pernicious temper. Did everyone misjudge Damir? Damir appeared to be an understanding, generous person, not the devil incarnate who purposely tortured everyone's lives.

Jasmin returned to the office. He brought two cappuccinos and set the Styrofoam cups on the desk. Then he fished several packets of cream and sugar from his coat pocket, and placed them next to the coffees.

Damir said jovially, "Ah, Jasmin brought back some coffee. Please, help yourself Branko to one of the coffees."

Branko leaned forward stretching his hand in a polite gesture to grab the closest coffee.

As Branko reached for the cup and before Branko knew what happened, Jasmin punched him hard on the side of his head near the temple. Branko lost consciousness immediately and fell to the floor, sprawled out. Branko was knocked out cold.

"Well, I guess you will not need that cup of coffee after all, Branko," Damir said gleefully. Then he added in derision, "You are so smart. I bet you did not see that coming?"

"If you do not mind boss, I will take that cup of coffee," Jasmin said.

"Oh by all means, please help yourself. Once we finish our coffees, then let's take this piece of shit to the car," Damir said. His voice was full of anger and fury. "This little motherfucker would not pay his tuition. Did he actually think I would let him continue to study at my university?"

Jasmin sat in Branko's chair and plopped his heavy, dirty boots onto Branko's back, using Branko as a footrest.

Then Damir and Jasmin enjoyed their coffees in silence, and continued to read their magazines again.

Later that day, Jasmin and Damir drove to the countryside between Tuzla and Banja Luka. They were dressed in camouflage military uniforms.

Dusk was rapidly approaching. The tall hills and the leafless trees cast long, dark shadows on the ground.

Then Jasmin turned left on a dirt road.

The road was treacherous, as it curved and winded through the back country in the Balkan Mountains. After an hour, they reached their destination, which was a valley surrounded by wilderness. The desolate frontier spread for miles in all directions. At the bottom of the valley, four vehicles were already parked there.

Both Jasmin and Damir exited the vehicle.

At least 10 soldiers clustered near their vehicles. They at once stood in a straight formation, when they saw Damir approach.

Jasmin joined the line at the end.

Damir stood proudly in front of his platoon and addressed his troops, "ATTENTION!"

All the troops snapped their heels and saluted their commander in strong synchronous movements.

Damir began, "Good morning troops. I am glad you all could make it to our training exercise today. Unfortunately, Adnan could not make it today. He is busy with an important errand. I know it is a cold day and we all rather be back at home, sitting in front of a fireplace. However, these training exercises are important. We must remain prepared for the next Bosnian War. We have to continue to train and be diligent. I also have a surprise for you today. Jasmin, will you please grab the surprise."

The day was bitter cold, and the snow was pelting the ground. Several inches of snow already accumulated on the car.

Jasmin walked to the car and opened the trunk.

A scared Branko peeked out of the trunk. He shivered from the coldness.

Jasmin grabbed him lifting him out of the trunk and tossed him between the soldiers and Damir.

Branko crashed onto the snow, landing face down. Then he looked up at Damir, and pleaded, "Pleeeeaasee Daaamiiir.I thought you understoooood."

Damir kicked Branko in the face right under his chin.

Branko flew back onto the snow and landed on his back. One of his teeth bit into his lower lip, causing blood to trickle down his chin and onto his jacket.

Branko rolled over. He remained on his knees and hands, looking up at the soldiers and Damir; his body trembled and convulsed as fear gripped his body. Branko could see the soldiers

had Zastava M80 assault rifles slung over their shoulders. The Zastava M80 was a cloned version of the Russian AK-47.

Branko began to cry. The tears streamed down his face. He realized what Damir had in store. He began to shiver from fright and even pissed his pants a little.

The soldiers laughed and mocked Branko, especially after seeing the expanding wetness around his crotch area.

Damir addressed Branko, "You have exactly ten minutes to run. Once those ten minutes are up, we are coming to hunt for you. GO NOW!" Damir said with hate exuding in his voice. Then Damir pressed the timer button on his watch.

Branko scanned the faces of the troops, and then gazed at Damir.

Damir glared down on him, as if Branko was nothing, a small helpless elk that stepped across the path of savage hunters.

Branko continued his pleas, "I am sorry sir. I will get the money for you. I am so sorry. I will pay you. My family will find the money for you."

Damir continued to glare at Branko, and then he tapped his watch, "Tick-tock. Tick-tock."

Branko leaped onto his feet like a scared rabbit and sprinted towards the trees. He ran for the nearest woods. Branko ran as fast as he could. Once he made it to the trees, he glanced back at the soldiers.

The soldiers were still standing in formation. Damir stood like a statue, watching the timer on his watch.

Branko trembled with fear. He could see his path clearly marked in the snow. His boots at least sank a foot into the snow, making his presence known. Occasionally, droplets of blood from his busted lip speckled the snow.

They were in some deserted valley with no people, and Branko had no way of escaping. Wherever he walked, he would make fresh tracks on the snow. It would at least take a couple of hours of falling snow to erase his path. Nature was not on Branko's side today.

Branko continued to run.

After 15 minutes, he had to stop running. His lungs felt like they were on fire. He hunched over in a coughing spasm, and he spit a little blood onto the snow. He did not know if the blood was

from his lip, or he coughed up parts of his lung. He wished he quit smoking years ago. A weird thought popped into his brain. He glanced numerous times at the side of the pack of cigarettes that contained the well-known warning, 'Smoking may be harmful to your health.'

"No shit," he mumbled to himself.

Branko rose to his feet and walked briskly. He did not quite have the energy to run again. His lungs ached sorely. He turned occasionally to see if the soldiers were behind him yet.

The approaching dusk made the forest dark and the barren trees casted long dark shadows upon the ground. Twilight was approaching fast. In another 20 minutes, the forest would be black.

Hope sprang from Branko's heart, as he realized the cover of darkness could help protect him.

Just then, a deafening succession of bangs filled the forest. Several bullets wheezed by Branko's head, and they barely missed him.

Branko started to run again, weaving in and out behind large trees. He kept running.

Branko thought the imminent darkness would help hide him. At least today, he wore dark-blue jeans and a black winter coat. Maybe after all, fate was on Branko's side.

Another succession of explosions filled the cold, still air. Another three bullets wheezed by Branko's leg. Then splinters flew in the air as the bullets buried themselves into the thick tree trunks.

Branko continued to run. He gasped for air. His lungs begged for a break from the strenuous physical activity.

Branko felt at any moment he would pass out from the intense physical exercise. The years of smoking were having a tow on him. His lungs begged for mercy.

Another succession of explosions echoed through the forest. One of the bullets bit Branko in his left leg. The pain was intense and excruciating, as the pain quickly dashed up through his body.

Branko fell to the ground, but quickly hopped up and started limping towards a large oak tree. He knew his life was coming to an end.

Once Branko tucked himself safely behind the tree, he pulled out his pack of cigarettes, and fished a cigarette out. Branko

was a proud Serb who only smoked Serbian cigarettes. His favorite brand was *National*, and this brand was smuggled into Bosnia from Serbia.

Branko inhaled and let the Serbian tobacco soothe his aching lungs.

The strong Serbian tobacco even mitigated some of the pain emanating from his injured leg. Branko felt at peace with himself. Branko tilted his head back against the tree, and took another drag from his cigarette. He held the smoke in.

Before Branko realized what happen, a black leather belt snaked around his throat and pulled taut. Then someone pulled Branko away from the tree, pulling the belt tightly like a boa constrictor wrapped around his neck.

Branko's body began to tremble and shake, as his body was deprived of oxygen. Then Branko's complexion turned a bluish hue, and he died.

Damir released him, and Branko fell to the ground dead.

Damir and his soldiers surrounded Branko's body, observing their trophy.

Everyone began to kick and spit on Branko. One of the soldiers zipped down his fly, and urinated all over Branko's face. Afterwards, the soldiers lined up ten feet away from the body and practiced shooting him with their assault rifles.

Branko's body shook from each bullet as it penetrated his flesh.

Damir stood to the side with gloated triumph. He pulled out a towel and began wiping his belt clean. Then he put his belt back on.

Once the soldiers were done, Damir saw Branko's pack of cigarettes lying on the ground. He picked it up and sniffed it. The whiff sent paroxysm of rage through Damir's veins. He crumbled the pack and tossed it to the ground, and then he mumbled, "You Serbian piece of shit."

Some of the soldiers shot bullets into the air to express their agreement with Damir. Then they headed back to their vehicles.

Branko's remains are still at the base of the large oak tree, hidden deep in the Bosnian countryside. His parents searched frantically for Branko, but to no avail. Branko disappeared without a trace.

Chapter 4

Keith sat in his chair for days, occasionally nodding off to sleep. It was already Sunday, January 16. He rose up from the chair, and approached the window.

Bosnia experienced cold winters. The wind howled outside, furiously blowing the snow around. Keith could see in some places, the snow accumulated several inches.

Tuzla was settled between two mountain ranges. The mountains were old and worn down, like the Appalachian mountains in the United States. The rain and wind softened and eroded the ragged edges for centuries. Trees covered the mountains with several species of pine, oak, and maples. Now in the dead of winter, the trees were bare. The oak and maple trees shed their leaves before the first snow pelted the ground.

During the winter, Tuzla was always foggy and smoky. Residents constructed homes up and along side of the mountains, and they used coal to heat their homes. Unfortunately, the coal smoke was dense and heavy, and drifted towards the ground in the very cold air, becoming trapped between the two mountain ranges.

As Keith looked out his window, he could a thick fog cover the Balkan Mountains, and he smelled a hint of sulfur from the coal smoke. Although Keith did not smoke, he was developing a smoker's cough from the exposure to the coal smoke and second-hand smoke from the cafés and restaurants.

On the table, he saw Yelena's scarf. She always wore it when she went outside. Keith walked to the table, picked it up, and smelled it.

Keith could smell traces of Chanel. For Christmas, the Catholic Christmas on December 25th, he bought Yelena a small bottle of Chanel. At first, she was surprised, when she opened the box, but her large beaming smile turned into a feigned disappointment. She returned it to him, jamming the box into his hand.

Yugoslavian women were very proud and did not like expensive gifts, even gifts from their men. Yelena knew the bottle was expensive and only one place in town could sell it. It was the

perfumery in Mercator. Mercator was a small mall that catered to the few wealthy Bosnians who lived in the area.

After Keith walked her home, he kissed her gently good night. As he held Yelena tight and their tongues swirled and chased each other in their mouths, Keith secretly slipped the bottle into her jacket pocket. Yelena wanted to be upset with him when she discovered the bottle in her pocket, but she did want to keep the 100-euro bottle of perfume. She decided she would only wear the Chanel for him and just for him.

Three days ago, Thursday, January 13, he was supposed to meet Yelena at the fountain near her work. He was a little late and arrived at 9:05 PM.

That night was bitter cold, and few Bosnians trekked outside. The streets had few pedestrians and little traffic. Unfortunately, Yelena was not at the fountain.

Then Keith walked to the coffee shop. Through the windows, Keith could see the café was filled with patrons, and Bosnian folk music echoed loudly inside. The windows rattled a little from the strong bass beat of the music. A thick cover of smoke clung to the moist, stale air inside the coffee shop, as bodies huddled to together for warmth, drinks, and cigarettes.

Keith walked to the back of the café, where the bar was located.

The manager was behind the espresso machine, preparing several espressos.

"Have you seen Yelena?" Keith asked in a worried voice, screaming to be heard above the loud music.

The manager could not speak English, but he recognized Yelena's name.

Everyone in the café knew Yelena was dating an American. The way the Bosnians gossiped, the whole city of Tuzla knew Yelena had an American boyfriend. Tuzla had maybe 20 Americans dispersed among 200,000 Bosnians, and the Bosnians vigorously gossiped about all of them. Everyone knew who they were. The Americans stuck out at the malls and restaurants as sore thumbs. Sometimes, Bosnian heads would turn to stare and gawked at the Americans, as they walked into a business.

"She went outside to wait for you," the manager said in Bosnian. As he was saying it, he was pointing outside towards the water fountain.

"Thanks, Keith replied apologetically.

Keith quickly returned to the water fountain. A thick tarp covered the fountain in order to protect it from the ice and snow. He looked in all directions, searching desperately for the love of his life. Then near one of the benches, he saw a splotch of color. If he arrived a few minutes later, the falling snow would completely cover it. His heart began to race, as he approached the buried object in the snow.

He leaned over and picked it up. It was Yelena's scarf! The scarf was a light blue with pinkish and yellowish spots on it. She always wore it around her neck. As he held it to his nose, he could smell the faint lingering scent of Chanel.

Keith immediately stuck the scarf into his winter coat pocket, and called Teah on his cell phone.

Teah answered on the second ring.

"Hello, Teah, I 'm apologize for bothering you, but have you seen Yelena?" Keith asked worriedly.

"No, I have not seen her since noon. I know she was going to meet you at the fountain at 9," Teah replied cheerfully.

"I am at the fountain now, and she is not here. I found her scarf by a bench."

"Did you check in the café? Sometimes, she has to work over time." Teah became concerned and her voice rose to a panic.

"I was just there. Her manager pointed towards the water fountain."

Then Teah became alarmed. Her heart beat a little faster, a little harder. Then she quickly replied, "I will be right there," slamming the phone down with a thump.

Within a half hour, Keith, Teah, and Yelena's boss, Emir, were standing in the police station in front of the police counter.

From the outside, the police station looked in shambles. Serbian snipers shot at the building during the Bosnian war from the mountain peaks. The concrete wall had numerous two-inch pockmarks covering the whole wall surface. The powerful rifle bullets could not penetrate through the solid walls. Unfortunately, the Bosnian government was poor. The police department barely

had funds to pay the salaries, let alone fix up their buildings. The bullet holes remain as a remnant of the Bosnian War. They served as reminders to the Bosnians, and continued to fuel their hatred of the Serbs and Croats. The bullet holes would not let the three races forget the tragic, horrific Bosnian War.

Inside the police station, the paint was peeling. The electrical wires snaked along the outside of the walls, and large industrial staples held the wires in place. The floor looked dirty and grimy, as if no one had washed it for at least a decade.

Yelena's boss, Emir, started first, "I would like to report a missing person. The missing person is Yelena Backovich, my employee."

"How long has she been missing?" the first cop asked. He was still sitting at his desk. A large stack of papers stood in front of him.

Emir glanced at his watch, and then replied, "Almost an hour."

The first cop looked agitated, and stated in a rude commanding voice, "She has been only missing an hour? Well sir, I would not worry about it. I am sure she will turn up."

Teah interrupted, "Please sir. Yelena does not run off like this. Her boyfriend found her scarf on the ground, near where they were going to meet."

For added emphasis, Keith pulled the scarf out of this pocket and held it up for the policemen to inspect.

Teah continued to plead with the cops, "Please, couldn't you go outside and search for her?" Teah tried to put the charm on the policemen. Bosnian men usually salivated all over themselves to help Teah. Unfortunately, it was not working tonight on the police. Teah's pleas could not lure the police outside into the shivering coldness.

The second policeman had a surprised look on his face, when Teah said 'outside.' He glanced at the window to see the falling snow outside, and shivered a little. Between his legs beneath his desk, his legs curled around a small electric heater. There was no way he was going outside, leaving behind the warmth of his desk, and trading it for the coldness outside.

The first policeman continued, "Look! I know you are concerned. I know she will turn up. Tuzla rarely has any murders.

Nobody has been kidnapped or disappeared since the end of the Bosnian War. Trust me, she will turn up." The cop's voice emanated confidence and sincerity.

The three, Teah, Emir, and Keith, left the police station disappointed. They decided to search for themselves without the aid of the Bosnian police.

Keith had a sinking feeling in his gut. He did not know why, but he suspected the university president, Damir, and his drivers had something to do with it. Who else could it be? Why would someone kidnap or harm Yelena? Yelena was a poor Serbian girl trapped in a poor country. She was not a threat to anyone.

The three gave up their search three hours later. They could find no trace of Yelena, except her scarf that was discarded by the bench beside the fountain.

The next day, Keith and Teah searched for Yelena again.

Yelena disappeared without a trace. If it were not for that scarf, it was as if Yelena never existed. After a couple of hours, the harsh coldness forced Teah and Keith into a coffee shop. Teah ordered an espresso and Keith a cappuccino.

As they waited for their drinks, Keith began, "Did you tell Yelena's mom?"

"After I went home last night, I called her. She broke into tears and she became very hysterical. I am going over there later in the day and try to comfort her."

Keith felt sullen, depressed, but continued, "Who would kidnap Yelena? Who would do such a thing?"

Keith pounded his fist onto the table for emphasis.

Teah jumped a little from the sharp noise.

"Teah, do you know anything about the Bosnian University of Management?" Keith's voice was stern and direct. Keith was not really asking a question about the university; he just wanted a confirmation of his suspicions.

"I know it is several blocks from the center of town. It used to be a cinema. I heard it cost a lot of money to study there."

"Have you heard anything about the owner, Mr. Damir Kovacev?"

"I never heard of him." Teah replied, shaking her head in wide arcs for emphasis.

"Have you heard anything bad about Damir or the university or maybe even his drivers?"

"I am sorry Keith," Teah said softly, reaching for Keith's hands, doing her best to soothe him, "I have not heard anything about the university. The only thing I heard was Damir was a war hero, and he is a successful businessman. He also studied and earned his college degrees from America."

Keith jolted out of his memories and then smelled Yelena's scarf again.

Keith was deeply in love with Yelena and wished she was still okay. He began to ponder. When did he exactly know something was wrong with BUM University? When did he suspect something, evil lurked within its walls, within its classrooms? An evil that would kidnap an innocent woman or perhaps murder a sex-crazed political science professor? What purpose did this serve? Who could do such a thing?

Chapter 5

Adnan was sitting down on a chair with a serious contemplative expression on his face. He was watching a documentary on TV. The documentary was the biography of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. Adnan was not quite religious, but he could feel the tug of religion on his conscience. He knew another five or ten years; he will become a devout Muslim.

Of course, Adnan was several steps ahead in the religion. He had a string of serious girlfriends spread around Tuzla. Now, if he could only marry them all. Although Bosnian women were Muslim, they strictly clung to the Western notion of one man and one wife. Bosnian women could also be very emotional. If one of his girlfriends found out about the others, he could be in serious trouble. Adnan would have to ensure the girlfriend was not clenching a heavy iron skillet or held a long sharp kitchen knife in her hand. An emotional Bosnian woman with a weapon could be fatal to one's health.

Jasmin paced back and forth in the living room. He still wore his camouflage fatigues from the outdoor exercise.

Then Jasmin glanced at the closet where they held Yelena captive. As he approached the door, he started to unzip his jeans zipper and unfasten his belt. Glee and lust filled his eyes, and his male instrument throbbed in anticipation. After a good hunt, it was nice to wash it down with a little hot sex from a stranger.

Adnan glanced at Jasmin, and said in a loud, authoritative voice, "What are you doing?"

"I thought I could get me a little something something before the boss arrived."

Adnan's face contorted into a frown, 'You are going to stick your dick into that Serbian bitch?'

"Well, I figure the Serbs raped our women; we can return the kind favor."

"Jasmin! You want to contaminate the Bosnian race with that slut's dirty DNA?"

"That is not my problem! I am not going to raise a bastard's child! That's her problem."

Jasmin reached for the lock on the closet door.

Then Adnan and Jasmin heard a heavy key slide into the lock at the front door.

Jasmin started to fix his belt and Adnan used the remote to turn off the TV.

The door opened and Damir appeared in the room. He switched out of his camouflage fatigues and wore a dress shirt, dress pants, and a new silk tie. A few flakes of snow clanged to his thick dark wool overcoat and leather black cap. He stomped his boots onto the welcome mat to shake off the sticky snow.

A cold draft immediately invaded the warmth of the house. He closed the door, removed his winter attire, and entered the living room.

Damir glanced at Jasmin, as he zipped up his pants.

Jasmin had an embarrassed look upon his face, like a schoolboy who was caught sticking crayons into the teacher's coffee mug. He sheepishly said, "I just got out of the bathroom boss." Jasmin looked at the ground when he said it.

Damir sat on the couch, and Jasmin joined them, sitting on the other side of Damir.

"How is that Serbian slut?" Damir asked in a jocund mood.

"She is doing well," Jasmin replied.

"Did she give you any trouble?"

"No, we have her locked up in the closet. She has been very quiet." Jasmin pointed to the hallway closet for emphasis.

"Did you contact the police detective to find out if anyone saw her kidnapped or reported her missing?"

"Yes boss," Jasmin replied, and then added, "Nobody saw us kidnap her. Me and Adnan were careful. We knocked her out with chloroform. Then me and Adnan helped her walk to the car. We made it look like she was drunk, and we were taking her home like the gentlemen that we are. It was very cold, and few people were around. Nobody knows we have her, boss."

"Good! That little bitch will net us 5,000 euros. However, we have to get her safe and unharmed to Budva, Montenegro. Sasha is willing to pay top dollar for her. If she has any scrapes or bruises on her, then that could lower the negotiated price."

Damir glanced slyly at Adnan and then Jasmin. Subsequently Damir added, "Adnan, I want you to take that bitch to Montenegro. Make sure you line the car's trunk with heavy

blankets. Before you cross the border to Montenegro, make sure you sedate her. We wouldn't want to attract any attention from the custom's police, would we? We have to get her to Montenegro safe and sound with no bruises."

Adnan nodded his head in agreement. This was not the first time he smuggled living or even non-living cargo across the border.

Although Yugoslavia broke up into six countries and two provinces, they erected customs and border patrols; however, the officers were very lax. They never checked the trunk of citizens of Yugoslavia, as long as they were not suspicious. One literally needed bulls-eye painted on the trunk with a caption, 'Drugs inside,' or even a couple of stalks of marijuana partially dangling outside the car trunk before a customs agent searched a car. Yugoslavian police never took the initiative to enforce the law.

Damir deliberately picked Adnan for this assignment. He knew if he entrusted Jasmin to deliver the cargo, the delivery time would be a few hours longer. Plus, the cargo may become slightly damaged and bruised, which reduced his profits. He had no feelings for Yelena. She was just a pawn on a thug's chessboard. Sasha could shoot the bitch for all he cared, as long as Sasha paid for it. Sasha could do what he liked with Yelena. Her fate meant nothing for him, except that he was 5,000 euros richer.

Then Damir started to chuckle evilly.

Adnan and Jasmin search Damir's face for clues of his exuberance.

Damir explained somberly, "I wish I could see Dr. Swanson's face when he found out his little bitch was missing."

Adnan and Jasmin joined in the laughter. They did not like one of their top professors dating the enemy or even potentially produce offspring with them.

Then Damir added, "I am also thinking about paying Dr. Swanson a bonus for his hard work. I think a two-thousand-euro bonus would be nice. He did work hard for me this past semester, and he should be rewarded."

Adnan and Jasmin roared with raucous laughter that echoed throughout the house. Jasmin almost fell to the floor to roll around in laughter.

As the laughter died down, Damir asked, "Do you have anything to drink? Something that is warm."

"Yes'em, boss!" Jasmin sprang from his seat and scurried into the kitchen. Five minutes later, Jasmin returned with a shot of bourbon and traditional Bosnian coffee.

Traditional Bosnian coffee is the Turkish method of brewing coffee. Turkish coffee is brewed in a *kanaka*. A *kanaka* is a small metal pot with the sides tapering to a narrow opening near the top. Then water, coffee grounds, and leaps of sugar are added to the *kanaka*, and softly brought to a boil until the brew froths and foams. Afterwards the *kanaka* is removed from the heat for a few seconds and then brought back to the fire to re-boil. The process is repeated four or five times. Finally, the brew is removed from the heat and allowed to set for a couple of minutes, as the coffee grounds settle to the bottom. Then everyone can enjoy a good, strong cup of Turkish coffee.

Damir took the shot of bourbon and quickly gulped down its fiery liquid. Next he picked up the Bosnian coffee and chased it after the shot.

"Aaahhh!" Damir uttered melodiously. After a minute once the coffee and alcohol worked its magic in Damir's brain, he asked, "Did you get more jingle bells and Bosnian tank mines?"

"We have three crates of jingle bells and two crates of Bosnian mines." Adnan confidently replied, "Our cache of weapons is growing."

"Good! This is really good news. We are not going to let the Serbian military get the upper hand for the next Bosnian War," Damir stated proudly.

Jingle bells started as a sick joke. Jingle bells were small round land mines that look like Christmas bells. The only purpose was to kill soldiers and people or at least remove an arm or a leg. Around Bosnia, the soldiers littered the mountains and hilltops with these deadly surprises. Although the Bosnian War ended 15 years ago, these buried mines are still active. Many of these areas have posted signs for mountain hitchhikers. The signs were painted red with a black skull and cross bones, the warning written in Bosnian, 'Danger – Landmines.'

The Bosnian land mines were in a completely different category. The Bosnian land mines were a large disk shaped object

that weighed 100 pounds. These mines were powerful enough to puncture and ripped through the underbelly of a tank, killing all the tank's occupants.

Damir continued, "We will be prepared for the Serbs next time they attack. As their military tanks drive into our territory, we will plant these Bosnian mines on the main roads. Then we will plant the jingle bells along the side of the road to take out as many soldiers we can. We will shoot down those dogs."

Damir paused for a moment, because his throat was parched.

Jasmin forgot the other part of Bosnian tradition. Bosnians always have a glass of water with their strong coffee.

Jasmin quickly ran to the kitchen and returned with a clean glass and a bottle of natural spring water.

Damir drank a half glass of water and put it down on the end table. He continued, "Jasmin, how is your surveillance going in Banja Luka?"

"Very well. After I drop off the professors off at campus, I drive around and scout their military activities. I drive by their old military bases and then the main government buildings. So far, everything is quiet."

Adnan began to abject, "Boss. I like that the campus is in Banja Luka and gives us a means to keep our eyes on the Serbs, but I do not like educating the Serbs. We are educating the enemy! They can use their education against us in the next war."

Damir sighed and then started his discourse, "I know we are educating the enemy. However, you have to realize one thing. We are educating Serbs, who in all likelihood will become officers in the Serbian war machine. From our school records, we know who they are and more importantly, where they live. Once the war looks imminent, we sneak into Banja Luka and take them out. We will kill their officers! We will damage their leadership! We will plunge a gaping hole into the Serbian war machine!"

Jasmin and Adnan were grinning.

If only those Serbian students knew what diabolical plan, the university president contemplated. The Serbian students were under the impression that the Bosnians wanted to make a little money from educating them. They had no realization that Damir was monitoring them for the next Bosnian War.

Then Jasmin and Damir began to laugh again. Adnan looked at them in surprise.

"What's so funny now, boss?" Adnan asked perplexed.

"Ah, you missed today's training exercise. We kidnapped a Serbian student and hunted him down like the dog he was," Jasmin said between bursts of laughter.

Damir even jabbed Jasmin's ribs playfully with his elbow.

"Who was this Serb?" Adnan continued.

"It was one of the top students at the Banja Luka campus. He owed me some money, so I bought his ass. His debts are paid in full," Damir smiled as he said that and tugged at his favorite black belt for emphasis.

"How was the hunt then? Was he any challenge?" Adnan asked earnestly.

"Ppppssst," Jasmin said and started to laugh harder and added, "He was weak. It would be more of a challenge to shoot at a barn blindfolded."

Damir added, "He was not a challenge. The sad thing was he was the top student in Banja Luka. These young Serbs are so weak and spoiled."

"What about his parents," Adnan asked intelligently.

"If his parents ask, I will just say he missed his morning meeting with me. I was only trying to help the young kid. If his parents ever find the body, I will send them my condolences and a wreath of flowers for his funeral."

Then the whole group erupted into laughter again, a loud raucous laughter.

Then Damir pulled out a small plastic ziplocked bag filled with several grams of cocaine.

As Jasmin saw the baggy, he quickly returned to the kitchen to retrieve a mirror and razor blade. The boss needed his real medicine.

As the room became very quiet, Damir, Adnan, and Jasmin could hear soft sobbing sounds coming from the hallway closet. They started to chuckle again.

Then three lines of coke quickly disappeared up into Damir's nose. Subsequently Damir laid his head back on the couch, and began to smile with glee.

Yelena's sobs continued for another hour.

Chapter 6

Yelena awakened to a rattling at the door.

The closet was pitch black, and someone was jingling a key into the lock. Then the door quickly opened, and the hallway light flooded the closet, temporarily blinding her.

Before Yelena realized what happened, the big looking country boy quickly pinned her hands, while the older man again covered her mouth with a chloroform-saturated cloth. Yelena instantly lost consciousness.

Yelena awakened an hour later.

She was again in a very dark place. This place was more cramped and she was lying down. Her heart rate quickened, as realization leaped into her head. She thought she was buried in a coffin! A thick wool blanket wrapped around Yelena securely.

She forced her left hand out through an opening and used her fingers to feel around. She reached outward, trying to figure the dimensions of her final resting place. Her fingers hit something hard.

Yelena rapped her knuckles on the solid surface and knocked, "Cllinnnk! Cllinnnk!Cllinnnk!" The clinking sound had a metallic hollow ring. Confusion swept across Yelena's face.

Then a centrifugal force pushed Yelena's head against the sidewall of the car, and she could discern the soft hum of the car's tires gripping the road. Yelena was trapped in a car trunk!

The driver was speeding around the dangerous curved roads in the Balkan Mountains.

Yelena fumbled her hands in the dark, searching for the lock's latch. Her fingers found the latch and tried to move any mechanism. However, the lock would not bulge. The trunk stayed securely closed. She pounded the latch with her fists. The latch resisted Yelena's futile efforts and remained locked.

Yelena softly cried again and began to think about Keith.

Yelena remembered the first night when she, and Keith kissed. The first night they made love, hot passionate love.

Yelena was in her bedroom at her mom's apartment. She went to her closet, searching for something to wear.

She had three pairs of jeans, five blouses, and two dresses, hanging in the closet. She picked the skimpy red dress and quickly slipped it on. Although this dress was over five years old, Yelena only wore it for special occasions. It still looked new. She thought tonight would be a special occasion. The dress was open from the top, had two narrow straps that draped over her shoulders and formed deep v's along the front and back. The dress revealed Yelena's exquisite physique and exposed Yelena's light creamy skin.

Yelena sat at the bureau and dabbed a little makeup, a little eyeliner, a couple pats of blush upon her cheeks, and rolled a cherry color lipstick across her pursed lips.

Yelena smacked her lips together evening out the lipstick. Then she blew a couple of kisses towards the mirror. She knew she looked ravishing.

Yelena put on her coat and fished out her pack of cigarettes. Then she placed the lighter and pack of cigarettes onto her bureau. She planned not to smoke tonight. She wanted her breath to remain fresh and pristine. Keith was becoming more than a little interesting. So who knew what would happen tonight?

Yelena walked out to the living room where her mother sat and hypnotically watched a Spanish soap opera on TV.

Yelena's mother turned to look at her daughter; suspicion filled her eyes. She asked in a scolding voice, "Yelena, where are you going tonight?"

"Mom, I am going out."

"Do you have a date?"

"No mom, I am meeting Teah at the Roma."

The Roma was Tuzla's hottest nightclub. The nightclub was small but had three levels. Each level had a balcony that gave patrons a view of the dance floor on the bottom level. A circular winding staircase with marble steps connected each level. All the rich men in Tuzla hung out at the Roma. Most patrons remained seated, mesmerized by the dancers on the dance floor. Bosnians and Serbians were not good dancers. They danced like chickens with their heads cut off, swinging and gyrating out of sync to the music.

Her mother's questioning eyes looked up and down at her daughter. These young women dressed so provocatively now days.

She squarely looked Yelena in the eyes, and stated, "Make sure you are home at a decent hour. It is just that I worry about you." Then she turned to watch her soap opera.

Yelena bent over and kissed her mom on the cheek, and added "I know mom." Then once the kiss made contact, Yelena mumbled, "Bye," and made a dash for the door before her mom could ask any more probing questions.

Yelena met Keith at the water fountain in the center of town. Keith was already there sitting on a bench near the water fountain. Keith was wearing a patterned light brown sports jacket, a blue dress shirt with a dark-blue tie, and light chestnut trousers. Keith stuck out like a sore thumb.

Yelena's face lit up when she saw him. She eagerly skipped to the bench and hopped onto it.

"Hi Yelena."

"Hi Keith."

"So how are you doing?"

"I am doing fine."

"Are you hungry? Thirsty?" Keith asked softly.

Yelena shook her head no in exaggerated movements.

"What do you want to do?"

Yelena blushed a little. Her cheeks turned a shade redder while a sly smile snuck across her face.

"So what do you want to do?" Keith repeated.

Yelena scooted closer to Keith, removing any distance between them.

"Well then, I guess we will just have to sit here and enjoy the sunset." Next Keith stretched his right arm over and then laid it on top of the bench.

Then Yelena leaned back so her back rubbed against Keith's arm.

Subsequently Keith scooped his right arm around her in a loose embrace.

Keith and Yelena peered at a flowerbed of red and white vinca flowers. A cool fall breeze caused the flowers to dance in the wind.

Yelena glanced questioning at Keith. Yelena wondered if she should have drawn diagrams on Keith's lecture notes. She sent out a myriad of signals, and Keith was impervious to all of them.

Keith gazed at Yelena's blue eyes, and whispered softly, "Yelena, you look really beautiful tonight."

Then Keith began to caress Yelena's right cheek and ear with his left hand. Keith was very gentle, smooth, and sensual.

Yelena closed her eyes. The smooth caresses sent her on a journey of ecstasy.

Then Keith bent down and kissed Yelena softly on the lips. His lips barely touched hers. Then Keith retreated from her a little and came back for another round. The second kiss was firmer, a little deeper, a little longer. Keith's tongue began to search for Yelena's. Then their tongues began to dance and twirl, as the vinca flowers danced in the breeze.

After several minutes, Keith retreated and lifted his head, and Yelena opened her eyes.

Keith was different from the Bosnians. Bosnian men were rough and to the point. Keith was different. He was so gentle and soft with Yelena. At that point, she knew she loved Keith. Keith was the one. Yelena's previous relationship was a mere curiosity and not the amorous pings of her heart.

They sat on the bench and watched the sunset.

The sun emanated a spectrum of colors, yellow, orange, and red. The clouds on the horizon turned a pinkish orange. Then the colors began to darken until the sun disappeared behind the mountains.

As the sunset, Keith kissed Yelena several more times. Each time, their kisses became longer, more intimate, more sensual.

Then Keith retreated again, and asked sweetly, "Are you hungry? I know this pizza place, the Heartland. They have good pizza."

"I am not hungry. I am a little thirsty."

"What would you like to drink? Would you like a soda or a coffee?"

Yelena slowly shook her head no in exaggerated motions.

"I can get some wine if you like?"

Yelena began to smile.

"I know this great coffee shop near the university. They have a good selection of wines."

Yelena shook her head no again, and then whispered into Keith's ear, "I do not want to be around people, not tonight. I just want to be with you, only you."

"Oh, okay.

Uh, I can get some wine at the store. Uh, uh, maybe we can have, uh, uh, some wine at my place?" Keith said in a state of confusion.

Yelena smiled.

Then Keith came in and kissed Yelena again. This kiss was deeper, more passionate.

Yelena felt light-headed, drunk from Keith's kisses. She felt a pulsating heat sensation emanating from the center of her body.

Then they stood up from the bench, and walked towards Keith's apartment. Keith lived seven blocks from the center of town near the main post office and the Tuzla Brewing Company.

When Keith and Yelena approached a dark alley alongside a building, they hid in the shadows and kissed passionately, holding each other tightly, oblivious to strangers walking by them. Their tongues played chase as the tongues twirled around in circles.

Near Keith's house was a small convenience store, Bingo. Yelena waited outside as Keith ran in order to get a bottle of wine.

Keith emerged from the store several minutes later and showed Yelena his choice.

"Unfortunately, I could only find wines from former Yugoslavian countries. So, I bought this Serbian Red Burgundy wine."

Yelena smiled again. Then she softly said, "Thank you. A Serbian wine will be perfect."

Once they made it to Keith's apartment, Yelena sat on the couch in the living room.

Keith turned on a little desk lamp, casting the room in dark shadows. Then Keith turned on his small radio. Enigma's third album, *Le Roi Est Mort, Vive Le Roi*, softly filled the room. Next he lit several fragrant candles and went to the kitchen for two wine glasses and a bottle opener.

The cork moaned and groaned as Keith pulled it out, and quickly filled the two wine glasses. The wine filled the room with a fruity, sweet aroma.

Keith handed Yelena a glass and raised his glass for a toast, "Let's make a toast. Tonight is a beautiful night. That I should be so lucky to be in the company of such an attractive young woman."

Then they softly clanked their glasses. Keith took two sips, while Yelena drank half of hers.

The Serbian wine was smooth and fruity with a hint of mystique. Then Keith and Yelena began to kiss fervently, uncontrollably again.

Before Yelena knew what happened, they both were in Keith's bed. Their clothes were scattered around on the apartment floor. Keith was on top of her, making hot passionate love to her. Yelena had no recollection of getting undressed, or how she ended up in Keith's bed. After each thrust, Yelena felt an explosion of sensation radiate through her body, as if a discharge of electric emotion surged throughout her body. Each thrust sent a wave of ecstasy through her body, and Yelena quivered from each stroke. She felt she was floating in the heavens and clouds, far, far away from Bosnia.

Then Keith's thrusts abruptly ended, and he lay motionlessly on top of Yelena.

Both Yelena and Keith could feel their cool perspiration.

Yelena wanted so badly to whisper in Keith's ear that she loved him. She was deeply in love with him.

Then Keith lowered his head and started to nibble and kiss the nape of Yelena's neck, and subsequently, he made his way to Yelena's left ear, whispering softly into her ear, "I love you, Yelena."

"I love you too, Keith."

Keith slid off Yelena, and turned to lie on his back. Yelena planted her head on his chest, and Keith embraced Yelena, holding her tight.

After Enigma stopped playing, Yelena searched Keith's room for a clock. She saw it was approaching midnight.

"Keith, I have to get back home. I told my mom I would not be out so late."

"No problem. I will take you home."

"No, I will be fine."

"I insist. A gentleman always walks a young lady home or at least calls a cab for her."

Yelena began to smile and she added, "Thank you for the romantic music and the excellent Serbian wine."

Then they both slid off the bed to get dressed.

It took them a while to reach the street. Every few seconds, they would embrace and kiss. They did not want to say good-bye to each other. Yelena wanted to keep tasting the sweetness of Keith's lips.

Yelena's recollection faded as the driver careened around another dangerous curve. Yelena's head brushed against the sidewall again. Then she uttered, "I love you, Keith," and tears began to flood Yelena's eyes. "I love you, Keith. Please save me."

Chapter 7

It was time for Keith to go. He took one last sniff of Yelena's scarf, and then he tucked it neatly into this back pocket. A partial tear formed in the corner of his right eye. He missed his Serbian girlfriend.

He kneeled down unto his knees and folded his two hands together for prayer.

"Dear God, please forgive me for I am about to sin," Keith said softly, almost in a whisper. Then he used his right hand to make a cross over his heart.

Keith rose and put on his heavy winter jacket, gloves, and a thick hat. Next he slipped the 0.38 into his front coat pocket. The coat was thick, and no one would notice the bulge of his gun.

Before Keith closed the front door to his apartment, he turned to take a final panoramic view of his apartment. This was the last time Keith ever saw his apartment. He only lived there for four and a half months, but the short time duration was full of sweet memories of him and Yelena. If he never found Yelena, then he never wanted to reside in this empty apartment without her.

Keith walked to the nearest bus station that was two blocks over.

Bosnia was a poor country, and few residents owned cars. The majority of Bosnians relied on the public transportation system.

Lucky for Keith, the buses ran until 10 o'clock, at night. He still had an hour to go. He planned to go to the northern part of the city; the place where Karl frequented. Keith did not know what he was getting into, but he knew one place where he could try.

After Karl Carlson's murder, Keith began to suspect something was wrong in Bosnia, something was wrong with the university. Keith did not know why he did it, but he would have coffee or tea at the coffee shops in the northern part of the city. He worked on his lecture notes and waited until 9 o'clock, the time when Yelena finished work.

Then a couple of days after Karl's murder, Yelena showed Keith a newspaper article. Another murder occurred during the night that Karl died. A transient was found strangled with some

type of leather cord. The strangulation was so brutal; the transient's windpipe and throat were completely crushed.

The police claimed the murders were not connected. However, wasn't it odd for a city to have almost no murders, and two murders occurred on the same night?

Consequently, Keith usually roamed that neighborhood within two blocks of that murder. This was the same neighborhood, where he bought his gun.

A shady looking Bosnian hood stood silently and watched Keith walk by. In broken English, the hood asked, "Cocaine or ecstasy?"

Keith came to a halt. Then he slowly turned to face the hood. Keith replied with an emphatic "No!"

After a pause, Keith sarcastically asked, "How about a gun?"

The hood hesitated, as he scanned Keith up and down.

Keith was ready to turn, when the hood replied, "What if I did? How much is it worth to you?"

"I would pay two hundred Euros," Keith said confidently, but Keith really did not know what the true street value for a gun was. He threw a number out there, and 200 euros seemed reasonable. Apparently, the value was close, because the hood happened to have a gun for sell, an ole 0.38 Smith and Wesson with a half box of bullets.

Keith without hesitation bought that gun. The exchange happened so fast, it was as if Keith was in a dream. Before Keith could say, 'Thank you,' the hood disappeared into the night.

Keith continued to meander along through these neighborhoods. He never took his gun with him. He always hid it behind the radiator in his apartment. He did not want Yelena to know he bought a gun.

Keith knew from Yelena's friend Teah that Yelena's father died during the Bosnian War, and Yelena was terrified of guns. However, Keith's inner voice screamed at him that he should have a gun. Harm was coming his way. Something is wrong at the Bosnian University of Management.

Then on one dark, December night, around seven on December 3rd, Keith scored big. He was sitting in the coffee shop

in the back corner in the shady Northern neighborhood. He had a perfect view of the street outside.

The constant parade of pedestrians and drivers going by the coffee shop never noticed Keith sitting in the shadows in the corner.

On that night, the night was a little foggy and dark, and Keith saw Jasmin, the driver, drive by in the university car.

For the Bosnians who owned cars, the cars tend to be old and rusty, and pedestrians would cough and belch as they breathed in the thick oily smoke from the cars' exhaust. The cars of choice were the aged relics left behind the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Yugo.

The university leased brand new Skoda Octavias. The sedans were a sleek silver car that resembled an Oldsmobile sedan. The Skodas were mass-produced in the Czech Republic, and the sedan had plenty of room. It could comfortably seat four professors and one large driver. Further, the Skodas were priced competitively and were the cheapest sedans one could buy in Europe.

Keith gathered his things and started walking around the neighborhood. Keith walked for hours and could not spot that silver Skoda. He was about to give up when he spotted a shadow, a silhouette of a car under a tree. As he snuck closer to a thick oak tree, he saw it was a silver Skoda.

The car was parked in a driveway, and the house had large oak trees scattered around the property. The house was a typical Balkan design, which resembled the Italian style. The house stood three stories tall, had orange terra cotta roof tiles, and painted a pastel yellow. On the front and back of the house, it had large spacious balconies on each floor, except the first.

As Keith approached the house, he ducked himself into the shadows, hiding behind a large oak tree. He kept observing and studying the large three-story home.

After a couple of minutes, he could see a moving shadow open the door to the second-floor balcony, and someone stepped out. It was Jasmin!

Jasmin pulled out a cigarette and started smoking. He coughed a couple of times, as he took a drag on his cigarette. Once

Jasmin finished his cigarette, he flicked the butt onto the lawn and walked back inside.

Keith decided it was time to leave, and retraced his steps back to the center of town.

Tonight, on a freezing cold January night, Keith was going to return to that house and confront the owner. He was hoping Yelena was there. Then he could rescue her and take her to America. They will leave Bosnia behind forever.

As Keith approached the front door, he swayed his head back and forth, searching for strangers hiding behind the trees. Once at the door, he knocked loudly and shouted in Bosnian, "Police, open up!"

Keith was hoping the occupants could not hear his thick accent.

After several minutes, Keith knocked again. He flashed a fake badge in front of the peek hole. He knew it was a long shot, but he was hoping his badge that he bought in a toy store would pay off.

A frail, old man opened the door slowly.

His hair was pure cotton white, and was sticking up in all directions. He appeared to be a mad scientist. He was very small, thin, and had a tired look, as if he had not slept in ages. The old man appeared to be relieved by Keith's presence, like an escaped prisoner who has been on the run for so long; he is actually relieved when the police catch him.

Keith pointed the gun at him and tucked the toy badge back into his pocket.

"You can shoot me if you want," the old man said in English.

Then the old man turned and hobbled slowly up the stairs into the living room.

Keith entered the home, and cautiously closed the front door. He carefully followed the old man upstairs into the living room and sat directly across from him in an armed chair.

The living room had a strong stench of chemicals, like a dry cleaners. The living room also had several tables with laboratory equipment. The tables had an assortment of Petri dishes, beakers, flasks, and containers of chemicals. The table near the old man had a large flask with a Bunsen burner heating a flask filled

with clear solution. The solution boiled slowly in the flask as the bubbles glided upward toward the glass tubing. Then glass tubing led from the flask to an ice bath.

Keith pointed the gun at the old man.

The old man began to speak softly, "You can shoot me if you like. However, you should know that would be foolish. You see this flask," he was pointed at the boiling flask on the table, "That chemical is very explosive. You will die, if you shoot me. This whole house will blow up with you and me in it."

"Who are you?" Keith began.

"My name is Boris. I am the chemist."

"What are you making here?"

"I make almost anything Damir wants. Tonight, I am making methylenedioxymethamphetamine."

"What is that?" Keith asked with a confused look upon his face.

"That is called MDMA for short. On the streets, the kids call it ecstasy. It is very popular with the kids all over Europe."

"Ecstasy?"

"Yes, and the chemical reaction is very dangerous. You shoot that gun in here; we will both die."

"Damir is a drug dealer?"

"Well, Damir does not sell the drugs, but he is the mastermind behind the operation. Damir, let me say, has his dirty hands in everything around this little town."

A flabbergasted look erupted across Keith's face.

How could a university president be a drug dealer? He was a president of the university, and also a dark lord who controlled the underworld of Tuzla. What a dichotomy?

Boris began to chuckle ominously. "I also make methamphetamine or you'd call it simply meth, PCP, and LSD. I also test the potency of the cocaine. Damir buys it from someone in Montenegro. Damir is such an entrepreneur. Wherever there is money to be made, Damir will be at the center."

"This is completely insane! How could you and Damir do something like this? This is wrong on so many levels."

"Well; it's a long story."

"We have plenty of time."

Keith waved the gun intentionally in the air in wide arcs and then pointed it back at Boris.

Boris let out a long sigh and began, "I was tricked by Damir. After the Bosnian War, nobody had money. I worked at the University of Tuzla and was a chemistry professor. My wife became gravely ill, and we needed to buy expensive medication from Italy. I had no money. The university had no money to pay me."

Boris paused for a second. He reached for a teacup that was sitting on the edge of the table. Boris's hand trembled a little when he sipped his tea.

Then Boris continued, "Damir appeared and said he could solve my financial problems. I started making drugs for him. In the beginning, the money was good."

Keith was still in shock. He thought this must be a bad dream. Any minute he should wake up and the dream would be over. However, he was not dreaming. This was the cold reality in Bosnia. University presidents could be drug dealers; professors could make illegal drugs, and university car drivers could kill honest people and kidnap innocent women.

"Why does Damir sell the drugs? He owns a university! Isn't that enough?"

Boris chuckled again, and added, "It is very complicated to own and operate a business here in Bosnia. A businessman has to bribe the politicians, the police, the tax inspectors, and anyone else with sticky fingers. All the government officials stand in line, demanding their cut. This money has to come from somewhere. Then I heard you professors from America are very expensive. Who knows, Damir hates the Serbs. He may be trying to finance the Bosnian War machine. He may be accumulating weapons too."

"What do you mean?"

"During the Bosnian War, Damir's wife was brutally raped and murdered by the Serbian military. Damir has never gotten over it. Damir has several houses scattered around Tuzla in the countryside. I would not be surprised if he is stockpiling weapons. Of course, I only make drugs for Damir. I do not know anything else about his other activities. In my business, the less you know, the longer you live."

Keith uttered, "Oh my god!"

After a minute of silence, Keith asked, "When you opened the door and saw the gun, you looked relieved. You were happy it was over."

"I was hoping you would arrest me and then it would be over."

"Why?"

"I am tired. I am tired of life. I am tired of Damir and his goons. I am tired of making drugs. I just want it to be over. I want to get away from Damir, but I am afraid to do it myself."

"Why are you tired of Damir?"

"He is crazy. He is impossible to deal with. I know eventually he will kill me or have one of his goons kill me. If he could find another chemistry professor to take my place, then I am a goner. Who knows what would happen to my body?"

"What do you mean he is crazy?"

"He lost his wife during the Bosnian War. His mind snapped. He thinks the world is out to get him. He tries to squeeze the world for every nickel and penny he can. Look at me. In the beginning, Damir paid me 5,000 euros each month to make his drugs. He easily makes 10 times that on the black market. Then he started to renegotiate my salary. Look at the big house! This is not even my house, but I am here 15 hours each day. So Damir started charging me rent. Last month, Damir did not understand why he has to buy the chemicals for the lab. So now, I have to buy all my chemicals myself. I try to recycle every chemical I can. I cannot do anything about it. If I do not agree, then Damir will kill me. Each month, my salary becomes smaller. Who knows, maybe next year, I will be paying him to work for him."

Then Boris burst into a chorus of coarse laughter.

"I cannot believe this! This is crazy!" Keith was in a state of confusion. His mind refused to accept the facts.

"Then wait. You teach for him at his university. Just wait a year. He will start charging you for the paper clips, the sips of water out of the water fountain, and your office space. After each month, when you get your paycheck, I guarantee there will be a new deduction. He will figure out something to take away from you."

Keith bowed his face down, so his face rested in his hands. He was holding the gun in his right hand, and he could feel the coldness of the steel barrel on his cheek.

After Boris let this information steep in Keith's mind, Boris continued, "Just take this piece advice. If you have a chance, then just kill Damir. Don't talk to him. Don't reason with him. Don't ask him questions. You point that gun at his forehead and pull the trigger; then god will do the rest. If you hesitate, he will kill you. I am positive Damir has killed many people, even after the Bosnian War. I would not be surprised if people are continuing to disappear."

"I do not understand."

Keith laid the gun on the end table. The weight was too much for his hand. Besides, the old chemist did not appear to be a threat. He wished he would awaken from this nightmare.

"Damir Kovacev is quite psychotic. He is not a little deranged where a few neurons are misfiring in his brain, and god is talking to him. He is psychotic of the worst degree. He would kill someone just to see if his soul would separate from this body and drifted upwards to heaven. He would cut someone's head off and drink his blood, if he knew it would make him stronger."

Keith raised his head again and looked directly at the old man. Keith had to know. His voice wavered, "I was dating a Serbian woman. Her name was Yelena. I believe she was kidnapped three days ago. Do you know anything about it?"

"I have not heard of anything. I am so sorry. If she was not found dead, then you are lucky. Damir hates the Serbs. If she is still alive, then most likely, he sold her to the sex trade."

"What?" Keith could not believe what he said, "The sex trade?"

"It was very common after the Bosnian War. Many poor Bosnian women were sold to brothels all over Europe. Some girls were outright kidnapped, while other girls were tricked into prostitution. The poor girls thought they were going to work in a foreign country. Their employers never specified the nature of the work or their pay."

"Oh my god!"

Keith wanted to lie down on the floor and cry. He would not let the tears stream down his face. It was his fault that Yelena

was kidnapped. If it were not for Keith, Damir Kovacev would have never heard of Yelena.

After several minutes of silence, Keith asked, "Would you happen to know where Damir might have sold her?"

"They do not tell me anything. The only thing I know is Damir gets his cocaine from Montenegro. I know he has connections to the Russian mafia. If she is not in Tuzla, then she has to be in Montenegro."

"How could I find her?"

"I do know someone who may know where Yelena is. I expect Jasmin will be over to check up on me in the morning. Jasmin should know where she is. You confront Jasmin. Then you kill him, afterwards you kill Damir, and then you go find your girlfriend. I will help you. That ecstasy should be done within an hour. Then I will press the powder into white pills and will clean up all the dangerous chemicals. Tomorrow morning, you can shoot your gun as often as you want and not worry about blowing yourself up. Just point the gun at Jasmin and ask him. Then you kill him."

Keith sat in the chair. He could not believe what he was hearing. He could feel his eyelids become heavier, as his brain was overwhelmed from the new information, he learned today. Then he drifted to sleep in the armchair. His dreams were horrific and troubled. Occasionally, he stirred and screamed obscenities in his sleep.

Sometime during the night, Boris brought down a thick wool blanket and draped it around Keith.

Keith stirred a little as the woolen fabric itched his neck and hands.

Boris started to smile, as he peered down and looked at Keith. Tomorrow he will be free. If everything goes to plan, then both Jasmin and Damir will be dead and Boris will become a liberated man. His deal with the devil will be broken. The devil will be back in hell swimming in his lake of fire and sulfur. Boris will be a free man again and he, and his wife can flee Tuzla forever.

Chapter 8

Jasmin slept soundly and awakened around 6:00 AM. It was Monday, January 17.

Outside, no clouds were in the sky, and the sun was peaking over the mountain peaks. Several inches of snow clung to everything outside. The air was dry and frigid.

Normally, Jasmin picked up the professors at 7:00 and drove them from Tuzla to Banja Luka. The trip would take four hours for a normal driver, but Jasmin shaved down his time to two and half hours. He drove like a racecar driver, accelerating around the dangerous, mountainous roads in the Balkan Mountains. Around each breakneck curve, the centrifugal force tossed the professors round a little in the back seat like a sack of potatoes.

However, today, all the professors were on winter break. There would be no Banja Luka today.

Jasmin slept in the bedroom upstairs. He sniffed the new bed sheets and burst into laughter.

Sometimes, a professor would spend the night in another city if they had a morning class at that campus the next day. The university owned several flop houses near the university's campus in case a professor had to sleep in another city.

For the Banja Luka campus, Jasmin was supposed to buy new bed sheets. Well, in fact, he did. He put the new sheets on his bed and put his old, grimy dirty sheets on the bed in the flop house. Then he turned in the receipt to the university administration.

A professor who taught economics complained to the administration.

Jasmin thought that was funny. Didn't the professor know Jasmin was the university president's war buddy? Didn't the professors know the drivers were number two in the organization, while the professors were dead last? The professors were viewed lower than the custodians who cleaned the classrooms and bathrooms.

Sometimes the drivers would play games on the professors and see how they responded. The dirty bed sheets were another game.

Jasmin slid out of bed and headed for the mirror. He slicked his grey hair back with an old comb with several chipped teeth. Then he changed out of his camouflage pants into his driver's uniform. The uniform was brown khakis and a hazel dress shirt. The dress shirt had the emblem of the university on his left shoulder.

He took a last look at himself in the mirror and stuck his thumb up. Then he headed downstairs to get some coffee and a cherry pastry roll.

Keith jerked awake. He fell asleep in the chair, and his back was sore and his neck hurt. Then he jolted up and looked around. The wool blanket fell to the ground.

Keith was still in the living room, Boris's lab. He fell asleep in the enemy's lair. He glanced at the table next to his chair and saw the gun was still there. A strong aroma of freshly brewed coffee filled the air.

Keith's stomach began to growl.

Then Boris walked into the room. He was carrying an old tin tray. On the tray was a Bosnian breakfast.

Keith could see a *chevapi* on a plate, a cup of hot coffee, and a little container of hot sauce.

A *chevapi* was a Bosnian sandwich usually eaten for lunch or dinner. The bread was flat and thin, and fried in grease and oil. Between the buns rested 10 little beef sausages with a layer of freshly diced onions sprinkled on top the sausages in a thick layer. Bosnians have a simple rule, the greasier the sandwich, the better it tastes.

Boris set the tray next to the gun lying on the table and said, "Good morning; I thought you would be hungry. I made you a Bosnian lunch, well I mean breakfast. I figure you will need some energy today."

Keith replied quickly, "Thank you."

He picked up the fork and removed the top bun. He used the fork to push off the thick layer of onions off the sandwich and pushed them to the plate's side. Then he used a knife to cut the

bread and sausages, and stabbed at them with the fork. Next he quickly gobbled them down.

Boris sat across from him and watched him eat his breakfast solemnly.

The sandwich quickly disappeared.

Then Boris asked, "How was the *chevapi*?"

"The chevapi was excellent. I normally do not eat these because they are way too greasy."

"Good. I was hoping you would like it. I want you to have plenty of energy today. You have a lot to do."

Once Keith's plate became bare, except for the small hill of onions to the side, Boris began, "Keith, it is almost time. Jasmin is an early riser, and I would expect him around seven this morning."

Keith scanned the room for a clock and saw that it was 6:40 AM. Then he asked, "What should we do?"

Boris laid out his plans, "Keith let us start..."

Jasmin put on his jacket and headed out the door.

As he stepped onto the fresh snow, his right boot exploded. His toes poked through the gaping hole, like a tongue sticking out of a cavernous mouth.

He returned to the kitchen, grabbed a roll of duct tape, and quickly wrapped his boot with three coils of duct tape. His toes were snugly tucked into the ancient boot. He mumbled smugly to himself, "I should at least get another year out of these old boots."

Then he headed for the door.

The time was 6:45. He wanted to be at the chemist's place by 7:00. Jasmin had to make sure more product was available for the markets. He wanted to keep Damir happy.

Jasmin climbed into the big silver sedan and headed over to the chemist's place.

Jasmin pulled into the driveway, and he could see coal smoke bellowing out of the chimney. A layer of fresh snow covered everything.

Jasmin scanned the front door and the yard surrounding the place. He was examining the area's foot traffic, a bad habit he picked up during the Bosnian War. Once he was satisfied that no

one has entered or left the area since last night, he opened the car door and climbed out.

Jasmin quickly approached the front door. He could hear his heavy boots crunch the soft snow beneath his feet. His right boot slipped in the snow a little from the layer of duct tape.

Jasmin pounded on the door and yelled out, "Boris, are you there?"

After several minutes, Jasmin banged on the door again.

Then the large deadbolt made a clank, as it was pulled back. The door sprang opened with Boris holding the door knob.

"Good morning Boris."

"Good morning Jasmin. Come on in!"

Jasmin entered the house and quickly shut the door. He smelled the remnants of brewed coffee and a homemade *chevapi*, and his stomach began to growl.

Boris hobbled up the stairs into the living room, and Jasmin followed him.

"Please have a seat," Boris said pointing at the empty chair, the same chair that Keith occupied several minutes ago.

Boris hobbled to the table and pointed at the ecstasy. The ecstasy was packaged into five small packets, and each packet contained 1,000 tiny white tablets

Boris mumbled, "Here is the ecstasy on the table."

Jasmin replied, "Good; the boss will be very happy."

Jasmin's grumbling stomach interrupted the conversation. Jasmin added, "Did you make a *chevapi* for breakfast?"

"Yes, would you like me to make you one?"

"Yes, that will be fantastic."

Then Boris returned to the kitchen. The rattle of large pots and pans being moved around echoed into the living room.

Jasmin leaned back in his chair, patting his stomach. His stomach purred in anticipation.

Before Jasmin knew what happened, Keith charged into the room. He was holding a .38 Smith and Wesson and the gun was pointed at Jasmin's head.

Jasmin laughed and started to get out of the chair.

A deafening explosion erupted from the gun and a bullet whizzed by Jasmin's head, planting itself into the wall.

Jasmin sat down again, and he eyed Keith coldly.

Keith began, "Jasmin; it has been a week since I last saw you. Buddy, please have a seat. We need to talk. Please keep your hands on your knees, so I can see them."

Jasmin obeyed and placed his hands on his knees. He studied Keith.

The gun trembled a little in Keith's hands.

Jasmin was gauging his enemy, and sarcastically asked, "You know Keith, have you ever shot anyone? Have you killed anyone before? I have. I probably have killed thousands during the war."

"Jasmin, I really do not give a shit about killing someone. If you do not answer my questions, then you will be my first murder. I want to know where Yelena is," Keith said sternly, but the heavy gun shivered in his uncertain hand a little.

Jasmin at first smiled and replied, "I am not sure. Maybe I do, maybe I don't. What will you do if I don't tell you?"

"JASMIN, WHERE THE FUCK IS YELENA? I WILL KILL YOU IF YOU DO NOT TELL ME!" Keith screamed at the top of his lungs.

"I am not sure Keith. Last I heard; she was on a trip to Montenegro. She ran off with another man. It's too bad, really. I thought she was a cute girl, or at least fuckable."

"What did you say? Who did she run away with? Why Montenegro?" Keith asked angrily. His blood began to boil with rage.

"The boss knows someone there. He sold her to someone? She is the property of some dude in Montenegro, a dude who owns her ass."

"WHO?" Keith screamed furiously.

Jasmin was still smiling. He studied Keith's every feature. Keith was weak. He did not stand a chance against an ex-soldier in the Bosnian army.

"WHO???" Keith screamed again. His face turned a reddish hue. His rage was ready to explode.

"His name is Sasha. He is our Russian connection," Jasmin answered nonchalantly, as if Keith posed no threat to him.

"Why was she sold there?"

"The boss did not want you dating a Serbian woman. He wanted you to teach and write research papers. Your job is only to

the university. Your wife and mistress are the university, not some Serbian whore you picked up at the coffee shop."

"What the fuck?" Keith exclaimed. Confusion swam in Keith's brain.

"Your job is the university, nothing more, nothing less." Jasmin began to smile slyly.

"I should shoot you right here and now. Then carry your sick ass outside and burn you alive," Keith said coldly.

The building rage was clouding his judgment.

Jasmin laughed and replied icily, "Then just do it. Don't talk about it. Just do it." Jasmin pointed to his forehead with his index finger, and added, "Just do it. Put the bullet right here." Jasmin tapped his forehead with his index finger for emphasis.

A fresh aroma of beef sausages sizzling in the skillet filled the living room. Jasmin's stomach began to growl angrily. Jasmin though once his sandwich was done, he will kill Keith, and then Boris. Afterwards he will sit there on the chair and eat that *chevapi* sandwich, as the bodies of Keith and Boris began to cool on the floor.

"What happen to Karl Carlson?" Keith demanded.

Jasmin laughed again, and muttered, "Oh, Karl. I remember him well. Oh, how could I forget about him? He was such an old weak guy that tried to fuck anything that moved in Tuzla."

"What happened to Karl?"

"Karl found out information that was fatal to his health."

"WHAT HAPPENED TO KARL?" Keith screamed.

Jasmin remembered that night well, like it happened yesterday. He started slowly, "We were having trouble with a drug dealer. So Damir wanted to x him out. Get rid of him. Damir and Adnan cornered him in a dark courtyard in a residential neighborhood. I stood back in the shadows. Adnan held him, and Damir wrapped his belt around his neck and stood behind him. Then Damir choked him to death."

"Why was he killed?"

"The drug dealer was skimming some of the money. We knew he was charging a little more and pocketing the difference."

"Who was he?"

"Just some piece of shit named Vladimir."

"What does this have to do with Karl?"

"Karl would frequently go to the brothel that was near where we were. He must have taken a shortcut through the courtyard. Adnan and Damir did not see him, but I did. He turned and retraced his steps quietly. I caught him quickly."

"Then what happened?" Keith asked.

"I held him until Damir caught up with us. Damir put his gun to the back of his head and shot him. We dumped his body near his apartment and made it look like a robbery. That cheap bastard only had 20 euros in his wallet."

Then Jasmin burst out laughing. An evil laugh filled the quiet room.

Keith could not believe what he was hearing. On the night, Karl died, Karl called him on his cell phone around 9 o'clock. He sounded frantic and scared, and out of breath. He said he saw something that was too unbelievable. He had to meet Keith in person. He told Keith to be very careful. Keith's life and his were in danger. Keith was supposed to meet Karl at The Wall.

The Wall was a rock-n-roll bar located on the south side of the city. University students, professors, and staff rarely visited that area. The place played their music loud, a perfect place to talk and avoid spies and eavesdroppers. The blasting rock music drowned out all normal conversations.

Keith and Yelena waited hours for Karl to show up. Around midnight, the dean called Keith and informed him that Karl was found murdered. Keith had to run outside the loud bar to hear what the dean was saying. The dean asked Keith if he knew about Karl's activities. Of course, Keith said no.

That week, the university officials and Bosnian police questioned Keith. They all wanted to know what Karl did on his free time. Did he use drugs? Did he drink too much? Was he visiting prostitutes? Keith said no to all of this.

Of course, Keith knew more about Karl's death than what he led on. He kept Karl's last phone call a secret from everyone except Yelena.

Keith faced Jasmin with a shocked look upon his face. Then Keith started, "I cannot believe this. The university held a wake for Karl Carlson. Damir even read a eulogy at the wake, and now you are saying that Damir is the one who killed him?"

Jasmin had a wide grin across his face, and he stated, "Bingo, you win the jackpot."

"Are you and Damir fucking sick? You murdered him and then held a wake for him?" Keith asked confused.

When Boris said Damir popped a few screws, he meant it. Damir and his henchmen are some sick bastards.

Keith remembered Karl's funeral well.

Although his body was flown back to Oklahoma to his family and wife, the university still held a service for him in the huge auditorium. A large framed picture was placed upon the stage to the right corner. Two candle stands with large red candles were placed along both sides of the picture. The flames flickered as the faculty and students placed flowers and wreaths around the picture.

Many of the female students and staff had tears in their eyes, while the men seemed confused, and walked around in a daze.

Keith and Yelena place a bouquet of flowers by Karl's picture and subsequently sat down in the front row.

Then Damir Kovacev gave a short eulogy.

This was the only time Keith saw the university president.

Damir wore a black Armani suit. His bald head glinted from the overhead stage lights. Damir began, "It saddens me to be here today. We lost a great professor. The students and staff looked up to him. He was a great teacher. He influenced many minds. His absence will be forever missed. His contribution and hard work to the university will always be remembered. I hope Karl Carlson will rest in peace. That god will look after him. Let us bow our heads in prayer and remember Karl Carlson one last time."

During the eulogy, Yelena held Keith's hand and occasionally squeezed it. Then he would glance at Yelena, and mouth the words, "I love you."

Boris entered the living room, holding an old tray. On the tray was a fresh *chevapi* sandwich.

Before Keith could react, Jasmin leaped out of the chair and was on top of Keith.

The gun fired, but the bullet barely missed Jasmin's forehead.

Keith crashed onto the ground with Jasmin on top of him. The gun slipped out of his hand and landed against the wall.

Jasmin pummeled Keith in the face with strong punches.

Keith thought he was going to pass out. Each punch brought him closer to unconsciousness. Then before Keith knew what happen, Jasmin jumped up quickly, and was scratching his face.

Boris hit Jasmin in the head with an iron pan, and subsequently splashed a small vial of sulfuric acid into Jasmin's face.

Jasmin began screaming loudly.

"Quick! Get the gun, Keith!"

Keith quickly rolled over onto his hands and feet, and crawled towards the gun. Keith picked the gun up and turned into a sitting position on the floor.

Jasmin sensed something was happening. The acid blinded him, burning his skin and blurring his vision. He could feel part of his face melting off. Then Jasmin reached inside his jacket and pulled the gun out of the holster.

"Boom!" The explosion from the gun deafened everyone in the house.

Keith scooted towards the wall, leaning his back against it.

Jasmin fell down to the ground. A large splotch of red began to spread over the front of his shirt. Then Jasmin died, as god called him home. Burnt flesh continued to fill the air, as the sulfuric acid continued to eat away at Jasmin's face.

Keith tossed the gun down and began to cry.

"Keith, you did it. You have to be strong. You have to be tough to get your girl back. Do you want Yelena back? Keith, do you want Yelena back?"

The tears stopped. The word Yelena brought him out of his hysterical state.

"How can I find her? Where do I look?" Keith looked confused. His first murder and he had trouble coping with it.

"You already know the answer. First, you confront and kill Damir and then you go to Montenegro. He told you the name. His name is Sasha. How many Russian gangsters could there be in Montenegro named Sasha? Boris said confidently."

"How do I find Damir?" Keith asked weakly.

"Nobody knows where he lives. However, go back to the university. Damir is always at the university. If you see Adnan, you shoot him too. Do not hesitate like you did today with Jasmin. Jasmin would have killed you if I did not intervene."

Keith sat leaning against the wall for an hour. His buttocks started to hurt from the floor.

The pungent, burnt smell from Jasmin's flesh permeated all the fresh air in the house.

Keith bent over and vomited his *chevapi* sandwich, forming something that resembled a white chunky puddle of gravy on the floor.

Boris brought him some really strong Turkish coffee and held the cup to Keith's lips, so he could drink it. Keith's hand trembled as he reached for the coffee cup.

After a few minutes, the burst of caffeine helped Keith regain his energy. Keith started to get up and shake the sleepiness from his legs. He could feel pinpricks and numbness in his legs. The nausea in his stomach began to fade and dissipate.

Boris entered the living room again and sat in the armchair across from Keith.

Jasmin was sprawled out on the floor between them. His face was charred black and the room was still filled with an acrid, burnt smell.

"What do we do about Jasmin?" Keith asked, regaining his composure.

"Don't worry about him. Once you leave, I am going to blow this place up. I will make it look like Jasmin accidentally blew himself up. Then my wife and I will disappear. We will flee Tuzla forever."

Keith staggered a little when he stood up. Then he grabbed the gun. Keith turned to leave, but Boris quickly got out of the chair and grabbed his hand.

"Before you go Keith, take this with you."

Keith glanced down at the bag clenched in Boris's hand, and saw five small packets filled with a thousand tiny white pills.

"Boris, I cannot take this. I am not a drug dealer. I do not even use drugs."

"I am not asking you to sell it. You may need it in Montenegro. This ecstasy is worth 50,000 euros. You can use it for a bargaining chip to get Yelena back. Nobody will help you for free. However, you can use this to buy some friends. Most of the women kidnapped from Romania go as cheap as 1,000 euros. I am sure you hand them these packets to someone, and they will take you seriously. Nobody will help you for free, not in Eastern Europe."

Keith reluctantly grabbed the bag. Although he abhorred drugs, he wanted Yelena back. If he had to use 50,000 euros in illegal drugs to get her back, then he will gladly pay the price. Yelena was worth much more than 50,000 euros. Yelena was priceless.

Keith searched Jasmin's coat pockets and found the car keys to the Skoda in his left coat pocket. Keith went outside and approached the car.

The cold morning air worked magic on Keith's composure. The coldness strengthened him, brought him back from the damned.

He quickly approached the car and first peered in through the dark, tinted windows to make sure no one was lurking inside. When he was satisfied that no one was there, he went to the back to the car and opened the trunk. There was a small brown leather brief case in there.

Keith placed the bag of drugs in the trunk and then tried to open the briefcase. The small locks would not bulge. He searched the trunk and found a crowbar. The edge of the crowbar would not slide into the closed lips of the briefcase. Then he started to beat the locks using the crowbar as a hammer. The cheap locks quickly gave away and unlatched.

Keith slowly opened the briefcase. He did not know what to expect. Maybe Jasmin filled it with poisonous snakes. However, there were no slithering snakes. It was three bundles of 100-euro notes.

Keith quickly grabbed the money and counted it. It was 30,000 euros.

Keith slid the money into the front inside pocket inside his winter coat, and threw the briefcase toward the nearest oak tree. He then hid the bag of drugs under the spare tire.

Keith unlocked the Skoda sedan and sat in the driver's seat. He started the car and honked the horn a couple of times.

After ten minutes, Boris appeared, walking fast. He reached the passenger side and opened the door, and jumped onto his seat. "Let's go now," Boris screamed as he slammed the door.

As Keith was pulling out, an explosion ripped through the house. The explosion was so powerful; it blew the windows out and the back wall. Then flames engulfed the whole house, consuming it within minutes.

"Don't worry about Jasmin. He is gone now."

"Drop me off near the university. I will take the bus home and disappear. You go find Damir. If I were you, I would go to the university first. Like I said, don't talk to him. Just shoot and kill the insane bastard."

Keith drove in silence the six blocks into town. As Keith neared the university, he pulled over to let Boris out.

Boris turned to Keith, "Keith, thank you for giving my life back. I pray that you succeed and get your girlfriend back." Then Boris held his hand out for a handshake.

Keith vigorously shook Boris's hand.

Then the door slammed shut, and Boris was gone.

Keith pulled back onto the road and headed to the university. He headed to confront the university president of the Bosnian University of Management.

Chapter 9

Veronika sat quietly in a chair in Damir's office. Her hands twitched, and her body shook uncontrollably. Occasionally, a tear would make a quick dash down her cheek.

Damir stood over Veronika menacingly, screaming at the top of his lungs. His hand and arms flailed wildly. He yelled, "You worthless BITCH! I gave you a simple job, and you FUCK IT UP! PLEASE EXPLAIN TO ME HOW YOU CAN FUCK UP AN EASY JOB!"

Damir's face was beet red. The volcano was blasting at full power. As he was screaming, spittle flew from his lips. Some of it landed on Veronika's hair.

His voice rose to a crescendo, "You are FIRED! GET YOUR SHIT AND GET THE HELL OUT OF MY UNIVERSITY! YOU HAVE UNTIL THE END OF THE DAY TO HAVE EVERYTHING GONE!"

The tears flowed heavier down Veronika's face. Then she bolted for the door. In the process, the chair that Veronika was sitting in, tumbled and fell over.

Damir watched Veronika flee. A gleeful smile crept across his face. He picked up the chair and put it back in its place. Then Damir sat behind his desk.

His smile deepened. Damir felt good. He just completely destroyed a person. Today, indeed, was going to be a great day.

He grabbed the glass of *Cockta* and quickly quenched his parched throat. All the screaming drained the moisture in his mouth.

Cockta was a popular cola soda drink in Yugoslavia. It tasted like a coke with a squirt of lemon juice.

Once Damir was refreshed, he opened a folder. In neat, meticulous letters, Resumes-HR Manager, was written on the tab in nice penmanship.

Damir began to leaf through the stack of resumes. Thirty good applicants were vying for Veronika's position. Another calf would be led to the slaughterhouse.

Just then, Damir's office door opened slowly and Admir; the computer administrator, came in.

The rage flared back up, and Damir's face turned a deep beet red. The volcano was ready to blow again. Residual anger was still left over from poor Veronika.

Damir started to shake and tremble with rage.

Admir sat in the vacant chair in front of Damir's desk. He saw the anger in his boss and began to apologize profusely, "I am sorry. I am so so sorry. I did not mean to offend you. I apologize for my mistake. Please boss, I am sorry. It will not happen again. Pleeeeee..."

Damir leaped to his feet. The rage coursed through his veins. He felt alive, blinded with drunken fury.

Damir sprang like a limber cat and pounced on Admir. The fists were flying in a barrage. Damir repeatedly punched Admir in the face, blackening his eyes, and busting his lip open.

The attack was so fierce; Admir tumbled to the ground, while Damir latched on and continued to pummel Admir's face.

After a minute, the rage weakened. Damir came to his senses, and he slowly got off Admir.

Admir did not even try to fight back. He laid there and took his punishment like a man. He laid sprawled on his back, breathing slowly. His confused mind wondered if the attack was over.

Damir sat down behind his desk again. He glanced at the man lying on his floor. Blood was oozing from several cuts across his face. Then Damir felt a little pity for him. Maybe he was too harsh on his employee. The volcano began to simmer down and become dormant.

Damir stated in a calm mood, "I am sorry Admir. I thought I was having a good day. I already fired someone a little earlier so I met my quota for the week. I was only planning to talk to you. Well, I guess we did some talking, in a manly way. When I saw you sit down, the anger shot out of me. Are you okay, Admir? Do you want something to drink? I think I have another *Cockta*."

Admir gargled "Yeah." His voice was weak. The wind was knocked out of him.

Damir opened the small dormitory refrigerator behind his desk and grabbed his last *Cockta*. It opened with a little pop, and the drink began to fizzle and bubble a little. Then he went to Admir and helped him up with his free hand.

Damir handed the cold drink to Admir.

Admir slowly regained his composure and suspiciously watched Damir, making sure Damir would not erupt again.

Damir sat behind his desk, was pleased with himself. The volcano went dormant.

Admir inspected the bottle, making sure the drink was not spiked with a poison or had a syringe needle swimming in it. Then he took a large swig while he kept a watchful eye on Damir.

Damir stated in a calm peaceful voice, "Good, I will not fire you. I know mistakes can happen. I hope this talk will straighten you out. Please, in the future, when you spell my last name Kovacev, make sure you write it K - O and not K - E. Did you understand? I cannot let a simple spelling mess up my name or my university's reputation. Do you understand, Admir?"

Admir mumbled again, "Yeah." Then he took another swig of that *Cockta*.

Damir went to Admir and gently took his hand, and led Admir to the door. Once at the door, Damir patted Admir on the back as he walked out, and added in a soft voice, "I am glad we could have this conversation, Admir. I can understand that mistakes happen. Some mistakes are correctable. Let us hope we will not have another talk like this again."

Keith parked the Skoda two blocks from the university at the State Hospital Complex. The hospital was tucked in its own corner, a block from the main road. The hospital was a perfect place to park. Keith hid the bright gleaming Skoda in a large parking lot full of cars.

Then he rushed over to the parking lot attendant and jammed a one-euro coin into his hand.

The lot attendant eagerly pocketed that coin and said, "Thank you sir," but Keith was already out of earshot before the attendant could complete his sentence.

Keith dashed to the faculty office first. He had to collect his thoughts and wanted some time to think. As he approached his office, he heard sobbing sounds echoing down the hall. He almost walked passed Veronika's door, and then he stopped when he saw Veronika was there at her desk.

Veronika was taking the pictures off her desk and carefully placing them into a cardboard box that used to store paper. Her face was pale and wet from her tears, and her hair was a little disheveled.

Veronika noticed Keith and tried to compose herself. She wiped the moisture from her face on the sleeve of her dress shirt, smearing her make up in the process. She tried to strengthen her composure, as she patted at the moisture on her face with her shirt sleeve.

Keith slowly closed her door and sat in a chair across from Veronika, and softly asked, "Veronika, could we please have a talk?"

"Keith, this is not a good time," Veronika's voice crackled with sad emotions. She was about ready to lose her composure again.

"Please Veronika, it's about Damir."

Veronika grabbed the last picture on her desk, placed it gently into the box, and quietly sat down. She did not look directly at Keith, but stared into space.

"I do not know how to say this but Damir is an evil person."

Veronika emitted a sarcastic sigh, and uttered, "That is an understatement."

"May I ask what happened?" Keith asked with complete sincerity and kindness, "Please Veronika; this is important to me."

"I have been fire."

"Why?"

"I accidentally stapled a document twice. Damir did not like the two staples in the document. He became quite irrational." Then she imitated Damir's voice sarcastically, "Do you know how much it would cost if every document had two staples? That would add up over the year. I cannot have my employees waste expensive office supplies."

"I am so sorry. This is completely ludicrous. What will you do?"

"I do not know Keith," tears began to flow down Veronika's face again. She continued to stare off to space.

"Veronika, I will make this short. Damir sells drugs. He uses the drugs to finance the university. I suspect he may have killed some people too."

"What?" Veronika stopped crying. It felt like someone punched her in the stomach. She turned to look at Keith in the eyes, to ascertain whether Keith was playing a cruel joke on her.

"Do you know anything about this?" Keith asked seriously.

"No, not the drugs, not the murders."

"What do you mean, not the drugs and not the murders?"

"Damir is very unstable. I knew last year, he threatened to kill the Mayor of Tuzla. The mayor wanted to take the university's building, demolish it, and build a new hotel. Damir was furious. Supposedly, he went with his drivers to the mayor's office and actually threatened him."

After composing her thoughts, she added, "Then I heard he stole \$75,000 from a relief agency to start the university."

"What? I see Damir has his hands-on everything. What happened to the case with the mayor?"

"Damir almost got into trouble. He had to bribe some top officials in the Bosnian government to make the charges go away. The mayor also decided to stay away from Damir and his university. The mayor wants nothing to do with Damir. Damir is too crazy."

Keith asked in a soft, sincere voice, "What happened with the relief agency?"

"Well, I heard Damir helped some European relief agency. They were helping to feed the refugees after the Bosnian War. Damir was a liaison with the relief agency because he was an officer in the Bosnian army and a decorated war hero. Then the relief agency found some of its funding stolen. They thought it was Damir, but they could not prove it. Then suddenly, Damir shows up with a bag of money and started this university."

"Damir is turning into one dirt bag. I have never seen such a slimy piece of shit," Keith said perniciously.

Keith paused for a minute in pensive thought. Then he cleared his throat, "I apologize Veronika for my course language. It is the more I learn about Damir, the more evil the man becomes. Then I know you will not definitely like this story. Damir's criminal behavior is extensive. I believe Damir kidnapped my

girlfriend. Her name was Yelena, and she was Serbian. I believe one of the drivers delivered Yelena to the Russian mafia in Montenegro."

Veronika's face writhed in surprise, "Oh no! Say it is not so! That poor girl!"

"Unfortunately, it is true. I am looking for her."

"I know Damir hates the Serbs, so I would not put it past him. I know he does business in Budva, Montenegro. He knows people down there."

"Budva?"

"It is a resort town in Montenegro. People say it is a very beautiful place."

"Could he have contacts in other cities other than Budva?"

"I do not think so Keith. Sometimes, I have to contact the drivers and when they are in Montenegro, they are always in Budva. They never go anywhere else."

"Do you know where Damir is right at this moment?"

"I was in his office a half-hour ago. I imagine he is still there. Why?"

"I need to talk to him," Keith's face twisted into a wicked smile.

"Damir does not allow you to talk to him. He always talks to you. He has his large driver, Adnan, sit outside his office door and make sure no one enters his office without an appointment. Besides, it is dangerous to see Damir. He fires anyone who upsets him."

"I still plan to talk to him. I will give him my letter of resignation. I decided it is time to move on. I can no longer work for him."

"Just be careful. I heard rumors that his drivers are armed. Adnan may have a gun. You will have to shoot your way past Adnan, but it was weird today. I have not seen Adnan at all today. It seems like he has been gone for a couple of days."

Veronika happened to glance down towards Keith's abdomen. Keith did not know it, but when he sat down, his unzipped winter coat opened a little, and a gun handle protruded from his trousers.

"Maybe you can see him without an appointment. Just be careful."

Keith reached inside his jacket and grabbed one bundle of euros. Then he flipped his winter coat closed, hiding the gun.

Keith placed the bundle of money on Veronika's desk, and stated, "Veronika, I want you to take this..."

"I cannot take this money, Keith!" Veronika feigned disapproval.

"Please take this money. This money is not mine. I stole it from Damir. Think of it as a contribution to your retirement plan or a severance package. It should be around 10,000 euros. I am giving this money to you; no strings attached."

"Thank you," Veronika said softly, gratefully. She became mesmerized as she stared at the money.

"It looks like I will turn in my letter of resignation. You take care of yourself." Keith quietly rose from the chair, and left her office. He even closed her door slowly and unpretentiously.

Before the door closed, Veronika exclaimed, "Thank you Keith."

Veronika's sobbing came to a halt and she remained seated. She took another look at the bundle of money and began to smile. Then she quickly snatched the money and tucked it secretly into the inner coat pocket. Subsequently she mumbled to herself, "It will be a nice day."

Keith quietly walked down the corridor of the administrative wing. The university was on winter break, and most staff were away from the university, enjoying time with their families.

Keith searched the hall, and all the doors were closed. The university was deserted.

All the doors were old covered with a fresh coat of enamel paint, except the last door. The last door looked like a new mahogany door with a polished brass knob. On a gold color placket attached next to the door, Damir Kovacev, President, was engraved in black letters.

Keith quietly approached Damir's Office. He also glanced at the desk that was next to Damir's door. The desk was vacant and Adnan was nowhere to be seen.

Once Keith reached the door, he grabbed the gun's handle and slid the Smith and Wesson from its hiding place. He glanced behind him to make sure the coast was clear.

The corridor was dead quiet. Nobody was here today.

As he reached for the door handle, his heart rate started to accelerate. Keith could hear the slight murmur of his heartbeat in his ears.

He grabbed the door handle tightly and opened the door furiously. The door swung inward and banged against the wall. Then Keith charged in; his gun was drawn and was pointed at Damir's head.

Damir raised his head and glanced at Keith. Damir's smile widened and he was oblivious to the gun. Next Damir announced in a civil, respectful manner, "Please come in Keith. I have been meaning to talk to you."

Keith glanced down at his hand to make sure he was holding a gun and not a banana. The polished steel of the gun glistened under the office light. He used his other hand to close the door gently and approached the desk.

Damir folded his hands together and rested them on that folder of resumes. He was still smiling.

Keith stopped three feet away from the front of Damir's desk. He still pointed the gun at Damir's head.

"Like I said, I have been meaning to talk with you. You are my best employee."

"What?" Confusion filled Keith's voice.

"I just saw the student's evaluations from last semester. You have the highest rankings. The students like you. I also saw you submitted a new research paper. I only glanced at the abstract, but the paper looks good."

"Where is Yelena?" Keith's voice was firm, assertive.

"I hope you will continue to teach in the university. I have high hopes for you. You are my best employee," Damir said in a jocund manner.

"WHERE IS YELENA?" Keith's voice began to rise in anger.

"I hope you find Bosnia to be a nice place to live. I hope you will continue your tenure at the university," Damir stated jovially, completely oblivious to the gun.

"WHERE IS YELENA?" Keith's voice rose to a scream. Then to emphasize his point, he used his thumb to pull back the trigger of the pistol.

A metallic click echoed throughout the room.

"Keith, oh Keith. You are not the first person to stick a gun in my face. You just put that gun down and go back to your office. Then we will forget about this little indiscretion. You will find out that I can be a generous, forgiving man. I always take care of my employees well, especially my best employees," Damir stated in a jovial tone.

Keith's face started to redden as anger coursed through his veins, "WHERE IS YELENA?"

"Oh, is that the name of that Serbian bitch? Keith, I really do not know. Besides, you are better off with a Bosnian girl. They make better wives than Serbian women. Serbian women can be quite nasty."

The anger overwhelmed Keith's conscience, "WHAT?"

"Serbian women make terrible wives. I cannot have my best employee dating a Serbian woman. So put that gun down and go back to your office. Then this weekend, we can go out, and I can introduce you to some nice Bosnian women. Bosnian women are much better than Serbian. Trust me, I know. At one time, I had the most beautiful Bosnian woman. Her name was Emina."

Keith began shaking with rage, "I WANT YELENA! IF YOU DO NOT TELL ME WHERE SHE IS, I WILL KILL YOU!"

Damir's smile contorted into a grimace. His voice became cold, emotionless, "Keith; I would not do that if I were you. I am asking you one last time. Put that gun down and go back to your office. This is your last warning! Trust me, my friend. You do not want to make me angry. I can be one vengeful cruel motherfucker!"

Rage boiled in Keith's blood. All reasoning and conscience shut down. Keith screamed at the top of his lungs, "TELL ME WHERE YELENA...."

Then a deafening explosion reverberated through the room.

A hole formed in the center of Damir's forehead. Blood began to ooze out through the hole and down Damir's nose. Damir shifted his eyes upward, to see if he could see the damage. At first, Damir's eyes gleamed with confusion, then the life drained out of

them, and finally, the eyes became blank. Afterwards Damir's head fell onto the desk on top of his hands that were lying on that folder of resumes.

Logic and reasoning swam back into Keith's head. Keith tilted the gun backward to examine it. He was not sure if he fired the gun or not. A wisp of smoke emanated from the barrel of the gun. Everything seemed surreal, like a bad dream. Keith was hoping this nightmare would end, and he would awaken in a cold sweat in this bed. However, the bad dream continued. Keith had to traverse this nightmare until the end. He could not awaken yet.

This was reality. He murdered another person.

Keith used his free hand to touch the barrel, and it was hot to the touch. Keith slipped the gun into his winter coat pocket and approached Damir's desk.

Keith could not believe his luck.

Damir had a large assault rifle built into the underbelly of the desk. The rifle's barrel was pointed directly at Keith. A small pedal was installed above the floor and one stomp of a foot could pull the trigger of the gun. Damir's right foot was brushing against the pedal. Damir was going to toy with him and then murder Keith. Keith probably would be buried in the foothills of the Balkan Mountains in an unmarked grave.

Luckily, in a moment of rage, Keith accidentally pulled the trigger of the gun, foiling Damir's plans.

Then Keith reached for a Kleenex on Damir's desk. He tipped toed backwards to the office door, keeping his eye on Damir.

Damir's head remained draped on the desk and was completely motionless. A pool of blood widened and spread across the surface of the desk.

Once Keith reached the door, he used the Kleenex to wipe the door handle. Before he shut the door, he glanced at the spot where he stood in front of Damir. He scanned the floor, making sure he did not drop anything.

Keith noticed some splotches of blood near the chair in front of Damir's desk. He inspected his arms and face to see if he was bleeding. When he was satisfied that it was not his blood, he quietly closed the office door and wiped the door handle on the other side.

Keith scanned the corridor, and he could see no other living soul around. Then he retreated down the corridor and walked outside into the cold January air. He had some errands to complete before heading to Montenegro.

Keith did not know it, but Admir was still in the building. Admir was nursing his wounds in his office. His office was four doors down from Damir's.

The gunshot echoed loudly throughout the whole building, and Admir heard it. He became afraid. Perhaps the boss and Admir needed another man-to-man conversation. Maybe a bullet would incite Admir to be more careful, become a better employee.

Admir scanned the room. This room had no windows. He had only one exit, which was the door. Since Admir was the computer administrator, his room full of computer servers had to be secure. On one side of the office, he had a desk and on the other side, were racks of computers and routers.

Admir turned the office light off and slowly opened his door, leaving the door slightly ajar. He saw Damir's door open.

A few seconds later, a professor emerged. The professor glanced down the corridor and then walked quickly to the exit.

Admir remained glued to the spot, and he shivered in fright. He kept staring at Damir's office door, waiting for that door to open and an insane Damir with a pistol in his hand run out and starts shooting.

After fifteen minutes, Admir began to move slowly. He meandered on his tiptoes to Damir's office door and put his ear against the door. He could not hear anything. Not a peep came from the room.

Then Admir slowly opened the door, and peeked inside. His head came in first tilting at an angle and then the rest of his body followed.

Damir was at his desk. His head was lying down on top of the desk.

Admir effusively apologized, "I am sorry boss. I did not mean to awaken you. Please do not beat me again. I will return when you are in a better mood."

Damir remained still, motionless.

Then Admir noticed the blood on the desk. The pool of blood was finding its way to the edges of the desk and was dripping onto the floor.

Admir started to smile. He felt much better. The throbbing from his bruises and cuts faded away, and he muttered, "Thank you for the *Cockta*, you asshole!"

Admir shut the office door and wiped his fingerprints off the handle. Then he returned to his office and gathered his things. He left early from work in a jovial mood. He began to hum an old Bosnian hymn, 'Death to the Devil.' As far as he was concerned, he did not hear a peep. He was still on vacation and had not been anywhere near the university that day, the day the devil was slew and return to his fiery eternal dungeon.

Chapter 10

Adnan drove all night. He was going to deliver the cargo as fast as he could. He drove through the Balkan Mountains under a canopy of leafless trees.

The trees filled every nook and cranny of the Balkan Mountains. In the dead of a winter night, the trees were bare skeletons pointing their gnarled twig fingers at the sky. The moon would peek through the clouds, casting the dancing shadows from the tree limbs onto the road.

Adnan accelerated around the mountainous curves at 60 miles per hour. He had only one thought in his mind, deliver the cargo safely. Get to Montenegro carefully.

Occasionally, Adnan would slow down. He drove along this road so often, he knew where all the police cars were hiding. He was not worried about the police. As long as the Serbian bitch was quiet, Adnan would pay his fine in cash.

Around 7 o'clock in the morning, Adnan approached the border between Bosnia and Montenegro. He slowed down and parked his car behind an abandoned building.

The building probably was a store before the Bosnian War. Now, bullet holes decorated the front of the store with gaping holes, while a mortar blasted a gaping hole through the roof.

The southwest of Bosnia was the poorest in the country, and its climate is dry and acrid. Somewhere between Sarajevo and Mostar, the climate changed. Lush trees gave away to scrawny brush. Vineyards dotted along the country roads around Mostar, and the thirsty grapes were irrigated by a river that flowed through the region.

This area within the country experienced the worse of the Bosnian War. Bullet riddled buildings were scattered along the countryside. The residents were too poor to fix up the buildings.

Adnan turned the engine off. He reached into the glove compartment and removed a semi-clean dishtowel and a bottle of chloroform. Then he exited the car.

Adnan reached the trunk and placed his right hand on the trunk near the key hole. Then he bent over to listen with his right ear.

Everything was quiet, until a soft chant echoed along the hillsides. It was the call to prayer. Five times every day, someone climbed the minaret tower of a mosque. Then that person chanted a prayer that echoed miles away. Devout Muslims would kneel down and pray in the direction of Mecca.

Adnan felt a tinge of sadness as the melodious chant penetrated his heart. Once the chant was over, he drenched the cloth in chloroform, unlocked the trunk, and quickly opened it.

Yelena was still there and she was sound asleep. Her face looked serene and peaceful. She mumbled, "Oh Keith," in her sleep.

Yelena managed to get her hands out of the thick blanket. One of her hands moved as if she were reaching out for someone. She was embracing someone in her sleep.

Yelena's eyes fluttered open. Her peaceful face contorted into a frown, as reality began to sink in.

Then Adnan reached over and placed the cloth over her mouth.

Subsequently Yelena's frown softened and disappeared. Her eyes became blank and her eyelids clamped closed, as Yelena went to sleep again.

Adnan studied Yelena's face and then open the blanket to examine her body. He whispered, "If only you were Bosnian. You would make someone a beautiful wife." Then he folded the blanket over her body and hands again.

Yelena's face only poked through, and she was sound asleep.

Adnan gently closed the trunk lid, and he leaned against the car, pulling out a pack of cigarettes and his lighter. He plucked a cigarette out and planted it squarely between his lips.

As he lit the cigarette, he inhaled a large plume of smoke. Then he immediately began coughing.

Although southwest Bosnia was much warmer, the air was dry and chilly, the first cigarette of the day always made Adnan coughed. The cool parched weather exasperated his coughing.

Once Adnan finished the cigarette, and he flicked the butt to the edge of the dirt parking lot between a mass of dormant weeds.

This was one of Adnan's resting spots and this area was littered with cigarette butts, the brand *Bosna* to be exact.

Adnan climbed back into the car and returned the cloth and chloroform to the glove compartment. Then he started the car and headed to the border.

Adnan approach the Bosnian customs.

This crossing point rarely saw any traffic. The Bosnia government was so poor; it could not even afford to build a shack for customs officials. Bosnian customs was a dark-red shipping container that had a window and door cut out. The Bosnian blue and gold flag danced and fluttered in the wind.

Adnan slowed the car to a stop.

Ahead of Adnan, a farmer was parked. His pickup truck had a severe case of rust leprosy, and a customs official stood near his door, studying his documents. The farmer had several bales of hay on the truck's cargo bed.

Adnan reached over and grabbed his insurance and inspection papers from the glove box. Then he pulled out his driver's license from his wallet.

Bosnians did not need a passport to visit other former Yugoslavian countries.

The farmer started his truck and pulled away.

Then Adnan drove to the same exact spot that the truck occupied a few seconds ago. He rolled down the window.

"Sir, please turn off the car engine," a stern authoritarian voice demanded.

Adnan looked up at the officer. He was another large guy in full uniform. On his left side dangling from his belt was a nightstick, and a pair of handcuffs, while on his right side was a Zastava pistol.

Adnan immediately turned off the car engine.

"May I see your documents?" the officer demanded.

"Yes sir. Here are my documents." Then Adnan gently handed them to the officer.

The customs official began to bark questions, as his meaty large hand leafed through the documents.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to Budva, Montenegro."

"What is your business?"

"I am a driver for the Bosnian University of Management. I have to pick up some supplies for the university."

"Do you have any illegal contraband?"

"No sir," Adnan said with a beaming happy voice, and added as an after thought, "I am clean. I was simply going for some supplies for the university."

The officer stopped looking at the documents, and he studied Adnan's face.

Adnan cracked a half-crooked smile, like 'oh shucks!' I am just an ole simple Bosnian boy.

The officer glanced over at the custom's building; he saw his empty seat through the open doorway. His mug of coffee was becoming cold, and the other two customs officers were playing cards.

The officer handed Adnan his documents and walked back to join his friends at the table.

"Thank you sir," Adnan said, while his smile widened. Then Adnan pulled away.

Then Adnan drove up a mountainous road to the Montenegrin customs. He already saw the farmer drive through the stall.

Montenegro was a beautiful country located on the Adriatic Sea across from Italy. Montenegro means black mountains. The mountains jugged up to the warm, blue salty waters of the Adriatic Sea. The climate along the Montenegrin coast is tropical and rarely experiences any temperatures below freezing.

Montenegro was a wealthier country than Bosnia. The government granted citizenship to anybody who brought more than half-million euros into the country. Unfortunately, the government officials never asked where the money came from, so Montenegro became the playground of the Russian mafia and other rich families with dubious pasts.

Montenegro also eliminated most of their regulations and simplified their legal system while Bosnia still clung to the overly complicated communistic system with its complex rules and regulations. Bosnia remained stuck between Communism and a market economy.

A wealthy Montenegrin government built new customs facilities along its borders. At this particular customs, it was a

small plain white building with toll road stalls barricading the road. The Montenegrin flag blew in the wind, which was red with a double-headed, golden eagle with its wings spread out across the flag.

Adnan pulled up to a stall, and stopped at a cross bar that prevented his entry into Montenegro.

A female officer with a clipboard began shouting questions, "What is your purpose for coming to Montenegro?"

Another officer walked around the car with a flashlight, looking beneath the car.

"I am here to pick up supplies for the Bosnian University of Management. I am their employee."

"How long do you plan to spend in Montenegro?"

"I will pick up the supplies in Budva today and cross the border again tonight."

"May I see your documents?"

"Yes, ma'am," and Adnan handed the documents to the officer.

The officer quickly leafed through the documents and passed them back to Adnan.

The officer with the flashlight glanced at the first officer, nodding his head up and down. The nod was slightly noticeable. Then he began to walk away and enter the custom's building.

"Before you can drive into Montenegro, you have to buy a road sticker".

"I know; I know; it is the road tax in Montenegro." Subsequently Adnan fished a five-euro note from his pocket and handed it to the officer.

Then the officer placed a translucent sticker on the inside of the car windshield. Afterwards, she added, "This sticker is good for thirty days," and she reached over and pressed a green button that raised the crossing guard, "Welcome to Montenegro!"

Adnan cracked a smile, and added, "Thank you," Then he glanced at the female officer as she walked away.

Although Montenegro sided with Serbia during the Bosnian War, Adnan did not harbor any bitter feelings about Montenegrins. Montenegro attacked the Croats in Southern Croatia and not the Bosnians.

Adnan could date a Montenegrin, especially with Montenegro attracting the wealthy from Europe, while his country was still mired in poverty and petty politics. He definitely could marry a non-Bosnian, especially if she became a devout Muslim.

Then Adnan drove the car into Montenegro after the female officer's ass was tucked safely inside the custom's building, out of sight of Adnan's molesting eyes.

Adnan arrived in Budva around 11 o'clock.

Adnan arrived just in time. Yelena was furiously banging on the car's trunk; the roar of traffic muffled her screams for help.

Adnan drove the car to the peak on the mountain overlooking the bay.

Sasha was an extremely rich guy and bought the whole mountain for himself. He built a palatial three-story white house on the summit with orange terra-cotta tiles covering the roof. A ten-foot high solid brick fence surrounded the home. Sasha had teams of armed guards patrol his property.

Adnan drove to the gate, which was barricaded by a large, black iron wrought fence.

A burly guard left the guard shack and approached the car.

Adnan rowed down the window.

"Hello Adnan, long time no see," the guard's features softened, and he extended his hand for a handshake.

"Hello Dmitry. It has been a long time." Then Adnan gripped Dmitry's hand and firmly shook it.

Yelena banged on the car's trunk. Her muffled screams, "HEEELLLPP! HEELLLPP!"

"I see you brought some cargo. The boss is expecting you. Just pull around to the front of the house."

"Okay."

Then Adnan drove through the gate, and pulled around to the cul de sac in front of the house. He carefully maneuvered around a large water fountain that was in the center of the cul de sac.

Sasha was standing on the edge of the cul de sac. His wild long black hair draped around his shoulders. He had a black, neatly trimmed beard and mustache. His eyes radiated a savage intelligence.

Sasha was wearing a white bathrobe. His robe was slightly open, revealing the black swimming trunks underneath. He seemed immune to the climate's coolness with temperatures hovering in the 50s.

Two large bodyguards stood sentry on both sides of Sasha. They both held AK 47s slung over their shoulders.

A third body guard stood further away. He was holding a leash to a ferocious German Sheppard.

The German Sheppard began barking maliciously, as Adnan climbed out of the car.

Adnan glanced at the two large bodyguards with the AK-47s and, he peered down at his tiny Zastava pistol that was tucked in his coat. He was slightly embarrassed, as if a length of a gun's barrel reflected the size of his manhood.

"Oh, Adnan, dear friend," Sasha said jovially.

"Hey Sasha, long time no see."

"When is Damir going to come down and pay a visit?"

"Damir has been real busy. He wants to come, but he is so busy with university."

"I heard you brought me a present?"

"Yes, sir; she is in my car." Then Adnan slowly pulled out his car keys. One had to be careful about quick movements around this neighborhood. A person could be accidentally shot if he reached into his pocket too quickly. Then he opened the car's trunk.

Yelena bobbed her head up. Her dark hair sprinkled in all directions, even covering her eyes.

Before Yelena knew what happened, Sasha's bodyguards grabbed Yelena and pulled her out of the car.

Yelena tried to struggle free, but the guards kept a vice grip on her arms. Yelena continued to contort and struggle, but to no avail. She could not break free from these strong powerful men.

"Boy, she is feisty!" Sasha exclaimed exuberantly and then added, "Pin her legs, I want to have a look at her. Hurry up. I don't have all day."

Sasha studied Yelena's petite body, like a diamond cutter examining his prized stone. He started with her legs. He sniffed them. Then he continued to sniff Yelena, working his way up. He

paused around Yelena's crotch area, and whiffed strongly and murmured to no one, in particular, "Very nice. Very nice indeed!"

Then Sasha continued to sniff Yelena until he reached Yelena's face.

Suddenly, Yelena spit on him before Sasha knew what hit him. She screamed, "You dirty, filthy pig!"

Sasha's backhand was lightning fast. He smacked Yelena hard across the cheek.

Yelena's head flew to one side from the powerful blow.

"Take her upstairs to her room," Sasha commanded his guards. Then Sasha wiped the dripping spit off his face with the collar of the robe, and started to laugh.

Afterwards Sasha said jocosely, "Boy, she really is a hell cat. We have to keep these bitches in line. If we cut them any slack, then they will think they own the place. I look forward to breaking her in and teaching her some proper manners."

Adnan began to laugh. At first, his laughter was a low chuckle that rose to a raucous crescendo.

"Come my friend! Let us have a drink," Sasha said politely, bowing slightly and flinging his outstretched hand in a welcoming gesture.

Yelena twisted and contorted her body as the guards carried her upstairs to the second floor. She was weak like a leaf being blown around in a hurricane. Her struggles were futile.

The guards opened a door at the end of the hall, shoved Yelena in, and quickly shut the door.

Yelena regained her composure and looked around the room. The room had a large queen-size bed with a canopy. Both the bedspread and canopy were pink. A vanity with a large mirror was off to the side, and various makeup covered its surface. The room had adjoining small bathroom and a minuscule closet with several hangers that held lingerie.

Yelena began to smile when she saw the window that overlooked the backyard over the enclosed swimming pool. She spread the curtains back revealing bars over the window. Her smile quickly turned upside down into a frown.

Then Yelena investigated the bathroom and closet, searching for an exit out of this nightmare.

As a last effort, Yelena quietly approached the door and turned the knob. The knob would turn, but the door would not open. She was locked inside this room.

Yelena gave up on her plans for escape. She sprawled out over the bed lying face down and buried her face into a pillow. Then she began to cry again. Between her sobs, she whispered under her breath, "Keith! Keith! Keith!..."

Adnan was sitting down on a brown leather couch in Sasha's den.

Sasha went behind the bar, and politely asked, "I know you have to be thirsty. What would you like to drink?"

"I will take a whiskey on the rocks," Adnan replied politely. He knew from previous experience that Sasha could be a little erratic. One minute, Sasha is pleasant and normal, and the next, he could be a raving lunatic.

Adnan had an excellent view of the swimming pool through the den's sliding glass doors. He noticed two incredibly hot blonds laying down on lawn chairs, soaking up the morning sun. They laid on their backs, and their tops were resting on a nearby table. Their bottoms had little fabric.

Sasha brought Adnan's drink over, and placed it down on the table in front of Adnan. Next he asked, "How do you like my swimming pool? It is quite a view, isn't it? It cost me a fortune to install a swimming pool on a side of a mountain and enclose it under a sheath of glass. It also costs me a fortune to heat that damn pool in the winter."

"Yes, you have a nice swimming pool," Adnan replied with a beaming smile.

"Would you care for a swim? I swim every morning to stay in shape."

"Nah, I am not much of a swimmer. We never go swimming in Bosnia," Adnan replied weakly.

"Then how do you like the girls?" Sasha said cunningly. His eyes glinted mischievously, and added, "They are beautiful, no?"

"They are quite nice. I can tell they are not from Montenegro."

"Of course not! Those girls are from Russia. Russia has some of the most beautiful girls in the world. Those two out there came from broken homes with families who did not care for them. From the kindness of my heart, I took them in, fed them, and put them to work."

Adnan burst out laughing, and said sarcastically, "Gee, what kind of work. Do they cook and clean? Maybe work in a store and sell cigarettes and beer?"

Sasha joined Adnan's laughter with his own, and then added, "Let's just say their specialty is properly taking care of a man. That is their only purpose."

Then Sasha began his discourse, "Russian women are beautiful, the most beautiful in the world. Men from around the world fall in love with them. However, some men do not want wives, but just a little hourly session once or twice a week with a sensual beautiful woman. So, I comply with their demands. Unfortunately, my clientele has demanding tastes. Sometimes, I have some clients who will fall in love with one woman and will pay to be with her once or twice a week. Unfortunately, this type of man is rare. Then I have the other clientele. They just want the same dish once or twice, and then they want to sample others. I feel like I have to fill my whorehouses up like a lunch buffet. Unfortunately, men get tired of eating the same meat every day, even if it is very good-looking meat. Some days they like to eat chicken. That is why I am very pleased that you brought that Serbian girl. I mainly have nothing but Russian and Romanian girls working in my brothels. A Serbian girl will add another flavor, a different taste to the menu. I want to keep my clients happy and content, so they keep coming back."

"Are we talking about girls or food?" Adnan asked in jest.

Then Sasha reached into his pocket, pulled out a kilo of cocaine, and plopped it onto the table in front of Adnan next to his drink.

Adnan reached into his pocket and pulled out 40,000 euros. He counted it, and then removed five thousands euros that went back into his pocket.

"I believe you, and Damir agree 5,000 euros for the girl."

Sashsa eagerly grabbed the money and slid it into the large pocket of his white bathrobe.

"Agreed! Thank Damir for the Serbian girl. I owe him one."

Sasha glanced back at the pool, and then he turned to study Adnan's face.

"Which girl do you like out there? Please don't be shy. That is my specialty."

Adnan picked up his drink and took a greedy sip, glancing at the two women above the rim of the glass. Then he replied, "It is hard to say. From here, they both look good. I would have to see them for a closer inspection."

Sasha jumped out of his chair and strode to the sliding glass door, quickly opening it. He clapped his hands together, "Girls, come here, now! Chop! Chop!"

The two blond women slowly stood upon feet. Their perky breast curved outward.

They both walked to the table, and slowly put their bikini tops on. They were not embarrassed as Adnan gawked at their exposed natural breasts. Then they turned and faced Adnan, while they put their tops on.

Beads of sweat formed on Adnan's face; he became excited. His male organ began to throb and grow eagerly.

The two hot women walked into the den and stood directly across from Adnan. They both place their right hand on their hips, thrusting their hips forward, displaying themselves, like a fine slab of meat.

Adnan's crooked smile crept back across his face, as he glanced up and down their bodies. He was a wine connoisseur looking for every flaw in a good batch of wine. His male organ became rock hard.

Sasha stood next to one of the blonds. He used his hand to trace the contour of her body, and said, "Look at her exquisite, hour hour-glass Look at the supple, natural breast. No silicon, my

son. This is all natural. This one here is Svetlana, and that one is Olessya."

Adnan became a little excited. Now, he understood why Jasmin loved coming to Budva. Sasha was the perfect host. You do something good for Sasha, and Sasha will do something good for you. He treated his business partners with class and dignity.

Sasha pleaded for an answer, and asked, "Which one do you like?"

The girls swayed their hips.

Svetlana began sliding her index finger in and out of her mouth rhythmically, slowly, erotically.

Adnan pointed to Svetlana. She was more petite, and had an innocent-looking face. She was so supple and gentle, sliding her finger in and out of her mouth.

"I like the way she looks," Adnan said in excitement.

"Good choice! Svetlana is one of my best. Svetlana, you know what to do!"

Svetlana came over demurely, and softly grabbed Adnan's hand. Adnan allowed Svetlana to pull him off the couch. Then he followed the woman up to a bedroom upstairs.

Svetlana and Adnan were in a bedroom upstairs.

Svetlana knew the drill. This was no romance, no love, no relationship. This was pure, animalistic, hedonistic sex. Svetlana was the highest earner for Sasha and with her price tag, men never bothered to romance her or seduce her.

Another problem Svetlana had was only the rich men could afford her, and they never enjoyed using protection. She had to get used to no condoms or any form of protection. Her clients were ambitious farmers planting their seeds into her fertile field.

Both Svetlana and Adnan removed their clothes, and tossed them on the floor near the bed.

Within seconds, both Svetlana and Adnan were naked in bed together.

Adnan rudely pushed Svetlana onto her back and quickly mounted her. He began thrusting hard and wide. The whole bed rocked back and forth along with Svetlana.

Svetlana closed her eyes and pretended she loved it. She moaned and groaned to Adnan's rhythmic barbaric thrusts. She was the consummate performer.

After fifteen minutes, Adnan finished and rolled off Svetlana. Then, Adnan instantly was sound to sleep on his side, facing away from Svetlana.

Svetlana laid back, and closed her legs and whispered, "That was fast big boy. What, no stamina?" Then she struck Adnan's back with her knee.

A loud, long fart blew like a trumpet from Adnan's ass.

Svetlana quickly jumped off the bed and put her clothes on. She quickly scurried out of the room. That was another casualty of being a high high-price girl; some men never showed any manners around her, and the men could be quite vulgar.

Chapter 11

Keith stepped out of the front door of the Bosnian University of Management. He looked both ways before stepping out onto the street. He did not want anyone he knew to see him.

Keith killed two people. His hands and arms trembled in fear, and the Smith and Wesson tucked inside his dress pants felt cold against his flesh.

The cold wind still howled, as Keith stepped outside. He walked down a street.

It was mid-day. The sidewalks were full of pedestrians, and traffic backed up a block, as drivers waited at the traffic lights. The sun was shining, but the day was bitter cold.

Keith exhaled plumes of mist, as his breath froze in mid air. He walked to the center of town and walked by the water fountain.

A thick tarp still covered the water fountain.

Sadness tugged at his heart, as he looked at the bench where he and Yelena first kissed. Three teenage boys sat there right now in their spot, jostling each other.

Keith could feel the rage boil in his veins at the injustice of Yelena's kidnapping. His fear began to melt and fade away, as rage replaced it. He was determined to go to Montenegro to get his girlfriend.

Keith walked past the water fountain and Yelena's workplace.

As Keith made his way back to the street, he saw the Serbian church where Yelena, and he went every Sunday afternoon. The first memory of Keith and Yelena attending church for the first time flooded his mind.

After Keith made love for the first time with Yelena, they bonded together. They became inseparable.

The next Sunday, Yelena called him early Sunday morning and asked him to meet her there at the Serbian church. Keith was happy to comply.

That Sunday was a typical fall day. The green leaves were turning to bright reds, yellows, and browns. That day was not too chilly and Keith only donned on a brown leather coat.

As Keith approached the church, the bells began to chime. The last of the congregation entered the church, closing the large, thick wooden doors. Then he saw Yelena standing off to the side.

Yelena's smile broadened as Keith approached her. She was wearing a purple blouse with splashes of bright colors, and a pair of blue jeans. Her dark hair was pulled backed into a braided pony tail. Her high heels were black and made her a couple of inches taller.

Keith looked at the church in awe. Serbian churches shared a common architecture. The front of the church has a soaring narrow tower that jutted up five stories tall with an onion dome on top. On both sides of the tower were smaller towers that were only three stories tall with onion domes. On top of the onion domes were long skinny crosses that reached for the sky.

Keith increased his pace, which was almost a jog, and grabbed Yelena in a sweeping, lovingly embrace. He hugged her firmly, and whispered, "Hi, Yelena. I am happy to see you." Then he kissed her on the cheek.

Yelena softly replied, "Hi Keith," and pulled away from his embrace. Her face reddened from embarrassment, and she added, "Not here Keith."

Yelena pointed her index finger towards the sky, and stated, "Not in front of god's house. You will have to wait after church."

Yelena did not wear a jacket and she felt a little cold.

Keith removed his jacket and wrapped it snugly around Yelena. Then Keith reached for her left hand and embraced it, leading her to the front doors of the church.

Keith tugged at the door, and only partially opened it. He had to let go of Yelena's hand and used both hands to open one of the heavy doors. Then he gestured for Yelena to walk in first.

The chorus of the congregation filled the cavernous hall of the church. The church had no pews. All the parishioners stood for service.

Yelena grabbed Keith's hand and led him to the back of the congregation on the far left side.

Keith stared at the beauty of the church. Frescoes of biblical scenes were painted on all the walls. The trim around the windows and crown molding were painted gold while the walls

were painted a pastel blue. Where the three towers stood, Keith gazed at the open space that reached the onion domes. Every tower wall and under each of the onion domes were frescoes of angels playing in the clouds.

The front altar was very elaborate. A long table was behind the priest, and the table was filled with religious objects, many of them golden in color. The table had numerous lit candles on gold candlesticks. A large statue of Jesus Christ nailed to the cross jutted from the wall several inches. Jesus gazed up at the heavens and asked God to forgive them.

Then the chorus became quiet, and the priest started his sermon in Serbian, or Bosnian, or Croatian, depending on which ethnic group one claimed to belong to.

The priest began to chant and held a tall shaft that contained a small bowl with a burning incense. As the priest chanted, he bobbed the shaft up and down, causing the incense smoke to weave convoluted patterns in the air.

Keith glanced over to Yelena.

Yelena smiled at him, and squeezed his hand tighter. Then she mouthed the words, "I love you."

Keith blushed a little; then he mouthed the same words back to Yelena, "I love you too."

The church service was over, and the congregation began to hum the chorus again.

Yelena tugged at Keith's hand and led him to the back of the church to a small altar.

The small altar had a large portrait of the Virgin Mary holding a baby Jesus hanging on the wall. In front of the portrait was a large stand that held a tray of white sand. People pushed tall, skinny candles into the sand and lit them, while saying a prayer to Jesus. The tray held about 50 flickering candles.

Keith saw what Yelena wanted. He deposited a one-euro coin into a wooden box on the altar and grabbed two new, unlit candles. Next he handed one to Yelena, and Keith kept the other one.

Yelena lit that candle using one of the flickering candles and pushed it into the sand. She closed her eyes, and her lips moved in prayer. Then she completed her prayer by making the sign of the cross over her heart using her right hand.

Keith followed suit and place his candle next to hers, and they both exited the church quietly.

Yelena and Keith walked towards the center of town. When they were at least a block away from church, Keith pulled Yelena softly under an oak tree, and embraced her. His lips began to search for hers, as they kissed for the first time that day. They stood under the tree and kissed, and leaves began floating and swirling to the ground around them as the cool fall breeze attempted to intrude in their hot passion.

Keith came back to reality. He walked past that tree and continued to the church.

Keith opened the heavy wooden door and entered the church.

Today, the church was quiet. All the lights were off and the large cavernous church was dark inside, empty, devoid of people.

Keith's footsteps echoed loudly, as he walked inside the church.

An old woman was kneeling in front of the main altar in heavy prayer in the front of the church.

Keith approached the small alter in the back where the Virgin Mary was holding baby Jesus hung on the wall. The altar had about 10-lit candles.

Keith instinctly grabbed two candles and lit them, pushing the candles into the white sand. He made the sign of the cross over his heart as he mumbled a prayer.

Keith turned to leave, but stopped. He almost forgot to deposit a donation to the church. He reached inside his coat pocket, retrieving a ten-euro note and depositing it into the donation box.

Keith started walking back to the hospital where he parked the car. His stomach started to growl, but he could not care less.

Keith kept walking impervious to the cold wind that started to blow in his face.

The sky began to darken as the clouds hid the warm sun, and the snow started falling again.

Keith walked past the Bosnian University of Management. He did not even pause to look at the marquee. He kept walking.

Then Keith walked by the Zaffe Café.

The Zaffe Café was a hip and modern café. The Zaffe Café was next to a high school and close to the university.

Consequently, the students from both institutions were frequent customers. The café served an assortment of coffees, teas, sodas, beers, and wines, and a variety of national dishes.

The national dishes were slices of pizza drizzled with a sweet ketchup and *bureks*. A *burek* looked like a cinnamon roll, but quite different. *Bureks* were not sweet. Instead of being rolled in cinnamon and sugar, the rolls were stuffed with potatoes, beef, or cheese, or any combination of those ingredients.

Keith entered the Zaffe Café, and sat down at his usual table near the front door.

The waiter recognized him and immediately approached his table. The waiter politely asked, "Sir, what would you like?"

Keith paused for a moment. Then he stated nonchalantly, "I will take a cappuccino, a pizza with ketchup, and a beef *burek*, please."

"Okay, sir," the waiter replied, and he quickly turned to get his order.

Despite Keith's determination to get to Montenegro, he wanted to stop at the café to get some pizza. He really loved the pizza here.

Zaffe Café baked their pizza in a brick oven heated by hickory wood. The hickory wood imbued the pizza with complex sweet bacon flavors.

After several minutes, the waiter placed the food on the table.

Keith sat in deep thought.

Although Keith's stomach continued to growl ferociously, he ate slowly. He would cut a slice of pizza and used his fork to push the slice around in the ketchup, taking his time. Then he would slowly chew that slice.

"Dr. Swanson," a young voice said with shrills of enthusiasm.

Keith turned, and saw three of his students standing next to his table. He should have known better. He picked the worse spot to have lunch.

Although Keith has taught thousands of students, he always recognized his good students and his bad students from the sea of faces. These three were his excellent students.

"Hello," Keith responded in utter surprise.

"May we sit down," Elmira said politely.

"Please sit down," Keith replied in a pretend jovial mood, but he was not quite sure if he pulled it off. He had one hell of a day, and he still had at least another nine hours before tomorrow officially started.

Then before Keith knew it, his three students, Emir, Elmira, and Alma were sitting around the table, occupying the vacant chairs. The three students were from his international finance course.

Emir, the male student, started first, "Thank you sir for the course. We learned a lot. Will you be teaching us next semester?"

Keith looked down at his food. He sliced a piece of the *burek*, dipped it in ketchup, and started to chew it slowly in his mouth. He politely held his index finger in the air to give him a chance to chew his food.

After an awkward silence, Alma reiterated the same question with a concern voice, "Sir, will you be teaching us next semester?" Her eyes filled with sadness.

Keith sipped his cappuccino, helping to wash down the *burek*. Then he cleared his throat, and said, "I am so sorry. The university president and I seem to have a communication problem, so I have been terminated."

"WHHHAAATTT?" the students chimed in unison.

"I am not sure why, but my services have been terminated. Damir was quite adamant."

"If it is not so rude, may we ask what happened?"

Keith stretched back in his chair. He glanced at each student's face and let out a long sigh. Then he added sadly, "To be honest, I am not sure what happened? I know my services are no longer required at the university. Damir will have to find my replacement."

"What did Damir do to you? He did not threaten you, or beat you up did he," Emir asked politely.

"Damir and I do not see eye to eye, so one of us had to go. It is his university, so I am the one who has to go. Unfortunately, there is no way Damir, and I could work out our differences. We are two different people with opposing strong personalities," Keith said slowly without emotion.

Elmira, the shy one, spoke up, "You are not the first to have a problem with Damir. I remembered last year when I was speaking with a professor during office hours. We were going over the problems I missed on the exam. Then Damir came in angrily and fired the professor of English. Damir was screaming at her at the top of his lungs. Afterwards, Damir returned a couple of minutes later to apologize, because Damir realized no other professor could teach her courses. Unfortunately, Damir acts before he thinks. We have lost many good professors because of him."

The group emitted a long sigh.

No one at the table was in a good mood, even over the stupidity of Damir and how he fired and re-hired a professor after he discovered no one else could teach her courses.

Keith began again, "I know you're good students. I am really sorry, but I cannot return to the university. I do not have a problem with you guys, but I have to move on. Trust me, if it was not for Damir, I would definitely teach you guys again next semester."

Keith sipped his coffee again, and added ominously, "Besides, I would not worry about Damir. Damir has some serious problems at the moment. I am the least of his worries."

The students somberly stood up, and each one shook Keith's hand. Then they left the café quietly. Doleful frowns replaced their happy demeanors.

Keith shoveled a couple more slices of *burek* in his mouth, and then drank his coffee in one long gulp. He slapped a five-euro note onto the table, and headed for Jasmin's car.

Keith drove and drove, until he found his way to Montenegro. Keith kept seeing memories of Yelena flash in his head on the long desolate drive to Montenegro. He did not know it, but he was on the same road that Adnan took 12 hours earlier.

Keith reached the customs of Montenegro at 8 o'clock in the evening.

On the Bosnian side, the Bosnian officials could care less. The officials stayed in their red metal container, playing cards and drinking coffee.

One officer glanced at Keith through the window, and waived him through. Only the next Bosnian War would force him out of the safety of the storage container.

On the Montenegro side, the customs officials were much tougher.

Keith pulled up to the booth.

A customs official barked, "May I see your documents and license?" She stood next to the booth, holding a clipboard. Her demeanor was strict and direct, and she meant all business.

Keith did not understand because she said this in Serbian. Keith replied in a confused manner in English, "I do not understand."

"May I see your documents and license?" the female officer dictated again in English with a heavy accent.

"Yes, sir or ma'am."

Keith pulled his license and passport out of his wallet and then grabbed the papers from the glove box. Keith was not even sure if the car was legal. His hand trembled a little, as he handed her the papers. He silently prayed for them not to search the car.

"Is this your car?" she said in a stern voice.

"No, it is my boss's car," Keith said weakly.

"Whom do you work for?"

"I am a professor at the Bosnian University of Management. I have to pick up a delivery in Boddva."

Keith opened his wallet and retrieved his business card. Then he handed the officer the business card with his name and university logo on it.

The officer checked the documents and matched the name to the driver's license, passport, and car documents. Then she inquired, "Do you mean Budva?"

"Sorry, but yes."

"You are the second person today to go to Budva from your university."

"Oh," Keith said in surprise.

"Sir, may I ask you to exit your vehicle and leave the keys in the ignition."

Keith slowly climbed out of the car and stood three feet away from it. His mind started to race a thousand miles per hour. He almost forgot about the drugs in the trunk. Beads of

perspiration formed on his forehead. Then Keith could feel the weight of the gun that was tucked snugly in his pants. Although his heavy winter coat helped hide the bulge, the gun felt like an icicle next to crotch.

Keith began to shiver in fear, as he realized the full extent of his heinous crimes.

The female officer placed the documents and clipboard down on the hood of the car, and began searching the driver's side of the car.

A male officer on the other side turned on his flash light and searched the other side.

Then the male officer pushed a button in the glove box, and the trunk clicked opened.

Both officers approached the trunk and peered inside.

The male officer used his free hand to pick up the carpeted cover to the spare tire.

Keith felt his heart skip a beat. He was ready to faint.

Then the officer dropped the cover back into its place and slammed the trunk lid. The male officer exclaimed officially, "The car is clean."

The female officer glanced at Keith.

Keith was pale white. His fingers twitched nervously. He rubbed his hands on his trousers, and regained his composure.

"Sir, are you okay?" the female officer looked questioningly at him.

"Well, no. I haven't been feeling well. I think I am coming down with the flu. In all honesty, I also came down to get some rest in Montenegro and relax in a warmer climate. I figured it would help with my flu. Maybe I will find a girl too."

The male officer began to smile, and reiterated, "A girl, huh?"

The female officer shot him a nasty, sour look. Then she handed Keith his driver's license and documents.

Next, Keith climbed back into the car.

"Oh, before you go. You have to pay a road tax. The tax is five euros for four weeks."

Keith absently handed the officer a five-euro note and the officer placed a sticker on the inside windshield of the car."

The arm guard rose upward, and Keith drove through and entered Montenegro.

The male officer waved good-bye and said, "Have fun in Montenegro. Don't be too greedy. Just find yourself one girl and leave the other ones alone!"

Keith arrived in Budva around 10 o'clock. He saw a large hotel downtown and pulled into the parking lot. He was not thinking clearly, because he parked the car in the front, which was visible to anyone who drove on the main road through downtown Budva.

He grabbed the drugs from the trunk of the car underneath the spare tire, and slipped them into his coat pocket. Along with the money, his pocket was ready to burst at the seams.

Keith started to sweat in his warm winter coat, as a soft tropical warm breeze blew off the coastal waters. The evening temperature was a few degrees above freezing.

Chapter 12

Yelena was stuck somewhere in the twilight between sleep and being awake. Memories began to swirl in her mind, giving her a little vertigo. She knew Keith would never find her nor rescue her, or hold her tenderly. She saw the healthy orange tree growing in the courtyard. Its leaves were a dark shiny green, and the tree had luscious orange fruit basking in the sunshine.

Yelena knew she was no longer in Bosnia. Orange trees could never survive the harsh Bosnian winters. She was somewhere further south, maybe as far south as Greece.

Then dreams of her father entered her mind. She had not thought of him in years. She was a little girl when he enlisted in the Serbian Army. The only thing she could remember was he was very big man, and he was a mechanic before the Bosnian War.

Yelena remembered running up to him, when he came home from work one day. The sun was shining; the sky was a deep blue, and birds were chirping as they perched in the trees. She ran to him with her outstretched hands as she saw him walking up to the apartment building.

Her father reached down to her, and lifted her up to the sky. Yelena tried so hard to reach and grab the sun, but before Yelena could grab the sun, she was wrapped in her father's loving arms, and he began to tickle her belly.

Then the Bosnian War started, and her father enlisted in the Serbian military or the Yugoslavian military depending whom you ask.

Yelena and her mother were stranded in Bosnian country, Tuzla. During the war, Tuzla was in a protection zone. Its population doubled over night as the refugees fled the war zones, and trekked to Tuzla with only the shirts on their backs. They carried all their worldly possessions as they walked somberly to the city.

Every day, Yelena sat on the couch with her mother's loving hand holding her, and they would listen to the radio. They listened for news about her father and the Bosnian War, hoping the war would end soon, and he would return home to them.

Her father sent letters home regularly at least once a week.

Her mother read the letters so often, the letters became worn, and started to tear along the folded creases. To this very day, her mother kept those letters, and hid them inside the pages of the thick family bible.

Yelena, as a young woman would once in a while, pull out the bible and read those letters.

Then the letters stopped coming, and Yelena and her mother began to worry.

Yelena learned her father died on January 14, 1994. The Serbian military conquered and captured most of the Bosnian cities except the cities around Tuzla. Tuzla was the last stronghold. The Serbian Army surrounded the capital, Sarajevo, and then made a push to the right center of the country where Tuzla was.

The Serbs were going to win the war. Then the Bosnian army fought back bravely and stopped the Serbs at Olovo, Bosnia.

Olovo was a small town sandwiched between Tuzla and Sarajevo. It was a tiny town of less than 3,000 residents, and the final resting place for Yelena's father. Her father was buried in a grave along the mountainside with thousands of other soldiers.

After the Bosnian War ended in 1995, her mother and Yelena made their first trip to Olovo. It was a cold rainy spring day. The trees were coming back to life. The valleys of the Balkan Mountains were brimming with flowers and the fragrance of the reincarnation of life.

As the bus traversed the winding mountain road down to the valley to the center of Olovo, Yelena saw the vestiges of a nasty war. She shivered at the total destruction of the city.

Olovo had three towering apartment buildings in the center of town that stood 20 stories tall. Soldiers shot out every window in the apartment building along with every window in or near the city. Every building wall was covered with pockmarks from the flying bullets. Here and there, a mortar blasted a gaping hole into a building. Bullet shell casings and cigarette butts littered the ground everywhere as soldiers on each side tried to massacre the other side. Consequently, thousands were killed in the Siege of Olovo.

Yelena and her mother walked to the end of town in a long procession. Her mother clenched her hand tightly as they walked and walked.

All Bosnians and Serbs were paying homage to their dead relatives that spring. The procession walked slowly and quietly under the soft drizzle of cold rain. They approached a pass between two tall mountains.

Yelena looked up at the sky. The rain clouds were dark cotton balls that hid the mountain peaks from view. Then she saw the two cemeteries. The Serbian cemetery started from the pass and went up the Southern mountain, while the Bosnian cemetery went up the Northern Mountain.

The procession divided into two lines: Bosnians and Serbs. Even in death, the Serbs and Bosnians refused to mix their races. The two races were buried separately from each other as each race went to their separate heaven.

Yelena saw row after row of white crosses that marked the Serbian graves. Each cross had the buried soldier's dog tags draped around it. Some crosses were replaced with carved marble tombstones while other spots were bare, as families exhumed the remains, and reburied their relatives closer to home.

Yelena and her mother walked up the mountain in silence. They heard the cold rain pelting the ground and the weeps from the kneeling sobbing mourners. Occasionally, a mourner would cry out in despair.

Yelena and her mother continued to walk along every row. Her mother read every name off the soldier's dog tags. They traversed row after row.

Yelena glanced upward to see how far the cemetery extended up the mountain, but she couldn't. A thick wall of fog shrouded the upper portion of the cemetery.

Half-way up the mountain, Yelena and her mother found his grave. Her mother started sobbing loudly, and her tears sprinkled the ground along with the raindrops. Yelena quickly joined her as she recognized her father's name on the dog tags, Slobodan Backovich.

Her father shared the common first name of Slobodan Milosevic, the leader of Yugoslavia and Serbia who triggered the wave of Serbian Nationalism, and instigated the Bosnian War. Slobodan means a 'free man' in all Balkan languages.

Since that time, Yelena's mother scraped and saved every penny she could, because she wanted to replace that white cross with a beautifully carved marble tombstone.

Every passing spring when Yelena was young, Yelena and her mother would make the sojourn to Olovo to mourn the death of her father. As Yelena became older, the trips became less frequent. Then they altogether stopped when Yelena became 20 years old.

Then Yelena awakened with a stir. She quickly sat up on the bed and remembered every little detail of her dream. She had not dream of her father in years, and she remembered every minute detail of the cold rainy spring day when she first saw her father's grave.

Yelena cried out, "Dad! I am coming home to see you. Please wait for me. I miss you very much."

Then she fell back to sleep. Her dreams turned dark and ominous. She was running in the dark, and something kept chasing her. No matter how hard she tried, she could not get away from that thing that was chasing her.

Adnan awakened several hours later. After he made love to the blond Russian woman, he fell asleep, sprawled out across the bed.

Adnan searched for the woman, but she was long gone. He thought that maybe she was a misty fragment of his imagination. Nevertheless, he could smell her faint, cheap pungent perfume that clung to the air and bed sheets. Then he began to smile.

Adnan snatched his cell phone from his pant's pocket, and called Damir to check in with him. He thought it was odd that the phone rang and rang, but nobody picked it up. Damir always answers his cell phone, especially from his war buddies.

Adnan glanced at his watch. It was almost 5 PM. He could not believe he slept so long, and the boss was not answering.

Then Adnan called Jasmin. The phone rang a couple of times, and subsequently, a feminine Bosnian recorded voice stated, "The person you are trying to call has his phone turned off or is out of service range."

Adnan muttered to himself in frustration, "What the fuck?" A foreboding feeling crept up in the back of his mind. Something did not feel right. He knew that sometimes Jasmin did not answer, but Damir always answered his phone. Something was wrong. Adnan always could get in contact with one of them, always.

Adnan leaped out of bed and hastily dressed. He glanced at the shower in the bathroom and quickly dismissed it. He probably should wash off the whore's scent, but he shrugged his shoulders. To hell with it, he had to get back quickly to Bosnia. He had to check up on Jasmin and Damir. They needed him.

Before Adnan could leave, Sasha's bodyguards directed Adnan to the back patio near the enclosed swimming pool.

Sasha was no longer wearing his white robe, but instead a flamboyant bright purple shirt with black pants. The rich young Russians tended to dress in bright flashy clothes that were fashionable ten years ago.

The two hot blond Russian women sat on both sides of Sasha. They both were wearing black cocktail dresses that fit the contours of their bodies. The dresses were quite revealing, showing the women's smooth, milky skin. They glanced hastily in Adnan's direction, and quickly lost interest.

"Please sit my friend, Adnan," Sasha said in a serious tone. A more calculated cold Sasha replaced the earlier jovial mood of Sasha.

Adnan sat down in the vacant seat directly across from Sasha. Then he glanced at Svetlana.

Svetlana's face was blank. She pretended not to recognize Adnan, even though they made love earlier that day.

Adnan searched her face for any emotion, but none was there. Svetlana was completely blank. Then Adnan contorted his face in a crooked smile.

Sasha glanced at Adnan's face and then Svetlana's. He perfectly knew what was going on.

A large silver tray was in the center of the table that had a concentric layer of beef prosciutto laid out like overlapping dominoes." Ah, you have my favorite. You have prosciutto!" Adnan stated in a cheerful voice. Prosciutto is popular in the former Yugoslavian countries, where the people dried and cured a variety of meats.

Adnan pushed his empty plate next to the tray, and used his fork to scoop all the slices of meat onto his plate like a bulldozer. He left the sliced cheeses and green olives behind. Then he began to shovel the meat into his mouth.

Sasha snapped his fingers, and a butler appeared.

The butler immediately poured Adnan a glass of Montenegrin red wine.

Svetlana sipped her glass of wine, hiding her frown from Adnan's disgusting table manners. He ate like a barbarian, completely devoid of any sophistication or culture.

Sasha noticed his guest's fondness for cured meats, and said, "The prosciutto is excellent. I also import Russian sausages and cheeses which are also good,"

Once everyone was done eating, Sasha cleared his throat, "Ladies, go upstairs and get ready for tonight. You have a long shift in front of you. Before you leave the house Svetlana, please check up on our new guest. I want to make sure she is okay. Bring her a plate of food."

Svetlana grabbed a clean plate and began filling it with a sample of everything on the table. Then the ladies disappeared into the house.

Adnan and Sasha were alone at the table, while Sasha's bodyguards lurked in the darkness around the house. The bodyguards kept a vigilant eye on the surroundings.

Sasha began, "I saw the smile you gave Svetlana. Don't sweat it. She is nothing but a fuck toy, nothing more, nothing less. Of course, she is a very expensive fuck toy. She normally goes for 300 euros per hour. Of course, I hope you were not planning to marry her or something. That could be dangerous to steal another man's cash machine."

Adnan almost choked on his food, and then burst into a short, soft laugh. Afterwards, he replied, "No, of course not. I have several Bosnian girlfriends scattered around Tuzla. I just wanted to try something other than Bosnian. She is definitely not Bosnian. I was just confused, because she seemed not to recognize me, even after I put my cock into her."

Then Sasha laughed coarsely, and added, "Now that we have our carnal pleasures satisfied. Let's talk about business."

Sasha was serious, and his eyes shone with icy coldness. Then he began his discourse, "I am thinking about expanding my operations to Sarajevo. I want to open several brothels in Sarajevo and also sell a little cocaine on the side. We can go into partnership with each other. Damir can supply his other drugs, and we will carve up the territories, so we can extract as much as we can from Bosnia."

Sasha took a sip of his wine, and then continued, "I also want to bring in some more talent and muscle. Maybe they can enroll them into Damir's university. That way, they have legal papers to live and work in Bosnia. The university would be a perfect cover. Who would ever suspect a university was a cover for a major criminal enterprise?"

Adnan's face became blank and expressionless. Damir warned him about this coming day. Damir knew that Sasha would not be content to stay in Montenegro. Eventually, Sasha would branch out into other countries, countries like Bosnia.

Adnan knew his Bosnian history well. Little did the outside world know that the Soviet Union was the origin of the Yugoslavian war machine. Joseph Tito, the first leader of the Communistic Yugoslavia, did not build up a military to fight Western Europe or America. Tito built up the military to avoid a Soviet invasion. Yugoslavia was the only country in the world that freely elected the communists into power. Further, Tito wanted to be equal with the Soviet Union with Joseph Stalin. However, Stalin wanted Yugoslavia to become subservient to the Soviet Union. Tito stopped the Soviet aggression with a strong military, a military that led to the nasty Bosnian War. Consequently, the Russians have a way of inviting themselves in as friends, and then they take over and rule with an iron fist.

After a long pause, Adnan replied diplomatically, "I have to discuss this with Damir. I cannot do anything without Damir's approval." His voice was devoid of emotion, but his concerns were escalating.

"Of course, I understand. By all means! I hate to discuss business over the phone. That's why I waited until you arrived. Have Damir reply with a yes or no. Just remember, we can make an insane amount of money together. We can carve up Bosnia and become extremely rich men."

Adnan did not buy a word of Sasha's business proposal. He was well aware of the Russian way of doing business. However, he had to keep up appearances. He did not want to piss Sasha off or incite a bitter feud, or at least not yet.

Adnan raised his wine glass for a toast, "We give a toast to a new business deal. May we become rich and grow old together. May we become the new kings of Yugoslavia."

Then their glasses clink together, and they gulped down their red wine.

Adnan knew better. This business expansion may lead to a war. Bosnians do not like outsiders to meddle in their affairs or profit from their citizens. A war was simmering in the underworld, and the body count would probably be high.

Svetlana entered Yelena's room.

Yelena was still lying face down on the bed. She was not sleeping, but deep in thought. Her face was still buried in the pillow, and her cheek was red from Sasha's smack.

Svetlana placed the plate of food on the vanity. Then she pulled the chair away from the vanity and sat across from Yelena. Svetlana wanted a heart-to-heart talk with her. She began in a suave, smooth voice, "Hi sweetie, my name is Svetlana."

"What do you want?" Yelena replied with icicles forming in her breath.

"The boss wants me to talk to you. He wants to put you to work."

"I am not a whore!" Yelena replied angrily, and then added, "I would never sell my body for money."

Svetlana said sternly, "You do not understand the position you are in. Sasha is more than a boss; he owns you. You are his property. He can do anything he wants with you. If you are smart, you will wise up and go with the program. If you cause problems, then Sasha will tie you to heavy bricks and toss you into the sea. You will disappear, and nobody will know where you are buried except for Sasha. So you wise up!"

Yelena looked up from her pillow, and she glared at her guest.

"Like I said, just go with the program. Here, Montenegro is beautiful. You get to go shopping, stroll along the seaside boulevard, or ride around in a Mercedes. Sasha will take good care of you. You just let the men do what they want with you. So what if you sleep with a couple of men every day. Just lie on your back and think happy thoughts. Just let your mind go somewhere else. Then once they are done, you can enjoy Montenegro. Sasha is a good master if you work hard for him. That is the key to staying on Sasha's good side. You work hard for him, and he will take good care of you."

Yelena's face turned red in anger. She screamed, "I am not a whore! I do not have sex for money."

Svetlana smiled. She knew the first couple of clients were the toughest. After a week, Yelena will harden; her inhibitions will disappear. She will go with the program. Yelena will lie on her back, open her legs, and let any man have their way with her, as long as he paid for it.

Svetlana reached out and caressed Yelena's arm gently, and continued, "I know you do not like it. I can understand. When I first came to Montenegro, I did not like it either. But I had no choice. I could have run away and made my way to the Russian Embassy, and beg my government to send me back. I unfortunately do not have anything to go back to. My father is a helpless alcoholic; my mom has been placed in a mental hospital, and my brother joined the Russian navy to escape the depressing little town. You see; Montenegro is not so bad after all, especially if you do not have anything."

Yelena looked up at Svetlana, and stared directly at her eyes. Her anger subsided a little, but her voice was still obstinate, "I can understand your situation. However, I am not you. I do have someone, and I love him very much, and he loves me. I have someone to return to."

"What?" Svetlana asked in a confused voice. This was a very unusual story. Svetlana inquired further, "What do you mean that you have someone?"

"His name is Keith. He teaches at a university in Bosnia. We fell in love with each other."

Svetlana could see the love swim in Yelena's eyes when she said 'Keith.'

"His name is not Slavic. It sounds like English or American," Svetlana probed further.

"He is an American."

A surprised look swept across Svetlana's face. She glanced up and down Yelena's body. Svetlana was so sure she pegged Yelena for a simple Serbian girl, a poor Serbian girl whose bruises and scars faded from the constant fights and drama of a dysfunctional family. Svetlana knew Yelena was not a ordinary Serbian girl who would choose prostitution rather than return to her family.

"How did you find him?" Svetlana's curiosity was escalating.

"I did not find him; he found me. I work at a coffee shop in Tuzla and he asked me out."

Svetlana exclaimed more as a statement than as a question, "Wow, what are the odds of that happening? He sounds like an educated man who happened to wander into a small coffee shop and by chance fall in love with the waitress. It sounds like a Cinderella story."

"I know. It just happened." Then the tears began to flow from Yelena's eyes, as she began to think about Keith again.

Svetlana's calculating mind began to churn. The only thing better than living in Montenegro was finding an American husband, especially an educated, sophisticated, successful husband. All the Russian woman knew about the U.S. divorce courts. It did not matter how long the marriage lasted. Once the man says 'I do,' the wife was entitled to at least half his assets and sometimes more. Svetlana knew a couple of women from her hometown that did exactly that. They married a couple of American men and cleaned them out, literally. Maybe the women left some dirty rags under the kitchen sink, but the women took everything else.

Svetlana asked sweetly, "May I ask you a personal question?"

"What is the question?"

"How did you arrive in Montenegro?"

"I was waiting for Keith, and these two goons grabbed me and kidnapped me," Yelena said through her tears, and added between sobs, "Then the next thing I know I am in a car trunk and ended up here in this house."

"I am so sorry," Svetlana said with sincerity. She knew Americans were many things, but American men were not known to sell their girlfriends to the mafia. Unfortunately, some Russian men would not hesitate to sell their mate into sex slavery, 'Hey honey, let's take a vacation down in Turkey? I know this great spot. You will love it there and never want to leave.'

Svetlana hugged Yelena, and whispered into her ear, "Look; I am going to take care of you. Please trust me." Then she let go and loudly stated, "Please eat and then freshen up a little."

"Wait, don't go yet, Svetlana," Yelena said woefully.

"I apologize but I have to work tonight. I have to go down to the hotel for the night. Is there anything else I can get you?"

"I am dying for a cigarette. I have not had a cigarette in days."

"Well Sasha does not like it when we smoke. Some clients are so particular about their needs. I see what I can do."

Svetlana left the room for a couple of minutes and quickly returned. She placed two Montenegrin cigarettes and a pack of matches into Yelena's eager hand. The brand was Royal Red, and the Montenegrin's double-headed eagle proudly stretched its wings across the front of the pack.

Yelena smiled slightly.

"Please, blow your smoke out the window. I don't want to get into trouble with Sasha. Sasha can be quite strict with the house rules. Before I go, can I ask you one last question?" Svetlana asked kindly.

"Yes, by all means."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Yelena Backovich."

Then Svetlana hugged Yelena tightly, and she left Yelena's room.

A large bodyguard sat as a sentry right outside the door. He latched the door shut and returned to his chair to read his magazine.

Sasha was standing there in the hallway with a mischievous glint in his eyes. His shirt was half-unbuttoned, and he was ready to break the new girl in.

Svetlana approached Sasha, and sweetly embraced him. Then she whispered into his ear so the guard would not overhear,

"Sasha, she is not ready. That long trip in the trunk has messed her up a little. I would give her a couple of days. A couple of days of rest will make the wait worth the while."

Sasha frowned like a bad boy who was punished from playing with his favorite toy.

Svetlana started to caress his crotch, and added, "I tell you what. I'll do that thing you like. I'm always ready for you, Sasha. You are the only man who can satisfy me."

"Svetlana, you have to work tonight," Sasha said firmly.

"Sasha, I still have time. Besides, if I am a little late, then I can stay over and work a little over time." Svetlana kept massaging Sasha's crotch, and Sasha gritted his teeth in pleasure. Then she led Sasha away from Yelena's room and into Sasha's bedroom.

Svetlana smiled as she led Sasha away. Her smile was not because she loved her job. She smiled because she protected Yelena. Yelena will be safe tonight. Nobody touched the new girl until Sasha had his way with her first. Yelena may be her ticket out of this place, a ticket to a better way of life, far away from Montenegro and Sasha.

Adnan leaned against the hood of the car, smoking his favorite brand of cigarette, *Bosna*. He had a worried look on his face. He frantically called Damir and Jasmin, but they were not picking up. Something was wrong. For the first time in his life, Adnan was worried.

Adnan parked the car on the side of the road behind an abandoned building. He was in Bosnia and about 30 miles from the border with Montenegro.

Adnan had to pull over and smoke a cigarette. The nicotine soothed his worries. He inhaled another puff from the cigarette and held the smoke in. He tried to use the smoke to wash the nasty taste in the back of his mouth.

Adnan wished he took a shower at Sasha's place and brushed his teeth. Svetlana was so beautiful, clean, and tasted good, when he made love to her, and kissed up and down her neck and breasts. Now his taste buds soured. Svetlana left a bad taste in his mouth. She was like food poisoning. The food tasted good

going down but then the food turned rancid and bitter when the microorganisms began to thrive and grow.

Svetlana was a 300-euro whore. Adnan shivered in fright to think what a 50-euro whore would taste like or which diseases she would leave behind.

The sun disappeared over an hour ago, and Adnan had a clear view of the road. The brush and the abandon building hid his presence.

Then Adnan saw an approaching car. It was sleek and sliver. The headlights sliced through the darkness, illuminating the road and surrounding countryside. As the car passed, he recognized it. Not only was it a Czech Skoda, it was Jasmin's car. However, Adnan could not see the driver. The driver seemed smaller in size.

Adnan quickly called Jasmin again, and then Damir. Jasmin's cell phone was still turned off, while Damir was not picking up his.

"What the fuck?" Adnan exclaimed angrily.

Adnan flicked his cigarette butt onto the ground, and jumped into his car, and followed Jasmin's car into Montenegro.

Chapter 13

Keith awakened early in the morning.

It was Tuesday, January 18. The morning sun warmed and bathed his exposed hands and arms, and blinded his eyes.

Keith did not even bother to tuck himself under the bed sheets. He sprawled himself across the bed, and was still wearing his clothes from yesterday.

Keith sat up confused. Yesterday's events were hazy, confused, like a thick fog that penetrated his mind and covered his memories. Then the memories rushed backed. He was in Budva, Montenegro, and he came to search for Yelena. He also murdered Jasmin and Damir.

Keith looked around the hotel room. Although he parked the stolen car at an expensive hotel, he walked around late last night until he found a small hotel near the shore. The small hotel was located on the peripheral of the city. Blinded by the darkness of the night, the hotel appeared to be clean but a little too small. Now the morning sun showed the hotel room's true colors. The hotel was old. The shag brown carpet was worn, especially along the walkway from the bed to the door. Around the light switches, the paint became stained and darkened from the many hands who rubbed against the wall, when flicking the switch on and off.

Keith slid out of bed, and approached the window. The waves were crashing on the rocky shoreline below. Then he glanced back the bed; at least the bedspread and sheets appeared to be clean. Twenty euros per night did not buy much in Budva, Montenegro.

The old Smith & Wesson was lying on the nightstand, and the ecstasy was lying on the dresser near the tv stacked neatly like a pile of bricks.

Keith searched the room for a hiding place. He pulled the dresser out and noticed the dresser had a small cavity at the bottom, where he slipped the drugs and gun into the cavity, and scooted the dresser tightly against the wall.

Keith did not intend to walk around Budva with a gun and drugs on him, but he kept the 20,000 euros in his coat pocket.

Keith quickly showered and put on the same clothes he came in. He did not even bring a toothbrush. He used warm water to rinse out his mouth, and used the outstretched fingers of his right hand as a comb to straighten his hair.

Keith did not come to Montenegro to party or pick up girls. He had only one mission. He had to find Yelena. She was held captive, somewhere in this big, coastal city on the Adriatic Sea.

Keith left the hotel, and walked around the downtown until he reached Old Budva. Old Budva was a five-hundred-year old castle that was converted into a shopping mall. It was surrounded by twenty-foot castle walls with turrets placed strategically every 50 feet. Inside the walls, along the cobble streets were coffee shops, clothes stores, restaurants, and an occasional nightclub.

Keith walked aimlessly around the streets, hoping to bump into his girlfriend, but it never happened. Yelena was nowhere near Old Budva. While he walked, his stomach growled furiously and occasionally Keith used his right hand to pat his stomach and tame its grumbles.

Around noon, he sat at a coffee shop and ordered a macchiato and sandwich. A Montenegrin macchiato is similar to a cappuccino, except the barista used cream instead of milk.

As Keith ate and drank mechanically, he noticed two extremely beautiful blond women shopping in the store next to the coffee shop. They were boisterous and loud. One of the blonds picked out a slim dark-blue dress and some sexy black lingerie.

When Keith finished his meal, he stood up to go.

The loud blonds strolled by Keith. The more petite blond who had an innocent-looking face bumped into Keith, dropping her bag.

Keith mechanically picked up her bag and handed it to her, and said apologetically, "I am sorry." Then Keith walked away before the woman could reply, "Thank you," in a heavy Russian accent.

Keith walked around Budva for hours and hours. He saw no sign or trace of Yelena. Then he glanced at his watch. It was nearing six o'clock, and Keith made no progress. He let out a sigh and continued to walk near the large expensive hotel downtown.

As he walked by the 10-story, five-star hotel, he noticed a couple of bellhops standing sentry at the front doors. They wore

their formal red jackets and crimson caps. Keith thought about walking up to them and just asked them. He remembered what Karl said how to find the brothels. Just ask the bellhops or the taxi drivers. They know their city well. They cater to the whims and demands of their customers.

Keith was too nervous to ask a stranger about brothels, and kept walking. Then he spotted an approaching taxi. Keith flagged him down and subsequently, he jumped into the back seat.

"Where to, buddy?" the taxi driver inquired enthusiastically. The taxi driver studied Keith in his rearview mirror.

"I am looking for a little companionship," Keith said softly, his fair complexion turned a reddish hue.

The taxi driver searched over his client using the rear-view mirror, determining how much he could charge for his service. Then he said, "Ah, you came to the right place. I know the place for you. What are you looking for? Blonds, ravens, Russians, Romanians, you name it. They are somewhere in this city. They each have their price."

"A Serbian woman," Keith replied in hope.

"You are in Montenegro, so there are plenty of Serbian women here. Montenegro used to be part of Serbia before it broke away after the Bosnian War."

"I was hoping for a brothel, maybe one that caters to high-paying clientele."

The taxi driver turned his head to take another stern look at his client and shook his head apologetically, "You have to have connections for a brothel here. The brothels here only cater to the rich clientele. You will never get in unless you know someone. Someone important has to vouch for you."

"Then what do you suggest?" Keith asked sheepishly.

"I could take you to Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley is located on the eastern part of the city against the mountains. It is a small enclave, like a city within a city. They can satisfy all your desires."

"Why do they call it Silicon Valley?"

The taxi driver started chuckling and then said apologetically, "I am sorry. We are so used to that term that we sometimes forget about outsiders. It's called Silicon Valley because

all the women get breast implants. In Silicon Valley, all you see are luscious hills and hills made from silicon."

"Okay that sounds good, I guess. I guess I have to start somewhere," Keith began to blush again.

"That's the way to go. You go with the flow and have a little fun."

The taxi driver only took 20 minutes to get to Silicon Valley.

Keith watched in awe from the back car window. He saw many scantily dressed women walking up and down the street. Occasionally, men would drive by in a car, yelling catcalls and hollering at the women.

Keith handed the taxi driver a 10-euro note.

The taxi driver cleared his throat, "Excuse me sir." His hand remained in place with the euro note still lying on the center of his outstretched hand.

"I guess that was not enough." Then Keith added two more 10-euro notes, forming a small pile on the taxi driver's hand.

The driver clenched the money and said, "Thank you sir. If you should need my services again, I will park over there by the bakery shop." The tax driver pointed to a shop a block away. That money was already resting securely in his front pocket.

"Thank you," Keith said, and exited the cab.

Keith never saw anything like this. It was a miniature Amsterdam. As he walked along the street, young women barely wearing any clothes sat on stairwells to apartments, smoking cigarettes. They turned their heads and looked at Keith as he walked by. Many women were also standing near doors, and the doors were slightly ajar with red fluorescent lights spilling onto the streets.

One woman opened the curtains to her apartment window. She was wearing translucent lingerie and displaying all her wears, leaving nothing to the imagination. All her goods were on display and for sale.

Keith turned his head and kept walking.

A dark hair woman was standing next to her doorway with the door partially opened. Several red candles inside her small apartment flickered from the salty sea breeze.

As Keith walked by, the prostitute asked, "Are you looking for a girlfriend tonight," in a thick heavy Russian accent.

Keith turned to study the older woman. She appeared to be in her early 30s. Although she was still attractive, she appeared worn out and run down, like an old reliable Chevy truck. The rough life on the streets was taking a tow on her, but like a Chevy, it could take a beating.

"Maybe I am," Keith said shyly, looking down at his feet as he said it.

The prostitute opened her door all the way, and exclaimed, "Please come in. I am at your service."

Keith entered the room and sat down on the edge of her bed. The thick heavy curtains were red; the bed sheets were red; the chair cushions were red, and several red candles were scattered around the room. Keith noticed the prominent color in the room was red, the color of hot passion, love, and uninhibited gratuitous sex.

The prostitute shut her door and pushed the curtains completely closed. She turned to Keith, and stated, "It's 100 euros an hour. You have to pay up front." The prostitute held out her hand, eager for that money.

Keith removed the 100 euros from his wallet and handed it to her.

The prostitute quickly examined the money, and then deposited it into a locked metal box on top of her dresser. Then she began taking off her clothes.

Keith just sat there and looked down. He did not even watch her.

The prostitute stopped as her underwear dangled around her knees, and looked at Keith, "Don't you want to have sex?"

"No," Keith replied firmly, and added, "I just want to talk. I am not here to have sex with you."

The prostitute had an exacerbated look on her face. She studied Keith to determine if he was a raving lunatic. She examined him closely. Maybe he was hiding an axe under his winter coat.

"I just want information. Please sit down."

The prostitute put her clothes back on and stated leery, "It's your money. If you do not want sex, then I guess that is your problem. Then let's talk for an hour. You paid for it."

Keith noticed on the bed stand was a bowl of pears. He wondered if a john was particularly boring, would the prostitute reach over, grab a pear, and eat it, as the john made love to her.

"What do you want to talk about?" the prostitute said in an irritated voice.

"Just hear me out. I know this is an unusual request, so I will start from the beginning. My girlfriend was kidnapped from Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. I believe my boss kidnapped her and sold her to some person named Sasha in Montenegro. I came down to get my girlfriend back. So I am asking you for any information. Would you know where I could find her?" Keith said with his voice pleading for any knowledge.

"I am sorry. I do not know anything about this. The women here in Silicon Valley are independents. We just pay the police a little money here and there, and they leave us alone. We are not connected to any crime families here. The crime families own the upscale brothels here in Budva. They make much more money from the rich businessmen and government officials. Here in Silicon Valley, we service the workers who can scrounge up a little money and want a little loving from time to time."

Keith continued with his pleas, "I believe Sasha is Russian and your accent sounds Russian."

The prostitute's face turned ghostly white, and she replied, "Oh!" She reached into the top drawer in the dresser, pulled out a bottle of water, and began drinking it.

Then the prostitute continued, "I did not know his name, but there is a Russian gangster here in Budva. He is bad news. The rumor is he is into drugs, prostitution, gambling. You name it. If there is money to be made, he will be making it. Bodies are known to disappear without a trace if they cross Sasha in any way."

"How would I find him?"

"Trust me, you do not want to find him. He is somebody you do not want to be friends with. He is someone you keep at a distance."

"But I have to. I have to get my girlfriend back. Please, tell me where I can find him. I believe Sasha has her. She was sold to him by my evil boss."

"I am not really sure. I do know someone who is not happy with Sasha. He would know.

Maybe he can help you."

"Who is he?"

"I cannot give you any details, but he may be interested. I can refer you to him. He used to be a big shot here in Budva until Sasha pushed him out a couple of years ago. He is a Montenegrin, and I used to work for him a couple of years back."

"Okay, I would like to meet him How do I find him?"

"Go to the Renaissance Night Club tomorrow night and ask the bouncer you want to talk to Senad. Senad may or may not be his real name, but he will know what you mean. I'll contact Senad tonight and let him know you are coming. He is going to check you out before he meets you. May I ask what your name is?"

"How rude of me? I can be quite forgetful. My name is Keith Swanson."

"I hate to be a bother, but I would need to see some form of ID? You cannot trust anyone these days," the prostitute said firmly.

Keith handed her his U.S. Passport, and she scribbled his name and birth date down on a small piece of paper. Then she handed Keith his passport back, and replied, "Thank you very much. I will make sure I pass this info to Senad. Maybe he will help you."

The prostitute glanced at the clock on her dresser, and added, "We still have some time, do you want to have sex?" As she said this, she pulled down her bra down and pressed her breast together, like a dog owner dangling a special treat for her pet.

"No, I can't. I am in love with another woman. I'm sorry."

Keith quickly scampered out the prostitute's apartment and briskly walked away from Silicon Valley. He saw enough for one night.

Chapter 14

Svetlana and Olessya were walking along the cobble streets in Old Budva, through the old castle. They finished their shopping for the day and planned to return to Sasha's mansion.

Olessya started, "Why did you intentionally bumped into that guy at the coffee shop?"

Svetlana replied innocently, "Oh, it was in an accident!" Next she began to giggle, and purposely bumped her hip into Olessya's side.

Olessya joined in the laughter.

"Besides, he was a foreigner. I thought I would improve the odds? I could smell a little romance in the sea air."

"You're scandalous Svetlana!"

"Could you actually marry a foreigner?" Olessya said with a gleeful smile.

"Of course!"

Then Svetlana leaped several steps ahead, turned to face Olessya, and thrust her hips seductively, running her hands up and down her sides, and exclaimed, "I am hot. Look at this body! Any man would be happy to have me."

"We're both gorgeous, but do you think any man would marry us? We do not have a glamorous profession."

"Oh Olessya! Will you stop? It's not like I am going to list my occupation on a resume. Besides, men are stupid creatures. I will just say I could not stand my rich boyfriend in Montenegro. So I left him. I had to start over in another town."

"Yeah, but that guy at the coffee shop looked poor. Didn't you see his clothes? It looks like he did not have a shower in days."

"So what, if he is poor. If he could take me to America, I would still marry him. Besides, how many Russian men shower regularly?"

The women stopped walking and began to laugh loudly.

After the laughter died down, they continued walking.

Svetlana started talking in a more serious tone, "You know Olessya; we only have a few good years ahead of us. It's not like we have a good retirement plan. Once we get too old, Sasha will kick us on to the street or perhaps bury us somewhere in an

unmarked grave. Sasha will find younger prettier Russian girls to replace us. Besides, I have no intentions working in Silicon Valley. Could you imagine us standing with those nasty whores on the street selling their bodies?"

Olessya shivered at the thought of standing on a street corner, trying to lure in the johns. Then Olessya inquired, "Why did you buy that new girl a dress?"

"Why not? I have a feeling she will become my new best friend. I wanted to do something nice for her."

Olessya turned to study Svetlana's face, "You are up to something?"

"Will you stop!"

Although Svetlana displayed her innocent puppy-dog face, Olessya was not buying it. She added in a suspicious voice, "You can stop the sad puppy look. I know you're up to something. I do not know what, but you're up to something."

Adnan woke up in the car. He parked the car near the marina in Budva near a row of tall palm trees. The sun was overhead, and the time had to be close to noon. The old castle of old Budva was several blocks from his car.

Adnan slept in the back seat. He rested his head against the hand rest on the back door and laid on his back. He was too big to sleep in the back seat completely stretched out, so he slept with his knees bent. Unfortunately, his back screamed furiously in pain. Shots of pain would shoot up his back, whenever he scooted a little.

Adnan got out of the car and stood to stretch his back. He stretched his back for several minutes; forcing the backaches to fade and subside.

Then Adnan reached for his phone. Jasmin's phone was still out of service range, and Damir was not picking up. Next he reached for a cigarette and started smoking.

Then Adnan began to think. He did not have a full night's sleep last night. He followed Jasmin's car to the parking lot at the only five-star hotel, and he was quite surprised to see Keith Swanson get out of the car and walk away. How in the hell did

Keith get Jasmin's car? Jasmin loved that car and he would never let anyone touch it, let alone drive it.

Adnan also parked his car and followed Keith on foot. Keith checked into the Las Palmas Hotel, one of the local dives in town.

Adnan remained outside in the distance. He smoked a whole pack of cigarettes as he waited outside, keeping his observant eye on Keith's room. Around three in the morning, Adnan headed back to his car to sleep. Unfortunately, Adnan had only 30 euros to his name and could not afford a hotel for the night. Those 5,000 euros were for Damir, and Damir would kill him if he spent any of it.

As Adnan leaned against the car smoking his cigarette, he saw the two women he met at Sasha's yesterday. The one he screwed, Svetlana, was carrying a shopping bag. He waved to her, as a satisfied grin appeared across his face, the chance to see one of his conquests after a successful attack.

Svetlana stuck her nose in the air and pretended not to see Adnan.

Adnan muttered to himself, "Fucking whore!"

Then the ladies drive away in a sleek red, E-Class coupe Mercedes. Olessya drove while Svetlana sat on the passenger side. They were laughing when they drove past Adnan.

Adnan flicked a half-ass wave, but the ladies did not acknowledge his presence, while he still had that prideful grin glued to his face and scratched absently at his crotch.

Then Adnan's cell phone began to ring. He quickly flicked his cigarette onto the park's lawn and fished the cell phone from his pocket.

"What the fuck is going on?" Denis screamed. Denis was an investigator for 20 years, and was Adnan's contact in the police department in Tuzla. The police were sorely underpaid in Bosnia, and Denis needed the extra money from Damir. He made sure the other police stayed away from Damir's street business and his drug lab, and was paid handsomely for his services.

"I do not understand? I have been in Montenegro for the last two days," Adnan said. Adnan was confused and in the dark. The voice in the back of his head was screaming, 'What the fuck? What is going on?'

"I was at the drug house yesterday. It burned to the ground. We had to wait this morning before we could comb through the ashes. We found a body in the rubble. We are not sure who it is, but from his size, it looks like Jasmin. Then an hour ago, I was called to the university. One of the staff members found Damir in his office. He was shot in the head. We also found a small quantity of cocaine in his office."

"Oh shit! This is bad!"

Denis said with an angry authority in his voice, "YES THIS IS BAD! I do not have enough authority to contain this. The Bosnia government will investigate these crimes and demand that the perpetrators are arrested. The mayor of Tuzla just found about this. He is demanding answers from the police department. A line of reporters is standing outside the university, asking questions about Damir. So, do you have any information about this?"

"Like I said, Damir sent me to Montenegro on an errand. I've been here for a couple of days. I don't know what is going on, but I am following some leads."

"Then you may want to stay there for a while until this investigation blows over!" CLICK, then the call went dead. Denis hung up the phone.

Adnan vented his frustrations, and muttered "What the fuck?" Then he opened the trunk to his car and popped open the secret compartment that contained his gun. Then he slipped the Zastava pistol into a shoulder holster and zipped up his jacket.

Adnan began to ponder Keith. Keith appeared more than he bargained for. Although he was smart, he appeared weak. Keith appeared to be a much fiercer opponent. Adnan had been looking for a challenge for quite some time.

Svetlana returned to Yelena's room. She brought a fresh plate of food and placed it on the vanity next to the plate she left Yelena last night.

Svetlana noticed Yelena barely touched her dinner last night, and said sweetly, "Yelena, you don't have to starve yourself."

Svetlana sat on the chair near Yelena again and placed the bag of new clothes on the bed next to Yelena.

Yelena sat up. She smiled a little at the bag, and then kicked the bag away from her.

"Please do not be that way," Svetlana said pleadingly, "I am here to help you. You have won me to your cause. I want to be your friend."

Yelena said sadly, "Then please take me home. Take me away from this place."

"I can't. Sasha will kill me. You ask the impossible."

"I don't want to stay here. I want to be with Keith."

"I know you don't want to be here. At the moment, I am powerless to help you. In a way, I am trapped here too. I am Sasha's prisoner too."

"I see you bought me clothes, so Sasha must let you leave the house."

"Of course, Sasha lets me leave. Then I always come back to him. Honestly, I have nowhere to go.

I have little money, no passport, no documents, and I do not intend to return to Russia. I'm trapped here just like you."

"Then why are you talking to me? Why are you trying to be my friend?"

"Believe it or not, I want to help you. For me to help you, you must help me. In all honesty, I want to leave this place too. However, I have to make sure I can get away safely. If Sasha knew I tried to escape, he probably would kill me and use my dead body as an example to the other girls. So I have to be careful."

"How can I help you then? I have nothing to give you." Yelena had a confused look on her face.

"Like I stated before, I had nowhere to go. I have no money, but if I knew someone could help me get away, then I would take it. Don't let me sound superficial, but does Keith have any money?"

"Whhaaatttt?"

"Does Keith have any money?"

"I don't know. He's a professor. I know professors earn more than teachers do. I know he probably is considered rich in Bosnia, but I never asked him. Money never interested me."

Svetlana had an exaggerated look on her face. She always sized up a man's net worth. The size of a man's wallet was more important than the size of his manhood. She studied Yelena closely. Yelena was a weird bird indeed, not a typical poor Russian girl who is ready to clean out any man who has a little money.

"Look, I will help you if you promise you will help me. Does Keith have enough money to help me to relocate? Can he help me buy a new life, a new life that is far away from Montenegro and Sasha?"

"If I had to guess, then he probably does have some money, but like I said, I never asked him."

Svetlana retrieved a pen and a small notebook from her purse and handed it to Yelena, and said, "Then write down his number for his cell phone. I will try to call him."

"Can you call him now? I want to talk to him," Yelena pleaded.

"No, I can't. I have to talk to him alone. I have to be very careful. If Sasha found out what I was up to, he would kill me. Then maybe he would kill you too!"

Yelena quickly scribbled Keith's number on the paper and handed it to Svetlana. Then Svetlana tore the paper out of the notebook and folded it multiple times into a small wad, and slipped the wad of paper into a secret pocket she had in the inside of her bra. Usually, she stuffed money into the pocket, but today, it was an escape pass away from Sasha's prison.

Svetlana stood up and hugged Yelena, and then she kissed her cheek. Then she whispered in her ear, "Please eat Yelena." Then she placed a couple more cigarettes into Yelena's eager hand.

Then Svetlana left Yelena's room and took last night's dinner plate with her.

Svetlana was in the kitchen, scraping Yelena's old dinner with a fork into the trash can under the sink.

Sasha snuck into the kitchen and quickly approached Svetlana, embracing her from behind.

Svetlana dropped the plate into the sink. She closed her eyes and tilted her head back in anticipation. Sasha was wearing

his white robe, and she smelled the chlorine on his skin from the morning swim.

Then Sasha began to fondle Svetlana's breasts. She kept her eyes closed, and let the pleasurable sensations send her flying into the skies. Next Sasha's hand brushed accidentally over the wad of paper in her bra.

Svetlana turned quickly before Sasha realized what it was. She started to kiss Sasha's neck, making sure she did not kiss anywhere near Sasha's lips. He would become furious and beat her black and blue. Sasha knew Svetlana's lips have been around quite a bit in Budva, and he never kissed his women on the lips. That was just down right nasty.

Svetlana continued to kiss his chest that was covered with lusher black hair, and worked her way down to his crotch area.

Sasha thrust his hips forward in throbbing waves of ecstasy. Then Sasha picked up Svetlana, opened her skirt, and made love to her on the kitchen table.

Svetlana laid back, smiling, and let Sasha have his way with her. Her smile was not from the sexual animalistic pleasure, but from the realization her life will change. Hopefully, in another week, she will begin a new life, a life devoid of men and their sick sexual depravities.

After Sasha was done, Svetlana would not let him leave. She seduced Sasha repeatedly until Sasha could not take it anymore.

After the third time, Sasha pulled away and put his bathrobe back on. He exclaimed, "Damn girl! What has gotten into you? You are insatiable!" He glanced down at Svetlana. She was smiling, wriggling her body seductively.

Sasha turned and stormed out of the kitchen before Svetlana could seduce him again. He had to retain some energy for the rest of the day.

Svetlana continued to lay naked on the kitchen table for a few minutes. Beads of cool perspiration covered Svetlana's skin around her breast and abdomen. Most of the perspiration was from Sasha and it was cooling her skin.

Svetlana continued to smile, pensive in deep thought. In another week, she can walk away from Sasha and never see him again. She will be free. This was not good-bye sex, where she will

never see Sasha again, and she was giving him a good-bye present. She wanted to wear Sasha down and leave Sasha drained, so he would leave the new girl alone. Svetlana was protecting her one-way ticket out of the underworld. She crossed her fingers that Keith had better have some money. That ticket for freedom was not going to be cheap.

Chapter 15

Svetlana was sitting in the parlor in the *Hotel de la luxure*. The *Hotel de la luxure* was the cover for the most exclusive brothel in Montenegro. The entrance of the hotel led into a large foyer with a circular staircase that wined to the second floor. Three heavily armed guards controlled the front door while two guards secured the rear door. A Madame stood observantly behind a desk near the lower steps of the staircase. She monitored all traffic from the parlor to the rooms on the second floor. The hotel had a third floor too, but these were the living quarters for the women. Sasha would only let a handful of his best girls stay at the mansion.

The parlor was the first room off to the right. It was spacious with a full bar along one wall, a large stone fireplace, and several black leather French provincial couches that formed a semicircle in the center of the room. The parlor effused opulence, wealth, and class. The burning wood in the fireplace would cackle and hiss, as it heated the room on the cool winter Montenegrin nights. The available women sat and waited in this room listening to classical music. Some were dressed in French maid uniforms, while others wore slim, provocative dresses.

The regular johns with a connection would come in through the front door, while security would usher the 'connected' influential men from the back door. The back door led to a dark, spacious garage, hiding the important johns' cars from public view. The connected people were important government officials in the Montenegrin government or CEOs of companies doing business in Montenegro.

The johns coming to this place had to have money. This was Sasha's finest brothel in Budva, and this entertainment was not cheap. Sasha stocked his business with Mercedes and Lamborghinis. If a john wanted a Ford Escort, then he would need a cab ride over to Silicon Valley.

Sasha had three other brothels where the girls were not tops, but they still did a good job for the johns. Of course, each place had its own-price scale.

The johns would come to hotel and mingle with the available women in the parlor. Here, conversation and liquor were

free. Once the john made his selection, they headed to the Madame who tabulated his bill. The second floor was like suites for an exquisite hotel. The Madame offered a range of rooms and amenities. Some suites simply had a queen's size bed, dimmed lights, and thick curtains on the windows, while the executive had a large king's size bed, a Jacuzzi, and a fully stocked bar.

Svetlana sat at the bar, drinking a glass of Russian Champaign. She had a busy night. It was only 11 o'clock, and she entertained one Montenegrin government official and two old businessmen. She tilted the Champaign glass back and greedily swallowed the sweet bubbly contents.

Then Svetlana headed to the ladies' room. The ladies' room was located in the back around the corner from the foyer and had two toilet stalls.

Svetlana walked around the bathroom looking for occupants. The stalls were empty and not a soul was to be seen in the bathroom. Next, she locked the door, went to the stall in the back, and sat on the toilet.

Svetlana fished out a new cell phone she bought at a news stand kiosk. The cell phones were prepaid and were not traceable. She turned on the cell phone and activated it.

Then Svetlana dialed Keith's cell phone number. It rang once, twice, a third time, and subsequently a groggy, "Hello!"

Svetlana hesitated for a few seconds.

Keith said "Hello" a couple of more times. Each hello became stronger and more frantic.

Then Svetlana asked, "May I speak to Keith, please."

"This is he. May I ask who is calling?" Keith asked in confusion. It was not typical for Keith to be getting phone calls in the evening by strange women.

"We have a mutual friend Keith. She is worried about you, and you are worried about her."

"YELENA! WHERE IS YELENA?" Keith screamed into the phone.

"Keith, please calm down. I have no time for a long conversation," Svetlana said gently. She tried to keep her voice down to a whisper, in case, if someone was outside the bathroom door.

"Where is Yelena? Is she okay? Is she alive?" Keith asked excitedly.

"At this moment, Yelena is fine. She is doing well," Svetlana said reassuredly.

"When can I see her?" Keith asked.

"I need to have a private conversation with you in person, and not over the phone. When can you get to Montenegro?"

"I am already in Budva, Montenegro," Keith said proudly.

"Really, when did you get here?"

"Yesterday, I came to search for Yelena."

"Keith, I cannot talk long. First, you are not to contact the police. Besides, my employer has several policemen on his payroll anyway. This will put Yelena's life into danger. Second, I want you to meet me at the coffee shop in Old Budva at 11 o'clock. Come alone. The coffee shop is the first one to the left after you walk through the main castle gates. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Keith replied, and he started to smile.

"Make sure you get a table in the back and away from the street."

Then the phone connect went dead.

Svetlana could not believe what she did. Her heart was racing a little, while her palms were sweaty.

Then Svetlana turned the cell phone off, slipped it back into her purse, and flushed the toilet. Afterwards, she went to the mirror and dabbed a little makeup on.

Then Svetlana returned to the parlor. She still had at least another two hours of work. Maybe luck will be on her side, and she can sit quietly at the bar and drink some more Champaign in peace.

Keith could not believe his luck. He had confirmation that Yelena was still alive. She was still okay.

Keith slept soundly that night and then had a full breakfast the next morning. It was Wednesday, January 19, and he felt energized and filled with energy again. He knew he would be reunited with Yelena once more. He could feel the soft murmurs of his love for Yelena deep inside his heart.

Keith went to that coffee shop an hour early and waited. He found the perfect table in the back of the shop.

Around a quarter past eleven, Keith noticed a pretty blond woman walk by the coffee shop. He glanced at her, because she seemed so familiar.

Svetlana walked by a couple of more times from different directions. She glanced hastily in Keith's direction, and then quickly scanned the other tables. Then she quickly came to Keith's table.

Svetlana stood in front of Keith. She looked confused, scared. Then she asked, "Are you Keith?"

"Yes, I am. You must be that mysterious girl who called me last night." Keith studied the girl. The gears in the back of Keith's mind turned and turned, trying to dig up elusive memories of this woman, and why she seemed so familiar.

Svetlana sat down. She picked up a menu and perused it. Then she snapped her fingers together loudly to attract the waiter's attention. Svetlana ordered an Earl Grey tea with a dash of lemon and honey.

Svetlana started the conversation first, "At this moment, Yelena is fine, but we have to move fast. My employer is very dangerous. He --"

Keith interrupted her, "I know. His name is Sasha, and I have been hearing a lot about him."

Svetlana raised her eyebrow in surprise, and replied, "Very well. I see you are well informed. How did you learn his name?"

"Let's just say his business partner told me his name before he unexpectedly had an accident."

Svetlana raised her eyebrow again suspiciously at Keith. His nerdy appearance made him look too weak to take on the hardened dangerous criminals.

Keith hesitated for a minute, and added, "Do you think if I gave Sasha some money, he would give me Yelena back?"

Svetlana laughed sarcastically, and uttered, "Yeah, sure. Just walk up to his house, ring his door bell and ask him. By the way, I would like to buy my girlfriend back. Once he stops laughing, then he probably will shoot you."

"I don't see the problem," Keith pleaded.

"Sasha only plans for the long term. He handles everything through controlled business dealings. Besides, you could not afford to buy her back anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"If she earned Sasha 300 euros every night for six nights a week for five years, then you are talking about a large sum of money."

Keith turned a pale white and spat out a "What?" as more as an expletive than a real question. Then the numbers roiled in Keith's mind, and he blurted, "That is 468,000 euros."

"The sad news is I'm in the same boat. I personally will only see a small fraction of that. Plus my retirement plan is horrible. Thus, I'm willing to help you both. However, it is dangerous for me too. I may be able to sneak Yelena out of the house, but once Sasha finds out, he will kill me. So I need to escape too. So you have to help me! I can only do this, if you can help me."

"What can I do for you? How can I help you?" Keith asked with sincerity.

"I need money. I need money to start a new life. I need money to get away from Montenegro forever."

"How much?"

"I think 30,000 euros would cover it."

"I am so sorry miss, but I do not have 30,000 euros. Right now, I only have a little less than 20,000 euros," Keith replied, and subsequently, he opened his jacket and partially pulled out the two bundles of blue stacks of money, showing just the edges.

Svetlana's eyes bulged at the size of the stacks. The money hypnotized Svetlana, and her curious hand reached for it subconsciously.

Keith quickly closed his jacket and zipped it up before Svetlana's hand could caress the money.

Svetlana had a blank faraway look in her eyes, like a deer hypnotized by a car's headlights in the pitch of darkness. Then she added, "I see. I think I can find it in my heart to accept 20,000 euros. It may be rough, but I think I can do it."

"Okay, agreed. How do I get Yelena back?"

"That is the tough part. I will have to find a way to sneak her out. It will be tough, because Sasha has several armed guards

patrolling his house. Once I figure out a way, I will call you on the cell phone. You keep your cell phone on and charged. Then you will have to pick us up. It would also help if you can create a diversion. Something that will keep Sasha occupied. He keeps a close eye on everything. I do not care what you do. Have someone stand outside his gate and shoot at his guards. I really do not care."

"Where does Sasha live?"

"I cannot tell you that, not yet. Also, please do not try to call me. I cannot have you call me at the wrong time. Just in case, my cell phone will be switched off, but it is possible that it could turn on by itself or something. Once I have a plan, I will call you, and you will have to act fast."

"Okay."

Svetlana sipped her tea. She kept glancing at Keith. He seemed a little familiar, but she could not remember exactly. Her memories hid behind a wall of dense fog. Besides, she has been with so many men, she could not remember their faces anymore. Besides, all men pretty much look the same and pretty much do the same thing in bed. Once in a while, Svetlana would get a surprise from an eager gentleman.

Keith just blurted it out, "You bumped into me yesterday. You were with some other blond woman at a store. I was at the coffee shop that was further inside the castle."

Svetlana began to blush and added, "It is a small world isn't it. I vaguely remember bumping into you."

Svetlana continued drinking her tea. Once her tea was finished, she said, "I am sorry Keith, but I have to get back."

"May I ask what your name is?"

"I can't. Just call me a friend. Is there anything you want me to say to Yelena? She really misses you."

"Tell her I love her, and I did some really terrible things to try to get her back. Tell her I lit a candle for us in the Serbian church in Tuzla, the one near the city's center. She will understand."

"Bye Keith, remember, when I call, you have to act fast."

Then Svetlana gathered her things, and quickly disappeared into the noon crowd.

Keith thought about following her but knew that would be futile. He had no way of busting into Sasha's house, especially with

the armed guards. He did not mind dying, but he worried for Yelena's safety. If Keith died, then surely Yelena would perish, and Keith had no intentions of leaving Yelena stranded in Montenegro's underworld.

Then the waiter appeared and placed the bill on the table. The blond Russian woman walked away without offering to pay for her tea.

Keith smirked. She is probably used to getting what she wants from men. He thought about handing the waiter a hundred euro note out of the stack of money. That way, the mysterious woman left one hell of a tip to the waiter. However, Keith's conscience screamed at him not to do this. This woman was also trapped by Sasha, and she needed the money to buy a new life.

Keith pulled out some euro coins, and placed them on the table on top of the check. Then he returned to his hotel room.

Svetlana returned to Sasha's mansion.

Sasha fussed over his women's eating habits. He wanted all his women firmed and toned, so he hired a professional chef. The chef prepared Svetlana and Yelena a roasted breast of chicken with slivers of almond, a small mound of mashed potatoes with no gravity, and a tossed salad to the side garnished with a sprig of mint.

Svetlana inhaled her lunch at the counter. Afterwards, she eagerly grabbed Yelena's plate and headed for Yelena's room.

As Svetlana entered, she saw Yelena sitting at the vanity. She was fussing with her wet hair, and a damp white towel was tossed carelessly onto the floor.

Svetlana sat the lunch down on the vanity and Yelena immediately began shoveling bits of food into her mouth.

Yelena was gradually coming out of her shock. She was a withdrawn hidden caterpillar that was transforming into a happy, fluttering butterfly. Yelena was ravenous and swallowed her food in large gulps.

Svetlana noticed the empty plate from last night's dinner. Yelena was eating again.

Svetlana was excited and hugged Yelena tightly, whispering into her ear, "I have good news. I saw Keith!"

Yelena radiated with joy, which illuminated the room. Her voice rose with excitement, "Really! Keith is here in Montenegro. Please, Svetlana, do not toy with me. Is Keith really here?"

Svetlana hugged her tighter, "He's really here. He's in Montenegro. He wants you back."

Svetlana hopped up and down, like an excited little girl, and continued, "It has been arranged. I'm going to sneak you out of here. We have to be careful. I have to plan everything meticulously. I have to be very careful."

Yelena caressed Svetlana's hand affectionately, "Thank you Svetlana. Oh thank you."

Then Yelena's smile soured, and asked in a sad voice, "How are you going to do it. I have been studying the guards outside my window. It looks like Sasha has 20 armed guards down there."

Svetlana opened her shopping bag and pulled out a shiny dark cocktail dress and a blond wig. Then she said, "I went shopping again today by myself. I figure you are about my friend's size. Her name is Olessya, and she is a blond. So I figure that I dress you up like her and sneak you out tomorrow night. From a distance, the guards could never tell who you are during the night."

"Oh, I am so excited."

"I know. I am excited too. I am a little envious of you. Keith wants you back. He really loves you. He made a romantic gesture for your absence," Svetlana said mischievously. She wanted Yelena to beg for this nugget of information.

Yelena pleaded with her, and asked "Please Svetlana, don't play with me. What did Keith do?"

Svetlana hugged Yelena again and then added a kiss to the top of Yelena's head. Afterwards she whispered, "Before he came to Montenegro, he said he went to your Serbian church and lit a candle for you and him at the altar. Then he prayed for you."

Yelena folded her hands over her flippant heart while her cheeks turned a rosy red.

"He really loves you. You're so lucky," Svetlana continued. Then she carefully returned the skimpy dress and wig to the bag,

and buried it in the closet under a stack of old shoe boxes. She stacked the boxes like bricks over the bag.

"Remember, the wig and dress are in the closet. When I will come for you tomorrow night, you be ready to put that on. Oh, yeah, I almost forgot, here are a couple of more cigarettes. Please do not let Sasha catch you with these."

Then she kissed Yelena softly on top of her head again and left the room.

Yelena's cheeks were still red, and she was glowing. Keith was in Montenegro. He came for her.

Chapter 16

Keith kept his appointment for the Renaissance Night Club. He arrived early.

The bouncer at the door nodded his head in approval, when Keith said he had to see Senad. The menacing bouncer pointed to the tables on this side of the club.

Keith gasped for air as the bouncer lifted his arm and pointed in this direction. A bar of soap did not touch the bouncer's skin in weeks.

Keith was there for an hour, nursing his drink, a rum and coke. The two ice cubes quickly disintegrated into two white whiskers that floated on the top of his drink. He watched the withering and gyrating bodies on the dance floor. The Renaissance Night Club had nothing to do with the Renaissance. The customers looked rough, more like a biker bar than something as sophisticated as the Renaissance. Today, the evening tide must have been high washing all the floating shit and scum onto the sandy shore and into the bar.

Keith washed the remainder of his drink down, and was ready to order another one. The stench of the place escalated as more people found their way onto the dance floor. The place reeked of sweaty leather, cheap alcohol, and old vomit left fossilizing on the dance floor.

Then a large guy approached Keith. He glared down at Keith and then waved his hand at him, gesturing for him to follow. The man was a monstrosity, built like a grizzly bear. His dirty hair was tucked under a red bandana.

Keith sprang up from his chair and followed in close pursuit.

The large man led Keith to a back hallway that led to a single door. Several other sizeable men huddled around the door. As Keith approached, their raucous laughter and loud voices dimmed to mere whispers. They wore black leather jackets adorned with silver metal pyramid studs, filthy blue jeans, and red bandanas that covered their grimy greasy hair.

Once Keith and the large guy reached the door, the large man turned and barked commands at Keith, "Raise your hands in

the air." Then the huge guy proceeded to pat Keith down; as his questioning hands searched Keith's body for weapons.

Lucky for Keith, the Smith and Wesson remained tucked under the dresser in his hotel room. If worse came to worse and no one would help him, he would try to shoot his way into Sasha's.

Once the large man was satisfied, he opened the door and directed Keith inside.

Another large guy sat behind an old desk. A silent companion stood to his left side. The men had stone black eyes filled with intelligence and a dash of anger and savagery.

Keith became nervous. Maybe this was bad idea. Those guys looked rough. They would have no qualms about beating Keith to a living pulp, and leaving him to die on a dark deserted street in the middle of the night.

Keith sat down in an empty chair in front of the desk.

The man sitting across from him just glared at him.

Keith trembled a little. His heart began to beat quicker. He tried to talk, but his nervousness drained his mouth of any moisture.

Keith swallowed and smacked his gums a couple of times, but the words would not come out. They stuck to the roof of his mouth.

The man behind the desk yelled in sharp angry tones, "What the fuck do you want?"

"Ah, ah, ah," Keith stammered.

"Well, I am waiting, God damn it," then the man crossed his arms. The glare in his eyes became fiercer. The person standing to Senad's side kept his piercing gaze on Keith. The men looked menacing, like ex-felons who were mistakenly released from prison a couple of days ago.

Senad's face was butt ugly. Stubbles of hair protruded from odd places on this face, his brows were almost one continuous sash; dreadlocks of hair poked from under his bandana, and his face was squished flat like a bulldog. If the man had four legs instead of two, he would be an ugly bulldog.

"I I I thought yoouu could heellpp mee?"

"What do I look like, a travel agent? How the fuck can I help you?"

Keith thought about Yelena, and he let out a long sigh. Then Keith forced the words out of his mouth, and said, "My boss kidnapped my girlfriend and sold her to Sasha."

The man raised his eyebrows a little at the name, Sasha, and he replied, "I see we have a common enemy. I do not understand how I can help you."

Keith continued, becoming more confident after each uttered syllable, and added, "I thought he was your enemy. That somehow you could help me? You know that old saying, my enemy's enemy is my friend."

"I really cannot help you. Most people who come down to Montenegro have a magical, wonderful experience. Some people do not. Why don't you complain to the Montenegro Tourist Board or go to the Montenegrin police? I am sure they can help you."

The silent, standing watching man burst into laughter. Then Senad, the man sitting at the desk, joined and added to his laughter.

"I don't think they can help me. I was informed by one of his girls that Sasha would not hesitate to kill her. I am afraid to go to the police."

The ugly man, Senad, continued, "I understand why you came to me. I had you checked out with my contact in the police department. But you don't understand, how can I help you? I do not do charity work. If you take a look at this place, this place is a shit hole. Sasha took over my business a couple of years ago and pushed me out. I have to hide here like a scared rat. I can't even show my face around in my hometown. If Sasha knew where I was at, he would send a couple of goons over to kill me. The Russians are so peculiar about their business. They love to monopolize everything."

Keith wanted to burst out laughing, when Senad said he could not even show his face around Budva. With an ugly face like that, the city's animal inspector would have him captured and euthanized within an hour.

Keith hesitated. Afterwards, his voice cackled as he said, "I have about 50,000 euros of ecstasy. I was told by the person who made it to bring it here and buy some friends."

The standing man immediately bent over, and began whispering in Senad's ear. Then Senad added, "This certainly changes things. I have to discuss this with the crew. Return to your

seat in the night club and I will give you my decision within an hour."

Senad came over to Keith and like a gentleman, escorted him to the door. Then they shook hands, "By the way, you can call me Senad."

Keith returned to the nightclub. More bikers, criminals, and sea hags joined the growing gyrating crowd on the dance floor. The stench from the nightclub intensified along with the humidity level.

This time around, Keith felt a change in the mood of the staff. Before Keith talked to Senad, suspicious eyes and glances fell on Keith when Keith's head was turned away. Now he was a somebody. Before Keith even asked, a fresh rum and coke were quickly placed in front of him. The rum and coke even tasted better.

Keith waited for half an hour this time to talk to Senad again.

When Keith was led to the back office this time, Senad was still sitting behind his desk. Three rougher looking biker types joined the crowd. They flanked in a semicircle around Senad, leaving one vacant chair for Keith.

"My friend, Keith, please have a seat. Excuse my rough behavior," Senad said joyfully. Then he lifted his bottle of beer, and guzzled half of it down. Afterwards, he continued, "I think we can help each other. We can do business together."

"Thank you, Senad. I was hoping you could help me."

"We still have a problem. Sasha's mansion is well protected. We will have trouble getting through the front gate. If we have to blast our way in, then people will die, possibly your girl."

"I was contacted by one of Sasha's women. She thinks she can sneak my girlfriend out, but the trouble is we need a diversion to keep Sasha occupied. He keeps a close eye on his women."

Senad smiled, "I can create that diversion for you, so this could work. If you can get that girl to open the gate before Sasha knows what hit him, then we have a chance. Then you can grab your girl and go. Then I will take care of Sasha."

All the men smiled and gleamed maliciously, when Senad said he would take care of Sasha.

Keith was happy, while Senad and the four silent men stood grimacing. Keith was going to get his girl back.

"However, we still have the ecstasy to worry about. You give me the drugs tonight before I do any planning. Is that acceptable?"

Keith hesitated and thought about it for a minute, and then he replied, "That is fine by me. You can have it."

"Very well. Faruk will accompany you back to your hotel to get the drugs. Once he authenticates it, then the plan is a go. We'll help each other. You can get your girl, and I can get rid of Sasha."

Keith could not believe how smoothly the plan was going. Faruk and Keith were back at his hotel within twenty minutes. Maybe things were going too smoothly.

Keith pulled out the dresser and began removing the drugs, placing them on the dresser.

Faruk's eager hand grabbed the first packet. He opened it and sniffed the contents. Then he removed a vial with a clear liquid and dropped one of the white pills into it. Afterwards, he snapped the lid back on the vial and vigorously shook the bottle. The pill instantly disintegrated and dissolved.

Keith remained kneeling on the floor by the dresser. His left hand was still under the dresser, and his fingers were brushing against the handle of the gun. Keith studied Faruk's face, trying to foretell his intentions. The thought did occur to him that Faruk could kill him and steal the drugs. Then Yelena would be forever trapped in Sasha's prison.

The clear liquid immediately turned a luminescent orange-brown, and Faruk instantly called Senad to relay the good news.

"Senad, the test came back positive. It's pure, high-grade shit. We are good to go."

Then Faruk handed the cell phone to Keith. He reached up and grabbed the phone. His twitching fingers left the gun in its hiding place. "Hello," Keith chimed.

"Keith, the plan is a go. Once that girl calls you and gives you a time, you immediately call me, and I will send someone over

to pick you up. Make sure she gets the gate open, and she has your girl with her. Then you grab your girl and run like hell. Do you understand?"

Keith confidently answered, "Yes sir; I understand."

Faruk recovered his phone and took the drugs with him, slipping them into his inside pocket.

Keith felt the first weight was lifted off his chest. The drugs were gone. The second weight hopefully would be removed the next night. He will have Yelena back, and they can get the hell out of the former Yugoslavia.

Chapter 17

It was 11 AM on Thursday, January 20. Svetlana and Olessya joined Sasha at the dining table near the swimming pool.

Sasha was enjoying his favorite brunch this morning. Russian crepes rolled and stuffed with course ground beef with a drizzle of sour cream over the top. He greedily crammed his mouth with a crepe and then washed it down with a fine hot Sri Lankan tea splashed with a dollop of milk.

"Good morning, Sasha," the women chimed enthusiastically.

"Good morning, ladies," he spat between bites of food. Then Sasha grabbed another crepe from the serving plate and inhaled it whole. He quickly washed the crepe down with tea before it became lodged in his throat.

Olessya placed a couple of Russian crepes onto her plate, and spread a thick lather of sour cream over the top. She neatly sliced each crepe and began slowly eating them.

Svetlana continued to sit there with an empty plate in front of her. Her mind was deep in thought. She pondered how she could broach the subject with Sasha. Then she let out a sigh and leaned closer to Sasha. Svetlana pleaded, "Sasha, I was wondering if I could talk to you alone."

Olessya eyed Svetlana suspiciously. She passed furtive glances back and forth between Sasha and Svetlana.

"Sure, why not? Olessya could you please give us a couple of minutes."

Olessya dropped her fork on the plate with a clanked and grabbed an apple from the fruit basket that garnished the center of the table with luscious bright colors. She began nibbling on the apple, as she walked away from the table, and headed back into the house.

Svetlana started immediately, "I have been putting in a lot of hours at the hotel. I was wondering if I could have a day off today. I need a little me time."

Sasha hesitated. He was ready to snatch another Russian crepe off the plate, but instead, he folded his hands together and placed them on the top of the table. He scrutinized Svetlana closely

with fiery intent. He was giving Svetlana one-hundred percent of his attention. He normally does not cave into the girls, but Svetlana was one of his favorites.

"Okay, Svetlana, I supposed I can give you a day off. Are you planning on anything tonight? Do you have a hot date whom I do not know about," Sasha asked in jest?

Shrill laughter erupted from Svetlana, and she uttered, "Nooooo! I do not have a date. I been having at least three or four hot dates each day for the past two years. I think I definitely need a break from men. I would just like a little me time."

Sasha joined her laughter and added, "I can see your point."

Svetlana hesitated for a second before broaching a taboo subject. She continued, "Well Sasha, I was also wondering if it is not a problem if I could have some of my savings. I thought about buying some expensive jewelry, like a Rolex watch and a pearl necklace."

"You know I have your money invested," Sasha snapped sharply and added, "I am looking out for your best interests. When your services are no longer needed around here, I will let you cash out." Then Sasha hastily grabbed another Russian crepe.

Svetlana wanted to laugh, but she restrained her emotions from unwarranted outbursts. She knew the true meaning of Sasha's retirement plan. When Sasha did not need her anymore, she probably would be swimming far out to the sea wearing cement galoshes.

Svetlana caressed his hand and feigned sincerity by stating, "I think if I wear it at the hotel, the customers will think I am a princess. It could make me worth more." Svetlana jingled her body seductively to emphasize her point.

The greed slowly churned in Sasha's mind. He poured himself another cup of tea from a glass teapot. After a long sigh, he replied, "I suppose I can give you 5,000 euros. When do you need it?"

Svetlana hid her disappointment from Sasha. She worked for Sasha for two years for a gruesome six days per week with no vacation time, and serviced at least three customers each every single back-breaking day. Her long disgusting toils were rewarded with a paltry 5,000 euros. In Svetlana's mind, she earned Sasha a

truck load of money, but Sasha was a greedy, Russian gangster. Of course, she was surprised; she would get any money from him.

Svetlana sweetly replied, "This afternoon. I would like to go shopping."

Then Svetlana began caressing Sasha's leg. Her hand stroked back and forth across his inner thigh. Each stroke brought her hand closer to Sasha's crotch.

Once Svetlana brushed her hand against his crotch, Sasha grabbed her hand rudely and thrust it away. He said rudely, "I'm sorry Svetlana, but not today. I'm saving myself for someone else. I have to break the new girl in tonight, and I want the energy and stamina. I need to put her ass to work, and start making some money from her."

Svetlana feigned a smile at Sasha' schemes, but her inner voice was screaming at her, 'Oh no. Leave the poor girl alone. She's just a simple girl who was kidnapped from Bosnia.'

Senad sent Faruk over to pick Keith up after Svetlana's phone call. It was around 7:00 P.M.

Keith sat quietly in the front seat blind folded. The trip was at least 40 minutes, and Keith was completely lost. All he knew he was somewhere along the wharf in Budva. Keith heard the periodical wail of several marine foghorns in the distance. He also heard a flock of seagulls flying around the coast. The seagulls jostled and gawked as they fought each other over the jumping fish that were peeking at the sunset.

Then Faruk stopped suddenly, and the brakes of the car squealed loudly. He jumped out, and strode to Keith's side of the car. Next, he opened the car door, and led Keith inside a large, cavernous warehouse.

Keith heard a large commotion of activity inside the warehouse.

Faruk continued to lead Keith towards the center of the warehouse, where Senad was standing.

Once they reached Senad, Senad removed Keith's blindfold, and simultaneously pulled out Keith's Smith and Wesson to study it. Then he placed the gun back into Keith's eager hand.

Keith stood in awe and amazement at the scene that spread out in front of him. He stood in an old warehouse near the wharf.

Thirty rough looking biker types sat on crates and boxes assembling their equipment. Every biker had a M80 Yugoslavian assault rifle. The rifles appeared to be ancient, as they remained hidden in old crates since the close of the Bosnian War. The men carefully disassembled and re-assembled the rifles, dabbing the essential parts with lubricant oil.

Once the bikers finished lubricating their rifles, they stood up and looped a thick green belt that crisscrossed their chests. In the belt were several assault rifle clips and grenades.

Keith fumbled at the butt of his 0.38 Smith and Wesson absently, easing his troubled mind from what was displayed in front of him.

Then Senad called his troops to attention.

Although the troops were former soldiers in the Montenegrin military, their old, tired bodies fell out of routine. The snapping of their heels together and saluting their commander was discordant and fell out of sync. However, their eyes glint with savagery determination.

Keith knew some people were going to die tonight.

Senad turned to Keith, and asked, "What's the message from Sasha's girl?"

Everyone was quiet in the warehouse. All the angry eyes focused on Keith's words, as he said, "She said to meet them at the gate at 10:00 PM sharp, and don't be late. Yelena's life depends on it. Sasha's place is the large white mansion that is perched on the first mountain top outside of Budva. She said any clueless driver could easily find it. A long winding road leads directly to the top of the mountain to his place."

Once Keith finished, Senad rallied his troops, "Soldiers, tonight we have a fierce battle with an old Russian enemy. This enemy Sasha came to our city and pushed us to the side like we were nothing but dog shit on the sidewalk baking in the sun. Tonight, we take back our city, and get rid of this son-of-bitch Sasha. Tonight, Sasha dies."

Then a raucous crescendo of cheers and hollers rang out in the warehouse, as the soldiers screamed their approval.

Once the screams died down, Senad continued, "Tonight, we will become the kings of the underworld again. We will take back our streets and reclaim our businesses. However, this victory will come at a price. Some of you will not come back. Your sacrifice and blood will be always remembered. You will be memorialized with a picture of you hanging on the wall near the entrance to the Renaissance Night Club. Today, you'll live as brave soldiers, but some of you'll die tonight as heroes!"

The roar of the crowd rang out again. All the soldiers held their assault rifles in the air, displaying their bravery and allegiance to Senad.

Keith stood there apprehensively. He thought to himself what in the hell did I just do.

Then the soldiers began climbing into two old rusty parked vans. The soldiers sat down on the van's floor with their backs to the wall, clenching their assault rifles.

Senad glanced over at Keith, and called, "Are you coming Keith. Hop in the van in the back with the soldiers. Then Senad climbed into the passenger seat of the other van.

As Keith huddled for room in the back of the van, the sliding van's door slammed shut.

The ride to Sasha's was excruciating. The stench in the nightclub was a godsend compared to the stench inside the van. Bodies covered and sprawled over every square inch of the van's floor.

All the soldiers were chain-smoking cigarettes, and the metal floor had gaping holes that allowed some of the exhaust to pollute the already foul air inside the van.

Keith wrenched and wiggled in pain as the metal floor bit into Keith's ass. As the van hit a bump, the floor would bite his ass even harder.

As they approached Sasha's mountain, a command rang out from the walkie talkie from Senad. Everyone had to extinguish their cigarettes and remain absolutely quiet.

The vans slowly crept up the mountain with their headlights turned off. Then the vans came to a stop a half-mile away from Sasha's front gate.

One of the soldiers quietly left the van, and scampered forward on his hands and knees. He had binoculars in one hand

and a walkie-talkie in the other. He hid under the darkness of the night to get a better view of the front gate. The front gate to Sasha's mansion illuminated the dark mountain side like a light house. The soldier saw one solitary guard staffing the guardhouse.

Senad's crew hid under the cover of darkness out of view of the guardhouse, waiting silently, ready to spring into action like a provoked rattlesnake striking at its enemy. Senad planned to strike hard and fast when those gates open.

Chapter 18

Sasha awakened around 10:10 PM in his den. He was sprawled out unconsciously on this brown leather sofa. His head throbbed in pain.

Sasha massaged his temple, trying to alleviate the throbbing sensations. Then he sat up on his couch. What the hell happened? What were his last thoughts? How did he end up sleeping here so early on the sofa? His mind searched for his last memories before losing consciousness.

Then Sasha noticed the two wine glasses on the coffee table. His wine glass was empty while Svetlana's was still full. He picked up his wine glass and sniffed it. All he could smell was the sweet residual of a fine red wine.

Then Sasha picked up the bottle of wine and examined it. He noticed a white substance settled to the bottom in a thick layer. He swirled the bottle, watching the milky power swirl at the bottom like cottony clouds swirling during a spring thunderstorm.

Sasha's eyes widened in surprise, and then he exploded into rage. When he was angry, he had a nervous tic. His right cheek was convulsing sporadically and violently. Then he screamed, "That fucking bitch drugged me! I'm going to kill that bitch!"

Sasha opened the safe that was hidden behind an oil painting of an 18th Century Street in Moscow ,and retrieved his Stechkin APS pistol. The pistol was made in the Soviet Union and was similar to a 9 mm pistol used in the West. "Tonight that bitch is going to die," Sasha huffed under his breath.

Sasha stormed up to Yelena's room.

The guard was still stationed there. He was reading a Russian newspaper, *Pravda*, or 'The Truth' as it is translated into English.

Sasha screamed in rage, "Have you seen Svetlana today?" His nervous tic pulsated wildly.

The guard trembled in fear. It was not wise for Sasha to be so angry. It could be dangerous to one's health. He obediently replied, " Boss, I saw her about 30 minutes ago. She checked up on the girl inside. Then she left a little while later."

Sasha barged into Yelena's room. The room was submerged in darkness. He violently flipped the light switch on and saw what appeared to be someone sleeping in the bed. He rushed to the bed and peeled back the covers. It was a mound of shoe boxes and clothes. Yelena was gone!

The guard began to shake as he peered at the mound of clothes.

Sasha yelled at the top of his lungs, "How'd the fuck did the girl get out of here?"

The guard trembled and shook with fear. Then understanding and comprehensive pierce through the guard's thick skull, as he muttered, "Oh shit. Please do not be angry, boss, but that dumb bitch tricked me."

Sasha's rage increased a few clicks on a seismograph, as he screamed, "What? How'd she trick you? God damn it!"

"Svetlana checked up on the girl. When she left, she came to me and started rubbing against me. She even stuck her tits in my face. I didn't see, but she must have left the door unlocked ---"

"What? ... What?"

"Boss, she said she wanted me right now. She kept touching me. Then she sat on my lap and started kissing my neck. She kept saying she wanted me. So I took her to the bathroom, so we would not get caught. I am so sorry boss. I am really really sorry. I thought the dumb bitch was just horny and needed a fuck!"

Sasha raised his pistol and shot the guard dead. The bullet pierced the center of his forehead, and the guard immediately tumbled onto the floor, lifeless.

Then Sasha ran downstairs and ran out the front door. He ran to the edge of the cul de sac to get a better view of the guardhouse. What he saw disturbed him. He saw Svetlana lure the guard out of the booth's side door, as she bared her breast for him.

The guard could not see the other blond woman who resembled Olessya who was hiding next to the door. She held a heavy brick high above her head. Sasha knew it could not be Olessya since Olessya went to the hotel to work this evening.

"Shoot the fucking bitches, goddamn it," Sasha screamed at the top of his lungs, but to no avail.

The blond woman knocked out the guard cold, and he sprawled onto the lawn unconsciously.

Sasha shot at them with his pistol, but his rage clouded his judgment and his aim. The bullets missed and dug into the wall of the guardhouse.

Then the gates began opening, and headlights appeared quickly in the driveway. A vehicle was rapidly approaching.

Before Sasha knew the extent of Svetlana's treason, a small group of armed bikers started jumping out of an ancient rusty van and began shooting.

Then another van drove through the gates and maneuvered to the backyard.

Sasha ran back inside his house to rally his troops. He looked forward to killing that treasonous bitch Svetlana. Of course, Sasha was perplexed over Svetlana's actions. He so generously bestowed gifts and respect onto her. Then she turned around and disrespected him. That bitch will pay! That bitch will pay dearly!

Keith heard a small barrage of gunfire from a pistol. Then the large iron wrought gate slowly opened and two blond women emerged from the guardhouse.

The vans came to life and lurched forward towards the open gate at a full speed. The first van, where Senad sat in the passenger seat, drove through until it reached the front of Sasha's house. The second van came to a screeching halt at the gate, and Senad's men literally tossed Keith out through the back doors. Then it careened across the lawn to the back of the house.

Under a crimson colored moon, a barrage of gunfire torn through the calm dark night. Then every few seconds, a flash from a grenade illuminated the dark night in bright flashes. Shouts and screams were heard between the gunfire. At some points, twenty assault rifles were firing at the same time with a barrage of explosions.

The blond women ran outside the guardhouse and ran for cover around the outside corner of the thick brick wall.

Then Keith stood up and ran after the women. He saw Svetlana holding the hands of another blond woman. He felt apprehensive, as if Svetlana grabbed the wrong girl on her way out.

As Keith came closer, the blond woman's face seemed familiar. Before he came to a stop, the blond woman hopped into his wanting arms and embraced him hard.

She joyously yelled, "Keith! Keith! Keith!"

Then familiarity flooded Keith's mind; he was holding Yelena. He retorted her screams with his own, "Yelena! Yelena! I found you!" He embraced her tighter.

Svetlana interrupted them, and said loudly, "Well Keith, Congratulations. I see you started the next Bosnian War. When I told you to create a diversion, you really created a diversion."

Both Keith and Yelena cried with tears of relief. They held each other tightly, as gunfire and grenades invaded the quietness of the night.

"Well, Keith I hate to keep bothering you, but you remember our promise? I met my side of the bargain, and now you must abide by your side," Svetlana said, as her voice echoed in shrill tones.

Yelena embraced Keith tightly and would not let go.

Keith had to squeeze his hand into his coat to retrieve the two bundles of money.

Svetlana quickly snatched the money out of his hand, and slipped it into a pouch that was attached to her belt. Then Svetlana hugged Yelena from her back and kissed the back of her head. After she let go, she said, "Good luck to you Yelena. I wish you the best." Next she glanced at Keith, "Keith; you take good care of her. You're holding onto one in a million. You treat her well."

Then Svetlana sprinted into the darkness directly towards the sparkling city lights of Budva.

Yelena and Keith never saw her again.

Keith whispered firmly, "Yelena, we have to go now." Another grenade explosion illuminated the night as if to punctuate Keith's statement.

Yelena tossed her blond wig to the ground, and the two began sprinting down the mountain directly towards the shoreline. From this height, they could see the sandy shore below as the moon glimmered off the black polished obsidian stone of the Adriatic Sea. The lights from the city of Budva twinkled and sparkled in the horizon to their left.

They ran and ran until they reached a patch of small trees halfway down the mountain. The gunfire stopped several minutes ago and now, a chorus of police sirens interrupted the calm darkness. The wailing from the police sirens rose and fell, in the distance. At one point, it seemed the sirens were coming nearer but then the sirens faded into the night.

Yelena and Keith paused to embrace each other by the trees. Their moist lips searched for each other, becoming reacquainted. Their kissing became locked and fused together for several minutes.

Then Yelena pulled several inches away from Keith. Her wandering hand found the butt of the gun. She whispered in Keith's ear, ever so softly, "Keith, what is this?"

"I am so sorry Yelena. I know you do not like guns, but I had to come and get you. I was going to use whatever force, I could get my hands on."

Then Yelena embraced Keith again, and their lips began another long, intimate conversation.

"Huh huh! I hate to be a bother," a booming, baritone voice said from a patch of bushes directly behind Keith.

Then Adnan stepped out from behind the bushes. In one hand, he had a pistol pointed at Keith's back and in the other was a lit match that just lit the dangling cigarette in his mouth.

"Well Keith, I have to congratulate you. I don't know how you did it, but somehow you really did. Please put your hands up slowly, carefully, or I will be forced to kill both of you now."

Yelena stiffened as Keith raised his hands, and he replied, "Adnan; it has been a long time. Don't take this personally, but I was kind of hoping not to see you again."

"Well Keith, you murdered my two best friends. I don't know how you did it, but they are gone. I received confirmation two days ago."

"I am sorry about that Adnan, but with all due respect, you guys kidnapped my girlfriend and sold her to Sasha. I figure I could repay Damir's generosity."

"Keith, slowly turn around and step away from your girl," Adnan demanded. Hatred pulsated with shrill undertones in his voice.

As Keith slowly turned around, he felt Yelena grab his gun.

Then Keith faced Adnan.

Adnan added coldly, "I take it the small war at Sasha's place was your doing? In some ways, I'm glad. You actually did us a favor. However, you killed my best friend, Damir. I cannot forgive you for this!" The anger and fury sharpened the tones in Adnan's voice.

"I'm sorry about that Adnan. I did not mean to rain on your parade, but Damir was crazy. Come on, he set up a criminal enterprise around a university," Keith uttered logically, hoping to diffuse Adnan's rage.

"I know Damir had his troubles, but he meant well. He founded that university to be his legacy. He wanted to leave something good for this cold cruel world."

Keith burst into laughter, "Damir could not even manage a hotdog stand let alone a university."

Then Yelena fired the pistol at Adnan. She emptied all six bullets into Adnan's chest. The gun continued to emit dry clicks as Yelena continued to pull the gun's trigger, but all the bullets were already spent.

Adnan had a shocked look on his face. He only kept a watchful eye on Keith, but not the woman. A woman shot him! Yugoslavian women were traditional and never fired guns. They stood on the sidelines as the Balkan men fought their war.

Then Adnan fell to the ground dead. The look of surprise eternally froze on his face.

Keith grabbed Yelena's hand and pulled her forward. The gun fell to the ground near Adnan's outstretched dead hand. Then they ran and ran until they reached the shoreline.

They embraced each other strongly as the waves splashed rhythmically onto the sandy shoreline.

Yelena began to cry and Keith was wiping away her tears. Yelena whispered, "K-e-i-t-h, I I I s-h-o-t someone."

"I know Yelena. It's okay. He was evil like Damir and Sasha." Then Keith held her firmly; as her body shivered and trembled.

After several minutes, Yelena came to her senses. She asked softly, "What about the police? I am afraid to go to prison. Keith, I cannot go to prison."

"Yelena, we are not caught yet. If they do catch us, then I will confess to all the crimes. You are innocent."

"Keith, what about us? What will happen to us?"

"Yelena, I'm going back home to America, and I am taking you with me. I think I have seen enough of Bosnia and Montenegro to last a lifetime."

Then Keith and Yelena began kissing again. Afterwards, they both began walking towards the lights of the city, while the waves continued to roll softly onto the sandy shores.

Keith asked in jest, "I know this great little coffee shop in Old Budva. It is in the old castle walls near the center."

Yelena emitted a sad giggle, and replied "Keith, I do not think I could drink some coffee right now. I think I have seen enough for one day. I think I rather be alone with you."

The two continued to walk along the beach, and the lights and roar of Budva became stronger, brighter after each step.

Epilogue

Yelena and Keith stayed in Budva, Montenegro for a week.

Yelena's mom stopped over for a couple of days to say good-bye to Yelena and brought Yelena's id and documents.

Then Keith and Yelena headed to Lyubiana, Slovenia. Along the way, they both stopped in Olovo, Bosnia. Yelena wanted to say good-bye to her father one last time. They had trouble finding his grave as the snow pelted the ground and covered all the tombstones with several inches of snow. Then they both stood over his grave, and Keith held Yelena silently, as she wept.

Then Keith and Yelena continued to Slovenia. As they approached the turnoff for Tuzla, Keith stomped on the gas pedal shooting by the turnoff. They were never going to set foot in Tuzla, Bosnia ever again. They stayed in Slovenia for a couple of months until the U.S. Embassy approved Yelena's fiancé visa. Then they dashed to the airport and were on the next plane to the United States.

They settled in Heber Springs, Arkansas, where Keith accepted a low-paying job at the local university. He had to teach many courses, and work long hours. However, Heber Springs was the perfect place to settle down.

Heber Springs was a small community of 15,000 souls, who were stranded out in the middle of nowhere, about an hour's drive north of Little Rock. Nothing of any consequence happened there. Both Keith and Yelena blended in with the locals, occasionally joining the gossip of every little thing that happened in the community.

Heber Springs rarely saw any violent crime. The only major crime was a drunk driver would occasionally plow over a stop sign. Unfortunately, Heber Springs had an epidemic, where many toppled stop signs were lying on the grass near the intersections.

It took months for Yelena to heal. At first, she was scared to go out by herself; she would not even let Keith leave her sight, but gradually, she emerged from her protective shell. She still had a strong fright of closets and car trunks, and it would take a long

time for those mental wounds to heal. However, Keith was very patient with her. Yelena continued to make progress. Her ordeal in Montenegro will fade in time. Eventually, Yelena will begin to explore outside. She may even enroll in a couple of courses at Keith's university.

On one morning, the early sun was peeking through the curtains, illuminating the whole room. On the dresser were their wedding photographs. The photos were Keith and Yelena standing in front of the Justice of the Peace. After they were in the country for two days, Keith did not want to gamble with the Immigration and Naturalization Service and immediately married her. Keith would break down, if his bride was pulled out of his hands and forced to live in another country away from him.

Keith and Yelena awakened at the same time, staring at each other. Both were smiling, as they watched and studied one another.

Then they began to kiss, softly at first, and subsequently, their kisses erupted into long explosions of passion and intimacy. Then Keith mounted her and began to make soft passionate love to her.

After Keith showered and dressed for work, Yelena had a king's breakfast waiting for him.

Yelena always cooked for him even against Keith's wishes. Sometimes Keith tried to help her in the kitchen, but Yugoslavian women were so proud, so traditional. Their womanly duty was ingrained in them since birth. Yugoslavian women must take care of the household and their men.

Today, Yelena fixed him a plate of scrambled eggs sprinkled with diced tomatoes, salsa, and cheese, a side order of two wheat toasts topped with cream cheese, and a hot cup of American coffee with a dollop of cream. The American coffee was not as strong as the Bosnian coffee, but Keith reverted to the old American lifestyle.

As Keith ate breakfast, he leafed through a newspaper, the *Arkansas Democratic Gazette*. Arkansans were curious about the outside world, outside the borders of the United States. It was sprinkled here and there on each page with news from a foreign country.

Buried in the business section on the second to the last page, Keith read the headline, 'A Shoot-out in Montenegro.'

Keith recognized the picture and his face became pale, as the invigorating blood drained from it. It was the Renaissance Night Club. Senad and his gang had a shootout against the police. Five thugs and three policemen were shot and killed during a police raid. This gang recently gained a stranglehold over the Montenegrin underworld, supplying drugs to all the addicts and operating the city's brothels. The police raided the nightclub to shut the gangster's businesses down.

Keith's eyes bulge out in awe, as he read the grisly details. Keith wondered if Senad was counted among the dead.

Yelena stood by the refrigerator, drinking a glass of orange juice. She saw Keith's pale face as he flipped the page. She asked with sharp tones of concern wavering in her voice, "Keith, what's wrong? What did you read?" She studied Keith's face intently.

Keith quickly closed the newspaper and folded it up and nonchalantly replied, "Oh nothing. I see the stock price is down for Microsoft. It looks like my retirement plan will take another beating." His stale statement was followed by a burst of nervous laughter.

Yelena smiled as she studied Keith's face. She knew Keith was lying; he would make a lousy poker player. However, they had one simple rule in their household. They were under no circumstances to talk ever about what happened in Bosnia and Montenegro.

Maybe they knew it was wrong, burying those memories into the deep graves in the back of their minds. However, not enough time had passed for them to accept what happened to them. They figured their mental anguish, and wounds would take years to heal.

Keith stared at Yelena seductively. The news story awakened Yelena's worth to him. To a drug dealer, Yelena was worth 20,000 euros in cash, 50,000 euros in drugs, and a row of coffins each one stuffed with a gangster or criminal. To Keith, Yelena was priceless. She was the other half that complemented and completed him. Keith committed a long list of felonies to get Yelena back.

"Seriously, Keith, what did you read?" Yelena pleaded with him gently.

"It was about Montenegro?"

"Really, anything about us?"

"No, it was really a boring story. Nothing about us or anyone we knew or could know."

Then Keith went to Yelena and started kissing her.

Yelena let the half glass of orange juice fall to the ground and shattered.

Both Keith and Yelena were oblivious to the world around them. They became lost in their fervent kisses.

Keith started loosening his tie and unbuttoning his dress shirt, while at the same time he was tugging Yelena back towards the bedroom. He wanted to spend more quality time with her before going to work.

"Keith, you will be late for work. What about your students?" Yelena teased.

"They can start the class without me. Right now, I want you. A story in the newspaper reminded me of my love for you, and what it took to get you back. I want to spend more time with you. To hell with my students, they can wait."

Yelena smiled. Her smile was glowing and it illuminated the room. She knew she found the right man, a man who came for her and rescued a damsel in distress.

Yelena began slipping out of her clothes. She was going to reward her hero handsomely.

The Bosnian government wanted the Bosnian University of Management to stay in business as long as possible. The university student body was the affluent Bosnians, Bosnian families with strong connections to the top politicians in the Bosnian government.

The new university president wanted Veronika to return. She reluctantly accepted and was even promoted to the executive director, the second highest position in the university.

Some days, Veronica hated her job, not because of Damir, but because of the university was constantly plagued with money

troubles. Without that drug money, the university fell on hard financial times and had trouble paying staff salaries. By the end of the school year, half the foreign faculty fled the university. Veronika expected the other half would flee by the end of the next school year as the blight on their finances continued.

The police questioned Veronika, but then they let her go after an hour.

Veronika only told the police that Damir fired her that day, and she packed her things and quietly left the university. She did not hear a gunshot, nor see an upset professor like Keith Swanson, who turned in his letter of resignation around the time of the murder. Besides, if the police knew Veronika received 10,000 euros in cash from Keith, then she would have to pay the police their cut. Veronika decided it was her money. She went through hell at the university under Damir's stewardship to earn it. She was going to keep every penny of it.

Damir had such an acrid, quarrelsome relationship with the university staff; the next president simply plastered over Damir's office door, sealing it shut from the world. The Damir's door became a mausoleum hidden behind a white wall. To any new staff, they would never know there was an office behind that wall. An oil painting of a Tuzla countryside during spring dangled on the wall over the spot where Damir's nameplate was located.

Veronika and some of the old staff, at least once a day, would approach Damir's office door. The new staff members mistakenly thought the staff was admiring a beautiful painting of the Bosnian countryside. However, the evil that once lurked among the university hallways was sealed in that room. Even the air seemed a little fresher around the university. The stench of Damir's evil vaporized into thin wisps of smoke at the time of his death.

That new wall became sacred for the staff and instilled a sense of inspiration. If god could come down and remove an evil man from the world, then Veronika knew she could come in every day and try to cause a change.

Veronika would remain at the university until the very end. She would be the last person to walk out the university's front door and lock up the university forever, if it came to that.

Then to add insult to injury on Damir's untimely demise, the university buried him in a grave in the cheapest cemetery they could find in Tuzla. They made sure Damir would never be buried next to his beloved Emina in Srebrenica. Then they placed a blank tombstone over Damir's grave.

Anyone who ever had a run-in with Damir, which was quite a voluminous crowd of people, showed up to his funeral. No one read a eulogy during the wake. It was a large joyous party. Crowds ebbed and flowed with laughter and happiness. Even the Mayor of Tuzla made a quick appearance. His grin was wide and beaming. The evil man of Tuzla was gone, and everybody was happy. Nobody would miss Damir.

Admir still worked at the Bosnian University of Management, as the main computer support technician in the very same office.

Since Damir's demise and violent murder, Admir enjoyed going to work. He skipped a step and lulled a happy tune as he headed for his office every morning to clock in for work. He loved his job now, even when the university was a little late in his paycheck every few months. Similar to Veronika, Admir would pay a daily homage to the oil painting and wall that hid Damir's office door.

After Damir's murder, the Tuzla police questioned Admir for days. They even held him in a locked cell.

Every few hours, the police captain would come to his cell and interrogate him. Two large guards restrained his hands, and the police captain would punch him in the stomach and face repeatedly to punctuate the question marks in his questions.

Admir told him everything, except the professor. He told the police the time he stole a candy bar from the store when he was 12 and stole money from his mother when he was 16 to buy a pack of cigarettes. However, he kept that one important detail about the professor to himself. In Admir's book, that professor was a hero. He killed the devil incarnate.

The police reluctantly let Admir go free, and they did not even bother to apologize to him. The police literally shoved Admir

onto the cold January street. They knew Admir's blood stained the carpet in front of Damir's desk. However, the police could not directly link Admir to Damir's death.

Then the Montenegrin police recovered the murder weapon that killed Damir, Adnan, and Jasmin. The bullets from that .38 Smith and Wesson were a perfect match for all three murders.

To this day, the police never identified the shooter or shooters. The grisly murder of a university president and his two drivers remained an unsolvable mystery. With Damir's infamous reputation, no one is in a hurry to solve the crime either.

Svetlana ran away as fast as she could during the night, heading directly for the city of Budva. The city's lights illuminated the horizon from a distance. She could hear the machine-gun fire and exploding grenades at Sasha's mansion. Then she heard the incessant wale of the police sirens in the distance.

She kept running until she reached the bus station. She was on the next bus to Bar, Montenegro.

Bar was not a tourist attraction, but a seaport. Bar was the main sea port of Montenegro and linked the other major cities of the former Yugoslavian countries by railroad.

Svetlana was already at the main rail station in Bar at dawn. As she stood in line at the ticket agency, she scanned the various destinations. Then she saw a city in Greece listed towards the bottom. She became intrigued and decided that was her next stop. Svetlana was going to start a new life in Greece.

Svetlana roamed the cities of Greece until she reached Athens. Before Svetlana knew what hit her, she was working at a gift shop in the center of Athens directly across from Hadrian's Library.

Svetlana was one of the best sales people the shop ever employed. Sales doubled when Svetlana started working there, as she wooed over the crowds of tourists. Young men were particularly susceptible to Svetlana's sales pitches. She cajoled and sweet-talked the foreigners in buying loads of Greek alabaster statues and trinkets.

Svetlana chose Athens because of its long, rich history.

Hadrian's Library was constructed in 132 AD by the Roman Emperor Hadrian. At that time, Athens was a Roman province, and the Romans held Greek culture, arts, and literature at the pinnacle of class and achievement. All educated Romans had to be fluent in Greek, and well versed in Greek culture and literature. Hadrian's Library rested at the foot of the Acropolis.

The Acropolis was the tallest hill in Athens, and the Greeks built a complex of ancient temples on it over 2,500 years ago. The Old Temple of Athena and the Parthenon are the two most famous buildings on the Acropolis. One of the paths that led to the Acropolis went near the shop where Svetlana worked. Some tourists could not resist Svetlana's sweet smiles as they strolled by the gift shop.

Svetlana stayed in Athens because she was fascinated by Greek culture and was inspired by the story of Athena. Athena was the goddess of strength, wisdom, warfare, and reason. She was the daughter of Zeus and hence the name of the city became Athens, Greece.

After a long day at the gift shop, Svetlana would leave the shop at dusk. As she exited the shop, she would gaze up at the Acropolis. Under the darkness of the night, orange lights illuminated the ancient structures of the Acropolis against the backdrop of the city with its twinkling lights. The lights bathed the Acropolis in an orangish hue that shown proudly under the canopy of the stars and moon.

Svetlana looked for the Temple of Athena as her inspiration, and subconsciously scratched the silver medal of Athena that dangled around her neck. Whenever she had the whole day to herself, she would trek up the Acropolis. She would read a little while sitting on a bench, or sketch a picture, or drink a soda.

Svetlana's life became simple. She gave up the good expensive things in life, no more high-priced clothes, no expensive dinners, nor stroll around in style in a new sleek Mercedes. Her life was frugal, and she even started dating a poor American. His name was John, and he studied history at the University of Athens.

John was dirt poor, struggling to survive in such an expensive European city. However, Svetlana did not mind. She wanted out of Montenegro, and Athens was a world away. Athens was a new chapter in her life. She did not even mind riding around

in John's broken-down Fiat. As Svetlana and John drove by, the pedestrians would gasp and choke from the car's polluted exhaust.

Sometimes, she wondered if it was a dream that she was an expensive prostitute working in Montenegro. The memories began to fade and lose color, like an old photograph. Then she would go with John down to McDonald's that was several blocks away from the Acropolis.

This part of Athens was in a state of decay. Homeless people slept on the streets, and some of them would even shoot up heroin in direct view of the pedestrians walking by. On the other side of the street from McDonald's, Svetlana saw the prostitutes standing on the side of the road, luring in the johns with their sensual rented bodies. Then her memories of Montenegro would flood her mind again with clarity and horror.

Svetlana and John would walk around the shops and pedestrian sidewalks that circled the base of the Acropolis when they had some free time together. Occasionally, Svetlana would notice a dirty stare from a well dress gentleman, as they walked by. Then Svetlana would glare back with a sour smile, and then distract John, so he would never glimpse the exchange of angry smiles.

On one occasion, Svetlana was working in the gift shop, and a well-dressed man came in with his family. He asked his wife and kids to go around the corner to the outdoor coffee shop, the one that had a nice view of the courtyard of Hadrian's Library.

Once his family was out of earshot, he just blurted out, "Do I know you? Have we met before?"

"I am sorry, sir, but we have never met?" Svetlana replied, feigning sincerity and confusion.

"Have you ever been to Montenegro?" the businessman persisted.

"I am so sorry, but I do not know where Montenegro is," Svetlana pleaded innocently, hoping the probing questions would come to an end.

The businessman gave up his interrogation immediately. He strolled around the gift shop and bought 100 euros of statues. One of the pieces was an exquisite marble chessboard with hand carved pieces.

As Svetlana wrapped his gifts, he continued to gaze and gawk at her suspiciously. Then he left and never returned.

Svetlana suspected it was only a matter of time before John found out about her foul past. However, she planned to hide it from him as long as possible. Who knew? If John asked her hand in marriage, Svetlana would probably say yes. If she made it to America, then maybe she could look up Yelena and make sure Keith was treating her right.

The End