

**The novel:**

Clear Blue Waters of the Danube

**The critical project:**

English-Speaking War Correspondents of the Spanish Civil War: Why was Objectivity Impossible?

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The love and support of my parents, Jean and John, has been invaluable. Without them, for so many reasons, my thesis would never have been written. This work is dedicated to my father, John Kelly, who died in March 2010.

## Preface

*Clear Blue Waters of the Danube* was planned and drafted from October 2007 to December 2012. It is written from the perspective of Daniel Rourke, a young man whose life is changed forever by the arrival into the family home of Marija Kovač, a Croatian refugee. The wars leading to the break-up of Yugoslavia, notably the Croatian War of Independence from 1990-5 and the Bosnian Civil War from 1992-5, provide the novel's historical background. Preparation included interviews with conflict survivors, witnesses, soldiers who fought in the war, and those who were children during the fighting. Research visits to Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina took place during the summers of 2008 and 2009. I also drew upon conversations with former Yugoslav refugees from my time working in London during the 1990s and early 2000s. Other information was selected from biographies, historical records, documentary films, diaries and reports by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Although the novel notes the key moments of Yugoslavia's violent break-up, *Clear Blue Waters of the Danube* is not a political thriller. It follows a young man on a journey of self-discovery that takes him away from the family home, first to London, then across the Balkans. By establishing the truth about terrible incidents from the past, he comes to a greater understanding about himself and his previous behaviour. More importantly he is able to re-evaluate the relationship with his father that lies at the heart of everything he does, and in whose shadow he has always lived.

The question of whether a writer is truly able to separate himself from his/her subject matter is investigated in greater depth throughout my critical project. Planned between October 2007 and June 2008 then written over the following two years, the perspectives of English-speaking war correspondents during the Spanish Civil War from 1936-1939 are examined. Newspaper articles, memoirs, biographies and films are scrutinised. Although the allegiances of British newspapers were split more or less evenly, the majority of writers and reporters supported the Republican effort and invested huge amounts of personal feeling into their work. For a war fought over such contrasting values, a degree of bias was perhaps inevitable. As I began my research, my aim was to investigate to what extent objectivity in such circumstances was even possible.

If news reports bore the hallmarks of fiction, what then of the Spanish Civil War novel? The final part of the project deals with Ernest Hemingway and *For Whom the Bell*

*Tolls*. As a journalist, Hemingway had engaged in propaganda on behalf of the Republic and readily accepted the weak evidence behind the denunciation of Republican dissidents. Following the war's conclusion, he returned to Cuba to write his novel of the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Ironically having written newspaper reports to spread misinformation, he elected to use the form of a novel to reveal his version of what had actually happened. Can fiction reveal the 'truth' about events when supposedly non-fiction texts cannot?

My thesis asks fundamental questions about why we write and what we choose to write about. Can any writer truly separate him/herself from the subject matter? Can our understanding ever be full and free from bias and prejudice? Or do a writer's values permeate the work to the extent that, whether a newspaper article or a novel is written, genuine objectivity becomes impossible? Is the quest for objectivity a desirable or realistic aspiration?

**Clear Blue Waters of the Danube**

## Prologue

(i)

Opatovac, a village near the city of Vukovar, Croatia. July 1991.

The villagers were fleeing towards the river. Behind them, a pool of black smoke had emerged from the hillside buildings and was spreading across the sky. They reached the outlying woodland and ran down a slope. An elderly man yelled as he lost his footing, but the crowds ignored his outstretched hand.

Marija Kovač stumbled through the branches. She was used to running every night after high-school and shouldn't have been tired. Even so, she clutched at the stitch which gnawed beneath her ribs. She glanced at her mother, Ivana, who made a whining sound every time she exhaled. They reached a ditch. Marija slipped and touched down, dragging Ivana with her. Another explosion thundered out behind them. The fighting had reached the village.

“Get up.” Marija dragged Ivana to her feet.

A short burst of gunfire rattled out. Screams followed, then another burst of fire, this time more concentrated; two further explosions. Several villagers broke off to determine the threat's location, before pushing forward again with frantic urgency. A piercing screech cut through the skies. Terrified people covered their ears and ducked. A panic-stricken child threw herself to the ground as a jet plane roared across the tree tops. A gust of wind tore leaves from branches, scattering shards of bark into the air. A stream of fire illuminated the sky. After a short delay, another jet appeared overhead. It hovered high above the clouds, tracking the villagers, before banking sharply. Marija saw the missile but didn't hear the sound.

She opened her eyes, shook a trickle of earth from her face and looked up. The hole was about ten metres away, about four metres high and wide, and pure black. Traces of flames flickered from the circumference.

“Don't look at it!” shouted Ivana. Marija shut her eyes, held onto her mother and edged away from the heat.

The remaining villagers scrambled through the undergrowth. At a clearing they joined a crowd of several hundred on the river bank. Exhaust fumes gushed from a tug boat as it pulled away from the jetty. Women, children and the elderly were crammed inside. A dozen

young men were balancing on the outer rim. The tug lurched forward, but the stern was too heavy and the bow began to rise above the water. A portly man set off in pursuit. He grabbed at the railing, but slipped and fell. The boat accelerated away, leaving him to flail amongst the reeds.

A volley of gunfire, followed by the squeals of armoured vehicles, announced the imminent arrival of the Yugoslav People's Army. Hysteria swept across the crowd as it squeezed towards the second and final boat. Marija felt herself being shoved into the water. Later, she'd be unable to recall the exact moment she lost her mother's hand.

(ii)

Lovas, a village near Vukovar, Croatia July 1991

Chris Rourke pushed the door aside, leaving it to swing on its frame. Chips of wood and dust spun from the ceiling. He marched across the wooden floorboards and ripped open the curtains. A burst of light filled the front room of the cottage, revealing the body of a man. His head was propped up against a skirting board. On closer inspection, a small bullet-hole was visible, puncturing a mass of bruising on the right side of his face. A rifle, still tightly gripped, lay at right angles to his body. The newly-woven insignia of the Croatian army was sewn onto a shirt sleeve, caked in blood.

Gary Ingram let the TV camera fall around his shoulder and headed towards the empty window. He ran his finger along the frame then jabbed at the building opposite. "Sniper, probably fired through here."

Chris crouched on the broken glass and peered across the road. Two soldiers of the Yugoslav People's Army were sitting by the opposite window. They basked in the sunlight with their feet perched against the ledge. A black banner, featuring two white eagles above a cross, was hanging from the wall.

Chris squinted up at the sky. It was about midday. Avoiding the shards of glass, he poked his head out and inhaled the fumes from burnt-out cars. The church, on the far side of the village, had been reduced to cinders. Its battered, three hundred year old beams were lying in ashes and rubble. At the bottom of the bell tower, chunks of metal were protruding from gaps between planks of timber. Chris's eyes widened, he motioned frantically to his colleague. "Point it here, Gary! Now!"



The camera zoomed in on the bullet-ridden hoardings. Only twenty four hours earlier, these boards had advertised pop concerts. Now the same posters were in tatters on the ground. At the corner of the road, about a hundred villagers were squatting amongst the debris. Several metres away, dozens of soldiers were pointing their rifles with fingers poised.

Chris had last visited this region in the weeks following Tito's death, back in the summer of 1980. Even in those days, a new nationalism was stirring, and most of the Yugoslav troops now defined themselves as Serbians. The villagers sitting in the dirt were Croatians, and they despised the men with guns as foreign invaders.

A young man in a baggy, green uniform struggled to restrain his Alsatian while an officer barked orders into a megaphone. The troops moved in, forcing hands against the backs of heads. The villagers were shoved into single file and ordered to march.

Chris strained to get a better view. "There's a truck, no, a line of trucks at the end of the road. Get a shot of them."

"I can't reach. Get out of the way."

The prisoners started moving. Two jeeps, carrying more troops, drew up alongside. The soldiers began chanting: "*Slobodane, Slobodane, šalji nam salate...*"

"They're calling for Milošević," said Gary. "They want him to send salad."

"Salad?" Chris stared at his partner.

*"Slobodane, Slobodane,  
šalji nam salate,  
biće mesa, biće mesa,  
klačemo Hrvate!"*

"For the Croatian meat they'll be eating tonight," Gary stated bluntly.

Chris ducked inside the window. "It's just words. Nothing's going to happen out in the open."

A bottle hit the ledge, just below his head. The glass shattered and sprayed up.

"Drop the camera," Chris yelled.

The young Yugoslav soldiers in the cottage opposite were no longer laughing. Both now stood with rifles pointed directly at the two foreigners.

"It's okay, it's okay! Journalists," Chris shouted. He fumbled for his ID. The soldiers hurled obscenities while the two men waved their press cards in the air.

"Look, we're going okay? We're going." Gary stepped back from the window, nearly treading on his partner in his haste.

As the journalists backed away, the two soldiers lowered their rifles. The younger man took a swig from a bottle then yelled at the civilians being herded into the trucks. The other one maintained his glare at the British journalists. He began slapping the ledge in time with the chant.

*“...biće mesa, biće mesa, klačemo Hrvate!”*

Chris disappeared inside the bedroom. Gary crouched next to the body on the floor and pointed his camera into the dead man’s face. “How old you reckon...Chris?” Gary got to his feet.

Chris was sitting on the edge of a bed. The girl looked about sixteen. She was crouching underneath a window in the corner. Her head was dipped between her knees, and her body quivered as she leant against the radiator. Both hands were wrapped around her legs. Her muddied white blouse was buttoned at the neck and at the wrists.

Chris watched the nape of her neck rise and fall. When he offered his hand, she stared up at him. Traces of tears had dried beneath her eyelashes, leaving smudges. Her thick, black hair had fallen around her shoulders. He decided that she was very pretty.

A bright light shone onto her face. She shrieked and ducked.

“For Christ’s sake, Gary!”

Gary let the camera drop to his waist, and raised the palm of his hand in apology. Chris helped the young woman onto the bed.

“What’s your name?”

She didn’t reply.

He tried to release himself, but she clung to him tightly. He winced at his colleague then turned to her. “What... is... your... name?”

She stared up at him again.

A chain of machine gunfire rattled out from the building opposite, followed by more raucous cheering. Gary helped his partner carry her from the room. Moving quickly, they exited through the back door to Gary’s battered Escort. Chris deposited the young woman in the back seat and leapt alongside her without pausing for breath. For a man in his fifties, he was still very athletic, or so they told him. His younger partner wheezed while reaching for the ignition.

They accelerated out of Lovas and headed for the coast. Smoke was drifting from the nearby villages. Shops and homes had been ransacked and roof tops still smouldered. They slipped past a convoy of military trucks at Opatovac and followed the Danube River towards

Vukovar. Chris stared through the window. The sun's glare was creating a hazy shimmer above the water. Patrolling Yugoslav gunboats broke barely a ripple while gliding across the river's surface. He decided that in another era, it would be a scene for a tourist leaflet or holiday brochure. He imagined there was never a war in Yugoslavia at all; that the UN had intervened and stopped the fighting; that they'd nailed that bastard Milošević, long before he'd ever considered a 'Greater Serbia' project, and that everyone had just stayed at home.

Home? Yeah right. Who was he kidding? Even if there was no Croatian War, he'd only be somewhere else. Maybe he'd be in Moscow, covering Yeltsin's first term as President, or travelling with the weapons inspectors in Iraq. Or maybe he'd be in India, reporting on Rajiv Gandhi's assassination...anywhere but moping around Hampshire with Theresa and Dan.

Chris closed his eyes. He'd forgotten to ring Theresa last night. He pressed his head against the window. What if she was to fall ill again while he was away? And wasn't Dan meant to be graduating soon? This summer? Yes, this summer, he was sure.

Vukovar's battered water tower appeared in the distance. Once iconic, now an empty shell, riddled with bullet holes. The car jerked suddenly as Gary swerved to avoid rocks in the road. Contents from the young woman's purse spilled onto the floor. While she gathered her coins together, Chris spotted what appeared to be a school library card. He picked it up. The name caption read: *Marija Kovač*. He handed it back to her.

An army road block brought them to a halt on the edge of the city. Marija started shivering again and Chris put his arm around her shoulder. Gary waved his documents at the first soldier while another stalked the perimeter of the car. Marija shut her eyes when he stooped to peer through the glass. The officer at the front inspected the faded lettering on Chris's press card, stood upright and muttered something in Serbo-Croat to his colleague. Gary slammed the accelerator to the floor and the Escort sped away. No-one dared to look through the rear view mirror.

Their destination was half an hour inland. They slowed at a concrete, three-storey block of flats. A Red Cross flag was sagging from a pole, outside an entrance patrolled by armed security guards. The roof and ledges of the main building were lined with barbed wire. A small banner, stating 'Media Center', was draped across a first floor window.

They took a lift from the basement car park to the first floor and headed along the central corridor. Croatian journalists were chattering furiously to each other, crying out in despair, or shaking their heads in silence while viewing transmissions of their own reports.

Gary quickly disappeared to the bar, but Chris gripped Marija's hand and pulled her past inquisitive eyes.

A Red Cross team was working from one of several tents pitched in the backyard. Chris tried to deliver her to the medics, but she held onto him, refusing to let go. Eventually, two nurses prised her away. For a few minutes, he waited, listening to her screams and tears. In the end, another nurse told him to leave.

Two hours later, Chris found himself back outside the tent. A doctor was able to update him on the girl's condition: Marija had now settled. There were no serious injuries, just cuts and bruises, and she was beginning to talk to the nurses. Her story was an increasingly familiar one. While trying to escape from Opatovac, her tug boat had been rammed and sunk by a patrol boat. Although she'd made it to the water's edge, she was forced to hide in the reeds while the Yugoslav People's Army lined up the locals. Her mother and dozens of others were gunned down as she looked on. As darkness fell, she went looking for her father, who'd separated from her mother years previously. She crept through the fields to nearby Lovas, but the army had beaten her to it. Chris knew the rest. He and Gary had found her father's body in the living room.

Chris wandered over to the bar. He slumped onto a stool next to Gary and propped up his head with his hands. Behind him, Croatian news reports ran across the television screen. Gary took a gulp from his beer.

"What do you think will happen to her?" asked Chris.

Gary drained the remainder of his drink. "Best not think about it."

A small group of Dutch journalists entered the bar area. Chris sat up. "I thought we were the only foreigners."

"They turned up this afternoon," Gary smiled. "Missed the action, though. They were gutted."

"There'll be more interest when our report's aired, then."

For several seconds, neither man spoke. Gary took a sideways glance at his partner before opening his mouth. "...Unless it gets chopped again."

"Why should it?" Chris snapped suddenly. "Vukovar is in far worse shape than Dubrovnik."

"Dubrovnik has Renaissance architecture, sand, sun, and the Adriatic sea," Gary stated coolly. "Vukovar has shitty roads, factories, and a dilapidated water tower. The networks won't venture up here, I promise you."

Chris took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Behind him, a crowd of Croatian reporters entered the bar. They all looked like kids, far too young to be in the field. He remembered his first overseas assignment, following American troops into Vietnam. He wasn't sure about that conflict. He wasn't sure about the Falklands either. But he was older now and this one was clear cut with no arguments. It wasn't just a civil war. Someone had to stop these Serbian animals. This one was worth fighting for.

Chris stared through the window. In the distance, a scarlet hue was spreading across the skies. In the foreground, streams of smoke were rising from battle-scarred villages. Gary took the camera from his bag. He pointed it at the horizon. Short bursts of light flickered from the forest, followed by faint cracks of gunfire. Gary finished the shot, but Chris's attention had already shifted to the medical team in the yard below. Marija was sitting on a bench adjacent to the main tent. Someone had given her a striped t-shirt and baggy jeans. She was staring at the wall, looking half asleep.

Gary glanced at Marija while lighting up. He waved his matchstick, extinguishing the flame. "Was she raped?"

Chris gazed at the teenager sitting on the wall. He shook his head.

"She's lucky. I'll tell you that." Gary took a drag from his cigarette.

Chris pulled out a coin and tapped gently on the glass.

Marija looked up.

He raised his hand.

Her eyes widened and she smiled.

"Beautiful country, crazy people," remarked Gary. "Maybe the Americans will do something."

**Part 1**

## Chapter 1

Hampshire, England. October 1991

The bus trundled away from the village square. It passed the war memorial, the Victorian school and the row of timber-framed cottages at the top of the High Street, before winding down the hill towards the riverside. It was a quiet day on the banks of the Solent. The sun was hiding behind the clouds, and the sky was a silvery grey.

The bus screeched to a halt. I leapt out to meet the cool sea-fret drifting in from the coast. Hauling my back-pack over my shoulder, I crossed the road and followed the footpath across my parents' front lawn. At the end of the drive, I hurdled the flower beds and knocked a tune into the front door. No answer. I knocked again, let my back-pack fall to the ground and pressed my face to the side window. My own reflection was visible in the sunlight. It was one in the afternoon. I planted myself against the door, waited for a couple of minutes then headed for the far end of the house. The gate to the back garden was wide open. After climbing onto the patio wall, I dropped onto the concrete next to the kitchen.

It was in the living room that I detected the scent. There was something about it, faint, subtle, not a perfume as such but definitely something new. From the front window, I spotted a bicycle. It had been propped against a tree trunk, on the far side of the drive. A pair of trainers, white with pink trim, was hanging from the pedals. I stared for several seconds then turned around.

“Hello? Mum? Dad?”

No answer. A letter, marked for me, was on the sideboard.

*We've just popped out to get some more paint. Hope you don't mind. Everything is OK so far!*

*Mum*

I stuffed the letter into my pocket and went upstairs. My desk and bedroom carpet were covered with newspapers. The wall paper had been removed and the whole room repainted. A roller and paint pot were on a tray next to the skirting board and a workbench was below an open window. I ran my fore-finger over the wall. The paint was dry. A cardboard box, crammed with rolled-up posters, had been left in the corner. I unravelled each poster in turn: rock bands, pop stars and football teams.

The chest of drawers was full of female clothes: T-shirts, tops, socks and underwear. Inside the wardrobe was a dress. I held it up to the light for a few moments then hung it back. Another box, containing a pile of books, had been left by the door. The cover of the first book was backed with shiny paper, and marked in childish lettering with a felt tipped pen. Although the language was foreign, a picture of the Union Flag had been scribbled at the top.

The front door opened downstairs. A man's voice called out: "Dan? Dan?"

At last. I tossed the books onto the bed and returned to the top of the staircase. Dad was standing in the hallway, holding my back-pack. "Don't you want this?"

I trotted down the stairs, took the bag and hugged him tightly. An awkward silence followed. I'd prepared for this moment for ages. Now, after so long apart, we were face to face, and I didn't know what to say.

He gave me a manly slap on the arm. "How long's it been, son?"

"Too long," I smiled. It had been sixteen months and three days.

We entered the living room and sat down.

"So how was Yugoslavia?" I asked.

Dad exhaled. "Dangerous, maddening, exhausting..." he stopped.

I suppose conversation with my father had never been easy. His overseas assignments had always demanded prolonged absences from home, especially during my teenage years, so there was rarely any time to build a father-son relationship. As I grew up, there were no family holidays, football matches, driving lessons, or advice about life. In fact, since leaving school, I'd hardly seen him at all. Things were about to change, though. I'd promised myself that much. Everything would be alright, I knew it. Just so long as I could keep one thing from him.

"I enjoyed France," I said eventually.

"You went to France?" He sat up.

"Yeah, they asked me to stay on."

He raised his eyebrows. "Where? Doing what?"

"In Lyon, teaching English as a foreign language. It was only for a month or so...I needed the money. I tried to call you but..."

Outside, female laughter rang out across the driveway. Dad's face broke into a grin. "They're chatting to the neighbours, but don't worry. They'll be here in a minute."

"*They?*"

"What?"

"You said 'they'."



“Oh,” he chuckled. “*The girls.*”

A female laugh rang out again, followed by another voice. The front door opened. Dad jumped to his feet.

“Thanks for leaving us with the bags, Chris...Hey, Dan!” Theresa hugged me then stood back, improvising a frown. “Why didn’t you write?”

“Sorry Mum, I’ve been...”

Before I could finish, she stepped into the hallway and returned with the hand of a teenage girl, who had to be almost dragged into the room. “This is Marija.”

Marija tilted her head at an angle, letting her jet-black hair hang over her eye. She was quite cute, definitely younger than me; sixteen, maybe seventeen, and she hovered near the door as if about to launch a getaway. We shook hands awkwardly.

My parents glanced at each other. “And she’s going to stay,” Mum added.

“*Stay?*” Now hang on a minute; that was far too sudden. I might’ve asked what the hell was going on, or asked whose half-brained idea this was. If I’d been more assertive, I could’ve done something. But with all eyes upon me, I chickened out. “Uh, Okay.”

Mum turned to Dad. “See, I *told* you he’d be fine about it.” She gripped my arm, kissed my cheek sloppily, then took Marija’s hand and pulled her towards the kitchen. “Marija and I have lots to do.”

Dad led me upstairs. He explained how he’d found the girl near Vukovar; that she’d seen her mother shot; that she’d been traumatised and made homeless. He’d been left with no alternative. Someone *had* to step in. Someone *had* to do something.

I didn’t respond. My mind was blank. I didn’t know what to think, though nothing should’ve surprised me where Dad was concerned. Not anymore. We reached the top of the stairs and crossed the landing. Dad explained that he didn’t know how long Marija would stay: weeks, months, perhaps longer. It was just too soon to say. She only needed to get better. That was the main thing. Then they’d all sit down and discuss it. In the meantime, I’d have to stay in the spare room.

I opened the door in a daze. Half a dozen wooden boxes had been stacked against the wall; all crammed with my belongings. I dropped my backpack and entered the room, my bedroom, now. It was empty and lifeless. Dad continued talking but I wasn’t taking any of it in. Then he turned, closed the door on me and went downstairs.

My father held everyone’s attention during dinner, just like when I was a kid. We’d long been used to him boring us rigid by moaning on about journalistic ethics or editorial decisions. It

was how he liked to let off steam and he enjoyed it. That night was no exception, and we let him work himself into a quiet frenzy. Why was he the only British journalist in Vukovar? Who'd decided that Mike Tyson's antics were more important than war in Croatia? And did anyone really care about what Sarah Ferguson was doing with some Texan playboy? Wasn't there something better to report? The clowns responsible should be fired. And so on.

Mum loved every minute of his anecdotes and I couldn't recall her looking so happy. For as long as I could remember, depression had sapped her energy. In her darkest moments, she'd even questioned her will to carry on. Yet tonight there was a new light in her eyes and an increased vigour in her movement. After all she'd been through, it was good to see.

Marija was wearing the dress I'd found in my wardrobe earlier on. The candle light illuminated her olive skin and piercing, green eyes. I decided she was even prettier than I'd first thought. She was a little thin, though perhaps this was unsurprising given her ordeal. She was also painfully shy. As we ate, she followed my parents' every move. Before taking mouthfuls of food, she glanced at them, as if in need of reassurance. When they looked in her direction, she smiled or nodded. Apart from that, her contribution was minimal. She looked so completely out of place and bewildered. I felt sorry for her. At the end of the meal, I tried to start a conversation. "Are you enjoying it here, Marija?"

She nodded.

"Are you going to attend school?"

"Soon."

"Have you made any friends?"

She stared down at her plate.

Dad leant forward. "You're graduating this year, aren't you?"

I stared at him. Graduation was the one thing I didn't want to talk about.

"It is *this* year, isn't it?" He turned to Mum. She smiled and nodded.

"Yes, Dad," I sighed. "It is indeed *this* year."

"And you want to be a *teacher*?" He grinned at Mum.

"They said I had a talent," I said coolly. "I turned them down."

"So what are you going to do now?" His eyes narrowed.

"Well..." I paused before replying. I wasn't expecting the moment to arrive so soon. The last time we'd discussed the matter had been couple of years previously. Certain promises had been made and I, at least, remembered them. Now the issue was being raised again. The time had come and there was no going back. I steeled myself and looked straight into his eyes. "I'm going to work with *you*, Dad...like we've always planned."

I watched his reaction carefully. He stopped eating and glanced at Mum, but said nothing.

“Why not?” I insisted. “I can write. I’m curious about the world. I work hard.”

“...Because it’s too bloody dangerous!” interjected my mother.

Dad winced. He put his knife and fork together. “Look, I’ve only just got home,” he said. Then he tried a reconciliatory smile. “We’ll talk about it sometime soon...” He looked at Mum reassuringly, “...but not now.”

After dinner, I went upstairs to sort out my new room. The light bulb worked too well, and shone brightly against the newly painted walls, making me see stars and blink. A single duvet was on the bed alongside some linen. My old university files had been dropped to the bottom of a wooden box. I swore while sifting through papers to retrieve them. I thought he’d be pleased that I’d finally made up my mind; that finally I knew what I wanted to do. Okay, it was a while ago when we’d last spoken about it and nothing was set in stone, but I remembered. *I remembered*. Why had it always been so unsettling to be around him? Why had I always felt that he was disappointed in me? Christ, he hadn’t even known when I was meant to be graduating. And who was this girl anyway? What the hell was he playing at? I tried to make more space by re-positioning the bed and the desk, but it was no good. My old clothes were stuffed inside small baskets, and as I rifled through the boxes with my other things, I felt sure that I had more books and records than that.

I sat down on the bed and kicked one of the boxes, hard. Then I heard a noise coming from across the landing. I stopped and listened. Someone was sobbing. Through my open door, I could see my old bedroom, her room now. I crossed the landing. Marija’s door was slightly ajar. She was sitting before a mirror and her hair had been pulled back. Some of her make-up had been removed and she held her head in her hands.

I stood outside for a few moments, not knowing what to do. Then she spotted me through the glass. She began drying her eyes and sniffing. I asked if she was okay. It was a stupid question and she didn’t answer. She hung her head and took a deep breath. I asked if she wanted anything. She closed her eyes, took another deep breath and sat completely still. I muttered my apologies and closed the door, feeling ashamed.

## Chapter 2

November 1991

I could just make out the coast under the moonlight, as foam from the waves sprayed against the railings. I rubbed condensation away from the bedroom window. Sailing boats were bobbing up and down at the Yacht club. Trees at the end of the drive were swaying in the gale until, suddenly, the wind ceased. After an eerie pause, a rush of water surged up and over the river's banks, then spread across the road, before gently receding. Tyres screeched and swished in the water. Beams from headlights dipped between branches. I checked my watch. She was late again. The wind caught another smattering of rain and hurled it onto the glass. Then she appeared from behind the trees. Her journey home had become routine. Every evening she'd exit the train station, follow the footpath through the underpass then cut across the field. At the outskirts of woodland, she'd take the track along the coast.

Despite the rain, Marija's pace was graceful and unbroken. She reached the edge of the farmer's land, smoothly scaled a stile then, without breaking step, continued on her way. I watched while she ploughed through the leaves and crossed the lawn, her legs moving in perfect synch with the swing of her arms. Then she stopped abruptly in the middle of the drive and faced the neighbours' front garden where Mrs. Johnstone-Ward had appeared near the fence.

I pressed my forehead to the window and watched the old woman, arms folded and wearing a cagoule, advance to the edge of her lawn. I headed downstairs, grabbed my coat and went outside. By the time I'd arrived, she was already jabbing her finger in Marija's direction.

"Well, who's going to pay?" Johnstone-Ward chuntered.

"What's going on, Elizabeth?" I asked.

"My front gate, it's been smashed..."

I turned to Marija. She looked distraught.

"It's sheer bloody-minded vandalism. I'll call the police..." The old woman stomped across paving stones to the middle of her lawn and pointed to her entrance gate. The timber had been crudely snapped at the top, as if someone had tried to clamber over. The initials of the local football team had been sprayed underneath. Johnstone-Ward shook her head furiously. "And there are footprints all over my garden."

The wind had dropped but the drizzle was turning into a downpour. She glared at Marija through the rain. Marija screwed up her face and shook her head.

“Marija didn’t do it.” I said.

“She’s good at jumping fences. I *saw* her just now.” The old woman’s ruddy face was covered with streams of water.

“It’s probably lads coming back late from The Bugle,” I said.

“Who’s paying for *her* to live here?”

I stared at the old woman.

“Is she legal?”

Unable to listen to any more, I led Marija back towards the house. She stepped inside the front door, ripped off her hood and ran her hands over the nearest radiator. Mum passed her a towel. “How did it go today?”

“Okay.” Marija forced a smile, marched through the hallway into the kitchen and flung her coat onto the chair. It slid to the floor.

Mum stooped to pick it up. “Is everything alright, dear?”

“Fine.” Marija sat down at the kitchen table. She flicked through a newspaper while drying her hair.

After finding my own towel in the bathroom, I stood by the door.

Mum edged towards me. “What was going on out there?” she whispered.

“Oh, just Elizabeth grumbling, as usual.”

“Don’t fight with her, Dan. Just smile and nod your head.”

She was right. I shouldn’t have let her get under my skin, but she’d frightened Marija.

Mum marched into the conservatory with the coat, which was dripping a trail of water onto the floor. Marija turned to the listings. She scrutinised the print then tore a strip from the rest of the paper. “Alfred Brendel is playing Chopin, at the Guildhall, next month. Can I go?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Who’s Alfred Brendel?” I asked.

Marija lifted my mother’s handbag from the chair. She took two ten pound notes from her purse. In an instant, the money was gone. I smiled to myself. Very smooth. This girl was a survivor. Marija got up from the table and headed for the living room. Mum appeared from the conservatory. She trailed after the younger woman. “Don’t go in there, love.”

Too late. The doors swung open and Marija was greeted by posters, balloons, photographs, decorations. A paper banner was hanging from the ceiling. “Happy 17<sup>th</sup>

Birthday Marija” had been drawn with felt pen and coloured in with luminous markers. She turned in a circle and stared.

“It was meant to be an extra surprise for later.” Mum put her arm over Marija’s shoulder and whispered, “But I don’t see why you can’t find out now.” Their friends had been demanding to meet her, and they were all arriving that night to celebrate her birthday. Marija’s face reddened. She thanked both of us then retreated upstairs. The bedroom door closed.

Mum spun round to me. “Why didn’t you lock the door?”

“You didn’t tell me to.”

“Do I have to tell you everything?”

The guests began arriving at eight. Marija eyed each newcomer from between the banisters. When Dad finally returned home, she rushed down the stairs to embrace him. He wished her a ‘Happy Birthday’, extricated himself and escaped upstairs to the shower. Marija was sent back to her room to prepare for her official introduction.

At half past eight, I was summoned to fetch her. She was in her room, pushing studs into her ears, and wearing a dinner-dress. Classical music was playing on my old stereo. She straightened her back, smiled at the glass and began talking to the mirror. “Thank you. You are very kind.” The accent already sounded affected. Her shoulders dropped as she angled her neck forward.

I put my hand over my mouth and coughed. “That’s nice,” I cleared my throat. “The music, I mean.”

She spotted me through the reflection in the glass and froze.

“Mozart?” It was a wild guess. I propped myself against the doorframe.

“Clarinet Concerto...” She swallowed. “...In A major.” She took a deep breath then began brushing her hair, with short, rigid strokes. Her arm was thin and fragile.

I perched on the end of her bed. She didn’t complain, but kept sight of me through the glass. I told her not to worry about old Johnstone-Ward. She was always making accusations but no-one took any notice of her.

Marija smiled nervously.

I didn’t know anything about classical stuff, so I asked her about pop music, and slowly she began to talk. She admitted to liking stuff from the seventies, rather than the new English groups with their flared jeans and floppy haircuts. Mostly she enjoyed classical:

Mozart, Beethoven. As a child she'd tried to take up the violin, but had soon given it up. Now she didn't know what she wanted to do.

I told her I was going to be a television news reporter, like my father. He'd be in England for the next few months. Nothing was guaranteed, but when his next assignment was scheduled, hopefully I'd join him.

She put the brush down. She was very grateful to Chris. He'd saved her, and she didn't know how she'd ever repay him. She liked Theresa too.

"I hope she's not smothering you," I smiled.

"Smothering?"

"Mum's had a rough time."

I asked her about the school she was to attend.

She admitted being nervous.

When I described some of the teachers, she laughed. She didn't yet know which subjects to study. Maybe photography. A friend, back home, had once owned a camera. They used to sit by the river and take shots of the boats that sailed down the Danube. She wished she could afford her own equipment. Marija's voice was soft and kind and I liked her accent. I could've listened to her all evening.

"I'm very impressed with your English," I said eventually.

Her face fell. "My father taught me. He was a translator, sometimes for American businessmen."

There was a short, uncomfortable silence. I tried to think of something, so asked her what she liked about England, compared to back home.

Marija hesitated. She liked the promenade at the end of the drive, and the large houses near the seafront. They were very pretty. But the sun shone brighter in Croatia. She was from a village called Opatovac. It lay at the bottom of a valley, near the river. As a child she played in the woodland which ran along the bank. The Danube was always a pure blue in the summer. "Like a crystal."

My mother called up from the hallway. It was time to meet the guests. Marija returned to the mirror, lifted a new necklace from the dressing table and, without turning around, handed it to me. I cleared my throat, passed the chain under her chin and fastened it. My fingers brushed against her skin. She didn't react or pull away. I found myself leaning closer. Was I really going to kiss her? Then she rose abruptly, thanked me and left the room.

### Chapter 3

We descended the stairs to the rising murmur of adult voices. Bursts of laughter mixed with the sounds of glass and metal against crockery. Our entry to the lounge provoked a sudden hush as twenty people gaped in our direction. My father stepped forward and took her hand. “This is Marija, everyone.” He led her to the centre of the room. She began with a few words of thanks but faltered, her blushes prompting a ripple of sympathetic laughter. Then she released herself and sat down. I passed her a glass of wine.

“Come on, you’re not escaping that easily. Some people want to meet you.” Dad pulled her back into the circle where he introduced his work friends: television producers, reporters and writers. He looked ready to burst with pride. When he broke into the first line of “Happy Birthday to you”, everyone joined in. I perched myself on the edge of a chair, sipped my drink and flipped through a case of CDs.

The friendly interrogation continued but Marija quickly regained her composure. She answered every question with all the charm and self-assurance I’d witnessed earlier on, and her increasingly confident demeanour was noted by several guests. I returned to the kitchen and poured myself another drink. I couldn’t believe I’d nearly kissed her. What had I been thinking of? She was still a school girl for God’s sake, and after everything she’d been through? In some ways, I was more worried about my father. If he ever found out, he’d accuse me of taking advantage.

After eleven o’clock, the guests began to drift away. Marija was cornered by her new headteacher, Miss Alderton. A former classmate of my mother’s years ago, she’d been invited as a family friend. “Your English is better than *his*.” The headteacher jerked her thumb in my direction. “You’ll get a job before he does.”

I slumped onto the couch and downed another glass of wine. Rousing myself, I reminded her about my English language work in France. She seemed surprised. She asked if I wanted to teach. I explained that I was going to be a foreign correspondent, just like my father. I’d applied for plenty of traineeships with national newspapers. No luck so far, but something would be out there.

The remaining guests finally left just after midnight. Marija began extracting cocktail sticks from the carpet while my mother cleaned up in the kitchen alone. Each dish hit the sink with



a harder thud than the previous one. There was a crack and a smash. I found Mum sitting at the table with her head in her hands. As I entered, she looked up, wiped her eyes and forced a clumsy smile. She said it had been a long evening. Her voice was slurred.

I helped her upstairs. She rolled into bed and went to straight to sleep. Maybe I'd been deluding myself. She wasn't going to get better as easily as I'd hoped. My thoughts drifted to my father. He'd treated Mum badly over the years, especially while he was overseas. When I was twelve, he even left us for a while, thinking that he'd found someone else. He sloped back soon enough, but the damage had been done. She'd already been hitting the booze. The days in bed, the depression, the painkillers, and eventually the stays in hospital, were to follow. Dad was never around to help her out of the hole she ended up in. Yet despite everything, I couldn't hate him. When I was a bit younger, I often thought that I did. In the end, we learned to deal with his behaviour as a family. It was the way things were. He wasn't a bad guy, really. He never took drugs, or got drunk or violent. In his own way, he probably did his best. He was still my Dad. Despite his faults, I always longed to see him return when he'd been away. I just wanted to be with him. I was his son and I loved him.

A beam of light emerged from underneath Dad's door. I pushed it open. He was sitting at his desk, writing furiously, as usual. I tapped the frame. He looked up, smiled and gestured to the chair opposite him. His journalism awards covered the wall. Surrounding the trophies were old photographs from his thirty year career. One space had been left unfilled. He pointed at it. "That's for your degree, when it arrives." He dropped some papers into a tray and slid his reading glasses into his top pocket. "Did you enjoy the party?"

"Mum's gone to bed."

He got to his feet. "Is she alright?"

I raised my hand. "She's just a bit tired."

We both sat down.

"Probably had a surprise," Dad said eventually. He explained that several of the guests had been discussing the war and were mulling over their television schedules. It had upset her. She'd asked him repeatedly if he'd be leaving again soon.

"You're not..."

"...I'm not going anywhere, well not for another few months, at least." He told me how much he was enjoying being at home. He'd formed a production company and in the meantime, he was writing a few articles to keep himself busy. It had given him a real buzz to be back at the typewriter. He'd only recently finished a piece about Croatia for the *Guardian*.

The *New Statesman* wanted a similar article, and even the *Spectator* had been on the phone to his agent. Before I could respond, he sat up. “Wasn’t Marija brilliant this evening? And you as well,” he said as an afterthought.

I said nothing.

“What’s the matter?”

I told him that there was still no job on the horizon. I wanted to train as a journalist but I needed his advice. He said that he’d like to help, but things had changed a great deal since he started out. He began suggesting courses for post graduates.

“Well, how about you and me together?” I interrupted. “Father and son. You often said...”

He looked away.

“I could come with you. I could learn...”

“You need to make your own way, Dan. It’ll be much better for you in the long run. Anyway, we’re not taking on trainees right now.”

I was speechless. This wasn’t the plan.

“Okay,” he said, spotting my reaction. “Tell me about Yugoslavia.”

I sank into the chair. It had started out as a friendly chat. Now it felt like a job interview gone wrong. I admitted that I knew nothing. We hadn’t discussed the conflict at university. “Some of us were angry over Iraq. One guy wanted the troops out of Northern Ireland. And I remember everyone celebrating when Thatcher fell. But I don’t know anything about Croatia.”

“What about Vukovar? Or Dubrovnik?”

I stared at him.

He closed his eyes in resignation. “It’s my fault I suppose.”

I knew he was right, of course. I wanted to be a reporter but I didn’t even read the newspapers. Who was I kidding?

“You *must* know about Slobodan Milošević.”

“He’s the bad guy, right?”

Dad winced. “Milošević wants to pool the Serb-populated regions from across Yugoslavia into a giant, ethnically pure, ‘Greater Serbia’. Croats finding themselves in the wrong place, like Marija, are being driven out or shot. The UN’s a joke and Milošević knows it.” His eyes glossed over. “Bastards. The Serbs make me fucking sick.”

For a few moments, no-one spoke. I pushed myself out of the chair.

“Where are you going?”

“To find the jobs pages.”

“Oh.” He blinked. “Maybe we can go through the ads together.”

“That guy from *First Tuesday* was here tonight. They needed a couple of trainee researchers, but there’s bound to be serious competition.” I took a deep breath. “Won’t you put a word in for me?”

He didn’t reply.

“They’d listen to you.”

“If I did that, you’d never be taken seriously by anyone.”

“Okay,” I opened the door.

Marija was standing in the hall.

“Come in, love.” Dad beckoned to her.

She slinked under my arm and into the room.

“They all loved you tonight. And you look very pretty too,” he smiled. “Julie Alderton is most impressed.” He rubbed his eyes and looked straight at her. “Oh I nearly forgot.” He rose from his seat, unlocked the cabinet behind the desk, and returned with a camera. “I heard all about your photography from Theresa. I know it’s a bit late, but think of this as an extra birthday present.” He placed it in her hands. It must’ve been worth over a thousand pounds.

I felt the blood rise into my chest. “That’s not fair,” I muttered.

If Dad heard me, he didn’t react.

I passed Marija’s half-closed door on the way back from the bathroom. She was lying on her bed and pointing the camera at the ceiling. Yeah, I was still annoyed about the camera, but when I saw her happiness, I couldn’t help breaking into a smile myself. There was something childlike about her excitement, and just seeing her play made me realise that I’d overreacted downstairs. It was only a bloody camera for God’s sake. After all she’d suffered and lost, Marija deserved it. Dad was spoiling her, but he had good reason. I needed to remember that.

Yet, as I retreated to my own bedroom, I remained furious with Dad’s attitude towards *me*. I’d only asked him for help. I only wanted a job. Was it such a terrible thing to ask my own father for some support? I wasn’t trying to cheat. Not really. I only ever wanted him to be proud of me, and yet he had so many ways of making me feel so bloody useless. And he was already asking about my graduation. I’d tried to keep a lid on it for as long as possible, but he *would* be obsessed about that fucking degree. I lay down on my bed and

thought for a few minutes. Then I snatched the receiver from the bedside phone and began dialling.

“Hi, Jared, it’s Dan Rourke....Yeah, I’m fine.”

We chatted about college, the previous summer and Jared’s recent exploits. I eventually came to the point. Did he have any spare tickets for graduation ceremony? I needed two, maybe three, and offered him good money. There was a short pause. If he was surprised he didn’t let on. He told me he’d see what he could do.

## Chapter 4

January 1992

“We’ve been here; we’re repeating ourselves.”

“It’s meant to be repetitive,” I insisted.

“We’re lost.”

“Just follow the lines on the floor.”

My mother gripped my hand.

I pulled her along, hoping to find a detour from the maze of walkways that circled the interior of London’s Barbican Centre. Above us, visitors were crossing internal bridges to the galleries, libraries and restaurants. As we passed the cafeteria for the second time, the clock on the wall struck a quarter to two.

“Don’t worry,” I assured her. “We’re going to be fine.”

Eventually we reached the main hall entrance. I joined a line of graduates and descended on an escalator to the foyer, where hundreds of young people, clad in black, were waiting anxiously for the double doors to be unlocked. I collected a gown and put it on.

A programme of events was pushed into my hands. The cover read: University of London: Degree Congregation. January 1992. Underneath the heading *Bachelor of Arts, English Literature*, were the names of friends and colleagues. Mine was missing. Behind the stage, an ornate set of orchestral pipes dwarfed the platform ten metres below. The stalls stretched back fifty metres then angled steeply upwards. An expectant hush spread across the hall. I barged past the legs of several other students to a seat in the centre of the row. My watch was showing two minutes to two. In the parents’ section, ten rows behind, my mother was reading her programme alongside two empty seats.

The flow of people was thick and fast. The student next to me tried to make conversation but I wasn’t listening. The lights dimmed and spontaneous applause rang out as the university dignitaries marched onto the stage. I turned round once more, this time to see Marija and my father scramble to their places. The chancellor began to speak. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

The reception was held in the gallery next door where portraits of former chancellors adorned the walls. On one side, a raised dais decorated with oak panelling, was the location for

several professors to congregate and preside over the function. My friends had already occupied the centre of the floor, next to the portable bar.

“You owe me one,” Jared Browning chuckled as I handed back the ticket bearing the name of ‘Peter Dawson’.

I didn’t reply.

He placed a rolled-up cigarette between his lips and spun round to face the flow of graduates filling the room.

“So, Daddy got you a job yet?” Jared took another glass of champagne from the tray. He grinned at two female graduates who were passing the table. They ignored him.

“Actually, I got it myself.”

“Where?”

“The London Evening Record.”

“You’re joking.”

“No, I’ll have to find a flat-share soon.”

Jared steadied himself. “Do you know how many people went for those traineeships?”

“I just applied like everyone else.”

He moaned something about, “Friends in high places,” and drained his glass. “You didn’t even finish your degree.”

He was right. My thoughts turned to that fiasco last summer. After I’d been told to re-sit a couple of exams at the end of my second year, I’d made the mistake of revealing the bad news to my mother. She, of course, phoned Dad straightaway. He’d been busy at some meeting in New York and he massively overreacted by cutting off my living allowance. He probably reckoned that I was a slacker, and that I’d be forced to buck up my ideas and get a part-time job. Maybe then I’d come to a greater understanding of the value of hard work.

I’d been getting sick of the degree anyway, having chosen English literature partly to impress him, and when, as usual, he’d showed no curiosity, I slowly lost all interest myself. Some friends were in a band so I toured around Europe with them for a few months. It seemed like a good idea at the time, and for a while, I earned some money as a stage hand. I sent a letter back to the university, asking for an interruption in my studies, but I’d no real excuse and so was turned down. When I returned to college nine months later, I was told that I’d already lost my place. Initially I wasn’t that bothered. It was quite cool to be sent down, and for a while, I was stupidly proud of myself. In a way, I suppose it was payback for Dad’s over-zealous discipline.

Reality set in a couple of months later, but by then, it was far too late to ask Dad to intervene on my behalf. I didn't know how to break it to either of them, so I kept quiet about it, stayed with friends for a while then took off back to France. I tried to put university to the back of my mind, though deep down I knew they'd ask about it at some point. I was terrified that Dad, especially, would find out. Now, thanks to Jared, it no longer mattered. I was a graduate after all.

My mother and father waved from the entrance then weaved their way through the crowds. Dad shook my hand. Mum whooped with delight. She swung me around until we nearly lost our balance. Her head bobbed from side to side, tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Dad explained that after dropping me and Mum off, they were unable to find a parking space. "We thought we had plenty of time. Marija wanted to take some pictures of the building. The exposure was all wrong but she worked it out."

I looked beyond his shoulder to see Marija entering from the foyer, wearing a suede jacket and a white vest. Her hair had been cut shorter, just below her ears.

"She was so excited for you," said Mum.

Dad ushered me to one side. "Why didn't they call your name? You missed out on the chancellor's handshake?"

"There was a mistake; they left my name off the list and the programme."

"I'm going to complain." He turned abruptly, in search of an usher.

I pulled his arm. "It doesn't matter. Please, Dad. I don't want a fuss."

"It's a bloody insult. Theresa panicked when she couldn't see you."

"Both of you are here today, that's all that matters," I insisted. "I'll get a photograph taken with all of us."

"Okay," he conceded, after what seemed like an eternity. "Marija can join us. Get one of your friends to take it." He beckoned her over. "It'll be a real family portrait."

The reception lasted about an hour before starting to wind down. I'd become tired of the thanks and well-wishing, especially from grinning fellow 'graduates' who were very aware that I was sent down due to non-attendance long ago. I was able to usher them away from my parents' earshot, but several of my former lecturers appeared as well. They too were most surprised to see me.

A handful of parents and students were loitering on the grass. They were chatting and smoking cigarettes. Some were rubbing their hands in the frosty atmosphere before retreating

back inside. I began to relax and hardly noticed the falling temperature. I'd done it. I'd pulled it off. I was a 'graduate'. Well, at least in Dad's eyes, anyway. That was the main thing.

Marija was sitting alone on a bench against the far wall. She gripped the camera in both hands then tilted it at an angle to take shots of the architecture. A breeze blew across the compound. Soft drink cans bounced on the concrete perimeter of the courtyard. She pulled the zip to the top of the suede jacket, just above her mouth and her eyes tracked the guests who mingled on the terrace.

Jared Browning approached from the gallery and headed in Marija's direction. I blocked his path. "Who's that?" He nodded at her. "Your sister?"

I wasn't going to let him anywhere near Marija. I explained that she was a family friend, and while gently guiding him towards the exit, I revealed that some important people were looking for him.

"Where's she from?" he asked, almost twisting his neck, as I pushed the palm of my hand against his back. "She looks Italian."

"She's from Croatia."

"Near enough." He spotted my blank expression. "Just across the Adriatic, near Italy right?"

I smiled but it was obvious that I'd no idea.

He chuckled, took a drag on his cigarette and nodded at Marija again. "Does she have a boyfriend?"

I didn't know that either.

"Don't you know anything?" he scoffed. "And you want to be a reporter? Time you did some research. Good luck with the new job, pal." He disappeared back into the hall.

Normally I'd take no notice of an idiot like Jared Browning. But this time, he'd struck a nerve. He was right. I hadn't a clue. So far in life, I'd succeeded in nothing. He knew it and I knew it. The university, this whole event, was a celebration of others' success, not mine. If I wanted to be a journalist, I'd have to get my act together. I watched Marija pack away her camera. She'd been here for months and yet I knew so little about her, or her background. She stretched out her legs and yawned into her coat. *Who was she?*

"So there we were. Three o'clock in the morning, skint and twenty miles from the outskirts of town."

My mother groaned.

"And then it started to snow."



More groaning and laughter.

It was getting dark. I was sitting between my parents with my back to the fire. The candles had nearly melted and although it wasn't late, far too much wine had been drunk. Marija was sitting at the edge of the table, but she hadn't spoken for an hour. Most of the conversation had been about old times.

The phone rang in the kitchen. Dad rushed to answer it. Mum looked worried as he murmured into the receiver, but he soon returned with a grin on his face. Did we remember the report he'd made in Croatia? Well, some UN officials had asked to view the film. Maybe they'd get involved at last. No news yet but fingers crossed. We burst into cheers and applause. Mum was certain he'd be nominated for the BAFTA again. He contemplated the possibilities. It could happen of course, although he'd be up against stiff competition this year. Nick Broomfield's documentary about Eugène Terre' Blanche was a contender, but he reckoned the *World in Action* report on the Birmingham Six would win. We began to argue but Dad interrupted. Tonight wasn't going to be about him. It was a celebration of my efforts, not his. He planted two new candles on the table, lit them then got out his guitar. I'd known the lyrics since childhood and decided to placate him by singing along. Mum joined in, looking tired but happier. It had been another good day for my mother. Her prescription was nowhere near as strong as before. Dad was right. Marija's arrival had been a huge help. Still, in my heart I knew that *his* presence was the key. Mum was always happiest when *he* was at home, and he'd been back in Hampshire for the longest I could remember.

After finishing with the guitar, my father struggled to his feet and proposed a toast. He directed everyone to take their glasses. "Dan's reminded us why we all love him so much: his kindness, fairness and his generosity to everyone. And he's done it all himself." He raised his glass to me. "I know that this degree will launch a great career."

Everyone toasted the new 'graduate'. I braced myself, and gave them time to drain their glasses yet again before struggling to my feet. I began with a few special words for my father, and concentrated on not slurring my words. I'd always wanted to follow in his footsteps. I'd been given opportunities that he'd never had. I owed it to my parents to make the best of what they had given to me. I stopped. For the first time that evening, both were silent. Mum brushed away another tear and nudged over her empty wine glass.

I couldn't remember a time when we were all so happy together. Okay, deep down, I felt terrible about the deception, but in some ways I'd convinced myself that I wasn't such a fraud. The love we all had for each other wasn't artificial. And when I saw the expressions on their faces that evening, maybe, just maybe it was worth it.

“I have something to say.” Marija had slipped out during the speech. Now she stood in the doorway with a carrier bag. “I can’t speak as well as Daniel, but you have all been so good to me.” She took a gift-wrapped box from the bag and placed it on the table between my parents. “There is a saying in Croatia: ‘Don’t visit with empty hands.’”

Dad opened the box. Inside was a huge gingerbread, cut in the shape of a heart. The surface was layered in multi-coloured icing. It gleamed under the candle light.

“It’s called a ‘Licitarsko Srce,’” Marija explained. “It means ‘Gingerbread Heart’. We give it only on special occasions.” She hugged them both. “Hvala lijepa. Thank you.”

Dad disappeared into the kitchen to find some more wine. He switched on the radio just as they were announcing it on the World Service. The European Community had recognised Croatian and Slovenian independence. UNPROFOR was to send peacekeeping troops to the disputed Krajina region. Fingers crossed, it looked like the beginning of the end. Everyone cheered.

I was probably the only one in the room who had no idea what he was talking about. Jared’s mocking comments, from earlier that afternoon, stung once again. Where was Krajina? I didn’t even know what UNPROFOR stood for. Dad whooped as he opened another bottle. “Remember the date: January 15<sup>th</sup> 1992. The writing’s on the wall for Milošević.”

Mum bounced up and down while refilling everyone’s glasses and there was another toast: to Croatia, to Marija.

Marija blushed and brought her glass up to her mouth, “I hope I can still stay.” She sipped her drink.

“We won’t ever let you go,” gushed my mother.

It was getting late and I’d nearly finished the latest bottle. Marija had set up a projector screen while we cleared the plates and cutlery away. Her shots of the graduation ceremony were all well received, including the main picture of me waiting in the foyer, just before my name wasn’t called. I stared at my drink and thought about all the bullshit I’d invented. As for Marija, well now she had it all. I should’ve envied her, despised her even, but despite everything, I couldn’t. I finished the glass and let it fall on its side. Actually, I really admired her. She’d worked hard and she’d been rewarded. She’d made the best for herself. She was a success. She was everything I could never be. So, no, I couldn’t hate her. In fact, I reckoned she was fucking great. I hated myself.

I poured myself another drink and downed it in one. A reporter? It was never going to

work out. I wasn't even a graduate. I'd fucked up my whole life. I slumped onto a chair next to the door and filled another glass. Marija sat between my parents, her expression dignified, triumphant. Maybe she was laughing at me. She had good reason. She was my parents' new little girl while I was just a fake. I shuffled towards the table, slammed the bottle down onto the wood and knocked into the chair. Before anyone could speak, I lost my balance and sprawled forward. The glass spun in the air. My left hand flailed out, knocking the portable stereo off balance. Its plastic casing bounced off the carpet and shattered on the hardwood floor.

## Chapter 5

March 1992

Her bedroom was becoming a private studio. On her desk, books with titles such as ‘Take your Photography to the Next Stage’ and ‘A-Level Photography’ were alongside magazines and scribbled pencil portraits. The camera had been fixed onto a pod facing the window and images were displayed on the far wall. One was a close-up of a menacing human eye which was leering back at the lens. A blonde girl in the next picture was spinning in mid-flight. Her face was blurred and she might’ve been laughing or crying. The last two photographs had been filmed in black and white. In the first, a girl from Marija’s class at school was sitting on a swing. In the second, a hood had been pulled over her head.

I approached the open window. Down below, Marija was walking around the perimeter of the lawn. The glow from the artificial light engulfed her as she stepped inside the greenhouse. She passed behind an electric heater, but soon reappeared clutching a pitcher plant and Spanish Moss. A flower bed of maroon bromeliads was next to the door. Reaching down, she retrieved one from its roots then held it up to the light. She was lucky that my mother wasn’t around to catch her. She glanced up at the windows before tiptoeing back into the house.

I returned to my own room and sat at my desk. Since finding a trainee post, I’d been hanging around the house for months doing very little. Thankfully, the start date had arrived earlier than expected and I needed to get organised. I’d already spent most of the morning on the phone to landlords, and my note-book was filled with phone numbers, scratches and doodles. A West London apartment? I could only dream. *The Hackney Advertiser* was hardly the big time. As a free paper, it could never pay like the *London Evening Record*, especially for a cub reporter with only basic shorthand. But I was never going to admit any of that to Jared Browning; it was difficult enough telling Dad. Still, after so many rejections, at least it was something. I booked three nights in an East End bed and breakfast.

Marija returned upstairs. I watched her entering her bedroom. Of course, I wasn’t attracted to her. Definitely not. She was far too young. She was quiet as well, maybe too much so. Still, I wondered what she was thinking. Was she unhappy, or just coolly confident? What did she really want? She never gave anything away and she never discussed her life back home. It was a sensitive issue. Not surprising, given what had happened, but since she’d arrived here, we’d hardly spoken. Not only that, but apart from scraps of information gleaned

from Dad's outbursts, I still understood very little about the conflict that had torn her country apart. If I did some research, it would certainly be good for my credibility at work, where everyone, especially the editors, knew about Dad. And because of his reputation, people naturally assumed that I should be an expert too. Yeah, right, an expert. I could almost hear Jared laughing. Yet, if I knew something about Yugoslavia, not only would it help my career prospects, but it might also allow me to connect with Marija in some way.

I switched on the radio. The news began with speculation that Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson were on the verge of splitting up. Governor Clinton was ahead in the key primaries leading up to 'Super Tuesday', and a mine shaft had collapsed in Turkey. Anthony Hopkins was touted as a possible British winner at the Oscars for his role in *Silence of the Lambs*, and at the end there was something about the Maastricht treaty. I knew it was important, but I wasn't sure why.

I turned the dial to the BBC World Service, only to find a report on shrimp farming in Ecuador. There was hardly anything about Yugoslavia anymore. Then World Update brought breaking news of tension rising in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the Bosnians had declared their independence last January, the Serbs living there had responded by setting up their own government in defiance of the national referendum. The Bosnian Serb leader was a psychiatrist-turned-poet named Radovan Karadžić. He'd delivered a speech, threatening the annihilation of the entire Muslim population if anyone dared to oppose him. The Bosnian Croats wanted their own state as well. A three-way war seemed inevitable.

'Bosnia and Herzegovina.' Was that two countries or one? I retrieved an old junior atlas from my shelf. It was out of date. There were no internal borders and Yugoslavia was shown as one country. So who were the Bosnian Serbs? Were they the same as the Serbians? Did they speak the same language? Were they loyal to Belgrade or not? It was too confusing. I switched the radio off. "Fucking Serbs." That much at least made some sense. I paused. I sounded just like my father.

I crossed the landing to her Marija's door. A vase containing several of the greenhouse flowers was on a stand, next to the window. As she arranged the petals, isolated bolts of morning sunshine broke through the greyness, and reflected off her skin. She moved away from the window to stand before the mirror. She ran her fingers through her hair. I angled my head to get a better view but she moved out of sight. When she re-emerged, she was wearing a maroon blouse and a black skirt. She posed before the mirror again and moved her head

from side to side. Satisfied, she opened the cupboard, retrieved an art-file and returned to the flowers. She looked up and spotted me.

I poked my head around the edge of the door. "Have you heard the news?"

Her eyes narrowed.

"Trouble's brewing in Bosnia between the Serbs, Croats and Muslims."

"How long have you been standing there?" She folded her arms.

"I'm doing some research." I swallowed.

"Research. On me?"

"No, no!" I tried to force a laugh but felt myself turning crimson. "I'm interested in the Balkans."

"The Balkans."

"Yes, er this guy, Karadžić..." I swallowed. "Who is he?"

She stared at me disdainfully, as though I was an idiot. At first I thought she was going to scream or throw me out of her room. Instead, after a short silence, she muttered something to herself then returned to her camera.

Dad arrived home in the late afternoon and found Mum in the kitchen. I couldn't hear what they were talking about but the door remained closed for a least half an hour. When he exited, Marija was waiting for him. He gave her a fatherly hug whilst my mother stood alone in the kitchen. She looked sad and tired. I felt sorry for her because when Marija had first arrived, she and Mum were inseparable. They used to go out shopping, meet people and have lunch. They seemed to be having a great time, and it was great for Mum, but for some reason, that didn't happen anymore. I couldn't recall the last time I'd seen them together.

For several minutes, Marija and my father meandered around her bedroom, surveying the photographic display. I watched from my desk while she pointed out the black and white photographs. Dad focused on the sky-scapes. The first picture showed the early evening from the fields behind the house. Shades of blue were running across the heavens then cutting diagonally down alongside a thick stream of maroon. In the centre, thin strips of light were forcing their way through the clouds. The final photograph was a canvas of pure blue. Dad studied her work for several minutes, concentrating on every piece. Then he removed his glasses and he told her he was proud of her. She was making great progress. She had a real talent.

I waited for him on the landing and, as he exited, he nearly crashed into me.

"Dad, have you heard about Bosnia?"

He brushed past and descended the stairs.

“There’s going to be another war. The Serbs...”

His study door slammed shut. A few minutes later, he re-appeared, only to leave the house again without explanation.

Later that evening, I was watching television downstairs in the living room. The news reports were detailing the rapidly escalating tensions in Bosnia. My mother was looking drained. She’d spent the afternoon sleeping on the sofa, and there were lines around her eyes. A small bottle lay next to her on the side table.

I asked whether Dad would be sent over there again.

“Not yet.” Her voice became almost a whisper. “But if it gets worse, he’ll go. You can bet on it.”

The front door opened. There was a commotion in the hallway, an excited flurry of voices. My father strode through the door, followed by Marija. As they entered the living room, she flung her arms around him.

“Is there anyone else?” he asked her.

She stared at him, “Anyone else?”

“Who you’d like to share with? Someone from school?”

“No.”

Dad explained that he was really impressed when viewing Marija’s photography portfolio. More than impressed, actually, amazed.

“You mean the photos *upstairs*?” Mum gave me a puzzled look.

Yes. So he’d taken a chance. Life was all about taking chances and seizing the initiative, wasn’t it? Marija looked ecstatic. She hugged him again. Dad had contacted a friend who owned a private gallery in Southampton. “He’s allowed Marija to display her photographs for a week next month at the Lorimer. It’s a great honour.”

“Never heard of it,” said Mum.

“We went with the school last term,” said Marija, beaming with pride. “With the A-Level class.”

“Oh,” replied Mum.

Marija sang to herself as she skipped upstairs. I stared at the television. Dad slapped me on the shoulder. “Dan, you asked about Bosnia?”

I looked up at him.

“This afternoon. Sorry, I barged past you. I was in a rush.”

“Oh that. Forget it.”

He stood in the middle of the room with his hands in his pockets. His eyes followed the images on the screen. Mum sat up. Her hair was dishevelled and her face looked pale. “Daniel?”

“What?”

“Have you packed for tomorrow?”

“Oh Christ, I forgot,” Dad remarked. He turned and looked at me. “What time are you off?”

“Will you give him a lift to the station, Chris?” Mum asked.

“Well, I wish I could but I’ve...”

“It’s okay,” I interrupted, “My name’s not Marija.”

“That’s not fair,” he snapped.

“If Marija asked, you’ll carry her to London, personally.” My eyes remained fixed on the screen.

“What does he mean by that?” He stared at Mum.

I’d had enough. I finished packing and slung the back-pack over my shoulder. A final look around the room sufficed then I pulled the door until it clicked shut. The clock showed 6 am. This morning there would be no last minute advice, no waving from the doorway, no tears goodbye. I tiptoed across the landing. My mother’s breathing was barely audible as she lay asleep in bed. I held the suitcase so it didn’t brush the stairs then descended without making a sound. My back pack rustled as I set it down in the hallway.

I could make out the trees lining the drive, and the beach at the bottom of the road. Everything else was dark. Above the clouds, a faint trace of blue was inching its way across the skyline. I patted my back pocket and froze. I tiptoed back upstairs to my bedroom then used the dimmer to create a thin beam of light. Taking care not to make a sound, I prised open the drawer next to my bed. After rifling through some papers I finally pulled out an envelope with a train ticket inside. Southampton to London: 6:30am.

I descended the stairs to the crackle of tyres on the driveway and the short burst of a taxi’s car-horn. By the time I’d got out, the darkness had nearly lifted. I’d never arrived at the station so early, but at least twenty people were already on the platform, waiting for the London train. I checked my watch. Ten minutes before departure. I bought a newspaper from the stall and sat down on a bench.



A man finished his call on the payphone. He checked the change holder for loose coins before returning to the platform's edge. Leaving my luggage on the bench, I edged over and shoved some coins into the slot. I brought the receiver up to my ear and tapped in my parents' phone number. The tone changed as someone picked up. I replaced the receiver, held it against the hook and shut my eyes.

"Excuse me, are you using that?"

"Oh, sorry." I handed the phone to a man behind me. He shuffled me out of the way.

I turned back towards the bench and froze. My suitcase and backpack had been moved onto the ground. Marija Kovač was sitting in their place.

"I don't like bad feelings," she said.

I looked around at the other waiting passengers. No-one else was listening.

"I disagree with Chris. He should spend more time with you. I've told him. You're his son."

I didn't reply.

"You need to talk to him," she said.

"It's difficult, sometimes."

"I'm not competing against you," she smiled, took my hand and squeezed it. As she spoke I began to relax. She was a good kid and it was a lovely gesture to come looking for me. In fact she'd always had a kind heart and I realised that I shouldn't have doubted her. Of course it was difficult for Marija when she'd first arrived, given what she'd gone through. But she was alright; she'd come through it. She had beautiful eyes and skin and there was no point in denying it. Deep down I knew that I'd always liked her, from the moment I'd set eyes on her.

The train emerged in the distance and was approaching the station. The waiting commuters rose from their seats and moved towards the edge of the platform. She asked me about my new job. When was I to start?

"Tomorrow."

"You must promise to let me visit, as soon as you are settled. Good bye, Daniel. See you soon, I hope." Instead of leaving, she lingered. She looked into my eyes, reached up and kissed me on the lips.

The train pulled into the station. I sat down in the non-smoking carriage. An elderly gentleman wanted to chat about the weather. I lay back in my seat and looked out of the window. The sun's rays reflected off the glass. The colours of the rainbow spiralled into my

eyes, camouflaging the fields that were lining the route. The touch of her lips against mine had filled my senses and my every thought, and I realised that I was in love.

## Chapter 6

May 1992

I pulled up opposite the school's front gates and cut the engine. It was almost half past three. I turned to the pile of newspapers on the passenger's seat. The front pages of the broadsheets were dominated by John Major's narrow election victory that had so confounded all the predictions. The Labour Party looked set to choose John Smith as their new leader, replacing Neil Kinnock. Foreign news was restricted to the inside pages. Below rumours of civil unrest fomenting in Los Angeles was an article about Yugoslavia. Milošević had been moving troops from Croatia into Bosnia to support Radovan Karadžić and the Bosnian Serbs. I scanned the print. The previous week, there were predictions about 'ethnic cleansing', but there was no new information.

I tossed the newspapers onto the back seat, took a deep breath and sat up. The railings made it difficult to see the sign. It was about twenty metres from the car window and fastened to the red-brick wall. Following recent redevelopment, the sixth-form building was almost unrecognisable. I'd been taught in a prefabricated building that had been considered to be temporary back in the 1950s. Following my departure, a brand new building with transparent partitions had been constructed with a bridge to the main site. A newly refurbished reception area strategically separated visitors from access to the main offices and classrooms. Even the entrance gate was on the opposite side of the original site. Eventually I decided I was in the correct place. I could just make out: 'Southampton Central Sixth Form College: North Entrance.' Marija had been a student at S.C.C. for almost six months and she'd made lightning progress. The school had entered her for two A-Levels, to be taken in November. They hadn't offer subjects like Media Studies and Photography when I was a student.

It seemed crazy, but I was thinking about Marija all the time. It would've been far more sensible to settle in at my London flat and get to know my new colleagues. Instead I'd managed to find a reason to return to Hampshire almost every weekend for the previous few weeks. Perhaps, deep down, I'd always felt this way, even since the moment we first met. She was still at school, I knew that, but I convinced myself that her youth wasn't a problem. After all, she'd nearly finished her A-Levels, and she was planning to go to university the following year. I decided that it hadn't been that long since I'd been at college, and a five or six year gap wasn't so great.

A trickle of students began flowing through the transparent doors and down the steps. Within seconds, the trickle had become a flood from every doorway and exit, as hundreds of students raced towards the main gates. I got out of the car and headed for the entrance before being swamped by hordes of young people, mostly teenage boys.

The crowd took over fifteen minutes to ebb away until only a few stragglers were loitering. A teacher trotted through the car park, lowering his head as he passed the staffroom window. Marija appeared at the top of the stairs, alongside two other girls. All three descended until someone called out from within the office. He looked young: early, mid-twenties at most. He was smooth, fit; fitter than me. She skipped back up the steps and propped herself against the door. Her body curved towards him while they spoke. Her two friends glanced at each other and giggled. I paced back and forth, outside the gate.

Marija waved ‘Goodbye’ and joined the others. They walked together down the path towards the main gate. Somehow, although it had only been a few months, she looked older, more mature than her friends. Gone were the juvenile gestures, the t-shirts and the suede. Her shoulders were flung back, and her stride lucid, gazelle-like. I stood behind the railings, straightened my tie and pulled the lapels of my jacket. As they reached the gate, I ran my tongue over my front teeth and stepped out before them. All three stopped and stared. Marija folded her arms. She looked me up and down.

“Do you want a lift home?” I stood back, and raised my arms to reveal the full splendour of my new suit.

She agreed but looked wary. The two other girls made their excuses and departed. I pointed towards my new car: an old Audi Quattro, broad and angular. Marija tried the handle; the door seemed jammed but swung open suddenly. She shot me a worried look.

“Yeah, I’ve got to fix that.”

Marija laughed. She hung onto the door with one hand and poked her foot inside, as if testing thin ice. She sat down and tugged at the seat belt. It didn’t move.

“Wait. I’ve got to release the brakes.” I climbed into the driver’s seat and turned the ignition key.

She took two attempts to close the door while I revved the engine. Eventually we pulled away. I explained that I was back for the weekend again. I’d been meeting friends in town and happened to be passing. I strengthened my grip on the steering wheel. “Who was that in the doorway? Your boyfriend?”

It was a mild afternoon; the air was fresh and cool. We took the long route back, brushed the outskirts of the New Forest then headed for the coast and home. I tried to make conversation but Marija had focused on the horizon, where a huge billow of smoke was rising quickly into the sky. Black clouds were gathering ominously. I told her that it was a bonfire; that it was normal for the time of year, but she said nothing. For several minutes we sat in silence. I didn't understand why.

I wanted to discuss developments in Bosnia. The Serbs had laid siege to Sarajevo and were shelling civilians. She blinked as if snapping out of a trance. She said it had been a long day and she didn't want to discuss it. I changed the subject to my new job, and told her that it was working out really well. I didn't reveal that my most recent assignments had included an interview with a man whose garden wall had collapsed into a school field, and a story about a pregnant woman who was chased by an unlicensed pit bull. So instead, I weaved a tale about fast-paced competition, the thrill of the chase, and the financial potential. I paused and scrutinised her reaction.

She nodded politely.

We pulled up at traffic lights and I paused for breath. The sun was low and rich. I checked her reflection in the side window. Marija's silk blouse was much more stylish than her friends' silly indie dresses and net tights, and so much classier. Her sunglasses were tucked neatly above her forehead. As we reached the Solent, she coolly brushed loose strands of hair away in the breeze.

I asked about her photography. The dates for the gallery exhibition had been fixed. Her portraits were to be displayed for an entire week. I reminded her of my father's suggestion, that other students might be able to display their work too.

"No, my work is stronger."

"So, nobody else is involved?"

"No."

We reached the edge of the village, passed the cottages and teashops and took the narrow winding lane down towards the riverside. As we reached The Bugle pub, a sports car shot in front of us. I swerved, narrowly avoiding a bus. Marija held the edge of the steering wheel, keeping it steady. I slowed to a snail's pace as the sports car accelerated away into the distance. She told me to concentrate on the road.

We headed off again. I asked if she'd need any help with the exhibition. She smiled and thanked me. No, she didn't need my help. It was very kind of me to ask.

We turned into my parents' driveway and I pulled up in front of the house. She told me about her classmate's brother. Well, it was a friend of the brother, actually. His name was Ben and he'd started up a magazine in London. "He's been let down by someone," she added. "And he's looking for a photographer." She got out and strode across the pebbles towards the house.

"You're leaving for London?"

She continued walking.

"What about your A-Levels?"

She turned around. "He just wants to look at my portfolio."

"No, I mean," I scrambled out of the car. "What about your school work? What about the gallery?"

She shrugged. She was only going for an interview. It was a part time job.

I asked how she was going to get there.

She said something about train times from Southampton. I interrupted her. "Listen, I'm going up to London in a couple of days, anyway. Why don't I take you?"

We made record time, entering the city from the south, cutting through Croydon then across to Southwark. We passed the endless line of high-rise flats, estates and crumbling shop fronts, the fumes, the dirt and the heat. As the sun beat down, the single file of cars slowed to crawling pace. We crossed Tower Bridge at about Midday and turned east towards Whitechapel. Marija stuck her head out of the window and stared up at the garish tinsel lining the Shoreditch shop windows. While the sound of the sitar pounded out from cars and stalls on street corners, she tapped her hand in time with the beat. City stockbrokers, hijab-wearing Muslim women, students, artists and shop workers all passed by each other on the pavement.

Halfway up Commercial Road was a Dickensian-era building, now serving as a community centre. A graffiti-scarred noticeboard outside proudly proclaimed that, at different times the centre had served as a place of prayer for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Now surrounded by a maze of desolate post-war housing estates, modern signs of worship were scarce. Broken satellite dishes were sagging from roofs and roadside bins were overflowing with junk food cartons. Punctured footballs had been planted on the shards of glass lining the centre's brick walls. Lumpy tarmac had been smeared across its back yard. In the backyard, children were scuttling around on plastic three-wheeled bicycles. Pop music was blaring from the open window on the second floor, where the magazine had rented some office space.

We let ourselves into the yard through the gate. A lone child hurled a broken cricket bat repeatedly against the concrete ground. Chips of wood whirled and spun in the air. I pressed the buzzer next to the back door. Wearing a flannel shirt and frizzy, bleach-blond hair, Ben Ogilvy, editor in chief, opened up. He held the tips of Marija's fingers, stood to attention and bowed. She giggled. He turned to me, clasped my hand and slapped my shoulder. He said something about Dad and how much he admired his work. I began to thank him but he was already too busy ushering Marija through the door.

The magazine studio stretched across the whole of the second floor. There were no carpets, hardly any furniture, and a smell of paint was lingering from the empty walls. In one corner was a camera on a tripod, and a pair of light stands. A background cloth was hanging limply from the ceiling. Next to a sofa, where two young men were munching crisps, a portable black and white television was flickering on and off. One man, wearing ripped jeans and Dr. Marten's boots, rolled off the sofa and began twisting the aerial to get a clearer signal. The other man, wearing a baseball cap and a vest, grunted to a friend, who was swinging from a set of wall bars. They both stared at us. In the centre of the room was a bank of word processors. Three young men were tapping into their keyboards. A trail of screwed-up papers led to a bin, where a typewriter had been dumped. Pop music was blaring from a stereo.

"Come on guys. Back to work," Ben yelled.

The young man on the wall-bars let himself down slowly. He dropped onto the sofa and began wrestling with his friend. They both fell onto the floor. Marija burst out laughing.

"Guys, Guys!" called Ben. He looked at us and rolled his eyes.

Ben gave us a short tour, including the cameras, lighting systems and the new PC computer. Up to date software had enabled him to publish the magazine, almost entirely, from the office. He was devoting nearly all his attention to Marija. She nodded attentively after every comment and laughed at his jokes. They walked side by side, meaning that I had to march behind. "Well, let's have a chat about your portfolio," Ben said as he led her into his office.

I approached the door but he blocked my way. "We'll be about twenty minutes, mate." He pointed to the kettle, next to the pile of plates on the sink. "Make yourself a cuppa." Then he shut the door.

The two young men, sitting at their computers, sniggered to each other. I strolled around the studio while they gossiped about football and sex. I tried the back yard, but it was too noisy and hot. After a while, I became anxious. I checked my watch several times and

scanned the studio window for signs of movement. Soon I found myself marching up and down outside Ben's office. Laughter could be heard from within. I threw open the door. He looked up from the portfolio of photographs as Marija spun around on her chair. "How are you getting on?" I asked. No-one said anything. "It's just that we'll be late unless we start back soon."

"Late for what?" she looked puzzled.

I looked down at the floor then back at her. "I'm worried about the car."

She stared at me.

Ben nodded. "Won't be long, mate."

His manner was beginning to irritate me already. His use of the word, "mate" was beginning to grate. He wasn't a "mate". I didn't even know him. As I strutted around outside for a while, kicking thin air, I decided he was probably a creep. Yes, he was definitely a creep and he was going to take advantage of her. I soon found myself hammering on the door again. This time, he relented.

Ben saw us both out. He was very impressed with Marija's photography. No promises, but it was definitely looking good. Her portfolio was the best he'd seen so far. There might even be a permanent position if everything turned out well. He'd give her a call later on today, if that was alright.

I explained that she didn't have a phone, so after scrawling on a piece of paper, I handed him *my* car phone number instead.

Marija bounced across the back yard as if she was about to burst. At the exit gate, she shielded her eyes and squinted up at the studio window. Ben was standing at the glass. He raised his hand. She returned the wave and beamed a smile.

We found the car and got inside.

"Thank you for taking me to meet Ben."

"No problem." I strapped myself in. She pulled her legs up onto the seat. "What was that music they were playing on the stereo?"

I didn't know.

"It was so...*cool*," she gushed.

We travelled for about an hour on the motorway before pulling into a service station to refill the tank. Marija decided to get some food from the shop. As she crossed the forecourt, my car phone began to ring. I recognised the number but didn't answer. Thirty seconds later, I realised it wasn't going to stop. I removed the handset from the hook on the dashboard and



brought it slowly to my ear. The other end was silent except for a mild crackle. I listened and waited.

“Er, hello...hello, Dan?”

I paused before answering, “Yes, *mate*.”

I looked out of the window. Marija was inside the shop, rifling through the sandwiches.

“Hello?”

“I think the line’s breaking up.”

“Is Marija there?”

I closed my eyes. “No, she’s had to go out.”

Again, there was a short silence. A lorry pulled away from the service station. The Audi shuddered.

“Where *are* you guys?”

I looked out of the driver’s window again. Just a few metres away, cars were zipping past on the road south. I pushed my forehead onto the steering wheel. “Listen Ben, there’s no easy way of saying this but...”

“Yes?”

“She’s not interested.”

“Not interested?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

“But thanks for ringing...”

“Well, I thought we’d agreed...”

“...She’s had another offer.” I closed my eyes again, tightly. I felt like a monster but I couldn’t help myself. “But listen, Ben, we really enjoyed it. Your magazine is going places. I can tell.”

“Could you get Marija to give me a call?”

“Of course.”

Marija was receiving change from the assistant.

“Listen, I have to go. I’ll tell her you rang.”

Marija emerged from the shop. She waved at me while crossing the forecourt. I waved back, forced a smile then pressed the red button on the handset. It made an electronic beep. I tried to replace it onto the hook, but it wouldn’t click into place. The green light started to flash. It was still on. I pushed some more buttons. They beeped in unison.

“Hello?” It was Ben again.

I pulled the back of the handset from its casing and ripped out the battery.

Marija opened the car door. “Who was that?”

“You’re not going to believe it.”

She got in and looked at me.

“Ben’s cancelled.”

Her mouth dropped open. She blinked several times.

“He *did* like it, Marija. It’s brilliant, but he got a call from a professional photographer right after you left.”

She let the bag slip to the floor. “So that’s it?”

“I’m afraid so.”

Tears began to well up in her eyes. I drove the car into the forecourt lay-by, cut the engine and ran my hand across her shoulder. “I didn’t want to say so, but it looked like a Mickey Mouse organisation all along. I could tell as soon as we got there.”

“Mickey Mouse?”

“Yes...no good.”

I should’ve felt shame at what I was doing. Later on, I’d reflect on my actions with disgust. Yet, that afternoon, I felt nothing except pure satisfaction as she buried her face in my chest. I inhaled the aroma from her perfume, and while she wept, I ran my fingers lightly through her hair.

## Chapter 7

May 1992

I'd parked behind the gallery over half an hour earlier. Since then I'd been sitting at the wheel of my Audi. I took another swig of whiskey and closed my eyes. I must've been at least three or four times over the limit, again. What the hell was happening to me? For all his other failings, Dad would never have pulled a stunt like that. Whilst he'd only helped her, I'd destroyed her chances. What would he think of me if he knew what I'd done? I was pathetic.

I'd decided to come clean and apologise to Marija. I'd even tried ringing Ben a few days after our meeting in London, but he'd already appointed someone else. So there was nothing else for it, I'd have to tell her the truth. I'd explain that I hadn't had time to think; that I'd panicked and done something stupid. I'd tell her that I hadn't wanted to lose her and that I was sorry. Of course, I'd no idea how she'd react. I reckoned she'd probably punch me. I necked a final shot of whiskey, dropped the bottle in the glove box and flung open my door.

The Lorimer Gallery stood near the summit of Wriothsley Hill on the edge of town. Surrounded by woodland and lawns, it had been built several hundred years previously by Lord Southampton. Stately and Georgian, the building consisted of only two floors and three main viewing halls. A path, which ran around the perimeter of the building, led straight to the entrance. From there, a narrow road wound down towards iron gates. Access was granted or denied via an intercom in the side wall. The gallery extension, known as the East Wing, had been built in the mid-eighties in a darker shade of brick. Ivy had been cultivated to create a sense of age. The critics, however, had been unanimous. The extension was not in character with the rest of the building and spoiled its overall appearance. This conclusion had not gone down well with the owner. For a while there was even a threat of litigation.

I found the rear of the East Wing and peered through the glass. The room inside was purest white sunlight, gleaming off the walls. I blinked several times and rubbed my eyes. Next to the wall on the far side, several bottles of wine had been laid out. A collection of glasses were sitting on an adjoining table and a microphone was on the floor near the window. Blocking the entrance, a cleaning station was parked alongside a half rolled-up carpet. Marija entered. Her hair was tied back. I waved but she didn't notice. Instead, she crossed the floor to examine one of the photographs. She re-arranged the frame before

standing back and viewing it again. I knocked on the window. No response. I pulled a fifty pence piece from my pocket and tapped on the glass.

“What do you think you’re doing?” A man in his sixties, wearing a wax jacket and Wellington boots, marched in my direction from the trees. “Why aren’t you following the path?”

“I’m sorry. I was trying to surprise someone.” I stepped back and headed for the entrance. The old man blocked my way. “We don’t open until tomorrow evening.”

“I know, I...”

“What do you want?”

“I was visiting Marija.”

“The Serbian girl?”

“Croatian.”

The old man looked puzzled. Then, as if a light bulb had been switched on, he stood upright and grasped my hand. “You’re Chris’s son.” He chuckled and gestured towards the main entrance. “Come on, I’ll take you.”

We walked around the building together before entering through the main doors. The old man introduced himself as ‘Alexander Lorimer.’ As we strolled through the darkened entrance hall, Lorimer detailed the gallery’s history. It had been bought by his uncle, a property magnate, in the 1930s. Alexander had inherited the place in the early seventies. As we moved through the poorly-lit passageways, Lorimer pointed out lesser known paintings by Hogarth and early works by Gainsborough and Reynolds. I glanced at the walls and nodded. They’d built a new wing, just for photography.

The old man pointed towards the brightness of the East Wing. “What do you think of it?”

I strained my neck to take in the symmetrical arches at the entrance. “It’s wonderful.”

Lorimer relaxed. “Not wonderful...” He looked up at the glass ceiling and sighed, “...but effective. It gets the young people in. It’s popular with modern artists. You know, people who like to be on the television.” He stopped. “By the way, how is your father? When do you think he’ll be able to start?”

“Start?”

“He’s making a documentary about the gallery’s history.”

My head lowered. “I didn’t know that.”

Marija was standing by the far wall, close to where I tapped against the glass. She appeared to be unaware of our presence.

“Miss Kovač?” Lorimer called out. “You have a visitor.”

Marija spun round as I entered. When she saw me, her eyes narrowed. Then, as if remembering herself she smiled and greeted me. I hugged her. She let her limbs hang loose.

“Do you ever go to work, Daniel?”

“I thought I’d see how you’re getting on.”

“I’m busy.” She looked back at the mess on the floor.

“I’ll help you.”

She ran the palm of her hand against her forehead. “Please, don’t.”

“Tell Chris to give me a ring,” Lorimer called out from the doorway before exiting.

I trawled around the edge of the room, scanning the photographs on the wall. I’d seen most of them before, especially the landscapes and self-portraits. Then I spotted Marija’s reflection in the glass. Her arms were folded and she said nothing while I completed the tour.

“What do you have left to do?”

“Just the carpet then I tidy.”

I walked over to the door, leading onto the path outside. I tried the handle. The air felt cool against my skin. The sun was low and rich as I stepped out onto the lawn. “I want to talk to you.”

She raised her eyes but followed. We walked outside to the edge of the hill, overlooking the city. The traffic below made no sound. The air was almost completely still and only a faint breeze stirred the trees. Insects were buzzing in the undergrowth. My watch showed nearly eight o’clock.

“Daniel, what is it?”

I turned to face her. “I’ve been meaning to speak to you.” I stopped. For several seconds, I found myself staring at the ground.

She folded her arms again. “Daniel, you have something to say?”

I blurted out how awful I felt; that she’d been treated terribly. She’d been let down and I felt responsible. I glanced up at her. She was staring straight at me. Now was the time to explain the truth; to tell her what I’d done and ask for her forgiveness. But suddenly I couldn’t. As the setting sun began melting across the city skyline, my behaviour back in London suddenly seemed completely reasonable. It struck me that I hadn’t driven to the gallery that afternoon to make an apology after all. Saying ‘sorry’ was the last thing on my mind. Before, I’d been confused, but now everything was clearer. I edged forwards and tried to kiss her.

She jerked her head away. “What are you doing?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Are you mad?” She sniffed. “Have you been drinking?”

“I said I’m sorry... I misunderstood.”

She stared incredulously then began to laugh.

I didn’t move in my seat for over an hour. I couldn’t move. The sun had set. Scarlet was spreading thinly over the pale sky, blocked by clouds and dusk from the Solent. The lights were still on in the East Wing. Everywhere else was dark. She hated me. No, it was worse than that. I was joke to her. That was the most painful bit. Laughter was worse than hate, much worse. I’d made a complete fool of myself.

It was time to go, or else I’d be in the car park all night. I turned the ignition key. It was quicker to take a short cut over the edge of the car park, onto the main track that wound its way to the front. My Audi began the steep descent to the main road. A silver, two-seated, sports car was parked on the gravel, right in front of the entrance. I pressed my foot on the brakes and squinted through my rear window at the number plate. I reversed alongside, and cut the engine. My hand rested on the latch. I took a deep breath and swung open the door.

The hallways leading to the East Wing were dark and silent. I felt my heart beating; sudden and irregular, yet so loud I was certain it would be heard. I crouched down in the shadows. An icy spurt shot up my spine and spread across my chest.

My father was still wearing his suit from work. Marija clung to his arm while leading him on a tour of the room. She pointed to an image on the wall. Then he put his hands on her shoulders and began talking. I couldn’t hear what was being said. I crept closer to the open door, by an attendant’s chair. I strained to hear their exact words.

“Next week,” he said.

“It’s too soon,” she replied.

He agreed, but he’d only found out that day. He was going to New York to cover the UN discussions about Bosnia. The Carrington-Cutileiro peace plan was in tatters, so another strategy needed to be drawn up. David Owen’s name had been mentioned as a possible mediator, and Chris had arranged an interview with him. The entire trip was to last for about a week.

She took a deep breath. “I’ll look after Theresa.”

He thanked her but it wouldn’t be necessary. There was room on the plane for a photographer, someone who was particularly talented; someone who’d already shown a great deal of promise; someone who might be the next Robert Capa.

Her eyes widened.

He told her it would be a great experience for her. She didn't have to go, but wasn't life about taking chances?

She leapt forward and hugged him, burying her head into his chest. I felt like shouting out. But I couldn't. They'd already walked to the far side of the room. I strained to hear again. They'd been booked into a downtown five star hotel, regularly used by the foreign press. Once the filming was out of the way, they would take in the sights: Times Square and the Statue of Liberty; the art galleries and museums; the restaurants and the architecture. There would also be time to meet important contacts, including a friend who ran professional courses at the New York Institute of Photography. Anything was possible once her A-Levels were over. She thanked him again. She owed him so much. He told her she deserved it. She was getting her chance on merit.

I couldn't believe what was happening. He sloped over to the table where the glasses and wine bottles were laid. I squatted in the shadows, out of sight. Through a narrow angle, I watched him duck under the table to retrieve a CD player. I heard it being plugged in. The sound of classical music drifted out of the light, into the darkness. I didn't know the name of the composer or the composition. He poured two glasses of wine and toasted her success. A few centimetres of plaster and brick separated them from me. His voice was now louder, crisper while they ambled over to the hall entrance. They discussed preparatory meetings for the trip. Marija would have to attend with the other crew members. She told him she'd be glad to. She was looking forward to it. He finished the drink quickly. He was going home because he needed to be up early. Did she want a lift back?

No, she had to finish clearing up. Tomorrow was too important for her. Everything had to be perfect. She'd only be another hour before calling a taxi. He pulled his wallet out and handed over some notes. She shoved them straight into her pocket. He told her not to be too late. She had school after all. They hugged each other "Goodnight" and she kissed him on the cheek. When he released her, his arm lingered around her waist. Then he headed off in my direction. I ducked away into the shadows.

She called out. She wanted to know about the opening night. It was crucial that he should attend. He explained that he had a meeting in London. He'd try to make it back on time. She insisted he *had* to be there. He said he would do his best.

For several more minutes I stayed in the darkness. Oddly, I felt overwhelmed by a sense of calm. Sometimes, when there's nothing you can do, things can become easier to understand, and I became reconciled quite quickly to what had happened. It was very

straightforward now. She'd taken it all: my room, my family's love and finally my future, and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. I'd been a complete fool all along. She'd known what she wanted from the beginning. She'd planned it, I'd let her do it, and now, Marija's triumph was complete. And yeah, finally, I despised her.



## Chapter 8

June 5<sup>th</sup> 1992

It was a Friday afternoon and my boss had gone home early, as usual. I was standing at my desk, putting on my jacket. The phone rang. It was my mother. She was surprised that I'd returned to London so soon. She'd waited up for me the previous evening. I told her that I had to get back for an early start. There was going to be a breakfast meeting. Key editorial decisions needed to be made.

The raucous cheers of the other trainees resounded out across the corridor. I looked out of the window and checked my watch. I wouldn't be able to attend Marija's opening after all. I'd far too much work to do. I was sorry. There was a gasp on the other end. She remonstrated. "Why are they so strict?" Her voice was drowsy, irritable. She didn't need to tell me I worked for a local rag. I *knew* it was only a local rag. I repeated that I was sorry but I really *was* too busy. I wished it was otherwise. But it just wasn't possible.

A trainee tapped on the window then mimed as if drinking a beer. I grinned and returned to the phone, fiddling with the lead as I spoke. Another meeting had been arranged. I told her it was an important story.

"Marija will miss you."

I said nothing.

"Your father will be upset as well."

"I'll bet."

She sounded tetchy, "Did you fall out with him again?"

I didn't reply.

She was annoyed that he was going to New York. But at least it was safer than Bosnia. She'd still worry about him while he was away. She always did. But did I know that Marija was going as well?

"Yeah, they can look after each other," I said.

She thought he was doing too much. It was about time they let a younger generation of reporters take over. I agreed. I definitely agreed.

She pleaded with me to come down for the weekend. "If your father can make it, you certainly can."

I looked out of the window. My friends had already disappeared around the corner of the building. I clenched my fist and checked my watch again. Okay, I *would* stay over but I *had* to leave early on Saturday morning.

This time she was satisfied.

It started to rain shortly after I left work; small spots at first, then as the light began to fade, a torrential downpour. The traffic on the motorway slowed to crawling pace, becoming stationary outside Winchester. I waited for over an hour and a half, watching the windscreen wipers shove water from the glass. I wished I'd gotten round to fixing the car radio. At some traffic lights, a policeman explained that there had been an accident. A car had skidded off in the wet and several people had been seriously injured.

Eventually, the traffic began to clear. Upon reaching Southampton, I cut across the city. In the distance was Wriothlesley Hill. The thicket of trees at the summit was hiding the gallery building but a stream of light shone through its glass ceiling, illuminating the clouds. I slowed to a standstill at another junction. It had already gone eight o'clock. As I pulled away, a sports car appeared from nowhere and cut across my front. Its lights flashed red and its rear wheels slid across the tarmac. I slammed my foot on the brakes and turned sharply left. The engine cut. I swerved, ending up almost perpendicular to the offending vehicle. I brought my fist down on the steering wheel and slammed the car horn. The driver in front raised his finger to the rear mirror before pulling away slowly. For a few seconds, the only sounds were of droplets of rain tapping against the glass, followed by the slow screech of windscreen wipers. Then from behind, car horns started blaring. I turned the ignition key again. It was dark outside and the rain was getting heavier.

I knew I was going to be late although, this time, there was a genuine reason. Not that anyone would've cared. Besides, I needed to change my clothes. I'd need another hour to get to the gallery and back. By the time I arrived, it might even have finished. Not such a bad thing.

There was no sound as I walked through the door. In the lounge, several of Marija's text books were on the floor. One had been pressed open on the middle of the sofa. On the sideboard, the phone receiver was off the hook.

The lights were on in the kitchen. My mother was sitting at the table. She didn't acknowledge me. Instead, she slowly got to her feet. I moved towards her. She opened her

arms as if I'd just returned from a trip from the other side of the world. The whites of her eyes were blood-shot, hollow. Her eyelids fluttered but her voice was clear.

“Your father has been in an accident.”

Dad had crashed his car near Winchester. He'd left his meeting in the early afternoon. It had started to rain. He was driving too quickly and had skidded off near a roundabout. He was killed instantly. It was as simple as that.

For the first time, I noticed the mundane objects in the kitchen, things that I'd never really taken notice of before: a picture on the wall, the curtains that blocked the lightning flashes outside. Through the glass, I caught sight of the long branch from the tree; it once served as a cross bar while playing football as a child. My chest tightened. Tears welled up but I managed to control myself. Mum told me to ring Marija. She'd be wondering where everyone was. She headed towards the door then stopped, wrapped her arm around my shoulder and pulled me closer.

Several minutes passed. The door-bell rang. A female officer went upstairs to speak to Mum. A car had been placed at the foot of the drive. A policeman offered to wait outside on the porch. He wanted to extend his condolences. He told me that he'd long admired my father, and had always enjoyed his special reports. He kept talking. He was trying to be kind but I didn't want to know.

I interrupted him to insist that access be granted to family members only. My mother had a sister who lived near the New Forest. My father's family lived overseas. No-one else. No reporters, no television.

The policeman exited into the storm. I picked up the address book from the side table. The pages were full of Dad's cursive handwriting. My aunt's number was near the front. I picked up the receiver, listened to the tone for several seconds then replaced it.

It seemed like an hour had passed. I sat in silence on the staircase, still unable to gather my thoughts. Then, seemingly of its own volition, the phone rang.

“Hello? Hello?”

I didn't recognise the voice.

“Who's this?”

“Alex.”

“Who?”

“Alex Lorimer.” Conversation simmered on the other end of the line, alongside the clinking of glasses and laughter of young people. “Where's Chris?”

I bit my lip. “He’s dead.”

“What? I can’t hear you.”

“He’s dead.” My voice was faint.

“What?”

I put the phone down.

I sat upstairs with Mum. We talked about Dad. Her hand trembled as she wiped away tears. There was so much to do over the coming days. I sat for a while then buried my head in her arms. Eventually she slept. I switched off the light, removed the bottle of pills from her side-table and closed the door.

It had been half an hour since I’d spoken to Lorimer. Apart from the kitchen, the house was in complete darkness. I stood in my bedroom, which overlooked the front of the house. The rain was incessant but the thunder had passed. A car pulled up at the end of the drive. A lone person got out: Marija. She dropped her purse on the gravel. After scrambling on the ground, she retrieved it and paid her fare. She started along the drive, but a policeman got out of his car and blocked her way. There was an argument. She flung out her hands. He shook his head. She tried again. Then she ran for it. She dodged him, removed her shoes and sprinted towards the house.

I watched from the window as she approached. The policeman from the porch grabbed hold of her. She wrestled with him and cried out. I returned from the window and sat on the edge of the bed. The doorbell rang. I sat perfectly still. It rang again. There was a thud against the door. She cried out. Two more thuds. About a minute later, the phone rang. I edged to the top of the stairs, descended and picked it up. It was the policeman from the porch. “The young lady says she lives here.”

“She’s not family.”

“Can she come in?”

“No.”

I put the phone down and sat on the stairs. The rain lashed against the windows. Marija’s bedroom door was open. Inside was a notice-board, highlighting the dates and times of upcoming A-Level exams.

There was a wailing sound, a wild screaming. I looked out of Marija’s window. She lay in a heap, in the middle of the garden, surrounded by three policemen.

## Chapter 9

July 1992

My mother was tending to the garden. I stood alone in the bedroom, *my* bedroom once more. The walls were almost bare, the floor virtually empty. I decided to tear up the carpet and start again from scratch. A poster advertising the photography exhibition was the last to come down. I finished packing away the remainder of her things into a box and dropped it into the corner of the room. Later on, I'd shove it into the cupboard underneath the stairs. I crossed the landing, returning with my record player and a bag containing books and clothes.

Outside, the garden was blooming with colour. I joined my mother on the lawn. We sat opposite each other while midges whirled in beams of sunlight. Neither of us spoke. The pock-pock of tennis balls started again from the other side of the fence. A tractor could be heard in the distance as it ploughed through the field. Birds chirped to each other in the trees. The sun shone in the sky. The smell of bonfire drifted across from the farmer's land to the north. I lay back in my deck chair, stared up at the sky and tried to relax.

The funeral had been well attended. The service itself had been quiet and dignified, family and close friends only. The wreaths were colourful and the tributes, sincere. Dad's parents had died several years ago, not long after retiring to Spain. He'd no siblings although two cousins did manage to come over for the service. Mum's family had stayed on for several days, in case they were needed, which they weren't. In the end, they became bored and went home.

In the couple of weeks since then, Mum had spent most of her time in the garden. She hadn't smiled since that night. Instead, she sat quite still and stared into space for hours on end. It was the middle of the afternoon and she was still in her pyjamas. Traces of white hair had begun to emerge at her temples.

I got to my feet and grasped her hand. "It's time I went back to work."

She raised her sun-glasses.

"They've rung me again."

She paused to register my words, nodded and sat up. "Just till the end of the week, Dan. Stay until then." She took hold of my hand again.

I didn't respond.

“Dan?”

I wavered, looked up at the house then back at her. I gave the slightest nod.

She looked relieved.

I edged towards the house.

“Where are you going?”

“To finish clearing the bedroom.”

Her smile vanished. For a few seconds, neither of us moved. I felt myself blush.

“Have you heard anything?”

“No.”

“Probably just as well.” She picked up a packet of cigarettes and pulled one from the top. It became stuck. She toggled the packet which dropped to the floor. I watched her scramble on the grass for the lighter.

“I made a mistake telling you.”

“No, I’m glad you did.” She lit the cigarette. “I *was* angry with you at first. It was always in the back of my mind, of course.” She glanced up at me before taking a drag. “The best thing either of us can do is not mention her again.”

On the night Dad died, the police had taken Marija back to the station. There was nowhere else for her to go. The next day she disappeared. At first, Mum had wanted to go looking for her so I had to say something. It was only two days after the accident when I told her. For those few minutes, until years later, I tried to convince myself that I’d spoken the truth. I told my mother that it had become obvious, that I’d witnessed their affair at the gallery and elsewhere, at home, even in her bedroom. I didn’t know how long it had been going on. But it had been embarrassing, shameful, an insult to both of us, particularly to her. Not that it was all Dad’s fault. He’d been flattered by *her* attentions.

My mother had stared at me. Initially, she’d said nothing at all, as if unable to comprehend. She’d tried to laugh, to argue until eventually she broke down. A sickening feeling emanated from the pit of my stomach and spread, like tar, around my body. It had never been my intention to hurt her. But once I’d told her, there was no turning back. For days and weeks, whenever I thought about what I’d said, the feelings of guilt would return. But those guilty feelings eventually passed. Marija didn’t resurface and we never saw her at the house again.

## **Part 2**

Part 2  
Chapter 1

London, December 1995

The clock above the office door struck five pm. The heating system hummed then whirred into life. Six of us were sitting around the table. One man was doodling on his writing pad. Another was skimming through his file in order to appear industrious. I stifled a yawn and played with my plastic cup.

Dorothy Baxter was sitting at the head of the table. She looked at the young man opposite her. "Russ. Do you have any ideas?"

He straightened his tie.

I leant between them. "And we *still* have nothing in writing from Shepherd's Bush."

Dorothy re-adjusted herself. "Only last week, I had a heartening conversation with the commissioning editor and..."

I snorted.

Her eyes widened, revealing traces of blood shot. "Can we get on?"

"Does 'In This World' have another series, Dorothy?"

No response.

"Dorothy? Yes or no?"

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

I glanced around the table and smirked. The others stared downwards.

Dorothy started again. "We need new ideas, perhaps..."

"...We need new direction," I muttered, just loudly enough for everyone else to hear.

Dorothy removed her glasses and pulled her papers together. She stood, nudged her chair to one side then left the room.

Russ knew a place where we could talk. After crossing Oxford Street, we cut through St. James's square, where I half expected to find a seedy Soho bar. But instead we pressed on eastwards towards Charing Cross Road. At the Embankment, we joined the crowds heading towards the Thames until stopping at a vast, Georgian building that overlooked the river. Two doormen were at the foot of the steps. I stood back to view the antiquated 'twenties-style' lettering on the front: "The Hotel Wexford."



We pushed through a set of revolving doors to find ourselves surrounded by wooden panelled walls. While Russ found his bearings, I turned to the buzz emanating from the high-tech restaurant across the hallway.

A concierge spotted us, his eyes narrowing as he descended the mahogany staircase. Russ asked for directions to the 'Drawing Room.' He directed us towards the far side of the foyer and down some stairs. The concierge watched us until we disappeared from view. On entering the 'Drawing Room', we were met by a fug of smoke which drifted across from a group of businessmen at the bar. I glanced at the modernist paintings on the walls and sat down by the window. It was getting dark. The nearest tube stop was a long walk away.

Russ returned from the bar with two drinks. We chatted briefly about the state of play in the office, the general level of incompetence, the lack of progress.

I glanced at my watch.

"You're developing quite a reputation."

I stared at him.

"I mean, you're a rising star."

I sank back into my seat and sipped my drink. It was fair to say that I'd taken my opportunities. If he wanted to do the same, he needed a nose for a story, to be cunning, to take advantage of what might come his way. He needed to be *ruthless*. And he needed to be *believable*.

An explosion of laughter resounded from the bar. I asked Russ why he hadn't taken his idea to Dorothy first.

He took a deep breath. "Dorothy is a good boss but..."

"She's dead wood." I chuckled to myself. "Okay, what's your story?"

Russ checked behind his shoulder and took a gulp from his drink. He explained that the previous weekend, he'd been at some late hours drinking dive in Whitechapel. He'd struck up a conversation with an Eastern European couple. They looked dishevelled and stood out a bit, but both spoke English quite fluently. After a few drinks, the woman invited him back to their flat, a squat inside a derelict pub in Shoreditch.

"Her name is Merima," he said. "She's originally from Bosnia but now works as a cleaner, here at the Wexford." He paused. "You used to follow Bosnia quite closely, didn't you?"

"I did, once."

"She works in this hotel. When I asked her about conditions, she got angry. They get about one fifty an hour, and are sworn at and bullied by management every day."

Her boyfriend, Tomas, also cleaned at the hotel. “He didn’t talk much that night. Instead, he just sat in the corner and smoked; scowled when I asked him about work.”

“So where’s the story?”

Russ’s face fell.

“Why would *‘In This World’* want another story about poorly paid foreign workers?”

“Think of the history of this place. It’s a landmark, an icon,” Russ insisted. “The manager is a thug. We could expose him, and the hotel. We’ll get the ratings if we do it properly.”

Outside, a couple swayed in the wind as they staggered along the Thames’s North Bank. I checked my watch again and picked up my glass. It was getting late.

Russ persisted. “They’ve escaped war and genocide. Now they’re living hand to mouth.”

I stopped drinking and closed my eyes.

“Dan?”

I brought my glass down a little too strongly.

The barman glanced over but carried on serving his customers.

I remembered where I was. I slapped Russ’s shoulder and tried to smile. I told him that I was pleased with him. He was right to confide in me.

Russ began to look hopeful.

Then I explained that there was no point in wasting anyone’s time. There was absolutely no mileage in the story. Similar things had been done before. I thanked him, made my excuses and exited while he struggled with his overcoat.

The display in the foyer was advertising the ‘International Photographer of the Year Awards.’ I stopped. It was late, I wanted to get home but I found myself halting to read a poster. The ceremony was to be held the following month at the hotel. ‘To be presented by H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh.’ The evening was to be hosted by legendary television presenter, Sir David Parker-Rose and shown live on Channel 4.

The reception desk was stacked with leaflets containing reproductions of the short-listed photographs. I took a flyer then ran my fore-finger down the list of nominees. There *was* a Croatian, but she’d been nominated in the under eighteens category. I paused. I hoped Marija was doing something with her life. I wondered what I’d say to her if I came across her again. But then what would there be *to* say? Nothing would be enough, I guessed. What could

you say to someone whose future you had destroyed? I tossed the leaflet back onto the counter and told myself I'd forgotten her. She was just a distant memory.

A short cut to the Tube station led around the back of the hotel. The alley was poorly lit and I moved slowly. Up ahead, a backdoor opened next to a wide holding bay. Its faded letters revealed: 'Hotel Wexford: Staff Entrance.' A lone, female figure emerged onto the pavement. Cleaning overalls hung out from underneath her coat and her hair was tied back. The streetlamp illuminated her figure. As she passed underneath the beam of light, I caught a glimpse of her face.

I stopped and blinked. By the time I reached the streetlight, she'd already disappeared along a narrow pathway between two Victorian buildings. I made it to the corner and peered into the darkness. In the distance was a slit of bright light. She emerged from the shadows and headed for the Strand. I ran to the main street, where shoppers, home-bound workers and theatre-goers swarmed in different directions. I looked one way then the other. She'd vanished. I pushed on towards the centre of town, moving at a snail's pace for about fifty yards before stepping out onto the road. A taxi swept past blaring its horn. I retreated back onto the pavement and waited inside a shop doorway, but there was still no sign of her.

A stiff wind blew against my forehead. It was getting late. A Tube station was nearby so I pulled my coat together. I put my head down, and pushed forward again. It began to rain, a short shower at first, followed by a torrential downpour. All around, people were putting up umbrellas or running for cover. I darted under the nearest bus shelter. Then I saw her, standing at the front of the queue. She put out her hand as a bus came screeching to a halt.

I edged through the line of people until only a few metres away.

An elderly man stepped in front of me. "Where are you going, son?"

I stared at him.

Before I could say anything, several other commuters shoved past. From the front of the queue, she glanced towards the commotion before stepping onto the bus. I watched her pay for her ticket and sit down near the back. Her skin was olive, her face, slender but...it wasn't her.

## Chapter 2

The red light on the answer phone was flashing. I dropped my coat on the chair, pressed the button and entered the kitchen. I shoved a ready-made meal into the microwave. The clock on the wall showed 10 pm. I slumped onto the sofa. The first message was from my Auntie Louisa. My mother's anniversary had been the previous Sunday and they'd gone to the cemetery. I hadn't visited them in ages. Was I alright? I listened for a few moments then pressed the 'forward' button. Louisa's voice became a high pitched squeal.

The next one was from Claire. "I haven't had a message from you so I *get* the message." The call ended with a click.

I delved under the sofa cushions for the remote control and flicked to 'The News at Ten' headlines. There was another message on the answer phone. Interference, street noises, cars, buses, brakes screeching, someone muttering in the background. Click. There was a final message, Claire once more. "Don't bother fucking calling me again ...." The tape whirred to a halt.

I stared up at the walls. I'd lived in this flat for over a year. One day there'd be time to put something up, get some decent carpets. I lay back, perching one foot on the side table.

The news cut to a breaking item. The final version of the Dayton Agreement had been signed. President Milošević of Serbia, President Tudman of Croatia and President Izetbegović of Bosnia had all been in Paris to confirm what had been agreed last month in Dayton, Ohio. The Bosnian War was finally over. I closed my eyes and thought about my father. If only he was still alive, he'd be overjoyed.

It had been years since I'd followed the conflict, and with Dad gone, I'd quickly lost interest. I switched off the television, but the Yugoslavia story lingered in my mind. It was weird seeing that woman outside the hotel. It brought back memories....

I reached for the phone. Maybe Russ had a story after all. It was too late to make it up to Marija, but perhaps there *was* some mileage left in another film about the Balkans. After all, it had worked for Chris Rourke, why not for Dan, too? I tapped in a number, lay back and listened to the tone. It rang several times before veering into voicemail.

"Come on. Where are you?" I stretched the phone lead, wrapping it round my fingers.

No response.

I hung up then tried again, pressing the buttons with more force, a longer gap between each press. This time I got through.

The voice on the other end was weak. “Uh, yeah.”

“Russ?”

“Just got through the door.”

“Listen. I’ve been thinking about your idea. I’ve changed my mind. I reckon you’ve got something.”

By the time I met Russ for lunch in the canteen the following morning, he’d already spoken to Merima. She was still interested in doing the story but her boyfriend would need some serious persuading. I told Russ to organise a meeting. We’d smooth everything out and show them that we could be trusted.

It was dark as we took my newly serviced BMW 316i over to Shoreditch. We wound through the side streets then slowed at the traffic lights opposite the community centre where I’d once visited with Marija. The orange hue from the street lamp smeared across the brownish sky, revealing its brand new entrance. I could just make out the people on the first floor: maybe dancers, keep-fit, or aerobics.

Russ followed my stare. “Do you know this place?”

“I used to know someone who worked there.”

The lights changed. We drove past the trail of businessmen as they headed towards Liverpool Street then turned off the main road, away from the bright lights and trendy bars. Burnden Avenue was lined with dilapidated terraced houses, and many were shrouded in darkness. We negotiated a series of speed bumps, until we found our meeting place, a derelict former public house known as ‘The Cricketers.’ Outside the front entrance was the empty shell of a car. It had been set alight and gutted. Plastic, shattered glass and debris were lying around its perimeter. I parked on the other side of the road, got out and ran my hand over the newly waxed bonnet.

“We should’ve taken the tube,” laughed Russ.

In the distance, a police siren squealed then faded. A posse of young men were leaning against an advertising hoarding on the street corner. One of them caught my eye. He stared while lighting a cigarette.

I locked my car door, checked the handle then peered up at the pub. A beam of light shone from the second floor window. The others were boarded up. “Free electricity here,” was daubed in whitewash on the wall.

Russ hammered on the door.

There were no curtains. The chips of paint in the porch had curled long ago. The grass in the front of next door had been tiled over. Rust from a child's bike had spread onto the concrete.

Russ banged again. "Hello? Tomas?"

A murmuring could be heard from inside. I turned around to see a curtain being pulled back in the house opposite. Russ banged once more. This time the door opened. A male in his late twenties, wearing a faded grey training top, peered outside for a moment then beckoned us in. His hair was dishevelled but his eyes were sharp and followed me as I entered.

Russ hurriedly introduced him as 'Tomas.'

I extended my hand. Tomas nodded then pointed the way upstairs with his torch to the flat above the pub. We passed a hole in the toilet brickwork where someone had taken a hammer to the sink. Gashes stood out in the walls where pipes and wiring had been snatched. Wallpaper had been ripped away and there were scratches where pictures had been hurriedly removed. In one bedroom several bin liners were covering a window frame.

"Not a bad venue for a party," I laughed and tapped him on the shoulder. Tomas didn't respond. He led us along a narrow corridor to the living room. It was almost completely barren; a single light bulb was hanging from the ceiling. Wooden boards and newspapers were covering the floor. A single bar on a three-bar heater was glowing from the fireplace.

Russ perched on an inflatable chair, but nearly sank inside. It tipped over, rolling him onto the floor. I balanced on one of the cushions that lay on the floorboards and hurled another one over to my colleague.

Tomas looked down at us. "Merima will be here soon," he said. We smiled and nodded. For several uneasy moments, no one spoke.

"Who else lives here?" I asked eventually.

"Merima and I share the room next door," he replied, stoney-faced. "Tanja has the room across the hallway."

There was another bout of silence. Tomas took a packet of tobacco from his pockets. He grabbed an ashtray from the floorboards and crossed the room. He opened the window on the far wall, planted himself on the sill then rolled a cigarette.

"Russ tells me you're from Bosnia," I said.

He licked the edges of the cigarette paper.

"So how long have you been in this place?"

Tomas lit up, took a drag and exhaled. He stared at me through the smoke. “Why do you want to know?”

I looked at Russ. Someone hammered at the front door. Three short taps then a space between two louder ones. Tomas dropped to the floorboards and disappeared along the corridor.

“He’s probably alright, once you get to know him,” said Russ.

I got up and peered out of the window. Two figures were entering the building from the street outside.

I sat back down. Tomas reappeared from the corridor. Behind him trailed two women in their early twenties. He introduced them as Merima and Tanja. They took off their coats, revealing cleaner’s overalls. Tanja was tall, slim and had fair hair. She waved ‘Hello’ before hanging an expensive-looking leather jacket on the door-hook.

Merima was shorter and stockier. She acknowledged Russ and pressed buttons on the heater. She rubbed her hands together as a second bar began to glow.

I clambered to my feet, brushed dust from my suit and offered my hand. Merima shook it firmly while eyeing me from beneath her fringe. Her face was cast into a permanent frown.

Both women sat down while I spent several minutes explaining our roles. We were journalists for a prime time current affairs programme and were looking for a story to investigate. If we decided to run one about the Wexford, we’d need some background information about the hotel and those who worked there. And although we’d need to interview people, I assured them that we’d always protect their identities.

I waited for Merima’s response. For several seconds, no-one spoke.

“We’re here to help you,” offered Russ.

Tomas laughed sarcastically from the far side of the room but Merima waved him away dismissively. She was sick of the hotel and the bullying of foreign staff. She agreed to get involved.

I reminded her that she was doing the right thing for her colleagues, and began by asking her about life at home. How did she end up in London?

Merima explained that she was brought up in Sarajevo, in the Muslim quarter. Until the war spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina, she’d been training to be a nurse. When the city came under siege, the Bosnian Serb army shelled the market-place. Her father was killed. Two nights after his funeral, she waited until dark then slipped through the military cordon. Within a week she was in London.

“How did you get the job at the Wexford?”

She'd met Tomas through other refugees. Tomas was a Bosnian Serb who'd left Sarajevo not long after war erupted in Croatia. He'd been in London a little longer and knew of a hotel where they didn't need passports, visas or numbers.

The cleaning agency had an office in the basement. The boss was a guy named McKenna, or 'Mac' as everyone knew him. He'd fire you as easily as clicking his fingers and was known to shove people around. Just the other day, he'd spat in the face of a Nigerian cleaner because she argued with him over wages. That's another shift they'd have to cover. And they *would* do it. No-one could afford to walk out.

While Merima spoke, I pulled out my 'Dictaphone' and pressed the 'record' button.

“Hey!” shouted Tomas.

I held up my hands. “It's just for my notes.”

He began remonstrating with his girlfriend. She turned her head away but he tugged at her sleeve. She shrugged him off and shouted into his face. A full-scale row threatened to erupt until Tomas suddenly leapt to his feet. “I've got to go to work,” he said, wiping his eyes as he stormed from the room.

For several seconds, no-one spoke.

“He's just worried about me,” she said.

A door slammed from inside the corridor. There was more shouting.

I looked at Russ.

“Tomas is a good man; a proud man,” Merima murmured. “He's been through a lot. Don't upset him.”

“I wouldn't...”

“Don't.”

Outside, a fire engine raced past the window with all sirens blaring. The window shook from the vibrations. The pole holding up the curtains wobbled then crashed to the floor.

I looked around. A plan was forming in the back of my mind. I didn't have to rely on these women. I could go undercover, dig around for myself. But, it would be better to have them on my side.

“Why do you have to live here?” I asked. “There's a scheme for refugees, accommodation. The government will provide....”

“Get up when you're told,” says Merima. “Eat when you're told, lights out when you're told.”



“I’m sure it’s not like that. There are plenty of...”

“We didn’t leave our families behind in Yugoslavia to live in some kind of hostel,” she interrupted. “Anyway, we have jobs now; we don’t need hand-outs from anyone.”

Tanja’s eyes lit up when I asked her to speak into the voice recorder. She told me that she was from Croatia, and spoke in short, chirpy bursts while recalling the good times in London. She cited the usual list of tourist haunts: Portobello Road, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Covent Garden and Buckingham Palace.

I stopped her. Were there other Croatians at the Wexford?

It was an odd question. She didn’t think so. “But people come and go,” she added. “There may have been others before I arrived.”

I moved on quickly. So how was she coping with life at the hotel?

She’d probably stick it out, she’d no plans to go back home.

But wouldn’t she wish to return one day?

“It’s not the same country anymore. It’s not the home I left.” She shook her head. “It’s difficult to explain.”

Where was home, originally?

Borovo, near Vuvokar.

I sat up. “Do you know Opatovac?”

Tanja raised her eyebrows. Yes, she *had* been there, but only as a child.

“The village is at the bottom of a valley.”

Her mouth broke into a curious smile.

“Woodland runs along the bank of the Danube. In the summer, the river is crystal blue.”

She raised her eyebrows, “Very good,” she said. “When were you there?”

Russ and I were sitting in the BMW opposite the pub. The car radio was playing one of his favourite new bands. It was pitch black outside. I peered into the driver’s mirror while removing bits of dust from my suit jacket.

“I didn’t know you’ve been to the Balkans,” he said.

“I haven’t.”

The front door of the pub opened. Tomas appeared, wearing a backpack. He marched down the pavement towards Liverpool Street before disappearing around the corner. I switched off the radio. I needed this guy onside. I turned the key in the ignition, drew up

alongside him, and lowered the window. Tomas glanced at the car then walked faster. I pushed my foot on the accelerator and leant across. "Can I give you a lift?"

He stopped, winced and got in.

We turned south to the Thames then west towards the city. I told him that we needed his support. He was integral to the success of the investigation. Life would be better for everyone at the hotel if we could produce a report.

Tomas said nothing.

"We know you're only looking out for Merima...", Russ said.

"But we're going to do it anyway," I interrupted. "It would be better if you were with us."

Tomas looked out of the window. We pulled up outside the hotel as guests returned from restaurants and bars.

"Do you like living at the pub?" I turned to face Tomas.

He stared back at me.

"You don't have to be there forever. I can find you a job at the largest television corporation in the world."

Tomas's eyes narrowed.

"You can forget cleaning. I can make you a researcher."

Russ tried to interrupt.

"I know you're a hard worker," I continued. "Help us and I'll make sure the corporation looks after you."

He remained stoney-faced but a smile began to emerge at the corner of his mouth.

"You want to change your life?" I extended my hand. "Here's your chance. What do you say?"

### Chapter 3

Merima phoned me the next day. The vacancy left by the Nigerian woman was still available. I filled in an application form under an assumed name and duly received a phone call that afternoon. The job was there if I wanted it, starting the following Monday.

On the Friday evening before my first week, I invited all three squat members round to my Docklands flat. Tanja had made prior arrangements but Merima and Tomas agreed to attend. They arrived an hour late after nearly getting lost in Surrey Quays. I gave them a tour of the flat, showing off the automatic curtains, the new lighting system and the cable television. Tomas was impressed.

“If I was you, I’d put up some pictures,” suggested Merima.

Tomas was keen to discuss my job offer. He and Merima had been talking, and he’d changed his mind about the investigation. He agreed to be my chief contact at the hotel and shook my hand warmly. He’d help me in any way he could.

We ate dinner and opened a bottle of wine. I told them I was surprised that a Croatian, a Bosnian Muslim and a Bosnian Serb could all live together, given everything that had happened.

“Why do you think so?” Merima asked.

“We’re all Yugoslavs,” said Tomas. “Well, we *used* to be.” He paused but didn’t continue.

“So how would you define yourself now?” I asked Tomas. “Are you a Serb or a Balkan?”

“A Balkan?” Merima cringed.

“I’m not a Serb or a Bosnian,” muttered Tomas. “I come from Yugoslavia. I used to be a Yugoslav. Now, I’m an ex-Yugoslav. My country no longer exists.”

Merima told me that Tito’s personality and outlook were huge influences on their lives. Yes, he was a dictator, but he’d promoted South Slavic unity over nationalism. *And* he’d kept the country out of the Soviet Union’s clutches.

I asked if it mattered to people from the other republics that Tito was born in Croatia.

Merima seemed irritated by the question. “In those days, we were all Yugoslavs,” she stated. “No-one cared about where any of us was born. As children, we all took part in the unity festivals, ring dances, and processions. We learned folk songs from Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia. A verse from every region was recited.”

Tomas explained that even the families depicted in school reading books reflected the Yugoslav ideal of diversity, but unity. “The father was Bosnian Usman, the mother was Croatian Mirjana,” he laughed.

Merima agreed. “But the new textbooks tell pupils that we were never Yugoslavs. We were always Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, or whoever. Now it’s written that we always wanted separation, that in some cases, we’d wanted it for a thousand years. But if that’s true, the life I lived, never happened. We’ve been removed from history.”

“Our newspapers re-invented the past,” insisted Tomas. “They told lies about people in the other republics, they stirred up hate. But your press tells lies too. From British newspapers, you would think that Yugoslavs enjoy violence and death, that from the beginning, we were always at each other’s throats.”

“But wicked things did happen in the past,” I said. “What about Dubrovnik, or Vukovar? What about Srebrenica? Eight thousand Muslims murdered by Bosnian Serbs.”

Their faces fell. Maybe I shouldn’t have been so blunt.

Tomas sat up slowly. “Yes, but not all of us murdered our neighbours.” The tone of his reply was lower, and suddenly more pronounced. “Most people got through it somehow....And everyone I knew always wanted peace. We’re human beings, despite what the British press says.”

“Everyone blames the press,” I snorted.

“They are right to blame them,” interrupted Merima. She poured herself another glass of wine. “We’re supposed to believe everything we read. But when war broke out, Serbian journalists wrote lies about Croats and Muslims. After the war, Croatian writers helped destroy Serbian books. Authors who promoted the Yugoslav ideal, like Miroslav Krleža and Ivo Andrić, were removed from the shelves of libraries and universities. All over Yugoslavia, national identities were changed, folk songs and dances were re-crafted, national dresses re-designed. History was rewritten. Our past, our memories, our lives were officially forgotten. We ceased to exist. Who knows about that in England?” She finished the glass and dropped it onto the table. She ran her fingers back through her hair and glared back at me.

“There’s a programme on Croatian television about the President,” said Tomas. “It’s called ‘Franjo Tuđman, the Croatian George Washington.’”

They both laughed knowingly.

“He used to be a Communist party member. Now he’s a Croatian Nationalist, shaking hands with Clinton,” scoffed Merima. “Every Sunday, he sits in the front pew at Mass, in Zagreb Cathedral, as if nothing ever happened.”

“He’s a fucking murderer,” added Tomas.

I asked them why they hadn’t returned now that the war was over. They could’ve changed things.

“None of us can go home,” said Merima. “Back home we’d be called ‘Yugonostalgics’, ‘traitors’ or worse. Everything’s changed forever.”

When I asked Tomas about his own background, he told me that, after leaving school, for a while, he was a printer in Sarajevo. After losing his job, he found his vocation as an artist, until finally securing a place at university just before the fighting broke out. “My father demanded that I joined the People’s Army to fight for Yugoslavia. In those days, I thought I was going to stop the persecution of Serbs in Croatia. They said I’d be away for only a short time.”

“Where were you sent?”

He stared down at the table.

Merima took his hand. I felt her glare.

“It’s just that my father was a war correspondent,” I explained. “He was sent out there when the conflict broke out.”

Tomas tried to smile, but his hand trembled as he picked up his glass. “I deserted,” he whispered.

We finished the wine and listened to some music. Then I revealed my plan for the hotel. I’d follow the cleaning staff and do whatever they did, work whatever hours they worked. Anything I earned would go back into expenses for the investigation. For the first week or so, I’d suss out the atmosphere, speak to a few people and maybe see this McKenna guy in action. Hopefully there’d be a story in it, and we’d take it from there. We’d work together, expose the hotel together and make life easier for everyone.

Tomas wrapped his arm around Merima. He looked happier again. She kissed him on the cheek.

I turned on the television. Tomas took the remote control and flicked through the cable channels. “That’ll be me next year,” he grinned, pointing to the news reader.

There was some stuff from Bosnia and Herzegovina on the new twenty four hour news network. Tomas stopped to listen. Merima whisked away the remote and switched to the movies.

## Chapter 4

Claire and I discovered Rossi's soon after it had opened two years previously. Built on two storeys, the restaurant jutted out from behind the power station onto the South Bank of the Thames. Away from tourists, cosy and welcoming, Rossi's was also in handy walking distance of the Royal Festival Hall. On wintry evenings like this, we'd start with something to eat. Then she'd drag me to a concert or recital. Afterwards we'd escape into the West End until the early hours.

"Are you alone?"

The waiter led me to a table in the corner. I flicked open the menu and ran my eyes over the contents.

Outside, the sky was turning to dusk. Neon lights had lit up the river. Nightclub boats were moored on the North Bank. Young people were leaning against railings. Others were drinking, chatting and dancing on the top deck. The thud of the dance beat was pulsating across the water.

The waiter suddenly appeared alongside me.

I ordered a drink and a starter only.

He rolled his eyes, took the menu and vanished. Twenty minutes later, he reappeared, chatting to a young couple on the far side of the room. The woman's hair was newly styled into cork screws. She was wearing a cream blouse and a navy blue velvet jacket. As her boyfriend leant forward, his tie dipped into his food. They both creased with laughter.

I waved to attract the waiter's attention. He glanced at me but continued chatting. Only when the young woman noticed my irritation did he detach himself.

"I've been waiting a while...."

He walked straight past me to welcome two more guests. I waited while the couple were shown to their seats. Finally the waiter took an order pad from the bar and strolled over.

"I've been waiting nearly half an hour..."

"We're busy."

I stared at him while he sauntered towards the front of the restaurant. I sat rooted to the spot for several seconds. I wasn't having that. I rose and shoved my seat aside.

I dawdled along the South Bank for half an hour before crossing the Thames via the Hungerford Bridge. It was dark on the North Bank but chatter was buzzing from bars and

restaurants on both sides of the river. I climbed the Embankment and made my way towards Trafalgar Square.

The cinema on Shaftsbury Avenue was showing a version of Richard III, set in the 1930s. And there was a new Ken Loach film about the Spanish Civil War. The foyer was almost full as I entered. I joined the queue for the ticket office to find myself sandwiched between amorous couples and chattering movie addicts. The man in front pulled his girlfriend towards him. They exchanged a sloppy, drunken kiss. She caught sight of me, grinned then kissed her man with greater intensity. When I reached the front, the ticket seller behind the glass stared back at me. I looked around, hesitated then shoved my wallet back into my pocket. Suddenly I didn't want to be on my own that night.

The narrow passage that cut through the heart of Soho was lined with sex shops and peep shows. Young women in sleeve-less t-shirts were leaning against doorways; a beat was pounding out from the behind the walls. A punter slipped past two bouncers as he exited a strip club. He stepped over an over-turned bin before escaping into the darkness. Flyers, advertising discounts and special showings, were littering the pavement alongside rotten food from nearby market stalls. Two tourists, unexpectedly in the wrong place, put their heads down and accelerated towards the bright lights of Piccadilly.

The passage opened up into a square where late-night shoppers struggled with partying revellers in the race for taxis and buses. I sat down on a bench.

“Looking for fun?” The woman next to me had an Eastern European accent.

When I heard her voice, I realised why I was there. I was looking for much more than fun. She led me back to a terraced house behind Tottenham Court Road. The entrance was from the back alley. The pathway was narrow and broken bricks bulged from the walls. The first drops of rain began to fall. She pushed at a paint-flaked, wooden door. It opened into a back garden, overgrown with weeds and long grass. The moisture from the reeds whipped against my feet and legs as I picked my way towards the house. She had a friendly voice. Her name was ‘Lara’ from Ukraine. She explained that half a dozen other women also worked in the building. Tonight they were nowhere to be seen.

The ground floor was set in darkness apart from traces of light that stretched from the single bulb in the landing. The beige, cross-patterned wallpaper was pre-war. Someone had given up and torn it away long ago.

We climbed the staircase. A hole had been smashed in the dividing wall of the first room, creating a makeshift office booth but there was no sheet of glass covering the gap. We reached the end of the landing. Lara switched on the light in her bedroom. It was barren apart

from a wardrobe, a bed and a mirror that hung from the wall. While we agreed the money, I could hear the sound of a couple having sex in the next room.

She took off her clothes and sat on the bed.

She let me kiss her. Then I fucked her.

Later, I straightened my tie in front of the mirror. "What's your real name?"

"Why do you care?" Her tone had altered. I turned around. She was already fully dressed.

I told her that I was a community worker; I worked with immigrants.

She stuffed the notes into her pocket.

"I'm interested in the lives of ordinary Eastern Europeans."

"I can tell." She stood by the window sill and folded her arms.

"I'm most interested in Croatia."

"Croatia's not in Eastern Europe."

"No."

She raised her eyes to the ceiling as I began to explain that I knew a woman from Croatia. She'd lived in England with my family. But we'd fallen out...

Lara was looking at her watch.



## Chapter 5

There was little sound in the hotel basement, except for the hum of washing machines.

“Where’s he from?”

“London.”

“London? Why does he want to work here?”

Tomas beckoned me forward and I approached the glass booth. Mac wheezed as he pushed himself to his feet. He stubbed out his cigarette, tucked himself in, and shuffled down the steps.

“Daniel Routledge,” I held out my hand.

Mac looked me up and down while sucking on his biro. “You want to be a cleaner?”

“I’m studying...”

“Studying?” His eyes narrowed.

“I needed money for my fees. I studied in my spare time.”

He laughed out loud. Some cleaners were sitting at a nearby table. One looked up and forced a smile. The others were staring down at their coffees.

“He’s a hard worker. I can vouch for him,” offered Tomas.

“Vouch?” Mac’s face was frozen; perpetually unimpressed.

Tomas nodded.

“Well if he’s shit... you’re *for* it, Tommy.”

Tomas reddened. Mac chuckled to himself.

“I promise you, I can work,” I insisted.

Mac’s face fell. He turned towards me. “You’d better.”

I followed Mac to his office, standing in front of his desk while he dropped into his chair. The air was filled with the stale scent of tobacco. Dozens of cigarette stubs had filled a single tin-foil ashtray. Papers were lying across his desk.

As well as the 6:45am to 4:45pm shift on weekdays, they needed someone on Saturdays from 9pm to 3am; sometimes a bit longer. If I showed some aptitude, he’d consider me for the late shift as well.

“Do you have any cleaning experience?”

I shook my head.

Mac sat back in his chair and tapped his biro against his teeth. For several seconds he eyed me, saying nothing. Then he sat up. He didn’t think it would matter. He was going to

take a chance. He'd pair me with *diligent* cleaners. "At least we'll have some English blood for a change."

Mac looked out of the window while lighting up a cigarette. Tomas trudged over to the others and poured himself a coffee.

When he returned, his eyes narrowed again. "How do you know Tomas?"

He pulled the blinds shut.

"We met in a pub."

He frowned and shook his head. "Right, Routledge. You know this is a five star hotel?"

I nodded.

"Well it isn't. It's better than that, much better. We have important guests, wealthy and famous, movie stars sometimes. If you pester the guests, you're out. Speak only when spoken to. No autographs, no handshakes, understand? If you don't keep to your timetable, you're out. If you turn up late, you're out. If you get two poor inspections, you're out. If you slack, you're out. Do you understand?"

I nodded again.

"And don't ask me about holidays."

He sifted through his filing cabinet and pulled out a form. "I have to read you this." It was a statement from the hotel manager to all prospective employees. "Everyone who works at the Wexford must be driven by an uncommon passion. We work together as a united team. This hotel has a uniquely individual aesthet... aesthet.."

I took hold of the page. "*Aesthetical* culture."

He snatched it back. "Right, sign here!" He slammed the biro onto the table and pointed to the dotted line.

I scribbled my new name.

I was to be paid in cash. It made things easier for everyone. And I was to start that evening.

I got fully kitted out in blue cleaning overalls. Tomas and Merima both grinned at my appearance then took me on a tour of the hotel. First stop was the administrative and management offices. We were warned about cleaning the desks. We were not to move any papers. We were not to chat with staff or allow liquid near computers. We were not, under any circumstances, to touch anything. Wherever we went, staff watched us as if we were about to commit a crime.

We took an elevator to the sixth floor, grabbed a cleaning trolley and began down the corridor. A butler was stationed outside each suite. I greeted the first one. He looked right through me.

“Get used to it,” said Tomas. He explained the dress code. The cleaners wore light blue overalls. The butlers wore dark blue suits; the concierge team wore dark green with golden lapel badges. Only members of the senior management team were allowed to wear black. There were ninety rooms, spread over six floors. Merima and Tomas went through the routines. First were the Greek-marble bathrooms with the ‘cast iron’ bath tubs. The hotel was especially proud of its bathrooms. We were to pay careful attention to the ‘solid nickel’ taps. The bedroom windows were lined with silk curtains, and modernist paintings were hanging from the walls. Bed linen was to be replaced every morning. Floors were to be vacuumed and fresh flowers changed daily. Drinks were to be replaced in cocktail cabinets. The gilt-edged fireplaces needed to be inspected every day and cleaned in monotonous detail.

The kitchen was not on our list of duties, but the hotel had an international rating. Only a handful of restaurants in London had received this distinction and the Wexford was very proud of it. We left the cleaning trolley in the corridor and stopped at the back entrance. Tomas poked his head around the door. A chef stood in front of service bar, applying the finishing touches to a line of dishes. On the far side of the kitchen, flames suddenly erupted from a pan. An assistant snatched a fire extinguisher from the wall while the chef left his position to assist his colleagues. The food was left on the silver surface, ready to be served.

My mobile phone beeped in my pocket. I retreated back into the corridor. There was a recorded message from Russ. He wanted me to call him. I tapped in his number and he answered immediately, chortling down the line. Dorothy had heard about our plan and gone up the wall, but her bosses had overruled her. They’d decided it was a good idea and worth pursuing. She’d been forced to go along with it.

“She really hates you. You’re cynical and unprofessional.”

I smiled. I told him I’d already started work at the hotel but I wasn’t yet fully prepared. I had a ‘Dictaphone’ but I was going to need pictures as well.

Russ reckoned he could sort out some surveillance equipment. They’d used hidden cameras for previous assignments.

I switched off the phone.

Tomas waved an empty plate under my face. “Squid and black rice; delicious.” He grinned and pushed the plate against the skirting board. “The cook,” he wiped sauce from his mouth with his cuffs, “is always calling me a Polish gypsy.”

I stared at him.

“The bastard can make another one.” He waved his hand dismissively.

We both froze for a moment then took off along the corridor. Exiting via the fire escape, we stopped outside the back entrance to the basement. Tomas collapsed into a fit of laughter while I caught my breath.

The basement, including Mac’s office, was my last duty for the evening. As I emptied the bins, I noticed Tomas’s name on a sheet of paper in Mac’s in-tray. Tanja’s and Merima’s names were below. I held the sheet up to the light. It was the cleaning rota for the photographic awards ceremony. Underneath were more names, difficult to pronounce. I flicked through the rest of the papers. There were several faxes, notes about protocol, company policies to be typed up, nothing worth using.

Another file on the shelf contained records from previous weeks. I ran my finger down the lists of cleaners’ names. Underneath the cleaning rota was a document entitled ‘Hotel Internal Security’, and had a ‘Human Resources’ stamp in the corner. In preparation for the Prince’s visit, Mac had been asked to write the names, addresses and nationalities of all staff under his control. The senior management team was to be updated with information on any staff with criminal records, no matter how minor. Merima was listed as ‘Bosnian’. But Tanja and Tomas were listed as ‘Italian.’ Ivana and Dani, both Romanians, were from ‘Portugal’. Esole, who was Nigerian, was also, somehow, ‘Portuguese’. I switched on the Xerox and took a photocopy of the ‘nationalities’ sheet. The buzz of chatter emanated from the hallway. I left and locked the door.

The following morning, I ventured into the basement canteen. It was grey and threadbare apart from an old coffee machine, a breakfast bar with a kettle and a cupboard. The handful of tables and chairs were occupied mostly by the older staff. The new Eastern Europeans were loitering on the far side of the room, whispering to each other.

Regardless of the information on Mac’s sheet, the majority of non-British staff members were from outside the European Union. Most of them had arrived from West Africa or Bangladesh. Several were from former Soviet Bloc. None could afford to leave, no matter how bad things became.

I got to know several of the English-speaking workers and secretly recorded our conversations. They all hated working for Mac and the way he spoke to them. Most would leave if they could.

It wasn't all misery, though. Maureen Bolland had worked in the hotel for over thirty years since moving to London from Dublin. When I met Maureen, she claimed that she was about to leave for good. The other cleaners grinned. She'd been about to leave almost every day since she started working there.

She'd started at the Wexford on the same morning as the manager, Trevor Fellows. "Twenty fourth of April 1970; we met in the entrance foyer. That was before the cleaners had to creep around in the back alley. He was a young man then, thin, had hair."

Sniggers rippled from the neighbouring tables. The other cleaners gave each other knowing glances as she recounted her stories. They'd heard all of them many times before.

"He introduced himself as Trevor. Ever since that day, whenever we cross paths, he nods." She imitated a haughty inclination of the head. "But he never speaks. Not once in twenty five years." She perked up, aware of her growing audience. "I say hello to *him*, though, especially when he's not expecting it. He jumps as if he's been shot." She straightened her back. "Trev-*or*," her voice went higher with the second syllable.

Everyone laughed.

There was a hush as Tanja and Merima entered the basement.

"Look who's here," muttered one woman behind me.

Merima banged open her locker, tore off her cleaner's shirt and stuffed it inside. She wiped her brow with her forearm. Tanja glanced over as she trudged towards the coffee machine. She'd just finished dragging the garbage to the skip, and her hands were still shaking from the January cold. She took a plastic cup from the machine. It slipped from her fingers and bounced off the floor.

Someone behind me tutted.

Tanja stooped to retrieve the cup.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"*They*'re the matter," said the woman behind me, just loudly enough for Tanja to hear. "Bloody Czechs."

Tanja and Merima sat down on their own on a separate table.

I asked the woman behind me why they were so unpopular.

"They took lower wages," she snapped, "so everyone else has to. And now there's so many of them, no-one's certain to keep their hours. We're all worse off."

Later that morning, I finished ploughing sheets into the washing machine as the laundry doors burst open. I pushed the flat of my palm against my spine and tried to straighten my back.

John 'Mac' McKenna stormed into the middle of the room. "Meeting...*now!*" He pointed towards the basement area. Slowly, everyone filed into the main concourse. Everything was silent, except for the hum of washing machines. I found the 'record' button in my pocket.

Mac eyeballed us as we stood in a semi-circle. "Some of you have been taking cigarette breaks in the alley outside."

He paused. No-one looked up.

"Cut it out. It looks bad for the hotel to see workers loping around with fags in their mouths." He tilted forward, hands on hips. "It doesn't happen again, understand?"

There were murmurs and nodding of heads.

*"Do you understand?"*

A quicker nodding of heads.

"Which brings me to this." From under his clipboard, he produced a dinner plate. "What the fuck is going on?"

Silence.

He raised his voice, "What *the fuck* is going on?" He began to pace up and down. "The head chef is going crazy." He bit his lip, took a deep breath and bawled, "If you are going to steal from this hotel, at least have the fucking sense to hide the evidence."

The cleaners looked puzzled.

"This is no fucking accident. Too many things are going missing from around here." His eyes darted between us. No-one spoke. No-one even looked it up.

"If I ever catch any of you..."

"Now then, Mac," piped up Maureen.

"Shut up, Maureen!" He stuck his head into her face.

Maureen turned her head away and closed her eyes tightly.

Merima stepped between them, arms folded. "Leave her alone, Mac. She's old."

He stopped and glared at her. "Don't you like working here?"

I felt my heart beat inside my chest.

"I said, 'Don't you like working here?'"

Merima was trying hard not to blink.

"Cos you can fuck off if you like. I promise you, love. No-one else will have you."

Merima's eyes widened.

The basement was silent.

"Now get back to fucking work. All of youse."

The crowd dispersed without a murmur. Tomas entered from the far entrance and sidled up to me.

"Where've you been?" I asked.

"I was late, so I waited outside rather than take any abuse. What's the shouting about?"

"I'll tell you later."

"Hey Routledge!" It's McKenna.

I started to walk away.

"Hey, is your name Routledge or not?"

I stopped.

"Come here!"

I entered Mac's glass booth. He shut the door and lit up a cigarette. "Do you know who's been stealing?"

"No," I felt myself blush.

He stared at me. "One of the blacks?"

"I don't know."

Tanja strode past the window and glanced up at the glass. He paused, almost nodding to her, before returning to his desk.

"Anyway, you've forgotten something."

I looked at him.

Mac took another drag on his cigarette. He opened his drawer and pulled out the file of staff details that I'd photocopied. He dropped them on the table and raised his head.

I avoided eye-contact.

Mac delved around in his drawer for several more seconds. He pulled out a tin containing a pay book and several rolls of ten pound notes. "Friday's your pay day."

## Chapter 6

Russ opened his suitcase and pulled out a tiny machine. A lead, attached to a glass opening, stretched around the case. "Careful with the lens." He passed it over.

I held the recorder in my hands. Light enough and easy to hold, I pressed the on/off button then held it at different angles, altering the light, distance, shutter speed, taking different shots. Satisfied, I opened my holdall and lowered the machine inside.

We left my flat and drove round to Shoreditch to pick up Tomas. I waited in the car while Russ knocked on the door. Outside, droplets of rain began falling onto the windscreen, a typical January morning. I turned on the heater and closed my eyes. I wondered what my father would say if he'd been sitting alongside me. I wondered what he would think of all this sneaking around. Would he say it was all completely unethical? Probably. He'd say that I was wrong, that I didn't really care about the people involved. He'd say that I had my priorities all mixed up, that I was just doing it for myself.

Well, I *was* ambitious and I reckoned there was nothing wrong with having goals. Was he any different? And surveillance was a fair tactic under the circumstances. This *was* an exposé, after all. It *was* a genuine story, a nailed-on winner if it came off. I decided that the management team deserved everything coming to them. The cleaners *were* being treated like dirt. They'd escaped hell and made it to Britain, only to be forced to work for an animal like Mac.

I found myself talking to Dad, as if he was sitting right next to me. I told him that I was intervening, just as he'd done with Marija. He'd always said that events compelled him to get involved, and that a reasonable person couldn't just stand aside. Well, I was doing the same thing. Okay, so I didn't feel good about all of it. But he'd also done a few questionable things along the way. It was never a clean job, and nobody was pure.

I opened my eyes. Tomas slapped my shoulder and clambered into the back seat. He put on his seatbelt, accidentally dislodging an envelope from his inside pocket. It dropped onto the seat. He snatched it and tore it open.

I started the engine. Russ and I began discussing office politics as we pulled away. Russ was convinced that Dorothy was on the verge of quitting. We mulled over potential replacements. I wondered if they'd ask me. It was possible. I was ready.

"Bastards." Tomas sat back with the letter already crumpled in his fist.

"Bad news?" I asked.



“No, it’s not a problem.” He stuffed it into his inside pocket.

“Anything you want to discuss?” said Russ.

Tomas didn’t reply. His face was suddenly pale. For the rest of the journey, he rubbed his temples slowly with his forefingers and stared silently out of the window. When we arrived at the hotel, the doormen’s eyes followed the car. Tomas pushed his elbow against the window frame, his forearm obscuring their view of his face.

The rest of the week was spent in preparation for ‘The International Photographer of the Year’ awards. I’d been ordered to help set out the tables in the Grand Hall. A temporary stage and lighting system had been constructed. A booth had been built to accommodate the presenters and camera crew. Display boards had been erected at the back of the grand hall and at the sides of a stage. An exhibition showing prints of the short-listed photographs had just been opened on the first floor.

One image stuck out, a cemetery in Sarajevo. A wave of gravestones was drifting into the distance. On the other side was a monochrome photograph of Dubrovnik’s shattered walls. Clouds were dragging across the skies, smeared with smoke from rocket attacks. In the foreground, a mother and two children were crouching beneath the crumbling walls. Nobody paid much attention. There were plenty of similar photographs from war-torn zones elsewhere in the gallery, and those pictures were in colour.

By the evening, I was exhausted. I cleaned up and trundled my trolley back to the storage room. My equipment needed to be locked inside before I could make my way back to the basement. Rather than use the cleaners’ staircase I cut across the main foyer. The corridor leading to the basement was cold and quiet. Suddenly, the entrance door burst open. Tomas nearly knocked me over in his haste to get past. Our eyes met and he stopped.

He looked drained and his hair was a mess. “Have to be somewhere,” he rambled. “Cover my late shift, will you?”

“Well, I’m...”

“Thanks,” he grabbed my arm. His fingers were trembling. “Thank you, I appreciate it.” He disappeared along the corridor.

“Where are you going?”

The door at the end of the corridor slammed shut. I found myself standing alone in the basement. No-one else was around. I’d no idea where he’d gone. The clock was ticking. Within five seconds, I’d already thrown my overalls into my locker and grabbed my jacket.

It was dark outside the Wexford's rear exit. Tomas had already disappeared onto the high street. I raced to the top of the alley and looked both ways. It was as if he'd merged into the crowd. Then I spotted him, heading for the tube station.

I raced through the ticket hall and passed the machines. An inspector shouted as I jumped over the barriers. I reached the top of the escalators as Tomas stepped off at the bottom. I descended to the screech of an arriving train. By the time I'd made it onto the west platform, the high-pitched warning noise was already sounding. I hurled myself through the doors before they closed.

The train pulled away. The carriage was crowded with tourists and commuters on the way home from work. I strained to see, but there was no Tomas. I slapped my hand against the hand rail.

The train entered the next station. My mind was racing. What was I thinking of? Wasn't this just a waste of time? I got to my feet and waited by the doors. Then I saw him through the window on the next carriage. He sat, head bowed, as passengers filed out. I positioned myself just out of view. The doors shut and the train moved on.

Tomas stayed in his seat for a further four stops before exiting at Liverpool Street. It was one of the busiest stations and I was able to stay close while remaining hidden in the crowd. The main street was heaving with people, but the crowds thinned as we headed towards Burnden Road.

We closed in on the Cricketers pub. I crossed the road and crouched next to an advertising hoarding. My heart sank. There was no need to bother. Tomas was simply going home, and I needed to get more sleep. But maybe not. After passing the front door of the pub, he kept on walking.

I pursued him for further fifteen minutes onto Stoke Newington High Street. The stalls on the High Street were closing; holders were packing away their goods. Flattened cardboard boxes were cluttering the road alongside the remains of discarded fruit and vegetables. Groups of young men were conducting their dealings in the side-alleys, away from the glare of street lights.

Tomas halted at a crossroads. He stood outside a large, modern building that jutted out onto the main street. He looked around. I ducked into a doorway to avoid detection. He scaled the steps toward the front entrance then wavered, seemingly unable to go in. He started to edge forward but when two uniformed men emerged through the front doors, he spun around and vanished back into the crowds.

By the time I got across the pedestrian crossing, he was long gone. I followed his footsteps to the main entrance and stared up at the modern concrete fortress. The sign, almost hidden by the barbed wire and graffiti surrounding the first floor, stated: *Stoke Newington Police Station*.

## Chapter 7

I arrived in the basement early the following morning to complete Tomas's shift. At 7am, he appeared. He flung open his locker door, hurled his shirt inside then slammed it shut. He closed his eyes and pushed his head against the metal frame.

"Did you get to your meeting on time, Tomas?"

"Uh?"

"Last night?"

Tomas opened his locker again. He snatched at his cleaning overalls, accidentally dislodging a file which slapped against the floor. Sheets of paper scattered everywhere. I crouched down to gather together what appeared to be formal letters.

"Leave them!" He snatched the papers and shoved them back into his locker.

I stood back. "Sorry." I held up my hands.

He took a deep breath. "Forget it, just forget it."

I grabbed a couple of coffees from the drinks machine. "Who were you meeting, anyway?"

Tomas had already gone. I wouldn't see him again for the rest of the day.

The royal visit was drawing near. I became used to security guards suddenly appearing in doorways and passageways, whispering messages to colleagues through hidden microphones, before disappearing again. Tension was rising steadily across the hotel. Rumours began to spread among staff that there'd been a death threat from Irish Republicans. Army marksmen were to be positioned in the dress circle when Prince Philip was to hand out the awards.

All the cleaners were ordered to a meeting outside the exhibition. Hotel manager, Trevor Fellows, appeared, flanked by two security advisors. He looked nervous while they inspected the layout of his hall. Several areas of concern were noted while a group of police officers made preliminary checks of the building.

Mac handed out a programme of events. We were told exactly how to clear away without spoiling the furniture. We were not to touch anything unless asked. We were not, under any circumstances, to approach Prince Philip. Access around the hotel would be severely restricted. Each of us was issued with a new identity card, to be displayed at all times in case we were stopped by security. When the meeting broke up most people began to slope off. Some hung around to chat. Others browsed the display boards.

I finished cleaning the executive suites with their panoramic windows. The black sky was smeared with streams of light, merging onto the streets below. Tourists, weighed down by shopping bags, were heading towards the theatre districts. Taxis were blasting their horns; street musicians were strumming out songs. People were clapping, chattering and laughing as they flowed into Covent Garden. The hubbub rose to the window. I pressed my fingers against the glass.

Before clocking off, I returned some stock to the storage room on the second floor. While I stood inside, a familiar voice blurted out. John ‘Mac’ McKenna emerged from the bedroom opposite. He bade ‘Goodbye’ to a suited, male guest and disappeared down the corridor. I peered over the guest’s shoulder and caught a glimpse of a woman sitting on the edge of the bed. *Tanja*. She was wearing a white blouse and a knee-length grey skirt. Her fair hair was hanging around her shoulders and she stared straight ahead as he began unfastening her blouse.

The following morning, I found Merima cleaning one of the bedrooms. When I explained what happened, at first she didn’t respond. Instead she stooped to pick a shirt from the bedroom carpet and stormed into the bathroom. Clothes and towels were draped across the tub and floor. A bin, crammed with rubbish, had been overturned. She knelt down, sprayed fluid into the toilet bowl and wiped the cistern.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I asked.

She gathered her bottles together then shoved past me into the bedroom. “We didn’t think you’d take this long to find out.” She picked up more clothes from the floor, “*You’re* meant to be the investigator.”

“I just can’t believe it. Why *Tanja*?”

“How would I know?” Merima unplugged the vacuum cleaner and dragged it across the carpet.

“Is Mac involved?”

“What do you think?”

“Poor *Tanja*. It happens when people are desperate.” I continued.

“Not to me.”

I sat down on the bed.

“Well?” she said. “You have enough information. So what are you going to do?”

## Chapter 8

The basement was beginning to fill. Mac had arranged a final staff meeting before the awards ceremony. I was expected to attend, and was anxious to be there on time. I still hadn't had the chance to press Tomas about the police station visit, and I wanted to interview Tanja as well.

I arrived to find Maureen holding court and complaining about 'that Balkans girl.' Earlier that afternoon, Merima had unexpectedly turned up on the second floor in a strange mood. She'd dragged Tanja into a guest room where they remained for several minutes. Maureen had heard them arguing from halfway down the corridor until Tanja suddenly burst through the door in tears. Afterwards, they found out she'd gone home, ill. Maureen shook her head. Who was going to finish the rest of her timetable?

The basement was packed with cleaning staff. Tomas and Merima arrived as Mac began his talk. He checked our new security passes and issued final instructions. The building was to be spotless. We were all to be on our best behaviour, and above all, we were to remain hidden. The Prince was to leave with positive memories of the hotel.

Merima yawned.

"This is the list," continued Mac. "If you're on it, you're on overtime tomorrow night."

Everyone took a sheet of paper. We scanned it for our names.

"I'm not on this, Mac," I said.

He ignored me. "The list is final. The timetable and routines are on the notice board. You are all to be in place from ten tomorrow evening. No later or there'll be problems with security."

No-one dared to breath.

"What time do we finish?" asked Tomas.

"An hour or two after the show, if you work quickly," he replied. "Maybe twelve, twelve thirty. Maybe one."

"Forget it," said Merima.

"Shh," whispered Tomas.

"Who said that?" McKenna spun round.

Merima stepped forward. "I can't do it, Mac, I'm sorry."

"What do you mean?" He shoved his way through the crowd.

I edged over to the locker. I plunged my hand inside the holdall and quickly found the record button on the video recorder. I pressed it and carried the holdall to the centre of the room. The hidden camera was pointed at employer and employee.

“I’m sorry Mac,” Merima repeated, “I’m not available.”

“Not available?”

“Tanja’s not well. I’m looking after her.” She folded her arms and glared at him.

I held my breath.

McKenna’s mouth broke into smile. “In that case, you don’t have to turn up tomorrow evening.” He turned away.

Tomas kissed Merima on the cheek. He smiled but his face was drained.

“In fact, you don’t have to come in at all,” Mac continued. “You’re fired.”

Tomas stepped forward. I blocked his path with my forearm.

“I’m sick of you, Marina; whatever your name is,” sneered Mac. “We’re *all* sick of you. Look around.”

I pointed the secret camera at the other cleaners. They stared back at their boss.

“So go home and don’t fucking come back.”

For what seemed like an eternity, nothing happened.

“Fucking pimp,” spat Merima.

Mac stopped.

“You heard me,” she shouted.

His eyes darted from cleaner to cleaner.

“Everyone knows it.” She spun round at the others. “Come on guys,” she shouted, “What do you say?”

Their eyes remained fixed on the floor. The only noise was the hum of the washing machines in the background.

Mac grinned. “What’s the matter? Jealous?” He laughed out loud.

“Fuck you.”

There was a short pause as Mac fully registered what had been said. Then he slapped her hard across the face.

The other cleaners gasped.

Merima took a step back but he swung again, striking her forearm. She lost her footing and fell onto her backside. Her head bounced against a locker door.

“Hey,” shouted Tomas. He ran towards the larger man. I held him back.

“Do you want to go too?” Mac strode up to Tomas. “Do you want to fucking go too? It’s your choice.”

Tomas’s eyes glowered. He wrestled himself free from my grasp and rushed to Merima’s side. She assured him that she was okay.

Mac stormed back towards his office. “Looks like the job’s yours, Routledge.”

Outside, another gust of wind splattered rain against the glass. We’d been sitting in the living room for over an hour. Merima lay slumped across the sofa. Tomas approached with a drink. She took it without thanking him. He sat down next to her and put his arm around her shoulder. She shrugged him off.

The front door slammed shut. Tanja stomped upstairs, entered her bedroom and slammed the door. I picked up my holdall, walked towards her room and knocked lightly.

She opened up and stared back at me.

“Can I come in?”

Tanja didn’t reply. She left the door open, sat down at her desk and looked out of the window. There was only a bed, a desk and an open wardrobe. Inside was the leather jacket she wore on the night I’d first met her.

I told her I’d seen her in the hotel bedroom. *I knew.*

At first, Tanja said nothing. When she eventually spoke, her voice was barely audible. She began by explaining about her upbringing in Croatia, which was happy enough rather than idyllic. Then the Yugoslav army invaded and everything changed.

I reached down into my holdall and pressed ‘record’ on my tape recorder.

Tanja didn’t notice. She barely moved while explaining how, after moving to London, she’d moved from squat to squat. Eventually she’d met Merima and took the cleaning job. The pay was poor from the beginning and got worse when other Eastern Europeans and Africans began to arrive. She’d already asked for a pay rise but Mac turned her down. One day, after a shift, he approached her with an idea.

She stopped.

“What did he say?” I edged forward. “What did he offer you?”

She lowered her head.

“Tanja, I need you to be specific.”

She breathed deeply. “Money, clothes, more money.”

“For what, Tanja?”



Her eyes, once full of colour, were now lifeless. She stood up and moved out of shot. It would've been sensitive, humane even, to have turned off the tape. But I sensed that she had something more to say, and this story was too important, so I let the film run and asked her what she was going to do next.

“Merima and I have fallen out. She should mind her own business. Who is she to tell me what to do? I'll find somewhere else to live, soon.”

“Can't you go home?”

She tried to laugh then told me about the sister who was married to a Serb. They'd lived in Zagreb, but after Croatian independence, their house was burnt down by Croatian Nationalists. They fled to Amsterdam.

Maybe she could go there.

“I'm never going home.”

“You can if you want. Croatia is free. It's a democracy...”

“Croatia is free?” She spun round and glared. “Is that what you think? Is that what you report on your television?”

I told her that life was better there, now that the Yugoslav army had gone. I explained that my father had reported from Vukovar; that his efforts had prompted the United Nations to get involved. He'd intervened to save someone from the conflict. He'd helped make Croatia free.”

“So I can breathe clean, Croatian air?” She tried to laugh while brushing away a tear.

I didn't understand.

“It's a Croatian government slogan. Do you know what happened there last week?”

I couldn't answer.

She wiped her eyes, which then widened, as if incredulous at my ignorance. “It wasn't in your newspapers. A government minister stood up in our free Croatian parliament recently. He wanted to assure his colleagues that he was one hundred per cent Croatian; that he was neither Serbian, Jewish nor black. And nor was his wife. They were both proud to breathe free, clean, Croatian air.” She sniffed. “In the old days, he would've been laughed at, dismissed as a crank. But do you know what his colleagues did?”

I stared blankly at her.

“They gave him a standing ovation.... No, I'm never going back there.”

I decided that she was naïve but I didn't argue. There was no point in telling her that Croatia was much better off without Yugoslavia and Milošević, that it was the Yugoslav People's Army, along with Serb paramilitaries, who'd killed her parents and thousands of

others. I didn't know why she blamed Croatia or democracy. As far as I was concerned, millions had struggled for her country's freedom, and people like my father had risked their lives to report it. In the end, I couldn't be bothered to argue. I decided that she wasn't thinking straight, and as I couldn't think of anything else to say, I wished her luck and left.

I returned to the living room and switched off the recorder. Finally, there was enough material to go to edit. I had a bounce in my step. But the living room was empty; papers were scattered across the floor. In the far corner, was a file similar to the one Tomas had been guarding in the basement. An opened letter lay next to the sofa. I picked it up. The fonts and stamp were official. The address in the top right corner stated: Stoke Newington Police Station. I read the first line:

*Mr. Petrović,*

*You were asked to report to this station on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1996 as part of your agreement...*

My eyes skimmed the remainder of text.

*“...We have re-arranged your meeting for 20<sup>th</sup> January... Failure to attend will result in your arrest.”*

The 20<sup>th</sup> January was that coming Saturday. Raised voices thundered out from Tomas and Merima's bedroom. The door was open and Merima was sitting on the bed. “There's always Germany,” she muttered while brushing away tears. “My cousins went to Berlin.”

“It doesn't matter where.”

They both stopped as I entered. No-one spoke, no-one told me to leave. I crouched by the door.

Merima pulled the blankets around her shoulders. “It's cold,” she moaned.

Tomas ran his hand over the electric fire, tapped the sides and flicked the switches repeatedly. “England is a cold place.” He looked dishevelled as he approached the mirror. His fingers trembled while he probed his eyes.

Merima's arms were folded. She stared down at the bed.

No-one spoke again.

## Chapter 9

I sank my fork into my rice. Three tables in front of me, a lone Japanese tourist was reading a book while playing with the remains of her food. Apart from a man propping himself up against the bar, the restaurant was deserted, almost completely silent. It was cold and dark outside.

A couple burst through the door. They took a seat at the table next to mine. The male, his tie loosened to the centre of his chest, beckoned to the waiter while his girlfriend giggled. The waiter rubbed his forehead and glanced wearily at his colleague. He sauntered, as slowly as possible, to the bar, before returning with two menus. The clock on the wall showed eleven o'clock. It had been a long night.

I finished the remains of my meal and asked for the bill. The waiter disappeared into the kitchen as my phone began to ring. I picked it up from the table and squinted at the display.

“Hello?”

“Hey Dan, it’s Russ. How’s things?”

“I’m shattered. There’s lots of tape to go through and...”

“We should meet.”

Raucous laughter exploded from the next table.

“Sounds like you’re having a good time,” he said.

I tucked the phone between my shoulder and neck. The woman had spilt her drink and her friend was trying to mop it up with a napkin. He turned towards me and slurred something unintelligible. They both collapsed into fits of giggles.

“Dan, are you still there?”

I brought the phone back up to my mouth, “I can’t talk now.”

There was a pause. The sound of conversation filtered down the line. I could hear him talking to someone else and sniggering. Then I heard a female voice.

“I’ve got some important news.”

“Russ, I’m exhausted. I can hardly stand up.”

“Come on, you’ll enjoy it. I’ll buy you a drink.”

I yawned. “Okay. Where are you?”

“Blakey’s. It’s at the bottom of Charing Cross Road.”

I rubbed my hands together and blew onto my fingers. The snow, having fallen for the last few days, had frozen to ice. It was slippery underfoot as I made my way across Piccadilly then unsteadily along Shaftesbury Avenue. The theatre doors were being locked and bolted, the streets were clearing. All around me, young people were making their way home. Taxis blazed past tourists, who waved their arms in vain. Commuters sprinted for the last tube. The hungry jostled outside fast food trailers. I walked faster, trying to keep my balance until reaching Charing Cross.

Blakey's was one of several venues at the bottom of the road. Away from the big beat and noise of other clubs and bars, a modest sign was hanging outside. The entrance was at the summit of a narrow flight of stairs. My feet stuck to the steps as I climbed the staircase.

The sign next to the stage still advertised the previous month's music. The Parisian chandeliers, once sparkling, now hung, dull and limp from the ceiling. It had once been a busy thirties style Jazz club. Tonight, it was no more than a third full; the dimmed lighting failed to mask the faded colours and worn curtains. I crossed the floor as the band finished playing a 'Gypsy-Swing' number to sporadic applause. A drunk leant against the bar whilst haranguing a barman over his change. A bouncer hovered nearby, ready to intervene.

Russ was on the far side of the stage with a small group of city people. They'd clearly been celebrating for several hours and their toasts drowned out the singer's introduction to the next song. Russ caught sight of me and waved. He took my coat and dropped it on the back of the chair.

I complimented him on his suit.

"I should think so too, it's Hugo Boss." He stood back for me to admire then barked into my ear. "I've had some amazing news." He paused before delivering the punch line, "I'm going to be your boss." He studied my reaction.

The music started up again in the background.

"After Dorothy left, well after she was asked to leave," he continued. "I guess there was no-one left to ask."

I tried to smile as I shook his hand.

"There'll be someone watching over me, though. Roger Simmons."

"Roger, he's a good man."

There was a crash from the bar. A woman had fallen from her stool and was lying, sprawled across the floor. The people on Russ's table roared with laughter. The barman turned his back and shook his head. One man opposite me, downed his glass, slammed it onto the table and scowled in my direction.

“It’s Dave’s birthday,” explained Russ. He’s getting a promotion next week as well, ninety grand a year!”

“Let’s talk about the hotel,” I said.

Russ led me to the back of the hall. A red belt stretched across the entrance to a side room. Russ nodded to the security man. We sat down at the nearest table.

Russ said nothing but looked concerned.

“I don’t get much sleep,” I said.

“Yeah? Well you look terrible.”

My eyelids were heavy. I closed them and rubbed my eyes.

Russ reached forward and tapped my forehead. “Wake up. There’s work to do.” He checked behind his shoulder then pulled a small bottle from his pocket. He emptied a thumbnail of white powder into my palm. “Rub it on your teeth. It’ll keep you awake.”

I pushed my fingers over my lips then brushed the powder over my gums.

A waiter looked across from the bar.

I sat back, feeling an instant buzz, as the blood rushed around my body.

“Well? What’s happening at the hotel?”

I told him we’d almost enough material to go to edit. Russ called the waiter over and ordered two drinks. I explained the need for a climax to the story. There’d be one last chance, the following evening, to nail McKenna. After that, we’d have to reveal ourselves. All three members of the squat were close to breaking point. The game was nearly up.

Back in the main hall, the music lurched to a halt. The band received limp applause, littered with cat-calls.

I went through all the evidence on tape: the conditions, the illegal workers, the fake permits, the threats and the intimidation. And with Merima being assaulted by Mac, we had a major incident.

“We could put that in the trailer,” grinned Russ while linking his fingers.

I paused. “And there’s something else.” I explained to him about Mac and the women. I told him about Tanja.

At first, Russ’s eyes widened. For several moments, he said nothing. Then he exploded into laughter and clapped his hands together. “This is going to be sensational.”

I smiled back at him.

“Have you recorded any interviews with the women?”

“Only Tanja.”

His eyes narrowed. “McKenna could just deny it.”

The waiter brought the drinks over.

My heart was beating faster. I snatched several gulps of beer.

I told him about the awards ceremony. But there was one serious problem, Tomas's state of mind. I told Russ about the letter from the police.

"I'll bet it's a minor issue, marijuana, maybe. He likes to smoke doesn't he?"

"I think it's more serious than that. He's becoming more unpredictable."

Russ shook his head. "If Tomas had done something terrible, they'd have thrown him into prison or slung him out of the country already." He slid back in his chair.

"Tomas wants to humiliate McKenna," I warned. "He's talking about getting on the stage with the Prince."

Russ snorted and sipped from his Martini.

"Don't laugh. He might try it."

He stopped drinking. "What are you going to do?"

"Mac's had it coming."

Russ paused then sat up. "You could make something of it, you know, something everyone will remember."

"That's what I hoped you'd say. I already have an idea."

## Chapter 10

The audience and guests started arriving at about seven. The heightened security presence had done nothing to quell the buzz. The reception foyer was shaking with the hubbub of nominees and their families. Waiters were ducking and darting between guests, carrying trays of champagne. The restaurant was packed. Those unable to find a seat were milling around the foyer. Others were gazing through their programmes, scanning for the names of loved ones.

At about a quarter to seven a bell rang. The concierge called the guests and nominees to their seats. Plain clothes officers touched their ear pieces, and attempted to melt into the crowds. Inside the Grand Hall, tables and chairs had been set around a wide stage. Behind the curtains, Sir David Parker-Rose was rehearsing his introductory lines.

The hour was approaching. The hall began to fill as television cameramen moved to their positions. They propped themselves against the stage and checked their watches with increasing frequency. Rumours began to spread that Prince Philip had arrived.

I was standing at the front of the dress circle, high above the ground floor. I lowered my head to conceal a yawn. By combining work at the hotel and editing at home, I'd been working for between eighteen and twenty hours a day. I'd already taken some of Russ's pills to stay awake, but by now my throat was dry. Tomas had worked out a way of taking liquor from the mini-bar and we'd developed a habit of finishing off several bottles every evening, after shifts. I was alert, sharp, but sweating, and my head was feeling light. I checked that no-one was looking, took another miniature bottle and downed it. I wiped my mouth and slumped against the wall. My heart was beating faster against my chest. I swallowed and blinked. No, I was okay. This was going to work.

My eyes fixed on the Channel 4 presenter who was sitting several feet away, behind a cardboard set. She held her position, keeping her expression steady while make-up people administered the last touches to her face. A man wearing headphones counted her in. The light on the top of the main camera turned red and she burst into action, welcoming viewers to the show. Then she stumbled over her words. The director called 'cut' and stepped forward. The presenter apologised. She tried a helpless smile, but the director wasn't happy. He insisted that there could be no more mistakes. It was nearly ten to eight.

I glanced at my watch. I was already walking quickly. I accelerated towards the fire escape. I'd arranged to meet Russ and Tomas in the alley behind the hotel.

“Young man?”

I kept walking.

“Young man would you help me? I’m lost.” An elderly gentleman was waiting in the middle of the corridor. I was late and I considered ignoring him but something about his hectoring tone made me stop.

“Young man, I need to find the awards ceremony downstairs.”

I directed him to the far staircase.

“...Yes, yes,” he snapped, “But it leads to a dead end.”

Our eyes met.

“I know you, we’ve met before,” said the old man.

Then I remembered. “Mr. Lorimer?”

It had only been four years but Alex Lorimer had aged. His suit sleeves extended over his hands. His white hair was hanging over his collar and he looked thinner than I remembered.

“I’m Daniel.”

“Who?”

“Daniel Rourke. My father was a television journalist.”

His face contorted.

“He was about to film a documentary for you. He was killed in a car accident.”

“Chris?” he gasped then clasped my hand. “How are you?” He stood back and scanned me up and down. Then his face fell.

I asked him if he enjoyed the exhibition.

“A bit hit and miss, I thought. But I’m thinking of offering one or two of the younger winners an opportunity to...”

“...That’s very kind of you.” I looked at my watch again.

“Did you see those photos of Dubrovnik?” he continued. “They reminded me of that Serbian girl your father took in.”

“Croatian.”

“What?”

“She was Croatian. Her name was Marija.”

“Oh, well I was quite fond of her, she was a pretty thing.” He paused. “Is she still around?”

I smiled and shook my head. “She’s long gone.”



It was almost eight o'clock. I escorted Lorimer to the staircase, wished him well then escaped along the corridor. I exited onto the fire escape and descended the stairs, placing each foot firmly down on the icy steps until dropping down into the alley.

Russ reversed the car into the loading bay next to the hotel. I knocked on the window. The door opened. The clock showed 7:58pm.

Tomas squeezed my shoulder, "Ready?"

I could smell his breath. He'd been drinking, too. He passed me another bottle. I opened it, hesitated and downed it.

"Not too much," warned Russ. He dropped some amphetamines into the palm of my hand.

I shoved the pills down my throat, switched off the radio and turned towards Russ.

"Remember, as we agreed. No last minute change of plans."

Russ nodded.

I glanced at Tomas as I got out of the car. He was lying on the back seat, muttering to himself.

"I'm taking him home right now," stated Russ.

"Just be there on time."

The staff entrance from the back alley was locked, but I had a spare set of keys, lifted from the secretary's room earlier on. I locked myself inside, and headed straight into the basement. It was pitch-black inside. I tried the switch. The bar hanging from the ceiling flickered and buzzed until suddenly, light engulfed the room. It was empty. There was nothing but barren concrete walls. No hum of machines, no murmurs from the staff on the far side. No John McKenna. I crossed to the far corner. Mac's office was unlocked.

As usual, the papers were in a pile on his desk. There was a strong scent of tobacco and a cigarette was in the ashtray. I picked it up. It was still warm. My mind was racing. I took a small can of lighter fuel from my pocket and looked up at the fire alarm. The red light was on. I stretched for the switch but couldn't reach.

There was a jangling of keys. It was from the corridor outside the basement. I switched off the office light. My heart was thumping. Blood was pulsing around my brain. I pressed my ear to the door, as the basement entrance opened. Footsteps tapped on the concrete before stopping abruptly outside the office. I ducked underneath the desk. The door opened and light flooded the room.

I pulled my knees below my chin and listened. From my position under the desk, I recognised Mac's scuffed, brown leather shoes. I heard him playing with the blinds, altering the angle. A box of matches bounced onto the floor. He cursed to himself then wheezed while reaching down to retrieve it. I held my breath. If he looked up, our eyes would meet.

Instead he struggled upright before perching himself on the window sill. I heard him sucking on the cigarette then exhaling. I became convinced that he'd settled for the evening until he grabbed his jacket and disappeared to the front of the office. I heard him stubbing out. He turned off the light. The door closed and a key turned in the lock. Footsteps became more distant. The beam of light under the door suddenly extinguished.

Everything was dark and silent. I got up and switched the light back on. A programme for the evening had been left on a shelf. It stated that the main award would be handed out at about ten. My head was buzzing, and my vision was already slightly blurred. I squinted at my watch. It showed 8:30pm. 'God Save the Queen' rang out upstairs.

I balanced on Mac's chair and stepped onto his desk. The smoke and fire alarms had been switched off, and dust had accumulated over both boxes. I twisted the switch. A green light began to flash. I could hear mutterings from the corridor outside. Someone tried the basement door handle. I froze but no-one entered.

I got down from the desk and sifted through Mac's staff files, policies and other reports from his in-tray. I shredded magazines and old newspapers, piled the paper in the bin, emptied a tin of lighter fuel and struck a match. The flames leapt higher than I expected. I plunged my hand into my pocket and snatched at the set of keys. None of them worked in the lock. Blood sloshed against my skull as I pulled at the office door again. It rattled against the frame but refused to budge. The flames rose behind me. I kicked against the door. It bulged but stayed shut. I kicked again and again until it burst open.

I took the staircase to the second floor and passed two sets of security guards before returning to the back of the dress circle. On the ground floor below, a nineteen year old was accepting the Best Young Photographer award from Prince Philip. The audience broke into applause while she left the stage. Several feet away from me, the television presenter was sitting with her producer. She yawned and looked at her watch.

The fire bell began to ring. At first it made a muffled sound, as if originating far away. The television crew give each other quizzical looks while the sound became progressively louder. Audience members began staring at one another. On stage, Sir David stopped mid-speech. He raised his hands to the television crew. They looked back with blank expressions.

The bell's shrill tone resounded across the hall. Steadily increasing in intensity, it soon became almost deafening. Trevor Fellows scrambled up the steps and snatched the microphone from Sir David. "That's the fire alarm, ladies and gentlemen. Please leave the building through the nearest exits."

For several seconds, no-one moved. A handful of people rose from their seats.

"Everyone out now!" He wheezed and dropped the microphone. It hit the floor with a thud.

I flung open the dress circle fire-exit doors. Down below, several bodyguards appeared from nowhere to usher the Prince through a side door. I made my way down the stairs to the ground floor.

People were already congregating outside. A collective cry rang out as water sprinklers erupted along the basement corridor. It took about ten minutes for the guests to escape into the narrow alley. Everyone was shivering in the cold.

Then it started to rain.

Staff and officials emerged with towels but as the rainfall increased in strength, guests began drifting off into nearby bars and pubs. Sirens droned in the distance, getting louder while black smoke wafted from windows on the first floor. Rumours spread that the flames had already reached the upper floors. I found that difficult to believe but even so, panic had broken out as terrified people searched for loved ones.

Mac waited under a lamppost while watching the alarm's red light flashing on and off inside the basement corridor. For the first time, he looked frightened.

The remaining crowds retreated from the road as the first fire engine appeared. It charged along the alley with all sirens blazing before screeching to a halt next to the staff entrance. The firemen swarmed onto the street and barged the basement door open.

Mac waited outside the exit.

The alarm and water sprinklers ceased suddenly, and there was a short interval of a few minutes. Another fire engine arrived outside the front entrance, followed by two ambulances. Paramedics and firemen raced upstairs into the hotel. Minutes later, the first casualties, wearing oxygen masks, appeared on stretchers. Others exited, coughing and spluttering, from the building.

The police arrived half an hour later. The manager, Trevor Fellows, was already locked in deep discussion with the chief fire officer. He turned and signalled to Mac, whose face was ashen.

I sidled up behind them. Mac was informed that the fire had emanated from a bin in his office. Fellows gave his cleaning manager a chastening look.

For once, Mac was lost for words.

Fellows asked Mac if he'd been smoking.

No, he'd not been smoking.

Was he sure?

Mac began to stammer.

Prince Philip was soaked while exiting the hotel. He was understandably furious. There'd have to be an enquiry.

Mac's shoulders dropped. His mouth opened but made only a whining sound.

Trevor didn't want to discuss it now. He was only thankful the fire had been contained reasonably quickly, and that it hadn't spread very far. Mac was ordered to help everyone get back inside the main foyer. Accommodation would need to be found for the guests at other hotels. They'd talk again the following morning.

Mac nodded slowly then turned to leave.

Then Russ appeared with a camera man. When I signalled to them, they snaked through the crowds towards me. Russ handed over the microphone. I ran my fingers through my hair and looked into the screen.

Mac was trudging down the alley in the opposite direction to the crowds.

I tapped him on the shoulder.

At first he didn't recognize me. Then his eyes narrowed in recognition. "What do *you* want?"

The camera lit up behind me. He squinted as it shone into his face.

"Mr. McKenna, I'd like a few words with you."

## Chapter 11

My living room table was crammed with empty wine bottles. Russ was lying flat out on the floor. I pulled myself up to the table surface, rolled a banknote and snorted another line. The television screen flickered with interference then went blank. Russ sat up on his elbows and shot me a worried look.

Suddenly the picture re-appeared. Mac's puzzled expression filled the screen. The camera switched towards my face while I stood in my cleaning overalls, holding the microphone. The guests leered at the lens as the rain poured down.

"How many illegal workers do you have in your hotel?"

Mac edged away from the camera.

"How much money do you pay them, Mr. McKenna?"

"Eh?"

"Given that this is one of the wealthiest hotels in Europe, why does the Wexford encourage its workers to accept money for sex?"

Mac's eyes glazed over. He tottered, as if about to collapse.

"How many cleaners, from Eastern Europe and elsewhere, work as prostitutes on your staff?"

"That's enough." Trevor Fellows stepped between Mac and the camera. "Who are you?"

The picture went blank again.

I relaxed on the sofa and placed my hands around the back of my head.

Russ cheered. He grabbed a bottle of beer, and took a swig. "Your dad would've loved this."

I didn't answer. But it felt good.

"Dan?"

"Yeah, I know," I smiled. "He would have been proud."

I switched my mobile phone on. It beeped. A couple of messages appeared from the producer of *'In This World'* at Shepherd's Bush. The crew from Channel 4 had been on the phone. What was going on? He wanted to see the tapes.

I rang him and arranged a meeting for the following morning. Russ and I raised our glasses, put them together and drank.

An unanswered call appeared on the mobile display. It was Tomas's number but there was no message. I switched it off and returned to the tape. I hadn't spoken to Tomas since the awards ceremony. I hadn't had the time. There'd been too much real work to do.

Russ soon departed to celebrate somewhere else and I managed to sleep through the following morning. For the first time in about six weeks, I could have a lie in. That afternoon, I sorted out the footage, and edited the unimportant or irrelevant material whilst homing in on the key moments. I reflected that all along, I'd been crafting a story. The heroes, I supposed were the foreign cleaners, led by Merima. There was no doubt about who the villain was going to be.

I remembered my father coming back from overseas, sitting down with his film and writing his script. He'd take me to the studios and I'd watch him record his voiceover. He was able to analyse any event and immediately draw out the key issues. Then he'd condense it perfectly into an hour's broadcast. Now it was my turn. I'd tell myself I was walking in his footsteps.

I used the remainder of the day to organise the episodes I wanted the producers to see: the shouting matches, the threats and the interviews with disgruntled staff. I considered scrambling the images of the cleaners' faces.

After categorising the tapes, I decided to turn in. The phone rang. It was nearly midnight. I let it click into the answer-phone. It was Merima. She was worried about Tomas. He'd come home in a strange mood. They'd fought and he walked out. Was he at my flat? The message ended.

I picked up the receiver and looked at the clock. It was late. For a brief moment I considered searching for him, but then went to bed instead.

Wednesday morning was brighter; still cold but the ice had melted. There were no clouds and for the first time in ages, I was able to travel to work while the sun was in the sky. I gazed at my reflection in the mirror. I hadn't worn an expensive suit for a long time. I put on my tie, brushed my shoulders and grinned at myself. I felt almost as if Dad was standing next to me.

It took several minutes before my identification was confirmed at the Shepherd's Bush centre car park. Eventually, I was allowed to pull up alongside the executive cars. Presenters, personalities and soap stars were flowing in and out of the sixties-style building. This was it. This was where I wanted to be.

My meeting was for eleven o'clock and I'd fifteen minutes to waste so I began skimming through the newspapers. My mobile burst into life.

*Tomas.*

“Where the hell have you fucking been?” he screamed.

“What’s happened? Where are you?”

He was almost incoherent, he’d been crying. He’d arrived for work early on the morning following the ceremony, but the police were at the hotel already. Mac was arrested and taken away. All the cleaners were interviewed, and someone had given Tomas’s name to the investigators.

“There’s no way they could link it to you.”

“They’ve already been. They called while I was out...” His words began to merge.

“Stop panicking. You weren’t even there.”

“There’s more to it than you think...You don’t understand. You’ve no fucking idea what I’m up against.”

“Where’s Merima?”

He didn’t know.

“I’m coming over. Where are you?”

He told me he was at the Cricketers.

I assured him I’d be less than an hour. I knew I was lying.

He broke down again. The call went dead.

My mobile phone showed over a dozen missed calls, all from him. I liked the guy, but he’d nothing to worry about. I’d talk to him later. I grabbed the tapes from the back seat and strode towards the main building.

The receptionist directed me to a waiting room. I sat for several minutes until met by a trainee producer who led me through a maze of corridors. As I passed a line of production offices, faces rose from computers and work stations. Eyes widened and heads nodded in recognition.

The young man stopped halfway down the corridor. He produced a set of loud, jangling keys and opened a door. He stepped aside, allowing me to enter first. It was a narrow room with only a couple of plastic chairs and a table. A television and video on a trolley were parked in the corner. Wires and leads were hanging from the sides.

A large, suited man in his late fifties appeared in the doorway behind us. He introduced himself as ‘Victor Hambling,’ the Chief Commissioner of the corporation. His handshake was firm and he towered above me. Behind him followed Roger Simmons, the new producer of ‘*In This World.*’ Roger was significantly shorter than Victor and when we

shook hands, he made only fleeting eye contact. Instead he readjusted his glasses before stepping back behind the larger man.

Victor's tone reverberated around the walls. The hotel had been on the phone. They were claiming they'd been set up and were threatening legal action.

I looked at him, blank-faced.

And the police had been in contact. They'd probably need to speak to me at some point. It was a miracle that no-one was killed. Over twenty were taken to hospital. Five were seriously injured after inhaling smoke. Did I know how it had happened?

I shook my head.

He looked into my eyes. The interview had been organised and filmed on the same night as the fire. It was a huge co-incidence.

It was indeed.

Victor grabbed a chair and planted it in the middle of the room. He sat down, folded his arms then jabbed at the television. "Right. This had better be good."

I pushed the first tape into the machine, retreated to the back of the room and turned off the lights. They watched in almost complete silence. Every so often, Victor whispered in Roger's ear. Roger nodded vigorously every time. We watched a couple of hours' worth of material. During the fight episode and the interview with Tanja, Victor edged forward and focused. But during the scene with Mac outside the hotel, he shook his head. As the credits rolled, he ran his palm over his forehead.

The tape whirred to a halt. I turned on the lights.

No-one spoke.

Victor signalled that I should wait outside.

Roger led me back into the corridor. "Your father reported from the Balkans didn't he?"

"Yes, mostly from Croatia."

I waited for him to continue.

He seemed poised to speak but didn't say anything. Instead, he took me to the end of the corridor and told me to wait upstairs. They'd call me when they were ready. I raised my hand 'goodbye,' but he'd already disappeared back into the viewing room.

I checked my mobile to find six text messages, all from Tomas, each more hysterical than the previous one. I switched it off.



Forty five minutes later, I sped from the gates of television centre in a celebratory mood. Although he wasn't happy with Mac's ambush, Hambling was pleased overall. We'd need to offer further interviews to both Trevor Fellows and John McKenna. We'd also have to agree everything with the corporation's legal team. On the other hand, there'd be a great deal of interest. It had the potential to be a worthwhile project. I was to be congratulated. The project *would* indeed have the corporation's backing.

When I arrived home, I grabbed a bottle of beer from the fridge, tore off my tie and toasted my reflection in the mirror. "I've done it, Dad." I raised my bottle to the glass. I wished he was still around to see this. I decided to ring my aunt and tell her. I finished the beer and picked up the receiver. My mobile phone hummed into life.

"Where the hell are you?" It was Tomas.

"Sorry, I was just about to ring you. I'm on my way."

It took three quarters of an hour to get over to Shoreditch. I pulled up outside the pub and hammered on the door. It was already open. I called upstairs.

No response.

I moved slowly up the staircase to the flat.

I was still in shock as the police arrived. Tomas was dead. First he'd tied his belt to the hook on his bedroom door. Then he'd taken off his clothes. Then he'd hung himself.

**Part 3**

Part 3  
Chapter 1

Hampshire, August 1996

I opened up the front door. It had been at least three months. I took the large envelope from the concrete floor and tried the light switch. The click echoed around the hallway. The lounge was bare apart from a shard of corrugated cardboard and some screwed up paper. In every room, the curtains had been removed and the carpets torn away. Furniture and other household goods had been transported weeks ago. Where paintings had been hanging undisturbed for years, only shadows remained.

I climbed the stairs, stopping outside the room where Mum had died. My fingers rested on the door handle, but I couldn't face going in. Marija's old bedroom door was ajar. I pushed it open. This room had been empty since the day I'd cleared out her things. I sat on the window sill and took in the view. A few miles to the north, the sun was steadily disappearing from the horizon; a bronze sheen was melting across the crowns of distant trees. It was a familiar sight, and gave me a jolt as the memories returned. I took a final look then retreated downstairs.

My father's study had been stripped of warmth, like the other rooms, but for some reason, his old desk and chair remained next to a couple of cardboard boxes. I planted myself in his seat and swung round. Where the photographic highlights of his career had adorned the walls, only holes and scratches remained.

It was getting chilly. I brought my bag in from the car, and opened it to retrieve a torch, a bottle of red wine and a glass. A file was lying at the bottom of my bag. It contained details of the libel proceedings the hotel was bringing both against both me and the television company. Underneath was a letter, newly re-flattened, from the producer, Roger Simmons, reminding me that due to the court injunction, the hotel documentary had been shelved indefinitely. Attached were the threats from the hotel's lawyers, and the letter from my solicitor, outlining the terms of the out-of-court settlement. I poured myself a glass of wine and scanned the page, focusing on the string of digits at the bottom. I read the document several times before taking a pen from my inside pocket. Only then did I feel my heart beating loudly.

I ripped the envelope open and read the covering letter by torchlight. If I wanted to sell the house, the matter was simple; the potential buyers were not going to raise their offer. I could take it or leave it. And if I wanted a quick sell then I had no choice. I crumpled the letter into a ball and took a large gulp of wine.

The papers were ready. I'd known for some time that this moment would come. But now that the official documents were before me, I couldn't bring myself to do it. I knew I could've gotten a better price than this, but I had no choice. I scrawled my signature, downed the contents of my glass then sank my head into my arms and wept.

The phone rattled on the desk.

"Hello?"

"Russ?"

"I'm returning your call."

I thanked him and wiped my eyes.

"I've been very busy."

I told him that it didn't matter. I appreciated him getting back.

We chatted about his life, his new home, his fiancé, his new sports car and the new people at *'In This World.'*

"So," he said, "How are *you* coping?"

I rubbed my eyes. "I've had an offer for the house."

He told me that's great news.

"I was just wondering, Russ," I took a deep breath before continuing. "Is there any word from upstairs?"

There was a short silence. "Not much happening at the moment, sorry."

"I see."

There was another pause.

"Well good luck then," he said. "Keep in touch...."

I shut my eyes. "Russ, I've got a great story... about Tomas." I grabbed the file and opened it.

He didn't respond.

"Those letters from the police, I've been going through them." My foot tapped repeatedly against the chair leg. "The Croatian government wanted him for something. I don't know what but...."

He sighed, "Dan..."

I dropped the file onto the desk. Several pages fell to the floor. I snatched at one and shoved it under the torch. "I have a letter from Stoke Newington Police Station. Tomas had been ordered to inform them every time he changed address." I sat up. "I need to find out what was going on."

"Dan, I really think you should leave it now. This story's caused too much trouble already. Not just for you."

"I have to do this."

There was another short silence.

"Whatever in Tomas's past had made him unhappy," Russ stated, "You weren't responsible for what happened..."

I took another deep breath. I couldn't speak.

"...And you don't owe him anything."

I cleared my throat. "Okay, can you at least give me Roger Simmons's number?"

He didn't reply.

"Russ?"

"We're looking for a different approach for the next series. Something more...well..."

My heart was beating faster.

"...*ethical*."

"This *is* ethical."

He sighed again.

"Just give me Roger's number."

"I'm meeting him tomorrow. I'll tell him you called."

"You *do* that." I switched off the phone.

I spent the next half an hour sifting through Tomas's papers without getting anywhere. Apart from the letters sent by the police, there wasn't a great deal to go on. Merima didn't leave much before she disappeared but there was a list of addresses, telephone numbers, and a letter from Tomas's family in Sarajevo. I couldn't decipher the writing but a photograph of two women was attached. I slipped it into my wallet then rolled out my sleeping bag and flicked through the messages on my mobile phone. There was nothing from work, nothing from the television company, nothing from my solicitor. I emptied the memory, deleted missed calls and old texts.

One message was from Tomas: "*Call me.*"

I stared at the text with my thumb resting over 'Delete'. I'd acted thoughtlessly. I was selfish, stupid and greedy, and it was too late. My chest tightened, but still I felt unable to press the button to make his words disappear. I dropped the phone and pushed my hands against my temples. Maybe, Russ was right.

Yet I *couldn't* just forget. I knew I was wrong, that it was a reckless, stupid stunt. I knew that was how Dad would describe it. He'd say I got what I deserved. And he'd be right. My behaviour was worse than stupid.

But I also knew that there was much more to Tomas's death than my own selfishness. Something else had been going on, and I needed to prove that it wasn't *all* my fault. I sat up, tapped in the number for directory enquires and asked for the Croatian embassy in London. I had to finish this, for my own sanity, if nothing else. I scribbled the number down, finished off the bottle, and slept.

I woke to the sound of scratching. It was ten past midnight and dark outside. Overgrown branches next to the window were scraping against the pane. A bird shot past. Was it an owl? Within seconds, it re-appeared and swooped towards the lawn. Its claws snatched at something on the ground before swinging back up to the trees. Apart from the muffled barking of dogs, there was only darkness and silence. I shut my eyes, and once more, tried to sleep.

At first it was a slight sound that caused me to stir; a repetitive tapping from Marija's old bedroom, directly above me. It grew louder before quickly fading. I propped myself on my elbows and tried peering through the darkness. The tapping stopped abruptly. I waited for it to restart but nothing happened. I lay back down.

A crash rang out from above. This time I snatched the torch from my bag and struggled to my feet. I pushed forwards across the landing until reaching Marija's bedroom door. I waited outside. A rattling sound could be heard from within. I stopped, feeling my heart beat louder, clutched the handle and flung open the door.

Somehow, a cardboard box had fallen from the window sill onto the floorboards. Rubbish had rolled out: a broken cup, plastic packaging; some old clothes. The torch's batteries were running low. Its fading light rested on an old shoe.

It had belonged to my mother.

I stared at it for several seconds then closed the door. I returned to the top of the stairs and began my descent.

The disconnected phone in the kitchen started to ring. Crisp, jarring, each ring louder than the one before. I hurried down the staircase but my foot slipped. I fell onto my backside and slid down two sets of stairs. The torch bounced against the wall before disappearing into the darkness.

That was it. I leapt down the remaining four stairs, nearly breaking my ankle on the concrete, hauled open the door, raced across the gravel for the car then took off in search of the nearest hotel.

## Chapter 2

The following morning I entered the living room of my Docklands flat. I stepped over the empty beer cans, bottles and other trash, before collapsing onto the sofa. A stench was rising from the bins in the kitchen. There was a message on the answer-phone from Russ. He'd been trying to get through to my mobile but it was switched off. He'd wanted to apologise for his curtness earlier on.

I yawned and lay back on the sofa.

He revealed that he'd already chatted to Roger Simmons.

I rolled onto my feet and crouched next to the phone.

Russ said that they'd discussed my idea. I could call Simmons if I wanted to, but I shouldn't be too optimistic about my chances. He left me the number and hung up.

I tried it several times but there was no response. I decided that I was probably wasting my time. I turned the radio on and took a shower. The coverage of the Olympics in Atlanta was winding down and Britain had won only one gold medal. The commentators were complaining that school playing fields were being sold off. I began to lose interest until the radio programme cut to the hourly news. In between stories about the government and the crisis within the Tory party was an item about the Balkans. Sarajevo Airport was re-opening to commercial traffic after nearly four years.

I turned the water off and listened.

The first incoming flight would be from Turkey. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Bosnian President Izetbegović would be waiting on the tarmac to mark the event.

Several Bosnian citizens were interviewed. One man hoped for an increase in tourism now that peace had been brokered. For another, it didn't matter how many visitors arrived, the Serbs would have to pay reparations for war crimes.

This time, when I dialled Roger's number, each digit was punched into the keypad with decisive force. This time, the line clicked into life. The moment Simmons answered I bombarded him with information about Tomas. He was a good man; quiet and emotionally erratic but strongly principled and honest. The key point was that, at the time of his death, he was being tracked by both the U.K. police and the Croatian government. But there was another angle. It was a tragic tale about a man who had escaped a war to become part of a different fight, one he'd ended up losing. We needed to establish the truth, and it would make



great television. Almost breathless, I finally paused. I asked him what he thought of the project.

At first, Simmons didn't respond.

"I'm going to Bosnia next week," I declared, surprising myself.

When Simmons eventually replied, his tone was slow and measured. "There is no way that we could sanction something like that..."

I slouched onto the arm of the sofa.

"...After everything that's happened."

"Roger," I curled my fingers around the wire. "I *need* to do this."

There was another short silence before he responded. "Dan, many people think you were very lucky not to be prosecuted."

I closed my eyes.

"Have you already booked a flight?" he said eventually.

"Yes, of course," I lied.

He paused again. "Well, we can't stop you travelling." He sounded more conciliatory. "When you get there, and *if* you think there's something we should know, you know where I am."

I cleared my throat. "Thanks, Roger." I was determined to try and clear Tomas's name. After what I did to him, I knew it was the least I could do. I flung the curtains apart. It took over an hour to bin the rubbish, clean the kitchen surfaces and vacuum the carpet. At the back of one cupboard, I found the remains of Russ's amphetamines from the night of the awards ceremony. I remembered thinking that my father would've been proud of me. Now I wasn't so sure. I dropped the powder into the toilet bowl, pressed the flush and watched the residue disappear. Finally, the fridge was emptied of all remaining bottles and cans of alcohol. With solemn ceremony, I poured each one down the sink.

The Croatian consulate was tucked away on a side street, near Victoria Station, and away from the noise of buses, taxis and tourists. I expected to find a state-of-the-art modern embassy reflecting a young, vibrant and emerging European nation. Instead, I encountered a lonely, Georgian building, squeezed inside a row of identical, terraced houses. A Croatian national flag was hanging limply from above the front door. The paintwork below the letter box was faded and scuffed. There were no policemen on the steps, not even a security guard. But at least they had an embassy and an elected government.

I drove past the front entrance and parked my car fifty metres away. Regent's Park was just around the corner. I sent a text on my mobile phone and got out, finding a bench near a line of tall bushes. For twenty minutes, I tried to relax as joggers and dog-walkers drifted across the grass. I checked my phone several times, but there weren't any return messages.

When he finally appeared, Luka Illic was tall, thin and fresh-faced. I asked him if he'd brought what we agreed. He shut his eyes and nodded repeatedly. I offered him some folded bank notes as a football bounced towards us from a children's game nearby.

"Put it away," Luka snapped. A boy ran over and collected the ball.

I rolled my eyes and stuffed the notes back inside my jacket.

"I must be crazy doing this," he breathed heavily.

"It's not exactly Burgess and Maclean."

"I could lose my job." He touched the sides of his slick, smoothly groomed hair and checked over his shoulder again. Although a Croatian national, Luka spoke English fluently. He was shocked that London was so expensive. By the end of every month, after he'd paid his rent, he had virtually nothing left. He complained that he and his colleagues were overworked. Every so often, the army back home would come across the grave of a fallen soldier or civilian. Part of Luka's role was to find the next of kin, or any close relatives living in Britain. Earlier this morning, they'd discovered the remains of four members of the same family.

"Do you have the documents?" I asked.

He produced an envelope from his inside pocket. "What is it about this Tomas Petrović?"

"I was a work colleague."

Luka stared at me.

"I know he was in the Yugoslav Army."

He folded his arms.

"And he killed himself."

His eyelids flickered.

"He was in trouble with the police for some reason."

For several seconds, the only sounds were from the children playing on the grass.

"So which newspaper do you work for?"

I told him that I didn't work for anyone. I'd been a journalist in the past, I'd even worked for television once, but I've given that up.

“There must be other stories, more exciting than this man.”

“Tomas was a friend.”

Suddenly he bent forward; his whole body convulsed and his eyes were ablaze. “Your *friend* was a murdering bastard Serb,” he rasped. “The only tragedy was not his death but that he escaped justice.”

I stared at him.

For a second or two, Luka moved as if about to get up and leave. Instead, he checked once more that no-one was watching then adjusted his position on the bench. He gestured with his forefinger and thumb. I plunged my hand into my jacket and produced the banknotes.

His face and eyes twitched as he counted the money. His fingers began to slow. “It’s not enough.”

“But we agreed...”

He put away the envelope and looked at me. Previously his eyes had been moving rapidly, darting between me and the entrance gate; now they were still and icy cold.

“How much?”

“You tell me.”

“I’ve only got another fifty.”

He hesitated then snatched the money. After dropping the envelope next to me, he got up and left.

I watched him slip through the gates. Something was wrong. Perhaps Tomas *did* do something. For a few moments, I considered not going to Sarajevo. What if I found out things that didn’t clear Tomas’s name but further tarnished it? But as Luka Illic disappeared into the crowds with my money, it struck me that something more important was at stake. Tomas might’ve been implicated in something. He was a soldier and terrible things happened in wars. He was not, however, a ‘murdering Serb bastard’. Someone had got that badly wrong.

### Chapter 3

The civil war in Bosnia raged from 1992 to 1995. Bosnian Serbs laid siege to the capital city of Sarajevo for nearly four years. I'd been working for *'In this World'* in London during late 1994, as the reports of mass killings, including film of emaciated prisoners at Srebrenica, began to flood the airwaves. I hadn't paid enough attention. It was my father's story, not mine. But I remembered the reaction of Western correspondents. In Britain, commentators were united in their condemnation. Comparisons were made with Second World War Nazi death camps.

Although it was a bitter and complicated war, the terms of peace were relatively straightforward. After the UN had failed to broker a ceasefire, NATO led by Bill Clinton, bombed Bosnian Serb positions. Eventually, the boundaries for two devolved regions within a nominally unified Bosnia and Herzegovina were agreed. The new 'Republika Srpska', an entity for Serbs, comprising 49% of Bosnian land, was set up. The mostly Muslim Bosniaks and the Bosnian Croats agreed to share the remaining 51%, forming the devolved Bosnian Federation.

Peace was finally achieved. But as the war ended, the recriminations began. The perspective of Western commentators was unequivocal: the responsibility for the carnage was laid entirely at the feet of the Bosnian Serbs. Their leaders, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, were to be pursued on charges of war crimes. It was a polarised viewpoint, but one my father supported whole-heartedly.

Sarajevo airport re-opened, as planned, to commercial travellers on August 16<sup>th</sup> 1996. But by the time my Air Bosna plane had touched down two weeks later, the politicians were long gone. All banners had been removed, the ticker-tape swept away and the media centres dismantled. I passed through customs, along deserted walkways, past empty escalators and foyers towards the arrivals hall. Apart from a security guard's shoes, which squeaked as he strode across the floor, everywhere was silent.

One taxi idled in the car park. The driver was a chubby man in his forties. Spotting me, he hurled his cigarette stub to the floor, opened the door of his battered Cortina, and angled his head for me to get in. Slavic pop music was rattling from the stereo. I sat down on foam that had sprouted from a split in the front seat.

The driver nodded when I stated the name of my hotel, and after lighting another cigarette, he started the engine. I asked him how much the journey would cost.

He didn't answer.

The taxi exited the airport. We passed some workmen who were trying to pull down a perimeter wall. The bricks were riddled with bullet and mortar holes. Behind it, a huge board, advertising a soft drink, was being cleaned for installation.

"Do you speak English?"

The driver gave the slightest nod.

"I understand there were celebrations a couple of weeks ago."

He glanced at me from the corner of his eye.

"The airport re-opening?"

He nodded again without any conviction.

I tried once more. "Is Sarajevo getting back to normal?"

He shrugged. Following a short silence, he turned up the volume on his radio.

I waited for a few seconds then sank back into my seat.

The taxi tore along country roads and descended through a valley filled with conifer trees. We pulled up at a junction and stopped with a jerk. The small Bosnian flag that was hanging from the rear view mirror fell and bounced at my feet. I tried to replace it on the hook.

The driver snatched the flag and repositioned it himself. "We fought for this." He pointed at the blue and yellow background with white stars.

"It was a heroic struggle. You must be very proud."

This time a hint of a smile flashed across his face. He squared his shoulders and readjusted himself in his seat.

Although the mountain peaks were rocky and sparse, we passed through valleys lined with lush, green fields, oaks and beeches.

I told him it was a beautiful country.

He lowered the volume and turned towards me. "English or American?"

"English," I replied. "My name's Daniel."

He introduced himself as 'Bosko'. He agreed that Bosnia was beautiful. He believed that more people would soon arrive from overseas, now that the fighting had stopped. Tourists would make the country wealthy.

I explained that I'd journeyed to Bosnia to research the recent war, that my father was a television journalist, and that he worked in the Balkans.

"What's his name?"

"Chris. Chris Rourke. He died a few years ago."

Bosko didn't say anything.

"My father risked his life reporting the conflict."

"So, you follow him? Father then son?"

I relaxed in my seat. "Yeah, something like that."

Bosko was quick to assert that he'd only recently become a taxi driver. For over fifteen years, he'd been a soldier in the Yugoslav People's Army. When war broke out, he joined the Bosnian military. It was difficult at first because they had no guns. International sanctions had prevented the Bosniaks from obtaining weapons, whereas the Serbs gained equipment from Serbia, and the Croats from Hungary. That hadn't been fair.

I asked him if it he'd found it difficult to fight former comrades and compatriots. At first he didn't reply. Then he gripped the steering wheel tightly, and insisted that it hadn't been at all difficult. In fact, it had been the easiest thing in the world to do. Yugoslavia was an artificial country that had outlived its usefulness. It was dead long before any fighting had broken out.

Bosko hated all Serbs. He explained that during the war, the Yugoslav army placed twenty thousand troops in the hills surrounding Sarajevo. They laid siege with tanks, mortars, rocket launchers, machine guns and snipers. "They didn't care about anyone. They hit anything: houses, markets, cars. It didn't matter if you were a civilian, man, woman or child. And if you were a Muslim and they caught you, well..." He ran his forefinger across his throat.

I thought about Tomas. He was a Serb, but he didn't hate Muslims. He'd had a Muslim girlfriend.

Bosko was implacable. He told me that although he liked the English, Bosnia didn't get enough support during the war. "We had no friends, no guns and no help," he shouted while swerving past a Volkswagen.

I didn't argue.

We arrived at some traffic lights. I lurched forward as the taxi screeched to a halt. Bosko began punching the steering wheel, hitting the horn repeatedly until the car in front pulled away. He revealed that he'd born in Prijedor, in the north of the country. After the fighting erupted in Bosnia, the Serbs quickly took control of the area and set up a detention centre called the Keraterm Camp. Men were tortured and shot. Women were systematically beaten and raped. Bosko shook his head. "And afterwards, the people who did it escaped." He put his foot down. "*Who* won the fucking war?"

From the distance, red tiled roofs suddenly appeared through the trees. It might've been any other Eastern European city. Smaller than I expected, Sarajevo was surrounded by towering mountains. The city had been built on a steep gradient that sloped down to a plateau in the centre. Although it was late August, there was no sun above the clouds. Instead, a thick, grey mist hovered above the skyline.

We slowed at a crossroads. I rolled down my window down. A small farmhouse stood in the middle of a field. Window-frames, shorn of glass, were blacked-out. A side-wall that had been constructed from crude blocks of cement was now lying in rubble, exposing a deserted kitchen. A barn was alongside the house, open and empty.

We drove on. The tarmac began to disintegrate where tank tracks had broken the surface. Slowing to swerve around holes in the road, we came upon a circle of cottages. Two buildings had been gutted. One had completely collapsed with only the roof frame pushing out of the earth and grass. The cottage nearest to us was on its side; shreds of clothing and plastic bags were hanging from the windows. Concrete was splattered across the ground.

We exited the country road and joined a dual carriageway. The route into town was lined with the skeletal remains of multi-storey blocks and offices. Nearly every building was pock-marked with holes and scars. As we reached the city, heads could be seen in windows and pedestrians chatted on pavements. Most shops remained closed, but the rubble across the roads had been cleared and several cafés had re-opened.

The taxi descended along a hillside road as we neared the city centre. Houses were perched on steep slopes. The main street, the 'Marshala Titova', dipped as we approached the centre, and split into four tributaries, which flowed around a vast communist-era building. Bosko accelerated then gripped the steering wheel, spinning it sharply to the left.

I grabbed the passenger's handle.

He took the first exit and put his foot on the brakes. "Are you okay?" he shouted.

I nodded but held on tight.

"It was called, 'Vojvode Putnika' during the war." He turned and grinned. "*Sniper's Alley.*"

I peered through the back window. On the far side of the road, three sets of shipping containers had been stacked on top of each other, forming a makeshift shield. We crossed the bridge over the River Miljacka.

The hotel was a townhouse near the centre. Bosko parked alongside the shell of an abandoned car. The driver's door was peppered with bullet holes and the engine was missing. Pedestrians were streaming around its rusty carcass as if it didn't exist.

Bosko shook my hand warmly, laughed and handed over his card. “Just ask for Usman Bošković.”

The guest house, once used by journalists and officials during the war, now felt cold and empty. An elderly woman greeted me with broken English. A grandfather clock ticked in the background while she entered my passport details into a book.

“There was a message.” She retrieved a note from a shelf behind the desk. I glanced at the name then stuffed the paper into my pocket.

The doors of the lift shuddered together. I held the railing and watched the numbers switch from 1 to 2 until the steel frame screeched to a halt. It jolted suddenly, throwing me against the wall. The light flickered then extinguished. There was no telephone and my mobile phone couldn’t find a network. I banged my fist against the door several times and shouted out.

The old woman called back. Hadn’t I seen the sign telling guests to take the stairs? I banged the door again before sinking to the floor. The old woman shouted that she was going to call someone.

I pulled the note from my pocket. It was from the *‘In This World’* producer Roger Simmons. He wanted to make a few things clear. I was ordered not to upset Tomas’s family. I was not to go undercover. Under no circumstances was I to attempt to gain access to information as a corporation employee, because I was no longer an employee. On the other hand, if a story did reveal itself, and I could deal with it responsibly, I should contact him on his office number.

“You’ve got four weeks,” ran the final line. “Blow it and you’re finished!”

I screwed up the paper and hurled it at the door.

It took twenty minutes to get me out which, according to the old woman, was quicker than usual. The caretaker winched the lift to the next floor and I dragged my suitcase up a further flight of stairs. Unsurprisingly, the room was basic and the length of its single bed. The only accessories were a writing table and a seventies-style telephone. My view from the window was blocked by the burnt-out frame of the communications tower. In the distance was the shattered dome of a mosque.

I’d never really spoken at length to Tomas about his life as a Serb in a predominantly Muslim city. I hadn’t considered how he must’ve felt when cast as one of the world’s bad guys, to be on the wrong side of history. I imagined he’d felt embarrassed about it.

I sat at the table and opened up his file. There wasn’t much to go on. Tomas had joined the Yugoslav People’s Army as a reservist attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tito Corps, just after



Croatia had declared its independence in 1991. Following his promotion to Lieutenant, his division operated in the Southern Dalmatia region of Croatia. He became attached to another unit and crossed into eastern Croatia. During this period, several massacres were alleged to have taken place. The Croatian government was focusing on an incident in Voćin, in December 1991. Fifty villagers were buried in the ruins of a demolished church.

I turned to my own notes. It would've been helpful if Luka Illic had provided Tomas's date of arrival in London. I'd never thought it necessary to ask him at the time, and the Home Office had been useless. My finger ran down the list of telephone numbers retrieved from Tomas's flat in London. I shoved the telephone receiver between my shoulder and neck and began dialling. There were six numbers in all. Alongside each one, I'd already jotted, 'Not interested', 'No English', or 'wrong number'. With so many telephone lines down, I'd been unable to get through to the final two from the U.K. I dialled the first one and looked at my watch. It kept ringing. I was in the process of putting the phone down when a female voice responded in Serbo-Croat.

I whisked the receiver back to my ear and quickly explained, in English, that I was a friend of Tomas Petrović.

There was a pause. "Tomas?"

"Yes, Tomas. Tomas Petrović."

A hurried conversation took place in the background. At this point in previous calls, someone would hang up. On this occasion, a younger, female voice came to the phone. Her tone was sharp. "Who *is* this?"

I explained that I worked with Tomas in London. I wanted to speak to someone who knew him.

"Tomas Petrović?"

"Yes."

She paused. "How do you know him? What do you want?"

"I'm just a friend. Who am I speaking to?"

There was another pause. "His sister."

## Chapter 4

She needed some convincing that I wasn't a policeman or an army officer, but eventually she agreed to talk. Her name was Andjela and although somewhat reluctant, she arranged to meet in Sarajevo the following morning.

Bosko picked me up from the hotel. Our meeting place wasn't far away. The taxi cut through the Baščaršija district, avoiding craters and partially cleared bombsites. Houses had been demolished. Mortar holes had been crudely splashed with cement. Meat in the market place was covered under tarpaulins, while concrete dust was spinning in the mid-morning sunlight. I remembered skimming through an article my father had compiled about Sarajevo. It had been written for the *Guardian* shortly before he died. I couldn't remember the exact details, but it was soon after a wedding had been shelled. Local Serbs had threatened retaliation. I think he'd also mentioned a market place. I couldn't remember exactly. I remember wishing that I'd paid more attention. I stared through the taxi window, wondering if he'd walked down the same pavement. Maybe he'd ordered a coffee in the bar across the road. Maybe.

The lights turned green. I pulled the photograph of Tomas's mother and sister from my file. They were both fair skinned, with reddish hair. It was an old photo, of course. I asked Bosko how many Serbs remained in the Bosnian Federation.

"Most went to the new 'Republica Srpska.'" He grimaced as if it hurt to even say the name. He explained that although the 'Srpska' remained within Bosnia's official borders, its Serb inhabitants retained a separate police force and army.

"It's reward for murder. You wait. One day they'll try to join with Serbia." His eyes burned. "*We'll* be ready."

The car turned the corner and pulled away.

"What about the Serb civilians who want to stay here, in the Bosnian Federation?"

He didn't reply.

I arrived early and sat down amongst the rows of empty, white seats. The café, on the edge of the square, had been built to accommodate the waves of tourists for the 1984 Winter Olympics. A fountain remained in the centre but the water supply had been cut off years ago, leaving only broken tiling and rust. Tall Austro-Hungarian buildings with Mamluk decorations and Moorish pointed arches surrounded the old town square. In the distance, a

call to prayer wailed from a minaret. A waiter watched from behind the glass then stepped into the sunlight.

I ordered a coffee. He raised his eyes and shoved his order pad back into his overalls. A handful of locals sat down opposite me, only to disappear several minutes later. I waited alone until a woman of about thirty appeared at the edge of the square. Wearing a white t-shirt and denim jeans, she took a seat in the shade and glanced over.

When I approached, she folded her arms. Her eyes narrowed, just like her brother's had done when we'd first met.

I introduced myself.

Recognising my voice, she forced a smile and allowed me to shake the tips of her fingers before stuffing them back into her pockets. Andjela looked thin. Her eyes, behind thin-rimmed glasses, were a faded, ordinary blue, and her make-up failed to mask premature facial lines.

I thanked her for meeting me then asked how long she had to talk. I didn't want her to get into trouble at work. Andjela assured me that she'd enough time. She was working as a teaching assistant at a local nursery school, but the children were still on holiday so there was no rush to get back. She was living in Ilidža, a suburb traditionally populated by fellow Serbs. It wasn't far from central Sarajevo and it was no trouble to meet someone who'd known her brother.

I ordered her a coffee. I told her I'd once taught English for a while, myself. I'd enjoyed it. I asked if she liked working in a school.

Andjela's face twitched before replying. She'd always held higher ambitions than teaching. She'd studied law at university, and worked as a solicitor at the same firm for five years. She'd always dreamt of making some money and then travelling the world, but it wasn't to be. After the war, just as the numbers of criminal claims went through the roof, she was abruptly made redundant. A Muslim woman was employed in her place.

She stared at me, searching for a response.

I said nothing.

She readjusted herself on her seat. She wanted to know why I'd come all that way just to talk about her brother. How had I come to know him?

I revealed that I was a journalist.

She blinked but said nothing.

I explained that Tomas had helped me expose the exploitation of immigrant hotel workers in London.

Her mouth broke into a fragile smile. “He always did the right thing,” she said. “Even when we were kids, he would stand up to bullies. Tomas was younger than I was, but he looked after me.”

The waiter returned with her coffee. Gradually, Andjela opened up as she recalled her love for her brother, and how everyone missed him. “On the day he joined up, we were so proud. When he appeared at the front door in his uniform, we all thought he looked just like his father.”

“Why did he leave the military?”

“I don’t know.” Her face fell. “Something happened.” She paused. “Then we had officers to the house.”

Three children crossed the road. They skipped past the café, chattering and giggling.

“He was sensitive,” she continued while lighting a cigarette. “And sometimes when things went wrong, he found it difficult to cope. It was always like that. He wanted to study for an art degree and finally won a place at Sarajevo University. After war with Croatia broke out, Father stopped him from enrolling. One day Tomas just disappeared. It took weeks to find him. We were terrified.” She sucked on the cigarette. “My mother wishes she could have gone with him to London. She wanted to look after him.”

I asked her if she knew when he’d arrived in London. Did she have a date?

She shook her head. Then she smiled again. “I told my mother about you. She wants to meet you.”

“I’d like that.”

I offered her the use of my mobile but Andjela chose to make arrangements using the telephone inside the café. She admitted that, after losing her job, she’d traded in her car. I called Bosko and asked him to drive us to Ilidža.

A trio of children approached an American couple sitting several tables away. The Americans were wearing suits with authoritative orange badges, indicating aid agency directors, or possibly UN officials. One child produced a recorder and began playing a tune. The others sang in unison but not very well. It might’ve been a traditional folk song or even a chart hit. No matter, it ended when the children collapsed into giggles. The Americans handed over some coins and waved them away.

Andjela couldn’t get through to her mother, who was either out or asleep. We decided to make the journey anyway and Bosko duly arrived to collect us. When he got out of his cab, he hugged me like a long lost relative.

“Ah, I didn’t know you had such graceful friends,” he said, grinning at Andjela. He bowed while opening the door for her. “Where are we going?”

She told him the address.

Bosko’s face fell.

“It’s in Ilidža.”

He started the engine.

As we pulled out of the centre, I asked her about her home. Andjela explained that her family had lived in Ilidža since she was a child. After the conflict had ended, the district came under the control of the Bosnian Federation. Many of the family’s neighbours were forced to leave home and move to the Republika Srpska. As a result, after the war, very few Serbs remained in a district they used to dominate. But her mother was tough. She absolutely refused to run to Srpska. Nothing was going to drive her out.

Bosko watched us through the driver’s mirror. Throughout our conversation, his eyes remained locked on Andjela. After a couple of minutes he turned sharply onto a side road where the buildings were derelict and ashen. The sky was suddenly overcast and the grass had faded into dirt and dust.

“Where are we going?” I shouted.

“The road is blocked. We’ll have to go back through Grbavica.”

Andjela whispered that before the war, Grbavica had belonged to the Serbs, but later it was turned over to the Bosnian Federation as part of the peace deal. And although the Bosniaks had been in control since April, the district was still in ruins.

We slowed at the top of Grbavica’s main street. Burnt-out flats and houses were stretching far into the distance. Other buildings were tottering on exposed foundations. Windows and roof tiles had been removed, exposing charred, wooden frames. Street lights were missing from lamp posts.

The taxi slowed to a halt.

Bosko spun round to Andjela and muttered something. She turned her face away. He got out, slammed the door then stormed across the road to a corrugated iron hut.

“What did he say?” I asked.

“It isn’t worth repeating.”

Bosko remained inside the hut, where he became locked in earnest conversation with two other men. We waited in the car for about a quarter of an hour before becoming restless. Eventually, we clambered out to find a thin layer of white ash lying on the ground like snow.

The hut door swung open and slapped against the corrugated iron wall. Bosko strode towards us. “We’re not going any further,” he snapped.

“Why not?” I asked.

Two men, wearing faded t-shirts and jeans, followed from the hut.

Bosko squared up to me. “Why do you insult me?” He jerked his head in Andjela’s direction.

When she tried to remonstrate, he barked into her face. The men moved directly behind us. The scrawnier one snatched at Andjela’s hair, twisting his grip as she cried out. She broke free, but he caught her hands and jeered as she tried to release herself.

“Don’t try anything,” Bosko warned.

I shoved past him, and tried to pull the scrawny guy away from Andjela. He let go suddenly, causing her to stumble backwards. The stocky man hurled me against the cab door and punched me in the stomach. I fell to the ground. He delivered a sharp kick to the ribs, another to my spine then a final blow to the back of my head.

By the time Andjela had helped me to my feet, the taxi was long gone. She revealed that the men had panicked after knocking me unconscious. Fearing I was seriously injured, they’d taken off. She thanked me for trying to help.

I rubbed the back of my head then asked whether we could walk the rest of the route. Andjela shook her head. The journey was too hazardous and Ilidža was too far away. I decided to call for another taxi and felt for my mobile phone. I swore to myself.

“What’s wrong?”

I explained that my bag, with the phone and Tomas’s file inside, were still in Bosko’s taxi.

## Chapter 5

Cars zipped past as we edged along the side of the motorway. I ran my fingers through my hair, touched the bruised and winced. I asked Andjela what Bosko and his friends would do with my things.

She reckoned they'd probably steal the mobile phone, but as there was no money inside the bag, its contents would be thrown away. She held my arm while we crossed the road. I apologised for putting her in harm's way. I told her that I shouldn't have hired Bosko. I wasn't thinking straight.

"Forget it. We're used to people like him."

Andjela made a call from a phone box, and her friend, Dragana, was summoned to collect us.

Andjela asked me how I was feeling.

I said that I was okay. I'd felt drowsy shortly after coming round, but I was better now.

She checked my bruise. It wasn't a huge swelling but she suggested a visit to the doctor.

I told her not to worry.

We waited by the road for her friend to arrive. She described her family and her father, who was a senior officer in the Yugoslav People's Army. He'd died suddenly of a heart attack in 1991, not long after war broke out in Croatia.

"Father was a great man and my brother always wanted to be like him," she said. "Tomas longed to carry on Father's work and become a hero." She lit another cigarette. "But he wasn't like Father, Tomas was different."

It took nearly half an hour for Dragana to show up and drive us the rest of the way. Although some travel writers had described Ilidža as one of the prettiest places on earth, I prepared myself for familiar scenes of carnage. Yet as we neared our destination, the road flattened out. There are no more bullet hole punctured road signs, or craters cut into the tarmac. Instead, we passed open fields with blossoming flowers, wide detached houses with swimming pools and freshly cut front lawns. After being taken down a private road lined by beech trees, we were dropped off outside some wooden gates.

Andjela thanked her friend, who needed to return to work. As the car disappeared down the driveway, she opened the gates and ushered me inside. She explained that,

following Tomas's death, she'd moved back home to care for her mother. She regretted that decision sometimes, but wouldn't be able to live with herself if something happened and she wasn't there to do anything about it. She asked about my life and how long I intended to stay in the country.

I told her that I lived in London, adding that I'd probably return at some point. I'd given up my job, though, and I didn't know what I was going to do when I returned. There wasn't much else to say.

My head began to clear as we followed the path through trees. The sun was hidden by branches, and the temperature dropped suddenly. Pebbles crunched underneath our feet as we made our way across the driveway towards the steps leading up to the house. There were two parts to the building. The white bricked two storey section with balconies on both floors was dwarfed by the wider black timbered edifice with its flat roof, and a veranda overlooking the front lawn. The walls were surrounded by foliage. Branches wrapped around the sides of the building, curling upwards towards the bedroom windows.

Andjela let me inside and warned me not to mention the incident in Grbavica. She walked down the empty hallway and called out for her mother.

No one replied.

She ran upstairs, shouting louder.

I wandered into the sitting room where the curtains had been pulled together. A single hardback was lying open on a side-table, with a pair of reading glasses resting on the pages. A clock was sitting on the mantelpiece. It burst into life, chiming twelve, midday.

I returned to the hall. Andjela's voice was audible somewhere on the first floor. I climbed the red-carpeted stairs and entered the first room. It was virtually empty but for some framed photographs on the far wall. In the larger of two central pictures, a man wearing military uniform with a chest full of medals glared back at the camera. The dedication inside the glass declared that this was Major Petrović, Tomas's father. The second picture was of Tomas himself, also in full military uniform. He looked like a boy standing alongside the Yugoslav flag.

The curtains were heavy as I pulled them apart. A patio door opened onto a balcony, revealing a view that stretched all the way to the mountains in the distance. The grass in the garden was overgrown. Patches of weeds were sprouting along a fence that had been kicked down in the corner. Someone had written graffiti in white paint on the shed walls and the windows had been put through.

*“Ko si ti?”*



I spun around. The woman was tall and thin, almost emaciated, but her eyes were sharp and they glared back at me. She wore a black, ankle length dress and her hair was grey, going white at the temples.

“*Ko si ti?*” she demanded while striding towards me. “*Šta želite?*”

She picked up a vase.

I backed into the balcony frame.

Andjela suddenly appeared in the doorway. She screamed at the older woman, who halted and turned around.

While Andjela chattered frantically in Serbo-Croat, the grey haired woman’s demeanour quickly altered. When Tomas’s name was mentioned, her face broke into a fragile smile. Taking a deep breath, she put down the vase, crossed the floor and clasped my hand. She introduced herself as ‘Slavica’, Andjela’s mother, and in broken English, apologised for her outburst. They’d had trouble from Muslim youths.

Slavica sat down in the nearest armchair and watched hopefully as I began to talk. I exaggerated the extent of my friendship with her son, taking care to highlight Tomas’s sense of justice whilst omitting the more eccentric aspects of his behaviour.

Slavica took a deep breath when I described Tomas’s treatment by McKenna. Afterwards, she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief but held herself together.

The bruise was stinging again. I rubbed the back of my head.

Slavica rose from the chair, clasped my skull and moved it from side to side. She looked studiously into my eyes before asking me what had happened.

I mumbled something about falling in the hotel lift.

Slavica turned to her daughter and said something in Serbo-Croat.

Andjela shook her head and replied in the same language. Her tone sounded unconvincing.

Slavica ran her fingers around the back of her head.

I groaned as she located the bruise.

She tutted and led me downstairs into the kitchen. After sitting me next to the window, she brushed my hair aside for a closer inspection. While she dabbed at the bruise with a cloth, I felt like a small child being comforted after a playground injury. She must’ve done it many times in the past for Tomas. For some reason, I couldn’t recall a similar incident with my own mother when I’d been younger. Then I felt guilty about having such negative thoughts. I told myself that I hadn’t been thinking straight.

Slavica opened the fridge door and returned with an icepack, wrapped in a thin towel. She pushed my head forward and pressed it carefully onto the bruise. Her touch was delicate, caring. She left the icepack in my hand, smiled wryly and told me to stay out of broken lifts. She knew what had happened. She'd seen it all before.

Andjela's gaunt face seemed set into a fixed worried expression. These people were hardly the Serbo-Fascists of the Western media, clasping silver crosses and machine guns, ready to cut anyone's throat. They were good people, who'd been through hell and were still living under terrible strain. I liked them. When Slavica asked me to stay for lunch, I was happy to accept.

I chatted with Slavica as she prepared the food. Andjela prompted her mother with a few words of English as the older woman described her own family, recalling, as a ten year old in Belgrade, the end of the Second World War. She wished everyone could return to the past when they were all Yugoslavs.

I watched her chop the vegetables, hollow out the potatoes and add an outer layer of onions. A cabbage leaf was carefully wrapped around a ball of stuffing. Minced meat, rice and seasonings were placed in a dish and sealed. I recognised that she was making a 'dolma'. Marija had treated my family to the same recipe on the night I'd 'graduated'.

"I'd always thought that it was Croatian food," I said.

Andjela corrected me. "Each ingredient comes from a different part of Yugoslavia. When it's baked, every component must retain its own taste, yet together the flavour is unique." She paused. "Like Sarajevo was, like Yugoslavia should be."

I tried to imagine what life must've been like in the Petrović family as Tomas and Andjela were growing up. Beneath the fearsome appearance, Slavica had a tender, caring nature. She would've been a strict parent, but not nearly as severe as Major Petrović. I wondered how many times she'd stood between her husband and son as they'd fought.

Slavica's hands shook as she slotted the food into the oven. She was still suffering. No-one could recover from the loss of a husband and a son in such a short period of time. Yet, there was an aura of defiance that surrounded her. She wouldn't easily concede defeat to anyone or anything.

My own mother hadn't been nearly so strong. Life had never been straightforward for her. Our relationship had often been difficult and we hadn't always connected. In different ways, we'd both spent our lives trailing in my father's shadow.

My thoughts drifted to Dad. Chris Rourke had always called the shots, made the headlines and taken all the glory. Okay, he loved us, but he'd also made time for a private life outside his family. Knowledge of his affairs with other women used to torture my mother. In later years, her paranoia would be routinely sparked at the slightest mention of a female colleague.

It was so different with Marija. Mum had doted on her. She'd always wanted a daughter, but it was never to be, and in the years following my birth, the succession of miscarriages almost destroyed her. Severe depression had taken hold following medical advice that she couldn't have any more children, and Dad's affairs only made matters worse. Mum's condition had always deteriorated during his absences. Then, for a few short months after Marija's arrival, she was so much happier than she'd ever been previously.

The things I'd said following Dad's death destroyed the memory of that relationship forever. It had been so needless, callous, and now it was too late to do anything about it. My mother had been far too young to give up on life. Yet she did exactly that. Not long after Dad died, the severe depression returned, this time for good. It was only eighteen months after his death when she overdosed.

I'd been working in London at that time. Unlike Andjela, I'd rarely found the time to go home. I hadn't even bothered phoning Mum regularly to check that she was okay. Afterwards, the doctor told me that she'd been very frail for several months and concluded that her death was almost certainly an accident. I was so full of self-importance that I'd hardly even noticed her decline. Part of me would always feel responsible.

At lunch, Andjela elaborated her views on Balkans identity. She insisted that no-one had ever heard of Slovenes, Serbs or Bosniaks when she was at school. "Everyone was a Yugoslav," she said, sounding just like her brother.

"But the conflict was necessary," interrupted Slavica. "Serbs were being attacked in Kosovo and Croatia. It was our duty to defend them."

Slavica's cousins had lived on the east bank of the Danube, on the Serbian-Croatian border. All were murdered by Nazi-aligned Croatians during the Second World War. "We remember," she declared. "And even today, they aren't ashamed to wave their Fascist flag in our faces. Everyone ignored what they did to my family. No-one cares."

I didn't know how to respond. I couldn't even remember what the Croatian flag looked like. There was so much I didn't understand. For several uncomfortable moments, the only sound was of Andjela's cutlery as it brushed against her plate.

Eventually Andjela broke the silence. She wanted to talk more about Tomas and his life in London. She was particularly interested to learn about Merima. “He didn’t call often,” she explained, “And he rarely discussed work or his friends. He never talked about girlfriends.”

The phone rang from the hallway. Slavica excused herself then left the table.

“‘Merima’ is a Muslim name,” giggled Andjela as her mother answered the phone, “No wonder he didn’t tell my mother.”

“I’m surprised he joined up in the first place.”

Andjela’s eyes widened. “No-one disobeyed Father.”

Shouting broke out in the corridor. Slavica was quivering, her face crimson as she rasped at the phone. She slammed down the receiver and returned to the table.

I asked if everything was alright.

She complained about nuisance calls. It was annoying but nothing to worry about. She didn’t want to talk about it.

Andjela tried to interject but Slavica halted her abruptly. There was nothing to discuss. For the remainder of the meal, we sat in silence. The older woman maintained a rigid expression throughout. After we’d finished, she took the plates to the kitchen then retired upstairs.

I asked Andjela what was going on.

“My mother’s been through a great deal.” She closed the door and slumped onto the arm of a chair. She pushed her head between the flats of her hands.

## Chapter 6

Andjela's eyes bulged with tears. I hesitated then took her hand. She pushed her head into my chest. Wiping her eyes, she revealed that Croatian investigators had arrived two weeks previously. She hadn't found out their names because Slavica had immediately thrown them out. She only knew that they were asking unpleasant questions about Tomas. The family had been pestered with phone calls ever since, and if it went on much longer, she didn't know how they were going to cope.

I opened the double doors that led onto the balcony. In the distance, the flat green fields and trees stretched for several kilometres, before rising sharply at the foot of the mountains. The air was clear as sunlight pushed through gaps in the clouds once more.

I turned around. "Let's get some fresh air."

Before we could go anywhere, Andjela went upstairs to check on her mother. She returned with the keys for the family car, a Communist-era Zastava. The engine made a choking sound every time she changed gear. After a couple of kilometres on the main road, we slowed at the entrance to a public park named "Vrelo Bosne", which Andjela translated as "Spring of Bosna."

She led the way through gates into the woodland. Although it was a mid-summer's afternoon, the park was almost deserted and the grass was overgrown. Earth, rocks and concrete rubble were lying across footpaths. Branches were stretching over the perimeter fences.

I tried to imagine the lake as it once had been. Muddy and polluted, a truck's engine had been ditched at the water's edge. Tank tracks, filled with litter, were imprinted deep in the side of the bank. Table tops in the picnic area had been vandalized or snapped in two.

"Trust me," she insisted, "I know a place."

We crossed a bridge, which was stretching over a brook. Water was rippling over rocks underneath, while insects were fidgeting in the reeds. We walked along the bank, until reaching an unspoilt clearing. The grass hadn't been cut, perhaps for years, but we flattened out a space. Andjela took a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses from her bag.

I sat down on the grass but waved her offer of a drink away.

At first she looked surprised. Then her face broke into a grin. "Very sensible," she laughed while twisting the corkscrew.

Andjela's giggle was infectious. She poured herself a drink, took her glasses off and sat down. For the first time, her eyes lit up. Her smile made her look younger.

"We used to come here all the time as children," she revealed. "We played here." She lay next to me, planting herself on her elbows against the grass. "We were so lucky in those days."

She asked about my childhood. I told her that in many ways, my early years had been idyllic and I'd wanted for nothing. My father had been a famous journalist and he'd earned a great deal of money. "It wasn't easy though, when your dad spends much of his life overseas. My mother was often unhappy. They used to fight because...well it doesn't matter now."

"And he was your inspiration...to become a journalist?"

"Of course. In many ways, I've always been following him." I paused. "Sometimes I think I'd be better off as a teacher. Maybe I'd be good at it. I've often thought about it."

She laughed.

I felt a tinge of anger. "Well, why not?"

"No not about being a teacher. It's what you said about following your father. It's true. No matter what we do, parents are always there in the background. We're always trying to please them, even when they're gone."

She began to describe her own father. In some ways, Major Petrović had been a bully. He'd wanted Tomas to be a soldier, although that was never realistic; his son didn't have the same outlook on life. The Major didn't have the same aspirations for his daughter.

"He would've quite liked me to have married a soldier," she smiled. "At least someone who was a patriot like him. I had better things to do, I wanted to study Law. He didn't like that. I'd argue with him, well, I tried to."

She sat up. "In his heart, Father was a good man. He was a proud Yugoslav. He tried to do the right thing for his family and for his country, but he was of a different generation. He grew up during the War when Serbians suffered genocide at the hands of the Croats and their Nazi allies. Fighting was a way of preserving freedom and life, of ensuring that injustice would always be defeated. Father wanted to ensure that Serbs would never be victims again."

She took a deep breath. "But not everyone could be like him. Tomas and I grew up as the world was changing. Communism was finished and people had new ideas. We could never live up to his expectations. Father's been gone for about six years. I miss him dearly, but..." She checked behind her shoulder as if somehow Major Petrović was able to hear our conversation. "In some ways, despite everything that's happened, now he's gone, I feel freer.

I can think and say what *I* think. I can do what I want to do. It's not always easy. Once, it was impossible."

She looked at me. "Does that sound selfish? Life could often be very difficult. When he was in a rage, it was almost unbearable. You have to understand that. Sometimes, it was like living in a prison."

She asked me whether my father was strict as well.

It was difficult to know how to respond. I hardly knew her, yet she'd already revealed so much about herself. In the end, I decided that the only thing was to be honest. I told her that my father didn't force me into anything. He wasn't a bully. The trouble was that we didn't spend enough time together when I was growing up because he was always away on assignments. When I was a small child, he was almost a semi-mythical figure. I knew he existed, and could tell school friends about him, and sometimes I would watch him on television. But most other fathers would come home at least once in a while. Times had changed. It hadn't been his fault, anyway. It was the nature of the job.

"The truth is I hero-worshipped Dad. I put him so high on a pedestal that I could never live up to him."

I told her that my father had achieved everything he'd wanted in life. He'd won all the awards, the money and the fame. I explained that his convictions were so strong, and that I was immensely proud of him. I told her that in many ways, he was a great man, although his success led to prolonged absences. He hadn't meant to overshadow us, but we all felt inadequate alongside him.

"Dad died a few years ago," I said. "I've never been able to live up to his expectations. I've never worked hard enough. I've never even come close. He'd do anything for the vulnerable, for the powerless while I was always cynical and selfish. I've always looked after myself."

I paused. Of course, I knew that Dad wasn't perfect either, that he'd made many mistakes, but I wasn't going to tell her about the way he'd upset Mum. And I chose not to reveal anything about our often fractious relationship either. No, there was no point in holding grievances or going over old ground. Anyway, I loved my Dad, and over the years, I'd learned to focus on the positives, on his principled approach to reporting, on the fact that his first inclination was to help those he'd reported about. Then I thought about Marija. I remembered how he'd helped her escape that hell hole and what I'd done to her in return.

"Dad wouldn't be happy about the way I've gone about my career," I said eventually.

“So many unpleasant things, stupid things have happened to other people, all because I’ve only considered myself.” I stopped.

“I’ll bet you’re a great journalist,” she said suddenly. “And you’re a good man, which is more important.”

I shook my head and smiled. “No. I’m not a good man.”

“Yes,” she insisted. “You’ve come all this way for us.”

I watched as she finished her drink. I could listen all day to her Slavic accent. And as she spoke, her breath brushed against my skin. I took her hand and squeezed it gently.

She kissed me on the cheek and smoothed the fabric of my shirt against my shoulders.

“Your father would be very proud of you.”

“Maybe.”

“Definitely.”

I paused again. “I’d love to make him proud, but I’ve too much ground to make up. Dad cared so deeply about what he was doing, that he would almost become part of the story.” I recalled his special report on the Battle of Vukovar which earned him huge plaudits. I explained that, after witnessing the suffering of Croat civilians at the hands of Serbs, his reports evolved into a campaign.

She didn’t respond.

“He changed the way British people viewed the war. Beforehand many simply dismissed it all as part of a ‘Balkans mentality’. But Dad always broke through the lies. For him, the West was always far too slow in its response to Milošević. The UN should’ve intervened militarily to support Croatian independence. It was straightforward issue: right versus wrong, freedom versus tyranny. No-one else cared, but Dad was different. He always got involved...”

“...Our television stations reported that it was Serbs, not Croats, who were slaughtered in Vukovar,” interrupted Andjela. She sat up and brushed away blades of grass from her lap. “We were told that it was a war to protect Serbs, that the Croats were Nazis, Ustaše, like in the Second World War. Our newspapers told us that it was an international conspiracy against Serbs. The Croats’ allies were the Germans, Austrians and the Vatican.” She got to her feet. “I knew it was propaganda,” she sighed, “But thousands joined up, friends from school and university.” She looked at me in the eyes. “They were *not* bad people.”

“My father was always accurate,” I insisted. “The truth is that the Serbs murdered many innocent civilians in Vukovar....”

“...But the Croats slaughtered Serbs in Krajina, last year.”



I couldn't answer her. I was vaguely aware of Operation Storm, back in August 1995. Croatia's President Tuđman had ordered the recapture of the disputed 'Krajina' region and Thousands of Serb civilians were driven out by the Croatian military. That was about all I knew, but I was too proud to admit it. And of course, it hadn't received much attention in Britain.

"The Serbs in Krajina were a defenceless people too, as innocent as anyone in Bosnia," she declared. "Yet they were beaten and killed by Tuđman." Her eyes flared up. "The West's best friend is a murderer, a cold blooded killer. Did your father report that?"

"He would've done had he lived. He won awards..."

"Would he have won anything if he'd reported that the Serbs suffered too?"

I didn't reply.

She scoffed and looked away disdainfully.

"It's not like that in England."

For several uncomfortable seconds, neither of us said anything. Suddenly, she slapped her hand on the ground. "The western media always makes Serbs out to be the bad guys." Her eyes narrowed. "I know Serbia was wrong to a degree. But two hundred and fifty thousand Serbs lost their homes or were murdered. Did you report that?" Her tone became increasingly exasperated. "What did NATO do to stop it? What did anyone do? The western nations should be ashamed, but they're not. And *you* don't care."

I didn't argue. I decided that it wasn't worth it.

"The Croatians should be ashamed more than anyone," she declared. "Yet they fly their 'Sahovnica' flag as if nothing *they* ever did was wrong."

She got up and walked to the bank. For over a minute, she stood alone, staring at the water flowing under the bridge. Then she turned to me, folded her arms and looked at the ground. The pain in her expression had returned. "Okay, what do they say about Tomas?"

I joined her by the water's edge. "I've spoken to a Croatian official in London. He gave me a file about your brother." I asked if she's heard of Voćin, in Croatia.

She shrugged.

"It's a village in eastern Croatia that was occupied by the Yugoslav People's Army. In December 1991, sixty of the eighty Croat villagers were murdered by soldiers and Serb militia men. When the Croatian military arrived to relieve the village, the bodies of fifty people, including children, were found in the church basement." I stopped. "The Croatian Government says that Tomas was an officer there."

Andjela breathed heavily. “This is stupid. Tomas was a good person.” She blinked back tears. “He wouldn’t have done anything...”

“I *know*.”

Her eyes pleaded with me to do something, anything to help.

I held her close to me. I wondered why Dad hadn’t written about crimes against Serbs? I didn’t get it and I felt so ignorant. I still couldn’t understand why they’d gone after Tomas. I was already starting to question so much of what had been reported in the past and I didn’t know who to blame anymore. It was more complicated than anything I’d read or seen back home.

I did know one thing. Tomas Petrović hadn’t murdered anyone. At first I’d thought something might’ve happened, perhaps an action out of character, in an unreal situation. Now I knew that was wrong as well, and that she was right about him. I’d witnessed his mental state too many times. He’d been too vulnerable. He hadn’t been capable of carrying out such crimes.

There’d been too much propaganda surrounding the coverage of this war. The charge against Tomas was insane, and perhaps his accusers knew it too. He was no longer around to defend himself, and his family had been left in agony to be tortured by lazy accusations and biased accounts, recorded by cynical investigators. It was despicable.

What could I do? I wondered what my father would’ve done if he’d discovered a similar injustice? I knew what he’d have done. I told Andjela that I’d already been in contact with my bosses. I was carrying out an investigation for British television, and at first, I hadn’t been sure about what I’d find. Now there was only one objective, and it didn’t matter how long it would take to achieve it. I told her that I was going to redeem Tomas’s name. Then we kissed.

## Chapter 7

Over the following week, I received several messages from Russ. All were asking for an update. I didn't respond to any of them. I felt light-headed, even elated. Andjela and I strolled through the unspoilt parts of town together. We visited the markets buying stupid stuff, listening to music, laughing and messing around. It was as if we were teenagers again. In the evenings, she took me to the newly re-opened bars and cafés. Afterwards, rather than head back to Ilidža, we often ended up back at my hotel. It was as though the war had never happened, as if London, Simmons, this project, and my gaping hole of debt had never existed, because I was happier than I could remember.

Initially, I was worried that Slavica would disapprove of my friendship with her daughter. Instead she invited me for lunch the following Sunday. When I arrived, Slavica hugged me like a long lost relative. She revealed how thrilled she was that Andjela was getting out more. She'd been moping around the house for too long.

Before I left, Slavica gave me a folder containing various military papers, forms and letters that Tomas had sent during his time in London. I'd asked for something, anything to tie in with what I already knew; a date, a number, for example. Slavica had done her best but wasn't much to go on. I thanked her anyway.

Later that afternoon, Andjela and I drove into the countryside with bicycles attached to the roof rack. She was once a keen cyclist, and before the war, our destination had always been popular with enthusiasts. The Trebević was the second smallest of the five peaks surrounding Sarajevo. It had been the site of the bobsled competition during the 1984 Olympics, but there was no longer any evidence of snow or sport. Instead, the roads were lined with warning signs about unexploded mines.

Andjela knew the safe route through dense woodland, towards the summit. She explained that, although the mountain was popular with tourists, everything changed during the Siege of Sarajevo. The mountain's ridges were used as platforms for the Yugoslav military and the slopes became a battleground when the city came under attack. Many Serb civilians were caught up in the fighting and killed.

We rode for half an hour then dismounted at a clearing, where we treaded through the long grass to take in a view of the city. Cloud cover was low; the air was suddenly cooler, thinner. I gazed down at the buildings and streets several hundred metres beneath us. Andjela pointed out the Serb enclave to the south east, known to locals as 'Srpsko Sarajevo'.

“It’s the part the tourists never visit,” she said. “Serbs fled there after the war but most of it is still in ruins. Nine out of ten people are without a job.”

Row upon row of houses, flats and blocks were in tatters. My eyes veered from the city, along the skyline, up the slope until resting on line of hollow brick shacks about a hundred yards away. I asked her what had happened.

“They belonged to Serb farmers.”

The buildings were empty, ashen and lifeless. She gave no further explanation. There was no need. We looked down. I started feeling queasy so readjusted my footing on the grass. She was right. Who’d even heard of Srpsko Sarajevo? The rest of the world knew nothing of the Serbs’ suffering. Sure, everyone had heard about the camps at Srebrenica. Everyone knew about Mladić, Karadžić and Milošević. We’d all been directed to despise them. But the Serbs weren’t the only ones to commit crimes. What did the West know of ordinary Bosnian Serbs and their struggles? Despised by self-righteous western correspondents, and now discriminated against at home, no-one cared about their pain. Who was going to tell their story? I decided that perhaps, one day I might just do that.

As we prepared to leave, I took in one last view of the city. Andjela wrapped her arms around me. The clouds began to clear as she pointed out the other mountains in the distance. My thoughts drifted to my father. I didn’t know how he’d come to his slanted viewpoint about the Serbs. It wasn’t as if he’d been unable to cope with the complexities. He’d interviewed political and military figures from California to Johannesburg to East Timor. He’d unravelled the globe’s most complex issues to devoted audiences. He’d been one of the few journalists embedded in Vukovar while the rest of the west’s media had sunned itself on the Adriatic coast. But only as the clouds began to break over Srpsko Sarajevo, I began to realise that he’d been completely wrong.

He’d always cautioned me to reflect on my ideas, to be wary of official opinion. He would turn concepts on their heads, and view matters from the perspectives of the powerless. If the mob went one way, he’d look the other. But his analysis of the former Yugoslavia was too westernised and conservative. For him, Slobodan Milošević and the Serbs represented the worst aspects of humanity. Milošević was an archetypal monster, a bully. The Serbs were racists and murderers. It was as simple as that.

It had been my father’s solemn duty to reveal the ‘Greater Serbia’ project to British viewers. He’d never cared about bias. For him, to show one’s feelings was necessary if one was to remain human. If his readers and viewers knew where he was coming from, then so much the better! But my father’s reports were too ‘black and white’, too simplistic. NATO

and the UN were his protagonists, flawed heroes, lazy and slow to be stirred into action. The Serb army always seemed to take on the roles of inhuman monsters.

Had my father become so certain of his own judgement that he'd stopped asking questions of himself? Had it become easier to take sides, particularly after Vukovar? Weren't the Serbs human beings too?

In the end, it came down to Marija. She'd been his greatest project, his most significant intervention. She'd been his adopted daughter, and in the end it was *her* prospects that had possessed him more than anything else. By trying to turn her life around, he'd been able to validate his own career and his own life.

I linked my fingers through Andjela's, though my eyes remain fixed on the burnt-out Serb shacks. The Serbs were victims as much as anybody else. They'd been smeared with an undeserved reputation, foisted on them by the lazy western press. It was a reputation my father had helped to create. I had to accept that. He'd been a good man, but his analysis was wrong. At least I had a chance to rectify matters.

## Chapter 8

Andjela's holiday ended the following week. I re-started my investigation on Tomas by flicking through his military papers. Slavica's information tallied with the Croatian government's assessment that Tomas had left the Yugoslav army in November 1991. However, there was no explanation of where he'd disappeared to, or his reasons for leaving. I'd sent letters of enquiry to Belgrade, but so far had received no response. The Bosnian army's main offices in central Sarajevo were an option. Tomas had told me that he'd deserted so I reckoned that the army would have something to go on; a record of events, maybe, or even a dishonourable discharge. I phoned to arrange an appointment for later that afternoon.

Recalling Bosko's rant about the Markale massacres, I headed towards the domes and pointed arches of the Old Town. The main street opened into an uncovered square beneath luscious, mountain slopes of copses and shrubbery. I shielded my eyes from the sun. Stall holders were crouching in porches while crowds went in search of jewellery, pottery, clothes or cheap food. Teenagers were smoking on the steps of the wooden 'Sebilj' water fountain. Parents were smoking and chatting while their toddlers fed the pigeons.

The call to prayer droned from a minaret. Dozens of hijab-wearing European women flowed through the gates of the Gustav Beg Mosque. The outer wall was splattered with machine-gun bullet holes, and scaffolding had been erected around the perimeter. Men, clad in white, were sitting cross-legged in the courtyard.

Western observers had reported that this part of Sarajevo was still in ruins, that the Serbs had destroyed everything. Well okay, serious damage was still visible, but you needed to be here for several days before you realised that a great deal had been exaggerated.

Red petals, symbolising drops of blood, had been cut into the paving stones, marking out the spot where the first mortars had struck. A memorial plaque had been fastened to a wall with a statement written in English underneath. Over one hundred shoppers were killed during two mortar attacks in 1992 and 1994. The language was blunt in its condemnation of the Bosnian Serbs.

I stared at the memorial, deciding that, on balance, no-one really knew what had happened. Bosniak militia groups had been active that day but Westerners never mentioned that. Accusing the Serbs was too easy, too convenient, a form of victor's justice. Serbia was allied with Russia. Most British reporters had simply fallen into line and adopted the western narrative. As Bosko had said, "Who won the fucking war?"

I walked around the stalls and chatted to the locals, yet whenever the conflict was mentioned I received blank responses. People simply shook their heads or walked away. Eventually I was directed towards the War Crimes Investigation Offices in the centre of the city. When I arrived, the officials insisted they were only working on events that had occurred in Bosnia. Their main focus was on the massacre at Srebrenica, and they'd no interest in what had happened in Croatia during 1991. I was wasting my time.

Later that afternoon, I took a taxi to the Bosnian Army headquarters. Its offices were situated near the Latin bridge where Princip had assassinated Arch Duke Ferdinand in 1914. An oversized blue and yellow flag with a line of white stars was drooping from the porch. I pushed through the large, glass revolving doors. A man, wearing an all-black uniform, projected a fixed glare from behind a desk. When I asked if anyone spoke English, he disappeared into a back room.

A minute later, another officer appeared. I explained that I'd rung earlier. Tomas Petrović had lived in what was now the Bosnian Federation. I needed access to his military records. He'd left the army suddenly.

The uniformed man remained stoney-faced. "Which regiment?"

"Tito's Second Corps."

He raised a lazy eyebrow.

"The Yugoslav People's Army."

The soldier shook his head.

"But he lived in Ilidža."

"Try Belgrade," he drawled, already turning his back.

Two days later, another phone message was pushed under my door. I could barely bring myself to pick it up. It was from Roger. The schedules were being finalised in ten days. They'd keep a slot open until then. If they didn't hear from me before that time, with a full synopsis and plan, they'd assume I was no longer able to deliver.

I was beginning to feel desperate. Everywhere I went, the National Museum, the library, army offices, the police, the result was the same. The door was slammed shut as soon as I revealed Tomas's cultural background. And I'd still heard nothing back from Belgrade. Was it possible that someone had intercepted the post, spotted the Serbian postmark and destroyed the letter? In any case, I was getting nowhere. The only positive discovery was of the Croatian Investigators' company card, lying loose in the papers from Slavica.

I lay motionless in my hotel room. I was meant to be seeing Andjela after she'd finished work, but I hadn't even got changed. I dragged myself to the mirror, stared and rubbed my hand up and down my chin. I looked pale, sick even. My head was beginning to spin, but at least I hadn't had a drink since leaving England.

There was an urgent rap at the door.

Andjela was standing in the hallway, grinning. "There are some people I want you to meet."



## Chapter 9

It had already gone eight o'clock. The locals were flowing towards the cafés and restaurants on the Ferhajida main street. Spotlights were lining the way, illuminating the white-brick and timber framework of the one-storey, shops and stalls.

Andjela had arranged for me to meet Tomas's friends at a party, but we decided to eat first. She took me away from the bright lights to a narrow, darker alley. It was still warm so we sat outside a tiny café-bar with a newly re-painted front. We were the only customers. Her hair had been newly styled. Now parted, it flowed over the side of her face. She looked confident and relaxed, so different to when we'd first met.

Andjela eventually ordered only a salad. I try a 'Burek', a rolled pastry with spinach, meat and potato. When I ordered some Kajmak cheese to pour on top, she winced.

"It's how they eat it in Croatia," I asserted.

"How do you know?"

I smiled to myself and peered through the café's windows. 'Bosnian' coffee was being prepared over a fire. As the water boiled, powder was added and stirred; foam flowed down the sides. The coffee was brought to us in a copper pot called a džezva. Two glasses of water were placed next to the cups.

"You lick it before drinking," she said, nodding at the lump of sugar next to the cup.

I picked up the sugar then glanced at her for reassurance.

"Go on!"

I licked it then put my mouth to the rim.

"Careful, it's hot."

It scorched my lips. I shoved the coffee cup back onto the table and snatched a glass of water.

"I told you to be careful." She put her hand to her mouth and giggled.

It had been days since Andjela had mentioned Tomas. Instead, while we ate, she concerned herself with local issues, and I didn't try stopping her. She chattered at break-neck speed about the refurbished school building, her new colleagues, and the children in her nursery class who were born during the war. She described their problems and traumas, the screaming, shaking and the tears.

I sat and listened. I'd been meaning to tell her that I was getting nowhere with the investigation, and that I'd have to leave soon, probably for Belgrade. But while she chattered with such enthusiasm, I didn't have the heart.

"I'm going back to university," she announced suddenly. "I want to study Psychology, and become a child psychologist."

"Good," I said. "It's a great idea."

Her mouth broke into a grin. Then she stopped as the doubt returned to her face. "Do you think I could do it?"

"Of course you could do it." I paused. But she'd lost her job because she was a Serb. Wouldn't it be difficult to find a university place?

"Oh, I'll never make it here. I'll have to go somewhere else."

"London has plenty of universities."

She smiled. She'd always wanted to visit England. She liked reading Shakespeare and Dickens.

I told her that if she liked Charles Dickens, then London was the place. While I was talking, I felt a sense of satisfaction. I was finally using my time at college for something worthwhile. It gave me a buzz to pass on my knowledge.

She interrupted me. It was a little too much information, despite her insistence that I was easy to listen to. "You make sense. Maybe teaching is a good idea after all."

It was kind of her, but I didn't agree. I was a journalist and I had a project to finish.

She smiled and carried on eating. When the conversation lulled, she leant forward. "You've made me very happy."

"Why?"

"Because you're a good man, Daniel."

I didn't reply.

For some reason, my thoughts turned to Marija. She'd been in the back of my mind since I'd arrived here. Of course, I'd told myself many times that she was ancient history. Yet her presence still lingered, even more so since I'd been with Andjela. It was probably unfair but I found myself making comparisons. Marija had always possessed a stronger sense of direction than Andjela, who wasn't as confident. Marija was tougher. She was a talented photographer, and she'd grasped her opportunities, there was no doubt about that. But there was also something mysterious, a side that attracted and also repelled. She'd been a loner. Never once had she brought someone home, or talked about friends.

Yet by the time she'd arrived in England, Marija's life was already in turmoil. She was much younger than me. And if she was selfish, was I not ambitious? Perhaps I just felt threatened. I wrecked her opportunities, and said all those things to smear her name. Ultimately, I was the selfish one.

Andjela wasn't as attractive but had a kinder heart. She was more sensitive and in some ways, more vulnerable. She too, had been damaged by the war. She was an ex-Yugoslav, but like her brother, she was fiercely proud of her Serb identity. Andjela was sick of being portrayed as a villain, when everyday life made her feel like a victim.

Had Marija defined herself as Croatian or Yugoslav? I couldn't recall discussing identity politics with her. She hadn't raised the issue and at the time, I wouldn't have understood the complexities. But if Marija had been cold, there was real warmth to Andjela's personality, despite everything that had happened to her. Okay, she needed me around to redeem her brother's name, but that didn't worry me. She was genuine and I liked being around her.

The owner switched off the lights. He began sweeping up the front entrance as Andjela took my arm. We strolled towards the main street, left the old town and came to a crossroads. A battered white, Lada pulled up.

"Dejan," she whispered. "A friend of Tomas."

A young man in his late twenties got out and hugged Andjela. He was thin with wispy black hair and a pasty face.

"We've organised a party," he said, shaking my hand. "You're very welcome."

The passenger door creaked as Dejan wrenched it from the frame. The locks on the backdoors were broken so he pulled the front passenger's seat back. Returning to the driver's side, he struggled with the ignition until the engine finally rumbled into life.

Within twenty minutes were passing through a Communist-era housing estate in East Sarajevo. A sign, obscured by graffiti, announced in large capitals that we'd entered the Republika Srpska. Most of the street lights were missing or smashed, and there were no signs of industry or commerce. Dejan parked at the foot of a tower block. Its name had been torn from the entrance and two craters were gaping from the side wall. The night sky was pitch-black, but lights were shining from the windows several storeys up.

We took the staircase to the fourth floor. Andjela flung open the fire door and led the way along a corridor that stank of cat litter and urine. A trace of light shot from underneath the door of a nearby apartment, and mutterings were audible from within. At the end of the

passage we turned into another corridor. This one was completely dark, apart from a block of light at the far end, which widened as we approached.

The front door was open. When we entered, a crowd of about a dozen people raised their heads. It had the appearance of a student flat although the inhabitants looked a little too old to be still at college. A central wall had been smashed through. Loose plaster and brickwork were visible through gaps in the wallpaper. A dozen bottles had been stacked on a breakfast bar, and a narrow set of balcony doors opened onto a crumbling ledge. Jazz was playing on the stereo.

The guests were mostly in their late twenties. The faded colours of their clothes recalled the fashions of an earlier era, signalling that their youths had been lost to the conflict. A handful of slightly older people were sitting in the middle of the room. A man and woman waved frantically at Andjela.

“Are these your friends?” I asked.

“Some of them are. Tomas knew them better than I do.”

Marko and Dragana introduced themselves and presented me to their group. All were former undergraduates, articulate English speakers, whose futures had been skewered by the war. Some had trained to be teachers or accountants before the fighting had broken out, but there were no jobs left for them now. Others were artists or former soldiers.

I was introduced as a friend of Tomas. All were friendly and receptive. They clearly missed him, and were quick to praise his sensitivity and his honesty. But they were not as forthcoming about his life as I’d hoped. Very few anecdotes were told, and there was a sudden hush when I mentioned that I was a journalist.

Marko helped me out. He confirmed that Tomas had always possessed strong values and had a peaceful, almost hippy outlook on life. He was more committed to his art than to money, and he’d always rejected violence completely. The only time he’d ever become aggressive was about six months before the war.

“He saw two young men throw rotten food at a homeless woman outside the bus station.” Marko recalled. “He chased them down the street. I’d never seen him angry like that.”

“It shows how much he cared about people,” added Dragana. “That meant everyone. Not just his friends.”

When I asked about the recent conflict, the group gauged each other’s reactions before responding. They all agreed the violence was terrible. After all, who wanted war? But

the fighting had marked them out as Bosnian Serbs and they weren't going to apologise for that. When I asked about Karadžić, Mladić, or Milošević, they fell silent again.

There were mixed feelings about the conflict's roots. Some blamed the Serb leaders. Others blamed Bosnian President, Alija Izetbegović. Dragana said that Izetbegović would've turned Bosnia into an Islamic republic if he'd been given the chance. He'd even written a book calling for the imposition of Sharia. She supported the idea of a 'Republika Srpska' and claimed that if its borders hadn't been defined, vengeance would've been pursued against ordinary Serbs.

Marko dismissed her views. He was a former soldier in the Bosnian Serb army but he didn't blame the Muslims for the war. For him, there was never going to be an Islamic state. It was all malicious propaganda that had been spread regardless of what Izetbegović had or hadn't written decades ago.

Marko had witnessed excessive brutality and criminality perpetrated by the Serb army. He wanted his people to face the truth about massacres at Srebrenica and Gospić, and he was opposed to the creation of a separate Bosnian Serb state. There needed to be more unity and understanding if everyone was to move beyond the past,

When I asked him what he did for a living, now that the war was over, he grimaced then cursed in Serbo-Croat. He knew of one graduate friend who drove a taxi and another who worked on his father's market stall. Several others were cleaners. Work was hard to come by.

I assured them that my stay in Bosnia had opened my eyes. I'd no idea that ordinary Serbs endured hardships like this. I told them I sympathised with their plight.

Marko blushed slightly but thanked me. He hoped that all Serbs and Muslims would be able to live together soon.

"You believe in fantasies," spouted a fat man who began jabbing his finger in the air. Everyone turned to face him as he took a deep drag from his cigarette. "I'll never work for a Turk."

The others shouted him down. He put his hand against his mouth as if mockingly accepting his own stupidity then smirked to himself.

Andjela took my arm. She explained that 'Turk' was a term of abuse aimed at Muslims. We walked away. I wanted to know more about Tomas but I hadn't any new leads.

"It doesn't matter. Dejan wants to show you something."

She pulled me towards the far side of the flat. Dejan led us into a narrow room and switched on the sidelight. It was chilly and uncarpeted, virtually empty of furniture.

“I cleaned yesterday because I’m moving out. Tomas and I used it as a studio.”

As music drifted in from the next room, Dejan pulled out a set of canvasses from behind the desk.

Andjela slapped his shoulder. “You didn’t tell me.”

“I only rediscovered them yesterday.” He turned to me. “Tomas was so proud of these ones.”

He passed me the first painting. It depicted a village in summertime. Colours burst from the frame, similar to the style of a Van Gogh.

“Tomas was proudest of this piece,” said Dejan. “It won him a place at university.”

The painting underneath was paler. Set on a path winding into the woodland, it was less fresh. Then there were several still-life efforts and a series of black and white paintings. The last picture was also on a black background. Two white eagle heads had been painted back to back. A cross was floating between them with a crown hovering above.

Andjela grabbed the painting and examined it before quickly returning it to Dejan. Then she turned to me and shrugged. “Tomas was a patriotic Serb. What’s wrong with that? So am I.”

Dejan packed the paintings away without further comment.

It took us nearly an hour to cross back into the Bosnian part of Sarajevo. When we arrived at the hotel, I explained about the calling card I’d found in Slavica’s file. It was from Croatian investigators. If I was going to make any progress, I’d need to visit their offices in Split and assess their findings.

“When will you return?”

“I’ve got a couple of weeks before I have to report back.”

Andjela said nothing. She sat down on the bed with Tomas’s file and began flicking through his personal letters sent from London. I lay next to her, facing the ceiling and feeling my eyelids close. It was late.

“There’s nothing in there,” I murmured. “I’ve been through it.”

“Have you looked at the dates? When was this supposed event in Voćin?”

“Uh, December, 1991.”

She checked the postmark on the envelopes, before discarding each letter in turn.

I sat up.

She finished sifting through the cards and shook her head. “They’re all from 1992 and 1993.” She shoved them back in the folder. A postcard stuck out from the middle of the pile.

I pulled it out. Colour pictures of Buckingham Palace and a double-decker bus shone from the front. Tomas had written something on the back.

“He couldn’t have been in Voćin,” I declared, pointing at the date. The postcard had been sent from England in late November 1991, but the deaths at Voćin had occurred in December, by which time he was already in London.

She snatched it from my hand. Her eyes moved quickly, zigzagging across the card before homing in on the corner. Then she screamed out loud and hugged me.

The guest in the next-door room banged on the wall to complain about the noise. I held the card aloft, flicking it triumphantly between my forefinger and thumb. “We’re nearly there.”

## Chapter 10

The following morning I booked a coach to Split. Then I called Roger Simmons. Nothing had changed. I'd nine days to get back to him with a detailed overview or they'd fill the slot with something else.

The coach from Sarajevo to Croatia's west coast took seven long hours. We crawled through valleys, along narrow hillside roads and untouched minefields, towards Split, on the edge of the Adriatic Sea. Before the war, Split's historical sites and clean beaches had been popular destinations for thousands of tourists. But although the city was spared most of the carnage, by November 1991, sporadic fighting had broken out. Dozens of civilians were killed when the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Navy ordered a light frigate to shell the city.

By the 1996, all wreckage had been systematically cleared from the city's streets. Yet although the signs on gift shops, restaurants and museums were newly re-polished and cleaned, the harbour remained empty and the cruise ships were yet to return. Although crowds of locals still jostled for food in the market places, only a trickle of tourists could be seen trailing around the ruins of Diocletian's ancient palace. Swathes of seats lay empty outside bars and restaurants, and untouched sand stretched around the coastline.

The investigators' offices were near the centre of town. The receptionist led me up three flights of stairs to a top floor studio. Light was reflecting through a glass ceiling onto a desktop covered in files, books and scraps of notepaper. Next to the far wall, where most of the paint had been scraped away, a pot and brush was resting on a workbench.

I crossed the floorboards, and grabbed a seat. On the opposite wall was a line of portrait-length photographs, all of young men, framed and displayed with dates of birth and death. A plate underneath stated: 'Defenders of Dubrovnik.' It looked like a high school leavers' parade. Many of the fallen were less than eighteen when were killed.

There was a message on my mobile phone. It was Russ, asserting that I'd only one more week to send the company a preliminary report. The deadline for the production meeting was being brought forward.

"Bastards." I switched off the phone.

The office door burst open and a middle-aged man in a shirt and tie strode into the room.

My eyes widened.

When he saw me he opened his arms.



“I don’t believe it.” I stared, open-mouthed.

“I thought your name looked familiar,” he laughed.

We shook hands and embraced.

It had only been a few years, but Gary Ingram looked older, thinner. There was no sign of the camera he’d carried into war-zones with my father. Gone also was the childish baseball cap that he always wore the wrong way around, and the Bermuda shorts that he took to every violent political hotspot, regardless of the weather.

“Last time we saw each other, you were at university,” he mused after releasing me from his grip. “I take it you finally graduated.”

I smiled.

“I’ll bet your father was thrilled.”

He led me into his office. We talked for a while about Dad. Gary winced when I raised their near legendary reputation among foreign correspondents. All hell-raising was officially consigned to the past. The camera had been discarded long ago, and his life was following a different course. After Yugoslavia had agreed to Croatian independence, he quit his career in England. Just like that. It took everyone by surprise when he returned to Croatia to work for the new government. He lived in Vukovar at first, helping to track down missing civilians. It was during these investigations that he met his wife, Jelena. Later they moved to Split to set up their own firm.

Gary admitted that for years he’d been living only for himself, but he’d finally grown up. The investigations offered him a chance to put something back, and his experiences in the field had given him valuable insights. “There’s real bad feeling over here, hatred still. People need to find out what happened to their own families, but they don’t want to help the other side.” He swung slowly from side to side in his chair. “We received your enquiry about Petrović.”

I recounted Tomas’s story, that he was a young artist who’d escaped a terrible war to end up in London. Although he’d done nothing wrong, the Croatians were accusing him of having a role in the Voćin massacre. I stopped and waited for a response.

Gary didn’t reply.

I asked if he could help.

He paused. “After you rang, Jelena went through our files. It’s not one of our priority cases but some work has been completed. There’s a stack of evidence.”

“And?”

He rubbed his eyes. “Dan, why are you wasting your time on this guy?”

“He was a good man, and his family...”

“...He was lucky the Croatians never caught up with him.” Gary began swinging on his chair again. “There are better options if you’re looking for ideas. Why don’t you visit Srebrenica?”

I was unable to speak. Neither of us uttered a word until the receptionist burst through the door, clutching a file.

Gary sat up, “This is Jelena, my wife.”

The woman smiled, but after a brief handshake, turned towards her husband. She whispered something into his ear and pushed the file under his nose. He winced, picked up the phone and began dialling. After chattering down the receiver in Serbo-Croat for a couple of minutes, he looked up at me and put his hand over the mouthpiece. “Sorry Dan. We’re very busy. Can we see each other later?”

I’d noticed a café-bar near the beach, on the way into town. I described it and we agreed to catch up that evening. Jelena led me to the door. She apologised for the brevity of our meeting and wished me luck with my story. Before I could reply, she’d already disappeared back into the office.

It was nine o’clock and darkness had fallen. I was sitting outside the café adjacent to the beach. Although a handful of tourists remained, most had moved away from the patio and onto the sand where a band had been set up underneath the palm trees. It had been eight hours since we’d met, yet I couldn’t push Gary’s words about Tomas from my mind.

A waitress appeared with a tray of beers and spirits. I watched her place each bottle down on a nearby table. I hadn’t had a drink since leaving England. I needed one now. I called the waitress over and ordered a beer. By the time Gary arrived, half an hour later, I’d finished two more.

Wearing a plain t-shirt and shorts, Gary looked older than his forty five years. He frowned at the thud of the music booming from within the glass panelled walls. The waitress strode past our table. I shouted over for two more beers.

Gary held up his hand, “Not for me.” He ordered an orange juice. Noticing my expression, he added, “Okay, may be one or two. But I want to be back before midnight.”

He explained that his final assignment had been at the end of 1991. He’d been sent with my father to cover the aftermath of the Siege at Vukovar.

“I used to let it wash over me. Until one day, I watched them cart a whole family out of sight, grandparents, mothers and children. Dozens were later found, piled up with bullet wounds in the back of their heads. In the past, I’d just...” He shook his head.

I asked about Jelena.

“Two of her brothers died when the Serbians shelled the city.” He stopped. “I’d never really understood your father until then,” he said. “It reminded me of a story he used to tell, of a reporter he’d met in Vietnam, an Australian. This guy had watched a Buddhist monk pour oil over himself then, as a protest, immolate himself. Do you know what this Australian reporter did?”

I didn’t answer.

“He got his notebook out and wrote it all down, as the monk lay there, dying in the flames. Could you do that?”

“I don’t know.”

Gary ran his hand over his forehead. “I know what your father would’ve done.”

“Started a campaign,” I laughed.

Gary smiled wistfully. “Maybe I’ll have another drink.”

The next couple of hours were spent reminiscing about Dad. As time drifted by, Gary became louder, but there was no-one around to hear us.

“Chris was the greatest person I ever knew.” He took another gulp of beer. “He cared about people, and he loved you dearly. He was always telling me what you were up to. He was thrilled that you were doing things he’d never done while he was young, and how proud he was of you.”

A surge of pride quickly subsided. It hurt me that Dad hadn’t told me that himself. Why couldn’t he have told me all those years ago?

Gary began jabbing his finger. “Someone had to tell the world about what the Serbs were doing, the fucking animals.”

“That’s a stupid thing to say,” I snapped.

The beat thudding from the beach, suddenly stopped. The dozen or so tourists cried out in dismay as the DJ offered his apologies in broken English.

I slapped my hand on the table. “Everyone talks about the Serbs. But Croatia got rid of a quarter of a million people. No-one stopped them and hardly anyone reported it.”

For several seconds, he only stared. “Who’ve you been talking to?”

“Do you research crimes against the Serbs?”

“Listen to me.” He began jabbing his finger again, his tone was more aggressive. “Do you know how many innocent Croatians were murdered in 1991 and 1992?”

I rolled my eyes.

“Everyone knows about the Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica. But what about the events that took place every day that didn’t make the headlines? Have you heard of the Sremska prison camp?”

I didn’t reply. No, obviously, I hadn’t heard of it.

“I covered Široka Kula and the aftermath of the Saborsko massacre. You can’t help it. You *become* involved.” He banged his glass on the table. “And you’re involved too, with this Petrović. The trouble is, it’s the wrong fight.”

I finished my drink. My empty glass slipped from my grasp and bounced onto the table. The rim broke, and spun in the air before landing on the floor.

I waved for the waitress to come over.

She approached slowly.

“I’ll have another one,” I said, “...oh make that two.”

“I’ve had enough,” Gary interrupted.

“Maybe *you* ’ve had enough too,” she said to me.

“I can’t hear you,” I replied, leaning towards her. “Do you speak English?”

“I just spoke to you in English,” she sneered. “Are you deaf?”

I glared at her.

“I’m sorry,” said Gary, getting to his feet. “We’ve both had enough, thanks.” He slapped my shoulder. “Let’s go back to my place. I want to show you everything I’ve found out.”

Gary lived in the old town, a kilometre from the beach. It was a long way past midnight and there were no street lights away from the main street. Climbing a steep bank, we moved along the narrow pitch-black passageway using the medieval brickwork to guide us. Soon we found ourselves in a dimly-lit courtyard. Gary led the way up the exterior stairwell to the first floor apartment. He opened the door, making enough noise to wake Jelena. He apologized even more loudly before leading me into his main study. I was left to recover on the sofa while he made some coffee.

The study was filled with banners, photographs and portraits dating back to the war in Croatia from 1991 to 1992. Files of war crimes evidence and videos of news reports had been

stacked against the far wall. The 'Sahovnica' flag of Croatia with its checkerboard emblem, was hanging in the corner.

I sat down on the sofa. Gary soon re-appeared with two coffees. On the table were copies of newspapers and magazines from the war period. He pointed out *Politika Ekspres*, *Duga* and other Serbian publications. One 1993 edition of *Duga* included a column written by Slobodan Milošević's wife, Mirjana.

"We called it 'Mira's horoscope'." He found a picture of the first lady. "One week, she would denounce a rival of her husband; the next week, the rival would disappear."

I sipped my coffee while Gary translated a paragraph Mirjana had written about Dobrica Ćosić, then President of the Yugoslav Federation. It ended with the line, "He is a fine novelist, but just not up to the job."

He tossed the magazine onto the pile and sank back in his chair. "A few months later, Ćosić was toppled. The coup was arranged by Slobodan. When we wanted to discover who was next to fall, we'd simply read Mira's columns."

Another Serbian magazine purported to show Vukovar in 1991. A photograph depicted a soldier holding out his outstretched hand. Resting on his palm were dozens of children's teeth.

"It says that the Croats gouged out Serb children's eyes and cut off fingers to make necklaces. It's great material, convinced huge numbers of people; brainwashed them. All lies, of course."

"But Serbs were hurt too. They were pushed into enclaves, discriminated against..."

"Okay, nationalism rose everywhere, but the violence only served Milošević's and Serbia's ambitions."

"That's a clichéd, western view." Feeling the heat rise inside, I ripped the postcard from my pocket. "It's not as simple as that. And Tomas wasn't at Voćin. He was in London by November 1991."

Gary scrutinised the card for a few seconds then handed it back to me. "So what?" He looked puzzled. "Who's talking about Voćin?"

"The Croatians said he was there..."

"We ruled out his involvement there long ago." He headed for a cabinet behind his desk. Returning to the sofa, he shoved a file under my nose. The first contained legal papers. I couldn't read them, they were all written in Serbo-Croat.

“Our records show that Petrović went AWOL in late October 1991. We don’t know why, but not long beforehand, he’d become attached to a right-wing, extremist group called the ‘The White Eagles’.”

On the final page, a photograph had been clipped to a printed sheet. A dozen young men in army uniform were standing in a line, holding a banner showing two white eagles on a black background. It was the same image as the one I’d seen on the canvas in Sarajevo. Their faces were young, idealistic and defiant. Standing at the end of the back row, Tomas Petrović was glaring back at the camera.

Gary pointed out another paper with a military stamp in the corner. “They were assigned to a joint operation into Lovas in north east Croatia during mid-October 1991. On the day before Chris and I arrived, dozens of Croat villagers were marched into a minefield.”

I stared down at the sheet.

“We’ve a very good contact in the Bosnian Serb military.” He turned the page. A line of passport-size photographs had been printed with names of soldiers underneath. “The men at the top were the commanders.” Four rows down and half way along the list, was Tomas’s photo. He’d been given a military style crew-cut and was dressed in a black uniform.

“But you can tell the Petrović family they don’t need to worry about Tomas’s honour anymore. I don’t know who supplied your information, but the Croatians gave up chasing junior officers months ago.”

I asked why his investigation team had visited Ilidža.

“We wanted evidence about senior officers. We’ve no real interest in Tomas Petrović.”

I let the sheet fall to the table. I couldn’t believe it.

“Over sixty villagers were murdered during the occupation,” he continued. “Twenty died in the minefield. All were from Lovas and Opatovac.”

“*Opatovac?*”

He paused. “Yes.”

Neither of us spoke.

It’s Gary who broke the silence. “What happened to Marija?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, she wasn’t at Chris’s funeral.”

“She left,” I paused.

“Have you heard from her?”

“No.”

We walked back to my hotel. Gary chatted about his latest case and where he was going the following day.

I was no longer listening.

The hotel was closer than I'd expected. When we reached the front entrance, he handed me the remainder of the file. "We're not interested in Tomas Petrović anymore."

I thanked him anyway.

"What are you going to do with it?"

I propped myself up against the entrance pillar. "Son of a high ranking officer, gets involved in an atrocity, goes AWOL, hides in London then kills himself as the police close in."

Gary nodded.

"Why do you think he ran away?"

He shrugged. "Couldn't deal with what he'd seen or what he'd done? Who knows? We'll probably never know. War drives some people over the edge. Especially wars like this one." He lowered his voice. "Are you going to tell his family?"

I thought about Andjela. I reckoned she must've known about all this. How could she not have known? Yes, she'd known the truth and had sought to conceal it. Worse than that, she'd used me, probably from the beginning. I tried to control my breathing, allowing the anger to slowly subside. She was expecting me to ring her the following day. She could forget it.

He looked weary as he bade me farewell. "Whatever you decide, always remember your father. Think about what *he* would've done. Chris's judgement was pretty sound. He always did the right thing in the end."

I bowed my head. "Yeah, he was a good man."

"He was a great man, Dan. Remember that. And he'd be thrilled with your progress."

My eyes began to well up. It was late. I'd had too much to drink. It was time to turn in.

"I'll get Jelena to give you a lift to the airport tomorrow," he called out.

"No thanks," I replied. "I've got a story to finish."

I waved while he disappeared down a side street. I realised that my story was going to end very differently to the way I'd originally thought. It wasn't the story of a misunderstood but principled young soldier, who was falsely accused and hounded to his death. Instead it was the tale of a cruel killer; a thug who'd murdered innocent civilians in cold blood then run

away. This assignment was far from over. Tomorrow, I'd travel to the scene of his crimes. And when I'd finished, I'd write the truth about Tomas Petrović.



## Chapter 11

*Tomas Petrović joined 'The White Eagles', a fascist group in late September 1991. No-one in the Yugoslav army apparently discouraged him. Several paramilitary groups including 'The White Eagles' and Yugoslav army reservists, moved into Opatovac on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1991, having devastated neighbouring Lovas three days previously. Villagers were tortured with electrodes or beaten with iron bars, sticks and knives. Survivors were forced to wear white ribbons, identifying them as Croats.*

*Before the occupation, Opatovac was home to five hundred and fifty people. As a result of the invasion, three hundred and twenty people were made refugees. Fifteen homes were completely destroyed and about fifty others were damaged. The local church was devastated and everything of value was stolen.*

It was late. I put down my pen then cradled my head in my hands. It was meant to be a proposal for a television programme. Instead, it had become a record of unravelling sanity, a descent into despair. The coach journey had taken eight long hours to the east of Croatia and the Danube. Rather than cut through Bosnia, the coach company's route had veered north for several hundred miles just to stay within Croatia's borders. After clearing all known minefields, we'd finally headed east towards the city of Vukovar.

I was staying in a simple, one storey cottage in Opatovac, a village close to the city. Gary Ingram had given me the address. There was one sitting room and no frills. In the corner were icons of the Virgin and Child. My elderly landlady was singing quietly to herself as she prepared a meal in the kitchen. Dubravka had helped Gary with evidence about the Lovas minefield massacre in 1991. Her husband had been murdered by the Yugoslav People's Army.

I shut my eyes. Nearly six years previously, war had broken out following Croatia's declared independence from Yugoslavia. Reports of appalling levels of violence had brought my father and Gary Ingram to these villages in the summer of 1991. They'd journeyed along the Danube to the nearby villages of Lovas and Opatovac. It was here that they'd come across Marija Kovač.

I opened my eyes. Dubravka put a salad onto the table and stood with a bottle of wine. She asked if I wanted something to drink. I thanked her but my head still throbbed from my

hangover. I asked for a glass of water instead and while I ate, skimmed through what I'd written so far.

"Who was he?" Dubravka pointed over my shoulder to Tomas's name on the page.

"I met him in London," I replied. "He was a cleaner."

"Was he a friend?"

"He was a criminal." I put my knife and fork together.

She took the plate. I told her that the story was nearly finished.

"Already? And you've come all this way." She disappeared into the kitchen.

I thought for a moment. "Have you heard of anyone named 'Marija Kovač'?"

There was no reply.

I followed Dubravka into the kitchen. She was washing up. I asked again.

"I can't remember anyone with that name," she replied. "And I know everyone."

I told her that Marija had lived in Opatovac with her mother. Her parents had separated when she was a child. Her father had lived in Lovas.

"There were many refugees after the war," Dubravka said with a shrug. "Some returned. Not many."

I revealed that my father had worked as a foreign correspondent in Croatia during its War of Independence. I explained that following her mother's death, Marija had been adopted by my father and brought to live with us in England. But there was a falling out and she left.

"Why would she come back here?" she asked.

I thought about it then agreed.

She wiped her hands and took off her apron. "I've never heard of anyone named 'Kovač', she replied. "But I will ask my friends."

The village was surrounded by hills, just far enough away from the industrial smoke of Vukovar's rubber factories. The larger settlement, Lovas, was five kilometres inland. With Serbia just across the Danube to the East and Bosnia to the South, the populations on all sides of the border had borne the brunt of some of the heaviest fighting.

Without the beaches, historical sites and the money from tourism, the recovery of the Croatian north east region had been slower than on the west coast. Despite the relative lack of prosperity, nearly all the fifty or so buildings in Opatovac had been restored. Their grey walls and clay roof tiles showed few remaining signs of damage and parts of the road leading into the village had been re-laid. But many of the newly planted trees were already shorn of

leaves; some drooped from poles, having wilted from lack of care. The playground near the school was empty and apart from the mutterings of the handful of locals as they left the church, an overwhelming silence engulfed the village.

I decided that most of the locals would be at Mass on a Sunday morning, so I made my way to the church. Newly built on the foundation of a previous building, that had been destroyed in the war, a single tower stretched up from its white-bricked walls.

I stepped inside as the organ music was playing a final hymn. The singing was faint and although there was room for several hundred, only about twenty people were sitting in the pews. At the end of the service, the parishioners filed through the narrow doorway before picking their way through the broken stones and rocks that covered the path outside. I noticed a middle-aged man wearing a cravat. He helped an elderly woman, wearing a black peasant's dress, down the church steps.

I asked if they spoke English. The man stopped and his mouth broke into an uncertain smile. I explained that I was visiting the area. I wanted to know about the occupation during the war. He closed his eyes and placed his hand over his forehead. The old woman moaned and tugged at his arm. I told him that I was researching the massacres for a British television company. After hesitating, he released himself and walked over. In broken English he revealed that in October 1991, the Yugoslav army appeared from the hills behind the village. Although neighbouring Lovas had been savaged for three days, the locals of Opatovac hoped that the tanks would move straight on to Vukovar. Instead, one morning they arrived with troops and artillery.

“What happened to the villagers?”

He pointed to a field which stretched about two hundred metres to the woodland. “Some people shot running to the river. Others make it onto water, but are surrounded by gunboats.”

“What happened to the people who were captured?”

The old woman reappeared at his side. She started moaning again.

“I am sorry,” he said. “My mother wants to get back.” He took her arm and turned back towards the village.

Beyond the trees was the Danube. I tried to imagine the villagers stumbling across the field towards the river. The terror, the loss of life; it was almost impossible to comprehend. “I forgot to ask,” I shouted. “Have you heard of anyone named, ‘Marija Kovač’?”

They both stopped. The woman turned her ear towards me and screwed up her face.

“Marija Kovač,” I repeated.

The man whispered into his mother's ear.

She shook her head.

"Do you know where the Kovač family lived?"

She pulled his arm again.

"We do not know her," he replied.

The ground was bumpy and uneven as I walked towards the trees. Clumps of weeds and patches of dirt were littered with rocks and stones. I skipped over a ditch to find the grass growing thicker as I neared the river.

Although most of the wreckage had been cleared long ago, several tree trunk shells remained. They lay blackened and ashen in the centre of a clearing; a memorial to suffering. I crossed another ditch and picked my way through the undergrowth. A slope led down to a clearing by the river. The water was completely still. I tried to imagine the struggle for a place on the boats as the Yugoslav gun-ships closed in.

"Hello?" The man with the cravat was peering from between some branches. He pointed across the water to where a small jetty remained half built. "Before the war, children used to make boats...." He stepped away from the trunk and edged his way over. "A few years ago, I knew man called 'Miho Kovač'. In Lovas. Teacher at the school. Spoke English for tourists. Dead in war. Daughter. I don't know name...."

"Do you know where he lived?"

The man closed his eyes again. "House. Small. By St. Michael's Church. A young woman lives there. Daughter? Maybe."

"In Lovas?"

"Yes, Lovas."

Lovas was a larger village, spread over a wider area with over one thousand inhabitants. The streets were busier than in Opatovac and the buildings were more spacious with front lawns and stone walls. Still, it was hardly a metropolis. Apart from a baker's, a grocery and several other stores, there were two churches and little else.

I remembered Marija once telling me that her father had been an English teacher. Or maybe she'd said he was translator. It was a long shot, I knew. Despite my misgivings, I found St. Michael's, and jogged along the road. I scanned the fronts of each building, trying to identify the correct number. The cottage, described by the man with the cravat, was mundane, ordinary. I stared at its newly-painted yellow walls. There were no bullet holes, no

evidence of chipped wood nor any other signs of damage. For about a minute, I stood outside the front door, unable to move. There wasn't a bell so I tapped the letter box. There was no response. I tried again. There was a muttering from behind the door, a female voice. The door opened.

“Yes?”

“I'm looking for Marija Kovač.”

The woman stared back at me. She was about thirty with dyed blond hair. A toddler was clinging to her leg. In the background, a radio was blaring out pop music.

“A man named Miho Kovač used to live here. I wonder if...”

“Who?”

“He was killed in the war.”

“Killed?” She looked confused.

“It was about five years ago.”

The child pulled at her jeans. She picked him up.

“He lived in this cottage.”

She yawned. “I heard about him. He died.”

“Do you know where his daughter might be?” I felt myself reddening.

“His daughter?”

A male voice shouted from deep inside the cottage.

“I don't know.” She closed the door.

It took me over an hour to drift back to Opatovac. The stones and rocks seemed sharper and it was late afternoon by the time I'd made it into the village. Although smoke billowed out from Dubravka's cottage, there were few other signs of life. One man, three doors away, was busy in his front garden. When I passed by, he stopped, brought his shears to his side and stared.

A next-door neighbour closed her curtains as I turned into the drive. Dubravka was waiting for me in her kitchen. She told me to sit down. I began by telling her about my wasted afternoon, that my hopes had been raised but instead, I'd been led on a wild goose chase.

“Daniel,” she interrupted. “I have asked everyone in the village about the girl who lived with you.”

The tone and slow clarity of her voice forewarned me that the message would be grave.

“Marija didn’t live very long in Opatovac,” she began. “Her family stayed in Lovas for many years until her mother split up with her husband.”

I nodded quickly.

“I’m sorry but so many people died and I’d forgotten all about them. My friends tell me that...Marija *did* come back, in 1993. You’ve been to the river. When Marija returned, she liked to sit there in the afternoons.” She paused again. “A sniper was on the other side of the Danube. Marija was shot. She’s dead.”

## Chapter 12

The following morning, it didn't take me long to book the coach ticket from Vukovar and then a flight from Split to London. Dubravka helped me finish my report then arranged for her son to take me into the city. I still had four days until the deadline. It was enough time. After packing my clothes, I read through the final section.

*On October 18<sup>th</sup> 1991, a platoon of White Eagles, including Tomas Petrović, and Yugoslav army reservists, forced a group of fifty one civilians to join hands and enter a minefield. One man was shot at point blank range because he was unable to walk. As the first mines exploded, Serb paramilitaries began shooting at the survivors. Twenty one villagers were killed and fourteen were wounded.*

“Do you want me to take a look?” Dubravka asked.

“No, I'm happy with it.”

She had a bottle of vodka in her hand. “Before you go?”

For a few moments, I considered her offer. No, I smiled my thanks but I wasn't thirsty. Not anymore.

There was a buzzing sound. Andjela's number appeared yet again on my new mobile display with a message:

*“Any news?”*

I was supposed to ring her, but I didn't want to know anymore. Everything she did back in Sarajevo had been false. She'd never been a friend. She'd used me from the beginning. Every sign of kindness had been a ruse. She must've known what her brother had done. I felt such a fool. Just thinking of her made me furious. I pressed 'delete' then switched the mobile off. Almost immediately, Dubravka's phone on the sideboard shattered the silence. She picked up the receiver then after a short exchange, passed it to me.

It was Roger Simmons and he sounded excited. He asked me how far along I was with the report.

I told him I was nearly finished.

Roger was delighted. He wasn't concerned that Tomas had turned out to be guilty after all. He'd spoken to several people and they'd all agreed that the story had merit. “But whatever you find needs to be true,” he warned. “No mistakes this time, remember.”

I revealed that I'd spoken to the Croatian Embassy in London, and to Gary Ingram in Split. Tomas had been a member of a Fascist paramilitary group.

"Have you told his family?"

"No."

"Listen, we can send a camera team. We can film their reaction when you reveal the bad news. Just imagine..."

"...No."

"It'll be sensational."

"It'll kill them."

There was a short silence on the other end of the phone. "I've organised a meeting on Tuesday. Make sure there's something for us by then."

The line went dead.

I turned to Dubravka. "They want the story."

"Well done," she clapped her hands.

I dropped the file relating to Lieutenant Tomas Petrović and his friends into my bag; zipped it and closed it. There was nothing else to say.

"I'll pray for his mother," she added quietly.

There was a knock at the door.

Dubravka's son, Raddy, had an old Ford Escort. I waited on the back seat with my bag on my lap while he turned the ignition repeatedly. Eventually the engine rumbled into life. The gear-stick squeaked and the car lurched forward onto the street. All was well until we passed the cemetery and the engine stalled. Raddy spent several minutes trying to revive it then got out of the car. "I'm going to call someone," he shouted while slamming the door.

I was already late and when smoke began seeping from the car's engine, I started looking at my watch. I was going to miss the coach. My head sank into my bag. There was no point in sitting around, panicking so I stepped out into the sunshine. A monument outside the cemetery listed the names of the sixty eight people buried in the mass grave. The plot was over twenty five metres long, but only one metre wide because the victims had been dropped in one by one. At least thirty civilians were over the age of fifty when they'd been shot. Twelve were women and four were under the age of twenty.

It was a late Monday morning and the church was empty. A notice board was hanging in the porch. Messages were pleading for the return of missing animals, or advertising the services of florists and cleaners. I took a card offering taxi rates to Vukovar and slid it into



my wallet. Next to the cards was an A4 size sheet. Attached were miniature portrait photographs of weddings, graduations, and families. At the foot of the sheet was an address and telephone number.

The name underneath was *Marija Kovač*. I stared at it for several seconds then pulled the sheet from the board. Raddy appeared from the side of the church. The car had given up completely. He promised that he'd speak to his mother and organise for me to stay another night. I wasn't listening. I showed him the address on the card. He knew the photography shop. It was only a hundred metres away on the north side of the village.

I found only two establishments, hidden down a cul-de-sac, at the end of the road. The first was a small supermarket; the other was the photography business. Its window revealed full size portraits of the miniatures displayed in the church: babies, newly-weds and graduates with degree certificates. The pictures were well-taken but the gloss had faded on some and the frames needed to be cleaned. The background of the shop was in almost complete darkness. A sign, written in both Serbo-Croat and English, stated 'Closed'.

I knocked on the door anyway. There was no response. I knocked several more times. No-one was around. I pulled the handle down and pushed. The door moved ajar an inch but scraped against the floor. Still no-one approached. I put my shoulder against the frame and pushed again. The door shuddered open. The shop was completely empty. A handful of cameras were laid out on a shelf. I took one and held it up to the window. It was about fifteen years old and the shutter didn't work. Underneath was a rack of disposable cameras. The colouring had faded on the packages.

A desk rested against the wall on the far side of the room. Although it was piled with paper, there were no family pictures and the in-tray was empty. Some boxes were stacked next to a vacuum cleaner. Apart from the front, where the display blocked the light, there were no other windows. The back door opened into a maisonette with a kitchen at the far end. A sofa and a couple of chairs were on a worn carpet. There was nothing on the window sill. I returned to the front of the shop and waited. An elderly couple shuffled past the building.

The road outside was empty. A woman approached from the other side of the street. No, she was too tall and her face was too thin. Two people arrived on bicycles. An old man, dressed formally in a smart white shirt, strolled past a housewife wearing a black dress and shawl. Then a teenaged couple turned in from the main road and passed the window.

Too young. I picked up a portrait photograph from the display. A graduate, wearing a gown and holding a degree certificate, grinned back at the camera. I held it in my hand as a woman appeared from the path leading from the cul-de-sac to the river. I nearly knocked over

the display as I strained my neck to see. She wore a white blouse and a knee length grey skirt and she might've been in her early twenties. I stopped, blinked then looked again. Her hair was the same jet-black colour but longer, and her stride was quicker.

She raised her head. I stepped back from the glass and waited. After a few seconds, she hadn't arrived. I opened the door and walked outside to find the supermarket doors swinging shut. The sunlight shone against the store's windows, making it impossible to see inside. I entered just as a motorbike was pulling into a parking space behind me. I edged past the checkout and turned into the first aisle. The woman wearing the white blouse was lifting a tin from the shelf. My heartbeat slowly relaxed. She was older than I'd first thought; maybe late twenties and shorter than Marija as well.

I returned to the street where a man was sitting on a motorcycle. The sound of engine revs jarred my ear drums. Someone was inside the photography store. I watched through the glass as she removed her helmet and dropped it onto a chair. Her hair was untidy. The motorbike pulled away and disappeared. I opened the front door. She stopped then slowly turned around. Her face was fuller than I remembered. The cartoon design on the front of her t-shirt had faded due to over-washing, and a thin layer of fat bulged around her waist.

## Chapter 13

“It’s been a while,” I said, putting my hands in my pockets.

Marija looked me up and down. Her shoulders rose and fell.

“I thought you’d gone forever.”

She said nothing. In one movement, she retrieved her helmet and jacket from the chair before exiting to the back of the shop. I followed her into the apartment. She reappeared from a side room with a basket of clothes. After carrying it into the kitchen, she dropped the basket onto the floor then unlocked the back door, and went outside. The yard was surrounded by a low stone wall but the grass inside was overgrown. Weeds were sprouting through cracks in the patio.

Marija dragged the clothes onto the concrete and began pegging out her washing. A man’s shirts, trousers and underwear were hanging in the sunshine alongside hers.

“I can’t believe I found you,” I said.

She continued pegging the clothes onto the line. Cracks broke across her skin as she squinted in the sunlight. Her sleeveless arms, once surrounded by spotless olive flesh, were scratched and bruised. On her left side, a dark purple scar stretched from her forearm to her elbow. Having finished, she angled her head for me to move aside.

I let her through. She dropped the basket to the floor, pulled a chair from the kitchen table and sat down. She sank her head into her hands then ran her fist against her eyes and forehead. Still she said nothing.

I stood by the door. “How are you?”

Marija sat up and folded her arms. She covered the scar with her fingers and looked up at me. It was *that* look, the same contemptuous scowl she’d given me many times back in England.

I grabbed the chair from alongside her and sat down, suddenly unable to think of anything to say. For over a minute, neither of us uttered a word.

“I can’t talk now,” she said eventually.

We agreed to meet back in Opatovac by the river at eight o’clock that evening. There was a path that wrapped around the bank next to the woods. I left the shop in a daze, uncertain that she’d turn up.

I arrived back at the house in Lovas. Dubravka was out but several messages had been left by the phone. The first was from Gary Ingram. Andjela was worried that I hadn’t been in

touch. She'd phoned him in Split and pestered him to find out news. Did I have any new information? He'd thought it best that I told her as soon as possible. He'd given Dubravka's telephone number to Andjela so she could call me.

The next message was from Andjela again. Her mother was distressed and had taken to bed. What had the investigators found out? Why had my mobile phone always been switched off? She demanded that I *had* to ring her soon.

I didn't care what she demanded. Sure enough, there were half a dozen missed messages on my mobile, all from Andjela. I deleted them and switched the phone off again. It was all lies. Everyone had told lies from the start, even Dubravka. What was the point?

Woodland separated the west bank of the Danube from the village. I reached the clearing, meandered along the path then found a bench. The surrounding trees were crowded, dark and littered with dead wood. It was getting late and by ten past eight, I became convinced that Marija wasn't going to arrive. I checked my watch one last time then got to my feet. A motorcycle stopped at the edge of the clearing.

Marija hugged the driver and got off the bike. She hadn't changed her clothes from earlier and kept her head bowed as she approached. She let me kiss her cheek before sitting down. I thanked her for coming.

"Peta brought me." She turned her head towards the edge of the clearing. The rider had left his bike and found a patch of grass to sit on. We faced the Serbian hills beyond the far bank. Although the sun was setting, low beams of sunlight dipped through gaps between branches. I asked if she was married.

She shook her head. "We've been trying to get some money together. But the rent for the shop is too high."

I waited for Marija to ask about my life, whether or not I'd settled down, whether or not I was happy. But she didn't ask me any questions. I revealed that I was living in the Docklands area of London. It was quite an up and coming area. I told her that I was a journalist, like my father. She gave the faintest nod then brushed back her jet-black hair with her fingers.

Marija's boyfriend was sitting on the bank, throwing pebbles at the water. Each one disappeared without disrupting the surface.

"I'm just glad you're alive. I was told otherwise."

"Did Dubravka tell you that?"

"How do you know?"

“Dubravka and my mother were like sisters. She’s very protective.” She smiled for the first time.

I felt myself blush.

“I’d heard that someone was asking questions but Dubravka told me not to worry. Whoever it was would soon be gone. She told the others to say nothing. It’s a small village...”

I lay back on the bench. “So the whole village knows your story?”

“Everyone knows. They know everything.” She paused. “Don’t take it personally. They’re very protective.”

I asked what had happened to her.

Marija’s boyfriend stopped throwing pebbles and returned to his bike. He fiddled with the lights while watching us from the corner of his eye.

Marija recalled that she’d stayed in a hostel for a couple of days after Dad’s death before taking the train to London. Thinking that there might just be a chance of a job, she made her way to Ben Ogilvy’s magazine offices, but he’d already employed someone else. “He was surprised to see me,” she says. “He said that he’d spoken to you.”

I avoided her eyes.

She tried working as a waitress, then as a barmaid, but had found it difficult. “I’m not good with numbers.” Soon she became homesick, but she’d nowhere to go. “I wasn’t a citizen. I couldn’t go to university because I had no exams.”

“You were a great photographer. Couldn’t you do something with...”

“How was I going to do that with no equipment and no money?”

I couldn’t answer.

She slept rough for a while and had nearly given up until she met a guy. “He was older than me, but he gave me somewhere to sleep.” She folded her arms. “So I got a job with his agency...” She looked at me disdainfully, “...as a cleaner.”

“At the Hotel Wexford?”

She seemed puzzled. “No, I worked in Lambeth, in Brixton.”

Marija had always wanted to live in Paris, but it wasn’t realistic. After the cleaning guy threw her out, she scraped some money together and returned to Croatia. By the time she’d arrived home, everyone she’d known since childhood was either dead, or had left for a new life elsewhere. A new family was living in her father’s house.

Then she ran into Peta. “He helped me back on my feet and gave me the confidence to pick up a camera again.” Eventually, she started up a business.

She stopped. It was my turn to speak. Although there was no breeze, for the first time, I felt a chill. “Marija, I’m sorry about the way I treated you.” I didn’t look to gauge her reaction. I explained that I’d been angry with her, that I hadn’t known why, and that when my dad died, I hadn’t been thinking properly.

She didn’t reply.

I admitted that I’d told lies about her, to my mother especially.

She offered no response.

I took another deep breath. “I said that Chris...,” I stopped then began again. “That you and Dad were having an affair behind my mother’s back.”

There was still no response.

“So there you are. I’m sorry.” I closed my eyes.

On the far side of the river, a couple were strolling along the bank. Some teenagers were trying to push their boat into the river.

Marija didn’t get up, shout at me, slap me or storm away. Instead she took a deep breath and started to speak.

## Chapter 14

At first, she'd loved my father as any child would love a parent. He'd saved her, educated her, bought her clothes, shoes, cameras, but more than that, he'd been there for her when she needed him. Gradually, as they worked together, they discovered shared interests, and became closer. She found herself thinking about him, dressing for him, longing for him, until one day.... She hid her face with her hand. Across the river, the boys pushed their boat into the water and clambered on board. They screamed with delight.

I could feel Marija shaking next to me but my mind was blank; no thoughts, no feelings.

"How is Theresa?" she asked eventually.

"She died a year or so after you left."

The delivery was swift and blunt.

Marija put her head in her hands. "I'm sorry." Now she wept.

I felt nothing. I didn't want to think about my mother or Marija. I could only think about my father coming home every month with presents from abroad. I remembered the way he and Marija had embraced each other, and the excuses that had followed; the gallery exhibition and the race to be there.

I closed my eyes. My mind drifted to Mum checking his pockets every time he came home, her prescriptions, tears and depressions. Then I remembered uttering the words that finally broke her. Words I'd thought were lies.

"You didn't do anything wrong." I wrapped my arm around Marija's shoulder and pulled her towards me. "You were a child."

"I was seventeen."

Over by the bike, Peta stood up. He wavered for a few moments but didn't approach. Marija and I edged back to the clearing. Peta met us half way and glared at me. He could see that she'd been crying. Marija told him to relax. Peta relented but walked behind us for the final few metres. She told me she was sorry but they couldn't give me a lift back to Dubravka's house. There was no room for three on the bike.

It didn't matter. "By this time tomorrow, I'll be in London," I said and looked out across the Danube. I remembered a few years previously, when she'd told me about how she'd played with friends on the bank. For me, the river was more of a darker colour, no longer the perfect blue she'd once described. We hugged again and she kissed me goodbye.

“Now you have a story, if you want it, Daniel.” She tried to laugh before brushing away a final tear.

“I don’t think so” I replied. “I’m working on a different one.”



## Chapter 15

*By the time the region had been returned to Croatian control, almost two thirds of Serbs had already fled. Previously, they'd made up a quarter of the population of Opatovac. After the restoration of the territory to Croatia, many instances of rape and torture were revealed. Serb paramilitary groups, "The White Eagles" and "Dušan Silni" were later linked to other massacres in the region.*

The coach pulled in at the service station. The man with the microphone told us that we were still an hour and a half away from Split. We'd been granted a twenty minutes break while the coach was being refilled with petrol. A stereo was playing from a wall that joined a road-café to a petrol station. A dozen or so people in their late teens were sitting on tables, flirting and dancing.

I read through my report once more. I'd three days left. If I flew the following morning, I'd arrive with a day to spare. My eyes homed in on the final paragraphs.

*Who really knows why ordinary, otherwise gentle people like Tomas Petrović behave as they do in times of war. Under normal circumstances, they'd be unable to pick up a gun, let alone pull a trigger.*

*Afterwards, many return home to their families and live normal lives. For others the pain never goes away. Tomas's first reaction was to escape, to go AWOL, to run to London. Away from the carnage, perhaps he found some time to reflect on what had happened. Possibly, in the end, he felt duped, and despaired of the propaganda and the lies he'd been fed. Maybe he gambled that he would return to being the person he'd either once been, or always wanted to be.*

*Tomas wanted to be a Yugoslav. His family were Yugoslavs. His London friends were Yugoslavs. But this ideal was an illusion. Yugoslavia was finished and the conflict provoked other instincts that raged beneath the surface. The Croatian war presented Tomas with a new identity, history and narrative. As a Bosnian Serb, he was destined to play his part in the vicious conflict to decide which version of history would triumph.*

*Afterwards, there would be no going back. The past could not be re-written after all. Perhaps this is why he ran away. But no matter where he ran to, he wouldn't be allowed to*

*start over. Instead, he was pursued relentlessly by those determined to hold him accountable for his actions.*

*So why did he have to die? I knew him reasonably well. He was too principled to blame anyone else. Tomas came to realise that he could never escape the past. Wracked with guilt and shame, and in the absence of a court or jury, Tomas Petrović delivered justice on himself.*

I sat up as a young couple clambered back on board, carrying a whining toddler. Most of the other passengers were still inside the café. I packed my report away. I wasn't sure what to think of Tomas anymore. I supposed he got what he deserved in the end. But no matter what he'd done, and although his crimes were despicable, he remained a hapless soul to me. Someone had put a gun in his hand and filled him with nationalist crap. He'd reacted like the frightened boy he was. Tomas had played a role in a terrible, criminal incident, but he was not an inhuman monster.

I closed my eyes as my thoughts drifted to my father. I'd been putting this off since yesterday and I couldn't put it off any longer. If Tomas had found justice in the end, what about Dad? What would constitute justice for him, anyway? What the hell had he been thinking? Had he been planning it all along? Could it have all been part of a plan to replace my mother, or had the idea of a relationship with Marija developed as he'd gotten to know her? Or had he simply gone looking for young girls? Perhaps the relationship had meant nothing to him. Perhaps he hadn't really known what he was doing. No, that was a pathetic excuse. For my entire life, I'd worshipped Chris Rourke, put him on a pedestal and followed in his footsteps. I'd wanted to be a reporter because of what he'd accomplished. I'd just wanted to be like him.

The sun was setting behind the mountains. The orange glow had revealed a tiny village, surrounded by woodland, at the bottom of the valley. We were so close to the borders, I couldn't be certain if it was Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina. I felt sleepy again. My eyes wanted to close but I wouldn't sleep. I couldn't. I still hadn't resolved my argument with my father. He'd no right to deliver those righteous lectures about thugs like Milošević, or make those speeches about intervening where there was injustice. Not when, at the same time, he'd been seducing a seventeen year old girl, someone without a family or a hope, someone he was supposed to protect. There was no defence for that.

Since I'd been in the former Yugoslavia, I'd slowly but surely come to question almost everything my father had stood for. I'd poked holes through his analysis of the war and now uncovered his worst secret.

Yet despite all that, something inside me couldn't condemn him. Yes, I might've deleted all references to his name, destroyed all photographs, and burned his work. But what good would that have done? People do stupid things, sometimes hateful things. Some people, like Tomas, committed much worse crimes. Was everything my father had stood for false? Was every choice he'd ever made tainted? Was every drop of blood inside him malign? No, I decided that he'd made a terrible mistake and human beings often make stupid mistakes. I knew that, as much as anyone else. Perhaps some people could be loving and deceitful, caring and callous, both at the same time. Maybe they were able to split themselves into two parts: one good, the other bad, and managed to live with both sides. My father had been a human being with faults. My prevailing memory of him had changed forever. I was still angry with him, furious even. Yet, despite everything, I still loved him. He was my father. He always would be.

My mobile phone rang.

Andjela again.

For several seconds, my finger hovered, poised over the 'off' button. Then realising she'd never let go, I finally answered. I let her complain that I hadn't been in contact. I didn't offer an excuse. I told her that I'd finished the report.

She sounded anxious. "What did you find?"

"Not everything was as I'd expected."

"What about Tomas?"

"I know what upset him. He's at peace now."

"And the investigation?"

I didn't answer.

"What about the criminal investigation?"

"You don't need to worry anymore. They've dropped it."

She shouted to her mother whose voice had become louder as she approached the phone. "And your story? What about your documentary?"

"Do your bosses like your proposal?" she asked.

"They haven't read it."

"Where are you?"

I told her I was on the way between Split somewhere else.

“Please come and see us before you go.”

## Chapter 16

It was nearly September but although summer was on the wane, the scent of freshly cut grass remained strong. As I arrived, a workman was busy fastening a series of wooden planks to the back fence. Another man was planting seeds into recently cultivated soil. All graffiti had been removed. The shed, which once lay dormant in the corner, had disappeared. Its pieces were lying stacked in a skip next to the new brick wall at the front. Beyond the fence were the fields and valleys that surrounded Sarajevo. The mountain peaks were easily visible through a cloudless sky.

Still dressed in black, Slavica lay quite still in her deck chair in the middle of the lawn. She looked relaxed, almost serene. And although she stirred as I approached, her eyes remained closed behind the dark sunglasses.

I turned to find Andjela standing behind me. She brought her finger to her lips and nodded in her mother's direction. Then she turned and I followed her into the house. She stopped in the dining room which overlooked the garden. She asked if I'd brought the story with me.

"I'm going to write that Tomas was part of a group that murdered innocent people."

"You can't write that!" She took my hand.

I snatched it back.

"But what about the postcard? That was proof."

"He wasn't in Voćin. But he *was* in Lovas and Opatovac, among other places, and dozens of people died. They were innocent civilians."

She looked outside. Her mother was still in the chair; one of the workmen was packing away his materials.

I asked Andjela how much she knew.

"What do you mean? He was defending Croatian Serbs in Krajina."

"That's one way of putting it."

"Tomas wasn't a murderer," she spluttered. "He cared about people." She was breathing furiously.

"Andjela, he became a member of 'The White Eagles'. Why was that?"

"Do you believe everything you read in the papers?" she snapped.

I'd heard this one before. "Andjela, why did you ask me to investigate?"

She looked uncertain. "To find out the truth. I knew he wasn't guilty."

“Come off it. They were fascists.”

“I call them patriots.”

“Patriots?”

“Yes.”

“They marched Croatian villagers into a minefield...”

“They did just as much to us.”

“That isn’t true.”

“Anyway, he wouldn’t have been part of any of that. Not the killings. He wouldn’t have known how to fire a gun. He ran away. You were supposed to find that out. You knew him. He was too gentle to be involved in anything bad.”

“That’s not what the Croatians say.”

“They only want revenge. They’ll accuse anyone. You knew him. You know he couldn’t have done anything wrong.”

I puffed out my cheeks.

“I thought you were honest. You’re a liar.”

I told her there was documentary evidence.

“Who wrote it? Show it to me?”

I stared at her.

“Ha! Liar!”

This was getting us nowhere. I turned to leave, but she blocked my way.

“It was a war,” she shouted, “And terrible things happened. Tomas believed in his people, and soldiers sometimes did bad things...”

I’d heard this one before too.

“...But he would never have killed anyone. I’ll never accept it.”

What had she expected me to find in Croatia? After all that, did she still really think that he was innocent of everything? Then it suddenly hit me that she really did believe it. She really thought he’d done nothing wrong out there; that I’d find evidence; that I’d get the allegations dropped. She looked so hurt, still so angry and yet so weak and helpless. I considered telling her that there might be hope, that there were no photographs of him at the scene, that evidence could be forged, that there was an outside possibility he hadn’t been involved, and that the investigators might’ve been completely wrong.

No. I was sick of lies. It was all I’d been listening to for years from the western press, the Serbian press, and from my own father. In the end, I could only tell her what I honestly thought. I told her that Tomas had joined up because he was a Serb nationalist. He believed

what the papers had written about the suffering of his people and had decided to do something about it. I didn't know what had happened elsewhere, but he'd definitely been involved at Lovas. To what extent, we'd never know. What had it done to him? I had a pretty good idea.

She stared at me, suddenly uncertain. Wavering, she grabbed a picture from the mantelpiece and shoved it under my nose. Major Petrović glared back at me. "I thought you understood. You know what influence our parents have. Throughout Tomas's life, Father would kick him, shove him...." She paused. "Father's control was total and Tomas couldn't escape. Tomas wasn't a soldier. He did as he was told. It was as if he was destined." She put the portrait down and closed her eyes. "Maybe something snapped inside him," she tried, sounding desperate. "Maybe he just couldn't cope anymore."

"Maybe."

"And in the end, he realised it was wrong and wanted it to stop. Isn't that something?" Tears were running down her cheeks. The realisation was dawning. It was brutal to watch the moment when reality set in, the moment when truth became clear. She broke down. I stepped forward and hugged her. At first she pushed me away. Then she relented.

I thought about Major Petrović and about Tomas running away. I recalled my own father and his reports calling for truth and justice. I remembered Marija, and my father's sense of righteousness, his lack of reflection and the stupid mistakes that impacted on everyone around him. And then I reflected on this stupid journey I'd been on ever since meeting Marija at our house in Hampshire.

I brushed the tears from her cheek and stared into her eyes. "Whatever happened doesn't stop him from being your brother. All those good things that you remember, all those memories, they remain just as true, a part of him as much as anything else. He was put in a situation that most people will never experience, not even in their worst nightmares. He's still your brother and always will be."

She looked through the window. The workmen had gone. Slavica spotted me from the garden. She waved frantically in my direction and ran into the house. She burst into the living room and grasped my hand. Andjela chattered to her mother in Serbo-Croat. Slavica opened up her arms and hugged me tightly.

"Mother insists you stay as our guest for the night." Andjela said.

The pain in Slavica's eyes had disappeared, replaced by a newfound energy and life from somewhere. I smiled and accepted.

Slavica sang as she exited into the kitchen. Andjela and I were alone. For a few seconds, the only sound was of the clock ticking on the mantelpiece.

“So what are you going to do?” she asks eventually.

I thought of Slavica then I thought of my own mother. I thought about everything that had happened. Then I thought about what they’d have to go through if the documentary was made. I had a decision to make. I opened up my bag and found my report. I dropped it on the arm-rest beside her and walked into the kitchen.

Just over a week later, the Zastava pulled up outside the coach station. It was going to be a long journey back to Split. From there I could get a flight to London. The coach was waiting. The driver hit the horn. I scrambled out of the car and Andjela accompanied me to the doors. I’m glad I was able to tell her about Marija and my father. It had made it easier for both of us to come to terms with everything. She promised me that she’d follow me over within a couple of weeks. She’d never visited London before and was looking forward to it. “I’ll finally get out of Sarajevo,” she laughed.

“Don’t tell your mother that.”

She laughed again. Slavica’s sister was to visit the following week from Pristina. They’d keep each other occupied. The coach driver hit his horn for the second time. He revved his engine and beckoned to me frantically. I scrambled on board.

“Make sure you apply,” she shouted. “Get the forms, and don’t forget. Remember to call me.”

The coach pulled away. Everything had happened so quickly. I didn’t know whether or not it would work out between us. I did know that Andjela would succeed and get a job in London. She was too resourceful and committed to fail. London was the city for someone like her. She was also pushing me to apply for teacher training at the Urban Learning Foundation in London. She’d found out all about it, of course. And it wouldn’t take four years either because there was a teacher shortage and they needed bodies in front of the children quickly. It was a controversial plan but ideal for someone like me.

I turned on my mobile phone. There was a voice message from Roger Simmons. Where was I? Why hadn’t I kept in touch? Why hadn’t I been present at the meeting? He said that I was lucky. He’d received a call from Gary Ingram, explaining everything, so I had Gary to thank that my name wasn’t mud. They were going to reschedule the meeting but I had to get in touch with him that day....without fail. He had a new number that I was to use.



This was my last chance. The call ended. I started to press the numbers on the key pad. Then I stopped, pressed 'delete' and switched off the phone.

## The Question of Objectivity: A Novel and a Critical Project

I discovered the Spanish Civil War specifically through two works: *Homage to Catalonia* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway had arrived in Spain as established writers, but although essentially on the same side, they produced contrasting and highly subjective accounts of the conflict. Both men became personally involved in the events they had been sent to cover, and as a result, their values and aspirations permeate their books and articles.

When I came to write my novel, the intention from the outset was to explore from the viewpoint of a writer who becomes a character in his own story. Given my interest in the events of 1936-1939, Spain was my primary choice for the novel's setting. More than seventy years have passed since the Civil War's conclusion, and passions roused by the conflict remain strong. Yet, as I researched the Spanish struggle, memories were sparked of my time in London's East End during the 1990s, when I'd met survivors of the Balkans conflicts, specifically refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several had lost family members, or had been driven from their homes. Despite these tragic backgrounds, most went about their daily lives quietly, concealing their personal histories from work colleagues. I was moved by their stories, and was particularly struck that their perspectives, especially regarding identity, nationality and history, contrasted dramatically with the attitudes portrayed by much of the British media. I wanted to know why.

British reporting of the Spanish Civil War and the break-up of Yugoslavia shared notable similarities. Most significant was the emphasis given to the reporting of battlefield events and atrocities at the expense of political analysis. In both conflicts, the local historical and cultural roots of violence were less extensively covered by the British media, and in the absence of insight, national stereotypes often sufficed. 1930s images of angry mobs engaging in shocking acts of violence reflected the commonly-held view of Spaniards as hot tempered, excessively emotional and generally unsuited to democracy. In the Balkans, Serbians and other Yugoslavs were portrayed in similarly clichéd terms as blood-thirsty Slavs perpetrating acts of 'ethnic cleansing' on their hapless neighbours. Extremists such as the silver-crossed paramilitary figure, 'Arkan', exemplified a 'Balkans mentality'. The high levels of violence were only to be expected of such peoples, whose temperaments were characteristically unstable, and whose societies were almost naturally prone to disorder and chaos.

Both the birth of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931, and the spread of nationalism across the Balkans during the 1980s, shattered the assumptions of ruling oligarchs. The authority of the 'revealed word' in the form of a religious scripture, or a non-negotiable party manifesto, was swept away by promises of more egalitarian forms of government. In Spain, Falangists, conservatives, Marxists, Stalinists, Socialists, regionalists and Anarchists jostled for the vacancy left by the 'Sacred Circle' of church and state. In Yugoslavia, Nationalists, Communists, separatists and Fascist paramilitaries, sought to replace Tito Broz's Communist dictatorship.

Whoever controlled the written and spoken word controlled the past and the future. But in the absence of 'objective truth', whose version of events could be trusted? Language was used in both Civil War Spain and Yugoslavia, not simply to question or hold to account, but to frame and rewrite history. In Nationalist Spain, the conflict was portrayed as a divinely inspired struggle against atheistic Communism. Franco's victory was recalled in the finest traditions of El Cid and the Spanish Imperial triumphs of Ferdinand and Isabella. Just as the 'Reconquista' had expelled the Moors, the Nationalists' 'Crusade' had purged the nation of 'godless Reds.' After the war, streets recalling Republican heroes were renamed after saints, and Castilian Spanish was installed as the nation's official language. Regional tongues including Galician, Catalan and Euskara were removed from school books, road signs and public documents. Even today, the names of Nationalists only are inscribed on 'El Valle de los Caídos', the monument to the Spanish Civil War dead outside Madrid. Republicanism, along with its supporters, was written out of Spanish history.

In the late 1980s, Serbia's Slobodan Milošević invoked similar tales of national destiny in order to justify aggression against neighbouring nations. The authoritarian, one-party Yugoslav state was threatened with extinction when its newly-democratic, constituent republics sought independence. Like Franco, the Serbian President stirred nationalist feelings by referring to historic, patriotic legends in his speeches. As part of a plan to overthrow the Muslim-dominated regional government in Kosovo, Milošević entered the ancient Serbian tale of the Battle of Kosovo, casting himself as a new Serbian Prince Lazar; a national saviour against the Sultan's hordes. As in Spain, the written and spoken word was carefully controlled and manipulated. By amalgamating several regional television stations, Milošević formed the Radio Television of Serbia, which broadcast nationalist propaganda throughout the wars. Newspapers and magazines including *Dnevnik*, *Duga* and *Politika Ekspres* were edited by Milošević's Communist Party allies and vigorously supported the official government position. In Bosnia, the pro-Serb Radio Prijedor depicted Muslims as merciless

‘Turks’ or extremist ‘Mujahidin’. It transmitted allegations that non-Serb doctors had forced Serb women into abortions, or had injected their bodies with drugs, making them incapable of giving birth to male children.<sup>1</sup> TV Belgrade reported that Muslims had thrown Serb children to the lions at Sarajevo zoo.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of Serbs enlisted to fight, prompting the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to conclude that:

In Serbia specifically, the use of media for nationalist ends and objectives formed part of a well thought through plan - itself part of a strategy of conquest and affirmation of identity.<sup>3</sup>

Following independence, Croatia embarked on a process of ‘National Homogenisation’. As in Spain and Serbia, Croatian nationalists wished to impose their own semi-mythical saga of national liberation. Croatia needed a fresh identity, free from all Byzantine (Serbian) influence, and as in Spain, flags and anthems were revised. Streets were renamed, not after saints, but after Ustaše and war criminals including Mile Budak and Mate Boban. By expunging Yugoslav elements from dances, songs and traditions, Croatians were able to declare that they had never been Yugoslavs at all. They had always wanted to be free from Serbia; not for a year or two, but for a thousand years. A pure, Croatian language was prised from Serbo-Croat and the Cyrillic alphabet, associated with the Serbs, was gradually eradicated from Croatian life. The works of award winning Yugoslav writers including Meša Selimović, Danilo Kiš, Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža were removed from the culturally cleansed Croatian libraries and universities. Across the new nation, a new slogan: “Clean Croatian air”,<sup>4</sup> was proclaimed on advertising boards and throughout the media. Dissident Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić describes post-independence Croatian life as a kitsch culture of candles, crosses and gingerbread hearts.<sup>5</sup> The Yugoslav past was erased from history. It was as if the world of South Slavic unity she’d grown up in had never happened; as if *her* life had never happened:

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<sup>1</sup> International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violation of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Former Yugoslavia since 1991, *Prosecutor versus Milomir Stakić, Judgement*, (United Nations: ICTY, 2003), p.28

<sup>2</sup> Renaud De La Brosse, *Political Propaganda and the Plan to Create ‘A State For All Serbs’, Consequences of using media for ultra-nationalist ends*. (Milosevic Trial Public Archive: ICTY, 2003), p.8

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.32

<sup>4</sup> Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p.60

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.51

Who am I? No-one. I come from Atlantis. Atlantis does not exist. Therefore I do not exist. If I do not exist, then how can what I am saying be taken as true?<sup>6</sup>

The destruction of language and revision of history across the newly-democratic Balkans republics recalled the world of *1984* and *Darkness at Noon*, both inspired by the paranoid nightmare into which Republican Spain had sunk. However, as in Spain, some Yugoslav writers, including Slobodan Blagojevic and Goran Stefanovski, opposed the confiscation of memory. Novels, plays and short stories reflected a resistance to the new order. In doing so, these writers followed in the footsteps of Orwell and Koestler who had railed against the distortion of history in the Spanish Republican zone. Objectivity was neither claimed, nor sought. Values, biases and prejudices flowed through writers' works. Without the input of such levels of emotion and feeling, it is difficult to imagine that many of these articles and scripts could have been written.

My critical project focuses on English-speaking war correspondence and had initially asked whether or not genuine objectivity was possible. Of the two civil wars, the Spanish struggle, rather than the disintegration of Yugoslavia, was chosen as the project's context. The Spanish Civil War inspired intensely partisan coverage. Dozens of English-speaking writers including John Cornford, Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway, W.H. Auden and George Orwell travelled as war correspondents. Many were committed idealists; some became propagandists or soldiers. The lives of all were changed forever (Cornford was killed), and survivors' subsequent works were hugely influenced by events witnessed in Spain. Given the sacrifices made, and the high calibre of the writers involved, the Spanish Civil War was an ideal environment to study objectivity, or the lack of it, in war correspondence. Secondly, although much of what occurred during the Civil War still provokes heated debate, enough time has elapsed since 1939, to allow space for considered reflection. After Franco's death and the establishment of democracy, many Spaniards chose to put the past behind them. There is no such sense of reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia. As of June 2011, the secession of Kosovo continues to be disputed by Serbia and Russia. Many in the Republika Srpska and Western Herzegovina yearn for separation from the Bosnian state, while several high-ranking Bosnian Serbs await trial on war crimes charges. Agreement over causes, perpetrators, victims and justice continues to be elusive, and is perhaps destined to remain out of reach.

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.39

The Yugoslav conflict was chosen as the novel's context. Fiction does not require a balanced or unbiased account of events, and the form of a novel lends itself to a more personal and subjective approach. The former Yugoslavia is where East meets West, where mythical narratives are plentiful and where identities are unclear. Not only the future, but the past remains uncertain, while fact and fiction can be almost impossible to distinguish. Not only did the Balkans offer the potential for an exciting setting, but given my experiences of meeting survivors, and knowing that few English language novels about the Yugoslav wars have been written, perhaps there was an opportunity for a new angle. By contrast, the Spanish Civil War has produced more literature than perhaps any twentieth century conflict except World War Two.

While planning my stories, first and foremost, characters have to be realistic and believable, and their actions need to be driven by human goals and desires. Chris Rourke was planned as a western journalist; an eyewitness to tragic events, and someone who believes in freedom and democracy. Like the Spanish Civil War writers, his values flow through his reports. Similar to the American correspondents who adopted village children during the Vietnam War, or more recently, ITN's Michael Nicholson, who famously adopted a Bosnian refugee from Sarajevo, Chris would have full certainty in his convictions. He would believe that his intervention to adopt Marija was morally justified. But although he is an eye-witness, can we accept his selection and analysis of events?

As a novelist, I had to find a way of delivering the background information accurately but also with subtlety. I had to avoid the pitfall of overloading scenes with too much narration or expositional dialogue. Although it is set in a war zone, *Clear Blue Waters of the Danube* is not a political thriller. Still, my research and preparation had to be accurate. It was a long time since I'd worked with Yugoslav friends in London so, to gain a wider perspective, I toured the Balkans in the summers of 2008 and 2009. As I made my way across the new republics, interviewing witnesses and survivors, I found myself continually questioning both my own westernised perspective and the opinions I'd come across back in London. While travelling along Croatia's Dalmatian Coast before cutting east into Bosnia, I listened to hugely contrasting narratives. Views on culpability, victim status, national identity and language varied dramatically according to villagers separated by just a few miles. I heard finely detailed descriptions of atrocities from people who couldn't have been born when a particular incident took place, and then completely different versions of the same event from similarly aged inhabitants of a neighbouring town. In Sarajevo I came across Bosnian Serbs who vehemently criticised the behaviour of their political leaders, and still others in the

Republika Srpska, who insisted that Srebrenica was the scene of a mass murder *against* Serbs. Then in Western Herzegovina, I met those who were so determinedly patriotic that they could not bring themselves to even utter the word ‘Serbian’. This was in stark contrast to friends in London, who recalled pre-war times when no-one mentioned Croats, Muslims or Serbs because everyone was a Yugoslav. Whose viewpoint could be believed?

When I eventually came to write the novel, the most sensitive issues to deal with were the atrocities. How would I record war time events? Although I decided that I was under no obligation to press a particular point of view, I had to be as honest as possible. The main difficulty, as my research on Spain was beginning to reveal, is that genuine objectivity is perhaps impossible to pin down. Yet, as plot points hinged around specific treaties and peace deals, I had to establish accurate dates and details of events. The description of the massacre at Lovas, a historical atrocity against Croatians, is a case in point. Specific incidents were pivotal to the novel’s third part so I followed the historical record as agreed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the Serbian war crimes prosecutor.

This is where the mirroring of history ends. The entrance of Serbian troops into Lovas took place on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1991. As a novelist, I cannot alter that fact. But I can develop fictional events and characters within that historical framework. I can use dramatic conventions to raise the stakes for main characters, who become involved in the most exciting moments. So when the missiles land, they miss Marija and Ivana only by inches. It is Ivana who leads her daughter through the flames to safety. The last villager struggling onto the boat is Marija, who looks on as her mother is shot. I can artificially insert plot points and craft a story according to reversals and character arcs that do not necessarily conform to typical, everyday life. I can create conflict, (between Dan and Marija), sudden death, (of Chris in a car accident) suicide, (of Tomas) and romance (of Chris and Marija, or Dan and Andjela) to highlight the extremes of the human experience. I can experiment with concepts of objectivity and identity, and send characters on quests of self-knowledge and understanding. I can explore themes of jealousy, desire, anger, loss, sometimes in heightened scenarios, but in the hope that readers somewhere might empathise.

Why choose particular themes and where do they come from? Not every story is autobiographical, but neither can the writer and the subject matter be completely separated. Some ideas or contexts emerge from the unconscious, from the author’s memories, hopes and fears. Other themes, more knowingly important, will also inevitably pour onto the page. When creating and writing a novel, the author must try to balance these unconscious and

conscious impulses. For example, while teaching in Tower Hamlets and Newham, I worked with children of refugees, who had escaped war zones from Sri Lanka to Uganda. Their stories of being smuggled out of town in car boots, or of parents being imprisoned for political beliefs, were surprisingly common and formed a lasting impression on me. Particularly memorable were the levels of fear and suspicion expressed by many locals, who assumed that these outsiders were in the country simply as free-loaders. Mrs. Johnstone-Ward's attitude towards Marija, in the novel's first part, reflects the xenophobic attitudes I encountered in London. When I began writing the novel's second part, several issues relating to the treatment of refugees in the U.K. emerged in the plot, particularly during the London scenes in part 2. Initially it wasn't a conscious decision to write about their hardships, but I eventually used later drafts to blend this theme into the narrative arc, giving a clearer context and motivation for the Bosnian characters' actions.

I am not preaching or writing a text book or political pamphlet but I can raise questions. In *Clear Blue Waters of the Danube*, allusions are made to polarised media coverage of the war, in both Serbia and in Britain. A lack of objective reporting often led to violent, nationalistic propaganda in Serbia and Srpska. In contrast to the crude stereotypical reports written by correspondents such as Chris Rourke, my Bosnian Serb characters, Andjela, Slavica and Tomas are depicted as human beings. They are not perfect. Tomas has hidden a terrible past, and both Andjela and Slavica betray certain prejudices about Muslims and Croats. However, they all express human aspirations, emotions and feelings. Their attitudes reflect some of the opinions encountered during my Bosnian visit, but they are not representative of a balanced, cross section of opinion, as a journalist might be obliged to find.

I was also very careful not to get sucked in by pro-Serb propaganda. I would not behave as one Bosnian Serb interviewee would have liked, and portray Srebrenica as a crime perpetrated solely by Muslims against Serbs. So, when forming a plot, there is a tension between the creative writer's desire to explore from an alternative perspective and his/her own values that might rein him/her in. I would not write from the viewpoint of a Serb paramilitary figure without recognising the Karadžić regime's crimes. Atrocities could not be ignored or dismissed in the name of creative freedom. However, whilst I acknowledge the impact my own feelings and emotions, conscious or unconscious, have on plot development, there are also potential pitfalls. Of course, I have my own opinions about the war, but I have tried not to be a cultural tourist or ventriloquist. I do not wish to use the context of a tragic conflict to project liberal, western values onto Bosnian characters. To do so would be to patronise victims and readers. Chris Rourke, does hold a typical western perspective and is



highly judgemental, particularly of Serbs, but he is a less sympathetic character as a result. So whilst alluding to perceived injustices, the novel's dominant themes are universally-held concepts of love, hope, loss, guilt, family relationships, developing maturity and betrayal. It is not my intention to lecture perpetrators or victims of a terrible war. The emotions and feelings experienced by the novel's characters are intended to be understood by all human beings whether they are in Bosnia, Croatia, England or elsewhere.

Although the wars that tore apart Yugoslavia provided the novel's background, my Spanish critical project continued to inform the writing process. Ernest Hemingway's minimalist prose, as demonstrated in his war correspondence, was useful when planning a story with a journalist as its main protagonist. Hemingway's narrative style, honed during his early days as a reporter, influenced aspects of my own writing, deliberately shorn of adjectives, adverbs and imagery. Dan is not omniscient. We doubt his analysis because he is immature. However, his later internalisations, particularly in Part 3, reveal a growing sense of self-awareness when compared to his earlier immaturity. Frances Davis's self-critical reflections on her politicised upbringing in New England, as she moved from Nationalist sympathiser to Republican supporter in Spain, mirror Dan's journey from western pro-Nationalist to Serb sympathiser and back again. Even Chris Rourke's self-righteous, pro-interventionist approach echoes the work of campaigning correspondents, including Orwell, Cockburn, Hemingway and Gellhorn, as they demanded the end of the Allies' non-intervention agreement.

There were areas where the Spanish Civil War project and the novel did not influence each other. In some ways (and it was certainly not a conscious decision), the plot follows the conventions of an archetypal 'rites of passage' journey. The protagonist, Dan, is young and lacking in knowledge. He needs to grow up and find a partner. He has to travel far away from home to foreign lands, learn new insights, solve important questions, and then with newly discovered maturity, return with his new wife. In *Clear Blue Waters of the Danube*, Dan lives in the shadow of his father and becomes obsessed with Marija. It is only when he travels to the former Yugoslavia to establish the truth about Tomas's life and death that he meets Andjela. At that moment, he begins to question his past life and offers hope for change.

The central relationship, however, is between a son and his father. It is a bond that, when reflected upon over time by the central character, provides the novel's emotional depth. The feelings of loss, regret and growing maturity can be understood by most readers but are not inspired by the Spanish project. Nor is the arrival of Marija, the outsider whose very presence causes chaos. The entry of a stranger into an established environment, shattering

that community's social regulations and hierarchies, is a well-known device in drama and literature. It remains popular because it is relevant in so many different human settings: at the home, in families, in friendship groups and at work. It was exciting to explore the arrival of the Yugoslav refugee into the middle-class English family. Everyone can draw something from a family drama, and empathise with at least an aspect of any particular relationship. However, there is nothing from the Spanish Civil War project that inspires such a theme.

In future drafts, I might explore Theresa's perspective in greater depth. In Spain, Martha Gellhorn's and Frances Davis's feminine viewpoints formed an alternative to the bloody, battlefield reporting style of men. In a similar way, it would have been interesting to develop Theresa's analysis as events unfolded. How would she have reacted to Dan's behaviour around Marija? How would she have intervened when he fell out with his father? I might have explored her suspicions regarding Marija more deeply, or considered a slow descent in the relationship with her adopted daughter. I might add to her back story and explore the roots of her mental illness. What had Chris been up to in the past?

As I concluded my analysis, having reflected on dozens of books, memoirs and articles, I came to the conclusion that my original question was flawed. Given the tribulations endured by many of these correspondents, I shouldn't have been asking whether or not objectivity was possible, but *why it was impossible*. Is a lack of objectivity in journalism necessarily a bad thing? Yes, if reports are sloppily researched, riddled with invention or lacking insight and analysis. One of the most damaging accusations to throw at a journalist is that he/she is biased. In order to maintain professional standards, correspondents aim to detach themselves from the subject matter, regardless of personal conviction. But by refusing to intervene when reporting on some of the worst events to befall humanity: famine, murder, genocide and disease, surely an essential human impulse is suppressed. Wouldn't it be more humane to show one's feelings? Isn't a personal response to disaster and bloodshed inevitable if the writer is to remain true to him/herself? Herbert Matthews famously claimed that by rejecting bias, one rejects, "the only factors which really matter: honesty, understanding and thoroughness."<sup>7</sup> George Orwell reflected that, "Unconsciously, everyone writes as a partisan."<sup>8</sup> He cautioned his readers to be mindful of his own bias when reading his work. For Orwell, whether or not a correspondent tries to remain impartial is irrelevant. Bias is inevitable.

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert Matthews quoted in *Cockburn in Spain, Despatches from the Spanish Civil War*, ed. by James Pettifer (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p.16-17

<sup>8</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, 2003 edition), p.195

How does the question of objectivity relate to the novelist? If journalists are expected to at least provide a semblance of balance in their reports, fiction writers are under no such obligation. Theoretically, novelists have more freedom to explore themes and ideas. Even so, the question inevitably arises regarding the author's relationship to the subject matter. Why do we put pen to paper in the first place, and how does this impact on what is written? For years, thinkers from Carl Gustav Jung and Sigmund Freud to Joseph Campbell and Christopher Booker have suggested reasons for why we tell stories. Whether the need is based on the struggle for internal balance, the reintegration of the psyche, the existence of archetypes working within the unconscious, or none of these things, something inside the writer inspires him/her to create. Plot, characters, and settings are provoked by various feelings, including childhood memories, fears, aspirations, desires or deep-seated philosophical values.

The project and novel has shown that the relationship between the author and subject matter is incredibly strong but also complex and intricate. In non-fiction, a lack of objectivity might lead to a lack of insight or perspective. It could lead to stereotyping, narrow-mindedness and propaganda. However, an open degree of bias can lead to determined, courageous journalism in the spirit of George L. Steer at Guernica, or Orwell in Barcelona. Bias can be conscious and unconscious. Although fictional stories might be technically untrue, they can also reflect deep-seated feelings, emotions and neuroses as conjured in the human imagination. Perhaps writing stories is partly about the resolution of these feelings. This is not to say that all novels are auto-biographical, but if the author can find dramatic scenarios to represent the feelings and emotions that come to him/her instinctively, then he/she will be a more successful story teller. The ability to understand this relationship between novelist and subject matter; the ability look inside oneself and harness some of the innermost thoughts, in order to produce something with which others can empathise, is one of the most important skills for any successful creative writer. Writing is an intrinsically personal experience. The author's personality flows consciously and unconsciously through everything that he/she writes. Having worked on both a critical project and a novel, I have come to the conclusion that genuine objectivity is probably impossible.

## Introduction

### 'Spain is not politics but life'

I always felt the falseness and hypocrisy of those who claimed to be unbiased, and the foolish, if not rank stupidity of editors and readers who demand objectivity or impartiality of correspondents writing about the war...the chronicler who being human, must have his feelings and opinions; in condemning his bias one rejects the only factors which really matter-honesty, understanding and thoroughness.<sup>9</sup>

Herbert Matthews

The Spanish Civil War marked a turning point, not only in the struggle for a new, modern nation, but also for freedom of journalistic expression. Foreign correspondents poured into Spain from July 1936 to cover the fight for that country's soul, and possibly Europe's future. Since William Howard Russell's coverage of the Crimean War for *The Times*, the correspondent in the field had been expected to effectively act as the print wing of his nation's military. The Boer War and World War One had produced dramatically high levels of jingoistic coverage in British newspapers, but the Spanish Civil War was a different matter. When a group of disaffected generals, led by José Sanjuro, Emilio Mola and Francisco Franco unsuccessfully tried to topple the democratically elected Popular Front Government, a failed coup attempt quickly degenerated into a civil war. English-speaking correspondents found themselves reporting on a conflict of limited strategic or economic value to their own governments. Released from patriotic duties, they enjoyed varying levels of editorial freedom, and were able to approach the issues from a more personal perspective. As a result, the nature of war reporting changed forever.

This did not mean that objectivity was any more likely than before. Given that many correspondents travelled to Spain for personal and/or political reasons, their accounts often became even more subjective. In an atmosphere where 'revealed' truths were being swept away, both reader and writer were forced to make a choice. But whose version of events could be trusted?

For many British people of the 1930s, 'Spain' was not simply the location of a savage internal struggle, or site of the international battle between Fascism and Communism. As a

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Matthews quoted in *Cockburn in Spain, Despatches from the Spanish Civil War* (ed.), James Pettifer (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p.16-17

traditional foe in the story of English freedom, Spain's reputation was rooted in memories of the sixteenth century. Spain was the land of the Armada, the Inquisition and the wars against Elizabeth the First. Spain was a Catholic country, dominated by the repressive teachings of its Church. Spain was a backward nation, prone to revolt and dictatorship; the work-shy home of the siesta and 'mañana'; an exotic land of dust and sun, bull-fighting, dark veils and rosary beads.

Herbert Morrison claimed that Spain's failure to control its military in 1936 was, 'A reflection upon the capacity of the Spanish people for self-government and good public administration.'<sup>10</sup> The Spanish were 'first incompetent and lazy, second, cruel and violent, and finally selfish and individualistic.'<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the United Kingdom was moderate, civilised, democratic and forward thinking. A *Pathe* report at the beginning of the war concluded that Britons should be:

Thankful that we live in a country where men are free to express their political opinions without being shot....While we live here under the protection of the law, the young Spaniard learns to shoot.<sup>12</sup>

After the 1936 election victory of the Popular Front, the *Daily Herald* reassured readers that, 'The average Spaniard despite his sometimes ferocious appearance, his devotion to his spectacular blood sport and the fact that his country still breeds anarchists, is a very ordinary, kindly disposed human being.'<sup>13</sup> Before embarking on a visit to Spain, Leah Manning Labour MP, admitted to preconceived, romantic images of gipsy girls, mixed with nightmarish visions of tortures and inquisitions.<sup>14</sup>

But for many English-speaking writers there was a different Spain, a nation that looked to the future rather than to the past. Across Europe, inequality was the norm between genders, races and social classes, so for its supporters, Republican Spain represented the dawn of a new world. It was the place where, ever since the Second Republic's institution in 1931, a society had been reformed for the better, and it needed to be protected from the forces of reaction. If successful, the Republic's egalitarian and secular principles might be transferred to other nations. Philip Toynbee recalled:

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert Morrison is quoted by Tom Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 2007) , p.4

<sup>11</sup> Buchanan, *Impact*, p.4

<sup>12</sup> Pathe report of 3/8/36 cited by Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997) , p.25

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan, *Impact*, p.5

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.7

This was the last chance for the politics of ‘Attempting the Good’, as opposed to the subsequent politics of ‘Avoiding the Worse.’ The political optimists were never more united in England.<sup>15</sup>

As another World War loomed, the global context of the Spanish conflict was emphasised. A war for civilisation’s future was raging and Spain was its first battleground. So rather than being merely a struggle between ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Spain, of traditional hierarchies resisting the onset of modernity, this was a battle of freedom against tyranny, Fascism against Communism, democracy against dictatorship; or from a conservative perspective, Christianity against Atheism. Feelings further intensified as Franco’s army, aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy took the upper hand. For Republicans, newly gained freedoms including universal suffrage, gender equality, education for the poor and working rights for ordinary people, were threatened.<sup>16</sup> Writers and intellectuals took up the fight. Nancy Cunard, of the *Manchester Guardian*, organised fundraising activities for the Republic. She wrote:

Spain is not politics but life; its immediate future will affect every human who has a sense of what life and its facts mean, who has respect for himself and humanity.<sup>17</sup>

Cunard’s questionnaire, sent to British writers, was headed by the following questions: “Are you for, or against, the legal government and people of Republican Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism? For it is impossible any longer to take no side.” The results were published by the *Left Review* under the title: *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*. She received one hundred and forty seven answers, of which one hundred and twenty six, including those of Samuel Beckett, W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender, supported the Republic. Only five responded in favour of Franco, including (with reservation) Evelyn Waugh, who rejected the premise that a choice between Communism and Fascism was imminent or necessary. Those deemed to be neutral included H.G. Wells, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Toynbee, *Friends Apart: A Memoir of Esmond Romilly and Jasper Ridley in the Thirties* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), p.90

<sup>16</sup> For more details of the repeal of egalitarian legislation by the right wing Radical Party/ C.E.D.A. coalition from 1933-1936 see Paul Preston in *The Spanish Civil War, Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p.67- p.68. Also see Raymond Carr *Modern Spain 1987-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.129- p.134. Finally see Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.14-15

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Cunard, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (London: Purnell and Sons, 1937), p.6

Of the correspondents who ventured out to Spain, many arrived with fixed political opinions. Some Republican writers, including George Orwell and John Cornford, joined up to fight. Louis Fischer, Arthur Koestler and Claud Cockburn engaged in propaganda. Others were initially less committed, but the scenes of death and destruction left a profound impression. In many cases, it was only a matter of time before eye-witness reportage became imbued with the writer's values and opinions. Republican sympathisers such as Martha Gellhorn and Ernest Hemingway proclaimed a global struggle for a fairer, more equal society. Their dispatches highlighted the Republicans' progressive nature in contrast to the Nationalists, who were cast as faceless thugs. Franco's forces had a (smaller) group of supporters. Arnold Lunn, Nigel Tangye, Roy Campbell, Harold Cardozo and Cecil Geraghty portrayed the conflict as a struggle for freedom of religious expression against godless atheism. Their reports were filled with stories of innocent priests and Christians under murderous attack from Moscow-directed Communists and bloodthirsty Anarchists. These polarised positions were reinforced because (with few exceptions) reporters were forced to stay within either the Republican or Nationalist zones for the war's duration. Venturing into opposing territory might bring a charge of espionage, so writers tended to stay put and were rarely able to experience a contrasting point of view, even if they had wished to hear one.

This unlikely set of circumstances did not lead to an outpouring of bias and propaganda. Although on foreign soil, and away from the editor's watchful eye, correspondents were not given complete freedom to write as they pleased. Instead, they were required to portray the conflict in terms most acceptable to his/her readers and newspaper proprietors. Tension inevitably simmered because although half of British national newspapers were neutral or supported Franco, most reporters were sympathetic to the Republic's cause:

As a result of what [war correspondents] saw, even some of those who arrived without commitment came to embrace the cause of the beleaguered Spanish Republic....They saw the mangled corpses of innocent civilians bombed and shelled by Franco's Nazi and Fascist allies. And they saw the heroism of ordinary people hastening to take part in the struggle to defend their democratic Republic.<sup>18</sup>

George Steer of *The Times* and Jay Allen of the *Chicago Tribune* were vilified when their reports of atrocities committed by German and Nationalist forces in Spain hit the headlines. Allen's revelation of the massacres at the bullring in Badajoz led him to be

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die* (London: Constable, 2008), p.16

hounded from his job at the *Chicago Tribune* following a prolonged campaign by Nationalist sympathisers in the United States. Steer's allegation that German bombers were responsible for the carnage at Guernica in April 1937 embarrassed editors at *The Times* who, although officially neutral, were anxious to avoid upsetting the German government. To placate the German Embassy, *Times* editor Geoffrey Dawson ordered a second account to be written, by another journalist, in which the Anarchists were identified as perpetrators instead.

Despite the often partisan enthusiasm of correspondents, few editors were willing to donate space to political analysis. A survey of nine British national daily newspapers: (*The Times*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Worker*, *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* from July 1936 to March 1939) showed that 'Battlefield Stories' was by far the most reported theme with twenty seven percent of all articles.<sup>19</sup> Other accounts concentrated on anti-clerical violence or on the experiences of British people caught up in an alien conflict. Headlines such as 'London Girls Escape in Spain,' from the *Daily Mail*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1936 or 'British Nurse is Favourite of the Wounded', from the *Daily Mirror*, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1936, were common in the early stages. By contrast, political analysis accounted for only six percent of Civil War stories in the *Daily Herald* and zero percent in the *Daily Mirror*.<sup>20</sup> Articles analysing Republican politics made up four percent in the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, and only three percent of Spanish war stories in the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>21</sup>

Although editors wished to avoid the deeper political issues, their newspapers still tended to align themselves with one or other faction, and reporters were directed to toe the line. The *Daily Herald* had a large working class, pro-Republican, readership and remained loyal to the Spanish Government throughout. Liberal papers including the *Manchester Guardian* and *The News Chronicle* also supported the Republic and condemned the British Government's non-intervention policy, which was seen to unfairly penalise the Spanish government.<sup>22</sup> The *Daily Worker* supported the Communist party and hailed the formation of Comintern's 'International Brigades'. It was vehemently opposed to the social revolution led by Anarchists in Catalonia. The *New Statesman*, edited by Kingsley Martin, was hugely supportive of the Spanish Republican cause and refused to print any criticism of the Popular Front government.

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<sup>19</sup> David Deacon, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War: Tomorrow May Be Too Late* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), table 6.9, p.134

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, table 6.2, p.119

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Buchanan, *Britain*, p.25



*The Times* avoided controversy whenever possible and claimed to be neutral. In addition to Steer, it counted Harold (Kim) Philby, posing as a Nationalist sympathiser, as one of its correspondents. Of the other conservative papers, *The Daily Telegraph* was broadly pro-Nationalist. However, it was also heavily critical of Germany and highly suspicious of Nazi intentions in Spain. *The Daily Mail* was openly pro-Franco, and routinely referred to his forces as “Patriots” in a crusade against the godless “Reds”. It printed a steady supply of unsubstantiated reports of atrocities perpetrated against the clergy and other conservative groups. *The Morning Post*, *Sunday Observer*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Sketch* were also pro-Franco.<sup>23</sup>

Correspondents had to contend with high levels of intimidation, particularly in the Nationalist zone. Whilst reporters in the Republican zone were allowed to mingle with military staff, as part of a deliberate effort to project an image of free expression and movement, Franco’s military censors threatened writers with imprisonment or death if any articles were deemed to be overtly critical of the Nationalists’ cause. Even terms used to describe the respective factions were scrutinised. Any reporter using labels such as ‘insurgent’, ‘Rebel’ or ‘Fascist’ to describe the Nationalists was threatened with imprisonment or deportation by the chief press officer, Luis Bolin. Although only one foreign correspondent was executed, many others were threatened or harassed.

In such circumstances, objectivity often proved impossible. The case studies reflect the various choices English-speaking writers felt compelled to make. The first case study investigates reactions to the wave of anti-clerical attacks that took place in the Republican zone during the first weeks of the war. The Church’s fall in status was a matter crucial to any understanding of the cultural shift taking place in Spain. For centuries, the Catholic Church had wielded power through its doctrines, institutions and alliances with other oligarchies. This world was destroyed in a flurry of church burnings and anti-clerical assassinations. Although vitally important for both Nationalist and Republican propagandists, the violence was often misunderstood, particularly by many English correspondents, who had arrived from a country where religious influence was already in decline. Despite an often blatant lack of insight, crude and simplistic analyses were published. Views of both Nationalist and Republican correspondents are investigated.

The second case study depicts the struggle of the individual against the party machine. It contrasts the correspondence of Claud Cockburn with that of George Orwell, and takes the

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

Barcelona Riots of May 1937 as its context. Cockburn wrote for the Communist-backed *Daily Worker* throughout the Spanish Civil War and willingly engaged in propaganda on behalf of the Party. His reports repeatedly denounced Orwell's anti-Stalinist faction, the P.O.U.M., holding it to be responsible both for the Barcelona Riots and an anti-government putsch. By contrast, Orwell was not backed by a powerful party regime. His battle to publish his eye-witness account of the riots and the subsequent purges was met with fierce opposition from Republican government supporters, including former allies in Britain.

Female correspondents were more numerous in Spain than in previous conflicts. Many had been sent by their editors to write 'colour' stories of everyday life for newly identified markets of female readers back home. Content, style and story focus altered significantly from mainstream war correspondence of the time, which was nearly always written by men. The journalism of Martha Gellhorn, from the Republican side, and Frances Davis, who worked for the *Daily Mail* in the Nationalist zone, are contrasted.

The final section of this project deals with the work of the American novelist, Ernest Hemingway who wrote dispatches for the North American News Alliance. Having spent the war burying bad news whilst conjuring up lies on behalf of the Republican Government, Hemingway returned to Cuba to write *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Only now did he reveal what he'd known all along. To what extent can a novel, written from a highly subjective and personal perspective, liberate an author to explain what his articles could not?

Ultimately, these correspondents found that objectivity was not only impossible but undesirable. The Spanish Civil War was a story like no other they had experienced. It demanded a personal response; one that compelled the writer to look in the mirror and decide what it was that made him, or her, a human being. In such circumstances, the writer's values would not be separated from the content of reports. Two broad groups formed in Spain, each representing a strikingly different vision of the future. To paraphrase Nancy Cunard, it would be impossible to avoid taking sides any longer.

## ‘A Grand Bonfire’

### Contrasting Responses to Anti-Clerical Violence in Republican Spain

Atrocities make eye-catching headlines, and even today there are few more divisive issues than religion. This section investigates the reporting of anti-clerical violence in the Republican zone because the coverage provoked such wide ranging and emotionally charged responses from Nationalist and Republican writers. Reports and photographs provoked outrage in Britain and America, where newspapers were filled with stories of churches in flames, the destruction of sacred images and statues, the shooting of clergy, and the disinterring of cadavers at the hands of town militias.

It is difficult to accurately assess the level of religious freedom tolerated in the Republican zone during the Civil War period. We do know that out of a total Spanish ecclesiastical number of 115000, 13 bishops and 4184 priests were massacred, 2365 members of other Catholic orders were killed, along with 283 nuns.<sup>24</sup> The vast majority of murders took place in the summer of 1936 during an outbreak of lawlessness in the weeks following the military uprising. Although churches in the Socialist stronghold of Madrid were often locked up, most places of worship in Barcelona were set on fire or looted. Until government forces restored order, destruction was most likely to occur in places where Anarchism was strong, such as in Catalonia, Aragon and Andalusia.

For conservative critics of the Spanish government, the murders constituted proof that the Republican cause was not primarily concerned with social justice or the ‘Rights of Man’, but was instead rooted in atheism, wanton destruction, and selfishness inspired by Bolshevism. Condemnation of the killings was widespread, even in Anglo-Saxon, Protestant countries such as England and the United States, where Catholicism, especially the Spanish variety, was still viewed with deep suspicion. It is nevertheless unsurprising that intensity of the reaction was so strong. Religious feeling, although in decline, remained hugely influential in 1930s society, and attacks on Christian institutions, regardless of denomination, struck at the heart of what many believed to be the core meaning of life.

In the wake of such extreme levels of violence, correspondents were compelled to ask questions about the role of religion in a modern world. Republican supporters, in particular, were forced to reflect on the type of culture and polity which they wished to create. What did

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<sup>24</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain* (London: Phoenix, 2006), p.92

this new Republic really represent: was it a new world of freedom and equality, (including the freedom to worship), or the unleashing of a new form of crude intolerance? Although an atheist and a Republican supporter, W.H. Auden was left ‘profoundly shocked and disturbed’ by the sight of closed and burnt churches. He’d experienced no interest in religion before but:

Could not escape acknowledging that however I had consciously ignored and rejected the church for sixteen years, the existence of churches and what went on in them had all the time been very important to me.<sup>25</sup>

British and American correspondents had to overcome two main obstacles. The first was a lack of understanding of the political and social roots of the anti-clericalism. This is partly because many foreign reporters arrived in Spain from societies where the bonds between temporal and religious authority were no longer strong. It had been years since clerics had held senior positions of power or significant influence in Britain or North America. The United States was a fervently religious nation but its constitution enforced the separation of church and state. Although England had an established church, its subjects had not known such widespread destruction of religious artwork and buildings since the time of Cromwell. So whilst many writers arrived with a deep interest in the global, political or economic context to the fighting, fewer understood, or cared about the nature of the peculiarly Manichean brand of Catholicism that had existed in Spain for centuries. The Church’s authoritative role at the centre of Spanish society, including the nature of its controversial and mutually supportive relationships with other Spanish oligarchies, was often handled superficially. With often minimal understanding of the specifically Spanish historical and cultural roots to the violence, some writers produced fantastic and graphic accounts of the church burnings and murders, without offering any insight as to the causes.

The second difficulty was that first hand evidence proved difficult to find. Nearly all foreign correspondents arrived in Spain shortly after the initial burst of fighting had broken out in July 1936. By this time, most of the anti-clerical murders had already taken place. The only available witnesses were terrified civilians, who were fearful of reprisals from whichever local army or town militia was left in charge. In such circumstances, correspondents were often left to either report hearsay, or fall back on the heavily biased, ‘official’ narratives of one or other warring faction. In the absence of concrete proof, serious attempts to report the violence were often overshadowed by a tirade of gruesome tales, based

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<sup>25</sup> W.H. Auden, in ‘Missing Churches’, reprinted in *Writers on the Civil War* (ed.), Valentine Cunningham. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980), p.305

on the flimsiest evidence. Ed Knoblauch, of the Associated Press wrote that Anarchists had “forced the severed organs [of priests] into the dying victims’ mouths before finally shooting them.”<sup>26</sup> Knoblauch had dined with the alleged perpetrators, and although that he had no way of verifying their story, he presented it to readers as if it was true.

Despite the difficulties in establishing the facts, two broad narratives emerged. The first was adopted by Nationalist supporters, who had no difficulty placing the terror in the context of the global conflict of religious expression against atheistic Communism. Although genuinely horrified by the attacks, Nationalists also saw outstanding propaganda value in Franco’s uprising being portrayed as a ‘Crusade’ to redeem Spain. Throughout July and August 1936, the *Daily Mail*, in particular, focused on anti-clerical atrocities. Headlines included: ‘Red Women Butcher Spanish Priests’, (4.8.36); ‘Spanish Priest Dragged from Reds’ Car’, (8.8.36) and ‘Priests and Monks Tortured by Nuns’, (13.8.36). Church burnings and other atrocities accounted for a third of all the *Daily Mail*’s Spanish coverage during this period.<sup>27</sup> Similar headlines were also reported in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Express*. For Nationalist sympathisers, the culpability for the violence was laid at the door of predictable targets. Cecil Geraghty, a *Daily Mail* correspondent in Spain wrote:

We have shown that Spain was the victim of a vast Communist plot, inspired and controlled by continental Freemasons, largely Jewish...to establish a world domination for the Comintern, which at present is identified with Stalin and Russia.<sup>28</sup>

In reality, the Communist party in Spain had polled badly in the February General Election. Despite this, many conservatives were convinced that Moscow was the ‘puppet-master’ behind the violence. Correspondents operating in the Nationalist zone dealt with Captain Luis Bolin, who as Chief of Press Office, ensured that a steady supply of anti-Communist atrocity information spread across Europe and America. Before the war, Bolin had worked as the London correspondent of the Spanish paper, *ABC*, and had reported the destruction of Christian art in his family’s hometown of Malaga. Like other Nationalists, Bolin declared that effete foreigners and Communists were responsible for the atrocities.<sup>29</sup> He enjoyed links with right-wing English writers including Douglas Jerrold, and Arnold Lunn, who repeated a harrowing tale, passed to him by the Bishop of Gibraltar, about a priest

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Knoblauch, *Correspondent in Spain* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), p.86-7

<sup>27</sup> Deacon, p.137

<sup>28</sup> Cecil Geraghty and William Foss, *The Spanish Arena* (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1938), p.429

<sup>29</sup> Luis Bolin, *Spain: The Vital Years* (Philadelphia and New York, J.B. Lippincott, 1967), p.106-111

having his hands cut off before being shot.<sup>30</sup> Lunn himself was searched at gunpoint by Republican border guards, who were in search of religious material. If caught in possession of a statue or crucifix, he might have been fined or even imprisoned. The guards were unable to locate the missal hidden in his wife's luggage. Lunn's conclusion, in line with the Nationalist narrative, was that the Bolsheviks were responsible for the anti-clericalism. Not only had the Communists been ordered by Moscow to 'insinuate themselves into Christian churches', but a similar rising was imminent in Britain.<sup>31</sup> The South African poet, Roy Campbell, also reported to have suffered anti-Catholic violence, perpetrated by the Republican authorities. He claimed to have stepped over the bodies of murdered monks in Toledo. 'Thus Strikes the Cheka,' had allegedly been written on the monastery walls. Campbell was later threatened by Assault guards who were searching for religious iconography. He claimed that his attackers had failed to notice a chest of Christian artefacts left in his hallway.<sup>32</sup>

In America, the conflict provoked intense levels of partisanship, particularly in Chicago and New York. Fully aware that high numbers of readers were from the Catholic Italian and Irish communities, owners and editors were under huge pressure to deliver a succession of atrocity stories rather than discuss the controversial political and social roots to the violence. The Church scrutinised the editorial policies of newspapers through organisations such as the International Catholic Truth Society. A daily news service, The National Catholic Welfare Conference, delivered a steady flow of news items to the American faithful.<sup>33</sup>

If the Nationalist tale of godless reds butchering saintly clerics was an effective narrative, a Republican response was not so easily forthcoming. How could Republican values be rooted in the principles of the Enlightenment when religious processions were banned and priests were arrested? How could freedom of expression be guaranteed when churches and other places of worship were being boarded up or burned? At the very least, the attacks were creating embarrassing publicity. One Republican tactic was to minimise the significance of the anti-clericalism by emphasising the bigger picture: a war against Fascism needed to be won. The church burnings and murders were an unpleasant side issue, but not hugely important compared to the global threat posed by Hitler and Mussolini. Yes, the

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<sup>30</sup> Arnold Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1938), p.232

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.153-6

<sup>32</sup> Peter Alexander, *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.164

<sup>33</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000 edition), p.215

destruction and death was regrettable, but in some ways, the violence represented a form of justice for those cold hearted and tyrannical oligarchs who, for so long had betrayed the needs of ordinary Spanish people. Within this context, three possible Republican responses emerged. They could either: downplay the levels of brutality; blame the church for bringing the violence on itself, or transfer responsibility onto non-government factions such as the Anarchists.

Claud Cockburn took the first response and insisted that reports of church attacks had been exaggerated. He even suggested in the *Daily Worker*, that ‘Catholics and conservatives find themselves on the side of the People’s Front and the Republic.’<sup>34</sup> On the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1936, he reported ‘nuns quietly sewing’ in a Barcelona convent and even reprinted a letter from a senior member of their order:

We wish to thank the militia for the kindness and the assistance they have given us and to express both our gratitude and our admiration of the manner in which they have cared for the works of art and other valuables of their church.

Signed Sister Veronica La Gasca.<sup>35</sup>

The convent had been turned into a prison for female political prisoners. Cockburn claimed that the nuns had been caught providing ammunition for Rebel soldiers who had been firing at crowds from the convent building. He did not speculate on the atmosphere in which such a message, honouring her captors so graciously, had been written.

George Orwell took the second strategy and blamed the Church for making itself an enemy of its own people. Orwell rarely mentioned the Spanish religious authorities in his dispatches, though when he did, most of his comments were limited to narrow broadsides such as: the ‘huge parasitic church’<sup>36</sup>, which was, ‘a racket pure and simple.’<sup>37</sup> As far as Orwell was concerned, ‘the priest, the boss and the landlord were all of a piece.’<sup>38</sup> Under such conditions, the attacks, delivered in response, were almost inevitable. There was a deep, ‘hostility [of the people] to a corrupt church.’ He stated:

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<sup>34</sup> Claud Cockburn, in *The Daily Worker* 27.8.36 reprinted in *Cockburn in Spain, Despatches from the Spanish Civil War*, (ed.), James Pettifer (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p.53-5

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.65

<sup>36</sup> George Orwell, ‘Spilling the Beans’ in *New English Weekly* reprinted in *Orwell in Spain* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.217.

<sup>37</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, 2003 edition), p.72

<sup>38</sup> George Orwell, “New English Weekly” in *Orwell in Spain* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 316

In many villages, the huge garish church with the cluster of miserable mud huts surrounding it must have seemed the visible symbol of property.<sup>39</sup>

In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell described a line of gravestones where crosses had been chiselled from each face.<sup>40</sup> He viewed the destruction as part of a *popular* movement from ordinary people who'd long ago lost any sense of religious feeling. Throughout Republican Spain, the Catholic religion had been practically abolished, and for Orwell, it had deserved its fate.

John Langdon-Davies joined in the criticism from a theological, as well as political, perspective. He decided that not only was the Church an enemy of the people, but that the time had come for a Spanish Reformation. Viewing the violence through an English cultural prism, he decided that the destruction of church buildings and iconography was in the best traditions of Oliver Cromwell. 'One feels in Spain today that there is a wind abroad which blows from the same quarter as that which inspired our Puritan ancestors.'<sup>41</sup> Langdon-Davies was irritated by the sight of Spanish peasants bowing before religious icons and kissing the feet of statues. This was a world of spiritual subservience that the Republic was born to destroy. He dismissed the artwork and iconography as 'trash, tinsel and gilt.'<sup>42</sup>

The Communist correspondent, Ralph Bates took the third strategy and sought to transfer the more unpalatable aspects of the anti-clerical outbursts onto the Anarchists. Reporting from a small Pyrenean village, Espot in the Lerida, he was appointed to a committee charged to dispose of religious artefacts. Bates described the burning of statues and images, as 'a grand bonfire'<sup>43</sup> but insisted that the excessive violence was perpetrated by Anarchist militias. He recalled one villager's fear of the Anarchist movement:

I asked an old man, knowing him to be a leading Catholic, what he thought of the burning. Restraining his words, no doubt because the FAI (Anarchist Federation) was not far off, he answered, "Oh one dances the way the music plays, señor."<sup>44</sup>

Bates nevertheless supported the Anarchist leader's assertion that the spirituality of the priest was nothing more than, 'a vulgar materialism behind the mysticism'.<sup>45</sup> Afterwards,

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<sup>39</sup> Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p.315

<sup>40</sup> Orwell, *Homage*, p.71

<sup>41</sup> John Langdon-Davies, *Behind the Barricades, Reports from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Reportage Press, 2007 edition), p.129.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.141

<sup>43</sup> Ralph Bates in 'Companero Sagasta Burns a Church' reprinted in *Writers on the Civil War* (ed.), Valentine Cunningham (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980), p.108

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.109



he noted the ambivalence of many locals who, having witnessed the destruction of Christian artwork, nonchalantly sat and discussed the state of Aragonese sheep.

Many Republican journalists found the specifically Spanish nature of the anti-clericalism too difficult to explain. Ernest Hemingway, as a committed supporter of the Republic, scarcely mentioned the attacks in his newspaper reports. He would wait several years until his book, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, revealed aspects of this Spanish issue, and even then, through the medium of fictional characters. The truth was perhaps too unpalatable to reveal when a greater war against Fascism was to be won.

Here is another indication that journalism in this area failed to make a significant impact. As correspondents became involved in their stories, many tied themselves to the viewpoint of a particular faction. Along with other aspects of political analysis, reporting quickly became too polarised and correspondents ended up toeing the party line. As a result, like their counterparts in the Nationalist zone, Republican sympathisers repeated unsubstantiated rumours and legends, but this time, their tales were told at the Church's expense. Bates recounted allegations of widespread financial corruption; Sylvia Townsend Warner repeated rumours that nuns had stolen and locked away Republican children to be re-educated in convents.<sup>46</sup>

Sadly there was little in the way of explorative or in-depth analysis. Specifically Spanish cultural issues were often ignored. The fractious relationship between the Spanish religious authorities and secular government, particularly during Bonaparte's period of control in the early nineteenth century, and the subsequent impact on the way the Church viewed Republicanism, was apparently not considered. The Church's policy of fully educating the children of only bourgeois families whilst perpetuating the illiteracy of peasant children was criticised but rarely investigated thoroughly. Even the mutually supportive relationship between the landowning classes and the clergy, which developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in response to emerging secularism and calls for land reform, was handled superficially.<sup>47</sup>

The more thoughtful insights came from those who broke with party or church rank and file to offer a more personal and subjective analysis. Lawrence Fernsworth, a Catholic

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.113

<sup>46</sup> Sylvia Townsend Warner in 'The Drought Breaks' reprinted in *Writers of the Spanish Civil War* (ed.), Valentine Cunningham (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), p.245

<sup>47</sup> For further details of the Spanish Church's attitude to Republicanism, see Graham, p.10-14. Also see Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, Reaction, Revolution and Revenge*, p.42-p.47, Frederick Benson *Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p.27-p.31

writer with the *New York Times*, visited the heart of the violence in Catalonia, and was forced to confront his own religious instincts and sympathies. As a genuine eye-witness to the violence in Barcelona on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1936, Fernsworth was able to dispel the theory of the Communist plot and confirm the popular nature of anti-clericalism among townspeople. While recording the sight of the Church of Maria del Mar in flames, he noted, ‘A small and nonchalant crowd of men, women and children [watching]...with all the detachment of people observing a stranger’s funeral.’<sup>48</sup> The crowd were not a group of imported Communists but ordinary people whose religious faiths had long ago faded into disillusionment and resentment. Fernsworth confirmed that bullets had indeed been fired from church towers, refuting an opposing claim by Nationalists that churches had not been used for military purposes. He noted that from, ‘a square niche near the top of the [church] tower, a machine gun was spitting furiously.’<sup>49</sup> But instead of reacting with fury or despair, Fernsworth reflected on the peculiarly Spanish roots to the violence. Rather than being the work of Communists, the Church in Spain had destroyed itself.

I could hardly consider that these churches were being desecrated. In my eyes, they had already been desecrated by the anointed money changers and were no longer holy temples of worship.<sup>50</sup>

By breaking with orthodoxy and despite risking vilification at home, Fernsworth was able to expose Nationalist myths about the violence<sup>51</sup>. The same cannot be said of most other English-speaking reporters. Hampered by constraint within one or other political zone, and fatally compromised by a lack of cultural understanding, writers often allowed their articles to dissolve into hysteria or propaganda. Too often, unsubstantiated tales of clerical corruption, sniper-priests or nuns poisoning children with sweets, although printed and circulated, were left unchecked and unverified. Shocking headlines were far more pleasing to editors pursuing newspaper sales, and although eye-catching and memorable for their emphasis on horror, too many accounts lacked accuracy, context and insight. By resorting to orthodoxy defined by a political party or even a religious identity, writers revealed their own

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<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Fernsworth in ‘Revolution on the Ramblas’, *Nothing But Danger* (ed.), Frank Hanighen (United States: Robert M. McBride & co, 1939), p.35

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.28

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.34

<sup>51</sup> Very little is written about Lawrence A. Fernsworth. He was the *New York Times*’s Barcelona correspondent during the Spanish Civil War and later became the Barcelona correspondent for the London *Times*. His personal history of the Spanish conflict is *Spain’s Struggle for Freedom* (USA: Boston Beacon Press, 1957)

lack of research and understanding. As a consequence, by offering the reader little more than second-hand atrocity narratives, too many articles provoked more questions than answers.

### 'History stopped in 1936?'

It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan.... Beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events.<sup>52</sup>

George Orwell

In this section I contrast the articles of Claud Cockburn and George Orwell. Although in a broad sense, both writers viewed the war from a Republican perspective, they approached work as war correspondents with wholly different concepts of duty to the facts. Both dispensed with any sense of objectivity in pursuit of their respective ideals. Orwell insisted that his version of the Barcelona Riots in May 1937 should be published regardless of any potential damage to the Spanish government's reputation. Cockburn felt that in certain circumstances, specific incidents could be moulded and even completely invented in order to support the greater goal of a Republican victory. If necessary, history itself could be rewritten to suit the aims of the Party.

The events of May 1937 in Barcelona remain, to this day, among the most controversial of the Spanish Civil War. When the police were sent to reclaim the Anarchist-controlled telephone exchange, the streets of the Catalan capital exploded into violence. Within days, government forces prevailed over the Anarchists and their allies, the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista, a dissident, anti-Stalinist group known as the 'P.O.U.M.'

Two contrasting narratives were to emerge. The Republican government in Valencia, under the increasing influence of the Communist Party, held the P.O.U.M. responsible for the violence. Its leader, Andrés Nin, was imprisoned and later killed. The Republican press, including Claud Cockburn of the *Daily Worker*, announced that the P.O.U.M. had been conspiring with Franco's army in order to dismantle Republican defences. The dissident group were widely denounced as traitors and 'Trotsky-Fascists.' Any challenge to this official record of events was suppressed, both in the Republican zone and in Popular Front-supporting journals. As victims of a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign, the P.O.U.M. was outlawed; its members were tracked down and imprisoned or shot.

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<sup>52</sup> Orwell, *Homage*, p.195

Despite this, another narrative was to emerge, written by Eric Blair, otherwise known as George Orwell, and other Republican dissidents. This view was scathingly critical both of the Spanish government and the Communists. And although ridiculed by many Popular Front supporters as naïve, this alternative version of events, with some reservations, holds greater credibility with modern historians. Rather than sign up with the Comintern-organised International Brigades, Orwell joined the anti-Stalinist P.O.U.M. The group's vision, that a social revolution needed to take place alongside the fight against the Nationalists, was not shared by the regional government of Catalonia, the Republican Government in Valencia or the Communist Party. After leaving Spain, Orwell railed against large sections of the liberal and left-wing press in Britain who had repeated the Spanish government's condemnatory attitude towards the P.O.U.M. Despite his stance, Orwell's account of what had actually happened in Barcelona was rejected by Popular Front-supporting editors, anxious that any criticism of government strategy would weaken the Republican cause.<sup>53</sup>

Neither Orwell nor Cockburn claimed to be objective; both had fought in the war and both were committed idealists. Yet their analyses of events from the third to the seventh of May 1937, differed dramatically. How they were drawn into the conflict needs to be examined because in contrasting ways, both used their writing skills to further the causes of their own factions.

Claud Cockburn was hailed by Graham Greene as one of the greatest journalists of the twentieth century. He is particularly famous for his work at *The Week* where, among other things, he exposed the pro-Fascist sympathies of Conservative groups such as the 'Cliveden Set'. After the outbreak of war in Spain, Cockburn was asked by Harry Pollitt, Secretary of the Communist party of Great Britain, to cover the conflict for *The Daily Worker*. Writing under the pseudonym, 'Frank Pitcairn', Cockburn became part of a propaganda machine that suppressed and re-organised information in the pursuit of higher, political aims. In some respects, he effectively became a leading member of the Communist Party's print wing. All political incidents were framed to further the interests of the Republic and if the facts were not apparent, they were invented and moulded to fit the cause. Two key incidents illustrate his approach. The first was when Cockburn was present at the Republican siege of the Alcazar in Toledo. He criticised the American journalist Louis Fischer for describing the Republican militias as 'demoralised'. Cockburn's colleague, the Russian agent, Mikhail

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<sup>53</sup> For more analysis of Orwell's battle with the liberal press, see D. J. Taylor, *Orwell, The Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2003), p.242-4.

Koltzov, also scolded Fischer, claiming that he'd done a better job than thirty British Tory MPs in undermining the Republican struggle. When Fischer protested that his readers were entitled to the truth, Cockburn exclaimed:

Who gave [the readers] such a right [to the truth]? Maybe when they have exerted themselves to alter the policy of their bloody government and the Fascists are beaten in Spain, they will have such a right.<sup>54</sup>

When French Premier, Leon Blum, blocked an arms batch on its way from France to the Spanish Republic, Cockburn and a Czech propagandist named Otto Katz, devised a fictional incident to put pressure on the French government. They invented a revolt at Teutan, deep in Spanish Morocco. Their aim was to present a story demonstrating that Franco was facing difficulties in his own heartland. Katz and Cockburn had never visited the town so they used travel guides to describe the streets and squares. They even invented a certain 'Captain Murillo' to be the hero of the piece. A variety of officers' names were sprinkled deliberately vaguely across the story, so that readers would make mental links with real soldiers but in a style that if challenged, could be denied and explained away. Despite the fictional nature of the event, Cockburn later insisted that the story eventually emerged as one of the 'most factual, inspiring, and at the same time, sober pieces of war reporting ever written.'<sup>55</sup> Significantly, having been made aware of the story, Blum duly re-opened France's borders.

Cockburn's attention turned to the riots in Barcelona. Although he was not an eye-witness, his first article appeared on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1937. Underneath the headline: 'Pitcairn lifts Barcelona Veil, Trotskyist Rising As Signal',<sup>56</sup> Cockburn announced that the P.O.U.M. had revealed itself as a subversive movement, and was responsible for the violence. He alleged that the anti-Stalinist group had been in league with undercover Fascist agents in Barcelona. Their collective aim had been to organise, 'a situation of disorder and bloodshed,'<sup>57</sup> to give German and Italian troops the excuse to land in Catalonia, under the pretext of preserving order. He wrote:

The POUM declares itself as the enemy of the People's Government. In plainest terms, it calls upon its followers to turn their arms in the same direction as the

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<sup>54</sup> Patricia Cockburn, *The Years of the Week* (London: MacDonald, 1968), p.208-11, cited in Preston, p.54

<sup>55</sup> Claud Cockburn, *I Claude* (London: Penguin, 1967), p.193, cited in Knightley, p.212

<sup>56</sup> Cockburn, 'Pitcairn lifts Barcelona Veil, Trotskyist Rising As Signal', in *Cockburn in Spain* (ed.), James Pettifer (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), p.183

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.183

Fascists, against the government of the People's Front and the anti-fascist fighters.<sup>58</sup>

According to Cockburn, the P.O.U.M. had also sabotaged Republican efforts in Guadalajara, Jarama, and 'with deluded persons in the anarchist organisations,'<sup>59</sup> attacked the Republican rearguard in Bilbao. He ended by attributing the culpability for as many as nine hundred dead, and two thousand five hundred wounded, all to the P.O.U.M. In a further *Daily Worker* article of 17<sup>th</sup> May 1937, headlined, 'Republic Rounds Up Hidden Arms,'<sup>60</sup> Cockburn accused the P.O.U.M. of stealing tanks, machine guns and rifles from the army barracks. The group's members were denounced as 'Trotskyist' agent provocateurs,<sup>61</sup> whose leaders had, 'publicly declared themselves active participants in the subversive movement.'<sup>62</sup>

Today, an essential feature of any journalist's role is to ask questions. Historically, this was not always the case. During the Spanish Civil War, Cockburn's articles not only refrained from challenging the official Communist position, but instead, followed it slavishly. In an era of Stalinist denunciations and show trials, his style was not only authoritative, but condemnatory towards anyone veering from the official Party line. Not only were all Nationalists termed simply as 'Fascists', but Republican dissenters were invariably dismissed as 'deluded', 'subversive', or even 'Enemies of the People's Government.' 'Trotsky-Fascist', a term regularly aimed at anti-Stalinist elements within Communism, was routinely applied to the P.O.U.M. leadership.

Cockburn invented statistics. In order to demonstrate the P.O.U.M.'s lack of popular support, he claimed that the government's mobilization decree had been answered by 'more than eighty percent of able Catalonian men.'<sup>63</sup> Cockburn had no evidence to assert such a figure. Despite this, he claimed that far from being reluctant to support their leaders, the men had, 'rushed to present themselves voluntarily.'<sup>64</sup>

George Orwell's recollections of the Barcelona riots were written in response to similar reports by Cockburn in the *Daily Worker*, and also from the liberal *News Chronicle*. In 'Looking Back on the Spanish War,' he wrote:

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p.184

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Claud Cockburn, 'Republic Rounds up Hidden Arms' in *Cockburn in Spain* (ed.), James Pettifer (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), p.185.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.186

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.187

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p.188

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

In Spain for the first time, I saw newspaper reports that did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie....I saw in fact history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various 'party lines.'<sup>65</sup>

He began his response with an article entitled, 'Eye-Witness in Barcelona.' The title itself distinguished the author from those, such as Cockburn, who had written detailed analyses of the fighting without actually having been present at the events. Orwell maintains, more or less, the six rules he later wrote in 'Politics and the English Language'. His choice of vocabulary is almost colloquial; his tone is often righteously indignant, and his straightforward and matter-of-fact style appeals to the reader's sense of fairness.

Responding to the much-levelled charge that the P.O.U.M. was behind a putsch, Orwell insisted that, 'We were simply defending ourselves against an attempted coup d'état by civil guards.'<sup>66</sup> For Orwell, the workers' resistance was not only spontaneous, but it was a matter of self-defence and a protection of what was gained at the outbreak of the social revolution in July 1936. Answering the charge that the P.O.U.M. had stolen machine guns, tanks and guns, Orwell claimed that in all P.O.U.M. occupied buildings, there were, 'about eighty rifles, some of them defective.'<sup>67</sup> The government's assault guards, on the other hand, were issued with new Russian weapons.

In the second part of the article, he described the suppression of his organisation by the authorities, explaining that the executive had been rounded up using the 'Fascist' tactic of imprisoning leaders' wives. Confessions had been extracted by restricting prisoner access to exclude lawyers or anyone from the outside world. The prison conditions were atrocious:

One has to remember, too, just what imprisonment means in Spain at this moment....Apart from the frightful overcrowding of the temporary jails, the insanitary conditions, the lack of light and air and the filthy food, there is the complete absence of anything that we would regard as legality.<sup>68</sup>

Orwell's view was that the Republican Government had betrayed the social revolution, and that the main target was the Anarchists:

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<sup>65</sup> George Orwell, 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', in *Orwell in Spain* (ed.), Peter Davison (London: Penguin, 2001), p.352.

<sup>66</sup> Orwell, 'Eye-witness in Barcelona', in Davison, p.235

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.237

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.239



The Anarchist leaders now have had a demonstration of the methods likely to be used against them; the only hope for the revolution, and probably for victory in the war, is that they will profit by the lesson and get ready to defend themselves in time.<sup>69</sup>

He concluded that by outlawing the social revolution, ‘The present government of Spain had more points of resemblance to Fascism than on points on difference.’<sup>70</sup> In ‘Spilling the Spanish Beans,’ published on 29<sup>th</sup> July and 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1937, Orwell continued with his condemnation of the way the truth had been suppressed. His opening sentence, ‘The Spanish War has probably produced a richer crop of lies than any event since the Great War of 1914-18,’<sup>71</sup> demonstrated his complete disillusionment with English-speaking reporting of the events. His target was not the ‘pro-Fascist newspapers.’<sup>72</sup>

I honestly doubt, in spite of all those hecatombs of nuns who have been raped and crucified before the eyes of *Daily Mail* reporters....It is the left-wing papers, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Worker* with their far subtler methods of distortion, that have prevented the British public from grasping the real nature of the struggle.<sup>73</sup>

He was furious that the left-wing British press had effectively censored any criticism of the Spanish Government. In doing so, they had covered up the bitter truth about,

A reign of terror- forcible suppression of political parties, a stifling censorship of the Press, ceaseless espionage and mass imprisonment without trial has been in progress. When I left Barcelona in June, the jails were bulging....The people who are in prison now are not Fascists but revolutionaries; they are not there because their opinions are too much to the Right, but because they are too much to the Left.<sup>74</sup>

Orwell believed that the Spanish government, in league with the Communists, had outlawed the social revolution to please Moscow. He expanded on his contention that the real struggle on the government side in Spain, was between revolution and counter revolution. In other words,

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.241

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> George Orwell, ‘Spilling the Spanish Beans’, in Davison, p.215

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.216

Between the workers who are vainly trying to hold on to a little of what they won in 1936, and the Liberal-Communist bloc who are so successfully taking it away from them.<sup>75</sup>

In the second part of the article, Orwell explored the term ‘Trotsky-Fascist’, attributed by Communists, including Cockburn, to the P.O.U.M. He complained that in Spain and England, anyone supporting revolutionary Socialism was labelled with the term, and suspected of collusion with Fascists. Rather than being ‘Trotskyist’ or ‘Fascist’, the P.O.U.M. was an ‘opposition Communist party, roughly corresponding to the English Independent Labour Party.’<sup>76</sup> He ended with another swipe at the left-wing British press:

There has been a quite deliberate conspiracy...to prevent the Spanish situation from being understood. People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the ground that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda.<sup>77</sup>

The concluding comments of ‘Spilling the Spanish Beans’ were chillingly prophetic and remind the twenty first century reader of the conflict into which the world was about to be plunged:

If the British public had been given a truthful account of the Spanish war they would have had an opportunity of learning what Fascism is and how it can be combated.... And thus we are one step nearer to the great war “against Fascism.”<sup>78</sup>

Orwell was not the only correspondent to criticize the Communist effort, but he had no party structure behind him with the power to intimidate editors, owners or publishers. As a result, few Popular Front-supporting editors agreed to publish his views. ‘Eye-witness in Barcelona’ eventually appeared in *Time and Tide*, and in a left-wing publication called *Controversy*, following rejection by other publications. The editor of *The New Statesman*, Kingsley Martin, took exception to Orwell’s anti-government conclusions. He refused to publish the article, insisting instead that the paper needed to uphold its policy to fully support the Republican leadership. As a consolation, Orwell was asked to review Franz Borkenau’s *The Spanish Cockpit*, but rather than fall into line, he provided even more allegations about the treatment of the P.O.U.M. He wrote:

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<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p.222

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

The most important fact that has emerged from the whole business is that the Communist Party is now (presumably for the sake of Russian foreign policy) an anti-revolutionary force. So far from pushing the Spanish government to the Left, the Communist influence has pulled it violently to the Right.<sup>79</sup>

This review was also rejected by Kingsley Martin. Orwell never forgave his former editor, later referring to him as a ‘decayed liberal and very dishonest.’<sup>80</sup>

The trouble was that in condemning the bias and propaganda of writers such as Cockburn, Orwell’s efforts had turned into a personal crusade. Orwell didn’t claim objectivity; he wrote as if expecting the reader to agree with his frustration at events. However, many feel that he was unable to reflect reasonably on his own position, and that he was too uncritical towards his own party. Orwell did not consider the possibility that the P.O.U.M.’s economic policies in Barcelona had been flawed in any way, or that the social revolution might be completely unworkable in a modern society. Many Republicans genuinely supported the Communist position that all forces should be united under the command of the government in Valencia. They didn’t need to be brainwashed by propaganda to decide that the P.O.U.M.’s insistence on political independence was naive and counter-productive. By defying the orders of the democratically elected government, were not the P.O.U.M. and Anarchists behaving similarly to the Nationalists? Had the result of their petty behaviour been to divide and weaken Republican forces just as the Nationalists’ advance gained pace?

Orwell’s campaign to reveal the truth was wholly unsuccessful. Communists and Popular Front sympathizers in the left-wing press continued their demolition of the P.O.U.M. In June 1937, and in a scene prophetically pre-emptive of 1984, the *Daily Worker* announced the public confessions of two hundred P.O.U.M. members. In almost hysterical language, the paper revealed, ‘One of the ghastliest pieces of espionage ever known in wartime,’ and ‘the ugliest revelation of Trotskyist treachery to date.’<sup>81</sup>

Memories of the First World War were invoked in the attempt to rewrite history. The Communist Ralph Bates, writing in the *New Republic*, regurgitated a famous scene from the trenches when he claimed that P.O.U.M. troops had been playing football with Fascists in No

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<sup>79</sup> George Orwell, ‘Spanish Nightmare’, in *Writers on the Civil War* (ed.), Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.317

<sup>80</sup> George Orwell, ‘List of thirty five crypto-communists handed to the British Information Research Department’, in *The Lost Orwell* (ed.), Peter Davison (London: Timewell Press, 2006), p.145

<sup>81</sup> Claud Cockburn, ‘Spanish Trotskyists Plot with Franco’, in the *Daily Worker* 21<sup>st</sup> June 1937 cited in Orwell, *Homage*, p.245

Man's Land.<sup>82</sup> After being imprisoned by the police, Frank Frankford, a P.O.U.M. member, was induced by *Daily Worker* journalist Sam Lessor to sign a document confirming that his organisation was dealing in arms with Fascists.<sup>83</sup> As a reward, Frankford was released from a Republican prison and given a first class ticket back to London.

Orwell had previously found himself as the target of personal criticism by the *Daily Worker*. Comments focussed on the writer's social class and his background as an officer in the Imperial British police. In his review of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harry Pollitt had referred to him as, 'a disillusioned middle class boy....I gather that the chief thing that worries Mr. Orwell is the "smell" of the working class.'<sup>84</sup> In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell had actually criticised the class-based prejudices of the 'bourgeoisie' he grew up with who opined that the working class smelled. However, later in the chapter, Orwell had insisted that:

It is a pity that those who idealise the working class so often think it necessary to praise every working-class characteristic and therefore to pretend that it is meritorious in itself.<sup>85</sup>

When *Homage to Catalonia* was reviewed by John Langdon-Davies in the *Daily Worker*, the personal attacks continued. It was asserted that Orwell:

Gives an honest picture of the sort of mentality that toys with revolutionary romanticism but shies violently at revolutionary discipline. [His book] should be read as a warning.<sup>86</sup>

Langdon-Davies's writing reflected the Communist Party viewpoint that all dissident groups on the Republican side needed to conform to the policies of the increasingly Communist-influenced Spanish government, or throw down their arms. He stressed the necessity of 'changing the mentality of anarchists,' and concluded that, '*Homage to Catalonia* shows the obstinate few who refuse to change.'<sup>87</sup>

Although initially blocked by Victor Gollancz of the Left Book Club, in 1938, Orwell did eventually publish *Homage to Catalonia*. In it, he again criticised Claud Cockburn's articles, and insisted that all notions of a treacherous 'Fourth International' were mythical. He

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<sup>82</sup> Ralph Bates, *New Republic* cited in Orwell, *Homage*, p.242

<sup>83</sup> Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), p.232

<sup>84</sup> Harry Pollitt, *The Daily Worker* cited in Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Abacus, 2006), p.229

<sup>85</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 2003 edition), p.121

<sup>86</sup> John Langdon-Davies, *The Daily Worker*, 21.5.38 in *Writers of the Spanish Civil War* (ed.), Valentine Cunningham (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), p.305

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

dismissed Cockburn's assertion that two hundred P.O.U.M. members had confessed their guilt as 'Two hundred pieces of somebody's imagination.'<sup>88</sup> By 1942, however, he'd lost hope that the truth would ever be established. In 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', he directed his reader to:

Believe nothing of what you read about internal affairs on the [Spanish] Government side. It is all from whatever source, party propaganda, - that is to say, lies....The Spanish bourgeoisie saw their chance of crushing the labour movement, and took it, aided by the Nazis and by the forces of reaction all over the world. It is doubtful whether more than that will ever be established.<sup>89</sup>

In the final analysis, for both of these men, objectivity was impossible. Both were driven by a world outlook telling them that change was necessary, but they had contrasting principles determining the way events were to be reported. Cockburn was linked to a vastly more influential organisation which demonstrated the power to alter history to fit its own vision for the future. Actual truth became less important when compared with the cause of ultimate victory. Such was his desire to see a new political system introduced, Claud Cockburn put his faith in the Party. However, the conviction that a new society was necessary, led him to become engaged in propaganda and lies. Later in life, Cockburn admitted:

There seems to be two be two pieces to this problem....The extent to which I myself totally believed what I said, and the extent to which I was, more or less consciously, trying to get others to believe it. But I don't really think there is such a clear line of division.<sup>90</sup>

He would not accept that his behaviour was morally wrong. After all, large sections of the right-wing press continually indulged in their own forms of propaganda, and regularly painted Spanish Republicans as bloodthirsty murderers of nuns and priests. Franco's 'Crusade' against the godless was supported by many conservative editors and newspaper owners. Communists and Socialists believed that they had no chance of receiving fair reporting in large sections of the British press, so they wished to fight back. In this context, Cockburn felt that the end justified the means. But by hiding facts and inventing fictional incidents, innocent people, including Orwell, were smeared and betrayed.

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<sup>88</sup> George Orwell, *Homage*, p.245

<sup>89</sup> George Orwell, 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', in *Orwell in Spain* (ed.), Peter Davison (London: Penguin, 2001), p.351

<sup>90</sup> Claud Cockburn quoted in Knightley, p.213

This is not to say that Orwell was indeed wholly correct in his political analysis. In his review of *Homage to Catalonia*, V.S. Pritchett wrote, ‘There are many strong arguments for keeping creative writers out of politics and Mr. George Orwell is one of them.’<sup>91</sup> Pritchett’s reasoning had nothing to do with Orwell’s writing ability:

If these [creative writers] toe the party line they are likely to be ruined as writers; if they preserve their independence...they become an annoyance to the causes they espouse.<sup>92</sup>

Orwell’s stance certainly irritated many in the Popular Front. Nevertheless, like Cockburn, he felt compelled to write and bear witness. Unlike Cockburn, Orwell didn’t use his words as a weapon of war. His aim was to reveal the truth and to achieve justice for his P.O.U.M. comrades. There is little doubt, however, that his attitudes towards that P.O.U.M. were often too uncritical and perhaps self-deluding. Many historians and commentators, whilst agreeing with Orwell’s analysis regarding the persecution of the P.O.U.M., strongly disagree with him over his defence of the social revolution.<sup>93</sup>

It is notable that both writers implied that their accounts were written, to some degree, from ‘unconscious’ as well as ‘conscious’ experience. This was a war that compelled them to act; to get involved. For both men, the values underpinning the fight against Fascism had forced them to write in a way that had little to do with any considerations of balanced journalism. Under such circumstances as these, objectivity was not simply undesirable, it was impossible. In order to achieve the certainty of victory, they had written themselves into the broader story of the Spanish Civil War. The main difference between them is that Cockburn had no difficulty recording lies as part of a broader fight to gain victory. For Orwell, written truth and ultimate justice were inseparable. Orwell’s commitment to the truth, as he saw it, nearly cost him his life, and damaged his career at home. Although at the end of the war, he became disillusioned and fearful for humanity’s future, his position did not change. Orwell wouldn’t follow the Party’s policies if he didn’t believe in them. In *The Prevention of*

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<sup>91</sup> V.S. Pritchett, ‘The Spanish Tragedy’, in *New Statesman and Nation* 30.4.38, reprinted in *Writers on the Civil War* (ed.), Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.302-4

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> For more analysis and evaluation of Orwell’s exploits in Spain, and of his efforts to exonerate the P.O.U.M. in the British press, see Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Time Warner, 2003), p. 201-247. Also see Bernard Crick, *Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), p.207-p.236 and D. J. Taylor p. 217- p.253

*Literature*, written in 1946, he set out his approach: ‘One has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox.’<sup>94</sup>

The journalist is unfree...when he is forced to write lies or suppress what seems to him important news. The imaginative writer is unfree when he has to falsify his subjective feelings, which from his point of view are facts.<sup>95</sup>

This view represents the defining difference between Cockburn and Orwell. It is the contrast between the idea of collective orthodoxy and the idea of individual free thought. Individuals are often weaker when up against the collective power of orthodoxy, and because the P.O.U.M. was vanquished and a united army created in its place, it must be accepted that Cockburn’s side triumphed. As a result, for years, thousands, perhaps millions of honest people believed the propaganda. Nevertheless it is Orwell, who stressed the necessity of “taking a stand” against totalitarianism, whose views have stood the test of time. Most historians agree that the fighting in Barcelona was not planned by the P.O.U.M., and although many disagree with the group’s contrarian stance, no-one seriously contends that the anti-Stalinist organisation was in league with Franco. The language of Cockburn would reappear in Orwell’s fiction, but it would not be the language of liberation. Instead it provided the inspiration for concepts such as ‘Double-think’ to be found in *1984* and *Animal Farm*. The language used to smear and humiliate dissidents would become imprinted on the modern mind as examples of the ways in which the rewriting of history can rewrite truth.

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<sup>94</sup> George Orwell, ‘The Prevention of Literature,’ *Shooting an Elephant and other Essays* (London: Penguin 2003), p.217

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.216

‘All that Objectivity Shit’

Martha Gellhorn, Frances Davis and Female Correspondents in Spain

This section examines the distinctive contribution made by female English-speaking journalists in the reporting of the Spanish Civil War. The content and analysis of women’s accounts differed to those written by men, and their reports were often compiled with a wholly different audience in mind. However, most female correspondents, like the men, found that when confronted with the injustice, misery and carnage of total war, objective reporting became impossible. The contrasting backgrounds, motives and activities of two Americans are investigated. Frances Davis worked in the Nationalist zone for the *Daily Mail* while Martha Gellhorn sent dispatches from the Republican sector for *Collier’s*. Although they arrived in Spain with contrasting levels of political conviction, the conflict was to alter both their lives dramatically. In different ways Davis and Gellhorn were to become advocates and, in some respects, participants in the war. Davis travelled to Europe in search of adventure and career enhancement. The terror and bloodshed would provoke a dramatic change of perspective. For Martha Gellhorn, Spain was always more than a savage but isolated, internal conflict. It was the place where Fascism had to be fought and defeated before it could spread across the continent. The war’s outcome would shatter her faith in humanity. Many years later, she would reflect that:

All of us who believed in the *Causa* of the Republic will mourn the Republic’s defeat and the death of its defenders, forever, and will continue to love the land of Spain and the beautiful people, who are among the noblest and unluckiest of earth.<sup>96</sup>

Today, western female foreign correspondents such as Kate Adie and Orla Guerin are widely known and established as frontline reporters. Between 1936 and 1939, however, women represented just ten percent of all war correspondents in Spain.<sup>97</sup> In response to a growing recognition of ‘women’ as a consumer group, editors needed a feminine perspective on events.<sup>98</sup> But although some female correspondents were given high profiles, virtually all were accorded lowly status and expected to work as freelancers behind the protection of male colleagues. Women were directed to provide ‘colour stories’ about the everyday lives of

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<sup>96</sup> Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War* (London: Granta 1998 edition), p.17

<sup>97</sup> Deacon, p.68

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p.77-8



ordinary citizens, in contrast to the battle reports and political analysis produced almost exclusively by men.<sup>99</sup> The female experience against the backdrop of a male-dominated environment was a familiar one. Universal suffrage at the age of twenty one was not achieved in Britain until 1928. Women would not be accorded full membership of Oxford University until 1920, and there were no laws regarding equality of opportunity in the work place. ‘Marriage is the one great profession open to our class since the dawn of time until 1919’, wrote Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*.<sup>100</sup>

Republican Spain did not bring about a gender equality revolution. In most parts of the country, women were expected to remain in traditional roles. Working women still only earned, on average, one and a half pesetas a day, which was half that of a man. However, some progress *was* made. Women were given full legal status and adult females were granted the right to vote in 1931. Divorce and civil marriage were legalised in 1932, and the crime of adultery was abolished. For the first time, mothers were granted limited maternity leave. Even the women’s civil rights group, ‘Mujeres Libres’, (Free Women) was formed by two Anarchists from Barcelona and Madrid. Such behaviour would have been unthinkable under previous regimes.

So for many women, including those visiting from overseas, the Republican side was far more likely to support female emancipation than any Nationalist administration. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many female journalists making their way to Spain became instinctively supportive of the egalitarian ideals underpinning the Republican cause. Of the twenty two English-speaking female correspondents working in Spain during the Civil War, eighteen reported from the Republican zone and a further two worked in both Republican and Nationalist sectors. Only two women sent dispatches solely from the Nationalist sector.<sup>101</sup>

Over a third of English-speaking female correspondents in Spain were American.<sup>102</sup> With equality of opportunity seen as a right to be grasped, rather than a plea to be granted, some Americans saw in the cause of the Spanish Republic, parallels with the birth of their own nation. American female reporters making their way to Spain tended to be well educated and wealthy, with liberal or anti-fascist views. Editors were often reluctant to send females into war zones, so women also needed to be well connected. Kitty Bowler was a Bryn Mawr student in Philadelphia; Frances Davis was a Boston University student. Virginia Cowles was

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<sup>99</sup> Deacon, p.72

<sup>100</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (Adelaide: Ebooks@Adelaide.edu.au, 2009 edition), Chapter 1

<sup>101</sup> Deacon, p.69

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

recruited by the Hearst Press, but was only able to travel to Europe by drawing from a large personal inheritance.

Martha Gellhorn was also born into a wealthy, educated and idealistic household in St. Louis, Missouri. Her early adult life was unconventional. Although she'd attended Bryn Mawr University in Philadelphia, she left before graduating and at twenty one, travelled to France where she started an affair with a married man. Dissatisfied with the direction her life was taking, by 1936, she'd already begun to feel, 'Increasingly fey, fake and oppressed.'<sup>103</sup> As the Nazis rose to power in Germany, Gellhorn ditched her pacifist views. She became convinced that Europe was heading towards a precipice, and that Franco needed to be defeated if the march of reactionary regimes was to be halted. In an interview with Philip Knightley, she later stated, 'We knew, we just knew that Spain was the place to stop Fascism.'<sup>104</sup> In a letter, written in January 1937, she wrote:

I want to be in Spain desperately because that's the Balkans of 1912. And if you're part of the big thing, you're safe; it's only waiting and looking on from the outside that makes you nervous and lost. For the first time in a long time, I hate the way I live.<sup>105</sup>

So the Spanish Civil War not only presented Gellhorn with an opportunity to fight Fascism. It also offered a chance to secure life fulfilment, and perhaps, a sense of direction. After exploiting her connections at *Collier's* magazine, she arrived in Madrid in March 1937, holding a letter identifying her as a special correspondent:

But how could I write about a war, what did I know, and for whom would I write? What made a story to begin with? Didn't something gigantic and conclusive have to happen before one could write an article?<sup>106</sup>

She would not need to look for long. The story of how the conflict affected ordinary people in Madrid would find her soon enough, and change her life forever.

Frances Davis also emerged from an idealistic background. She was born to trade union activist parents in an experimental, 'utopian' community called 'The Farm', in New England's Merrimack Valley. Davis grew up around Christian ministers, anarchists, poets, socialists, and anyone believing that an alternative vision to one offered by capitalism was

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<sup>103</sup> Martha Gellhorn, in a letter to Allen Grover, 4.10.36., *The Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn* (ed.), Caroline Moorhead (London: Chatto & Windus., 2006), p.41

<sup>104</sup> Martha Gellhorn quoted by Knightley, p.208

<sup>105</sup> Martha Gellhorn in a letter to Ernest Hemingway dated Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 1937, cited by Caroline Moorhead, p.46

<sup>106</sup> Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, p.16

needed to change American society. After a happy but sheltered childhood, she attended Boston University as a journalism student. Despite her idealistic family background, Davis did not hold strong ideological convictions. Her reasons for travelling to Europe were not based on political principle. Although worried about the rise of Hitler, she had little understanding of the tensions rising in Spain. She travelled to France as part of a plan to see Europe whilst kick-starting a career in journalism. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Davis tagged along with a handful of foreign correspondents into the Nationalist Zone. Most of her new colleagues wrote for newspapers that were sympathetic to Franco's uprising. After finding her way into Pamplona, she recalled speeding past young rebel soldiers.

“Arriba España!” they cried.  
“Arriba España,” we called in answer.  
This exchange with strangers excited (us).  
We were caught up in a surge of brotherhood.<sup>107</sup>

‘Arriba España’, was the rebel cry of Nationalist Spain. Davis's critics might describe her actions as naïve. Not many other journalists, even those ambivalent about Franco, could bring themselves to behave in the same way. At the very least, her actions were odd, given her political family background. She was later claim a ‘fearful innocence’ regarding the essentially Spanish dimension to the Civil War, but she was to grow up quickly. The culture of the Nationalist zone was conservative and did not cater for the advancement of women's rights. Pilar Primo de Rivera, leader of ‘Sección Femenina’ of the Falangist movement, repeatedly declared that there was nothing more detestable than an intellectual woman. Her organisation which, by 1939, boasted a membership of over eight hundred thousand Spanish women was committed to maintaining the woman's traditional place as home-maker:

What we will never do is put ourselves in competition with men because we will never attain equality with them and instead will lose all the elegance and all the grace indispensable for harmonious living together.<sup>108</sup>

It was into this environment that Davis suddenly found herself. She was often ignored and patronised, not only by Spanish military officers, but also by colleagues. The *Daily Mail*'s ‘Major’ Harold Cardozo was the self-appointed leader of the group of English-speaking correspondents in the Nationalist zone. When Davis joined them, he made his view clear regarding the only female present:

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<sup>107</sup> Frances Davis, *A Fearful Innocence* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1981), p.139

<sup>108</sup> Pilar Primo de Rivera is quoted by Victoria L. Enders in *Fascist Women Speak: the International Museum of Women*, [www.imow.org/wpp/stories/viewStory](http://www.imow.org/wpp/stories/viewStory)

Can't have her endangering the entire manoeuvre....Hardly can ask for a pass for a *girl* to go to the front, what? Spaniards won't like it. Think we don't take their damn war seriously, what? Have to find her a ride back to France. Sorry old girl.<sup>109</sup>

Davis had to prove herself as 'one of the boys'. First she used her diplomatic skills to secure a 'Salvo Conducto' for each of the dozen or so English-speaking correspondents. Although remaining an outsider, she proved her worth by taking on the extremely dangerous role of smuggling stories past border officials in order to avoid the censors. On one occasion, she crossed into the Republican zone by mistake. Theoretically, if her paperwork with Nationalist signatures had been discovered, she might have been shot as a spy. Instead, her efforts paid off when her bravery caught the attention of the *Daily Mail*, and she was hired as the only female correspondent in the Nationalist zone.

As Franco's bombs rained down on Madrid, Gellhorn too found herself at considerable personal risk. The piece she wrote for *Collier's* entitled: 'High Explosive for Everyone', is a classic example of the reportage she regularly provided:

Then for a moment it stops. An old woman, with a shawl over her shoulders, holding a terrified thin little boy by the hand, runs out into the square. You know what she is thinking: she is thinking she must get the child home, you are always safer in your own place, with the things you know. Somehow, you do not believe you can get killed when you are sitting in your own parlor, you never think that.... [The boy is later killed by a shell.] The old woman stands there, holding the hand of the dead child, looking at him stupidly, not saying anything, and men run out toward her to carry the child. At their left, at the side of the square, is a huge brilliant sign which says: Get out of Madrid.<sup>110</sup>

This theme, of a family struggling to survive amidst chaos, would become a feature of Gellhorn's accounts. Female correspondents were often employed by editors to provide a feminine angle for the emerging women's market back home. It is therefore no coincidence that the principle figures in this report are a mother and child. The implication is that a female readership would particularly relate to this scenario. Gellhorn would continue in this vein throughout her time in Spain, writing about children suffering from malnutrition; families picking their way through rubble, queuing for food, or trying to keep warm as firewood becomes scarce.

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<sup>109</sup> Davis, p.142

<sup>110</sup> Martha Gellhorn, 'High Explosive for Everyone', in *The Face of War* (London: Granta 1998 edition), p.22

Many commentators detect a contrast in the content of reports written by men and women. It is argued that stories written by females contain more empathetic concern than those written by men. According to Angela Jackson, women writing on Spain deliberately focused on the way the war affected people's everyday lives. For Jackson, this focus was 'the reflection of a different agenda.'<sup>111</sup> Virginia Cowles, for example, claimed to be much more interested in the human side of the conflict.<sup>112</sup> This may be so, but from what is known of the political beliefs driving writers such as Martha Gellhorn, the view that women wished to write only 'women's angles', can appear simplistic. There were other dominant reasons that forced women to concentrate on 'empathetic' themes. Women were mostly employed in a freelance capacity. Only officially accredited (male) correspondents were given access to the key army sites and personnel. Exiled from the front, women had more opportunity to meet with the local people and experience their way of life. It is perhaps inevitable that without the pressures of daily headlines, other issues became central to their stories.

When describing the war-time conditions, Gellhorn's writing style was comparable to that of her partner, Ernest Hemingway. The eye-witness, second person approach, and use of internalisations were intended put the reader in the position of a potential victim of Francoist aggression. The aim was to demonstrate that the war was being waged against ordinary people, trying to live their lives, just like the reader at home. She wrote about civilians: maids cleaning up a room after a bombing; women remaining in line for food, even after the main square is shelled, because they've already been waiting for three hours, while the children are at home, expecting to be fed. She described the resilience of customers moving only slightly away from the glass of shop windows while trying on new shoes as the shells struck. After visiting a young family and describing the state of the house, she wrote:

All winter long there was no fuel and the days were cold and the nights were colder, you know that food is scarce and that all these people have sons and husbands and sweethearts at the front somewhere.<sup>113</sup>

In another article, 'The Besieged City', she continued to focus on ordinary civilians, beginning with a description of a flimsy bomb shelter that had been destroyed. 'And now there was only a mound of clay and kindling wood, and they had dug out the five dead bodies

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<sup>111</sup> Angela Jackson, *British Women in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.132 is cited by Deacon, p.72

<sup>112</sup> Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941), p.55

<sup>113</sup> Martha Gellhorn, 'High Explosive for Everyone' in *The Face of War* (London: Granta Publications 1998), p.26

as soon as it was light.<sup>114</sup> In 'The Third Winter' of 1938, she visited the Hernandez family, and noted that all the wood in the house had been used for coffins, firewood and artificial limbs. The room was lit by a cup of oil and she reported the terrified reaction of the little boy who hid under the bed during bombing raids.<sup>115</sup> After travelling to Barcelona, Gellhorn described the 'pinched women' filing into shops, handing over cards in return for food that was doled out in little grey paper sacks. She visited a children's ward and saw:

Tiny white figures propped up with pillows, swathed in bandages, the little pale faces showing, the great black eyes staring at you, the small hands playing at the sheets.<sup>116</sup>

She notes in a child named Manuela, the 'rope thin legs and the swollen stomach of rickets.'<sup>117</sup> By reporting the effects on ordinary children in such graphic terms, Gellhorn is domesticating the war, visualising it, bringing it home to Americans, and by doing so, sending a clear message. People are suffering because of a conflict that was brought about by the forces of reaction. It was a rallying call for governments and readers everywhere: something must be done.

Unlike Gellhorn and most of the other female correspondents, Davis had greater access to the actual fighting. At times, she found herself in the thick of the action and reflected on the impact such scenes were having on her state of mind. At the Alto de Los Leones pass, when taking cover behind a rock, she found:

What had been a man, burnt crisped, fried; his arms stuck up to embrace my descent, the skin across his chest tanned tight as leather, his teeth grinning ear to ear. If I had grazed that leather flesh it would have crumbled and the gas of the putrid insides would have risen and engulfed me.<sup>118</sup>

After being strafed by Republican planes and wounded by shrapnel, she revealed her terror of everyday mechanical sounds: the screeched car brake or even the hum of an engine. She described the way, on hearing the noise of approaching aircraft she would curl up like a turtle to make herself small.

Obviously, Davis did not hold the same political convictions as Gellhorn. She continued to frame her stories to suit the policies of the *Daily Mail*, dutifully describing the Nationalists as 'Patriots' and the Republicans as 'Reds'. However, she became increasingly

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<sup>114</sup> Martha Gellhorn, 'The Besieged City' in *The Face of War* (London: Granta Publications 1998), p.30

<sup>115</sup> Gellhorn, 'The Third Winter' in *The Face of War*, p.39

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p.47

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p.154

shocked by the peculiarly Spanish mix of religion and war, particularly the sight of the rebel soldiers wearing medallions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or of Christ crowned with thorns. A female agenda also began to emerge in her writing.<sup>119</sup> In Franco's capital of Burgos, she described the pain endured by Nationalist families. She watched young rebels, in blood stained tunics, returning home to be embraced by their fathers, whilst tears ran down their cheeks. She watched women with coal black hair and veils, who never wept, but waited by the radio, listening vigilantly for news of their sons. Davis recorded the human devastation as she passed through empty and ghostly towns, such as Saragossa. Three old ladies, lay in a crater made by a shell, '...as if for a little dance, their skirts blown up in levity.' Ominously, however, 'High against the blue-glazed sky, the vultures circled.'<sup>120</sup>

On visiting Burgos again, she later claimed to feel pangs of guilt when rebel soldiers called her 'Amiga', whilst peasants cowered on the other side of the road. At San Raphael, she recalled watching with pity as a band of Republicans were rounded up.

Some were laughing, some were crying- and some were shouting, "Madre de dios" or "Arriba Espana!" One was screaming that he went regularly to Mass. Some made no sound and did not weep and would not run; their faces were stubborn and sullen.<sup>121</sup>

All correspondents' articles were vetted at the front by Nationalist authorities. Davis witnessed several writers being refused access to key personnel because their reports had not been sympathetic enough to the Francoist cause. Yet when it came to her articles, she found that: 'There is never discussion about my name. The stuff I have been sending is fine.'<sup>122</sup> She became wracked with guilt.

The deciding incident occurred after witnessing a conversation between General Miguel Aguilera and another journalist. Having compared the Republicans with human sewage, Aguilera declared that the working classes were no better than animals, 'Infected with the virus of liberty.'<sup>123</sup> He revealed that the Nationalists' program was to exterminate one third of the population. Having derided the 'Rights of Man', Aguilera asserted that the 'masses' were no more fit for reason than pigs. Davis's reaction was to recall her life at 'The

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<sup>119</sup> Little is written about Frances Davis's work. She wrote two memoirs: *My Shadow in the Sun* (USA: Carrick & Evans Inc, 1940.) and *A Fearful Innocence* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1981). Her papers are held at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

<sup>120</sup> Davis, p.141

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, p.150

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, p.151

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p.158

Farm' in New England; her father who'd fought for labour rights and her mother, who'd been jailed as a striker,

I get the shivers and stumble out of the hotel across the square; I cannot make my body cease trembling with fatigue and fear. I am often with [Aguilera], eat with him, ride with him, stand beside him at battles. But I know him for my enemy and I am his. Everything that has made me is death to him; everything that has made him is death to me.<sup>124</sup>

Davis's memoirs, published in 1981, state that following this encounter, she became filled with shame at the reports she'd compiled for the *Daily Mail*. Given the trade union and activist background of her parents, it is difficult to understand why she hadn't come to this conclusion sooner. Nevertheless, she decided that she could no longer write for a newspaper that supported the Nationalist side. She left her post, and according to her memoir, *A Fearful Innocence*, became an advocate for the Republic. Critics might note that Davis's account of her time in Spain was written many years after the events took place, and shows signs of having undergone considerable revision. The events are seemingly reconstructed according to a conventional autobiographical framework. The story begins with the protagonist, living without direction in a spiritual wilderness, as Davis was in Nationalist Spain. There is a moment of epiphany, when she realises the error of her ways, and by embracing the Republican effort, finds meaning and direction in life. The encounter with Aguilera is that moment of epiphany, written in the present tense, to bring the reader into the scene, create a sense of drama and perhaps provoke an empathetic reaction. Life rarely follows the path of a carefully drawn narrative arc. Memoirs are notorious for expecting us to believe in the simplicity of their frameworks. It is doubtful that Davis's account of her 'epiphany' is the complete picture. Given her family background and education, some might find it difficult to believe she could have been so innocent about the political situation. On the other hand some sort of conversion did take place because, soon afterwards, Davis did indeed leave the Nationalist sector for good.

Both women were soon to become active participants in the conflict. Gellhorn had always used her stories to bring home to American readers the miserable conditions inflicted on civilians, so they'd have contempt for Franco's uprising. She had no interest in 'All that objectivity shit,'<sup>125</sup> so valued by many other journalists. She was a supporter of the Republic

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<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p.159

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Jenni Murray, BBC Radio 4, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1993



as a bulwark against fascism; her reports reflected her politics and she made no apologies for her position. In a 1993 interview, she explained:

If you are seeing something happening, the idea that you are so brain-dead and stony-hearted that you have no reaction to it, strikes me as absolute nonsense....And you see appalling things happening to people, how could you not? You are describing what you see and what you see is awful.”<sup>126</sup>

She was to move into outright propaganda. When Ernest Hemingway wrote a documentary film, *Spanish Earth*, in order to rouse support for the Republic in the United States, Gellhorn helped create the sound effects with Joris Ivens. Following its production, she accompanied Hemingway as he took the film across the nation, including a Presidential viewing at the White House. The film was essentially a propaganda exercise that depicted a united Spanish people fighting for existence against an alien and unpopular military force, but it had little impact on American opinion. The President had no intention of breaking the non-intervention agreement, brokered by Britain and France, and for some, Gellhorn’s charges against the Nationalists were becoming tiresome. When in 1937, she wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, calling for the United States to intervene in support of the Basque children, Roosevelt replied that Gellhorn shouldn’t allow her emotions to warp her judgement. America was not going to intervene.

Some commentators feel that Gellhorn went further than merely demonstrating a lack of objectivity. She has been widely criticised for choosing not to write about the Stalinist purges, so vilified by writers such as George Orwell and Arthur Koestler. Yet none of the tortures or murders committed by Republican or Government forces reached her diaries or reports. Instead, she continued to follow the government line. In Gellhorn’s defence, it should be stated that not only were her opinions heartfelt, but the quotes were genuine and incidents accurately described. Unlike propagandists such as Cockburn or Koestler, she never concocted events or invented stories.

Having left the Nationalist zone, Frances Davis also decided to actively support the Republican side. However, as a former correspondent for a Nationalist-aligned newspaper, she knew that if she suddenly appeared, working in the Republican zone, she might be accused of spying. She spoke to Edward Mowrer of the liberal *Chicago Daily News*, which was banned in Nationalist Spain. Mowrer wanted information about German, Italian and Portuguese operations in Mallorca. Still perceived, in Spain, to be a Franco-friendly reporter,

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<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

Davis was given a room on a Nationalist ship. On arrival in Mallorca, she discovered that the island was being used as an aircraft base and concentration camp:

Each man lived in isolation, in fear of those he loved the most, and of his neighbour, and in fear of himself-of what his mind might contain that could betray him.”<sup>127</sup>

She watched Italian destroyers taking soldiers to Spain. Then in a revelatory moment that could have been written by Orwell or Koestler she noted: ‘In the morning the destroyer will be gone. Will never have been.’<sup>128</sup> Davis noted the German officers organising the discipline of captured crews in the hills. German fortifications had been built around the harbour and an airfield prepared by the Italians. She reported that Italian ships had been disguised to look like twenty thousand ton cruisers. After she had returned safely to France, the *Chicago Daily News* published her revelations. Davis had risked her life to provide first hand evidence of German and Italian involvement, and knew she could never return to Nationalist Spain. Still suffering from shrapnel wounds sustained during her time with the *Daily Mail*, she departed for the United States, never to return.

The Republicans were slowly but surely defeated. Martha Gellhorn had wanted to write about the evacuation of refugees from Barcelona but her offer of an article to *Collier's* was turned down. The world had moved on. Franco entered Madrid in triumph and Gellhorn's Republican comrades were utterly vanquished. The war should have resulted in a personal and political vindication for Gellhorn. Instead, her faith in the future of humanity evaporated as Europe tottered on the brink of the Second World War. Using a similar American demotic to Hemingway, she wrote:

And maybe history is a stinking mess and a big injustice anyhow, and the victory is always wrong....Though every day war seems more loathsome and the destruction of good people...more tragic and useless.”<sup>129</sup>

She'd never attempted to write rounded, balanced articles. Instead she'd sought to influence others with the power of her language, which was designed to appeal to the reader's essential humanity. As the war concluded, she turned in on herself and on her writing ability. ‘I cannot understand why there must be so much suffering,’ she wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt. ‘I shall

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<sup>127</sup> Davis, p.162

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, p.164

<sup>129</sup> Martha Gellhorn is cited by Caroline Moorhead, *Life of Martha Gellhorn* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), p.174

never be a good writer, the human animal escapes me.’<sup>130</sup> Upon leaving for America, she exclaimed that, ‘There will be millions like me who will never know what to believe again.’<sup>131</sup>

It has been suggested that the empathetic themes, adopted by many female correspondents in their approach to Spanish Civil War, translated not only into sympathy but outright advocacy.<sup>132</sup> This is true in Martha Gellhorn’s case. Like other female correspondents including Josephine Herbst and Virginia Cowles, she’d made a clear decision to write about the lives and trials of ordinary civilians caught up in the trauma. She’d aimed to bring home the horrors of war to people, in more comfortable nations, in order to galvanise support and aid for the needy. Although ultimately unsuccessful in at least some of her aims, Martha Gellhorn’s work has been remembered by historians, foreign correspondents and commentators all over the world. Frances Davis’s writing, for the most part, has not. Martha Gellhorn directed all her connections, wealth, and writing ability towards the continued existence of Republican Spain. Davis, for most of her Spanish career, had less political conviction. She found her vocation in the end, however, and both women used their writing skills and careers to further a cause that, they believed, would prevent the spread of Fascism across Europe.

It is true that Gellhorn can be held accountable for omitting what she must have known about the Stalinist purges. Many others, including Hemingway and John Langdon-Davies, were guilty of the same fault. She had entered a story on behalf of one faction, and convinced herself that the purges were less relevant than ultimate victory, because a greater good was at stake. But the Spanish Civil War was more than a story. For a short time at least, it became her life. Gellhorn once remarked that when in Spain, she’d ‘Got that fusion...of body and soul; of living one’s life and believing with one’s whole heart in the life around one.’<sup>133</sup> By becoming part of this narrative, of good versus evil, she projected expectations, normally associated with the assumptions contained in a novel or screenplay, onto the conflict. Hopes perhaps unconsciously became certainties. These certainties were destroyed by the Nationalist victory, and Gellhorn’s faith in humanity was shattered forever.

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<sup>130</sup> Moorhead, *Life*, p.170

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p.183

<sup>132</sup> Deacon, p.72

<sup>133</sup> Moorhead, *Life*, p.184

“A Very Corrupting Business”

Spain and Ernest Hemingway

He had learned that if a thing was right fundamentally the lying was not supposed to matter. There was a lot of lying though. He did not care for the lying at first. He hated it. Then later he had come to like it. It was part of being an insider but it was a very corrupting business.<sup>134</sup>

Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

The question of objectivity, and why it was so often absent in Spanish Civil War correspondence, is perhaps best answered in a study of Ernest Hemingway's reportage. The American novelist's time as a foreign correspondent in the Republican zone remains highly controversial, and his work has been frequently lambasted by critics. Opponents point to the partisan content of his dispatches, his propagandist efforts on behalf of the Republic, and his sentimental depiction of the Spanish people. He is often berated for writing himself into the action when, unlike, say Orwell or Cockburn, he was never a soldier. His gory battlefield descriptions have been labelled as 'immature',<sup>135</sup> and it is even suggested that he cynically used his time in Spain to hone his writing craft for later fictional works. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of his correspondence is his refusal, anywhere in his dispatches, to acknowledge the existence of the Communist purges that blighted the Republican zone from 1937 onwards.

Hemingway had already accumulated a wealth of battlefield experience by the time the Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936. As a teenager, during the Great War, he'd worked with the American Red Cross, narrowly avoiding death on the Italian front.<sup>136</sup> By 1935, and already a celebrated novelist, he was satisfied that he'd served enough time 'for society, and democracy.' His declaration that 'No European country is our friend...and no country but one's own is worth fighting for,'<sup>137</sup> chimed with the sentiments of many Americans. Yet within months, a failed coup attempt by a group of right wing Spanish generals changed

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<sup>134</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (London: Arrow, 1998 edition), p.245

<sup>135</sup> Knightley, p.231

<sup>136</sup> For Hemingway's biographical background, the main sources are *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* by Carlos Baker (New York: Scribner's, 1969) and *Hemingway* by Kenneth Lynn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, originally published 1987)

<sup>137</sup> Ernest Hemingway cited by Philip Young in *Byline: Ernest Hemingway* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.245

everything. Two of Hemingway's most famous books, *Death in the Afternoon*, and *Fiesta: The Sun also Rises*, were set in Spain and he'd developed strong feelings for its people and culture. When the Civil War erupted, the novelist spoke up for the democratically elected Republican government. He became chairman of the 'Ambulance Committee for the American Friends of Spanish Democracy', and raised funds for hospitals in the Republican zone. After signing a contract with the North American News Alliance (NANA), ostensibly to write 'human interest' stories, Hemingway returned to Europe. Over four stints from 1937 to 1938, he commented on the Spanish Civil War, mostly from the Hotel Florida in Madrid.

Hemingway's journalistic experience was extensive. He'd written for newspapers and magazines since 1920, reporting from Chicago, Toronto, Paris, and across Europe. But despite this, he never really adapted to the role of correspondent. He'd no intention of writing to deadlines, or offering balanced analysis. Hemingway was a creative writer, first and foremost, and his politically simplistic, yet powerful articles, conform to fictional writing conventions and expectations. Spain represented more than just a war to Hemingway. This was a fight for freedom against tyranny or democracy versus totalitarianism, and his dispatches are developed to support this analysis. His settings are carefully crafted, lyrical and poetic, depicting archetypal heroes battling to secure a nation's destiny against villainous foes. Our young protagonists are Republican soldiers and civilians: determined, and courageous. They struggle against the odds to protect the nation and people they love. Hemingway regularly refers to the troops as 'Government forces', a term which perhaps implies a greater legitimacy than 'Republican' or 'Loyalist'. The enemies are 'the Fascists', rather than 'Nationalists' or 'Rebels'. They are a faceless and malign group that aims to destroy a fledgling democracy. In this battle of light versus darkness, victory is surely inevitable.

Although Hemingway later reflected that the war had been effectively lost as early as the 'Fall of Irun', during summer of 1936, his articles consistently exaggerate the importance of Republican victories, whilst diminishing the significance of their crushing set-backs. Hemingway's article 'The First Glimpses of War'<sup>138</sup>, from March 1937, reflects his single-minded commitment to 'La Causa.' It was written from Valencia, the Spanish government's new base after ministers had fled from the siege of Madrid. Readers of Hemingway's account, however, wouldn't infer that anything was wrong, because the scene set is one of relative bliss:

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<sup>138</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "The First Glimpses of War", 18<sup>th</sup> March 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.247

Flying low down the coast towards Alicante, along white beaches, past grey castled towns, or with sea curling against rocky headland there was no sign of war. Trains were moving, cattle were ploughing the fields, fishing boats were setting out and factory chimneys were belching smoke.<sup>139</sup>

In reality, the Nationalists had taken control of much of the south, south west, and north-west of the country, in addition to the area north of Madrid. They'd forced the Spanish government from the capital, and were closing in on the Basque country. If the Nationalists' progress was to continue unabated, the French border would soon be sealed and the Republican zone, isolated. The war was not going well, but Hemingway reports none of this. Instead, he describes young recruits celebrating their enlistment. Youths were:

Walking four abreast, arms linked they were singing, shouting, playing accordions and guitars....The atmosphere was one of wild celebration.<sup>140</sup>

In Barcelona, where food was already scarce, price rises had provoked street riots. Hemingway reports no such scenes in Valencia. His article appears to have been organised to directly counter any negative rumours. Although he notes the presence of convalescent troops, and admits that food has indeed been rationed, he sees, 'butcher shops open and meat being sold with no lines formed outside.'<sup>141</sup> Conditions are so plentiful that, 'Our driver resolved to get himself a good steak on the way home.'<sup>142</sup> The Republicans had won a rare victory over the Italians at Guadalajara, and the generals in his company were proud of their success. Hemingway makes reference to the battle, declaring that the jubilant scenes felt like a wedding. 'You knew it wasn't an *Italian* wedding they were celebrating,'<sup>143</sup> he ends waspishly.

Spurious comments such as: 'Brihuega will take its place in military history with the other decisive battles of the world,'<sup>144</sup> accompany his accounts of other minor Republican victories. But the triumphalism would be short lived. Hemingway returned to Madrid where his base at the Hotel Florida was pounded by shellfire. In his articles, he takes every opportunity to highlight the bravery of Republican troops who are acting against the odds.

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<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p.247

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p.248

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Ernest Hemingway cited by Antony Beevor, p.276

‘The Shelling of Madrid’, from 11<sup>th</sup> April 1937, describes the advance of the Republican infantry as they try to break out of the Nationalist siege. Bent forward, the soldiers are:

Like men walking along a dock in heavy rain. Then they were in the underbrush and out of sight, and the tanks were moving ahead and shooting at the windows of the houses.’<sup>145</sup>

For Hemingway, Republican forces may be fewer in number than the Nationalists, but they are more courageous and skilful. Their tanks operate like ‘deadly, intelligent beetles’<sup>146</sup> and their planes ‘turn and dart like swallows.’<sup>147</sup> When a Republican vehicle explodes, the heroism of the Government’s forces is emphasised, as they push on through the flames. ‘The other tanks passed it and...went on firing into the houses and the machine gun posts in the trees. One at a time, men ran past the flame and into the woods along the slope.’<sup>148</sup> These courageous Spanish Republicans will not easily be defeated.

Despite the undoubted heroism, all attempts to break out were repulsed, and Madrid remained under siege. The novelist is unable to celebrate new Republican victories so the subject matter becomes one of human interest. Hemingway directs his readers to consider the criminality of a war launched against civilian targets.

They killed an old woman, returning home from the market, dropping her in a huddled black heap of clothing, with one leg, suddenly detached, whirling against the wall of an adjoining house.<sup>149</sup> They killed three people in another square, who lay like so many torn bundles of old clothing in the dust and rubble.<sup>150</sup>

‘They’ are the ‘enemy’, the archetypal monsters, the ‘Fascists’. Hemingway doesn’t explore their leaders’ ideologies. He is not interested in providing a balanced analysis of their motives. All you need to know is carved on the face of a civilian motor car driver. ‘His scalp hanging down over his eyes...the blood making a smooth sheen over his chin.’<sup>151</sup> The effects on the Spanish people, who are as ordinary as his American readers, is cruel and devastating. The message is clear: something needs to be done.

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<sup>145</sup> Ernest Hemingway, ‘The Shelling of Madrid’, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.250

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Ernest Hemingway, ‘The Fall of Teruel’, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.266

<sup>148</sup> Hemingway, ‘The Shelling of Madrid’, *Byline*, p.250

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, p.249

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p.250

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

In 'A New Kind of War,' written on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1937, Hemingway continues to highlight the suffering of civilians. When his hotel is bombed by Nationalists again, his reportage switches to the second person, putting the reader in the place of an eye-witness:

In the morning...the roaring burst of high explosive shell wakes you...There is the acrid smell of high explosive you hope you'd never smell again.<sup>152</sup>

One injured person grasps a wound to her abdomen: 'between her fingers, blood is spurting in a thin stream....A charwoman, her eyes red, is scrubbing the blood off the marble floor of the corridor.'<sup>153</sup>

The descriptive prose of Hemingway's war correspondence is often derided, in contrast to the studied, stylish flow found throughout his fiction. Knightley concludes that his brutally graphic descriptions of the wounded are part of an immature desire to shock.<sup>154</sup> But the crude images of severed limbs and blood-splattered walls are written with a specific intention: to promote sympathy for the Spanish people who are undergoing a terrible ordeal. Hemingway wants his American readership to identify with a suffering people. If roused, they might put pressure on their own politicians to offer support to the Republic.

Later in the article, as part of this attempt to promote awareness, Hemingway, himself, enters the story. He visits the wounded in a hospital donated by the 'American Friends of Spanish Democracy', one of his own charities. There he encounters an American named Raven, who has suffered terrible facial injuries. The subsequent exchange bears similarities to a conversation from one of his novels. For Knightley, it's a typical example of the dialogue to be found in the novelist's dispatches; the writing is 'so totally Hemingway in style as to make the reader doubt (its) authenticity.'<sup>155</sup>

'Who is it?' asked Raven.

'Hemingway,' I said. 'I came to see how you were doing.'

'My face was pretty bad,' he said.

'It looks swell,' I said. 'It's doing fine.' I wasn't looking at it when I spoke.<sup>156</sup>

Raven asks Hemingway about perceptions of the war in America.

'Sentiment's changed a lot,' I said. 'They're beginning to realise the government is going to win this war.'<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ernest Hemingway: 'A New Kind of War', 14<sup>th</sup> April 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.251

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p.252

<sup>154</sup> Knightley, p.231

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Hemingway, 'A New Kind of War', *Byline*, p.253



This expository dialogue is recorded as much to convince the reader as Raven. Have no doubt, America; the Republic *will* win this war, but we still need your help. The final, self-referencing exchanges are crafted to remind the reader, not only of the author's sensitive side, but of his own place in this conflict, alongside the injured comrade:

'You don't mind if I call you Ernest do you?'  
'Hell no,' I said. 'Please listen, old timer. You're going to be fine.'  
'Maybe,' he said. 'You'll be back?'  
'Sure.'  
'Goodbye, Ernest,' he said.  
'Goodbye,' I told him.

Raven is from Pennsylvania, where, Hemingway adds, 'We fought at Gettysburg.'<sup>158</sup> The reference to the American Civil War implies that the Spanish struggle is of a similar moral magnitude to America's own fratricidal conflict which had resulted in the abolition of slavery. Patriotic Americans are dying in Spain while fighting for freedom, just as their forefathers had done at Antietam and Shiloh.

Hemingway's work wouldn't descend into outright propaganda until May 1937, when he completed a script with fellow American John Dos Passos and Dutch Communist, Joris Ivens for the documentary film that became known as *Spanish Earth*. The film, narrated by Hemingway himself, was devised to convince Americans, especially President Roosevelt, to provide material support for the Republic. It portrays an overwhelmingly popular, progressive democracy under deadly threat from an alien and illegal military presence. Aspects of the narrative appear specifically structured to answer criticisms aimed by conservative elements in America. The film begins with a visit to a collective where farmers are forbidden to irrigate their fields by oppressive landowners. The camera follows Republican troops and artillery divisions to Fuenteduenas where the townspeople work together garnering supplies. The locals are happy; this new, fairer way of organising a society works well. Conservatives were accusing Republicans of bloodthirstiness, and barbarism. But here, in response, villagers are depicted as well-read and cultured people. Working men read the newspapers, and one commander is a lawyer. Government forces are drawn from ordinary people: bullfighters, actors and footballers. They drill in civilian clothes but parade through the streets with pride. Carlos, a soldier of the fifth regiment, announces that he is fighting for

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<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p.255

democracy. A boy writes home to his mother while locals meet to elect town representatives. The message is that these soldiers are no barbarians; they are family men, democrats and lovers of the freedoms that all Americans enjoy.

Hemingway introduces his Spanish heroes: Enrique Lister, a stone mason and brilliant soldier; José Diaz, who used to sell pipes but is now a Spanish MP, and finally Dolores Ibárruri, 'La Pasionaria' whose speeches energise a nation. The enemy, the Fascists, are civil guards and foreigners: dark skinned Moors, and professional soldiers. They line up against a proud, indigenous people who resent their presence. The Fascists behave savagely and destroy the Duke of Alba's palace. All the art inside is to be burnt until the government militia salvages it. Once again, Hemingway's message is hammered home with minimal subtlety: the Republic inspires democratic, educated and humane actions in contrast to the barbarism of the mainly foreign invaders. The second half of the film focuses on Madrid where the screen is filled with scenes of evacuating refugees. We see explosions, rubble, smoke and blasted granite. A village has been laid desolate by more foreign invaders: three German Junkers have dropped bombs, leaving scenes of carnage. The narrative moves to its climax as the Fascists cross the Jarama River. This scene is of particular relevance to the American viewer because the Abraham Lincoln Battalion had sustained heavy losses at Jarama during the early stages of the war. But this time, Government forces counter attack, aided by the people of the village who bring water from the river. The infantry moves forward to stop the bridge from being taken, and this time the counter attack is successful. Unlike the historical Battle of Jarama, when the Republicans were forced to retreat, Hemingway's film depicts the bridge being saved. In this supposedly realistic, (but in reality), wholly fictional version, the dark forces of Fascism are defeated, whilst the peasants are left free to irrigate their fields. Men, who only wanted work and food, men who are as ordinary as you and me, and who were previously untrained, fight on. Critics were dismissive; it was obviously a work of propaganda, and although the author took the film around his home country, stopping off for a special showing at the White House, Roosevelt's policy did not change. America would stay out of Spain.

A recurring theme of Hemingway's dispatches is the sentimental depiction of ordinary Spanish people. His final article to be cabled from Madrid before his return to America in May 1937 provides further evidence of this tendency. This time, Hemingway focuses on the heroism of the Spanish male, particularly his courage while enduring extreme hardship under fire. The example taken is that of his driver, a trade unionist named Hipolito:

He walked with a roll, putting his feet down flat at each stride, and he had an automatic pistol so wide it came half way down his leg.... He knew motors, he could drive, and if you told him to show up at six am, he was there at ten minutes before the hour.<sup>159</sup> [The Spanish] fought from street to street, house to house, as long as any of them was left alive....They are the Spaniards that once ruled the Western World. They are not romantic like the Anarchists and they are not afraid to die.<sup>160</sup>

Hipolito drives through the trouble spots, protecting his clients at great personal risk. Despite the fact that he is poor and hungry, he remains a man of honour and refuses Hemingway's offer to pay for his food. 'You can bet on Franco, or Mussolini, or Hitler, if you want,' Hemingway reflects, "But my money goes on Hipolito."<sup>161</sup>

By the time the novelist returned to Spain, later that autumn, fortunes had changed. Although all was not yet lost, the war had swung decisively against the Republic. Hemingway places himself in the action, again. His article from September 1937, 'A Brush with Death', is written in the second person, putting the reader in harm's way alongside the author. From his hotel room, he hears a shell:

Start from the battery then come with a whistling incoming roar like a subway train to crash against the cornice and shower the room with broken glass and plaster. And while the glass tinkled down and you listened for the next one to start, you knew you were back in Madrid.<sup>162</sup>

Around this time, his partner, Martha Gellhorn, was writing stories about families with small children unable to find enough wood to provide heat and warmth. Yet despite the hardships encountered by Gellhorn, Hemingway insists that shops are 'full of clothing. Jewellery stores, camera shops, picture dealers and antiquarians are all open and the bars are crowded.'<sup>163</sup> When a shell hits a house across the street, the militia man picks up a boy and comforts him. They may be under fire but they retain the spirit of brotherhood. Their spirit and defiance has not been weakened:

The people who started to run, slow down and grin nervously. The one who never started to run at all looks at the others in a very superior way, and the town we are living in is now called Madrid.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ernest Hemingway, 'The Chauffeurs of Madrid', 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.260

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p.261

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p.262

<sup>162</sup> Ernest Hemingway: 'A Brush With Death', 30<sup>th</sup> September 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.262

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, p.263

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, p.264

But courage, no matter how resilient, does not always lead to victory. The war was not going well as Hemingway joined Republican troops for the attack on Teruel in December 1937. While explaining his feelings, he switches to the second person again. Suddenly he is with the troops and you are in there with him. As the attack begins, machine gun fire erupts above that, ‘Would have lifted the top of your head off. You knew this because you had seen it happen.’<sup>165</sup> As the men suffer terrible wounds, all Hemingway wants is a spade, ‘to make a little mound to get my head under. But there weren’t any spades within crawling distance.’ The Republican artillery attack, ‘And after the crack, came the noise like tearing silk and then the sudden spouting, black geysers of high explosive shells pounding at the earth scarred fortifications’.<sup>166</sup> The battle moves towards its climax. Hemingway joins the battle as a soldier’s rifle jams:

I showed him how to knock the bolt open with a rock. Then suddenly we heard cheering run along the line and across the next ridge we could see the Fascists running from their first line.<sup>167</sup>

Critics have noted the author’s efforts to write himself into the action. It has been suggested that Hemingway exaggerates his closeness to danger, or that his writing is too similar to the prose contained in a novel. Some cynics have even claimed that Hemingway used the war to gain material for his later books. Yet the key issue here is not Hemingway’s egotism or boastfulness, but the intended effects of the ‘eye-witness’ approach. The result is a vivid account of the battle in which the reader is placed alongside the writer, ducking bullets. By the end, we too, feel the locals’ relief at victory. As a result, Hemingway’s wish to stress the Republican effort’s popularity among the townspeople is more believable. Their initial refusal to follow the army’s directive to evacuate can be overlooked:

In the town, the population all embraced us, gave us wine.... But they said we were what they had been waiting for. They said they had stayed in the cellars and caves when the offer from the government came to evacuate because the Fascists would not let them leave.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ernest Hemingway: ‘*The Fall of Teruel*’, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1937, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.264

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p.265

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, p.267

The town has been subjected to a terrible bombing. Hemingway insists that, in contrast to the behaviour of the Nationalists, ‘the government did not bomb the town, only military objectives.’ Then as if wary that others might accuse him of bias or inaccuracy, he adds: ‘They [the townspeople] said this, not me.’<sup>169</sup> At the end of the piece, Hemingway rejects reports printed in New York newspapers that Franco was on the verge of a final, triumphal offensive. His message directly contradicts such a pessimistic outlook. ‘It seems incongruous that we should be walking into Teruel, that great rebel stronghold from which they were to drive [us] into the sea.’<sup>170</sup>

Yet despite this victory, time was not on the Spanish government’s side. The Nationalist army was eating away at the Republican zone. Hemingway’s article of 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1938 reports on the sad trail of refugees on crowded carts carried by mules, cowed by the inevitability of defeat. Soldiers from New York and Chicago tell him that the ‘enemy had broken through and taken Gandesa.’ His hopes are momentarily raised with the news that ‘the Americans were fighting and holding the bridge at Mora across the Ebro River,’<sup>171</sup> but although he waits and waits, ‘Still the [Republican] planes did not come.’<sup>172</sup>

Shattered, Hemingway returned home. In conversation with New York reporters he maintained the official government line that Franco was short of troops and that the Republic’s chances of winning were good. In reality, he knew the Republic was six months away from defeat.<sup>173</sup>

Given his huge personal investment in a failed cause, and knowing the consequences for a continent poised on the brink of catastrophe, it is unsurprising that Hemingway found the loss difficult to accept. Nevertheless, the author’s behaviour on his immediate return to the United States is difficult to explain. Stalin’s Communist Party had taken increasing control of the Republican war effort, and Hemingway was fully aware of the murderous paranoia of International Brigades leader, André Marty. The author had worked in Madrid while the Communist Party’s rivals: ‘Trotsky-Fascists’, ‘enemies of the people’ and other suspects were selected for liquidation. Yet Hemingway’s journalism makes no reference to any persecutions. It is understandable that, fearful of repercussions against his friends, he might have refrained from speaking out at the time. Nevertheless, by the end of 1938, the author was safely home in the United States. He was free to reveal all, and as a celebrated

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<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Ernest Hemingway: ‘*The Flight of the Refugees*’, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1938, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.269

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Knightley, p.231

writer known for his partisanship towards the Republic, his insights would have been revelatory. Yet, his article ‘Fresh Air on an Inside Story,’ from 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1938, denies the existence of any ‘terror’ in Madrid. He recounts a conversation, from late April 1937, with a journalist, recently arrived in Madrid, who was convinced that the ‘Red Terror’ had destroyed thousands of lives in the capital. Hemingway’s dispatch asserts that no such terror exists:

‘Did you see any bodies?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘But I know they are there.’

‘What evidence of terror have you seen?’

Hemingway maintains that although some people were shot in the early days of the war, ‘for months, Madrid had been as safe and well policed and free from terror as any capital in Europe.’<sup>174</sup> In the second part of the article, Hemingway smears the reputation of the offending journalist, who although unnamed, was widely known to be Frederick Voigt of the *Manchester Guardian*. He reveals that Voigt had been bragging falsely about a price being placed on his head in the Nationalist zone. Even worse, the *Guardian* writer had given Hemingway’s girlfriend, Martha Gellhorn, a sealed envelope to take out of the country. The novelist had intercepted the letter and opened it, only to find an uncensored story containing the lines: ‘There is a terror here in Madrid; thousands of bodies are found.’<sup>175</sup> Not only was the allegation false, but if the envelope had been discovered by customs, Gellhorn might have been shot.

‘The dispatch was a lie,’ Hemingway declares. ‘The remarkable story at that time was that there was no terror in Madrid. But that was too dull.’<sup>176</sup> This story is significant. Not only does Hemingway deny the existence of the terror, he also attempts to denigrate the reputation of a journalist who doesn’t follow the Party line. By May 1938, stories of purges and terror were proliferating, and not only in conservative circles. George Orwell was one writer whose attempts to publish revelations about the Communist persecution of the P.O.U.M were routinely blocked by the liberal press. Yet just before his last visit to Spain in October 1938, Hemingway disclosed to his editor Maxwell Perkins of Scribner what he’d chosen not to reveal in print. The author admitted that Spain was ‘a carnival of treachery and rotteness on both sides.’<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ernest Hemingway: ‘Fresh Air on an Inside Story’, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1938, from NANA dispatch in *Ernest Hemingway: Byline* (ed.), William White (Great Britain: Collins, 1968), p.279

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*, p.280

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, p.281

<sup>177</sup> Ernest Hemingway is quoted by Carlos Baker in *Ernest Hemingway* (London: Collins, 1969), p.425

As a result, numerous critics have condemned Hemingway's 'total failure to report the Communist persecution, imprisonment and summary execution of untrustworthy elements.'<sup>178</sup> Reviewing Hemingway's dispatches, biographer Kenneth Lynn concludes that by routinely concealing evidence from his audience, the novelist had effectively provided a 'service for Stalin.'<sup>179</sup> So why had Hemingway concealed the purges and the disappearances? A possible reason is that, as all innocence dissolved, the novelist came to understand, and even agree with the necessity of the violence. His friends at the Hotel Florida were a small group of ideologically like-minded people who lived under terrible strain, and even fear of death. Such stressful and pressurised circumstances created a prime environment for the promulgation of views that, on reflection, might easily be dismissed.

Hemingway was also very susceptible to the flattery of high-ranking officials. 'Insider' status was hugely important to him, and he was especially proud of his association with Pepe Quintilla, the 'Chief Executioner of Madrid'.<sup>180</sup> Top-secret information channelled his way by Russian agent, Mikhail Koltsov and others stressed the importance of discipline whilst highlighting the destructive power of treachery. So having invested so much mental and physical energy into the cause, and after throwing his support around the Communist effort, it became easier for the American to believe the rumours against the P.O.U.M. and other dissidents.<sup>181</sup>

Hemingway was no Marxist or Stalinist. 'I like the Communists when they're soldiers,' he remarked in 1938, 'When they're priests I hate them.'<sup>182</sup> He was, however, an admirer of Communist discipline, and felt they were the mostly likely faction to win the war for the Republic. By contrast, those looking to drive through social revolution, like the Anarchists and the P.O.U.M. were unrealistic. If the Fascists were to be defeated, this was no time for free spirits.

Caroline Moorhead argues that Hemingway consciously avoided reporting the persecutions, torture and executions for fear of the political damage it would cause to the

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<sup>178</sup> Knightley, p.231

<sup>179</sup> Kenneth Lynn, *Hemingway* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p450 is cited by Jeffrey Meyers in *The Spanish Civil War in Literature* (eds.), Janet Perez and Wendell Aycock (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1990), p.104

<sup>180</sup> Preston, p.81

<sup>181</sup> Hemingway's motives are discussed further by Meyers in *The Spanish Civil War in Literature* p.85-p.107, Carlos Baker p.422-427, Knightley p.230- p.235 and by Lawrence R. Broer in 'Hemingway's Literary Treatment of the Spanish Civil War' in *Red Flags Black Flags* (ed.,) John Beals Romeiser (Maryland: Studia Humanitatis, 1982), p.55- p.99

<sup>182</sup> Ernest Hemingway quoted by Beevor, p.275

Republic.<sup>183</sup> Certainly, any self-centred polemics or individualist instincts, needed to be suppressed. Hemingway's job was not to provide balanced coverage. His role was in the print wing of the Republican resistance to Fascism. And unlike Orwell, who fought alongside like-minded souls in the P.O.U.M., the American regularly brushed shoulders with Koltsov and Quintilla. He might have been a famous novelist but he was not untouchable. Dissent was not an option, and death was a distinct possibility for anyone overstepping the mark. In the early days of the war, Republican censors had acted liberally, if only to present themselves in contrast to Nationalist press officers, who bullied and intimidated the press. But as Stalin strengthened his grip on the Spanish government effort, dissent became a sure sign of treachery. Hemingway had to consider the safety of himself and his friends.

One particular incident illustrates not only the author's susceptibility to Communist propaganda, but also reveals his fears about the consequences of veering from the Party line. Jose Robles, an interpreter to a Soviet military attaché was arrested on charges of spying and later shot. His friend, the American writer, John Dos Passos called for an investigation. Hemingway discouraged Dos Passos from expressing his displeasure too loudly for two reasons. First because he accepted the Communists' assertion that Robles *was* guilty, but also because he didn't want any suspicion transferred onto his circle of friends. When Dos Passos questioned the novelist's commitment to Republican values, Hemingway lost his temper:

Civil liberties shit. Are you for us or against us?...These people know how to turn you into a back number. I've seen them do it.<sup>184</sup>

Perhaps it is unfair to judge Hemingway too harshly. Spain had become a place where truth and fiction were interchangeable concepts, and finding genuinely reliable sources was often impossible. The facts of so many incidents during the Civil War have been disputed, even until today, and in such dangerous and paranoid times, many would find it prudent to adapt and conform to Party policy.

Hemingway's supporters readily concede that his Spanish Civil War articles lack any sense of objectivity. But so much political debate, then and now, is polarised, almost by nature, and this was an intensely political conflict. People took sides. Writers took sides. Journalism was no different. Self-critical reflections were not wanted by editors or authorities and were usually left unpublished. In such circumstances, and surrounded by unprecedented brutality and carnage, it might be understandable that, as with Claud Cockburn, a

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<sup>183</sup> Moorhead is cited by Deacon, p.63

<sup>184</sup> Preston, *We Saw Spain Die*, p.86



correspondent might turn a blind eye to occasional indiscretions when ultimate victory was attainable.

‘I don’t mind [the shootings],’ Robert Jordan said. ‘I do not like them but I do not mind them anymore.’

‘I know that,’ Karkov had said. ‘I have been told that.’<sup>185</sup>

Still, the reader must be able to read an account of an incident, be it a battle or an interview, and be able to trust the accuracy of the reported facts. Bias may well be inevitable, but, as with Cockburn, the omission of unpalatable truths, or invention of sources, destroys the writer’s credibility. Although his actions might be understandable, his reports, and particularly his reportage, were too far rooted in propaganda to be taken seriously. By ignoring the purges in the Republican zone, even once safely back in the United States, and by allowing personal pride and lack of self-reflection to blur his own analysis, Hemingway, the reporter, effectively allowed himself to become an agent of invention. Supporters maintain that by adopting the Communist position, he was merely politically naïve. Possibly. In any case, the result was that the American signed ‘moral blank cheques on behalf of the Republic.’<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.262

<sup>186</sup> Beevor, p.276

(ii)

Revealing Truth through Fiction?  
Ernest Hemingway and 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'

You corrupt very easily, he thought. But was it corruption or was it that you lost the naïveté that you started with?<sup>187</sup>

Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Hemingway, the novelist, was freed to reveal more of the crisis within Republican ranks than he ever could in his newspaper dispatches. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, published in 1940, is his novel of the Spanish War, and in many ways, can be read as an allegory of Republican defeat. In contrast to his journalism, Hemingway reveals his inner-most thoughts about the lies, treachery, in-fighting and persecutions that took place in the Republican zone. In doing so, he displays an honesty that was lacking in his war correspondence. But does his novel reveal a greater level of objectivity?

The blurring of invention and reality was always a feature of Hemingway's writing. His less political articles for newspapers and magazines were sometimes re-printed as short stories, with virtually no changes. *The Old Man at the Bridge* was published as a news item in the left-wing magazine, *Ken* on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1938, and later as a work of fiction in the *First Forty-Nine Stories*. The dispatch, *The Chauffeurs of Madrid*, was cabled to NANA on 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1937 then reprinted as a fictional tale in *Men at War: The Best War Stories of All Time*, edited by Hemingway himself in 1942. Many of the characters in his 1938 play, *The Fifth Column*, are based upon historical friends and colleagues. He was later to describe the text, written in Madrid while his hotel was being bombarded by mortar fire, as 'probably the most unsatisfactory thing I ever wrote.'<sup>188</sup> It is also true that neither the script, nor any of the early short stories about Spain explain the level of Republican infighting that would be revealed in his novel of the Spanish war. In many ways, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* represents Hemingway's attempt to get his 'story' of Republican Spain straight, once and for all:

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<sup>187</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.244

<sup>188</sup> Young, *Byline*, p.246

All right. He would write a book when he got through with this. But only about the things he knew, truly and about what he knew. But I will have to be a much better writer than I am now to handle them, he thought. The things he had come to know in this war were not so simple.<sup>189</sup>

Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Hemingway liked to write himself into his journalism, but although he put himself at great personal risk during the war, he was never a soldier. No such restrictions were in place for his fiction. Hemingway's main protagonist in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a real volunteer. Like the author, Robert Jordan is a fervent supporter of the Republic. He is also uninterested in Communist ideology, and despairs of the incompetence and treachery that is destroying the Republican effort. Some critics have identified the Californian university professor, Robert Merriman as inspiration for Jordan. Hemingway had indeed met the American, who was also a chief of staff of the fifteenth brigade.<sup>190</sup> But apart from the first names, nationality and profession, the two characters are very different. It is *Hemingway's* analyses of events that flow through Jordan's internalisations and self-critical admissions. By projecting his own philosophies and characteristics through the internalisations of the fictional character, as Hemingway does, Jordan emerges as someone the author had always wanted to be: a fighter and a soldier, rather than an observer; a man ready to die for his beliefs rather than conform. When we read Jordan threatening Pablo, or Jordan planting dynamite on the bridge; or when we picture Jordan sacrificing himself to save his friends, we are imagining an alter-ego, a projection of Hemingway's persona.

By taking the novel's title from John Donne's *Meditation 17*, Hemingway reminds the readers of the selfless approach of the Republic's volunteers. One key passage echoes the 'No main is an island, entire of itself' verses. Hemingway vividly describes, through Jordan's recollections, the surge of excitement when hit with the realisation that he is part of something that matters to humanity. It's a transcendent feeling that unites him with a cause of almost overpowering magnitude; a revelatory experience of finding purpose in life, and feeling a sudden rush of what it means to be alive. There is nothing in his correspondence as personal and vivid as the following moment of self-definition:

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<sup>189</sup>Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.265

<sup>190</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *For Whom the Bell Tolls as Contemporary History in The Spanish Civil War in Literature* (eds.), Janet Perez and Wendell Aycock (Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1990), p.104

You felt that you were taking part in a crusade.... It was a feeling of consecration to a duty toward all of the oppressed of the world which would be as difficult and embarrassing to speak about as religious experience and yet it was authentic as the feeling you had when you first heard Bach or stood in Chartres Cathedral or in the Cathedral at Leon and saw the light coming through the great windows; or when you saw Mantegna and Greco and Brueghel in the Prado. It gave you something that you had never known before but that you had experienced now and you gave such importance to it that your own death seemed something of complete unimportance.<sup>191</sup>

Jordan embodies the altruism of the Republican cause. He fights, not for himself, but for the poor and vulnerable of society. Unlike the author, he does not fall prey to the flattery of intelligence officers or lazy thinking, or fear for his loved ones. An academic, a soldier and eventually a martyr, he remains pure and committed to the Republic. As the story progresses we witness Hemingway's exploration of an incorruptible man, one who unlike the author, refuses to compromise.

The novel contrasts the altruism of its main protagonist, who embodies selfless Republican values, with the self-defeating individualism, corruption, and even murderous behaviour of many Republicans. The story's main action takes place just after Hemingway had finished his first stint as correspondent. The location is in the Sierra de Guadarrama, between El Escorial and Segovia, and the action takes place over three days in late May 1937. It is written in third person omniscient limited style, allowing Hemingway to explain the inner thoughts of key characters, particularly Jordan. The key moments to analyse are in Chapter 18, where Jordan recalls his experiences at the Hotel Gaylord's in Madrid; and in Chapter 42 where the paranoid madness of the Stalin-influenced government is personified by the sinister figure of André Marty.

Hemingway/Jordan enjoyed eating at the Hotel Gaylord's. Not only did it serve better food and drink than other local restaurants, but it was also the Madrid headquarters for the Russian military. In the novel, Jordan feels guilty about visiting Gaylord's because it seemed excessively luxurious. The food is too good for a besieged city and the talk too cynical for a war. 'But I corrupted very easily,'<sup>192</sup> he admits.

At Gaylord's, Hemingway came across many of the worker-generals, and he'd praised them in *Spanish Earth*. Robert Jordan's evaluations of the generals, however, are not as positive. Making reference to the American Civil War, as Hemingway had in his journalism, Jordan complains that there were no great leaders in Spain; no Stonewall

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<sup>191</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.250-1

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, p.244

Jacksons, Sheridans, or Grants. There were, however, plenty of weak or useless leaders. ‘The Fascists had plenty of [George] McClennans and we had at least three of them.’<sup>193</sup> The fictional biographies of the worker-generals are also derided. Valentino Gonzalez, known to all in Republican Spain by the legend, ‘El Campesino’, or ‘The Peasant’ was never a peasant after all, but is revealed as a deserting sergeant from the French Foreign Legion. In *Spanish Earth*, Enrique Lister is described as a ‘Brilliant soldier.’ Robert Jordan’s recollection, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is somewhat different:

Lister was murderous in discipline. He was a true fanatic and he had the complete Spanish lack of respect for life. In few armies since the Tartars’ invasion of the West were men executed summarily for as little reason as they were under his command.<sup>194</sup>

At first, Jordan is not overly dismayed with the atmosphere of deception. He reconciles himself to the view that, ‘There was always lying in a war. The truth about Lister, Modesto and El Campesino was much better than the lies and the legends.’ Tellingly, Jordan adds: ‘Well some day they would tell the truth to everyone.’<sup>195</sup> He criticises the worker generals because having been trained by the Russians, they remained under Moscow’s control. ‘They were like students flying a machine with dual controls which the pilot could take over whenever they made a mistake.’<sup>196</sup> He wonders whether the Russians will ever relinquish the controls, and whether or not Republican Spain will be truly independent at the end of the war. Such reservations or any references to Republican infighting are, of course, entirely absent from Hemingway’s newspaper reports.

Jordan is also frustrated by the military’s self-destructive impulses. Several International brigade leaders such as: Kleber, Lukacz and Hans, had done a fine job. But Miaja had brought Kleber down needlessly. Jordan rants:

Look at what Miaja did to Kleber. The bald, egotistical swine. The stupid, egg-headed bastard....Muck everybody but the people and then be damned careful what they turn into when they have power.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, p.248

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*, p.250

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, p.246

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, p.249-50

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, p.396

He reserves his worst abuse for the Spanish Prime Minister, Largo Caballero and his cabinet:

Muck them to hell together, Largo, Prieto, Asensio, Miaja, Rojo, all of them...Muck the whole treachery ridden country. Muck their egotism and their selfishness and their egotism and their conceit and their treachery.... I remember when I thought that Largo was O.K. Durruti was good and his own people shot him.<sup>198</sup>

Hemingway used his dispatches to refute allegations about the Communists' ruthlessness in the Republican zone. Yet in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the author reveals his knowledge of the purges through two main characters who gain significance during the second half of the novel: the founder of the International brigades, André Marty, and the Russian intelligence officer, Karkov. The inspiration for Karkov was Mikhail Koltsov, one of Russia's most successful writers and journalists. The American correspondent Louis Fischer, described Koltsov as 'Pravda's correspondent in Spain and unofficially Stalin's eyes and ears in the country.'<sup>199</sup> Hemingway considered him to be 'One of the three most important men in Spain.'<sup>200</sup> Hugh Thomas describes Koltsov as Stalin's personal agent 'with on occasion, a direct line to the Kremlin.'<sup>201</sup> The Russian writer provided Hemingway with reams of material that later found its way into *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The character created in Koltsov's image, is Karkov, an eccentric and insolent character who nonetheless befriends Jordan. In their exchanges, Hemingway gives the reader an insight into the cynicism of senior Soviet officials. When Karkov shows Jordan the communiqué from the Cordoba front, it states: 'Our glorious troops continue to advance without losing a foot of ground.'<sup>202</sup> Karkov knows that the communiqué is lie and is amused at its contempt for the truth.

Jordan, however, is dismayed at the lack of humanity in his friend's response. 'You could remember the men you knew who died in the fighting around Pozoblanco; but it was a joke at Gaylord's.'<sup>203</sup>

Karkov is ruthless. For him, the Fascist leader, Calvo Sotelo, 'was very intelligent and it was very intelligent that he was killed.'<sup>204</sup> Before his own liquidation, Koltsov had spoken

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<sup>198</sup> *ibid.* p.395-6

<sup>199</sup> Preston, p.178

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.255

<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*, p.261

of the need to shoot the treacherous Trotskyite generals and Anarchist leaders. Hemingway puts similar words into Karkov's mouth:

We detest with horror the duplicity and villainy of the murderous hyenas of Bakharinite wreckers and such dregs of humanity as Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov and their henchmen. We hate and loathe these veritable fiends.<sup>205</sup> We execute and destroy such veritable fiends and dregs of humanity and the treacherous dogs of generals and the revolting spectacle of admirals unfaithful to their trust. These are destroyed. They are not assassinated. You see the difference?<sup>206</sup>

Hemingway's war correspondence was unable to uncover similar brutal attitudes within the Republican zone, and in the case of Voigt, he was completely dismissive. By the time of the novel's publication, however, the purges were a major source of controversy. Karkov maintains that the anti-Stalinist P.O.U.M. was never a threat to the government:

The P.O.U.M. was never serious....There were some misguided people. There was one fairly good brain and there was a little fascist money. Not much. The poor P.O.U.M. They were very silly people. The P.O.U.M. is like the name. Not serious. They should have called it the M.U.M.P.S. or the M.E.A.S.L.E.S. But no. The Measles is much more dangerous.<sup>207</sup>

As the novel moves towards its climax, the author reveals probably the novel's most risible character. André Marty is a historical figure, the man behind the Stalinist paranoia, lies, madness and murder that had poisoned the Spanish Republican effort. In 1919, as a seaman-machinist, Marty had led the mutiny of the French Black Sea Fleet against the order to support the White Russian armies. After being brought to the attention of Stalin, he rose through the ranks of the French Communist Party. Following the outbreak of fighting in Spain, he formed the international brigades. According to Hugh Thomas:

By 1936, he had become obsessed with an imaginary fear of Fascist or other spies....He was also arrogant, incompetent and cruel....Even Stalin had a less suspicious nature than André Marty.<sup>208</sup>

Hemingway changes the names of several historical figures represented in his novel. Jeffrey Meyers identifies Martha Gellhorn as Maria, and Gertrude Stein as the chief inspiration for Pilar. General Lukacz is based on the Hungarian writer, Mata Zalka, and

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<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*, p.261

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, p.263

<sup>208</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 300-301

Koltsov is renamed Karkov. Hemingway himself identified General ‘Walter’ Karol Swierczewski, as the model for General Golz.<sup>209</sup> But the author chose not to change André Marty’s name. There is no need. Marty’s historical record is without comparison in Spain. Although the Frenchman admitted to ordering five hundred deaths, many historians multiply that figure by ten.<sup>210</sup> He favoured summary executions, rather than having to wade through the unnecessary, petit bourgeois indecision of due process.

Gustav Regler, working as a political commissar in the international brigades, claimed to have shared his knowledge of Marty’s actions with Hemingway.<sup>211</sup> The novelist refrained from mentioning anything in his dispatches, but revealed all in his novel. Marty is encountered in Chapter 42 when Captain Gomez and Andres arrive with Jordan’s message for General Golz. Marty has an over-sized khaki beret, bushy eyebrows, watery eyes and a double chin. His pistol is strapped around his overcoat:<sup>212</sup>

His grey face had a look of decay. His face looked as though it were modelled from the waste material you find under the claws of a very old lion.<sup>213</sup>

Marty instantly assumes the men are traitors. He confiscates their letter and has them arrested. While under guard, the corporal reveals:

That old one kills more than the bubonic plague.... But he doesn’t kill fascists like we do.... He kills rare things. Trotskyites. Divigationers. Any rare type of beasts....<sup>214</sup> We have shot French. We have shot Belgians. We have shot others of divers nationality.<sup>215</sup>

Hemingway reveals the Spanish Republican soldiers’ fear and loathing for the French Communist leader through the thoughts of General Golz:

Damn you to hell [André Marty] for all the men you’ve killed by interfering in matters you know nothing of. Damn the day they named tractor factories and villages after you so that you are a symbol that I cannot touch. Go and suspect and exhort and intervene and denounce and butcher some other place and leave my staff alone.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Meyers, p.100

<sup>210</sup> Knightley, p.231

<sup>211</sup> *ibid.*, p.232

<sup>212</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.445

<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*, p.447

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, p.451



*For Whom the Bell Tolls* reveals Hemingway's real views about other historical figures, including Dolores Ibárruri, 'La Pasionaria'. Ibárruri was elected Communist Deputy and Vice President of the Cortes in 1936. A famous orator, she composed the legendary 'No Pasaran' (They shall not pass) slogan. After the war, she escaped to Russia where she became President of the Spanish Communist Party in exile. Hemingway was irritated by the blind adoration shown to her by many Spaniards, and once declared, 'Dolores always made me vomit, always.'<sup>217</sup> Unlike in *Spanish Earth*, where she is lauded as a heroine, the novel depicts Ibárruri as gullible. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* she hastily believes rumours that the Fascists have fallen in disarray and are fighting each other.<sup>218</sup> During the fighting at El Sordo's camp, a Republican peasant mocks his friend's adoration of Ibárruri, repeating a rumour that she kept a well-looking after son in Russia, while other Spanish peasants suffered.<sup>219</sup>

It was not only the senior figures on the Republican side who are subjected to closer scrutiny. Hemingway's journalism, and indeed his film, *Spanish Earth*, both depict the working classes and peasants sentimentally. This is not so in the novel where the guerrilla group's leader, Pablo, is an untrustworthy and deviant character. His theft of horses and detonators, not to mention the murder and betrayal of colleagues, makes him a figure for the treachery and deceit that Hemingway/Jordan believes to be widespread in the Republican zone. Much of the country was plunged into lawlessness for several months, following the failed coup attempt in July 1936, until the government regained control. In this time, many priests, land owners, and Nationalists were beaten and murdered. In conservative newspapers across Europe, these acts of violence were exaggerated and portrayed as evidence of the Republic's unworthiness and barbaric nature. The Republican-supporting press, including Hemingway, tended to understate or ignore these incidents. Yet, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the author does not shy away from revealing the brutalities committed by Republican mobs. One incident, in Chapter 10, is based on a historical event in Rondo, Andalusia. After blowing up the barracks, Pablo shoots civil guard prisoners in cold blood. His mob terrorises the town's Nationalist sympathisers, including the local mill owner, flails them then throws them from a cliff into the river.

Although there is no doubt where Hemingway's sympathies lie, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* releases the author from the obligation to follow Party policy. As a result, Hemingway

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<sup>217</sup> Ernest Hemingway is quoted by Meyers, p.94

<sup>218</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.382

<sup>219</sup> Thomas, p.492

is able to make subtle contradictions to otherwise unchallenged Republican assumptions. Many English-speaking critics, such as Orwell, claimed that Christianity's influence was on the wane in Republican Spain. This decline was depicted, in part, as a popular response to the Church's traditional association with powerful elites. Yet in the novel, the spirituality of Hemingway's Republican peasants is more ambiguous. Whilst Pablo's gang are opposed to religion, they refer to God as 'Our former Lord', and often turn to their old faith in times of crisis. Anselmo says, 'Clearly I miss [God], having been brought up in religion.'<sup>220</sup> At dangerous moments, several resort to prayer. As the Nationalists close in on El Sordo's hideout, Joaquin says the 'Hail Mary' then launches into an act of contrition.<sup>221</sup> Before the final mission, Maria prays for Jordan's safe return.

Perhaps this behaviour is more believable than the slanted view projected through the war correspondence of Republican writers. And in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, even the Nationalists are no longer the archetypal Fascists of Hemingway's journalism. Lieutenant Berrendo ensures that the mortally wounded Joaquin dies humanely. Although he is forced to comply with the policy that dead Republicans are to be beheaded, Berrendo reflects on the futility of war, and regrets the need for his orders to be carried out.<sup>222</sup>

The Spanish Communist Party condemned *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, on its release. When the novel was finally translated into Russian in 1968, it was published with heavy cuts in Chapter 18, particularly where Jordan criticises the running of the war.<sup>223</sup> In a BBC television documentary, produced in 1987, the aging Enrique Lister still bristled at the author's depiction of him as a fanatic, and concluded that the novel was an insult to the struggle of the Spanish people:

When I read 'For Whom the Bell Tolls... I was furious but not greatly surprised. In spite of his talent, he was not able to understand [the war] in great depth. Hemingway, like many others, looked only at the external, the anecdotal, the superficial of our struggle....That was his way of getting even... and he had told me many times that he would never forgive me for not letting him see everything he wanted to see.'<sup>224</sup>

Those who criticise Hemingway's journalism forget that his novel reveals an exasperated contempt for the failings of the Spanish Republican government, the Communists, the infighting, the purges and the malign influence of the Russians. For many

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<sup>220</sup> Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.43

<sup>221</sup> *ibid.*, p.341

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.* p.343

<sup>223</sup> Meyers, p.104

<sup>224</sup> Lister is quoted by Meyers, p.96

intellectuals, the Spanish Civil War was supposed to mark the moment when modernity finally emerged and triumphed over Spanish medievalism; the moment when men and women overcame totalitarianism to assert their rights as championed by the Enlightenment. Those expectations for an egalitarian future were dashed. The paranoid and persecutory atmosphere in the Republican zone would not allow Hemingway, the correspondent, to report the despair he and his colleagues had felt as the reality of defeat set in. Yet Hemingway, the novelist, was free to take a different approach and demonstrate how fiction can liberate the writer's innermost thoughts, explorations and reflections.

Critics of the novel still remain. Many insist that Jordan is too good, too incorruptible; too honest. At the story's climax, Jordan achieves his objective by blowing up the bridge, and dies saving his friends who escape into the mountains. In reality, no bridge was destroyed and the Republic was utterly annihilated. The novel's ending, although brutal, is probably too satisfying; too chivalrous and romantic. As if to underline this point, when the Hollywood adaptation was cast, Hemingway's choices for the main roles were impossibly glamorous movie icons: Gary Cooper was cast in the role of Robert Jordan and Ingrid Bergman played Maria. By producing a script that adhered to popular dramatic conventions, the movie satisfied the expectations of audiences and received awards from professional critics. Many dismiss *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as unrealistic, partly because of the employment of such fictional practices. This is unfair. A novel's aim is not to compete with a newspaper report or history text in the search for factual accuracy. Adherence to the historical record, particularly where well known or pivotal events are concerned, is important if credibility is to be maintained, but exact replication is not always necessary. This is partly because even where plot-lines are based on real events, a writer still needs to build conflict, so inevitably a degree of invention is required to raise the stakes. As a consequence, the intensity of scenes is nearly always heightened. Even characters based on historical figures are often written with more extreme attributes than in 'real life'.

A novel might raise plenty of questions about the historical subject matter, as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* certainly does, and Hemingway was able to put the record straight on several other issues, notably the existence of the purges. Despite this, his story represents only a snapshot; one of many personal angles into a complex human situation. Fiction's role is to hold up a mirror to the human experience and by doing so, give us insights about what it means to be alive. Any fictional narrative is imagined through an author's memories, experiences, philosophies and values. It can explore ideas and perspectives but it is not a text book. Although sometimes based on real people and events, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a

very subjective exploration of the human condition in a strange, foreign war. It cannot and does not attempt to tell all sides of the story. It is unlikely, for example, that Hemingway would ever write a novel from the Nationalist perspective of, say, Lieutenant Berrendo. The author had invested too much of his feelings into the Republican cause. As has been seen, no writer can completely remove him/herself from the subject matter.

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* remains a very personal account of Republican Spain. Hemingway's characters, including Anselmo, Pilar, Maria, Karkov and Pablo all reflect life's hopes, loves, instincts, ecstasies and despairs far more vividly than the sentimental depictions of 'Hipolito' or 'Raven' in the dispatches. We cannot, however, say that Hemingway used his novel to explain everything he knew, and it is an exaggeration to claim that he revealed the 'truth' through fiction. Still it must also be said that, having been released from the shackles of war correspondence, the novelist was finally able to write more openly about human frailty and endurance than he ever could as a propagandist. In this sense, he revealed far more of the 'reality' of the human experience through fiction than when working for the North American News Alliance. The form of a novel allowed him to explore areas of the human consciousness that the reporter could not. By doing so, he was able to vividly recreate aspects of a paranoid world in which lies were so often blurred with truth, and unattainable dreams and aspirations neutralised by cold reality. Genuine objectivity was not sought and is impossible anyway, or so it seems.

## Preface: Changing a Reader's Perception of the Main Character

The main problem with the original submission concerned the depiction of the main character, Dan. His behaviour, particularly in Part 1, made him seem too unsympathetic for the reader to maintain sufficient interest in his story. This problem was exacerbated by two closely related issues: the use of the first person, present tense narrative and the suppression of internal commentary on the action as it proceeded.

As the redraft was written, the readers' response needed to be considered more thoroughly. The aim behind the use of the first person, present tense was to produce a neutral, pared down, journalistic style. This approach would reinforce the impassiveness of the main character's outlook and analysis. However, there were too many grammatical jars and shocks. The overuse of active verbs and absence of the continuous tense meant that a scene's order of events was sometimes difficult for the reader to grasp (see corrections no.5, no.10). On the few occasions when the protagonist did offer the reader his thoughts, the narrative style only brought more confusion. The reader found it hard to decide when the reflections were taking place, (i.e. straightaway, just afterwards or many years later, see corrections no.13). It was sometimes difficult to determine to whom the narrator was actually speaking (see corrections no.9). Sometimes, the staccato-style series of active verbs created an odd feeling because the protagonist's enigmatic behaviour seemed frustratingly out of step with the scene's overall atmosphere (see corrections no.10).

Dan's internalisations later in the novel were originally intended to reveal a growing sense of self-awareness in contrast to his earlier ignorance and insensitivity, as shown in Part 1. However, the results of this strategy meant that the main character was perceived as being too unsympathetic. Without having access to internalisations, the reader had only Dan's actions to judge his personality and motives, and his behaviour, especially at the start of the novel when he is first encountered, often came across as cruel or heartless. When internalisations were eventually given, Dan's analysis was often frustratingly under-developed. His narrowness tended to reinforce the reader's perception of a self-centred, immature or voyeuristic character. Faced with such obstacles, it was feared that the 'public' reader might give up on the main character and the novel.

In order to correct the grammatical problems, the tense of the narrative was changed from present to past. To inspire some sympathy in the reader for the protagonist, Dan's motives and feelings needed to be revealed and developed more thoroughly. To 'humanise' Dan, (i) more internal reflection needed to be added; (ii) more exposition of the back story

was necessary; (iii) more scenes showing the present causes of Dan's discontent, especially with his father, needed to be written.

How do these revisions change how the reader relates to the main character?

Dan's overall personality has been altered to create a much more positive and sympathetic figure. In the new draft, Dan records his feelings while looking back, as an older man, say a thirty year old, on actions that took place when he was younger and inexperienced. His inner thoughts now give context to his actions and make him more a more considered and mature character. So when we first meet Dan in the new draft, he is not as petulant or childish as before. He is no longer angry that his parents are away and unable to greet him (Old Draft p.16). When he sees his father after so long, he is thrilled (New Draft p.16): "At last," he thinks. Significantly, when he meets Marija, he is not suspicious of her motives. The cynical thought (Old Draft. p18): "She hadn't bought (the clothes) in Croatia," has been removed.

The use of inner commentary marks the clearest contrast with the old draft. From the beginning of the new Chapter 1, Dan's thoughts and motivations are shared with the reader and potential pitfalls are carefully avoided. Rather than becoming repetitious, the main character's desires and aspirations are developed around particular themes as the story progresses. Dan's changing perceptions of Marija, as he moves from sympathy and protectiveness, to attraction, love, envy and finally to contempt, is an important example. Nevertheless, over-elaboration of his thoughts during key moments is avoided because the reader must deduce certain ideas for him/herself. Although insights are offered, overuse of internalisations can slow the pace, potentially destroying the story's hooks and sense of mystery. In this draft, a more judicious use of inner commentary shows Dan to be, at heart, an imperfect but ultimately honourable person whose aspirations can be supported by the reader. By contrast, in the original version readers were given little or no insight into Dan's attitude towards Marija. During the first family dinner (Old Draft p.19):

The girl wears the dress I'd flung into the wardrobe earlier on. Before taking mouthfuls of food, she glances at my parents, as if in need of reassurance. When they look in her direction, she smiles or nods. Apart from that, her contribution is minimal.

Without internalisations, readers were forced to guess Dan's feelings. At the same time, the reader already knew that Marija had endured terrible trials in Croatia. So the reader might've

decided that Dan's lack of interest in her plight was a sign of insensitivity or self-centredness. So, in the same scene of the new draft, Dan's inner thoughts are revealed. Now he has sympathy for Marija's predicament and notes her vulnerability (New Draft p.18):

I decided she was even prettier than I'd first thought. She was a little thin though, perhaps this was unsurprising given her ordeal. She was also painfully shy. As we ate, she followed my parents' every move. Before taking mouthfuls of food, she glanced at them, as if in need of reassurance. When they looked in her direction, she smiled or nodded. Apart from that, her contribution was minimal. She looked so completely out of place and bewildered, I felt sorry for her. At the end of the meal, I tried to start a conversation.

Dan's thoughts reveal a more sensitive protagonist. He is attracted to Marija and notes (New Draft p.18): "her olive skin and piercing, green eyes." He is also more considerate. At the end of the chapter, when he hears Marija sobbing, Dan is drawn to her bedroom, not out of voyeurism, but out of sympathy. Earlier on, he'd been angry at his father's condescending attitude. Now when he hears Marija's cries, he decides that his own frustrations are of minimal importance, especially when measured against her horrendous experiences. He realises that he'd been acting selfishly (New Draft p. 19): "I muttered my apologies... feeling ashamed," he concludes. The old Dan had been incapable of reflection. Indeed, in the original draft, Dan's insensitivity had provoked Marija into tears. Rather than feel shame, Dan had decided (Old Draft p.21):

... that was a massive overreaction. She's not as pretty as she thinks either. Without the make-up, she's quite plain. And the cutesy act for Mum and Dad won't work forever, I think. We'll see how long she lasts.

This cynical attitude has been removed from the new draft. An author's decision to cast the main protagonist in such a negative light, so early in the story, could prove fatal to the novel's success, especially if the reader takes against the unlikeable character. So from the beginning of the new draft, a more mature and well-adjusted protagonist is depicted. Dan's strong sense of integrity is established early in Chapter 2, when he takes a principled stand against a neighbour's anti-immigrant outburst (New Draft p.21): "Unable to listen to any more, I led Marija back towards the house." He storms away and later reflects (New Draft p. 21): "I shouldn't have let her get under my skin, but she'd frightened Marija." Later in the novel, Dan will fall from grace but the reader will remember these earlier more positive incidents and know him to be basically a good character.

The new Dan is no longer cold or enigmatic. Instead he gives us insight into his developing feelings for Marija. At the railway station, he decides (New Draft p.41): “She was a good kid....In fact she’d always had a kind heart....Deep down I knew that I’d always liked her, from the moment I’d set eyes on her.” His internalisations later in the scene now make more sense and prepare the reader for the kiss. He thinks (New Draft p.42): “The touch of her lips against mine had filled my senses...I realised that I was in love.” Later, Dan reveals (New Draft p.43): “...I was thinking about Marija all the time.” Again, given that he is able to share his feelings and reveal his vulnerability, the reader is more likely to be sympathetic to his cause.

Dan is now capable of self-criticism. At the end of the new Chapter 3, he rebukes himself for his envious outburst just after Marija had been awarded the camera (New Draft p.27): “It was only a bloody camera for God’s sake. After all she’d suffered and lost, Marija deserved it.” He is also shocked at his own behaviour, having nearly kissed Marija in her bedroom (New Draft p.24): “I couldn’t believe I’d nearly kissed her. What had I been thinking of?” He is embarrassed that he’d lied to his parents about his ‘degree’, but he is also willing to explain himself to the reader. Although he has deceived his parents over his ‘graduation’, Dan suggests that he was prompted by his desire to be part of a family again (New Draft p.33):

Okay, deep down, I felt terrible about the deception, but in some ways I convinced myself that I wasn’t such a fraud. The love we all had for each other wasn’t artificial. And when I saw the expressions on their faces that evening, maybe, just maybe it was worth it.

Dan’s ultimate goal is to achieve a strong relationship with his father. His attempt to start a journalism career, his university degree, and even his fake ‘graduation’ are part of that quest for parental acceptance. Internal commentary makes his motivations clear, particularly when he explains why he was sent down (New Draft p.30): “I’d... chosen English literature partly to impress (Dad), and when, as usual, he’d showed no curiosity, I slowly lost all interest myself.” In earlier drafts, Dan may have come across as self-pitying or ungrateful. Now that Dan’s long-held aspirations are understood, the reader is more likely to sympathise when Chris refuses to help his son find a job. Dan reflects (New Draft: p.27): “I’d only asked him for help....I only ever wanted him to be proud of me, and yet he had so many ways of making me feel so bloody useless.”

In Chapter 3, Dan considers Chris’s cheating and the effect it’s had on everyone. He stoically resolves to make the best of things, despite his father’s behaviour (New Draft p.25):



“He was still my Dad. Despite his faults, I always longed to see him return when he’d been away. I just wanted to be with him. I was his son and I loved him.” In the following scene, Dan’s inner thoughts reveal that, although his mother’s drunkenness and depression had upset him on many occasions, Chris had never been around to help. So in the reader’s mind, while Chris’s stock is lowered, the perception of Dan as a resilient character who has struggled against the odds is raised.

The new Dan is a more positive character than before, but remains an uncertain and vulnerable young man. Chris’s judgement is never far from his son’s conscience. After nearly kissing Marija in Chapter 3, Dan fears (New Draft p.24): “I was more worried about my father. If he ever found out, he’d accuse me of taking advantage.” After lying to Ben in London, he again considers his father’s potential reaction (New Draft p.51): “What would he think of me if he knew what I’d done? I was pathetic.” Even Jared’s quips are enough for him to lose confidence in himself. Having been taunted about his lack of knowledge, in Chapter 4, Dan reflects (New Draft p.34-5): “A reporter? It was never going to work out. I wasn’t even a graduate. I’d fucked up my whole life.” While the family are discussing politics at dinner, he thinks (New Draft p.34): “I was probably the only one in the room who had no idea what he was talking about...I didn’t even know what UNPROFOR stood for.” Dan makes stupid decisions but in this draft, the reader should not give up on him. This is partly because his internalisations thus far have revealed a flawed yet ultimately sympathetic human being. Although in Chapter 4 he does sink into a self-pitying drunken haze that foreshadows the ‘inferno’ of Part 2, Dan’s internal commentary clearly shows that his anger is not aimed at Marija (New Draft p.34): “But despite everything, I couldn’t hate her....She was everything I could never be. So, no, I couldn’t hate her...I hated myself.”

In Chapter 6 of the new draft, however, Dan’s behaviour does take a drastic, negative turn. He destroys Marija’s job chances in London where she’d hoped to become a photographer. In the old draft, where few internalisations were included, except for some gloating, Dan’s response to Marija’s misery was cold and cruel. In the new draft, he is able to reflect on his actions and show remorse (New Draft p.51): “What the hell was happening to me?... I’d destroyed her chances....” While contemplating his rejection by Marija, he realises that (New Draft p.54): “She hated me. No, it was worse than that. I was a joke to her. That was the most painful bit.” Dan’s descent will be painful and unpleasant. Later in Part 1, (and throughout Part 2), he will continue his amoral behaviour. He will become cynical and unkind (New Draft p.56): “...Marija’s triumph was complete. And yeah, finally, I despised her.” However, partly because earlier on, Dan has shown himself to have been a ‘good guy’,

the reader will stick with him and hope that by the end of the novel he will achieve ‘redemption’ and manage to turn his life around.

Backstory gives the reader extra insight into the context of the novel’s relationships and events. A novel often doesn’t start at the beginning of the relationship between characters. So without some information explaining the roots or past history of a particular relationship, the reader might feel confused or left out of the picture when a character behaves in a certain manner. The extra knowledge or backstory gives the reader a fuller picture of what is going on and why a character reacts in the way he/she does. However, some pitfalls need to be avoided. It is important that summation is written clearly but concisely. The writer must be careful not to not become side-tracked. It can be tempting to give too much detail, but when the information does become too elaborate, scenes within scenes can be created and the main focus of the narrative can be lost.

The key relationship in the novel is between the father and the son. In the old draft, from the moment Dan and Chris met there was a feeling of tension, a lack of understanding and conversation, and yet, this was never explained (Old Draft p.17):

“She saw her mother shot,” he says gravely. He pauses as if expecting a reaction. I give the slightest nod. For several seconds, neither of us speaks. Eventually, he sits up. “How was France?”

Clearly all was not well between them and the reader suspects that something had happened in the past. However, no explanation or history of their relationship was given (Old Draft p.17-p.18):

“No but I enjoyed it...they said I had a talent. I turned them down, though.” I look straight into his eyes. “I’m going to work with you...like we’ve always planned.” Dad blinks but says nothing. He reclines slowly in his chair and stares up at the ceiling. “When will you know about your finals?”

Something was up, but again, the reader was left in the dark. By contrast, in the updated draft, new paragraphs of backstory are given. They explain that the father-son relationship never took off as a result of Chris’s continual absences as Dan was growing up. Dan laments this state of affairs and promises to change matters for the better (New Draft p.16):

I suppose conversation with my father had never been easy.... His overseas assignments had demanded prolonged absences from home, especially during my teenage years, so there was rarely any time to build a father-son relationship. As I grew up, there were no family holidays, football matches, driving lessons, or

advice about life. In fact, since leaving school, I'd hardly seen him at all. Things were about to change, though. I'd promised myself that much.

The reader now has a more secure understanding of why the conversation between the men in Chapter 1 is so difficult. The reader also knows Dan's ultimate goal: to experience a real father-son relationship. More new information is given later on, after dinner. Dan believes that several years previously, Chris had agreed to work on an assignment with him. For his part, Chris has either forgotten or reneged on the agreement. Dan is highly frustrated (New Draft p.19):

Okay, it was a while ago when we'd last spoken about it and nothing was set in stone, but I remembered. I remembered. Why had it always been so unsettling to be around him? Why had I always felt that he was disappointed in me? Christ, he hadn't even known when I was meant to be graduating. And who was this girl anyway? What the hell was he playing at?

Another element of the backstory is given in Chapter 3 (New Draft p.25): "I helped her upstairs...the stays in hospital, were to follow." The paragraph reveals the deeper, darker history to the father and son relationship. Chris's unfaithful behaviour has contributed to the family's instability and unhappiness. As well as the insights into Theresa's condition, we are told that Dan cared for Theresa while his father was away (New Draft p.25): "She rolled into bed and went to straight to sleep. Maybe I'd been deluding myself. She wasn't going to get better as easily as I'd hoped." Dan feels angry about his mother's treatment (New Draft p.25): "Yet despite everything, I couldn't hate him. When I was a bit younger, I often thought that I did." He is torn between his resentment at his father's behaviour and his desire for Chris to settle down and become part of a normal family again (New Draft p.25):

He wasn't a bad guy, really. He never took drugs, or got drunk and violent. In his own way, he probably did his best. He was still my Dad. Despite his faults, I always longed to see him return when he'd been away. I just wanted to be with him. I was his son and I loved him.

The reader now has a much greater understanding of the reasons behind the initial lack of communication. The protagonist of the old draft might have come across as childish or selfish. But now that the unhappy family experiences of Dan's youth are known to the reader, his sadness provokes our sympathy.

The background to the fake degree also needed explanation. In the old draft, Dan had to explain to his parents why his name had not been called out at the graduation ceremony (Old Draft p.30):

“Both of you are here today, that’s all that matters,” I insist. “I’ll get a photograph taken with all of us.”  
He looks at me.  
My heart thuds against my chest.  
“Okay,” he concedes. “Marija can join us....”

The reader might have been able to work out from the ‘look’ Chris had given his son that something had happened in the past, but frustratingly in the old draft, it was never revealed. The new backstory explains that the root of Dan’s university problems lay in the relationship with his father. Dan had been punished by Chris for academic underperformance (New Draft p.30): “My thoughts turned to that fiasco last summer. After I’d been told to re-sit a couple of exams...he massively overreacted by cutting off my living allowance.” He’d suffered his father’s disapproval (New Draft p.30): “He probably reckoned that I was a slacker, and that I’d be forced to buck up my ideas and get a part-time job. Maybe then I’d come to greater understanding of the value of hard work.” Dan had been kicked out of university for non-attendance (New Draft: p.30): “...I was stupidly proud of myself. In a way, I suppose it was payback for Dad’s over-zealous discipline.” He’d been too frightened to tell his parents, particularly his father (New Draft p.31): “...though deep down, I knew they’d ask about it at some point.”

The reader now has a better understanding why Dan feels the need to hide his embarrassing secret. It is clear that his father can be judgemental and harsh. We also know from previous chapters that Chris can be dismissive of his son’s aspirations. The backstory in Chapter 3 explains that Chris had upset his son and wife through continual absences and affairs with other women. The reader might be irritated that Dan has chosen to hide the truth about his ‘degree’ from his parents. However, the reader also knows that, for years, Dan has cared for his mother alone and been severely punished by the man who’d put the family through so much torment. So, as Chris is revealed as being chiefly responsible for the family’s ills, the reader is more likely to support Dan in his quest for parental acknowledgement.

New scenes were added to show the causes of Dan’s discontent, particularly with his father. Other scenes were written to demonstrate Dan’s honourable character, in contrast to the cold and enigmatic persona encountered in the first draft. The first new scene occurs near

the beginning of Chapter 1 when Dan, having returned from France, meets Chris for the first time in many months. In previous drafts the reader was able to deduce that relations between the two men were not perfect, but the reasons for their silences were never made clear. In the new draft, when Chris enters: (New Draft p16-17): “I trotted down the stairs, took the bag and hugged him tightly....Everything would be alright, I knew it.” Readers understand that Dan, who forces the conversation and asks most of the questions, is desperate to meet his father. By contrast, Chris does not display anything like the same level of excitement (New Draft p.16):

An awkward silence followed. I’d prepared for this moment for ages. Now, after so long apart, we were face to face, and I didn’t know what to say. He gave me a manly slap on the arm. “How long’s it been, son?”  
“Too long,” I smiled. It had been sixteen months and three days.  
We entered the living room and sat down.  
“So how was Yugoslavia?” I asked.  
Dad exhaled. “Dangerous, maddening, exhausting...,” he paused.

Later on in the chapter, the scene at dinner is developed to reveal more of their dysfunctional relationship. When Chris broaches the subject of Dan’s graduation, his son can only stare (New Draft p.18):

I stared at him. Graduation was the one thing I didn’t want to talk about.  
“It is this year, isn’t it?” He turned to Mum. She smiled and nodded.  
“Yes, Dad,” I sighed. “It is indeed this year.”  
“And you want to be a teacher?” He grinned at Mum.  
“They said I had a talent,” I said coolly. “I turned them down.”  
“So what are you going to do now?” His eyes narrowed.

It soon gets worse for the younger man. When Dan reveals his plans to work with his father, Chris stops eating. He glances at Theresa but says nothing. Dan is upset (New Draft p.18):

“Why not?” I insisted. “I can write. I’m curious about the world. I work hard.”  
“...Because it’s too bloody dangerous!” interjected my mother.  
Dad winced. He put his knife and fork together. “Look, I’ve only just got home,” he said. Then he tried a reconciliatory smile. “We’ll talk about it sometime soon...” He looked at Mum reassuringly, “...but not now.”

Dan’s aim to work with his father has been rebuffed and Dan is distraught. Consequently, as the chapter ends, the reader’s sympathies are firmly with the younger man. To preserve this feeling, the original end of the chapter when Dan visits Marija and cynically questions her until she bursts into tears, has been removed.

To emphasise Dan's integrity, an extra scene appears at the beginning of Chapter 2. Marija is accused of vandalism by an aggressive neighbour. Dan rushes into the rain to help. (New Draft p.20-p.21):

She glared at Marija through the rain. Marija screwed up her face and shook her head.

"Marija didn't do it." I said.

"She's good at jumping fences. I saw her just now." The old woman's ruddy face was covered with streams of rain.

"It's probably lads coming back late from The Bugle," I said.

"Who's paying for her to live here?" asked Johnstone-Ward.

I stared at the old woman.

"Is she legal?"

Unlike the cold, enigmatic figure of the old draft, Dan has feelings and a conscience. He is unable to listen to anymore of the old woman's prejudices and escorts Marija back to the house. At the end of Chapter 2, the scene in Marija's bedroom (New Draft p.22-p.23) is extended. As Marija is preparing for her birthday party, Dan visits her room and begins a conversation. In the old draft, he'd voyeuristically stared in the doorway as she'd practised for the important event downstairs. In the new draft, however, Dan wishes to befriend Marija. He reassures Marija that the neighbour is harmless (New Draft p.22): "I told her not to worry about old Johnstone-Ward. She was always making accusations. No-one took any notice of her." After gaining Marija's confidence, Dan asks about music, school and life in Croatia. Having demonstrated his sensitivity, the reader is ready to accept that the honesty of Dan's conversation. Marija eventually warms to Dan's attention and describes her home before the war. The Danube was always a pure blue in the summer (New Draft p.23): "Like a crystal."

## Revisions: Tense, Inner-commentary, Backstory, New Scenes

### Chapter 1

1. (Old Draft p.16): "When I step forward..." In the new draft, Dan has been revised as a more sympathetic character and is less of an immature clown. The pratfall served no real purpose and so has been removed.

2. (Old Draft p.17). The last paragraph originally began, "I look into his eyes....like we'd always planned." In the new draft, the reasons for father and son's lack of interaction are explained more fully. Some back story is now given (New draft p.16): "I suppose conversation with my father had never been easy....I'd promised myself that much." Due to his father's work overseas, Dan has not seen Chris for over a year, and they rarely saw each other as Dan was growing up. Consequently, they'd never built up a meaningful father-son relationship. This lack of understanding is something that Dan is seeking to change. Dan is no longer the cold-hearted enigma of the old draft. Rather than treat Marija with suspicion, he tries to engage in conversation with her (New Draft p.18). He is stunned by the new arrival, but regards his perceived displacement as his father's fault, not Marija's. A new exchange between Dan and his father is developed at dinner (New Draft p.18 and p.19): "Dad leant forward....What the hell was he playing at?" Dan's aspiration to work with his father is now revealed and partly rebuffed. Chris's amusement at his son's teaching experiences provokes the reader's sympathy for Dan, whose angry inner thoughts afterwards are now more understandable and reasonable.

Another short scene is added in Chapter 3 (New Draft p.25): "I helped her upstairs....and I loved him." Dan's feelings for his father are further explained and the family's painful past is revealed. As Dan puts his drunken mother to bed, we are given more backstory. Dan reflects on his father's philandering and the direct impact it's had on his mother's health, notably her drinking and depression. The young man's feelings for his mother are revealed throughout the first part with regular internalisations (New Draft p.18): "Mum loved every minute...." and (New Draft p.33): "Mum joined in, looking tired but happier. It had been another good day for my mother. Her prescription was nowhere near as strong as before." These reflections serve to humanise Dan. Rather than having to guess about the motives of the first draft's enigmatic and selfish protagonist, we now understand Dan's feelings and perspective.

3. (Old draft p.18) “Marija is quite pretty... that’s for sure.”

4. (Old draft p. 18) “He’s right...”

The focalisation issues of the old draft are now addressed. In the previous draft, there were fewer internalisations and therefore fewer opportunities to get inside Dan’s mental world. Apart from presenting the reader with a seemingly cold and indifferent protagonist, problems also arose when Dan eventually offered an internal viewpoint. Too often the reflections were short-lived and unsatisfying. It was difficult for the reader to decide whether the subjective commentary of an unpleasant, main character was being relayed or an objective statement of fact.

This problem was compounded by the protagonist’s enigmatic attitude and amoral/voyeuristic outlook. As a result, the reader was forced to make an early decision whether or not to persevere with Dan. One resolution was to add more internalisations and backstory about the relationship with his parents. The revised Dan of the new draft offers his internal thoughts much more regularly (see points 2 and 3). He is also more positive. With the reader in mind, Dan needed to be more likeable. So in the early chapters of the new draft, he reveals a kinder hearted attitude to Marija. He is no longer immediately suspicious of her intentions. He no longer questions where she bought her clothes. Instead, at dinner, (New Draft p.18) his inner thoughts reveal that he is attracted to Marija’s “...olive skin and piercing green eyes.” He notes her shyness and feels sorry that she is “bewildered.”

Although Dan is upset that he has been displaced, this frustration is directed at his father rather than the newcomer (New Draft p.17): “I didn’t respond...,” (New Draft p.19): “I thought he’d be pleased...,” and “I sat down on the bed and kicked one of the boxes.” The internalisation at the end of the chapter reveals, however, that he is no longer the selfish character of previous drafts. When he hears Marija’s cries, he feels “ashamed” at his earlier behaviour (New Draft p.19).

5. (Old draft p.19) “I’m sure I had more books...” In the previous draft, a short, jarring staccato phrase often followed the sequence of active present tense verbs. However, the deliberately terse, pared down language clashed with the present tense narrative. In the new draft, a change to past tense allows the rhythm to be clearer and the sentence to be expanded. (New Draft p.19): “My old clothes were stuffed inside small baskets, and as I rifled through the boxes with my other things, I felt sure that I had more books and records than that.” There



were other parts in the Old Draft where the present tense/active verb style produced unsatisfactory results. So when Dan visited Marija in her room at the end of Chapter 1 (Old draft p.19), he noticed that “She sits before a mirror.” A change to the past tense and the correct use of the past continuous tense gives the reader a better understanding of when events are taking place (New draft p. 19): “She was sitting before a mirror and her hair had been pulled back.”

6. (Old draft p.20-21) Dan’s mood swings as he journeyed from voyeur to sensitive soul to angry young man all within a page or two, were too unsettling for the reader. In the new draft, his feelings towards Marija are developed more gradually as the first part continues. From the moment Marija arrives, Dan is much less cynical and more sensitive to her feelings. He no longer spies on her, chats like a sensitive soul then disparages her, all within a few minutes. Instead, in this new draft, he hears Marija’s cries and tries to help her (New draft p.19). When he eventually leaves her to weep, knowing that he is unable to comfort her, he feels shame at his earlier selfishness. A deepening of their relationship will occur later.

#### Chapter 2 (New Draft Chapter 2 and 3)

7. (Old Draft p.22, New Draft p.20) In this example from the Old Draft, the series of active verbs, sparse detail and rapid series of narrative events worked well to demonstrate Dan’s developing voyeuristic attraction to the girl. In the new draft, however, Dan is a more positive character and the scene is crafted to make his behaviour less intense. Following on from the new scene at the end of Chapter 1, Dan is waiting for Marija to arrive home during a storm. He admires her poise as she scales the stile (New Draft p.20). Inside the house, (New Draft p.21) rather than being suspicious of her, he is amused at the way she pockets his mother’s money. A scene is added with the angry neighbour, Mrs. Johnstone-Ward (New Draft p.20-p.21). The newly revised Dan has stronger values than shown in earlier drafts, and he is angered by the old woman’s anti-immigrant stance. Later in the novel, Dan will fall from grace, most notably in part 2. Yet, as is demonstrated in this new scene, he is, at heart, a person of integrity.

8. (Old draft p.23-4, New Draft p.22-3). This scene needed to be developed. It originally showed a voyeuristic and nervous character unable to make meaningful contact with the

young woman. The new draft reveals a more confident and reflective character, who leads a sensitive conversation with Marija. They talk, and now we have the beginning of a potential friendship. Dan enjoys her company, “I could’ve listened to her talk all evening,” and nearly kisses her. The enigmatic character is now Marija. She has her own agenda and avoids his attentions.

In the following chapter (New draft p.24) Dan reflects on his actions with embarrassment, and his father’s judgement is never far from his thoughts: “What had I been thinking of? She was still a school girl for God’s sake. If Dad ever found out, he’d accuse me of taking advantage.”

9. (Old Draft p.25, New Draft p.25) “It’s given him a real buzz.” In early drafts, the use of first person present tense led to some confusing moments. In this paragraph, there was some confusion about who was speaking. The change to past tense and correct use of the past continuous in the new draft gives the passage a sharper edge and makes the narrative easier to follow.

The added backstory in chapters 1-3 makes the prolonged silences between father and son more understandable. Dan and Chris have a poor relationship. The historical exposition, detailed earlier, makes this clearer: Chris’s prolonged absences from home, in addition to his philandering, and the consequent impact on his wife’s health, have seriously damaged his relationship with Dan. In some ways the two characters are developing more conventional roles. The reader feels sympathy for the good protagonist, Dan, who has helped his mother through her illness without the support of his absent father. By contrast, the reader feels some contempt for Chris. Although he preaches self-righteously about politics and ethics, Chris has been the cause of so much of his wife’s unhappiness. In some ways, he is becoming the antagonist of the novel’s first part.

10. (Old Draft p.27, New Draft p.27) “I feel the blood rise....” In the old draft, this line offered a rare moment of introspection from Dan. However, in most other parts of the novel, his thoughts were left undeveloped. The deliberate policy of using a series of active verbs, shorn of internalisation or reflection, detracted from the narrative. The reader was unable to identify with Dan’s feelings (because he didn’t reveal any), and is left only with his actions, which were often self-centred. As a result, Dan became too unsympathetic. The new draft develops these scenes by adding internalisations. So when Dan sees Marija with her new camera, his anger dissolves as he reminds himself of her ordeal back home (New Draft p.27):

“It was only a bloody camera for God’s sake. After all she’d suffered and lost, Marija deserved it. Dad was spoiling her, but he had good reason. I needed to remember that.”

He remains indignant about his perceived displacement, but this anger is directed at his father, rather than at Marija. Chris has refused to use his influence to help find his son a job and Dan complains: (New Draft p.27) “I only wanted a job. Was it such a terrible thing to ask my own father for some support? I wasn’t trying to cheat. Not really. I only ever wanted him to be proud of me, and yet he had so many ways of making me feel so bloody useless.” The heart of this story is the relationship between a father and son. Rather than loathe Dan’s coldness, as in the old draft, the reader now has access to his internalisations and backstory. Consequently, the reader is able to sympathise with the young protagonist who feels rejected by his father.

### Chapter 3 (New Draft Chapter 4)

11. (Old Draft p.28) “Mine is missing.” We eventually find out that Dan was kicked out of university for non-attendance, but in the old draft, we were not told why. More backstory was needed. So now we discover that Dan left university after his father had cut his living allowance in reaction to Dan’s poor exam results (New Draft p.30-p.31). Dan had responded by taking off around Europe. He now reflects that, by reacting so hastily to his father’s over-zealous discipline, he’d spoilt his own life chances. As a result, he is even more determined to correct matters, particularly now that the ambitious Marija has appeared on the scene. Eventually, Dan decides (New Draft p.32): “I’d done it. I’d pulled it off. I was a ‘graduate’. Well, at least in Dad’s eyes, anyway.” Later in Chapter 4, (see no. 13) Dan reflects on what has happened. He feels that his lying might have been worthwhile because it has brought his family together (New Draft: p.33): “I couldn’t remember a time...it was worth it.” However, his satisfaction is short lived. While drinking, (and in a prelude to his alcoholic fall in part 2), Dan concludes that he is a failure, in contrast to Marija’s overwhelming success since her arrival.

13. (Old Draft p.31) “Yet I reckon his presence is the key”. Stylistically in previous drafts there was a problem with the use of present tense because Dan was reflecting in the past and the results were confusing for the reader. In the new draft, written in past tense, the narrative is easier to follow (New Draft p.33): “Dad was right. Marija’s arrival had been a huge help.

Still, in my heart I knew that his presence was the key. Mum was always happiest when he was at home, and he'd been back in Hampshire for the longest I could remember."

14. (Old Draft p.33): "I shuffle towards..." (New Draft p.34-35): "I poured myself..." In the old draft, this was an important scene, partly because it looked forward to Dan's alcoholic 'fall' in part 2. For such a pivotal moment, this glimpse into Dan's inner-most thoughts needed to be expanded. Here Dan finally reveals his frustration publically and drunkenly crashes to the floor. The action slows as he reveals feelings of self-loathing (New Draft p.38), over his failed past at university. "I poured myself another drink and downed it in one. A reporter? It was never going to work out. I wasn't even a graduate. I'd fucked up my whole life. I slumped onto a chair next to the door and filled another glass."

Although Dan is consumed by self-pity, we do feel some sympathy for him as he declares his admiration for Marija: (New Draft p.34) "Actually, I really admired her. She'd worked hard and she'd been rewarded. She'd made the best for herself. She was a success. She was everything I could never be." These revelations of inner turmoil prepare the reader for Dan's 'fall' to the floor, and also his moral fall in part 2.

#### Chapter 4 (New Chapter 5)

15. (Old Draft p.34-p.35, New Draft p.37) Here, some of the political background, relating to the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, is revealed. Dan, as first person narrator, is transmitting important information, necessary for the reader to fully understand the political complexities behind the violence. The information given in the old draft had a 'clunky' feel when placed alongside the narrative. It was decided that Dan should gradually develop his interest, both in journalism and the war, as the novel progressed. This would give the delivery of the exposition a more 'natural' feel. So in the new draft Dan asks his father about Yugoslavia as soon as Chris steps through the door: (New Draft p.16): "'So how was Yugoslavia?' I asked."

Later on, Dan is embarrassed about his ignorance of the conflict (New Draft p.26): "Now it felt like a job interview gone wrong. I admitted that I knew nothing." After Dan's fake graduation in Chapter 4, Dan is embarrassed again about his lack of knowledge, this time by Jared (New Draft p.32): "'Just across the Adriatic, near Italy, right?'"

I smiled but it was obvious that I'd no idea."

After this, Dan reflects that he will need to change his ways in order to succeed in his new profession. He blends his determination to succeed as a reporter with a fascination for Marija (New Draft p.32): “He was right. I hadn’t a clue.... If I wanted to be a journalist, I’d have to get my act together. I watched Marija pack away her camera. She’d been here for months and yet I knew so little about her, or her background. She stretched out her legs and yawned into her coat. Who was she?”

That evening, Dan reflects on news of a possible peace in the former Yugoslavia (New Draft p.34): “I was probably the only one in the room who had no idea what he was talking about. Jared’s mocking comments, from earlier that afternoon, stung once again. Where was Krajina? I didn’t even know what UNPROFOR stood for.”

In Chapter 5, the combination of his fascination for Marija and the approach of the start date for his new job drive Dan to turn on the radio and begin his research (New Draft p.37): “...but apart from scraps of information gleaned from Dad’s outbursts, I still knew very little about the conflict that had torn her country apart. If I did some research, it would certainly be good for my credibility at work.... it might also allow me to connect with Marija in some way.”

This developing interest in the war, no longer sudden as in the Old Draft, gives Dan the opportunity to talk with Marija (New Draft p.37-p.38). Later on that day, the conflict provides an opportunity for Dan to unsuccessfully engage with his father: (New Draft p.38-p.39)

“Dad, have you heard about Bosnia?”

He brushed past and descended the stairs.

“There’s going to be another war. The Serbs...”

16. (Old Draft p.39, New Draft p.41-42): “...I realise that I am in love.” In previous drafts, this was the first time Dan understood something about himself. However, the moment needed better preparation. In the new draft, the scene builds with Dan’s reflections: “I began to relax. She was a good kid. It was a lovely gesture to come looking for me.... Deep down I knew that I’d always liked her, from the moment I’d set eyes on her.” Only then does the train arrive and Marija kisses him.

## Chapter 5 (New Chapter 6)

17. (Old Draft p.40, New Draft p.43): “Crazy as it seems I’m thinking about her all the time.” In the Old Draft, this line did not make sense in the present tense. It is not the sort of thing Dan would say to himself in the pseudo-present of the retrospective of past events. Instead (New Draft p.43): “It seemed crazy, but I was thinking about Marija all the time.”

18. (Old Draft p.42-p.47, New Draft p.45-50): In both old and new drafts, Dan develops his relationship with Marija during these scenes. He can be cynical and irritable, and is annoyed by the word: “mate.” (New draft p.48). He can also be cruel and unkind. The chapter ends with his brutal betrayal of Marija. In the old draft, this behaviour is another example of the ‘monster’ Dan, an unlikeable and selfish protagonist who rarely reflects on his actions. However, the revised Dan of the new draft has been more positive and reflective since Chapter 1. The betrayal is particularly important in the new draft for it marks the first time he has done something unkind to Marija. Although he got drunk on the night following the graduation, his anger was not pointed at her. Now, feeling that he has fallen in love with her, Dan has destroyed Marija’s job chances in order to keep her away from a potential suitor, Ben.

The reader might be appalled with Dan’s actions, especially if he doesn’t show some remorse. But in this new draft, Dan is a more sensitive and reflective person. Yes, he has made an error, (one which will propel him towards the second ultimate betrayal at the end of part 1 and also lead him into the ‘inferno’ of part 2), but he is soon ashamed at his behaviour (New Draft p.50): “I should’ve felt shame at what I was doing. Later on, I’d reflect on my actions with disgust.” Later, he visits Marija at the gallery to apologise (New Draft p.51): “What the hell was happening to me? For all his other failings, Dad would never have pulled a stunt like that. Whilst he’d only helped her, I’d destroyed her chances. What would he think of me if he knew what I’d done? I was pathetic.”

Dan is not expected to be perfect. The internalisations help the reader understand his internal thoughts and realise that, whilst he is a flawed human being, he is not a ‘monster.’ Dan is immature and has made a bad mistake that will lead to a greater fall later on. The new draft shows that, at heart, he is a good man.

## Chapter 6 (New Draft Chapter 7)

19. (Old Draft p.50) “I feel responsible...” In the new draft, a remorseful and self-aware Dan drives to the gallery to apologise to Marija (New Draft: p.53): “I blurted out how awful I felt; that she’d been treated terribly. She’d been let down and I felt responsible.” However, as the betrayal in London has demonstrated, Dan’s emotions have dramatically altered since the kiss at the railway station. As Dan builds towards an apology, his thoughts drift (New Draft p.53): “Now was the time to explain the truth; to tell her what I’d done and ask for her forgiveness. But suddenly I couldn’t. As the setting sun was melting across the city skyline, my behaviour in London suddenly seemed completely reasonable. It struck me that I hadn’t driven to the gallery that afternoon to make an apology after all. Saying ‘sorry’ was the last thing on my mind. Before, I’d been confused, but now everything was clearer. I edged forwards and tried to kiss her.”

The humiliating rejection is followed by a period of reflection as Dan sits in his car outside the gallery (New Draft p.54): “No, it was worse than that, I was joke to her. That was the most painful bit. Laughter was worse than hate, much worse.”

20. (Old Draft p.52): “What more does she want?” This ending line was confusing. It was not clear who had spoken and so has been removed. In its place is a paragraph of reflection from Dan. He has witnessed the final confirmation of his displacement at the hands of Marija. Now, for the first time, he blames Marija, not his father. During this period of reflection, the journey from polite curiosity to mild attraction, to love, and now to hate, is complete. (New Draft p.55-p.56): “For several more minutes I stayed in the darkness...I despised her.”

This inner commentary prepares the way for a change of character and personality. The betrayal of Chapter 8 will lead into the ‘fall’ and ‘inferno’ of part 2.

## Chapter 7 (New Draft Chapter 8)

21. (Old Draft p.55): “It’s as simple as that.” (New Draft p.59): “It was as simple as that.” Dan is talking to his reader several years after the events of the novel have taken place. The ‘alienation’ style is successful here as Dan is dazed by the news of his father’s death and reflects on shared moments from the past. In the old draft, these reflections came as a shock to readers, who were not used to such revelations from the enigmatic protagonist. However,

in the new draft, we, the readers, are much more used to Dan allowing us into his thoughts. He has already revealed his angst at the end of the previous chapter, when, after being rejected by Marija, he believes that he has also been displaced in his father's affections. As a result we understand, (though we do not agree with) Dan's behaviour later on when he expels Marija from the house.

#### Chapter 8 (New Draft Chapter 9)

22. (Old draft p.58, New Draft p.62) Dan's reflections in the old draft are written in the past tense, as the protagonist is revealing his thoughts some years after the novel's events, not while they are happening. The past tense is used in the new draft, and so there is no longer the jarring effect that readers might have originally felt.



List of Influential English-speaking journalists in Spain during 1936- 1939

Jay Allen - *Chicago Tribune* and *News Chronicle*  
Franz Borkenau - *London Daily Express*  
Henry Buckley - *Daily Telegraph* and the *Observer*  
Harold Cardozo - *Daily Mail*  
William P. Carney - *New York Times*  
Claud Cockburn (under the pseudonym Frank Pitcairn) - *Daily Worker* and *The Week*  
Virginia Cowles - Hearst Publications  
Geoffrey Cox - *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Express*  
Frances Davis – *Daily Mail*, *Chicago Daily News*  
Sefton Delmer - *London Daily Express*  
Sheila Grant Duff - *Chicago Daily News*  
Lawrence A. Fernsworth - *New York Times*  
Cecil Geraghty - *Daily Mail*  
Martha Gellhorn - *Collier's Weekly*  
Hank Gorrell - United Press  
Frank Hanighen - the *Daily Express*  
Ernest Hemingway - North American Newspaper Alliance  
Frank Jellinek - *Manchester Guardian*  
H. Edward Knoblauch - Associated Press  
Arthur Koestler - *News Chronicle*  
John Langdon-Davies - *News Chronicle*  
Herbert Matthews was the *New York Times* correspondent on the Republican side  
Francis McCullagh - *Irish Independent*  
Noel Monks - *London Daily Express*  
Kim Philby - *The Times'* accredited special correspondent with the Nationalist forces  
Esmond Romilly - *News Chronicle*  
George Steer - *The Times*  
Nigel Tangye - the *Evening News*  
Dennis Weaver - *News Chronicle*  
Tom Wintringham - the *Daily Worker*

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