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City College of New York
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The Yellow House

A Novel in Progress

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of
Fine Arts of the City College of the City University of New York.

Mentor Linsey Abrams

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The Hague, Netherlands- 2008

“De faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire”- of doing evil for the pleasure of doing it. I remember hearing this, like a whisper in my ear. The reason for.

Now that my belief is destroyed, after such an ending I'm return to the beginning, to nature, by subtracting *the human*. Needing some kind of balance. Finding it will not happen, so I must create it.

I spent my life as a servant of the law fighting for this abstract concept called justice. I fought to punish people that I believed had done wrong. They were guilty.

There is no noble, universal sense of wrong that determine one's guilt. There's no righteous path lit by the divine light. It's a mercantile. Business. The guilty have incurred a debt. They have taken something that was not there's - money, property, a life or lives. I did everything to fight for justice. Which is to fight simply for the debtors to pay back their debts.

We call debt repayment punishment, and punishment is good. Punishing as a collective strengthens the us the community- it strikes fear into the guilty, it keeps society safe from criminals, it awaken feelings of guilt in the wrong doer, and it serves as source of retribution to the injured.

When we punish we are attempting to reign in the basic operations of natural life: assault, exploitations, injury, destruction—chaos— What we are attempting is to label essential actions of life as 'unjust' based on some unnatural concept of we call law. Where in nature does this exist?

When the eagle kills the lamb, the eagle does not incur a debt. Nature does not strike down take an eagle out of a sense of obligatory equilibrial justice. But the eagle's intent never varies. The eagle acts, neither justly or unjustly.

But Man can make and break promises, cause suffering, inflict guilt, act differently concerning a crime. For these reasons, we *need* the law. Only then can we can assign our own labels, and we can then be justified. But there is a price to pay.

Take too many lambs, and all eagles die too. Nature regulates the balance, but this is ecology. In nature there are no debts. The murder of the lamb cannot be morally judged, for the lamb's death is part of circle of the eagle's life.

So like nature, eventually man will cut himself down- killing for the sake of pleasure a device to quicken the process. As man becomes a blight on the Earth, nature creates genocide, population control, to ease the load on planet Earth.

Though when punishment is brought upon by an individual it brings the community apart, as long as evil for pleasure exists there can be no community worth saving. I shall find my own balance, and bring my own punishment. I'm servant of revenge now...

I was in massive firefights where shells rained down blowing houses apart, rifle bullets whizzed past my head, tanks fired at aircraft, mines, grenades, bombs...but it was back here in the ultra- safe zone of all places where they got to me. And now, these dark thoughts have gotten to me as well. But I can feel the cool wind on my face. Remember, today is supposed to be a happy time, a celebration. Darkness, lift a little!

The Hague is the place where peace is supposed to be made, not broken, but the attempt to unite all of humanity in the name of good is more than I can fathom at the moment. The work done here is very far from the actual violence it tries to pacify. It's all so removed, and very far away. We can try to pretend it doesn't exist, but it does, so why pretend.

On the ground in the southern Serbian city of Niš in 1999, a sniper shot at me while an invading mob of Serbs surrounded us chanting "jebeš kurvu, jebeš kurvu!" "Fuck the Whore! Fuck the Whore." I emerged with only an array of awful bruises. I was trying to put their leaders in prison for war crimes, yet back in the safe zone where the paper work is filed, this is where I almost get killed.

It was an innocent enough looking piece of black debris, half buried by the sand. It was right in my path, soaked with seawater. When I got closer I saw it was a black, canvas bag. It was heavy; I guess otherwise it may have washed away with the tide. Surely this was taken into consideration. Explosives are heavy, problem solved.

I remember the heaviness, the blood, and then after that the darkness. No dreams, only black. I distinctly remember this, the lack of anything. Just nothing, not even time, except for the pressure. A heaviness pressing down on me, like the weight of the bag. How do you remember *not* dreaming? An unanswerable question, I know, yet the phenomenon is uncanny and unforgettable. I must reflect: I remember remembering nothing. But before, everything before, I do remember.

In The Hague, winter is not beach weather. It's grey here all winter, but I like grey better than black. One can get stuck in black. Now I can feel the cold wind and the spray from the surf. The freshness in the chill. I'm making this a celebration. It's my first time here in two years.

The tiny specks, kite and wind surfers, I give them a piece of my celebration. These surfers were often with me through the years, braving swells, impervious to the sub-zero temperature, raised threshold to pain, definitely obsessed. So far away, a wonder if they heard the boom? It probably just looked innocent, like everything does that's very far away.

Through an obsession, we both unknowingly share in the same celebration: seeing the grey and fighting back the black. That's all any of us can do. While my world almost ended, theirs went on without more than maybe a moment's thought. Later the surfers watching the news may have thought, "so that's what the huge boom was."

I remember it was windy then, just as it is windy now. My security detail at the time had grown weary of following me every time I came down to walk on the beach. The icy wind off the North Sea kept them, two 6' 4" security, ex-special ops crammed into a small Fiat, heater turned to high. From where they were parked they could overlook the waves, but they didn't have to feel them. They were ordered to protect me, but I was an attorney, and not a president or a prime minister. Threat levels were low in the Netherlands.

There had been no threats on my life, or any indication of danger. We'd always set up a perimeter that I would stay within so my guards would have easy physical access to me, and so we'd have visual contact with each other at all times. These times on the beach were the only time I left my security, but even then, our visits were inconsistent. Always a different route; nothing special, just ordinary security protocol. We'd visit at random times, whenever I decided, and we had never visited the same spot twice in a row. This makes the bombing that much more impressive. How did the bombers know where we would go? Those dumb guards are part of my celebration too, no matter what they did.

Because of my occupational therapists, who I love to loathe for causing me more pain than my would-be assassins, and the miracle of prosthetics, I am able to live and function again. Kind of; I am no longer in need of 24-hour a day in-home care; I have legs and the ability to move them; I have independence. Thanks to some seriously skilled surgical hands the skin that was grafted from my ass has made my face look something like it was, but despite my friends and colleagues arguing that I still have the bone structure of dreams, my skin lost some its glow. I never used to wear make-up, but now I always do. I don't like finally looking my age. Still, my therapist and doctors who alleviate suffering for a living make me want to celebrate today.

I have not been here in person since the explosion. I wanted to wait until I could walk myself. Despite my 4-prong cane, and the medical aide that trails behind me, "just in case" they say. I never thought I'd be back here. Really, by celebration is actually a reflection.

The power of this place only seems to exist in the winter, when it's cold. Maybe achieved by a team of urban planners, some golden mathematical ratio achieved through symmetry, or mysteriously just by coincidence, in its scale. More likely it's a natural occurrence. Maybe caused by annual tidal movements, solar flares, there is a magic here that affects my thought patterns and structures. An un-randomizer.

When I was young, still working as a junior prosecutor, busting my ass trying to get ahead, I did my thinking on the move, in taxis, on planes, during late nights in offices supplied through diplomatic connections in host countries. The busier I was and the worse I felt, the better my ideas were. It was not until after I started for the tribunal and moved to The Hague that I had time to stop and think. But stopping and thinking don't mix. After I experienced my third or

fourth breakthrough, I realized the beach was special somehow. The wind feels nearly perfect now.

The bombing was headline news. At first it was thought that it was an attack on the Dutch Parliament buildings. They dominate the beachfront where the bomb went off. But after some investigation it was realized that this was an assassination attempt and not a terror attack.

The London Times reads, *“Geneviève DuPont, lead prosecutor of International Criminal Court for the War Crimes Tribunal, was the victim of an assassination attempt in The Hague today. She survives in critical condition while her companion, an unidentified male, was killed in the attack.”*

Sadly the attack on myself garnered more press than the actual case that brought the attack on. Too many dead and injured, civilians murdered by their own leaders, glory-seeking psychopaths set their countries ablaze just so they would look like heroes for putting out the fires. People no longer cared. The rest of the world had already sent in airstrikes and declared the war over. Their parts were done. Although by now, more people than before might have been able to locate the region called the Balkans on the map, the public had little sympathy for the people, or their wars. Thanks to the post-war antics of their crazy leaders, the people who the world had now turned away from suffered in silence. Not even an explosion rocking the most peaceful city on Earth could bring attention back to Kosovo.

I had always been a thorn in their side down there. These were sociopaths whose daily routines included committing mass murders between tee times, yet I never felt that I was taking unmanageable risks. Looking back I can see why-- I did not have strong enough proof. All the proof was within the borders of the countries, under these maniac s' control. All the witnesses

and living victims dared not speak out. Without some major set of evidence that was all encompassing, I was viewed as an annoying but minor threat. Eventually this changed, and I didn't even know it. I found out enough to be threat. But if I didn't even know it, how did my assassins know?

The only reason I lived was because of my Kevlar bulletproof vest. This is not the first time I've been saved by my bulletproof vest. I don't know if this is a blessing or a curse. For the entire first year after the explosion I'd wished I were dead. I know now that it was the pain causing these thoughts. Not so much the physical pain, as the mental, caused by the inability to overcome it all. Logic, reason, ambition, I found out these tactics don't operate for me when intolerable pain is involved. I've never been able to do any real work unless I have a clear head, so I couldn't work. Pain meds help, but add to the fog.

It was hell. A mind-over-matter mantra immobilized, I was propelled forward only by surges of emotion and instinct. I'd always thought of emotion as a hindrance. To rely on emotion was to play roulette with the outcome of the situation. Yet emotion running wild can be powerful, maybe more powerful than any of our facilities.

Before the physical rehab began, once I had regained my ability to process conscious thought, it was like a switch went on that relentlessly began tormenting me with question: why? & how? At first I avoided these thoughts with morphine and muscle relaxants, then I avoided them with pure, savage pain, but eventually I ran out of ways to cover up the voice.

I tried to forget but I couldn't sleep. This is when the voice began, as a low hum in the back of my awareness. I would lie awake and hundreds of people that I had never seen were being shot by firing squads, piles of burned corpses were burning. I'd seen the destruction. There

were bands of orphaned children, some as young as five or six running between crumbling buildings, under-dressed for the cold temperatures, shivering in the wind, eyes fierce and afraid one moment, the next they'd be smashing open the skulls of stray dogs and throwing the brain matter at each other, while laughing hysterically.

I took sleeping pills, but then the scenes just shifted to my dreams, and worsened. Ten-year-old boys stand guard with machine guns while Serbian soldiers rape fourteen-year-old girls. Fathers forced to rape daughters or have their entire family executed. I am chased by dogs. Some with brains running down the sides of their faces. I feel for the animals that were tortured and killed too. They have no one to fight for them.

I run endlessly, the voice rising into a discernible mumble now, as I'm searching for the thousands of residents that disappeared from Kosovo, mostly Serbs in a war fueled by Serbia. I stumble upon rows of mass graves, each as deep as a large house filled with people who, in my dream, scream for help but cannot free themselves. Many have faces that are burned away, torn or shot off. They are faceless and also voiceless. The people on top of the pits crushing the hundreds of people directly beneath them, then these poor souls crushing the layer beneath them. All is silent. Layers of crushed people, scraping, clawing, trying to escape, but they cannot because the world has forgotten them in their pits. But in my dreams there are graves; there are pits; in reality there are no such things. People have vanished. It's as if they had never existed.

While my dreams became silent, the voices of the people became one united voice in my head. I'm not a schizophrenic. I understand reality as it is. I am not affected by any behavioral disorders. The damn voice doesn't tell me what to do or think, ... *how, why, how, why*. The words in endless lines march along with insatiable rhythm.

Thousands of people were exterminated by their supposed leaders, many of these leaders still living freely, unpunished. Justice or not, these men and women need to pay. I tried to forget, but I cannot. These were pointless wars, pointless not only because of the human loss, but because of the ideological loss. An entire region--developed on the experimental concept of the multiethnic, multi-religious, socialism-- failed. Building, infrastructure, railroads, everything destroyed. Not questions...*How, why, how, why...* The words are like statements I'm dying to answer.

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Undisclosed location- Albanian Countryside- 1999

Always at night. Something about the darkness made it easier. Whoever made these decisions didn't actually get dirty on the ground, but the Driver thought that night just seemed right, for everyone involved.

Some of the vans used to transfer prisoners still had the Mercedes-Benz icon imbedded in the grill, but aside from they had no identify, the results of years of automotive surgery. All original parts had been replaced leaving the fleet of a half dozen vans with hardly any real, dependable parts. Wheels taken from Yugo trucks once used as spares, became permanent. As long as the size matched, all working rubber was precious. When bumpers were damaged by crashes, a bumper from the closest wreck was brought and welded on. So many accidents, bumpers were essential. Entire rear ends damaged by explosives had been removed and replaced by the entire back boxes of square, 3-ton trucks. Enclosed units like mini rail cars.

Lanes barely wide enough for single vehicles, abused beyond known measure, crazies pressing the known limits of automobiles, getting around obstacles was the number one priority, triple digit speeds into blind tight corners, at night, in the rain, and in the snow.

Hundreds of feet down, the mountainous passes surrounding the Kosovo/ Albania border are littered with wrecks and debris. Albanian shepherds, mountain people, know most of the wrecks, but across these passes, every day and night, somewhere, new ones are being added. Some shepherds investigate the crashes for valuables. There are usually dead bodies, sometimes not. A mystery considering the steep drop-offs. How could anyone walk away? Sometimes the survivors of the crash try to climb their way back to the road for help. Many die from their injuries. Some die from the elements.

Sometimes the vehicles are driverless. A brick and bungee cord are rigged up to the gas pedal, then the car is left to rip pointed down a straightaway. The rebels in the mountains compete to see whose car jumps the farthest. The cars are from Serbian prisoners, or they are from hijackings. Other times, if the Rebels are drunk, they might tie up a prisoner, a Serb, in a car and then launch it. Shepherds usually just search around the dead bodies, looking for CDs, VHS, weapons.

On the Kosovo side of the border, the wrecks remain mostly unexplored. Snipers keep the roads clear during daylight. Rain and snow make the mountain passes even worse. Surely just as many people must die in traffic accidents up here as from bullets or bombs, but the drivers of the transport van never have time to think about it. Their job is to keep their patchwork of vans moving. From Pristina they'd head southwest into the mountains. The weather and the treacherous roads are considered only as they pertain to their overall jobs. Delivering the goods.

Crossing from Kosovo night after night, all the supplies seemed endless. The Serbs moved black market cigarettes in the mid-nineties heavily, and it was not long until the Kosovars got their hand into the lucrative trade. Having seized cigarettes from Montenegro, they established these daily transports to Tirana. From Tirana the shipments would be taken to the port city Durres, and then by speedboat to Italy. Cheap cigarettes are worth a fortune in Europe.

The range of goods expanded in the late nineties when the rebels found themselves with an abundance of Serbian prisoners. Contacts in Western Europe through contacts in Turkey and the Middle East found an outlet, an extremely profitable use for these prisoners. A few prisoners were added to vans during the cigarettes route. Soon prisoners got their very own vans.

The prisoners left the internment camp in the darkness. Loaded into the back of the van. The butts of rifles used as encouragement to move faster. The back of the van had a few pieces of dirty cardboard covering the flat metal floor. The stench of the prisoner's from before them hung in the stale air. A strip had been cut out of the windowless box to allow ventilation. Otherwise, it was fully enclosed. In warmer weather the drivers sometimes rinsed out the shell with a water hose. In this weather, just around sub-zero, even the courtesies of not having to ride in the excrement of the previous cargo's excrement was foregone. The water would freeze the latches, hinges and locks, they'd say. Really, it was because the drivers were just eager to get out of cold themselves, and back into their shoddily heated cabs. Fuck the cargo.

They were seven; four were captured parts of the Serbian army, young men and three women. Two women were Kosovoraian Serb, one middle-aged and the other a teenager of maybe eighteen, the third was white, of some unknown, possibly western origin. They captives never told their stories to each other, but with the three men it was obvious. All around the same

age, chiseled, bodies once hardened by combat training. By now all seven individuals were emaciated however, the results of being illegal prisoners. All six had been in the prison camp long enough to have their rebellious streaks quashed, until they churned inside, becoming vengeful obedience.

The soldiers were part of a mile long tank column running down a dirt track next to a wooded area. Coming up near the rear, the army had not anticipated an aggressive move from the rebels then. They were not in a combat zone.

Either out of hatred and anger, or just for a show of will, a dozen heavily armed rebels fighting for Kosovo ambushed the last three tanks of the column. The rebels jumped out of the woods into the cover of smoke bombs and laid explosive charges under each tank, blowing the tracks off, immobilizing them. The machine gunners on the tanks were armed, but surprised, and through the smoke could not tell where to fire. A rebel fired an anti-tank rocket at the last tank, but at too close a range. This blew a hole in the side of the tank, killing the three soldiers inside. The rebel rocket operator was killed by the blowback of his own rocket. Of the six remaining, a grenade thrown inside the tank killed two, while the last four were taken prisoner; eventually they ended up in the back of the truck, freezing.

The middle age woman refused to flee Kosovo when her town was bombarded by KLA rebels. She had three kids then. They had all been killed during a raid. Her husband had survived, momentarily. He was brought to his knees in front of her. Two grizzled rebels asked him quietly in Albanian how he'd prefer to die. Would he rather accompany his wife to the camp, and spend his last moments with her, or be shot here and now? All he had to do was answer in a proper fucking language.

He didn't understand Albanian, but his wife did. She yelled out to him, stay with me! Rather than instruct him, she just kept screaming. An annoyed guard kicked her in the face, breaking her nose and a few teeth. The rebels screamed at the man for an answer in a proper fucking language. He tried Romanian, and Russian, but they knew he couldn't speak their language—"Motherfuckers try to take our country but don't even bother to learn our fucking language!" —one of the rebels used a pistol to shoot the man in the head twice. Then he fell face first into the mud. They kept the woman, since she had pleaded in Albanian. She could hardly be considered fluent, but she'd done as instructed, so they let her live. They were not heartless scum like the Serbs after all.

The young girl was stopped with her parents as they headed north trying to flee now that Pristina was under siege. Near the Serbian border a checkpoint was searching vehicles for weapons, or so they claimed.

After months and months of fleeing Albanians lining up at the southern and eastern borders, desensitization had set in. The practice of confiscating passports, along with all valuables, and then kicking ethnic the Albanian Kosovars out of Kosovo and into Albania or Macedonia with only the clothes they wore and no ID, no money, or anything else had now become regular procedure at the northern border too, the one into Serbia. Since no self-preserving Albanian would be trying to go into Serbia, this meant the Serbian Army was even harassing mainly their own, Kosovar Serbs. Soldiers somehow reasoned these people deserved it. If they'd been real Serbians they would have left the Albanian scum earlier, or even better, never gone to Kosovo at all. This Serb-eat-Serb mentality worked wonders towards creating tensions, making the war even that much more certain.

The soldiers made the family get out of the car while they searched it, knowing full well

they wouldn't find anything. Then they searched the family up and down. They searched the young girl especially thoroughly, patting her down twice as much as was necessary. Clean, yelled a soldier. He motioned for the family to get back in the car. The girl got in the back seat when shots rang out and the soldier fell. Yelling began as soldiers tried to take cover. Gunfire was exchanged. The family's car was pelted with a rifle fire, bullets tearing through both the parents. Once the shots stopped and she opened the car door and got out. The rebels didn't even raise their rifles at the trembling young girl. Now she was there's.

The third girl's story was sickeningly complicated. Too complicated for her even to piece together. She was neither Serb, Croat, Bosniak, or Kosovar but British, and had been held captive, forced to prostitute herself for many years before ending up here.

The road leading down in the town of Burrel that led to the final destinations was full of ruts and holes. The worn out suspension of the shoddy van did little to soften the ride. Every bump and jerk amplified by the darkness the prisoners were shrouded in, as if even in their dark cave this road told them where they were. Because of the darkness, making these roads especially dangerous at night, all the lookout posts were informed about these transports in advance. The transports tried to keep regular schedules, leaving Kosovo for Burrel at the same time every night. No need setting off edgy sentries and getting rattled with rifle bullets, all because of mistaken identity.

The authorities questioned this driver after the war, over and over, and he didn't remember any the specifics of this load, or any of loads. To him, "they"- the people he transported- were just cargo. At least this is what he told himself. He had two kids and elderly parents to care for. It was a choice he had made. A few years later he'd developed serious psychological problems leading to a heart attack. He was dead by thirty-five.

How information makes it in and out of internment camps in wartime is always a mystery. A kind of testament to human ingenuity. During these rides, when the cargo inevitably spent time together, they usually tried to piece together where they were going, but there was never enough information. During this war, information never made it back to the camps. The fact that the individuals of the cargo had made it this far, rather than being shot, told them they were not being transported anywhere that could possibly be good. This they had decided. It took an hour before the women finally gave in, and snuggled up to the men purely for the sake of body heat.

The trip had taken longer than usual, but the cargo had no way of knowing this. All they could do was try to balance themselves as this stretch of road that led up to their destination knocked them painfully all around the box. Suddenly the van stopped. After a few moments of silence the door opened and immediately a group of growling, barking dogs greeted them. A skinny, dirty skinned man with a bandana and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth yelled at the dogs, they backed off, then he yelled in English, "Listen up, we've got a nice warm place for you to rest. We've got some food and some clean clothes, so get up. Follow me." The prisoners got up, the two that didn't speak English filed out last, figuring out the message.

The third girl looked around as she was led and noticed this was an open field surrounded by mountains as a small plane flew a few hundred meters overhead. They were herded towards a lightly colored decrepit two-story farmhouse. It was still dark and hard to gauge the house's exterior but it was clearly in disrepair. Where there had once been a front vestibule, there was now nothing, leaving the front door five-feet off the ground, below were piles of scrap lumber and garbage. As the cargo were herded around the back of the house, the third girl observed the paint was peeling off the side of the house in big thick, yellow strips. The inside was filthy. Broken furniture, years of dirt and ill repair made the place look truly nightmarish, but then they

were led down a stairway going underground to cells that were clean, well lit, and full with other prisoners. Other cargo. Some looked up as the new prisoners were herded past. Some couldn't. Women separated from men, they were given showers, clean clothes and led to cell of others. Some healthy looking, others bandaged, pale and unconscious. All the new prisoners, all separated by now, were given food and water and bedding, but no bed. There were foam pads on the floors of the cells. They were soft.

The Western European Girl over heard two women whispering in Serbian. She had only a rudimentary grasp of the language but heard one tell the other say brother, Serb solider, land mine (in English). Hearing English she asked the women softly, "what is this place?"

They said they didn't know, "been here two days only."

Around twenty other women were already there, lying down, blank stares on their faces, seemingly oblivious to the world. The languages the western girl heard were Serbo-Croatian and some other eastern European languages, but not any Albanian. She guessed that they might be in Albania, which meant that that all these women were foreign, non-Albanian prisoners.

There was a noise at the end of the corridor and two groups of workers wearing surgical gowns and masks entered the corridor, each pushing a cart containing of trays of food. The workers opened the western girl's cell and her two talking cellmates rushed the door, yelling, "where the fuck are we?" Pushing the workers out of the way, trays of food- carrots, slices of beef, bread, crashed to the floor. The women froze. No attempt at violence or escape was made. The workers yelled for help.

An identical looking surgical team rushed in wielding syringes. The Western European Girl watched as a team stick the syringes into bottles of something.

She couldn't read the English clearly, something with a P. She sees the team struggle to

sedate the women, who also struggle not to be sedated. Finally both sedated women are dragged out, down the corridor, unconscious. All the staff disappears. The trays of food remain overturned on the floor.

After a few minutes of silence the skinny, dirty man who greeted the prisoners outside entered the room, no cigarette this time. “Listen up you fucking bitches! These nice people are trying to give you nice food. Fresh, tasty. We don’t need any more outbursts. Ok.”

He was silent. Then he pulled out a severely scratched black pistol and hit the bars of the cell. It was a jolting noise and echoed. “Ok! You fucking hear me?” Silence. “I want to know you fucking hear me.” The women that understood English mumbled they understood. Before he left he said in Serbian that those two women would not bother anyone again.

The medical staff behind him entered, unlocked the cells and began handing out new trays of food. The women around the Western European Girl took them, they even grabbed one for the Western European Girl. She hadn’t eaten in many hours, and the food was surprisingly very good.

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For all the reasons that a war broke out and destroyed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, history rests the majority of the blame clearly on the shoulders of the guiltiest and undeniably responsible state, Serbia. Serbia was the antagonist that created the tension, and pushed it to the brink until fighting broke out. The history books agree, Serbia’s purporting of blatant Serb nationalism, along with their absolute hatred of anything non-Serbian, forced the entire republic into civil war.

The Serbs held the power of the military. Even after the army that had once protected the entire republic, the Yugoslavian People’s Army (JNA) was dissolved, Serbia insisted on calling

their own army the army of the Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia. Except for Croatia, the rest of Yugoslavia didn't have any real defenses. Slovenia and Macedonia were lucky and emerged unscathed. The slaughter that fell upon Bosnia, causing the destruction of the country and its people, is one of the great horrors of our time.

The evil of the Serbian regime during the 1990's was unprecedented and cannot be justified, but in reality while the rest of Yugoslavia may not have been rooted in hate, it was certainly rooted in corruption. Early in the conflict, the West tried to force Serbia to surrender using sanctions. This attempt failed miserably. These wartime sanctions crippled not just Serbia's economy, but the economy of the entire Yugoslav region damaging everything: trade, legal and financial infrastructures, police, public sector and schools. Rather than give in to the West, the government chose to rely on underground gangs to keep trade flowing. The gangs had trade routes that were not affected by sanctions, but too soon, by the mid 90s, these underground gangs had made their way from the underground and into the government. Across Serbia and Montenegro, some of the most powerful leaders were literally hardened criminals.

War produces crime. In a court of law, intent is very important. If someone is forced to commit crimes, are they guilty? Do we call them a criminal? Boris Toska walked away from his post where he committed crimes every single day for years, and turned himself in. He didn't care about becoming an informant or helping anyone. He expected to be in prison for the rest of his life. He had no defense and intended to plead guilty. He told me once that he was actually looking forward to prison. In prison he could relax; he could sleep. He said he hadn't slept more than four hours a night for four years. Boris was pushed too far, so he did what he could, escape or die. The war was over, yet the war machine kept turning. It was time to go home! One day he just ran.

He showed up raving at a UN checkpoint, near the Kosovo Albania border. The Peacekeepers there thought he was a threat and almost shot him. He kept walking straight at them, hands in the air. The only reason he lived. The soldiers thought he was a raving lunatic and told him to fuck off, undeterred Boris started a fight with one of the soldiers. Soon he was arrested. Mission accomplished. For days he wouldn't talk. He just slept in a cell. Eventually he was transferred to Belgrade for safety since his involvement with the Albanians would have guaranteed his murder quickly in Kosovo. They kept him in solitary. After I met Boris I brought him to the Netherlands, and with much psychiatric assistance, I began to extract everything he knew.

I wish that getting people to open up was just as easy as asking them “what happened?” During wartimes people get scared, and they don't want to talk. It hurts to talk emotionally, and in many cases it can be very dangerous. Testimonies, even stories, were difficult to get out of either side, but the Albanians were particularly tight lipped. In towns where horrific things had clearly occurred, the people would either, lie and say nothing happened, or stay silent.

There had been no War Crimes Tribunal since after World War II so we were under-prepared to protect our sources. A Kosovar who testified in the murder trial against a powerful politician was shot the night right after he testified in Belgrade. Our witness protection was weak, and this led to his death. We lost not just an innocent person; we lost evidence in the case. The politician on trial went free.

Assassinations and beatings, threats to witnesses families, fires destroying witnesses, homes and businesses, the occasional hangings of “snitches” in public— these were all forms of retribution inflicted upon survivors by the reigning authorities, and this included something as

simple as being seen talking to an investigator. Nearly everyone I talked to in Kosovo, those that would make casual conversation, which were few, claimed they had at least one family member who had disappeared, or knew of someone who had. A family member vanishing was the most common answer when I asked civilians in Kosovo what they feared most, day to day. Getting people on the witness stand in a culture where retribution for testimony is assured was extremely difficult.

I have so much respect and compassion for the people that did speak up, and to the court, reliving what they had been through so that we could build cases. So many did suffer for our cause! And others' lives changed drastically. And yet, so many of these murderers and terrorists did their killing under the banner of what they called justice. To be an informant against one's country is treason, a position that many of the people killed or abducted did not even take. What they were doing by killing the treasonous was truly the best thing, even a great thing, for their country. These noble bringers of justice were just tipping the scale back to zero, keeping their country safe. I realized at one point, isn't this the same argument I've been using?

Once Boris came to The Hague, I eventually brought him to walk with me on the beach. I knew it unlocked my brain, so I thought maybe it could work for him? And so I found out, this beach apparently holds the key to many brains. The beach was where I learned about his life, including many the parts that were not related to the war. He had never told anyone about his life before. Once he started, it just kept coming out. But only here. It was like a tap that turned off as we stepped off the sand.

There were so many sides committing atrocities, equally gruesome, that looking at this war now, years after the conflict, I cannot tell who were the bad guys, and who were the good.

Do these distinctions even exist?

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Telling the time of day was impossible. The lights never went off in the cells and there were no windows, but while the biting fluorescent lights never went off, this did not stop everyone from sleeping most of the time. Surely this was a deprivation tactic, thought the Western European Girl, but why? And by who?

She knew this was a prison, but the women were treated so well. What continued to happen was that staff dressed like doctors would come in and retrieve prisoners. If the prisoner could, they'd usually walk out with the doctors, but everyone here was so very tired so some women had to be taken out on stretchers. Little outbursts like the incident with the food tray happened from time to time, but there had been no real acts of aggression; probably because almost none of these prisoners were actual criminals. The Western European Girl didn't like aggression. She liked it when everything just was nice and calm.

The Western European Girl was wrong. This was not a prison. Officially it was a medical facility for "healthy specimens only," so preventing incidents that could lead to the bodily harm of "patients" was the goal. The less the violence, the better for business.

The Western European Girl was feeling terribly lonely when she found out the teenage girl from the transport van, who also shared her cell, spoke English. Western European Girl would have been totally isolated and alone but instead the two girls became inseparable, yet they rarely spoke out loud. Usually they lay side-by-side, one gently tousling the others hair, their eyes half closed, tenderness for each other reverberating like a century of love, formed and abbreviated. Their passion thick and in slow motion; just like the rest of the women in the cell block, the tranquilizers and benzos that were mixed in with their meals, those nourishing,

fantastic meals. Non-verbal communications became the most desirable.

One time, while the teenage girl lay with her head in the Western European Girl's lap they would try to talk about the incidents that happened around them. There was a plump girl in the next cell; she had a shaved head and an eye patch and was frequently being taken away and brought back. When they came to get her last time though, she screamed and pleaded and fought ruthlessly, knocking back all the men trying to grab her by using her powerful fists. A second group of workers wearing surgical scrubs and masks entered, ran into the cell, and managed to stick a needle in the plump girl's arm. The two girls watched dreamily, as a big, bulky man in scrubs with a snake tattoo coming up the side of this neck appeared to carry the plump girl away. He wore an apron smeared with blood. The two girls wondered if the plump one was being bad, if she was acting out, or if the doctors were being mean by grabbing her too hard. In their current state, a conversation of even this depth was beyond the girls' abilities to process, but the bulky man tuned and locked eyes with the Western European Girl. Neither could look away for many seconds. After this The Western European Girl couldn't shake the helplessness she'd seen in his eyes. This she could process.

Later, the plump girl was wheeled back. This time patches covered both her eyes. A small blotch of blood seeped through the gown, a nice new, clean gown. Her hair was wet and she smelled of soap.

The two girls couldn't decide what was the matter with the plump girl. Who did what to whom? Truly, they couldn't decide anything at all! They were so sleepy; all they wanted was to dream, holding each other. They liked the smell of plump girl's shampoo.

When the whole cellblock began to vibrate, maintaining a slow rumble, even the dreamers pulled away from their chemical dreams to notice the happening. Was it an

earthquake? Or were they being bombed?

In reality, there was no threat. It was just part of the business. A chopper had just land directly over the women's cellblock. A sick man had been flown in from Turkey. He needed a heart transplant, he had a rare blood type, and he was also very rich. He made his fortune in energy in southern Turkey, an industry the blends all types of people, legit and corrupt. He was no stranger to operating on the dark side of the ethical line. Lucky for the Turkish man, he received word that the plump girl, who was now nearing her end, was the same rare blood type. And she still had a healthy, beating heart.

Something about the chopper's racket set the teenage girl off. She became distraught and frantic, and just then the staff rushed in to retrieve the plump girl, who was still unconscious on a stretcher. Then Western European Girl tried to console the teenager, to quiet her, but she started to get louder, drawing attention to herself while the staff was in the block. This was bad. An excuse for them to take the noisemaker away. When the teenager started to yell the Western European Girl rubbed her hair and her back, but she wouldn't calm down. Too late. The lock made a clanking sound as the door to the teenage girl's cell door was opened . She tried to back away into the corner, but it didn't matter, they'd easily get her. But they hadn't come for the teenager. They'd come for the Western European Girl.

A short time after the helicopter episode, the medical facility was closed. There was silence surrounding the existence of these medical facilities for years. There were rumors, very little evidence, and absolutely no witness testimony until around two years after the closure. A directive from The Hague issue the names and last know locations for a number of individuals that may provide information about their experiences in the "Yellow House" medical facility. The teenage girl, who had turned twenty, was one of these people. This is a summation

of her testimony regarding one particularly gruesome event:

“They came to take her away (the Western European Girl). I cried and I screamed. Once I was calm I saw they did not close cell properly, and so, I slipped out. I followed a corridor that led to a room, looked like a hospital with many instruments, and tubes.

I peaked through a small window in door. On bed was older man, unconscious, bare-chest. Next to him was other, bigger girl (plump girl), and she had no shirt too. The older looking doctor that I had never seen gave girl injection. After a moment, the older doctor mentioned to a younger one, a big, tall man that had some tattoo coming out on his neck to do something. The big man took the scalpel and began cutting girl’s chest, and soon girl woke up but was starting to scream. I could not watch and I hid in next room. It was piled with bloody clothes and garbage.

Then I hear big younger doctor yelling, “What should I do? What should I do?” in Albanian language and the older one motions to continue. The girl then wakes up and is not unconscious and is screaming through the walls, even in the cells they hear the screams “Bože pomozimi! Nemojte to da mi radite! (“God help me! Please don’t do this to me!”). She was a Serb. She is awake and they keep cutting but she is strapped down and can move only very little.

I looked to see the young doctor young slicing through woman’s skin and muscle and chest, very rough. A rag was put in her mouth, to stop her screaming but I still hear her thought rag.

The young doctor finished cutting but couldn’t open the chest, even pulling very hard. Two assistants also pulled at the chest until a loud crunch sound happens, and then chest hangs loose over the sides while blood is pouring onto the floor. The woman finally stopped moving. The young doctor pulled out the heart which makes a movement. Like it was still beating.

This is when the guard found me and took me back to the cell.”

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Serbian soldiers and officers often photographed themselves amongst piles of dead Bosnians and Albanians. Proofs like this existed for all levels of their government. The Serbs were very unconcerned with hiding what they were doing. Conversely, the Kosovo side had hidden their acts of war immaculately. Deeds committed by the rebels, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), were shrouded in uncertainty.

While the West rebuked Serbia as the devil, rumors were saying that there had been another side of horrors entirely. This is what made Boris so important. He showed us proof that this chasm of brutality existed. Having just received accolades for their perseverance, the KLA were turning out to be murderers, criminals on par with the Serbs. Their resistance operations fueled by a thriving foul black market of harrowing trades.

Boris had information about Europe’s underground- drugs, weapons, women, cigarettes, even caviar because he’d been selling it, or transporting it nearly all his life, but it was his time as a make-shift surgeon that I wanted to know about the most.

The story of Boris’ life was the story of a man who never had a chance. Never living outside of wartime, he shifted around the region, ending up where we found him in Kosovo. From the time he was ten he never had a place that he identified as home. His actions producing consequences that he’d never know the significance of all across Europe. He had a piece of a million different puzzles.

Boris had been working smuggling cigarettes when he was suddenly transferred and arrived at this mysterious facility in the Albanian countryside. This was after he had once let slip

to his boss that he had always dreamed of becoming a doctor, and that slip of the tongue found him in his new job. He was driven into Albania; he had no idea where, to a dilapidated farmhouse that covered an underground facility. Under the house were a series of bunkers, and this is where they kept the patients. From here he let the girl escape.

Boris couldn't say why he let this one free exactly. He had never really had a steady girl friend before, so maybe when a really pretty girl actually looked at him without turning away from fear, or shame, this slice of tenderness sent him into shock. He has seen a light in her eyes that he had a difficult time forgetting at a time when forgetting was necessary to survive.

She lay there on the operating table, naked except for underwear. Even after years of entrapment and maltreatment her body is still radiant, worthy a thousand sculptures. Boris marks up her abdomen preparing to remove a kidney that day, her eyelids are barely open, but she knows that look, the one men give. Boris's mouth is suddenly dry as he fumbles with the marker and it. Although she is strapped to the table, using her drug induced drawl, she says she needs to tell him a secret, and only him. In her sexiest rasp he lets her whisper her secret into his ear, "let me go." Then she cooed out loud, like it was all a game, but she knew it was not. They both did.

The house and bunker were surrounded by forest and mountainous hills, with a very sparse population. There were planes overhead often so he suspected it was near an airport. Guerillas had encampments in the woods. They monitor the roadways and patrol for attacks from Serbs, so very few people passed through for fear of being shot or stepping on a mine.

When Boris was alone with Western European Girl, he removed her restraints. He held her hand and looked into her eyes. He saw some kind of the truth. They stared at each other again until she kissed him soft, but he pulled away. "Count to ten, and then you run," he said.

He threw her a hospital gown and left her lying there. In the next room Boris dumped a bottle of alcohol on a pile of bloody rags. They burst into flames. He dumped more alcohol. He pulled a fire alarm yelling “fire, fire,” and he ran out of the room.. When he returned, the Western European Girl was gone.

Boris began to remember many other things over time. Who the hell knew that we were getting close? Where was this place they called the Yellow House medical facility? How many people innocent people died for the sake of their healthy organs?

Eventually once my sinus cavity was drained of fluid, the blood began flowing through the carotid artery and I regained partial vision in my right eye, so I’m thankful not to be blind.

My eardrums burst from the blast, plus there was some slight structural trauma: one of my ears was almost totally detached. I lost 75% of my hearing according to the last audiologist I saw.

I often run my hands down my arms. They are now covered in scars. They remind me of the explosion all over again. So much blood! I didn’t know a person could contain so much blood. Luckily my arms remained attached to my torso. They don’t work so well. I can’t hold a pen, but I can use a special keyboard with large keys to type.

Two years ago today I woke up from a three-week coma after a bag containing 125 pounds of explosives was denoted manually, via remote control, by someone who was within range of visual contact. I don’t remember anything except seeing a black lump, nearby on the beach. When I first woke up, I only stayed conscious for a few minutes, just long enough realize that was alive, and that I was a double amputee, then I was out again. In and out. In and out.

Now I walk alone, on this deserted stretch of sand, unlocking parts of my brain that may have remained locked forever; it brings forgotten thoughts back from the dead. This famous beach in my adopted home city works for me as a mind blender, the windier, the more it stirs up. The greyer, the better for the case. So I reexamine my whole ordeal from the beginning. Maybe I missed something before. Maybe my current self will see the facts differently and find a lead. I've noticed that proximity to the water is relative to spontaneous moments of breakthrough, so I walk along the beach as close as water as possible, being careful not to get y new legs wet.

The voice begs me to answer *how, why, how, why*. If the Western European Girl is alive, I need to find her.

The wind picks up. Swirling and twisting mysteries that I will try to unfold, as I remember how I ended up here. It all began with a batch of bad heroin.

-2-

Kandahar Province, Afghanistan 1996

At the dawn, the sun has barely risen and already it has begun to bake the land below. Two weeks after the brightly colored petals have dropped, an elderly Farmer examines pods along a row of his crops. Listening, is today is the day the ground will speak?

One pod lies on its side. Not ready. The next pod stands straight, but its color is too grey. Not ready either. The third pod stands erect, a luminous green color, practically bursting open. He squeezes it lightly. It feels ready. Neither too soft nor too hard. He removes a piece of dirty purple yarn from his pocket and ties it around the poppy's stem- ready! Later the field will be dotted rainbow of colorful yarn.

The rows are perfectly spaced, leaving gaps between plants necessary for optimal poppy cultivation. The farmer fills the spaces with miscellaneous seeds, this year tobacco and maize. What he doesn't eat or smoke, he'll sell.

Walking the line, the Farmer squeezes pod after pod now, not all, but many of them have burst open. He can see now which are ready, there is no need for the masters fingers to touch or squeeze, yet he wants to feel the magical plants that nature has shot up, ablaze, trumpeting readiness, all under his steady charge.

The soil speaks in scents. The Farmer bends down, rubs his hands in the soil, moist from the night's dew. Is it time? Begin too soon and waste precious labor. Begin too late and waste precious crop.

He closes his eyes just as the sun peeks over the trees, his vision is a rush of red. He bends down, rubs his hands in the soil, perfectly moist. The soil smells of dampness, and today too it smells and speaks, of beginnings, of hundreds of thousands of poppies, of total abundance. The Earth's scents say yes. The sun's bloodshot rays say yes, the warm light is like a revelation. It is time.

Within the hour the Farmer has called his crew who have now begun the construction of a small hut at the edge of the field, a station for shade, meals, and operations for the next couple of weeks. The Farmer is too old now to toil away in the fields himself but he is an expert teacher, manager, farmer, and if need be dictator. For the harvest the shack is where he will mostly stay.

The harvest is a grueling, labor intensive tasks taken on by a team of trained harvesters made up of family mostly, his daughters, grandkids, and great grandkids that have trained for years on this land, plus a crew of hired un-skilled laborers that come act as assistants to the harvesters.

The harvesters' skilled hands work expertly as they run their tapping knives, four small blades made of iron or glass bound together on a wooden handle, vertically against the top sides of the immature pods. This must be done exactly right. If sliced too deep, precious yield will flow too fast and dry out in the sun. Not deep enough and yield will remain inside and be lost. But tapped correctly, out spurts a milky white discharge. It lives momentarily, quickly oxidizing, forming a brown, viscous gum.

After the first sap is collected, the harvesters tap, and re-tap poppies over and over, some up to a dozen times each. All night the poppies ooze white, and this must be collected before the heat can scorch it away. The laborers get to work, long steel blades in hand, they move from pod

to pod, scraping off the brown gum, working their way backwards across the fields, collecting sap that has oozed, before the sun can cook it. Harvesters follow closely behind re-tapping. Until the secretions no longer flow, this activity will continue morning after morning, day after day. Pouches around waists, filling with ambrosial resin.

The Farmer's four sons works as foremen, supervising, making sure the Farmer's instructions are carried out correctly, and maybe most importantly, enforcing honesty. Every drop in every pouch should be accounted for, so the sons are always eavesdropping, always watching, trying to enforce the rules. But there are only four sons, and two-dozen laborers. Forbidden tastes happening behind turned backs.

Also, blades must be cleaned, as the act of scraping the liquid off each pod requires a clean blade. Continuous scraping causes a brown resin to build up. Too much build up, and the blade becomes worthless, unusable.

If this were a licensed farm, contracted to grow poppies for pharmaceutical companies, industrialist laws would attempt to intervene, attempt to arrange order and apply rules. Western rules. Workers would be requiring to wash their blades clean in water in between scrapes. But this is not a licensed farm, and these poppies are not being sold to pharmaceutical companies. Here many labors simply lick the blades clean themselves. In a land full of drug addicts, it is not difficult to find field workers. Addicts' mouths watering all day long, heads buzzing with warmth. Literally, addicted to their work.

After the poppies have been tapped out, all the resin as been collected, and so the laborers spread it dry it in sun to dry; evaporating water, mass-reducing, raw-opium- creating. Then the

flower pods are collected and dissected for their seeds. The seeds head west to be used in cooking.

Gifted agrarians, the Farmer and his ancestors have always had this way of communicating with their land. The preceding April, when they piled all the brush, vines and small trees and set them ablaze on an acre of the fertile farm, readying the fields to plant more crops in autumn, it was not just to routinely plant more poppies, but to rotate the entire crop for a season to tobacco. Generally, poppy yield is goal number one so not many Afghan poppy farmers, most having small plots, can let parts of their farm rejuvenate for a season. They would lose too much money. But our Farmer has experimented over the years, and has developed a crop rotation system that gives his land a boost of nitrogen, mixed with a secret fertilizer that includes human and bat feces, leads to an opium of higher potency and exceptional quality.

This is a generational family operation. The Farmer had the farm handed down to him, just as it had been handed down to his father, generation after generation. His ancestors bought up surrounding land as other families moved on. While most highlanders and their families manage about one acre of land this Farmer manages nine. In this heat, the Farmer is not overly concerned with the ancestry of the harvest, but tradition and ancestry have become ingrained in this work. It is his family's life path. This crop has provided for the generations and he expects this will continue as the world's demand grows.

After the harvest is complete, the resin is collected in bags and dried in the sun. It becomes a hard clay, and this year's crop amounts to a few dozen kilos of raw, dried opium. The next stage is the cook.

It has been a good year. This is a large yield for a single Afghan farm, and the Farmer has markets for all of it. With the rise of black market morphine and heroin, it is easier for most families to sell their opium raw, have it taken away and refined elsewhere, but this Farmer likes to cook his own. All his processes are done with care and knowledge having made his opium into a boutique item. A high quality product with a brand name of sorts that sells for a higher price.

Starting with ultra high-grade raw opium, over rows of burning fires hang vats of boiling water, the Farmer shouts commands his crew to dump their measurements, nearly half the raw yield, into the vats. Impurities float to the top and are removed. The Farmer bellows in Urdu “Stir! Stir! Fools. Do not let it burn!” Cooled and strained through cloth, the liquid opium is simmered again, laboriously. The crew takes shifts stirring until a brown paste, free of excess water, is all that remains.

Then comes the Farmer’s defining moment. Evaporating the water from the remaining paste requires the coals to be just the right temperature as not to burn the paste, and it has to happen with speed, evaporating the water quickly is part of the process for a better ‘cook.’ Just as the premier wineries have their secrets to perfecting their vintages, the Farmer himself has secrets and they lie in his cooking process. His Midas touch. The final piece to his opium’s amplified potency.

Taking the perfectly cooked opium, the drying method proceeds over days, and the paste becomes clay. The clay is then formed into bricks that are nearly rock solid. Almost entirely dehydrated, they bricks have an unlimited shelf life, an important characteristic to an exceptionally high-grade cooked opium, as is the fact that it is ready for the smoker or eater now, just as it is.

It is a unique product, artisanal opium. Like a fine scotch or a Cuban cigar, it's just another luxury item for people who enjoy grade-A products. For now the Farmer can sell this product. Next year, who knows? Not only does there need to be a market, the political climate needs to be stable enough for individual freedoms. When the time comes, he'll adapt if necessary, growing opium more suited to heroin production.

In a different world the Farmer may just as well have been the type jet-setting from fair to tradeshow, from festival to festival, just like there are Masters of Wine, the Farmer may have been a distinguished Master of Opium. But in the real world where opium is illegal, the Farmer cooks in a tent next to the fields.

Connoisseur traffickers are quick to buy all the top quality bricks; opium meant to be consumed as-is. He's seen the damage that refined opium has done the addicts of this own country, as addictions from using refined opium has hooked huge numbers of people. He will hold out as long as he can, making his own style of opium, before he switches to making opium for morphine, and adding to this market of addiction. Also, it helps that the Farmer's premium grade product sells for double the price of the regular market value.

There is a Dutch merchant who buys from the farmer annually, even occasionally making trips out to visit the Farmer in Kandahar. Each man fumbling through each other's language, the Urdu and English that they have both tried and failed to learn for years. The Dutchman sells this opium for a premium in Amsterdam to an exclusive clientele. The Farmer wishes he could produce and sell only his own premium-grade opium to his well-mannered Dutch customers, but these are dangerous times in his country, made only less dangerous through each man's docile cooperation.

There is a reason the Farmer freely maintains nine acres of poppies without a worry or fear of banditry, vandalism, or law enforcement invading his operation. (Growing opium is still technically illegal in Afghanistan.) This “freedom” costs him half his yield.

“Accidental” fires have been known to break out late at night, destroying the crops of the uncooperative. Gangs of outlaws have been known to storm farmers’ compounds, stealing goods and money, killing and stealing their livestock, and even raping their women and daughters if the debt is high enough.

For the sake of this deceitful protection, compliant farmers begrudgingly hand over the demanded fifty percent cut, but then, in exchange their farms are untouchable by threats from other criminals, gangs, even law enforcement. Intervening on a protected farm is a bad idea without a massive amount of firepower and fearlessness of violent combat. Mostly, handing over the premiums keeps the Warlord himself away.

It is for this reason the Farmer has not cooked his entire yield into premium grade blocks. He has instead taken half the crop and cooked it to a much lower quality, saving time, effort, and money, while producing more per pound. To the greedy eyes of the collectors, higher weight is deceptively pleasing.

In the distance a massive dust cloud moves toward the field outpost. The sound of unmuffled jeeps and motorbikes get louder as they get closer. The motorcade of multiple vehicles pulls round forming a semi-circle, jerking to a halt outside the Farmer’s shack, as the dust cloud engulfs the motorcade, nobody moves, and everything seems to silently freeze. Quickly the breeze blows the dust away, and three men that were standing in the back of a truck’s bed jump down, Kalashnikovs hanging around the shoulders. A man in the bed of another truck in the rear

does not jump down but stays in the bed, manning a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on the truck. Aiming it at the Farmer.

One of men on the ground walks around and opens the door of a jeep. A stocky, middle-aged man wearing combat boots, camouflage, and bandoliers of bullets across his chest gets out, and the Farmer cowers in obedience to the warlord.

The Warlord barks orders at two of gun-toting men. The Farmer leads them inside a storage shed where the men pick up as many tightly wrapped opium bricks as they can carry. After a few trips back and forth, the jeep's rear is piled high with opium. The Warlord examines the pile, staring at it in silence. It is an impressive payload, yet his eyes remain fixed. Tense. As if this payload were an insult, a demanding evoking proposition of necessary violence.

The Warlord is a former Afghan military officer and is both loathed and celebrated. His greed is second to none, and his temper volatile, exploding like a child often if he does not get his way, but the Warlord stays true to his word. He employs a small army of minions with plenty of firepower annexed from the government. Under the Warlord's rule there has been something close to a state of civil obedience. Violence and theft has lessened in the region, most of what occurs now is caused by the Warlord himself since he believes he must make examples of community wrongdoers regularly, reminders that he is not to be undermined.

Standing over the Farmer the Warlord pulls a pistol from a hip holster with his right arm, letting it hang loosely at his side.

“Are you sure this is half?” he asks the Farmer.

The Farmer replies yes.

The Warlord cocks the pistol and turns his eyes toward the Farmer, “You know, bad things happen when lies are told.” He raises the gun, pointing it straight into the Farmer’s face. The Farmer swears this is half, exactly the share the stocky Warlord demands, and has been demanding for the last five years. “Bad thing happen not only to liars, but to everyone around them. You understand me?”

The Farmer nods as if in a fit, but truly he is half-feigning his fright. The Farmer swears over and over to the Warlord, “Yes sir, I understand,” but this is not the first time the Farmer has had a gun, maybe even this same gun, aimed at his head. He knows appearances need to be upheld, and he also knows that this payload is more than adequate. The Warlord lowers his gun and starts laughing.

“Just a little joke,” the Warlord says, holstering his gun. “Nothing like a little joke here and there, right brother? Little jokes, to keep the little people honest.” All the men holding Kalashnikovs start laughing too. The Farmer smiles meekly. He knows that this is part of business, and he has played this part, he hopes well enough for another harvest.

The Warlord grunts an order and a Kalashnikov wearing man closes the doors on the back of the jeep. Two of the standing men take their places back in the truck beds. “Something to show I appreciate your cooperation.” The Warlord slaps the Farmer on the back and hands him a small stack of Afghan currency. “This is business, right?” This is the first time ever that the Warlord has paid the Farmer a cent for the opium he takes.

The last man on the ground opens the door of the jeep, and the Warlord gets in. As the vehicles drive away, the men brandishing their rifles stare at the Farmer, imagining the fear they

must certainly strike into the Farmer's heart. The trail of dust follows the disappearing motorcade.

The Warlord amasses a vast supply of opium through his use of force and violence. He'll either sell the opium to Turkish heroin refineries, or deliver it to local refineries, that turn into heroin, which he then sells.

In a Turkish refinery a foreman barks orders to production line workers wearing white lab coats, gloves and surgical masks. "Dikkit!" Pay attention. Every grain worth is more than its weight in gold.

Twenty-five one-kilo bricks of brownish clay composed of a complex set of alkaloids enter, opium. The finished product amounts to two one-kilo blocks of pure white derivative of opiate. The workers individually vacuum seal these bricks of white powder along with hundreds of others made from thousands of blocks of pure opium derived from poppies all over the Golden Crescent, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.

This is Grade 4 pure. Heroin of the highest quality made for the purposes of injection. Each one-kilo block of this white powder is capable of supplying 200,000 single doses.

In another warehouse sit a line of brand new Fiats bound for France. Electric grinders whine and sparks fly as workers lie underneath cars. They grind off the metal bindings holding empty fuel tanks in place. Once the tanks are removed, the spinning metal blades slice the tanks open, their insides are lined with bricks of heroin. The precious payload is securely wrapped in a thick protective aluminum foil before the fuel tanks are welded back together, and then bolted back on the brand new vehicles.

With a trailer full of heroin laden Fiats, a truck driver and the warehouse boss discuss the truck's route. They converse in Corsican interspersed with French. The route they plan needs to be specific. To pass through the Balkans unheeded it must make use of the Corsican's contacts in Serbia. The heroin route to Europe is through Serbia. Very powerful gangs control this route, and strictly enforce that this route be the only route for sellers that are transporting regularly. Serbia and Montenegro buy nearly all drugs, especially marijuana and opium, and sell it themselves.

Back to the poppy Farmer. His best products sold and his dues paid, the last of his business for the season commences. As much as the Farmer despises the drug abusing scum that tarnish the opium industry, commerce dictates that nothing in the world of opium shall be wasted. After selling his best stock, and giving the Warlord his cut, the waste liquid leftover from the Farmer's opium cooking process still contains large amounts of alkaloids, and this can be sold. Enter the low-level Trafficker.

Just as commerce sprouts community, the opium farm sprouts the fly-by-night morphine refinery where every last opium-contained drop will be processed. Kilos of low quality raw opium, along with rotten unsellable product, old pods that have been cut from their stalks, and all the watery sludge gathered from all the neighboring farms goes into the mix

By nightfall, the low-level Trafficker has set up a rickety shack just off the side of the Farmer's field, nicely camouflaged by the dense wooded area. The Trafficker has water filled oil drums sitting atop bricks, fires burning underneath to set the water boiling. To the water he adds the alkaloid ooze he bought from the Farmer, the rotten and bad quality opium, raw resin that was burned in the sun and failed to form opium, plus whatever plants or seeds or other oozes that he may have scrounged. Anything that will add up to morphine. The Trafficker's crew stirs and

stirs. While the liquid boils, impurities are removed with sieves. The heat from the fires in the close quarters of the hut is sweltering. The coolness of the night provides little relief.

Pharmaceutical morphine is made with pure lime, which of course the low-level Trafficker does not have. Instead, he dumps in bags of chemical fertilizers. These fertilizers contain enough lime to cause a sufficient chemical reaction, and, he would argue if confronted about such a practice, that whatever other chemicals are in fertilizer will only make the morphine stronger, and therefore better.

This liquid opium is then strained, reheated again, mixed with more chemicals to adjust the pH, strained once more until finally the Trafficker is left with brown chunks, a very crude morphine base. By now it is morning and the crew methodically place these chunks in the sun, on top of slats laid down outside the tree line. Like the Farmer, the low-level Trafficker knows the importance of the drying process. If not dried properly, his already sketchy product will rot, and not be sellable. But it is dried properly, and packaged up into small chunks.

The low-level Trafficker's usual routine from here is to load the morphine onto pack mules and make the week and a half trek to Kabul. A poverty-stricken city full of junkies and easy sales. There are no borders to cross, and many refineries along the way to turn the morphine into heroin. But this batch is different. It has been bought and paid for in advance, and is destined for Pakistan.

This low-level Trafficker only deals within the country. The penalty for trafficking into Pakistan is death, as it is too in Afghanistan, but crossing borders is the riskiest move in the business. It also pays the best. Enter the Smugglers.

The two Smugglers meet the Trafficker in the desert and collect the goods. The Smugglers have camped out about 20 km from where they crossed the border, having transversed a rugged mountainous pass. They'll spend the night here.

The main border crossing between Charman and Quetta is clogged with cars, buses, and trucks. There are armed guards too that search vehicles at random, but in the hot sun, the guards might just sit in the shade of their huts, passing the afternoon, dozing, waving every vehicle through. Or they might decide to tear apart every car, truck, and pack mule looking for contraband.

If they absolutely had to, the Smugglers would go across this border. This is their profession after all, and they've crossed borders by auto many times, but the Smugglers are not taking any chances today. Their load is small, so there is no need to stick the main roads like they would if they had a truckload. The product they are transporting is of a very low quality, and not worth the trouble and level of secrecy, but the Smugglers neither know this nor would they care if they did. They have been paid well to make sure this morphine makes it to its destination. Once delivered, tracing the source of the drugs will be nearly impossible.

The Smugglers have variations of techniques for trafficking contraband. The job requires creativity. They've camped in the desert with their small herd of cattle. For this job they use the cows' horns. The horns had been cut off long ago. Bolts were mounted on the removed sections, allowing them to be screwed back into the stumps on the cows' heads.

A piece comes off the side of each that can be pried off, revealing the hollow insides. The Smugglers stuff the morphine in the cavities and screw the horns back onto the animals. This is not the most efficient way to transport drugs since a herd of cattle is a necessary, since using too

few cattle may look suspicious and could lead to searches, so although totally inefficient, this method of trafficking is very effective.

Now the Smugglers are professional deliverymen, but once they too were farmers. Their farms were taken by the government. Empty promises made by corrupt politicians to build thoroughfares connecting mountain towns and cities. In a surge of empty productivity, the campaign was to let us invite the world into the Pakistan's spectacular mountains, so preparations for building resorts to attract skiers from around the world began.

But modern Pakistan became way too dangerous for the average tourist, and so lost hope of stealing skiers away from the tranquil European Alps. There was never any "Let us clean up our country and make it safe for foreigners to visit." Rather, the campaign was just abandoned, the thoroughfares connecting the city to the mountains were never built, and so, the former farms of the Smugglers sit, full of rotting road-building supplies. Variations of this story, hundreds, even thousands of different versions define the lives of so many in the region. From the junkies who used to be shop owners from Kabul with nice families losing everything, to the laid off government police officers now working in organized crime killing the innocent they used to protect, all slightly different stories, all very similar outcomes.

After crossing back into Pakistan, the Afghan morphine will be taken to Quetta, where it will be packed into a specific black backpack, delivered to a specific square, at a specific time, to a specific man wearing a Yankees hat and driving a green Jeep.

None of the links in the chain know anything about the origin of the product, so tracing the product back to its source is nearly impossible. This product is heading to London, and is just

one of many such packages, all bought from different sources, sent through long chains to different places, for uses that we will never know.

- 3 -

Geneva- February 1995

“Prime Minister John Major’s Chief of Staff called me today,” said the Director as we moved into the boardroom. This was an emergency meeting.

“Does anyone here know why?” Nobody said anything. “Can anybody explain how I’m reading about this in the paper? Fucking unacceptable!” From a pile of newspapers the Director picked up the latest *London Times*. The front-page story read, “*Death toll rises in illegal drug tragedy.*” A stack of the last few days’ worth of papers revealed similar covers.

“Hearing about it from the British government, and not from my own office! You have one job to do, stop these kinds of deaths, and you’ve failed to do it!” We rarely saw the Director. I’d only seen him in our office a few dozen times over five years, and he had definitely never called meetings. That’s why this one, on a snowy day in February, was so surprising.

London was my responsibility. I oversaw the functions of the London operation and so this was my problem. I skimmed through the articles. They were all reporting the overdose deaths of a large group of Londoners. Why had nobody called me? Our field offices all had managers that maintained their own staff, but outside of regular operations, the offices required approval from Geneva. Field offices were supposed to keep us in the loop, especially of anything unusual, and this was very unusual!

The Director proceeded with condescension, “A senior member of the UK Parliament was found dead yesterday, hence the phone call from the UK. I assume that none of you knew that?” We did not. “This is a major tragedy,” a touch of emotion now, “but you won’t find the

minister's name here. The story has not been printed, yet. The Chief of Staff called because the police want to know if we can help. The police don't exactly keep tabs on government ministers, so their looking to us for leads. The government cannot suppress this story forever. They're worried how the public will react. Who's in charge of this region?"

"Sir, that's me."

"What do you know about this?"

"Truthfully, this is the first I've heard of it." Thinking I was about to be fired, I kept talking, "we have some reliable people in London who are usually very good about filling us in. Something must have happened."

The Director swiveled in his aging designer office chair. The chair, like most things furniture around the office, was an expensive, chic model, about 10 years out of style. He seemed choked up, fighting back tears. Was this for real? He tried to lower the chair but it was stuck. Then he got angry struggling with it, and kicked it across the room. "Fucking piece of shit!" Maybe we'd finally get new office furniture.

He turned to me, "do you recognize any of the deceased?"

It was a trick question, or was it? I did not hear any sarcasm. Recognize? Two were famous artists who had just been on art section covers everywhere hyping their exhibition at the Tate. Another was a Hollywood actor. Everyone knew these people. "Not your typical overdose clientele at all," I said.

He rolled his eyes. Yes, he was being sarcastic. "Yes, thank you. We can tell by this being on the front fucking page on the *London fucking Times!*" It had been maybe 6? 8 months?

since the Director had last appeared here in office. The more I thought of it, the more I realized I had never known the Director to do any actual directing. So besides being rude, what was he doing here now?

“This story began forty-eight hours ago and we are only reading about it in only now, in a foreign paper, which means we are way behind the ball. Can we cooperate with the police? Do we have anything to give them?”

A colleague of mine that was also a managing investigator for the London office spoke up, “Sir, this operation works on the ground level. On the streets. We can’t keep tabs on the city if they don’t follow procedure.”

“You don’t keep tabs on the City?” the Director laughed. This was condescending, but it admittedly Brad had given a terrible excuse.

Brad continued, “As bad as that sounds, this is the first time our methods have ever failed, at least this badly. For every successful operation we’ve completed with the field offices over the past five years, our procedures have always worked.” Brad was trying to get us out of this office. “What I mean as well is, we can’t do much to help from here. DuPont and I will need to go to London and look into this ourselves”

Bad things had happened before and the Director had never showed up like this. “The media will likely be around,” said the Director, “depending on what kind of theories they’ve concocted. They’ll want some answers. Check in with my staff before you release anything to the press.”

The Director's assistant walked over and whispered something into the Director's ear, "People, we are going to see the gravity of this thing over the next few days, and it is not going to be very nice." He looked Brad and I, "I'm counting on you to take care of this. Can you do that?"

We looked at each other and shrugged. "We can get a flight out tonight," said Brad. The Director nodded and ended the meeting. "Excuse me, I've got to take a call."

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After law school I got off track. I was in litigation because I had wanted to punish bad guys, but ended I up fighting for them. I was pressing lawsuits for corporations. After five years of having no money, since I wasn't very good at that job, I failed to make partner, and so the firm failed to continue employing me.

Unsurprisingly, being fired was not great for my resume. It was after an old law professor from college took pity after hearing my story, that I got a new job. My professor knew someone in some international agency I'd never heard of, but that didn't matter. I'd been broke, living in near poverty, university debt hanging over my head for so long, that when I heard the salary for this new job, I cried, and then I dug my claws in. It was June of 1990 when I got the JEDIC job, short for Joint European Drug Investigation Commission.

It's funny now, remembering my declaration about taking the job, because I really, really cared about the world. I could make a difference here. At The Joint, that was the slang back then. JEDIC aka The Joint was an agency setup to monitor, and try to control, the flow of illegal narcotics across EU nations. Since all the European countries wanted to curb illegal trafficking, they all became part of, and contributors to, the organization.

When The Joint supposedly opened its doors in June of 86' it was without advertisement, fanfare, press conference, or even official documented evidence. Trying to find any trace of The Joint in the 1986 public eye has proven impossible. The first mention was in a 1998 newspaper article. Looking back, the staff must have figured out that nothing made any sense. Did we choose to ignore it? I don't recall any feelings of covertness. Still, the eighties were a particularly troublesome time of the Cold War. The world's major threats *were not* narcotics but nuclear war, yet somehow European resources were being directed to monitor drugs.

It was in June of 1990 when The Joint hired twelve Swiss attorneys, and I was one. The simplicity of the job was daunting, so after six months we had done our own investigations. During that first year JEDIC offices were located in an old airplane hangar outside Geneva. This hangar was massive, and there were storage spaces full of junk. Trudging through them, documents in boxes and cabinets clearly labeled "CLASSIFIED", and so not for us to look at where left out in the open.

But there was nothing interesting in there. Inter office memos, typical operation documents and invoices. We worked with the same stuff all day. The earliest Joint document we found was dated June 5, 1986, so we this what became The Joint's birthday.

The Joint attorneys here were glorified data entry clerks, and The Joint positively did not need a whole team. But, as I've realized after the fact, we added clout. We were the in-house legal team and we were the first to scrutinize all the events that happened through JEDIC. We gave The Joint the face of legitimacy.

There were logs, stats, graphs, charts documenting everything found, from a few kilos taken from a dealer's house, to a bulkhead full. Le Havre, Civitavecchia, Rotterdam. What

substance, how much, what ship, who the ship's crew were, who when to jail and who did not: this was all in the reports.

Everything was so well documented. All information retrieved from sources leading to operations that brought drugs off the street. The time. The Place. The Persons arrested. The Officers involved. And there was always a well-written description of exactly how the scenario when down. Our jobs as attorneys was to make sure that there were no glaring inconsistencies, which there never were. If something seemed off we could we could follow-up with the persons listed to validate their stories. This rarely occurred, but when it did, things always ended up lining up as documented.

Public records and world media slowly began reporting about The Joint when a number of major drug busts occurred in German and Dutch ports. The Joint was supposedly credited with discovering this operation, so the JEDIC name was on the map. Yet The Joint remained an obscure international agency; really though, besides the UN and the World Bank, what international agency isn't obscure?

On the outside, by instigating a widely displayed "zero tolerance policy" for injustice, backed up by experienced, professional lawyers, The Joint seemed a front-runner in anti-corruption. A front-runner that no one that had ever heard of, in a obscure field that was not on the tips of anyone's tongues. So if a slip happened here or there, its not as if the press would jump on it within an hour. Later, we could see the pieces, and see exactly how we'd been played.

I am trying to find justification for something. Many things that never made sense about this organization, but how I never saw that it was such a sham is the worst thing. It's only out of the sense that we did actually do some good that I can look back with any dignity. Even if The

Joint was just a corrupt front that failed to change the big picture, we helped many individuals and saved many lives, or so I say.

Dignity is the least of my concerns now. Looking back is to figure out how I got here.

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London

In our Geneva office, Brad Williams was the lone American. A communications specialist for the American military, he used to work for the UN in combat zones, emergency management. We came from different backgrounds, and had both ended up as investigators. We formed bonds and worked well together. Ultimately too well. This has left scars too.

Brad got a flight to London, and four hours later we were standing in Heathrow. Despite previous trips to London, I could never get a sense of direction. I hated the winding streets, but I also loved them. That is, I loved being driven through them by somebody else. Even the ride from the airport to the center, I love watching the way the city builds and builds from the Heathrow area inwards. Within a 40-minute taxi ride, the value per square foot doubles, as the buildings rise.

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived. We took a taxi from Heathrow to the Commission's London office just south of Hyde Park, located in area that seems to have all the world's consulates and embassies condensed into it. A swath of reporters waited outside the front of the building. The dots were being connected. When we got out of the taxi, some reporters approached us, asking us if who we were. We told them we worked for the Commission but

remembering what the Director said, we told him we had “no comment” and gave him a number to call for more information. They continued to harass us for answers anyway.

We took the elevator up to third floor of an old, stone building. I had never visited this JEDIC office before. Passing the offices of dentists and dermatologists we found the cozy, non-descript office with a little plaque reading- The Joint European Drug Investigation Commission.

London is a town full of drug users. With tons and tons of product to monitor, having employees that were functioning users themselves gave us a direct line to the streets. Ex-junkies, social workers, and counselors worked out of the office as support, close to drugs and druggies all the time. Everyone was in the thick of it. Ears and eyes open for anything harmful.

Monitoring may have to start on the street but then it needs to be logged and added to an organized system in order to be useful on a grander scale. Most junkies don't have the patience for this kind of work. Working with such a unique breed of employees, keeping track of salaries and benefits, this fell to field operations manager, a suit that declared he was not a drug user. This is the guy who should have called us days ago.

We walked into the foyer of a small office with a half a dozen cubicles. They were all packed with people. Sitting, standing, on phones, phones ringing, a dull roar of voices coming from a decent representation of JEDIC's full gamut of employees, from street staff to office staff.

Not many visitors came in that were not scheduled, I was told later and so no one paid us any attention. This is probably a good thing considering the scene that welcomed us was near total chaos and would have scared most normal people away. We walked until we found the manager's office. Sitting in an office with the blinds drawn, surrounded by what must have been

years worth of papers and files, we found him. He has on the phone with his back turned to us defending why he had no information about the deaths of twenty-three people.

Once he hung up, he noticed us. “Ahhh, welcome, Ms. DuPont, I presume? Good to finally meet you. Talking to your offices paralegals and reading so many of your briefs, I can finally put a face to name. I am so glad you’re here.”

“Please, call me Genevieve. This is my associate Brad Williams.” Pleasantries were exchanged. “So Mr. O’Keefe...

“Call me Curtis. So...” The press had been slowly increasing their presence here, he told us. They’d been calling the Commission office for answers, but nobody knew anything. Before this incident there had never been the slightest hint that London even noticed that the Commission had existed. Now, just because it had “Drug” in the name, it seemed the press was blaming the Commission. This was the O’Keefe take on the situation anyway.

“Looks like your maid took the year off,” said Brad, smiling at his own wit.

O’Keefe laughed. “It may not look like much, but I really do have a system. A very particular one, I assure you!”

“You might think about trying the regular system sometime? It seems to work okay for the rest of us, and it has the side benefit of looking professional to the outside world.”

O’Keefe glanced at me, but I shrugged. Brad walked around the small office, inspecting things. Picking up others. Dust was floating in air. “Why didn’t you call us when you heard about the incident O’Keefe? Not important enough to pick up the phone and call us about? Was twenty-three deaths not enough for you? Perhaps you have a twenty-four death minimum?” I

laughed. Brad was being rude, but he was right. “You know how we found out!? The London paper man! You should have let us know 2 days ago!”

Curtis and I communicated by phone quite often, so we knew each other. Email was becoming more common around this time and the Commission had setup an email system. I wanted O’Keefe to start using it, but he’d claim he didn’t know, so his secretary replied to me. Come to think of it, his secretary seemed to do most of his work for him. I wanted to know why he’d failed to contact us. But I thought I’d try an easier tone.

“Ok Curtis, what happened here exactly? I went back through the data and your people have been doing their jobs. The last time we had to bring something past to the police was that Russian thing last month, right? What happened here? No inside information? Did shit just happen? And seriously, why didn’t you call, I mean, that seems like a no brainer, yeah?”

Under normal times Curtis O’Keefe must have been a goofy man. He was round with glasses, a breast pocket full of pens. He looked like he might be a science teacher or professor. But now he was sweating, his clothes were wrinkled and stained, and he rubbed his forehead as if he was in pain. Still, he seemed good tempered.

He had security clearance before he came to the Commission, and supposedly a vast knowledge of the drug underground. It must have been all academic and research based. O’Keefe didn’t look the part for the street, like the only addiction he’d ever had was to sugar in donut form. Basically it was a mystery how he got this job. He was good at making nice, and getting along with people. He’d made friends everywhere.

“The problem is, we aren’t set-up monitor certain people. Shipments come in and move in array of patterns. Some we know. Most we know. But some we don’t.”

“Can we go over what we know about this so far?”

“A rough overview is that this group of people settled in, ready for a relaxing night. Most were in robes or sweats, not party dress. They planned to stay and take some heroin, but after they’d taken it, they began to experience overdose symptoms.”

“How many dead?” asks Brad sarcastically.

“Now, twenty-three.”

“Just making sure you’re still awake over there.”

“And these were not regular junkies either. I mean, in reality they are actually, but they don’t fit the stereotypes for most people. They were all rich, or rich *and* powerful. Users that could easily support their habits. So not only were they all upper class, what is even more screwed up is that there’s evidence that maybe they didn’t overdose on their own.”

“What evidence are we talking about?”

“Toxicology reports show some really weird shit. Samples of the drugs found on several victims were tested. All the tests came back showing an unidentified substance, a toxin I guess.”

“So we’ve ruled out the chances that these were just twenty-three unrelated, irresponsible drug users who got greedy and OD’d” said Brad.

“Did you hear my comment about the toxins?” asserted O’Keefe. Brad turned, slightly surprised.

“Where did you hear about this toxin business?” I asked

“I know someone, in the police labs. Police were the ones that dealt with all of this. They handled all the crimes scenes, took all drug samples, examines the spaces, looked at the bodies, and interviewed the survivors.”

“Survivors?” We asked in unison. “You didn’t tell us about the survivors when, you made, that important call telling us all about this whole thing...oh wait,” says Brad.

Yea, either family members or friends that were there when each person died. Some one these people had planned on using too, but the overdose, or whatever it is we should call it, killed their friends first. Now the police are in my face about where this stuff came from? Who sold it? I try to tell them, we only monitor the to flow of the stuff that we know about. In a crime, they’re out of our hands. They should know this stuff. Isn’t this just a police matter?”

The Commission normally tracks suppliers and seizes bulk loads before they ever make it to the streets. Less common is when our street crew hears of dealers cutting stuff, making it dangerous. We usually track these down and get the police to help with the bust. But to track a load backwards from the victims, once the tragedy has already occurred, this is most unusual type of investigating.

“If they want our help, are the police at least giving you any information?” I asked

“Just what I’ve been able to get through favors. It’s totally their jurisdiction. This is in the hands of the Chief now so things are clogged.”

We looked at all the documents O’Keefe had handed us. Lab tests. Pages filled with percentages, numbers, and graphs. Neither Brad nor I knew how to read them, but we figured it out. Left to do it on our own, it would have taken some time. O’Keefe ran down the list. Either

he knew what he was doing or he pretended: Caranite Pyruvate Kinase, Lactic Acid, Creatine kinase total, acetone blood, acylcarnitines qaunt plasma:c-2 (acetyl), c-3 propionyl, c-4, iso/butyryl...

O'Keefe's contact told him to skip all the random blood work and look at the results of the drugs. All the deceased were given a quick 10-panel drug test, for all the popular drugs. When dealing with twenty-three overdoses, this test is obviously a procedure of vast importance. It would tell if victims were using other drugs too. I thought, the more drugs, the more complicated this case was going to be, but it was actually the opposite.

Any one reading the form could have seen it. "Look, this person tested negative for opiates. If this person had been using heroin, how is that possible?" Since heroin is made from opium.

"Maybe the test was faulty," said Brad.

"The lab techs thought so too, but multiple tests still came up negative," said O'Keefe.

"Maybe they didn't die from overdose then," said Brad. "Or at least overdoses of heroin." O'Keefe and I looked each other. I was admittedly a little confused by this point, and O'Keefe looked like he was too, although he always looked like that.

"What are these names listed here?" Brad pointed to a section on back of the full blood panel forms. "Toxicology, as in testing for toxins, yes?"

O'Keefe took a look. "I'm not a doctor, but yes. It's hard to test for specific poisons since there are so many, but they must have done a general test for cyanide, arsenic, things of that nature."

“Ricinus Communis,” said Brad “Do you know what this is”, he asked O’Keefe. He glanced at me. We both shrugged.

“Why? Do you know what it is?” said O’Keefe

“The name, Ricinus, it sounds like something I’ve heard of before. It’s far out, more like a legend. So there once was this diplomat from Bulgaria, or maybe it was Romania, one of those places that end in –ia.

“Maybe it was Transylvania?” O’Keefe blurted out proudly.

“Thanks for that Curtis. I’m sure that all our problems are based in Transylvania. If only we’d thought of that earlier! It would have saved us a trip over here!”

There bickering was getting us nowhere. “Okay, maybe it was Transylvania, maybe it wasn’t. Brad, keep going.” Under his breath I heard, “Jesus fucking Christ, Transylvania!”

“A diplomat from somewhere, in the world comes to Paris. He’s one of these diplomat/leaders/dictators that had quite a few enemies. Ruling his country like a dynasty, threatening peace in the region, insulting other leaders. The story goes that he was out sightseeing, official sightseeing with all this security and everything, the kind of situation where a weapon is not going to get near him. Still, somehow a pedestrian who nobody can remember gets inside the perimeter and accidentally pokes the diplomat in the foot with this umbrella. The diplomat dies three days later. Toxicology reports showed some really powerful poison. Sounded kind of like that Ric- i-nus. Shit, I can’t remember any more.”

O'Keefe had been swiveling in his chair, acting just generally childish. This appeared to be this reaction to Brad's antagonism, but as soon as Brad mentioned the umbrella, O'Keefe stopped swiveling and sat up listening. When Brad finished, O'Keefe jumped in, "that's ricin!"

"You know what I'm talking about?" Brad asked, genuinely surprised.

"Well, there are million versions of that story. Some involve a king who gets pricked by a pen or a sheikh by lady's high-heel shoe, or your diplomat version, but they all lead to the same end...ricin poisoning. "

"Curtis, when you said before that you couldn't monitor certain people, what did you mean by that?" I asked.

O'Keefe showed us a list of the dead and the recognizable names I saw from before were there. The rest of people I learned were all upper class, society types- a lawyer couple, a real estates exec, even a businessman that owned hospitals in the US. These were not typically the types of people to overdose. Especially in these numbers.

"We have in this country what some might call a class system, and the dead here are up in the top. They control enough people that they can keep their information secret. Police are tight lipped. I have wait for leaks, and there haven't been leaks so far"

"I don't want to jump to ridiculous conclusions, but based on what we just discussed, is it just me or does it seem like all these people were all targeted? That they were then, murdered?"

Brad said

"There is something else going on here, causing an indecent. We need a way to get more information. Let me see what I can do," said O'Keefe.

We got up to leave. We gave O’Keefe the number of our hotel, and told him to let us know if he found anything out. We had all shaken hands, and O’Keefe must have been thinking he was off the hook, but he wasn’t.

“So, I need to know now, if you want to keep your job, why didn’t you call us? You’re usually good about procedure.”

He knew he’d fucked up. He sat down, and slumped forward, his head was down, there was no eye contact to be had. “It all happened at very bad time; just a result of very bad timing.” He paused. “I was out of town when it happened. We’d had no leads leading up to it, so I had no idea this was coming down the pike. By the time I realized the scope I was back and bombarded with calls. In the chaos calling you got swept under the rug.”

“So you couldn’t leave a phone number? You have an important job! Shit goes down, you need to be reached my man!” Brad dug into him. O’Keefe looks at me with sad, ashamed eyes. “I was with someone.” He held up his wedding ring. “You follow me? I didn’t want anyone knowing I was away. Plus it was the weekend, I never work weekends. We’d planned to be back Monday. It just got fucked up. I know. I apologize.”

We left O’Keefe’s office. We needed to talk to the police now. O’Keefe would either come through, or he wouldn’t. The involvement of toxins mixed in the drugs automatically made this a criminal investigation, but this was more than just drug crime and for us to be involved, it had to be crime that crossed borders.

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I was lost again. Despite looking at the map the night before and getting my grip on the city, the streets shifted over night, mixing everything up again. So typical. No wonder there are

so many places seem to hide here, and so many secrets in London. O'Keefe was driving us to the police station. Perhaps after realizing he'd screwed up, he volunteered to drive us around.

O'Keefe told us about had a guy in mind, an employee of the Commission. An on- again, off-again junky, his current status unknown, and unfortunately so was his location. O'Keefe said this guy knew everything that was happening- who was moving what, where, and if a why existed, that too. He was an evangelical of the drug trade. Keeping the products clean where his mission. We'd have to go to South London to search for him, later.

As we rode along, Brad brought up what he'd found out about ricin. "It comes naturally, from castor seeds, but the stuff is extremely toxic. Like a grain-of-salt-can-kill-you toxic. If the substance is found in multiple samples it would be clear what killed the users."

"So they were all poisoned?" I ask, despite the obviousness.

"If we can get the tox reports to confirm it, yes. Any idea when we might get lab reports O'Keefe?"

O'Keefe had driven up in front of the station. He told us he had some contacts here, but it was after we checked in with Geneva the night before that this meeting was arranged. Inside we sat and waited while O'Keefe went to talk to a captain. The station was buzzing. A group of pretty women we're handcuffed to a chair across from us. Yelling obscenities at whomever. One started blowing kisses at Brad when O'Keefe came out to get us.

We were shown into an interrogation room with the police captain who proceeded to lecture us that we were out of our jurisdiction. In any other circumstance he would not be able to

help us, but this time he said, we had some powerful friends intervene. A young woman wearing a fitted suit with short blond hair had followed us into the room. She stepped forward.

“Good morning. My name is Victoria Peters. I have been send by the office of the Prime Minister John Major to assist you in this investigation. As you know a senior member of this government has died and the Prime Minister wants to do everything to come to a conclusion on exactly what happened.” She was an assistant to the Crown Attorney.

She turned to the captain “thank you captain, we can handle it from here.” The captain backed out looking suspicious and distrustful. “Powerful friends,” he said as he closed the door.

“Well Victoria Peters, an aide from upstairs. This is unexpected!” said Brad.

All three of us Brad had to sign these binding confidentially agreements, serious ones that apparently amounted to treason if breeched, after that we were able to starting going through though lists of the deceased. The artists, the actor, an opera singer I recognized, we confirmed that these were the actual deceased, along with others from top London professionals to kids sitting on old-money, but then there was the information the press had not been able to get, and why’d we been sent here. Among the dead was a senior member of the British cabinet. Senior enough to be within the Prime Minister’s inner circle. Hence the direct link the PM’s office.

“Doesn’t the Crown Attorney report to the Prime Minister?” I ask Victoria. “You said you were appointed this by the Prime Minister’s office. Isn’t this a conflict of interest considering it was the PM’s staff that died?”

“Well, we all vested a interest in the well being of our country the leaders that run it. And I will not be involved in the investigation. Think of me more as a logistics coordinator.”

Victoria ended up being very useful to us. Every time we ran into some kind of snag with the police Victoria would make some calls and we would be allowed to proceed. Without her help, we would have been stunted.

“Well Ms. Peters...” She cuts in, “call me Vickie.” “Ok Vickie, I supposed you know everything that is going on here?”

“Actually, my job is to assist with the tools that will help with the investigation, not to get involved myself. I know the basics, but that’s all I need to know. Please, this is best way for me to do my job and help.”

“Ok. Well Vickie, we,” I turned to nod at O’Keefe, “have been unable to secure records about narcotic activity for this particular postal code. It’s seems certain citizens are able to live much more privately than the rest of the general population. Certain financial abilities tend to be the common theme. Can you help us with this?”

It seemed that she could, but, “as you must know, it is not easy to monitor a cabinet minister. They have their own security team. We may have more info on some victims than others.”

“Anything you can do, but we’d like as much information about Minister Bentonhurst as possible.”

Both the police and government intelligence had studies full of facts related to drugs in the UK. Important but overlooked, heroin in the west all starts its journey somewhere outside. This just means there are many ways in which these drugs could have ended up with these users. Narcotics are usually manufactured in mainland Europe, not in England, and the crops used to

produce the products come from farther away. If we wanted to track down the source of where the drugs found on the dead, we would need to find the local source.

Victoria had gotten us police reports of the scenes, next of kin with address and phone number, previous arrest records for the deceased and their families, and what was available of the lab reports. Most would still take a few days.

Brad and I examined the backgrounds of all the deceased, and the reports that came along. Not all the deceased people were necessarily society types, but they were definitely all rich. Some were more than rich with generations of wealth before them. Geographically, they all lived and died within a very close proximity to each other, all within a few adjoining sections of the city. There were four couples, fifteen singles. Some of the singles had companions that had emerged without injury; they either didn't used the tainted drugs, or didn't use drugs at all. I wanted to talk to these survivors.

Victoria was working on getting us tax returns for the deceased. We wanted to be sure that they were all who they claimed they were. This would help validate a theory, that the tainted drugs had been distributed to people who all had wealth in common, and who lived in the general area.

It was our second day in London, and the fifth since the incident, when the press started to become a problem for police. Until now, it had been reported that the deaths were all overdoses. This was thanks to an ambulance driver that had assumed they were overdoses and reported this to the press at the scene. The press had been recycling this, although not wholeheartedly. Calls for the further investigations were coming from concerned citizens groups

and op-ed journalists. We knew by now that these were not typical overdoses. These were most likely murders.

The users were at home, some with their partners that also used, some with their partners that didn't, some without partners. The users cooked up their doses and injected them. If there had been ricin in doses the users would have begun to feel wrong, weird, then sick, and may have felt like they could not breathe. As the poison entered the bloodstreams, it tore apart the blood vessels, heading for the organs where it would enter the cells shutting down the ribosomes. Working as protein synthesis inhibitor, ricin stops the ribosomes from making new proteins, causing the breakdown of the body from the inside out. Typically within 24-36 hours, ricin will have caused major massive internal bleeding, having led to organ failure, that the victim will experience this while conscious, as ricin does not cause a person to lose consciousness. Massive liver and spleen failure is said to be extremely painful.

Until we had the lab reports, it was impossible for us to know if this is what happened. I harbored hopes that these were all just regular overdoses. Then we could pack up and go home. But it was too suspicious, and I didn't want to sit around and wait for the reports that could take days, I wanted to meet with some living victims. Victoria arranged with me to meet with the wife of the deceased minister that evening.

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The UK keeps very good nation wide statistics. I had left Brad with Victoria to do some digging into them about illegal trafficking stats. Maybe he'd see some connections? We needed some leads because we had nothing yet. I wanted to know where the drugs came from. Brad had also set up some interviews with the parents of a deceased young man, and the surviving

girlfriend who was present during the inhalation by the victims, a twenty-two year old male that died in this 12 million pound penthouse.

As I pulling up to the Downing Street address where Cabinet Minister Bentonhurst's official office was, I prepared to enter one of the world's most famous addresses. I was meeting with the widow of a recently deceased official, only steps away from the Prime Minister's office. A wave of anxiety suddenly struck me. This is when I realized the true depth of the case. I

It was early evening. During the day shift I would have been escorted by a hospitality guide who would have been able to answer questions while walking me down the hall filled with audacious oil paintings, vases, and antique furniture. While the décor of such institutions always seems totally pompous, the guide would no doubt have been able to fill me in on the history of each piece, and mark its significance to the place it inhabited, but as it was late the guides had all gone home. Instead a security guard escorted me to the office where I was to meet the cabinet ministers wife. The building itself was quite modest with carpeted floors rather than marble, twelve-foot ceilings rather than the vaulted thirty-foot ones of the main parliament buildings. Minister Bentonhurst's office was designed similarly- mahogany filled the room, books filled the shelves, paintings covered walls. The décor of a quaint, earlier age.

I walked into the room. Mrs. Bentonhurst stood behind a large desk covered with papers and stationary. I introduced myself and she asked me to come in and sit. She stayed where she was, and continued to move a few things around on the desk.

At forty nine I knew the late Mr. Bentonhurst was quite young considering his senior position, one of only twenty-two cabinet ministers, but his wife who I'd been told was not that much younger looked like she was in her late twenties.

She was wearing a form-fitting suit that was definitely Italian. Since I was an employee of an international non-profit I spent an awful lot of time looking at designer clothes in windows and magazines. I noticed we were both seemed in abusive, unreciprocal relationships, with our heels. Hers had to have been Baldininis.

With a dark complexion and dark hair pulled back showing off her long neck and exquisite cheek bones. I expected to hear a Greek or Turkish accent come from her lips, and it would not have been that surprising. Men in positions such as these do not usually choose plain women for their wives. I wondered what a woman like her would do now with the rest of her life?

As soon as I entered she immediately started talking and at last dispelled this idea that she was unintelligent. Her words rolled out in a perfectly enunciated in the sound of upper crust London.

“This is an outcome I’d never have imagined. We weren’t saints exactly, so you always expect something could happen. You try to prepare for it, but still, you’re caught off guard.” Standing behind the desk, I could see now that she was taking her husband’s things and packing them in empty boxes. “We never knew what kind of future we’d have. How can anyone? He always told me, ‘once you’re into something this deep, you’ve got stick with it. Progress requires sacrifice.’ We never had kids because we never knew if we would be able to properly care for them.” She stopped to think.

I had just been standing in the doorway watching her. Now I noticed squares on the walls where photos had been hanging. The empty spaces stood out, twice as bright against the rest of

the faded wall. It looked like some kind of design flub. There were still at least about a dozen framed pictures hanging. I walked up and began examining the photos.

“We had an understanding you know, about how far we’d go. We had goals, together. Whatever it seems like, it was all for something bigger. We weren’t saints, but of all the ways...” She closed her eyes.

“Mrs. Bentonhurst, I am terribly sorry, for your loss,” I said, trying to break the ice. “From everything I’ve learned, your husband was a extraordinary person.” I was still waiting for her to ask me to sit down. After an awkward silence, I handed her business card.

“I hope you were told that I was coming, and why. I am Genevieve DuPont, an investigator for the Drug Investigation Commission.”

“Yes, but as I told before, I’ve already told the police everything I could. I would really not rather go through this all over again.”

“I don’t work for the police, and I will try not to go into things you’ve already been over.”

She sighed. “It makes me very upset that George will now be labeled as some kind of junky. What’s even sadder is that George deserved better! A better way to go I mean. He wasn’t assassinated. He was just erased.”

“I’m not sure what you mean. Do you think this was a mistake, and not a purposeful attack?”

She ignored my question. “Did you know my husband?” I shook my head no. “Are you familiar with the work the cabinet members do?” I said that truthfully, I was not. “George lived

for his job and for his country. He was part of an elite group, but he really did a lot for the masses.”

“All those pictures,” I had my back to the wall of photos so turned back to face them, “those are all the most important people in the world, that of course, nobody has ever heard of.” Off to the side were signed pictures of Robert Redford and Muhammad Ali. As I glanced at these she said, “aside from those two of course. Everybody loves the champ.”

“Did Mr. Bentonhurst associate with these people all the time? Celebrities and such. I mean, was he constantly maneuvering photo opportunities?”

“Believe it or not, George disliked capitalizing on the photo op, but he knew how to work the press, and the power this brought. What may seem to you as simply consorting, this is what buys you your own brand. This allows you to fuck-up and be forgiven by the public. They are called opportunities for a reason.”

“Yes of course. I mean, I can see here that he was aware obviously aware of the balance or power. Did the two of you write policy together? What I’d like to know is what were your processes for negotiating Britain’s more ‘underground’ trade routes?”

She finally sat down. “Ms. DuPont, asking how a top government official conducted their business is an extremely personal question, not to mention that that information would be highly confidential.” I had no idea if she was irritated, or if she was being coyly helpful. “I’ve already told the police everything. Can’t you talk to them?” She was irritated.

“I have, and I will talk to them more, but this is our area of specialty so we really want to find the source of the heroin that killed your husband, and, as it stands now, also twenty-two

others. I just wanted to make sure there wasn't anything that may have, slipped your mind that could help us stop whoever is responsible."

She leaned on a chair with one hand, the other hand held her face as she took a deep breathe. "I'm sorry. This is all creating a circus making my husband look like a junky. What will be next? The Enquirer printing lies about nightclubs and Russian prostitutes? Like I said we had plans, with an end game in mind. I was totally behind my husband, anything he had to do, he did to succeed. We had made agreements regarding all of this, and it was all for the public he served."

"What do you mean by endgame exactly?"

"A vision. Something that we were working towards that was bigger than just us. Many people will lose out now because of George's death. To make a better England one must embrace the country, in all forms and with all its faults, in ways that some people may view as... questionable."

"So if you were involved in his process of bettering the county, isn't there anything you might recall about this alternate side of your husband's life? You said you were involved in almost everything."

"I was involved in his work, both here and off-hours, yes. I did what he asked of me. We had an agreement like I said—we told each other everything. It wasn't always easy, but we had our reasons. I did what I had to on a few occasions."

"It's sounding to me Mrs. Bentonhurst, and excuse me for my being impolite, that your husband did not tell you everything. He has passed away because of a drug overdose, so either

you didn't know about his use, this was his first time, or, well you refuse to talk about it and are thus risking the escape of a murderer.”

Ms. Bentonhurst took a second to collect her thoughts. “Occasionally it was necessary to procure deals, and unfortunately, sometime this required engaging in unorthodox behavior.”

“You mean drug use?” She nodded “Can you tell me about any other “unorthodox activities” that you and your husband participated in?” She was coming undone. Heartbroken at being forced to dredge up so many personal moments? The death of her best friend and mate? Or hiding something herself? “Why am I not talking to the police about this again?”

“Because these substances cross many borders and go through many hands. If we can track down the source, it may lead to someone important in a criminal investigation that reaches outside this country. Also, we believe that although narcotics are illegal, one should be able to use them without being poisoned to death. Police do not care about such things.”

“You don't have to tell me! Then my husband would still be alive ” She said. “You should be able to buy the stuff from a pharmacy, but people just aren't ready yet. Especially politicians.”

I broke a long period of silence, pointing at a one of the many pictures still hanging, “Do you really know all these people?”

“I have met most of them, yes.”

Mrs. Bentonhurst had been holding a frame with a photograph of her and two others. One I recognized as the deceased minister, the other I did not know but observed he was in a number

of the other photos. “Who’s he?” I asked. She got up and quickly took the picture down and put it away.

“A good friend of my husbands, a diplomat. Very skilled in trade relations.” Mrs. Bentonhurst suddenly started to cry.

“I am very sorry for all this. We’re almost done here.” I tried to sound sympathetic.

“Oh, I’m sorry, it’s just that he, my husbands friend has disappeared too. His family, friends, nobody has seen him. He was a good friend to both of us.”

“This is all terrible timing. Where did he do most of his abroad work?”

“I know he spent a lot of time in the Greece, and in the Balkans. I didn’t keep up with this work very closely.” It was during this period of the 1990s when the only trade coming out of the Balkan states was illicit and black-market.

“I just wanted to ask if you’d noticed that the deceased in this incident were all wealthy, successful people. We are trying to establish the connection, if there is anything deeper. How it is possible that such a distinct group of people could all have succumb to the same toxin? The odds really are extraordinary!”

“I do not have a very high opinion of many of the deceased. Some were such undeserving brats. We honor these fucking people who make such useless things. Putting some paint down and pushing it around, this is what we say deserves to be in museums! They think that this is going to change the country, or make this a better world? A bit of paint! Maybe this alone would be motivation enough for some to commit murder.”

With this I had risen to leave and thanked the minister's wife for meeting with me. I told her that if she remembered anything else, or needed our help to call our office at the police station.

"It's dying in these peoples' company, like a tabloid fiasco..." as I was about to walk out she said grabbed my wrist looked straight at me with cold black eyes, "You simply must find who did this Ms. DuPont, and I ask that you do it quick. Very soon, it will be impossible," said in very austere whisper.

"Why? Is there a time limit?" I asked, rather shocked at her behavior

"Not all forces can be controlled." Letting go of my wrist, marks from her iron grip lingered in red.

She refused to elaborate any further and wished me luck. Before walking out I asked her the name of the diplomat in the photos. She was silent but she smiled and her face turned a shade of dark I had not yet witnessed. She turned to look out a window, "Goodnight, Ms. DuPont."

While I was halfway down the hall I heard her yell, "Cameron, William Cameron is his name." Then I heard the sound of a picture glass frame smashing, followed by quiet sobs. .

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Victoria asked, why would anyone set on making money from narcotics mix it with toxic substances? Why would someone want to poison their customers? Is it just a malicious crazy person who wants to harm drug users to make a statement?

We joked with her about asking such naïve questions, but of course these are actually very relevant questions.

Truly, it's impossible answer, yet what we told her was that the Commission research hypothesizes that in some cases, toxic cuts can be actually be justified as good for the financial side of the business, but in violation of all ethical business practices.

There was example of United States in the early nineties. In a section of the US, cocaine started making people sick. Advocacy groups distributed flyers in grungy neighborhood advising users that much of the cocaine in area was contaminated, and to beware. And the flyers were legit. There were not simply stating the dangers of drugs, but warning that the cocaine was in fact contaminated.

Citizens groups were already way ahead of the government. They tried to test samples for toxins, and found foreign bodies but lacked the facilities to isolate what they were. It took hundreds of cocaine users to get sick, and even more than a dozen deaths before the state stepped in. Tests found the cocaine was mixed with Levamisole, a de-worming drug used by veterinarians. Ingested by an animal with internal worms, the drug stimulates brain receptors in the worms that cause muscle contractions and paralysis.

When Columbian cartels started using submarines to transport cocaine, during long trips in leaking, makeshift submarines the drugs became susceptible to fungi that could rot the cocaine into worthlessness. Levamisole is not designed to inhibit the growth of fungi, so why sellers didn't just use an anti-fungal is a mystery.

Perhaps since Levamisole is slightly psychoactive, thus in theory improving the high, yet while at the same time making the cocaine three times as toxic. As a business move this may make sense since a drug with a better high may be more addictive and may sell better? Assuming clients can power through bag after bag of Levamisole-laced coke without dying.

Failing this, even if a single dose meant death, well, a few dead coke heads is well worth the price compared to a submarine full of spoiled, moldy cocaine. Levamisol is undetectable through the human senses.

Overall, hysterical fears that street drugs are all cut with brick dust, glass or rat poison are mostly unfounded. Real lethal poisonings are rare, and almost never occur with the knowledge and intent of the bulk dealers. Cutting is a way to maximize profits by mixing the drugs with other cheap substrates, thereby multiplying the product base. Heroin and cocaine are most commonly mixed with non-toxic substance like baking soda, quinine, chalk, caffeine pills, icing sugar; when the heroin is cooked these substances blend in easily. Some agents, laundry detergents and coffee grounds for example even though cheap and easy to get, leave particles floating in the cooked product; even poisons are rarely detectable by human senses, but a visible contaminant, even not toxic floaties makes people uneasy. They think it could be poison. Using non-toxic bases as mixing agents makes better business sense, but it also just way easier. A kilogram of baking soda is much easier to acquire than a kilogram of ground glass.

There are the occasional psychopaths who don't care about business. Hurting and killing is what they care about. Taking drugs is an intimate affair. Insufflation or injection of a deadly toxin is a great way to insure serious injury, and for the psychopath, a good way to damage a lot of people very anonymously, but the psychopath has little control over where their toxic drugs go once released into the market. Once its out there it cannot be controlled and this might not be to the psychopath's liking, nor would the huge amount of money it would end up costing at a loss.

So the reasons for cutting pure drugs with poisonous substances makes almost no sense under any circumstances, expect psychopathological ones.

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The Commission was not busting and bringing people down, but attempting to create and maintain relationships. We had contact with real people: names, faces, addresses, personal info. These were mid-level, street dealers working somewhere in chains, and they gave us leverage if we needed to make major busts of supplies. But we had built these relationship through respect and trust rather than threats, meaning that we that moles were allowed to continue operating, and if possible, drugs might be were seized while the actual mover would not be charged. We got the police to release the ship's crew. Yummy took risks doing the work, but it was this or prison on trafficking, breaking and entering, and assault charges. He whole-heartedly denied the assault charges were true.

After five days O'Keefe finally got word from his contact. He gave us an address where we were to meet him at a certain time. O'Keefe drove.

Thanks to this informant, the latest bust was a pallet of cocaine bricks found on a cargo ship coming from Nicaragua. It was all tainted and would have made many people sick. Because it was information we had gathered, the deal was the police had to let the innocents go. This was most of the ship's crew.

After crossing Tower Bridge and passing through the upscale neighborhood of Southward, we moved east as neighborhoods started to change. Going further east was brick building after brick building. Residential areas became plainer in décor. But the streets were tidy. The tightly packed neighborhoods were so quaint it was hard to imagine anything bad happening.

We pulled onto another non-descript street. Strips of identical buildings and parked cars. I noticed some dilapidated fences, boarded-up buildings, groups of people dressed for the chilly weather in baggy coats, all just hanging around.

We at been parked about thirty seconds before my car door opened and a scruffy looking guy looked at me, "Move over, yeah?" I froze and said nothing. "Please?" He said.

"DuPont, move over. This is our guy" barked O'Keefe. I shoved over to the other side in the back seat, and the guy got in. "Drive," he said. His clothes were ragged, he was unshaven this face was sunken and emaciated. Still, he was coherent and didn't smell as bad as he looked.

We pulled into the street and I had to yell at O'Keefe for not warning me that this is how we were meeting our contact. I was frozen with fear. It was totally pathetic. What if this had been more serious? I would learn that I could not freeze, I'd need to react better.

"Alright, sir Curtis. How's the old lady these days?" said the man.

"Ahh, still kicking. I'm always hearing about something I done wrong. You know, some things never change. Thanks for meeting up with us, these here are the two investigators I told you about."

The men had known each other for years, apparently. "You's came all the way out from Geneva to meet with me?" He smiled revealing plenty of missing teeth. When we finally introduced ourselves we learned that this guy was both Commission employee and junky. "The names Yummy. At your service." He tried to kiss my hand but I pulled it away.

"Let keep this on a professional level, Yummy. Is that you real name? Why do they call you that?"

“A very pretty lass gave me that name a couple years back, after a date.” It was hard to tell if he was joking. “If it’s what people call me, ain’t that real enough?”

“Yummy, we were very impressed and thankful for your help on the MS Intrepid bust. The cocaine was cut with something and you helped a lot of people. You may have even saved some lives there. Now we need your help on a event that’s already happen?”

“There was a bout of overdoses in London. It’s all in the news.”

“I know what you’re saying. Those Westminster fuckers. All the rich wankers? Not the your usual group a dead junkies, ah?”

“Can you tell us about what you’ve heard? Do you know anything about these kinds of people?”

“These kinda people. Fucking taking this shit for fucking fun! It’s their own fault if you ask me. You think the people around here are using for fun! That I fucking live like this because I enjoy the habit!” Yummy turned and looked out the window. The heroin problem in the UK has also been associated with the extremely poor, the destitute. The use of the upper classes or pleasure was a new phenomenon.

“Where were you, back when crack took down half the neighborhood? Huh, were you looking for the scum that was spiking their shit? Killing people here everyday! How about recently, a my mate Charlie, always buys from me, this one time gets some other sold, some Russian type sold cheap. Fucking red flag. Good ol’ Charlie banged the stuff and BOOM, his heart exploded. ? Did I miss your visit when you were investigating all those deaths?”

“Yummy, come on,” said O’Keefe. “These are good people, and we weren’t here yet when crack was around. We want to stop all this kinda stuff. That’s all.”

Yummy was not stupid. He understood that the rich got the attention and the poor withered away. Still, he must have seen something in what we were doing because he kept talking.

“They say the junky has about ten good years of life in em, if they’ve hit the junk hard. Twenty years if they’re real lucky but they say that heroin by itself isn’t that bad for you. Study from some university or hospital somewhere. You think if you gave a user enough to get by that he could bag groceries or pick-up trash? What about studying in uni? Or have kids, a cat, a dog, and a normal life.” He waved this hands, enraged, but still in control. “It’s all other shit parts of the heroin addict’s lifestyle that turns em junky. The constant scrounge to find the next fix. Who is to fucking blame for the scrounge huh?”

There’s two kinds a people in this world. Them that are addicts, and them that aren’t. Guess which I am? But you think we’re all worthless just cause we got this problem, cause were not?

Just cause one time I took some morphine pills, back when I was high school, when my mate broke his leg, just cause even though I didn’t feel nothing so I took more until I did, for that I should I have to live like this?

Getting fucking arrested. Getting locked up with some real hard criminal types. Guys you didn’t want to even look at. Maybe a fucking shank you. Cops make you feel like a fucking criminal. Calling me names, not giving me anything to eat. Bastard pigs. And For what? Because I wanted ta keep my fuckin job? People keep treating you like a criminal, soon you become one.”

“Yummy, we’ve come to you because we need your help. All those richer wankers that died, sure maybe their use was distasteful, but they didn’t OD themselves. The supplies were all cut with a poison. A strong one, that killed every single one of the users.” I said

O’Keefe suddenly added his two cents, “And maybe even a few that were just near the stuff too, innocents” This comment made no sense at the time. “This a whole new level of wrong,” said O’Keefe.

As I looked closer, I detected a collared shirt and tie under the tattered dirty coat. This guy was impossible to read. “Who supplied these people? It is extremely important that we find this person.”

Yummy took out a cigarette, and lights it. “Hope you don’t mind if I smoke. Maybe compared to H ciggies aren’t that bad cause what junk does to your life and all, but it’s kinda fucked up to think that in reality, a ciggy is actually way worse for your health than a boost of good, pure shit.

“I know we play for the same team, but you know I play for another team too. If I go around giving out the names of dealers, soon this little operation we got here starts to effect my business. You understand? I am a business person, just one who can’t stand these fuckers that purposefully try to hurt people.”

Why O’Keefe hadn’t told us before is a mystery, but after the meeting we learned that Yummy was not just as junky squeaking out a living working for the Commission, but one of the top suppliers of heroin, cocaine and pharmaceutical amphetamines, opiates and benzodiazepines in the Bexley area. He worked for the Commission trying to make his business safer and less

visible to the public. He didn't sell crystal meth or crack, he never uses toxins to cut products, he never sells to solo women or children. But since he had employees that did the street work, and were paid by the amount they sold, the last rule seemed unlikely to be obeyed. Yummy was a drug dealer with old school ideals.

“I'm going to tell you what I know because whoever did this has fucked up everything. A wrath is going to be unleashed now, and is going to fuck up everything. It is going to make it even harder for us at the bottom to get by. If I can help you find these fuckers, I will. And, of course,” he looked at me, changing his voice to a calm polite tone, “anything I can do to assist such a lovely lass such as yourself, Ms. DuPont.”

Yummy explained, how the top few distributors worked, basic stuff that we should have known.

After driving around for thirty minute, we dropped him off a block away from where we'd picked him up. This time I allowed him to kiss my hand. Under the rags this man had a profoundness, a will to power that I did not see in people who work office jobs. Was I learning not to judge people? Or was Mr. Yummy just that charming? As he exited the car, I found myself hoping I would see him again.

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How was it that we ended up investigating a crime of such magnitude when we had so little information. The JEDIC that I was working for in London was JEDIC in its second incarnation, and it turned out to be as dirty as the original. It had been there about a year after I'd started my work, so 1991, when the Cold War came ended and so too did the Joint. With the war

over, suddenly an office of around 40 people, highly trained professionals, had no more paper to push. Forms with signatures and official stamps with titles that include director, or deputy secretary were no longer needed to legitimize, since there was nothing to legitimize. With the discontinuation of the audits, suddenly teams of people began to wonder what they had been doing. Why should the war effect their drug trafficking jobs?

It was because now, The Joint European Drug Investigations Commission had to start actually monitoring drugs. What had we been doing up until then? Absolutely nothing. All those logs, stats, graphs, and charts documenting everything the Joint found, they were all made-up, fakes. The Joint never did any business in Le Havre, Civitavecchia, or Rotterdam. All the reports that we thought were real were actually drawn up by a team whose job was to draw up false reports and stats in order to fool the legal defense team. The top brass didn't want us, lawyers to know, so that we'd been better defenders under legal stress, believing fully in the Joint. Most impressive were the one-to-one phone calls that the legal team made to the "officers," especially since there were no officers. The company had hired a talent agency and these officers were actually actors that had studied the problems ahead of time, and told us enough to be believable, and get the case closed. The amount of work this sham must have taken seems enormous, but even though I don't have exact number for how much the bosses were extorting through the joint, since the money was coming from not from people or from companies, but from national budgets of countries, the amounts were substantial

I realized after my trip to London site, and getting to know the operations manager O'Keefe, that this new version of the Joint European Drug Safety Commission was still just the same ole' Joint.

With the first JEDIC it happened in a series of memos. As the assignments slowly dried up, the board of directors began talking about taking the Commission in a “new direction.” A more intense monitoring process, information about where the drugs were coming from, who was selling them, and who was shipping them. This would ultimately change the flow of the operations, the purpose was to reveal “leaks,” fraud being committed and trafficking occurring. The board had lost substantial funding they been given as countries backed out, citing “no change in their drug cultures.” This new direction was really just the directors managing to acquire their next source, and I would be used to help them tap it.

Maybe I was overly idealistic? But I never thought things were off. Making this transition never really made me flinch. A total 180 of my current self since now I’m a hawk for details. Of course, had I questioned the move I’d have been let go, I didn’t question and my ideas made me valuable. Although I never called any of the shots, but I did come up with the model that the reformulated Commission used. How it was that I was not in a top position despite my performance and ideas now makes me realize just how frozen in place the balance of power was. I never could move up since there was nowhere to move to.

This was how we restructured- the original Joint had a wide array of property and equity across Europe. We sold off everything. Removing drugs from the street, and stopping the traffic was going to remain our goal, but this time there would be no promises of bringing criminals to justice. The money from the property was used to hire new staff in Geneva, and to start offices in the cities that we were monitoring. With the help of local shelters and addiction centers, we attempted to form a kind of street team. Junkies, particularly those who have a interest in getting clean, became our the majority of our work force. They’d help us peg key dealers in major cities. The dealers were mostly people that sold to support a habit. They knew the situation, and had a

vested interest in keeping the streets free of dirty drugs. As drug users they would be safe. We hired financial analysts, activists who knew the cities themselves, psychologists to deal with the potential staff, and security people. The drug business is kind of dangerous.

We pledged total transparency, and this time the board of directors would make the decisions rather than a few individual diplomats like before. Despite the sham of the last Commission though, the same diplomats that committed fraud as the directors before, were still on the board of the new JEDIC.

With only a few countries still willing to fund us, it seemed liked we'd never be able to say in the black, but shortly after the new direction memos, a batch of heroin mixed with fentanyl killed a few people in France and so we had a green light. Since the Soviet Union had collapsed drugs were flowing out of the Balkans and were going to start filtering this flow.

With the proper negotiation tactics and compensation, the people in the cities were the real grit and muscle of our network- junkies turned informants: Our Street Team. They helped us with information about shipments, where the drugs came from, and above all told us about bad junk so we could get it off the streets. Rarely did of our cases ever go to trial. Dealers and addicts were always offered an out, reduced sentences for information, until finally and event occurred that could not be solved with plea bargains or immunity agreements.

We had done a good deal since 1991 when the Joint died. By mid 1992 we'd established offices in three European cities. By the end we had nine. The local offices were in charge of managing their employees, paying them, scheduling, working out plans of attack.

Their work with the Commission was pretty much just take drugs as usual, and talk about it. While they didn't have to hide the fact that that worked as informants, they weren't supposed

to tout about it openly either. Within the community of users, people like to talk, and our employee's jobs were to listen. Had anyone being OD'ing lately? Where? Who? And mostly importantly why?

But our informants had to deliver. It was one thing to get paid to shoot up and another to shoot-up and gather information that led to the recovery of dirty drugs. Many informants got fired. Some quit since they were essentially attacking the industry that fed their own addictions, or so they said. As much as we focused on dirty junk, the bulk of our collection was clean, and just illegal. We collected all illegal drug traffic, but unlike the police, our aim was not convictions. This is how we able to get most of our information, since people weren't as scared of prison.

The sites had managers themselves who ran them on their own. There was the civilian side: office of professionals ran the business while counselors and junkies became recruiters. Then there were the investigators. They were officials much like police but with jurisdiction only in the arena of their work. If we received info that was convincing, investigators would take it from there. The Geneva office got involved when drugs were discovered. We always worked with the investigators once they had located a target on the operation should go in retrieving it. If it was a large operation we'd enlist the local law enforcement, but otherwise it was a collaborative effort. Our guys took the drugs, and arrested whoever needed arresting.

The site offices did not have attorneys; we were all in Geneva. My job was partly legal advisement, counseling on what we could do and what we couldn't, but when the London deaths occurred I was doing mostly managerial work, i.e. paperwork and data tabulation. I still tried to work with the operations managers in the field on larger issues, but the managers all ran their

businesses. They were kept on a leash, but it was a very slack one. Too slack. But very soon, none of this would matter.

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We'd been in London for a week. The four of us were in a small examination room in the police station. We had lined up a row of tables. All of them were covered in notes, paper, files, photos, take-out containers, coffee cups. Brad and I had been on this for solid week, not sleeping much. Going over the reports, looking for similarities, motives, clues.

Now we had a picture of what the upper class users were like, and thanks to Yummy, we found the drug dealer. We'd interviewed the friends and families of as many of the deceased as would talk to us, and after we preemptively told them we knew who the dealer was, they confirmed it. A tall, black, late-forties male named Chance who liked to participate in the upper class himself.

As Yummy explained there are only so many ways to get junk into England, and only a few people that have enough power to muscle to get the huge amounts that users demand into the country's ports. Yummy knew London; different parts of the London were under different control by ethnic groups- Armenian, Georgian, Albanian, Serbia. Providing a run down of how a supply made its way into the country, Yummy's explanation was still vague and didn't tell us exactly who supplied London's elite with their recreational drug supply, but it gave us a better idea of how the distribution system worked, but it was all theoretical. He did not give us names.

We did mention William Cameron to him. He knew the name—a politician of some clout, known to be slimy and corrupt but was too far up the chain for Yummy to know specifics,

although he did know some dealers that did business with Cameron. Yummy knew a hoity-toity dealer that work in Central London named Chance.

Finding out that the dealer was probably Chance led us to two conclusion: the dealer sold the toxic heroin was aware that the drugs were filled with poison, perhaps even cutting the drugs herself. This would make the dealer the murderer. Or the dealer received the heroin from the distributor already cut, and simply sold the drugs as they were, therefore killing with out intent. Despite the despicable act of dealing the tainted drugs, in this case we would not charge the dealer with murder if he/she didn't know. We hoped the dealer might lead us to the supplier.

It took a week, but by now both Brad and I realized after just how unprepared we were for an investigation like this. It was only good luck that we were able to get as much information as we did. Our ignorance was unacceptable, and we knew we'd need to do better as investigators next time. We were sitting in our makeshift office in the police station discussing all of this, how our investigation was going, when all the lab and autopsy reports came.

All the drugs found on the deceased's persons were tested, as were all the samples police confiscated. Most samples contained an unknown agent. The ones that did not were likely part of a different purchase, from another source. The product in question was a fluffy, fine white powder that had the appearance of a fine grade; all of the samples where in the same packaging. Other clean samples were found too, but they were likely all stashes not involved in this incident, purchased elsewhere, or at different time. Brad was right. The unknown substance in the heroin turned out to be ricin, a protein from castor seeds, seeds used to make castor oil.

Earlier we had informed the police captain that we need to find a drug dealer named Chance. The captain smiled and said that he knew Chance. A very pleasant guy. Very visible

public figure but was never caught in the act of doing anything illegal. The captain agreed to find him and bring him in.

“Deadly if ingested.” This story was all over the news now.

We sat watching a small TV as news anchors told the public everything we had been trying to keep quiet. Now the public would know everything we did. And this means the killers had worldwide confirmation that their job went down successfully.

It came as total shock us, Brad and I anyway, how the story finally broke. The family of a dead first responder would no longer keep her story quiet, and released a statement. An unlucky EMT was attending to one of the drug victims and he (EMT) accidentally ingested or inhaled some powder of residue at the scene. After assisting the sick, now deceased, the EMT collapsed into a seizure and died immediately. After this incident, the crimes scenes were handled more carefully, but ricin is not an agent that chemists and lab workers come across mixed with narcotics often. It took some time before they found exactly what it was. Once they did, there was no longer a public debate about this being intentional. Was an international bio-weapons attack? Someone or something, like a group, wanted to kill these specific people, and successfully using an extremely complex plan, that worked brilliantly. The public called for justice. They called it an act of terror. An act of war against the United Kingdom. People were outraged.

There was a police spokesman talking to a camera. “We cannot tell for sure where these narcotics originated by we can assure you, there is an ongoing investigation into the source of these substances. From what I said earlier, at this point we do reason to believe that this is was a planned attack, and not a mistake on the part of the users. Of course drug use carries heavy risks,

and in this case the deceased paid a heavy price.” An aide whispered in the spokesman’s ear and the spokesman nodded. “If and when we do find this outside aggressor, I have been assured by Office of Prime Minister Major that the government intends to bring him, her or them to justice. We will be updating you as the investigation brings more details to light. Thank you.”

We turned off the TV and sat in silence, collecting our thoughts. I remembered O’Keefe’s comment in the car.

“Did you know about this?” I demanded. “Why the hell wouldn’t you have told us.”

“I just heard about it. I didn’t think it was too important. If I did I would’ve told for sure. Honest!”

“You’ve known about this since we met Mr. Yummy there in the car. But why we he withhold this information?” I turned to Brad.

Before we could discuss it anymore there was a knock at the door. It was the police captain. He brought us news about Chance.

Deputies tracked him down easily, but soon learned out that he wouldn’t be able help. Chance had been shot a week earlier and was now in the morgue at Royal Brompton hospital. An officer appeared saying we had a call from Geneva. Brad jumped up to take it, returning only moments later.

He sat down, took a deep breathe, “we’ve been shut down. We’re done here.”

“We’re shut down? You mean this operation, yeah?” As if I couldn’t believe it, even though I’d seen it coming.

“Shut down. That was the Director’s assistant. She told me she was calling on behalf of the Director. The Joint European Drug Investigation Commission no longer exists as an organization. They’re shutting it all down.” Brad laughed. “Looks like were both fired!” I told O’Keefe get the out and never come back. Suddenly Brad started laughing hysterically at our failure, and at the absurdity of our uncertain future, I laughed too.

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Precaz, Kosovo- 1999

Eight-year old Little Girl wakes up suddenly to the sounds of gunfire upstairs. She must have hit her head on the concrete. The basement had no windows so couldn't tell if it was light out. Time passed but she was unable to judge its speed without seeing the outside.

In reality twenty hours earlier, six unidentified armed men speaking a language the girl did not understand but could identify as Serbian, kicked down the door of her family's small house. Little Girl's father rose, a defensive action to protect his family, and he was quickly smashed in the head with a rifle butt for his actions. Little Girl's mother and the Little Girl sat hugging each other, cowering. Serb Solider #1 thought this scene looked ridiculously helpless, so he grabbed the mother and child and pried them apart. Both females screamed as Serb Street Thug #1 hit Little Girl across the face. This broke Little girl's nose and she blacked out. When she woke up on the floor, she saw her mother lying motionless beside her while her father was sitting tied to a chair, wearing a heavy black vest. Serb Street Thug #1 aimed his big gun and shot Little Girl's father in the chest. The chair toppled backwards and Little Girl screamed. Serb Solider #2 and Police Man #1 then dragged Little Girl into the basement, but before they locked the door, she saw them reset her father in the chair, ready to fire into the bullet-proof vest again.

From the basement she had heard shooting going on for a while, then it stopped. She must have fallen asleep, since the gunfire now was not coming from directly upstairs as before. It was outside, or in the distance. "Where are my parents?" she cries to herself. She no longer heard the men's footsteps, or their yelling in the awful Serbian language, so she leaves the basement.

The two rooms of her family home have been totally ransacked; dishes are mixed with Little Girl's toys and clothes; food has been thrown against the walls; the windows are all smashed in.

Little Girl can't find her parents. They are not here. They are gone. She calls out for them. She screams for them, but they do not reply. She follows a thick trail of blood out the front door and into the street.

It leads directly across to the her friends house that now is partially caved-in. While Little Girl was unconscious in the basement, tanks had begun firing shells into the town. One had hit her friend's house. She could see and smell the smoke, and hear the loud noise of machinery. Following the trail of blood and not finding her parents, Little Girl began to panic so she began to run, but at the end of the street, she saw burly, screaming men with guns. Men like the ones that came in her house. Terrified she runs around the rear of her friend's caved-in house where she almost runs directly into another awful situation. She hides in some bushes in the knick of time.

Little Girl's sees her friend and is so thankful that she almost calls out, but then she see that his family are with him. They are standing with their backs up against the wall of their house. The sister is crying and they all look scared. Little Girl sees that her friend's mother is already collapsed, and blood is all around her. Just as Little Girl's panic is about to overtake her and she is about to run out of the bushes to her friend, she hears a voice in the Serbian again. There are Uniform Wearing men holding guns right next to her! This is why the family is standing scared in front of the wall!

The Uniform Wearing men had been casually talking to themselves. Laughing, smoking cigarettes, half-ignoring the family altogether when suddenly a radio buzzes. Some words came

and one of the Uniform Wearing men that is very fat yells at the family. The don't move except inwards to hold each other. The fat man points his gun at the family, then the other men do to. They shoot at the family until they are dead. The Uniformed Men seemed satisfied and move on.

Little Girl sits quivering in the bushes, helpless, unable to manage. Then the sound of machinery grew really loud, and the next thing she saw was a huge tank appear and move towards her. Little Girl did not know this, she didn't even know what a tank was, but this was the very type of tank that Serbia denied having brought into Kosovo. This M-84 model was an upgrade from the original Soviet model. Because of the political climate in the Balkans, the Yugoslav army had overhauled the tanks' engines and firepower capabilities. This particular M-84 had over 1000 HP along with two larger, faster posted machine guns, added anti-aircraft capabilities, and of course the main 125mm main 2A46 Smoothbore main gun. This is one that is pointed at Little Girl now.

The tank accelerates closer to where Little Girl hides, stopping suddenly three house down. Her instincts tell her to move. She hears the sounds of gears turning and metal shifting inside the tank as the large gun on the top begins to pivot. It stops when it is pointed at Little Girl. Run, she hears again inside her head.

Although the gun was not pointed at Little Girl specifically but rather at her recently deceased friend's house, it was scary all the same. The tank gunners had orders to destroy the house, but with no threats, they were in no hurry to fire, but when all of a sudden Little Girl suddenly decided to dart out from the bushes and begin running as fast as she could, immediately the gunner launched the large shell, contacting the house dead-on. The impact threw Little Girl into the air and carried her 10 feet away where she landed on hardened gravel. She got up

somehow, scraped and bleeding, her nose mangled, and ran through the dust of the destroyed house. Gravel and rocks fly everywhere as Bullets from the tank's 7.6 mm search for Little Girl. She runs down an alley, and down another and another, until the tank is gone.

Then she ran out into the open, almost falling directly into an open pit. But it's too late, she has come into the view of a line of soldiers that are walking around looking for stragglers, just like her. There was is escape. They begin to fire at her so she goes down into the pit, her only chance, landing on the top of a pile of corpses. The soldiers frame the top of the pit and fire vigorously downward. Afterwards, when nothing moves, they walk away assuming that all is dead. Little Girl had passed out again covered by a fat, headless torso which she used as shield from the rifle bullets.

At the rear of the soldiers and tanks army came a half-dozen bulldozers and excavators, so when Little Girl comes to, so thirsty!! Earth is being dumped down upon her as the pit is being filled. She tries to move, but she hurts so much! Then the massive metal bucket of an excavator dumps a pile of debris right next to her, impaling a number of corpses on its way back up. What memory the Little Girl has of what happened after that is blurry. She remembers getting out of the pit, but she has no idea how. Trying to walk was impossible so she crawled. Later she was put into a potato sack and thrown into the back of a truck. Days or weeks later, she doesn't know for sure, she woke up in a NATO medical tent. She had been shot six times.

Later when confronted about the destruction of certain villages in the central region, the Serbian government denied flatly saying if they had destroyed the villages, there must surely be ruins, dead bodies, and proof of our deeds. In fact the Serbian government was right, theses

villages and bodies did not exist, nor did any trace of their destruction. They didn't know that Little Girl was still alive and remembered where her town was.

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Belgrade, Serbia 1991- March

Joseph Broz Tito, the most infamous yet integral ruler of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, died on May 4th of this year. He was the lynch pin that had held together the nation for decades, and it was after Tito's death that the republic's identity as a single unified nation composed of six autonomous states, began to erode. The Yugoslavian Republic was composed of Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia, and Tito intended it to stay that way. For the longevity of the union, his instructions were for the rule of the six nation state to be chaired by the head of a different region every year. This was an attempt to even the distribution of power, and prevent the dissolution that could occur if a single state, or an alliance, decided to overrule the others. With this system, power would be equally distributed.

Tito was not a liberal, warm-hearted ruler. He was a hard-line communist that demanded total obedience by the subjects of the republic. By enforcing two rules steadfast, the state was strictly communist; overt nationalism would not be tolerated, and, the masses were to have no hand in politics. Tito may not have been a gentle, sympathetic ruler, but he was fair.

After Tito, the states fell into disarray, as his instructions for leadership were eventually ignored. Because of its size Serbia had begun pushing for single state rule, with themselves at the helm. By the time the break-up happened officially on June 1, 1991, the nation called Yugoslavia was being called by the derogatory name 'Serbo-slavia.' The other states, faced with the choice of

being governed by Serbia, or of leaving the republic, made choices that set the gears of war in motion: Slovenia and Croatia detached from Yugoslavia on June 1st, 1991, attempting to become independent counties. The League of Communists, the most popular ruling party in the nation while under Soviet rule, lost its clout in the rest of the republic, and the economy was partially derailed. Unemployment was raging. Crime was everywhere.

With the secession of Croatia and Slovenia, chaos began. A Serbian nationalist movement that had begun months earlier began acting in direct disobedience of the late Tito. This started a torrent of venomous feelings by the Serbs towards their leaders. After the secessions this nationalism became rampant, logical reasoning ceased to exist and the criminal mindset took over. The petty issues that had started the argument had blown up into one of safety: safety of the Serbs around Yugoslavia (outside of Serbia) was at risk. The Serbs must be protected. With such a large population of Serbs in Croatia, the Yugoslav army which was largely controlled by Serbia, occupied the entire country.

It was later, once Serbians took full control of the Yugoslavian army, after the separation of the states and the war had broken out in full, this is when the desire of a genetically “pure race” began to emerge. More than 100,000 Bosnians who did not belong to this particular pure race demographic, were cleansed.

But now, in the beginning of 1991, danger loomed but the streets of were still peaceful. Where there used to be ice cream and cotton candy stands, vendors selling artisanal goat’s milk and goose eggs, vegetables, toy, families gathering, young children playing. Now there were toothless, dirty, bearded young men wearing leather jacket. They manned tables selling T-shirts reading “Freedom or Death,” while blaring Serbian nationalist songs through PA systems. The

sounds of one PA system bleeding into the next, forming a new music, drums, guitars, inaudible words, a total cacophony of sonic madness. This was March, still two months before the separation of Slovenia and Croatia.

Ko to kaže? Ko to laže? Srbija je mala. “Who dares say it? Who dares lie about it? Serbia is a small country.” –Too small a country to let lazy, good-for-nothings in. Too small to allow the evil, the bloodthirsty, the ravenous taint, to destroy the precious country. This was hate and fear that drove the rise of Serbian nationalism.

Enter the New Chetnicks, a group of Slavic nationalism movement that was active during the Second World War, now in pro-Serb fashion. The litter-filled, dank corner of the district that the Chetnick’s had commandeered seemed comical in contrast to Belgrade’s glitzy shopping drag Knez Mihajlova, that was a few streets away. Despite appearances, and income levels, both milieus were not that different in their opinions. Even the middle and upper class residents, those shopping for handbags and designer sunglasses voiced similar nationalist opinions: fellow Serbs around Yugoslavia were in danger from the maniacal Albanian Muslims and the evil, treasonous Croatians.

The Albanians were terrorists, they said. Already, the Albanians were taking Serbian jobs. Next it would be the media, and then it was only a matter of time until they took over all of Serbia. Being instilled was the notion that Serbia had become head of the Yugoslav nation, its ad hoc leader. Moving the power from 6 equal partners over to a single one always claiming, “a strong Serbia is a strong Yugoslavia!”

The nationalist mentality poisoned the country and the people became sick with hate. Their big brother the USSR was rife with single party corruption, so much corruption that the

destruction of the Soviet Union only a month earlier on Dec 26th was solid proof, yet the Serbian people, drugged-up on the movement, failed to see or care that the any power they created would only be wielded by single party, alas a single man. They failed to imagine that such fraudulence and corruption could happen in their great country.

In March, both Belgrade media essentials Radio Television Belgrade, and *Politika*, were taken over. But it was not by the Albanian “terrorists,” but by the new incumbent government of Serbia, and its new tyrant, Milosevic. Despite the ephemeral peace, with no freedom of the media, once the violence began there would be no way to stop it.

But for the time the presence of the Chetnicks clogging the squares was only an irritation to the police. During this period the Chetnicks were politically neutral, even in their hateful messages their loyalty was only to their country. Engineered exactly as the bosses upstairs intended, the rise of nationalism was kept behind the political curtain, and soon it would be taking center stage, but not before considerable violence introduced it.

After years of blocked and stunted trade under the Soviets, organized crime had become the major artery for trade in the Balkans. Once the criminals controlled the trade, they eventually moved into legitimate governments jobs, and took control of the county. This is a how Slobodan Milosevic, a person as evil as it is possible to be, could arise from a track suit wearing gangster to an ultra-legit, Armani suit wearing politician who shakes hands with top authorities across Europe.

Since history clearly shows Serbia as the war’s antagonists, after the war, some Serbian citizens struggled to come to terms with what their country did. They claimed to remember an

earlier Milosevic, one that had always proclaimed that he was at once a full proponent of communism, and deemed nationalism a toxin. Ironically, this same, at a rally in the 1980s ranted:

—“At home and abroad, Serbia’s enemies are massing against us. We say to them ‘We are not afraid’. ‘We will not flinch from battle.’”

Did these ashamed citizens miss this incendiary comment? Undoubtedly the architectural mastermind behind Yugoslavia’s break-up, history now shows that Milosevic was a violent thug wearing a suit the entire time. A very patient violent thug who waited until his time came. But without a major part of the nation willing to follow him into the storm, his time never would have come.

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Boris was a teenager in 1991, and international journalists were already referring to the city of Boris’s birth as the land of Mordor. Boris’s old neighborhood, *Novi Beograd*, New Belgrade, post- World War II Yugoslavia’s pride and joy, was no longer new.

This humorless irony was accentuated through the neighborhood’s architecture. Out-of-fashion, decades old, rickety high-rise commercial buildings, testaments to Serbia’s surge towards European-ness after WWII, sat strict and out of fashion; the dormitory-like Yugoslav structures, housing complexes, representations of the Republic’s more strict socialist origins; grays and off-whites contrasting the once bright but now faded colors of clothing drying on balconies; these were the beginnings of structural dangers that would come to plague the Republic. Some buildings having floors that had completely caved in. These were the beginnings of being housed in squalor being better than not being housed at all.

In Novi Beograd sat the Yugoslav Federation building government building, the post-World War II headquarters for the Yugoslav Republic's six autonomous regions. Surrounded by high fences and armed guards, the structure was all modernist lines, minimalist efficiency, cleanliness, and the facades of the intact. The building was actually now officially considered the seat of the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a seemingly slight change in name, but a major change of regional representations, considering, one of the of the six autonomous regions supposedly represented here under the previous Yugoslav Federation, Bosnia, would be all but wiped off the world's map in less than a year later.

Boris grew up in as an orphan, going from orphanage to foster family, but for the preceding two years he had been living with a middle-aged couple. Technically he was just under foster care with this family the Rusics, for now, but the Rusics had recently decided that Boris would stay with them permanently, that he was part of the family, and that they would formally adopt him. It was a mere matter of a waiting period and some paper work. He was sixteen then, and his formal adoption would mean that Boris would not be under pressure to move out on his own on his eighteenth birthday. The adoption would allow the Rusics together as a family to decide how to handle situations like these; he would be their son.

The Republic's once very solid health and social care system had been under constant financial constraints and cuts over the past decade. The slippery rhetoric of recent changes to Yugoslav foster laws meant that without this adoption, at eighteen, Boris would not only no longer be eligible for the support of Yugoslavian Social Services, meaning he would receive no allowance, counseling, or assistance with housing, and that his current foster family would have no further obligations to continue housing him. They could kick him out, end of story. At least for Boris, the adoption solved these concerns.

He was in his second to last year of high school. He applied to switch to this school as soon as he had moved in with the Rusics. Since they lived in a nicer neighborhood than Boris's native Novi Beograd, the new school was newer, cleaner, and had a better reputation as the kids generally came from higher classes. The Rusic's encouraged him to transfer, just as they always encouraged him, in an effort to try and his break ties with his old life. They didn't tell him this outright, but they were always suggesting that Boris meet up with new friends instead of old ones.

He wasn't a great student, but he was passing. The transfer application had taken six months, but since he'd started at the new school, the year and a half that had past was his longest and most stable stint in one institution since his mother had died.

Before finding his way to the Rusics, Boris was headed for a life of crime and almost certainly prison. There had been so many factors preventing him from developing and learning proper behaviors that his change of path was almost too perfect to be believable, but it was true, and of all the social skills Boris lacked, the first one that the Rusics encountered were Boris's table manners.

On Boris's first night with the Rusics, they had invited another couple with their two younger children over to dinner. When they sat down at the table for the first time to eat together, an act in itself of which Boris could make no sense, Boris thought nothing of his reaching out and grabbing the bowls of nicely prepared dishes out of the hand of others. Sticking his arms out directly in front of other's plates. If he had to pry the bowl of mashed potatoes out of the eight-year-old girl's hands, he pried. He dumping all the food on his plate in a pile rather than using

the assigned serving utensils, and whilst he was dumpling, he was using his free hand to stuff dinner buns and little bite size sausage rolls that Mrs. Rusic had made into his mouth.

The Rusics were of course shocked. The little girl almost started crying after Boris pried away the bowl, but as soon as Boris had formed his food pile and began eating, or what a great many would probably actually consider shoveling, the little boy started laughing, causing the girl to start laughing too, thus causing everyone at the table to start laughing. Boris didn't see what was so funny.

Later, when the family talked about this dinner, and Boris's early days with the family they spoke about it in jest: "What a spectacular display of pure scarfing. No food in the vicinity was safe while Boris was around," Mr. Rusic joked. Boris was a quick study, and at the bare minimum, he soon learned how to eat like a civilized person. But the volatility of Boris's constantly shifting familial past had consequences much deeper and more significant than table manners.

His main influences came predominately from his friends, or at least those whom he once called his friends. A crew of rough young hustlers who were constantly in and out of juvenile jail. A revolving group of kids that came and went: to court, prison, to new parts of town, out to the countryside to get away from the big city's bad influence. Through the Rusic's latent coercing, Boris hadn't been spending as much time with his old crew, but for years before they were the closest thing he had to family. And family time usually consisted of doing one of two things:

- 1) Leisurely hanging around underpass walkways, roughing up pedestrians and robbing, feeling-up and harassing women, or drinking and smoking.

2) Working crowded parts for the city as thieves in order to garner as much cash, and as many valuables as possible.

Among his friends, Boris was not the most vocal or opinionated kid. They were always boys with strong opinions about everything, and most could express stirring and well-articulated versions of them. Sitting around these underpasses, shooting the shit was what these guys spent most of their time doing together, so Boris heard opinions on everything, including sloughs of fascist liturgies about how the Serbs were overtly repressed in the Yugoslav Republic. These liturgies always led to total group agreement on how much everybody hated Albanians, and Muslims. Boris thought it best never to tell anyone, until much later in his life, that his mother was an Albanian from Kosovo, and that he spoke Albanian himself.

Boris's crew operated on rank system. It was informal, but there were a couple kids that were like commanders, Calvin and Andrej. Andrej was 2 months older than Boris, while Calvin was older by two years. The group called these two bosses, and they were already both dangerous convicted killers. They'd served time in juvenile detention. Both boys professed objections to unnecessary violence, and both denied they ever had wanted to kill anyone. They both claimed it had always been in self-defense.

Calvin had his solidified views and opinions on everything from politics to the best way to get a girl to fuck, but he was a man of few words compared to Andrej. Andrej was ultra-opinionated and conversing with him was like going to battle. Andrej could argue his points until his opponent either admitted defeat or until they gave up and walked away. Since these two were very good orators, they made good leaders.

Although most of these kids were total thugs, they'd have these surprisingly deep philosophical discussions as the ability to express oneself clearly was very important amongst this unlikely group. None of their ideas were based on academic study. No one quoted Aristotle, but years of systemic living led these kids to ponder the reasons for their difficult lives. Some discussions were more profound than others.

All the kids knew about Tito. They could argue about their interpretations of how he preserved the Serbian nation, saving it from Stalin and Russia, and they could riff on and on about his philosophy of single unified state. They'd add in their own parts saying, "Unified yeah, expect for Jews, those fuckers with the turbans, we don't got many but the few niggers we do got to go, fucking Albanians of course..." Boris wasn't so sure he agreed with most of what he heard.

Boris didn't get why Tito didn't just dissolve communism? After breaking away from Russia after the Second World War, this would have solidified Yugoslavia as a single capitalist nation, strengthening the region's sense of connectedness instead of tearing apart the separate regions, which was bound to happen eventually. Boris knew that Tito had operated the Yugoslav republic states the way the West had dictated, not the way that he should have, the way that would have been best for the country's people. This was obvious to him, but Boris didn't really know how to dictate these views.

When he tried to bring up how Tito could have brought in democracy while still working with the US and Western Europe, he got booed off the stage. Real democracy doesn't exist! Why would you want the same system as the US anyway? Fuck the US and Fuck Europe!

He lacked the skill of eloquent speech, and so he lacked the skills to be a leader, but he was good with his hands. He could fix complicated mechanical and electronic devices. He was not particularly ambitious, nor was he even particularly aggressive or angry. He thought maybe he could become a carpenter after he got out of school. Boris really only committed crimes because the group did, not because he really wanted to. He just liked hanging out, and he had nowhere else to go.

As for why the group would let a teenager who couldn't argue and coerce others into believing that his views were fucking true, a teenager who never instigated a robbery, planned a job, or individually brought the group any real loot, a rather socially passive kid who seemingly offered nothing as a gang member, into the group, the reason was because he was big. Very big. At twelve Boris was already almost 6 feet tall and he loved to lift weights. If an altercation got out of hand say, in a robbery, Boris would step in and end it. He wasn't the best boxer, but even if somebody was more talented with his fists, Boris's forte was wrestling, and if Boris couldn't get a hit in, he'd take you down. Simple. Since guys were always messing around, play boxing or wrestling, once in a while a guy might get the better of Boris, but in reality, Boris was so big and tough that nobody dared actually fuck with him. So, he was the group's muscle man. He was security.

In the underpasses, his crew had techniques for extracting valuables that weren't exactly tactful. Confronting pedestrians, demanding their wallets, watches, electronics, sometimes making smart-ass commentary, sometimes not. The disobedient ones, those that refused to give up their goods, might get a second chance: "I'm gonna ask you again. Gimme your fucking wallet and your watch. And that bag there too." If they resisted a second time other boys would jump up, forming a circle around the victim, knives and lead pipes appearing.

Underpasses were rarely policed which this why the groups hung out in them, but robbing individuals like this didn't pay the bills. Not everybody they stopped even had money or valuables, so underpasses were not the most lucrative locales for muggings. Still, most of these kids liked to kick ass, even if it meant hurting innocent people, they just didn't care, and the underpasses provided them with many innocent people to hurt.

When it came to killing, the attitude was that it was a necessary evil and not something they enjoyed. Being thieves was what they were most proud of. As pickpockets, they truly were amazing. They researched how to undo the bands on all the top watch brands, so they could get almost any watch undone in seconds. Any weaknesses in potential targets were noted. If a wallet was sticking out of a back pocket or a purse even the breadth of a hair, they could usually slip it out, and if they could get their hands inside unzipped jackets or hoodie pockets, they could get to valuables that were not even visible. Getting in open pockets was how they retrieved most of their loot: electronics, expensive cigarette cases, cassettes, sometimes loose cash, but pocket theft produced the least valuable goods. Jewelry was what they wanted the most, but aside from broaches and watches that were liftable, to get diamonds they'd have to threaten the target, and this meant the possibility of making a scene.

Outdoor markets, crowded squares, shopping malls was where the group exercised their skills. They had technique they called the Glass Jacket- it was called this because it was smooth, hard and moulded tight against the body of every target. Safe if left intact, but if hit with force, with violence, the glass would shatter and the wearer would get cut up by shards of razor sharp metaphorical glass.

A typical Glass Jacket approach worked as such: In the lead, either one of the bosses would approach the target, who they called the Situation. The boss would ask the Situation for the time or for directions as a distraction as the other members of the group surrounded the Situation.

If the lead saw no possible way to extract anything from the Situation using the usual, non-violent means that included tripping directly into the Situation, accidentally putting their hands on the Situation for “directional purposes,” pretending to faint and falling towards the Situation and then getting hands inside pockets or purses, only if all of these failed would the group get involved.

As the Situation tried to depart, the group would informally, as if accidentally all at once start bumping into the Situation in a mass of confusion, always keeping the Situation in the middle of the circle. In a crowded square, police might not see this happening through the mass and so was a safe approach, but if the group was bored they would sometimes do this even in a deserted square. It was even comical to watch a confused person being swarmed by a bunch of youths acting stunned, as if the square were packed, and these strangers were all being pushed together like in a giant crowd.

If something could be extracted using these techniques there'd be a call of Yellow Bird, or Horse Back, a signal, and the group would disperse, hopefully having extracted something of value.

If the encircling was ineffective and the Situation became agitated and aware of what was happening, the group would usually then disperse, but if something was very valuable, if perhaps a large was diamond involved, one of the members designated the Striker would grab the

Situation and whisper into their ear, “do not scream. You are being robbed. See this? (they’d get a glimpse of large knife, shank, or sometimes, a gun) If you don’t want to die, give me your ring.”

If the Situation failed to cooperate here, if they yelled, “Help,” or “I’m being robbed,” this would come after the Striker had specifically told them “do not scream.” This was direct disobedience. At this point, the extraction was usually abandoned and fleeing the scene becoming the main priority, but for disobeying the group would “shatter” the Glass Jacket.

Very few people ever walked away from these kids with their valuables, and if they did, they’d have been very badly hurt. It was best to give the rings and the necklaces, as being a disobedient Situation usually meant death. It meant first some tape over the mouth, then a few solid blows to the head with a pipe or heavy glass liquor bottle, then knives and rusty shanks stabbing from all around coming at the Situation from all 360 degrees, hitting all the body’s lower organs, done as silently as possible, so when the group all takes off in different directions, the Situation drops down peacefully, allowing an the group escape. Killing may not have been a badge of honor among these kids, but as far as they saw it, the Situation had brought this violence upon themselves. If the Situation died from their wounds, it was their own fault. Anyway, the boys never knew if their victims lived or died. They didn’t read the obituaries.

When not raising havoc in the streets, Boris liked talking about movies and music way more than philosophy or repression, but since his musical taste was mostly for American hard rock bands, this too made him see pro-US, and since none of the guys knew any of the music he talked about, he usually ended up in one sided conversation with himself. Boys yawning with boredom. After the crew split up the profits from robberies, Boris spent his cash on cassettes.

Everyone knew about Metallica, Guns and Roses, Aerosmith. Boris thought Metallica was ok, but more interesting were The Pixies and Fugazi. When Fugazi played Belgrade they'd charge five only 5 USD to for their shows, but Alice in Chains was his favorite. Something about the sound.

There were some Serbian bands doing similar things, but the once thriving hard rock scene of Belgrade was drying up. UK had Depeche mode and Smiths, his friends knew these bands, but the west coast, pre-grunge sound was being birthed, and this was pure US. A few years later, Nirvana appeared and this became his favorite of all. Nirvana was less intellectual, less topically sophisticated than the British bands, but their sound was just so much heavier, that with the brainy influences of their predecessors added to a self-propelled brawn. Nirvana blew away all the other bands on the scene.

Since moving in with the Rusics, Boris's life had changed dramatically for the better. When they first met it was just days after his fourteenth birthday, right as the social welfare system of Yugoslavia was on its last legs.

Boris's case manager Sofia, a tired-looking, underweight and extremely kind social worker that had been overseeing Boris's care for years heard about cuts coming to the system coming, so when the Rusics came to Social Services with an interest in fostering a troubled teen, Sofia immediately thought of Boris. Sofia always liked Boris. Even though he was tough and mean looking, he was always polite, and he smiled a lot. She knew the Rusics were no doubt her, and his, last chance.

They were a young couple, Mrs. Alex Rusic was 45 and Mr. Jan Rusic 48, newly arrived in Belgrade. Canadians, from Toronto, both were of Serbian decent, and evangelical Christians.

Jan Rusic was originally born in Krajevo, but moved to Toronto as a child. His wife Alex was born and raised in Windsor, Ontario by Serbian parents and moved to Toronto to attend university. Jan and Alex met in the University of Toronto's Serbia culture club. Alex had never been to Yugoslavia, but heard about it from her mom, a Croat from the Dalmatian coast, who never stopped talking about how great it was. Jan had been back to Krajevo as a teenager in the seventies to visit family. He also spent a few days with his parents in Belgrade, taking day trips to surrounding towns as part of a family vacation. His memories were fond. The couple spoke a mish-mash of the Serbo-Croatian language dialects they'd learned from their parents. The structure of the languages were so altered it was as if they had their own secret language, a code that existed between only the two of them. They got married a year after they graduated.

When Boris showed up at the office of Social Services, on move-in day, Sofia introduced Boris to the Rusics. Both were smiled and waving. "Dobrodošao." Welcome. What a strange accent, Boris thought, and why are they saying welcome? I've always lived here.

The couple led Boris to their car, a shiny new make. Japanese. They took him back to their apartment where the halls were not covered with trash or graffiti. Where there was no smell of urine. There *was* an elevator that they rode up six floors.

When Boris entered their apartment he thought it was like walking onto one of those American sitcoms he'd seen on TV, *Friends*. Prijatelji. Everything was so clean and new. The apartment faced west, so through the massive windows flowed the bright mid-afternoon sun. He could see mountains. The light shined on the glass coffee table. It was momentarily blinding. What the hell kind of a place was this?

The couple gave him a tour of the apartment. Boris had never been in an apartment this nice, at least not officially. Sure, he and his friends that broken into nice apartments, but always just to burglarize and trash. Boris thought those times didn't count since the owners of those places were obviously rich, capitalist scum. Not nice people like this.

After peering into the first three rooms they arrived at the last one, Boris's room. Boris had had his own room before. Sometimes the family he'd be staying with would have two or three other kids, foster kids like him, and have only two bedrooms. If family had their own biological kids they'd usually have separate rooms away from the foster kids.

Boris had never had a problem-laying claim to the single room, behind the foster parents back of course. If the other kids in the house didn't like this idea he offered a simple solution-wrestling match. A good, clean, fight. No punching or kicking. Whoever tapped out first lost the match, and the room. Rarely did any of the other kids ever except his challenge, and Boris had never tapped out.

But now he had his own room, and he didn't have to fight anybody for it. This was so different. It was just offered, by these strange people, who kept smiling. After the apartment tour, all three sat down on comfortable, new furniture in the front room of the apartment. More windows. More light. The couple sat back in a relaxed posture and gazed at Boris. Boris was on the edge of his seat. He sat there wearing his tracksuit, his muscles bulging underneath, his shaved head, his snake tattoo crawling up the side of his neck. "So what do you think?" the nice woman asked Boris in her strange accent after she had shown him the apartment.

He didn't know what to say, he was nervous, which was unusual. This was when she pulled out a pack of cigarettes. She was a Serb, and like most Serb she smoked. Finally,

something normal! Or at least kind of normal, they were still a weird brand. “Export A” brought from Canada, and as she offered Boris one he relaxed. It wasn’t difficult for Alex to assume Boris smoked. He offered her a light. Alex Rusic and Boris sat there smoking Export As, her last ones, she complained. “You can’t get these here.”

Jan Rusic sat back and smiled. He didn’t smoke.

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Southern Kosovo, -Red Cross survivor camp- Summer 2000

After the massive ethnic cleansing that had happened here, tensions towards foreigners were extremely high. Acts of revenge were expected. Even after the official enemies, Milosevic and the Yugoslav army had been driven out, it seemed that now anyone taking their place could be a suspicious invader- aid workers, civil engineers, protective guards. Anyone could be fired on without warning. NATO had bombed targets before, in Bosnia, thinking the war was over only to have it start up again. What if this was what was happening here? This place felt like it could erupt any minute.

NATO military forces had entered Kosovo after the Yugoslavia army finally withdrew, setting up a special Kosovo branch called KFOR. In a short time KFOR instigated a public order with patrols and curfews, but in reality Kosovo has always been on the outside of the law, and this was peace was only a veneer. Broken laws here had always been judged in vigilante courts. Punishments measured in out in blood, an eye for eye, with large doses vengeance and passion. KFOR was only here temporarily since it knew the justice of the land could not be contained forever, and would eventually have its day.

Even though the physical distance between Europe and the Balkans is not great, the cultural gap is wide. I knew little about the region called Yugoslavia. It was only after it had been destroyed, after I started with the Tribunal, that I learned how it was these differences between Yugoslavia and Europe, that made Yugoslavia's destruction so terrible.

The idea behind the Republic of Yugoslavia was one that attempted to extract from their society the poisonous ideology that ruins has always ruined the possibility of a utopias-- xenophobia. The massive Yugoslav republic was a magnificent experiment with its constitution of multiple ethnicities and religions, these difference succeeded for decades at holding together a nation of vastly different people, their differences actually becoming a kind of identity purveying glue.

Yugoslavia had existed since post World War I, but it post World War II, in 1945, when Tito founded the Yugoslavia that existed and flourished under his rule. He knew that the Balkan countries would not be able to fight off the Soviets after the war, so he bound together the six regions for there was power in numbers. In 1991, when the first piece of it, Slovenia, broke away, this was the end of Tito's republic.

After I was sworn into office I immediately went to the region to see the landscapes and the people. I flew into Skopje, Macedonia. I was moved to see that this capital city had faired well through the war. But I could not stay long. Soon I was traveling by jeep from Macedonia to Pristina, Kosovo's ravaged capital.

The thin awful roads that plague the route seemed extra bad, despite the UN four wheel-drive truck. Traveling the winding road, the hills dotted with farms, lone shepherds tending flocks. It did not appear the war had left any scars here, or maybe the poverty of the county was

so intense that war could permeate it. I didn't see any danger. I asked the one of peacekeepers that accompanied me if it would be safe to stop and walk around. The driver slowed down and pulled over and we waited. There was low brush, and taller trees back from the roadway. I peered into them, but then suddenly the driver pulled back onto the road, noticeably speeding. There were occasions where it might have been possible to stop, since it was early morning and usually snipers and guards are usually all passed out by now. But this occasion seemed off, and we did not stop.

Journalists complained this was a war with no frontlines. This was a partially crude commentary driven by the journalists' lack of photo-ops and leads. No striking photos or stories meant that nobody would follow the war, and the journalists would go hungry. Also though, it meant it was hard to report so that people would know what was happening. With no indicators as it was, if it would have been possible to simply *imagine* the war away, this quiet countryside would have to be the place it would happen.

As we approached the city, burned out cars were left on the sides of the roads and seemed to offer as a trail to guide us into the city. I tried not to think too much about becoming one of those wrecks ourselves. Entering Pristina was to witness a city decaying. The city streets had been torn apart by heavy machines leaving large bumpy, holes filled with rocky gravel. Garbage lined the sides, rotting, attracting rats and flies. Drainage systems were backed up and wastewater was flowing back out of sewer system. The buildings resembled the people, dirty, beaten down, missing floors, like missing teeth.

Investigators from the Prosecutor's office, my office, had been in Pristina ever since the shooting had stopped. Now I was in Pristina to rally support for my investigation by the NATO

team KFOR. I wanted to make sure we had their support when I started to go after the KLA militia, the rebels that had arisen to fight back against the Serbs. Although the rebels had the moral high ground, their tactics were highly unethical and so a number of their leaders were on our radar for war crimes. Talks went well with KFOR, and soon it was time to move on.

We drove another hour outside of the city to a survivor camp where the Tribunal had an encampment. This where I would stay. Once we arrived, being far from steep ledges, and building full of snipers, I insisted I be allowed to walk the perimeter of the Tribunal's compound. Even though I was under heavily armed protection, but I needed to connect with the people and the land. With much argument I was finally allowed access to only one street. Just out, and back in. The area around the Tribunal building had become a Red Cross camp for survivors, providing medical care as possible, and food. There were white tents as far as I could see. These were temporary shelters for locals who had lost their homes, or for those that that had been freed and were far from their villages.

Trenches had been created leading from the nearby tents, leading to latrines dug in the roadside. I could see the he road slanted enough for the latrines to flow away from the Tribunal compound. This was not the introduction to the Balkans I wished for. I wanted to be back in the country and see the landscapes for what they were. I wanted to stand on the coasts of Dalmatia, dipping my feet the crystal clear water, or up in the mountains of Bosnia where no one existed for hundreds of kilometers around me.

From the tents, I began to see people peering out, looking at me like an intruder. I was dressed in tight dark pants with boots and a dark jacket that said NATO; I wore flack jacket underneath. Also, I still wore long silver earring and some make-up. After this, I'd never wear

anything but stainless steel studs in the field. I wore a cap but with my hair pulled through the back, recently dyed, it was extra dark and shiny. Even with my plain clothing I must have attracted unneeded attention. My version of conservative was still too flashy for this region. It was then that one of these sets of eyes left the tent, walked down towards the latrine, stepped across onto the road, and began to walk slowly in my direction.

The sun had set but it wasn't dark yet. The lamps that had been hung up in the rows between the tents came on, like real streetlamps, in a tent city. It was as if the light acted differently here, unlike Switzerland or England. It was as if I couldn't make out the facial features of the walker. It must have be a woman I though. The person wore a headscarf like I'd seen other women here wear. The walker carried something in their arms and continued towards me. The guards noticed this all and warned them to stop. The guard didn't know what she held, but they didn't want to act with hostility in such tense parameters. Too close and they'd be in inescapable range for any kind of explosives. The walker slowed and finally stopped.

Some of the eyes around the tent had turned into full figures, stepping out and watching now. Forms visible but faces obscured by the bizarre twilight. The walker took another step forward and suddenly the guards fired into the air as a warning. Continue, and they would have to shoot. The walker carried what looked like a sack of clothes, or a bundle of something, squeezed tight to their chest. The walker peered inside, then suddenly set the bundle down in the road. Loud mumbling began and then backing up a few steps. Nothing moved for a time, and darkness began to fall. The walker was a woman. She yelled and charged at me, and seconds later she lie motionless on the ground, multiple rifle shots pierced her head. I was dragged back inside the compound totally stunned.

The walker very young and carrying an infant in the bundle, a very small baby, a girl. Why she had done this, with all the help available to her and her baby in the tents, is impossible to know. Maybe she intended to give me the baby? When she had then decided her plan had failed, she decided to smother the baby, right then and there in her arms. Baby was still warm when the guards unwrapped the bundle to find her. The Red Cross could have taken the child. This had left me truly shaken, and I was hard to shake.

The next days I had discussions with the KFOR leaders in this area, asking for their support. Again the talks went well. Later I met with some of the local authorities who took me to the outskirts of another city. We pulled into a heavily guarded perimeter. I stood at the edge of a large hole in the ground, a recently discovered mass grave. Off to the side were shapes resembling the forms of humans. I moved further down toward where forensic investigators were exhumed the contents of this hole. Forms of different sizes and shapes that had been dusted off, they all suffered that same black stain that is not associated with living things, their eye sockets were vacant, having been emptied by worms and rats.

Nearby was a body with a very large structure, decayed beyond being recognizable. It was said to be an important Kosovar civil servant, and so the examiner who was a small French woman, was told she needed to extract the teeth. However she had been unable to move the body to a position where she was able to manage it. Being that they were shorted staffed, there was no one to help her. Unable to move the corpse, she'd had to cut its face off. Beginning with a hand held medical bone saw that quickly snapped, the examiner explained she'd eventually had to use an angle grinder and this took off the jaw. She started from underneath the chin, moving upward, through the cheekbones and up the side of the head until the facial cavity could be removed. There was no blood but a strange smell of bone and dust that wafted from the corpse. As we left

the investigator set about prying the teeth out of the lower section of jaw, still attached to the body. This was one of the smallest mass graves I ever came across.

With the lack of frontlines, of battlefields, of clashes between armies and warring armies, I had officially found the frontline.

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The Rusics had two goals: adopt a troubled child and provided as much as they could for him or her, and spread the word of God. Yugoslavia had many Muslims to be converted, so in the way fundamentalists of all Christian denominations show up in unlikely corners of the world, this was the Rusic's corner. With their ancestry and ability to speak Serbo-Croatian, it seemed like a good plan. The problem was the timing. Serbia had recently begun their proclamations of hate and a superior race, while the rest of Yugoslavia sat trigger happy with paranoia. Guns are everywhere in the Balkans.

Despite the tensions of the outside world, Boris let himself get close to the Rusics. Their relationship was more like that of older siblings than parents, at first anyway. Boris had told them about parts of his life, so the Rusics knew he had been through a lot, but he still kept a lot of secrets. The best way to deal with Boris, they thought, would be to talk to him like an adult, while slowly starting to apply limits and rules to his life. Adding a structure that would allow the three of them to live together.

It did not take much for Boris to abandon his street life. This caused a few problems initially. As Boris moved and tried to pull away, Andrej became offended and started calling Boris out. Boris came around one time when Andrej wasn't there. Boris was broke, now that he wasn't stealing with the crew, so he wanted to get in on the odd job again. Calvin was cool with

it. He knew Boris didn't go off and join another crew, and he hadn't ratted on anyone, so it was okay. Calvin had been doing some of his own stuff on the side too. So Boris hooked up with Calvin and they hit some shops at night, then after they sold all the goods and made some money. This worked once, but then next time he ran into Andrej. Andrej called him out for being an ungrateful rat.

“You fucking pussy! Just want your fucking MILF to let you suck on her tits, huh. The gypsy whore, down on her knees, playing with your centimeter of manhood yeah. Fuck her up the ass or you'll end up a brother that's also you son. Do it, or I'll do, you fucking snitch cunt.”

Andrej couldn't beat down Boris alone, but he had friends there that were loyal to him. With this, Boris felt the temperature drop and decided it best to leave, and not return. After that, the crew knew Boris as an enemy. Calvin told Andrej there was no problem, but Andrej wouldn't listen. Soon these two would split up and become rivals. Calvin would eventually go straight, but Andrej was on the road to become another serious Serbian career criminal.

If Andrej's crew saw Boris, they were told to fuck him up, and if they had to, kill him. All this just for moving on to an easier life. Andrej was a true psychopath and he would go far in his field.

Meanwhile, the new leader of the country Milosevic was touring the land speaking at rallies, and encouraging the masses to participate in politics. Blasphemy against Tito. Some of the thugs that Boris knew from around Belgrade were paid to travel to these rallies and put down any resistance to the Milosevic movement using violence. Boris would have been one of these protest thugs too if not for his stroke of luck with the Rusics. Whatever semblance of order was left in the Serbian communist system had disappeared. The county's masses where recruited to

fight against the forces that threatened Serbian safety. Soon the fight would be the extermination of all non-Serb. Not just for the sake of safety, but also for a better world.

Andrej's anger was serious problem. Since they hadn't been able to take down Boris, hoodlums followed Alex Rusic from her apartment as she walked to the closest market. They caught her and pulled her into a back alley, covering her mouth. They made it clear that she was foreign scum, and not a real Serb. They punched her a few times. Grabbed her breasts and ass hard enough to leave bruises. They made her get down on the ground and one of the guys pulled out his dick and slapped across the face as hard as possible, over and over. The three thugs laughed hysterically. The guy closed his pants and told Alex, "Tell Boris that next time, we will make you into a real Serbian woman. For that, you will not need your clothes." They walked away joking about how after they were done with her, she wouldn't even be able to walk.

Alex Rusic was a strong Christian woman who thought she could handle any situation. Only by putting oneself in danger could one help others in danger, she thought. Forgiveness is the way. The power of Jesus heals all.

Growing up in Canada, it was possible to have such saccharine views, but on the streets of Belgrade, on the eve of war, a safer attitude would be to assume that Jesus had left the country not going to offer attractive, young-ish women protection.

Alex never told Jan or Boris about the encounter. She explained the bruising by saying she fell down the stairs. Boris had been having trouble too. He'd come home beat up one night, when later the police arrived. Boris had crushed the skull of one of the kids who jumped him, broken bones on the others. The attackers ratted him out, but when the police saw that he lived with respectable people, in a nice apartment, they concluded it must have been self-defense.

They would leave Belgrade for southern Serbia very soon after.

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Belgrade, June 2001

The role of the chief prosecutor is to pursue and investigate war crimes, and gather evidence against and prosecute the guilty. In all, the Office of the Prosecutor employs attorneys, forensic anthropologists and archeologists, police and security specialists, analysts and lobbyists, and a team of experts in the culture and language of the Balkan countries. Every single person was absolutely necessary by this time.

There were plenty of crimes to investigate, and evidence of the crimes was everywhere, but determining who was guilty was another story entirely. Since 1991, over a hundred thousand non-Serb minorities had lost their lives to the process of ethnic cleansing, but during the Kosovo war, the KLA resistance took the lives of many Serbs, some in ghastly ways. To be more specific regarding the evidence, it was everywhere, but also nowhere, meaning locating specific people that went missing was nearly impossible, while at the same time mass graves jammed with corpses were being discovered weekly.

Since I could not be everywhere investigating, office managers in The Hague dispatched deputies, investigators, attorneys, security staff, and our experts all over the region. The Tribunal's work was ongoing; I'd often show up in an area where my staff had already been working for weeks, even months.

When evidence is presented, a subpoena for a suspect is used, but unlike the courts of most states, the International Criminal Court (ICC) does not have jurisdiction to enforce its

subpoenas. The ICC can only request the cooperation of the legal and law enforcement systems of the countries in question. This makes the ICC's authority very uncertain. Hundreds of requests were sent to the governments of Serbia and Croatia, where most of the crimes were committed, and hundreds of subpoenas were ignored.

I had come to Belgrade to push a through series on indictments personally. I did not want these guilty to walk away. After the war in Kosovo had ended, Milosevic who had installed himself as President of all Yugoslavia and had always maintained total control in Serbia, was finally brought down. Through a set of elections, a man named Zoran Djindjic took over as Serbia Prime minister. From the beginning Djindjic cooperated with the tribunal. In our first meeting he told me about an incident that occurred that had been troubling him for years. I immediately send investigators to the area. What they discovered is what brought me back.

Earlier that day, I had been in Kosovo investigating recent accusations by a handful of Serbs who claimed they that had been kidnapped and tortured by the Kosovo resistance, the KLA. These claims seemed to be increasing everyday, and it seemed like there might be entire side of the war that was yet unknown. This fact weighted on me. I didn't want to think about multiplying the already terrible amount of atrocities by two, but when I received the a confirmation that after a thorough investigation, the events that Djindjic divulged at our first meeting had come true. Two masses graves had been excavated near a Belgrade airfield that contained the bodies of 80 missing Albanians. I felt of pang of sick joy. This was evidence enough to lock-up these police officers that had committed so many crimes.

Under the ultimate command of Milosevic, the Serbian secret police had transported the corpses of the dead from Kosovo, more than 500km, to this remote, grassy, inconspicuous field.

The commanding offices and two administrators for the police were arrested, and indicted for 80 counts of murder. Pressuring the Djindjic, the Serbian government allowed the prisoners to be released. A week later they were in The Hague.

Just as I am hard of shake, I am hard to offend and anger, but once someone so horrible comes along that I just can't control myself. This was the case when I met a particular biologist, a prominent professor at Belgrade's university. She had published numerous articles and had done some important research in genetics and coding. She had offered to help give us access to the labs our investigations. With so many samples, from so many crime scenes, this offer could have been enormously helpful. Then I sat down, the biologist sat across from me, and without a trace of irony told me that in her professional opinion, her research concluded that genes of the Serb were pure, genetically superior to other subjects of the Yugoslav republic. By opening up her lab to us, she was sure we would find that Serbia's only crime was for the good, and for the purification of mankind. After less than five minutes with this woman I had security escort her from the Tribunal's offices, banned her not only from all ICC proceedings, but from ever setting foot in any of our offices again. Next I made a call to the president of the university about the ethical implications of her tenure.

The next day a Serbian prosecutor reached out to me. They had in custody a young man who has worked as a 'medical butcher.' His words.

I remember I received a call in the middle of the night when a young man had turned up at a UN checkpoint near Pristina. This was the same kid. Disobeying the guards, he refused to stop and kept approaching. He was almost shot. Somehow he wasn't, and now he was here. The paperwork said he was Boris Toska. Belgrade's chief prosecutor said that it sounded like he'd worked

with the worked with the KLA, in a secret facility where human organs were harvested, but he was a Serb, not an Albanian.

Boris had had been placed in psychiatric care. I was told he shouldn't see anyone yet, but I insisted. I needed to know if he was just crazy or if this was real information. I know now it was the information that made him go crazy

“No small talk,” he said. “I say I give you information. Big information. You get me away from faggots here. And smokes. Canadian brand, eh.” He laughed at his own comment.

“Information sounds very good. What kind of information?” I asked.

“Fucking Jews. Motherfuckers. Try to touch my dick! I need to defend myself. What can I do?” he yelled totally abruptly.

“I understand you've been though a lot. How can I help you, Mr. Toska?” I asked.

He slams his fist down on the table. “MY NAME IS FUCKING RUSIC! RUSIC!!”

I waited and he stopped yelling. “I apologize Mr. Rusic, why are here? We would really like to help you.

“Oh yeah, this is to fucking help me?” He held up his handcuffed hands.

I gesture toward the guard. She shakes her head. Too many incidents. He had been terrorizing the nursing staff, throwing food, bedding, even feces. Now they had to strap him down to his bed.

Was he just another traumatized war victim? Was I wasting my time here?

“Zovem se Rusic.” He kept repeating this, his name was Rusic.

He had taken the Rusics name. His adopted parents, killed only two years after they’d become a family. Now his birth name Toska seemed to set him off. This name Toska, could be the one the only reason Boris was still alive. How he’d been able to join he KLA. It was an Albanian name.

“Mr. Rusic. I am the in charge of the investigations going on in this country. We want to help people get justice, but we also want to find people that have gone missing. If you won’t talk to me, how can I help?”

He responded with a tirade about how we were the enemy. The west created this entire war. It was the west that fueled the black market, it was the west that funded the Kosovo Liberation Arm. And, of course, again about Jews and faggots.

“You turned yourself in. They told you to fuck off which means it must have taken some convincing to get them to arrest you. We don’t know who you are Mr. Rusic. Please, start by telling me who you are.”

Boris had been leaning back in his chair, mumbling and daydreaming while I spoke. He spoke in Serbian. Even after years of working in the Balkans my knowledge of the Serbian language was lacking. My Albanian was non-existent. Boris suddenly leaned forward, looked at me in the eyes and said “kill me.”

It was just so unexpected I was silent. Then he started screaming at me, “KILL ME. FUCKING KILL ME BITCH.” He kept screaming and tried to stand, but his chains prevented

him. A guard and a medical aide came in. It was time to leave for me to leave. The medical aide told me he was Boris's psychiatrist, and to stay in touch about Boris's condition.

As I was leaving Boris yelled, "I can show you bodies. I know where bodies are." The doctor closed the door and I was alone, in an empty hallway. He kept screaming obscenities at no one in particular.

Making sense of people's behavior in a war zone is total mind fuck. Killers are labeled as bad, horrible monsters. How do we judge? What of the Decent Citizen who takes up arms, opening fire in a crowded underground Metro station. Avenging the slaughter of his family.

His family's killers are in this Metro station. They threw grenades into the Citizen's house after they learned the Citizens and his family were Muslim. Innocent of murder, there are hundreds of others in the Metro too. But the Citizen is using the same logic the killers used. These people are all guilty. Guilty by race. Guilty by religion. They need to die.

The Citizen easily mows down the killers. Despite being clunky-looking, the action is smooth on the cumbersome Y-M-49 sub-machine gun. At 700 rounds a minute, the Citizen's initial goal is quickly accomplished, so with ample time and ammo left, he decides, why not mow down dozens of others too? The weapon obeys his commands. The bullets slicing through flesh like butter, piercing brick and lodging in the walls of the underground station as mementos, dust is everywhere mixing with smoke from the weapon. "Out of ammo dammit." Thinking that at this point, he'd e rather not go home. There would really be no point, to leave here. All his loved ones are dead, the world is shit, and country's are at war, and goddamit! he's out of fucking ammo. With that, he decides there's nothing left and denotes the thirty-pound

fragmentation jacket strapped to his chest. This destroys half a city block. Where was the Citizen's conscience?

If conscience is relative, we are all capable of anything. If one's environment forms one's conscience then every behavioral trait is dependant. The kindest, gentlest person nurtured in a loving, violence-free home could become a carjacker or gang criminal. Just change the nurturing childhood to one full of poverty and violence.

And person who may be hard wired to help elderly people cross the street can be conditioned into a person that instead robs them at knifepoint. Perhaps knocking grandpa around a little. Breaking a few bones. You know, for good measure.

Good people get fucked and become bad, soaking into the pool of awfulness that would exist under any circumstances, in any world.

Boris was once a good person but was now a very dangerous man. His conscience had been repressed so badly it had all but died, so getting to know Boris took time. When we think of the people in wars that commit crimes, we cringe. We wonder how these people could ever do such terrible things. We think these people are sick. Don't any of these people have a conscience? They do, but having a conscience will get you shot. Now! So what's the point?

