

**Bulgaria** - Momchil Tsonkov walks into building 15 of Business Park Sofia, as he does every morning, though he has a different disposition today. He looks at Vitosha Mountain rising majestically behind the maze of corporate complexes and tries to channel its intransience. Today he is a terminator. All throughout his morning, Momchil has been imagining himself performing a rousing drum solo in front of a crowd of millions. This is how he prepares himself for days like this. Today he is a terminator.

Tsonkov is the youngest Senior Vice President in the history of The Dobrev Company - one of the largest real estate developers in Bulgaria. He will be meeting with the team from Nedev Steel and they will try to play hardball with him. They won't be able to provide the necessary sheet metal on time for the upcoming casino project. They know he knows this of course. So they will try to strong arm him by feigning indecision. The mutri<sup>1</sup> have bullied its way into all of the major construction jobs over the past eight months. The team from Nedev Steel will pretend to be concerned about this. What they don't know is that he is fully aware of their involvement with Iosif "Papagala"<sup>2</sup> Velikov, one of the most powerful mafia leaders in the country.

But it is Momchil Tsonkov who is at the top of the food chain on this day. He is sure of it. Momchil can feel the air of superiority in his own gait and the confidence in the smile with which he greets the security staff behind their ridiculous little desk. That is his last good deed for the peasants at this company. Momchil has been embezzling hundreds of thousands of levs<sup>3</sup> from Dobrev for a little over a year, and at the end of the day he will flee this miserable country for Germany, never to be heard from again. The least he can do is bury this Nedev Steel deal, then be done with all of Bulgaria. After all, he always felt Sofia too small for him. Take, for example, this very building in the business park, at 10 floors it is the largest in the area. Pathetic. Momchil Tsonkov will live like a king in Berlin, a real city.

He is imagining his new German apartment as he walks into the boardroom for his meeting. The Nedev Steel people have already arrived and are waiting for him. As soon as he walks in he's firing on all cylinders. He's in the zone. He introduces the construction schedule and the stipulations for

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian slang for members of the mafia; roughly translates as "mugs."

<sup>2</sup> Bulgarian for "parrot"

<sup>3</sup> Bulgarian currency

suppliers. The people from Nedev are shocked at his forwardness. Momchil ignores their timid reactions. The deal is going to go down according to *his* terms. The peasants will have to accept this as the way of things. Just as Momchil begins to go over the falling number that Nedev has been posting for the last three quarters, he is very rudely interrupted.

Seven large men dressed in black shirts and pants burst into the room. They scan the room quickly before locating Momchil Tsonkov. They begin pointing fingers and shouting angrily. They curse him. They curse his parents. They even talk about raping his mother. The other people in the boardroom try to leave but one of the mutri bars the way. None of them are threatened. Clearly Tsonkov is the only guilty party here. Momchil does not know any of these men. To say the least, he is confused and frightened. The leader of the pack, a short man, approaches him slowly. He calls the young executive "thief" and "bastard" among other things. Momchil backs up slowly. He raises his arms in questioning protest. The angry little man slaps Momchil roundly, knocking him into a waiting chair behind him. With thick, meaty, hands he takes hold of Momchil's suit lapels. With a quick jerk, he yanks Tsonkov to his feet. The man with the iron grip looks deep into his eyes vowing to do unspeakable things to his family members. Momchil wets his pants. Incensed, the diminutive brute drags Momchil to the window and throws him through the glass.

Momchil Tsonkov lands in a water fountain near a walkway between the office buildings. A woman walking by screams as water from the fountain splashes on her. Momchil attempts to get to his feet. He struggles mightily, but cannot. Both of his legs have been broken in the fall. He cries and begs for help from bystanders slowly gathering around him. No one offers a hand. "Mafia" and "assassination" are whispered among the stunned onlookers.

Up on the seventh floor, all of the mutri cross to the window to sneer, laugh or otherwise look menacing. Everyone else in the room bolts for the door. The lead man watches them leave and berates his comrade for leaving his post. This is met with an unrepentant shrug. Content with the assertion of his dominance, the head man returns his attention to the spectacle below. Fed up with watching the display of weakness, he pulls out his Arcus 94 pistol and fires five shots into Tsonkov. Satisfied, he corrals his brute squad and leaves with no other fuss.

**London** - It's a nice afternoon in June. I've got a great seat at the All-England Club for Wimbledon. Here I sit in my crushed linen suit watching my favorite tennis player, David Drake, lose to Yevgeney Rogovoy on the Centre Court. This he has done, without fail, in each of their last three meetings. Rogovoy is my least favorite player, and as painful as it is to watch, these matches are all classics. Several of the shots so far are highlight worthy - you know the type, you see them on ESPN in slow motion with *Carmina Burana* or *Requiem for a Tower* playing in the background. Drake is a stunning player, whose style is at once aggressive and cool. He plays with passion, and has an arsenal of shots at his disposal. In fact, he may have too many weapons to wield. His natural talent is evident and when you have a catalogue of shots to choose from at any given time, there will be times when the wrong choice is made. This battle is titanic, there's no doubt. With Yevgeney you have a player who is strong, tactical, fast, and worst of all, soulless. There is no depth of emotion in this opponent, just ruthless efficiency. His shots are chosen methodically, and executed to perfection. The man is a machine.

Taking into account (and, to some degree, ignoring) that Drake is American and Rogovoy is Russian, there is something to be said for the "talent versus skill match-up" on display today. The fact that Rogovoy's mechanized savagery tops Drake's passion-play is a bit unsettling though. Drake won the first set with ease, giving me futile hope that this match would be a decisive battle in a war I doubt anyone but me really cares about. In fact, I probably care about this particular war more than even the players! What can I say? I'm a sucker for metaphor.

After starting strong in the second set, Drake shattered everything that he had accomplished and allowed Rogovoy to get back in it with two break points. Two break points! I would launch further into this tirade, if not for my vibrating cell phone. Under any other circumstances I would ignore this call and proceed to drone on about the mental chess match that is tennis and the constantly shifting momentum, but it's my special cell that's ringing. It's Gabriel. With more than a little reluctance, I answer.

"Ashiel, I have work for you."

"Can this wait, Gabriel?"

"You know he's just going to lose again."

"Where's your faith, old man?"

"I lost that a long time ago. Speaking of which, you and I both know it would take nothing short of an act of providence to save this match for your man Drake."

"I do love your optimism. Where and who?"

"You'll be meeting my man Mr. Darcy at the Crown and Cushion Pub in Waterloo."

"Lovely."

"It is. Order a Father Sherman when you get to the pub. Darcy will recognize you."

"Spot on."

On that note, I hang up my phone. I try to ignore the angry gazes coming at me as I get up to leave. Ah, the clever mix of *vieux riches*, and upstart tennis star wannabes. And then there's me trying to leave in the middle of a match where I'm the only person around who really gives a damn about the outcome. Damn you, Gabriel Sexton.

The trip to Lambeth is not a difficult one, although it does take about an hour to travel. I get on the District Line to Westminster Station and walk from there. The walk is one of the reasons why the trip is so long, but it does afford me the luxury of walking across the Waterloo Bridge. I love the view from the Waterloo. Pausing to take in the sights around me, I am struck by Gabriel's thought process. I'm to order a Father Sherman, which I believe, is a brandy drink. But, "therein lies the rub," as the Bard would say. "Sherman" is old cockney slang for "Americans." He's starting to show his age. Nowadays, cockney slang for Americans is "Septic."<sup>4</sup> (Brits who do not care for Americans are called "Listerine" - I'll let you figure that one out on your own.) Ah, but Gabriel does treasure his little spy games. He has a network of "pigeons" with literary codenames who owe him favors all over the world. There really is no need for all of the cloak and dagger, secret meetings with shadowy people bit, but I guess old habits die hard. Besides,

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<sup>4</sup> Septic tank → "tank" rhymes with "yank," which is short for "yankee," as we are known to Brits

it may actually be pretty cool if I eventually get one too. Lost in this thought, I nearly forget the reason I stopped in the first place. The sun is setting and the view from the bridge is simply breathtaking. I pull out my handy Leica D-Lux 4 and record the moment for posterity. I love this camera.

At the pub, I go straight for the bar and order my appropriately named brandy drink. Apparently the Australian barman is not too impressed with my drink selection. But, fuck him. Once I get my drink, I swish it around in its pretentious little tulip glass, pretending to take in the surroundings. The place is a quaint little Irish pub full of locals who seem to have drunk their entire lives away sitting on these stools. Someone calls out my name. I ignore it, but take note of the area from which the voice came. I highly doubt there is someone else in this place named Ashiel. No one else has responded yet either. So this Darcy pigeon is the man behind all the pomp and circumstance. He's testing me. I don't bite; he'll reveal himself soon enough. The man who shouted my name is either some mug he paid to shout out a name when he gives a signal, or perhaps a little back-up muscle in case the Yankee gets uppity. Judging from the size of the bloke I think did the shouting, I'm going with option B. Jesus. What the Hell is going on here?

"Sam!"

Finally. Darcy is a fat fellow with a thick salt-and-pepper mustache, sitting alone at a booth in the back of the pub. I put my hand up amiably, and feign that I have finally found the man for whom I was looking.

"Darcy! I can't believe I didn't see you sitting back there." This is just ridiculous.

He greets me with a hug. We sit.

Then, just loud enough for everyone around to get the picture, "Darcy" bellows out an unnecessary greeting.

"Been a long time since I've seen you, it has!"

We get down to business. Darcy proceeds to rush through all of the information as if he's going to get brownie points for speed. And then I realize he's putting on a fake Essex accent. If I had to venture a guess, I'd say this "Darcy" is from Wales but, for whatever reason, he wants me think he's from Essex. Mr. Darcy here has officially lost me at this point. Thank God Gabriel does extensive homework on anyone who approaches him. At the end of this debacle, Darcy will give me a folder and I can go back to my hotel and see what's going on here. But, from what I can gather from Darcy's

babbling, some young Bulgarian in America wants me to kill a gangster in Bulgaria. What are you doing to me, Gabriel?

Back in my hotel, I go over the dossier for the job. The client is Mladen Raynov, a New York City stock broker. He went to the U.S. to study Economics and made his fortune. He's done well for himself, but he's concerned about the state of things back home. The mafia in Bulgaria has grown out of control and high profile hits on prominent public and private figures are a common occurrence. The problem has grown so out of control that the European Union has refused to continue providing financial aid to Bulgaria until the headlines stop. Now, Raynov, being the street smart businessman that he is, wants to invest in his home country, what with the expected growth that comes with acceptance in the E.U. And all of this mafia activity is throwing a big monkey wrench in his plans. This is where the story gets juicy. Raynov wants someone (me) to take out one of the mafia heads responsible for a good amount of the recent killings. The mark is Iosif Velikov, who is also Mladen Raynov's uncle. Velikov, known as "Papagala," runs a private security firm called IVS which, of course, is also a front company for his protection and gun-running rackets. And let's be honest, God alone knows what else this guy is involved with. So, obviously this puts me in quite a spot, because killing a mafia leader like this would most certainly be considered a high profile assassination. Now, I've killed before, but on orders, not for profit. Since joining Gabriel's Archangel Security Consultants, killing is done out of necessity, not as the mission objective. This whole thing seems to fall squarely in the do-the-right-thing-for-the-wrong-reason category.

It doesn't take long before I recall a story that Gabriel told me during my training. A Bulgarian journalist and political dissident, Georgi Markov, was killed in 1978, with an umbrella. So I hit the internet to learn more about Markov's murder. As it turns out, Markov was stabbed in the leg with an umbrella that administered a dose of ricin into his blood. He was killed by an agent of the Bulgarian Secret Service on the Waterloo Bridge. This disturbing little coincidence is immediately shoved to the back of my consciousness. Wikipedia even has a diagram of the firing mechanism that

delivers the poison.<sup>5</sup> Sweet. This reminds me of a similar situation involving an Eastern European whistle-blower assassinated in London a few of years ago. Alexander Litvinenko was killed with a poisoned piece of sushi (no nifty diagram on Wikipedia for that one though).

I draw up a list of goodies to give to Mr. Darcy tomorrow, so I feel good knowing that I should be able to get my weapon into the country undetected. Now I just need to figure out how to get close enough to a mafia leader to stab him in the leg. Oh, and of course, there is the small matter of my escape. By the way, David Drake lost to Yevgeney Rogovoy. Again.

The next day's meeting with Mr. Darcy is a pleasant surprise. The appointed destination is in Westminster at 54 St. James Street. I arrive 11 minutes early, and am pleasantly surprised to see that Darcy is already there. I am even more elated to see that we are at the Swaine Adeney Brigg store. From my homework the previous night, I know that the umbrella used to assassinate Georgi Markov was a Swaine Adeney Brigg. I think I know where this is going. Dispensing with greetings and small talk, Darcy gets right to the point.

"I trust that you know why we are here."

"I do."

"Good chap. After our last meeting, I was wondering exactly what type of person Gabriel was sending to me."

Ouch. That seemed a bit unnecessary, but I guess turnabout is fair play, after all. Regardless, I just can't help myself.

"This is the place that made James Bond's suitcase for *From Russia with Love*, right?"<sup>6</sup>

"I do hope you're joking, young man."

And with that, he rolls his eyes and walks into the store without even looking in my direction.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian\\_umbrella](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian_umbrella)

<sup>6</sup> You know, the one with the red interior and all the weapons stashed within

After procuring my umbrella, and a Poet Hat -the hat designed for Steven Spielberg to be worn by Harrison Ford in Raiders of the Lost Arc, we go to the Tower hotel where Darcy has booked a room. We sit in the Gallery, which has a magnificent view of London Bridge, discussing the details of arming the umbrella, over a few glasses of Guinness. He gives me a folder with very precise instructions based on information from Scotland Yard on similar umbrellas unearthed in a former KGB storeroom. There are photos and step-by-step directions. Ikea could learn a lot from Scotland Yard. Darcy gives me an envelope with the ricin at the end of the meeting. Before leaving, I have one very special request for Darcy. It will help me tremendously when I get to Bulgaria, but isn't the type of thing that Gabriel would include in his planning.

When I get back to my hotel, there is an umbrella on my bed with a note that says "Practice." Thanks for the vote of confidence, guys. This is a good idea no matter how much it may wound my self-esteem. I get to work creating, installing, and testing the delivery system in the practice umbrella. Everything seems to be in working order. The whole process takes no longer than 40 minutes, which I think is great time. So I get started on the Swaine Adeney Brigg umbrella, and finish that one in 35 minutes. Not bad. I now have two fully loaded, weaponized umbrellas at my disposal, and plenty of time, and poison, to spare. I order some bleach from the front desk. It arrives along with the special delivery from my man Darcy. I mix the remaining ricin with the bleach and flush the "cocktail" down the toilet.

The next morning, I embark on my journey to the Balkans. My Satchel & Page leather pilot's bag does not have enough clothes for the amount of time this task will undoubtedly require and the two umbrellas are a tad conspicuous. But I arranged my trip to include a midnight train to Bulgaria. I once read a spy novel that included that and, ever since, it has struck me as a particularly secret agent-y thing to do. As I step onto the train, I set my iPod to play the Rabbit in the Moon mix of Perfecto's "Bullet in the Gun." That song always manages to get me into a man-of-mystery mind frame. I'm going to need my blood flowing on this trip. This isn't a game of dress-up with toy pistols. The Bulgarian mafia is known to be ruthless. I've got to be careful. Trains are great for travel because I can carry some protection. It's too warm to carry Donna, my Kel-Tec PLR-16, (which is aptly named because you donna wanna fuck wit' her) since I need a coat to conceal

her, but I did bring Pat, my Kel-Tec P-3AT -the smallest .380 semi-automatic pistol in existence. I'm not expecting anything to happen this early in the trip, but that is no reason to get caught with my pants down if someone decides to get cute.

Besides the firepower and electronic music, I also brought along three books to help me with my Bulgarian history as well as current events. I have Robert Kaplan's Balkan Ghosts, and two by Mischa Glenny - The Balkans and McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld. The trip from London to Sofia is a long one, but I have plenty to read for the ride. Gabriel always makes sure I get a strong background on the current socio-political climate wherever I'm going, but there's a part of me that really appreciates a historian's touch. As far as I'm concerned, there's nothing worse than a debriefing that feels like a debriefing. Besides, Gabriel's CIA's "facts" are always a little slanted anyway.

In between chapters, I go over the files on the client, as well as the target. The man I'm after is Iosif Velikov, one of the most powerful mobsters in all of Bulgaria. His top man and bodyguard is Anton Medarov, a champion wrestler who even made it to the Olympics twice. Unfortunately, he had incredibly bad luck. In 1980, he was disqualified for doping, so watched as a spectator while one of his countrymen won a gold medal. In 1984, Bulgaria sided with Russia in the boycott of the Summer Games held in L.A. The two grew up together in Sofia, but while Medarov hit the weights, Velikov hit the road, going to Russia to make money. He ended up working for the KGB, spying on local dissenters. Eventually, he moved up in the ranks, finding himself planning hits on high-profile targets throughout the Eastern Bloc. There is even a theory that he was involved in the 1978 assassination of Georgi Markov. The irony is not lost on me there. But here's the amazing one - Velikov is rumored to have been one of the organizers of the KGB's attempted assassination of a Polish priest, Karol Wojtyla, then also known as Pope John Paul II. When the assassination failed Iosif, the lone Bulgarian at the table, took the fall. He was kicked out of his position and sent back to Sofia to work for the Bulgarian Intelligence Service. He remained there, in a markedly lower profile, until the end of Communism.

Once the Iron Curtain dropped, Velikov used some of his old Intelligence knowledge and contacts to steal recently discovered Thracian artifacts and made a boatload of cash selling them on the Black Market. From there, he began selling artwork from the National History Museum to buyers in

London. The success of that venture emboldened him to organize and devote his full attention to smuggling. Starting off with gun-running, Papagala enlisted former buddies from Bulgarian Intelligence and the State Security service.

When his old friend Anton, with his penchant for fast living, found himself without all that Soviet money backing his training program, he was out on the streets and quick. Anton turned to Velikov for help, and the two have been working together since. All of the Papagala's dirty deeds are covered up by the extremely convenient front company, IVS (Iosif Velikov Security), a high profile private security force for anyone who needs expensive, quality protection. Mostly that means Bulgarian pop stars, but he does have an exclusive contract with Jean-Claude VanDamme to provide security for all of the films he shoots in Bulgaria. Now, all of that is pretty damned interesting, but I opt for more historical research. I need to have a good understanding of the situation I'm entering.

Balkan Ghosts provides a traveling guide with a great historical perspective. Glenny's history book is much more detailed and offers less of an outsider's point of view, but really tries to shine a light on the complex history of Southeastern Europe. McMafia reads like crime fiction, detailing the sordid history and dealings of international crime syndicates. The sections focusing on the Balkans are very well researched. I get regular debriefings on world happenings from CIA databases, and this book actually fills in some holes. Hey, I didn't say I read 'em all. The Bulgarian mafia is particularly alarming because they have managed to openly control government and business so much that public officials and business leaders are gunned down in the streets, and no one is ever brought to justice. These men enjoy a ridiculous amount of leeway to do their business, and I will have to tread carefully.

After 15 hours and 3 trains, I arrive in Vienna a little after 11:30 pm. All things considered, the ride was quite pleasant, and rather quick, considering that I have passed through four countries by now. By this time I'm pretty well caught-up with my Eastern European education, but it's too late to catch a train to Bulgaria now. I get a hotel near the train station

and sleep like a baby. I get an 8 am train and “interesting” is definitely the word that best befits the experience in my Communist-era sleeper car. The inside looks like the exterior of a station wagon from the 70’s –lots of wood paneling, brown colored plastic, and metal finishes. No food or water is provided, my bunk has a disturbing rattle to it, and to top it all off, the luggage rack fell off the wall! I wanted to feel like a Cold War spy, and this is assuredly as close as I will ever come.

**Bulgaria** - Finally arriving in Sofia a little after 6:30am, I’m happy to see that Darcy hasn’t let me down. I’d requested that he book me a suite in the Hotel Anel and that he get me two bottles of Gentleman Jack. The bottles are the first things I see when I enter the room. One has a tag that reads: “For a rainy day, Love Stella,” with a phone number. I open it and pour myself a glass on the rocks – it’s been a long trip. My Blackberry starts buzzing. It’s an email from Darcy with info on Stella (always with the debriefings...). As it is, this was another of my requests. I asked the fat man to get me the contact of a reputable Madam in town. Scanning the email, the words “Interpol,” “London Daily Mirror,” and “scandal” appear more than once. Looks like I’ve found my gal.

I finish my drink, then go about checking the rooms. I need to know where all the windows are, what direction my room faces, and how many escape routes I have. Of what material is the furniture made? Is it heavy? Can any of these things protect me in a firefight, or at the least, hide me? I also have to keep in mind where things are around the suite and approximate distances between rooms. I’m not expecting any trouble, but I need to be prepared just the same.

After finishing, I shower and contemplate another drink, but its only 10am. I put on a turquoise polo shirt with white paints, have a shot, and head downstairs to withdraw money. At the front desk, I enquire about shopping. I’m going to need different clothes from what I packed for my tennis excursion to England. The bell boy calls a cab to take me to the shopping district, and then I get right down to business.

I’m satisfied with my purchases about three hours later, then make my way back to the hotel. High-end shopping is something you can do with

relative ease in any country, no matter if you know the language or not. First of all, certain name brands are available almost everywhere, but it's mostly because money talks - no matter where you are. Back in my suite, I order a cheeseburger from room service, since whiskey and coffee are the only things in my system just now. I contemplate the rest of the day's events while waiting for my food, but can't help thinking that I've bought more than I need. Sometimes I can't help myself. After leaving the Marines, I spent a little over a year modeling in Milan, and ever since I've been more fashion oriented. I enjoy shopping, there's just no other way to put it. After eating I call Stella. She gives me some instructions and we arrange to meet downstairs in the restaurant's hotel at 3pm.

I arrive at the restaurant at 3:07 - so as not to appear overeager. As promised, Stella is waiting for me wearing a black kimono-like top with black design and trim and white pants. She's a tallish natural blonde with brown eyes, somewhere in her early forties, though looks no older than 35. There's definitely a part of me that's hoping she's planned to come out of retirement for one last mambo - to go out with a bang, as they say. She looks me up and down, motions for me to take the seat next to her.

"I know your type. Rich American. You want European girl to fuck you silly like American girls cannot."

Her accent is rather thick, reminiscent of the Baroness from G.I. Joe (which makes her even sexier). She holds out her hand.

"Passport," she says.

I give her a passport with my undercover name, Anderson Howe. She takes a picture of it with an iPhone and emails it to someone.

"No funny business with my girls. You hurt my girl, I hurt you back."

"Fair enough," I say.

She removes the one thousand Euros from the back of my passport, as we discussed earlier.

"You said you want my best. I give you choice." She motions to another table where two stunning young women sit. "The blonde is Lilia, 19 years old. The brunette is Ivona, 20 years old."

Both young women look like models, about 5'8" and slim, but not skinny. Lilia looks exactly like a Barbie doll. Ivona has a darker complexion and is more exotic.

Ivona left my hotel room at about 8:30 in the evening, and was able to provide me with very useful information. While prostitutes can be found easily enough anywhere, high-end call girls are extremely valuable tools in situations such as this. I have to find this Papagala guy, but don't even have a lead on where to start. That's where Ivona comes in. Young, expensive escorts tend to party in the most exclusive places and rub elbows with powerful local villains. I tipped her €500 to tell me where to find Iosif Velikov and keep her trap shut about it. Turns out, Velikov is part-owner of a swanky piano bar called Asparukh, and spends a good deal of time there. Our intrepid young employer has been keeping his distance from the family for quite some time and information like what I just got wouldn't turn up in a CIA report. Iosif Velikov just isn't someone they give a damn about at the moment. The War on Drugs and the War on Terror are the greatest things to happen to international criminals not in South America or the Middle East. But that does not concern me. Now I have a place to start. I also made sure to have Ivona teach me how to say certain things to help get around. (Google Translate works just as well if you don't have access to the same resources that I do.) I will have to pass myself off as a tourist, so I don't want my Bulgarian to sound too good or rehearsed. But I also want it to be good enough to earn a little respect.

Asparukh is located near the National Palace of Culture, a nighttime hotspot in Sofia. After a nap, I dress to impress and make my way to Asparukh at 12:30 am. Walking up to the place, it is immediately obvious that piano bars here are nothing like piano bars in the US. There is definitely no lounge lizard behind some Korean Steinway knock-off playing to middle-aged Midwestern tourists drinking merlot here. There are four beautiful fire dancers outside of Asparukh. I watch them do an amazing show with choreography that is a mix of pseudo-tribal and techno moves. I snap out of it and step into the club. The inside looks more like a downtown dance club than what traditionally passes for a piano bar in the states. A

round stage, large enough for a piano and several singers, dominates the center of the room. A crescent-shaped bar lines the wall behind the stage. Lighting throughout the place alternates seamlessly between cool hues of blue and green.

At the bar I order a glass of Jack Daniels on the rocks. Drink in-hand, I do a couple laps around the club, taking in as much as possible. The place is starting to fill up so I have to see as much as I can before it's too full in here. I'm just stepping up to the bar for a refill, and then, there he is, Iosif Velikov walks past me. He's got a dark olive complexion and is wearing a straw fedora, which is unmistakably a Borsalino, with black shirt, pants and jacket – giving him a distinctly Italian feel, much more so than Eastern European.

“Papagala!” I shout after him. The immediate area around me goes quiet, just like in a movie. Out of nowhere, a short man rushes over and punches me in the stomach. I double over sucking air like I'm breathing through a straw. When I can stand up straight, I'm looking in the eyes of a very intense and very powerful Bulgarian gangster.

“My name is Anderson Howe,” nervously presenting my hand. He doesn't shake. “Mladen Raynov is my stock broker. I'm visiting from New York. He said I could find you here, and to call you ‘Papagala.’ He said you'd get a kick out of it.” I really sell the fear and confusion. I look around a lot, particularly at the man who hit me. I definitely plan on remembering his face, though. I hope to get the opportunity to repay him in kind. There are several large bald men dressed in black, displaying lots of gold jewelry standing around us.

“Do you know what this means, ‘Papagala?’ What you have just called me?”

I shake my head “no.”

“What else did my nephew tell you about me?”

“He said that you'd be the most important person in the place and that I should buy you a glass of Jack Daniels.”

Velikov looks at his drink-less hand, then back at me. I grin toothy compliance. Raising my hand to get a bartender's attention, I am seen almost immediately by a gorgeous young bargirl, and dismissed just as quickly. She goes back to drying glasses, and then stops for a moment. She looks back in my direction and I can only assume that she has now noticed the company I

currently keep because she rushes over to me, almost dropping a glass in the process.

“Do you have Gentleman Jack?” I ask, leaning in closer than I really need to. She nods. I show two fingers and smile as I indicate myself and Iosif. She nods again and is gone in a heartbeat.

“She must think you’re cuter than I am.”

“I would say, yes, but I also own this bar.”

“Nice one. Then I have come to the right place.” The bargirl comes back with our glasses.

I raise my glass, maintaining eye-contact with Iosif (as is customary).

“*Nasdrave.*”<sup>7</sup>

The Parrot doesn’t respond. He only glares at me.

“My nephew, he is good for you, yes,” he finally says. “He make money for you, yes?”

“Yes. He’s quite good at what he does.”

“*Super.*” He motions to the bartender to pour a round for his associates.

“*Butilkata*” I say - telling her to bring the bottle.

“You speak my language, eh?”

“Not really. But everything I know, I learned from Mladen. He is a good friend.”

“A friend that makes money for you is the best kind of friend there is!”

“I will gladly drink to that!”

I wake up the next day at the crack of noon. Papagala welcomed me into his fold for the evening. I was able to observe him up close; the similarities between him and Gabriel are very interesting. Obviously they are contemporaries, both being Cold War-era spies, so they share a common history. These men truly are members of the last generation of great covert operatives. They were able to operate successfully in an atmosphere of intense fear and paranoia. The game is different today - technological

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<sup>7</sup> Bulgarian for “Good health”

advancements have made the world a much smaller place than it was 30 years ago. Men like Velikov and Gabriel engaged in as many psychological war games as they did real world operations. Hell, for all I know, this could be a personal vendetta that Gabriel is paying back, using this whole thing as a cover. It would be hard to probe that kind of information out of Papagala so I'll just have to confront Gabriel about it when I get back to New York.

Spending the brief time that I did with the old man really gave me a good sense of his personality. He shows his lieutenants respect by bringing them out with him, since being in his presence at high profile clubs makes them notorious by association. But he walks the fine line of cavorting with underlings and actually fraternizing with them. While the old man could surely outdrink any of the men who work under him, he keeps a quiet reserve and it is clear that he would never allow his men to see him intoxicated. They, of course, know this and respect him all the more for it. For my part, I had to maintain a realistic level of false drunkenness just to make it through the night. If I'd aroused any suspicion last night, I certainly wouldn't be waking up today in the comfort of my hotel room. But before I can pat myself on the back just for being alive, I see her.

The bargirl is in my room rummaging through my bag. I know I didn't bring her here last night. As I watch her gingerly pick through my luggage, I wonder how she got here. I pause just a moment to take note of how long her hair is. It is a perfectly straight, medium brown color and flows all the way down to her waist. If she were a gift of some sort (or even a spy) from Papagala, she wouldn't be going through my things first. A hired killer would have put a bullet between my eyes before doing anything else. So she definitely isn't a pro. She has already poured herself a glass of my Gentleman Jack (I see the glass with her lipstick mark on a nearby table). My guess is she needed a little nip to calm her nerves. Luckily I packed light and she is finished rather quickly. She looks disappointed.

"If you want a souvenir after last night, don't get a new pair - I'd rather you take the underwear I already have on.

The bargirl jumps, startled. But she recovers quickly, then wheels around with the reflexes of a leopard and throws the glass at my head. I duck just in time, pausing for a moment to lament the wasted Gentleman Jack as it runs down the wall behind me. I leap off the bed and am on her with a good rugby tackle in the living room - thank God I decided to book this

extravagantly large room. I'm on top of her, pinning her arms to the floor like you've seen in every action movie ever made.

"What are you doing here," I ask her.

"Get off of me!"

"First things first. You're not a thief. You're not a killer. You're not even a prostitute. You're a bartender. Why are you here?"

"You smell like baboon. Let me up and I will talk."

I get up slowly.

"How do you know what a baboon smells like, anyway?"

Before she can make a break for it, I block her path to the door. As hard as she tries, the bargirl can't stifle her disappointment when she realizes my move. The kid's got spunk. I hate spunk.

So it turns out that the bargirl is Tsvetana Reynova, sister of Mladen Reynov and niece of Iosif Velikov. After spying on me all night, she spoke to her brother about me and didn't like the answers she was getting. So naturally, she comes straight to my hotel and bribes her way into my room to go through my things. On the train into Bulgaria, I'd gotten some very interesting advice: "Women in Bulgaria are like March in Bulgaria - be prepared for anything." I get that now.

As I begin lying to her about who I am, the door to my room bursts open and five angry bald men wearing all black file in quickly. The last man in is Anton Medarov. Even in a fine Italian suit this man looks like a refrigerator. He bounds across the room (rather nimbly for someone his size) and towers over me. Breathing hard in my face, he's all nostrils to me. Medarov takes off his sunglasses, revealing an intense pair of deep set blue eyes. I hold his gaze.

While I've never fought a wrestler, my savate<sup>8</sup> training should match well with someone his size. He won't move as well as I can and I can use his size against him. I'm about to punch him in the throat when he begins yelling at me in Bulgarian. He gesticulates wildly, slamming his meaty hands against his chests and indicating his fists. I think he's trying to ask me if I think I'm tough. I restrain myself for the moment. Since I can't tell if this is just posturing or an actual threat, I'm going to keep my cool and try not to blow my cover. I glance over at Tsvetana for some sort of

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<sup>8</sup> French kick-oriented martial art based on street fighting

explanation. Hell, she may have called him to back her play. She looks confused, shaking her head “no.” She doesn’t know why he’s here either.

The big man notices me looking at Tsvetana and turns to her. He must not have noticed her when he came in because he looks very surprised. He looks back and forth between her and me then starts shouting at her in Bulgarian. Again, with a lightning fast move, he grabs her arm to lead her out of the room. As he rushes to the door, he swings his free arm over his head in a short, circular motion. I think he just told his boys to kick my ass.

The guys in the punishing squad move to surround me. Luckily I’m near a wall, so I have a guy in front of me, one behind, and two to my left. The man in front of me gets it the worst – using my left leg, I strike out at his kneecap with a *Chasse bas*<sup>9</sup>, followed by a hard *Fuette*<sup>10</sup> to his temple. He goes down and likely won’t be getting back up to fight. Immediately after, I swing my left leg around to mule kick the solar plexus of the guy behind me. This expeditiously frees up my 12 and my 6. I just took out half the group with one leg and the other two guys look as ready to brawl as they did before their comrades went down. The closest nutri to me gets a hard side kick to his liver. As he whimpers, I launch myself onto the last guy, ramming my knee into his midsection repeatedly, while holding his neck for leverage. He is, by far, the largest of the four men and doesn’t go down easily. In fact, he picks me up and tosses me onto the bed. Not getting the help he expected from his friends, he decides for a very direct approach. He’s barreling toward the bed but I have just enough time to deliver my heel into his chin, taking out all of his momentum – very abruptly. He collapses to the floor with a groan.

I was going to spend the afternoon photographing the National Theatre and the Gypsy ghettos on the outskirts of Sofia, but that just isn’t going to happen now. I have to figure out what the Hell is going on here. Medarov was majorly upset with me about God knows what, but didn’t know that little sister was here. Tsvetana looked just as surprised as I was then the brute squad showed up. Mike Tyson once said “Everybody has a plan, until they get punched in the face.” I just got punched in the face. Later on, when I’m writing my memoirs, perhaps I’ll use something like “In the Corps, we have a saying ‘Proper Planning Prevents Piss Poor Procedure.’ But who could plan

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<sup>9</sup> a low side kick used to knock an opponent off balance while injuring the targeted area

<sup>10</sup> a quick, whipping roundhouse kick

for stuff like this?" Yeah, I like that. Either way, too many variables have been introduced to this equation and I really don't feel like solving for Y. So I stomp each guy in the groin, grab some clothes and make a run for it.

I don't bother reporting the incident at the front desk. Why bother? The same person who led those goons up to my room certainly won't be telephoning the police. Besides, if I can get outside fast enough, I may still be able to see where Anton is taking Tsvetana. I have no reason to believe she is in any danger, but there really is no place I can go for safety. Really I just need to not be in the room when those guys are able to stand again.

Outside, Tsvetana is arguing with Anton Medarov. He looks like a father attempting to discipline his teenaged daughter. Eventually they both throw up their hands in frustration. It looks like they are going to agree to disagree. Medarov walks off in a huff, still managing to look calm and collected while putting his sunglasses on and lighting a cigarette. In the Tarantino version of these events<sup>11</sup>, this would have happened in slow motion. While the big guy is doing his cool tough-guy walk, I run over and grab Tsvetana.

We find a small spot out of view and wait in the vestibule. Soon, I see the Neanderthal gang drag themselves off the elevator and, presumably, through the lobby and out on to the street. Tsvetana can barely stifle her amusement as they hobble out of view.

Back in my room, I see that the men in black didn't rummage through my things. As I figured, they were too embarrassed and sore to do anything but pull themselves together and leave. What they did do was take both my bottles of Gentleman Jack. Dammit.

As I pack, Tsvetana explains that Medarov was here to bash my skull in because Madam Stella told him that I beat one of her girls. Obviously this is a sting operation to get money out of me. I was supposed to be threatened with physical brutality and God knows what else, then cough up a large sum of cash to make it all go away. Madam Stella would then also retain the right to continue blackmailing me into oblivion. She does have a copy of my passport. Even though it is a fake, she doesn't know that. I bet they've done it a hundred times over. The important thing here is that Medarov is

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<sup>11</sup> Note to self, contact Quentin Tarantino

either involved with Stella romantically or just doing business with her. Neither is very good for me.

It's a good thing for me that Tsvetana kept her wits about her and realized that if I were into beating women, I likely would not have passed on the opportunity with her. But now she wants more answers out of me. I maintain my story that I'm a client of her brother and am just here on vacation. I can tell she doesn't believe me, but what choice does she have? It just makes me feel even worse that I'm only in this country to murder her uncle. I really don't need to think about that right now. What I need is a new plan.

Speeding down a Bulgarian highway in a stolen Audi A5 is not how I envisioned myself spending this day. This is part of the new plan. Today was supposed to be a day of rest. Just last night I met the man I'm here to kill. He's a violent criminal, and all around bad person, but we drank together and told jokes like old friends. That actually was part of the plan. As a Marine Corps sniper, getting up close and personal with the target isn't ever part of the job description. But now that I'm an international-man-of-mystery-for-hire, the game is a bit different. Now I also have to think about things like remembering driving gloves when stealing a car, so as not to leave fingerprints, and making sure to steal a car with a GPS. Still, James Bond never got double-crossed and outplayed by an Eastern European madam. So instead of lazing the day away taking photos and sitting in cafés, I've spent the last forty minutes kidnapping said Eastern European madam so she can lead me to her boyfriend, who just happens to be my mark's best friend and trusted lieutenant. There are twenty other ways I could lure this guy out, but I'd be lying if I said that the idea of tying dear Stella up and throwing her into the trunk of her own car wasn't a major motivation. She set me up real good and I definitely believe that retribution is a dish best served cold and quickly. I won't torture her, but she doesn't need to know that.

When we get to the meeting spot, it'll be improv time, but Anton Medarov will be alone and I should be able to handle him by himself. He's already underestimated me once and I can only hope he'll do it again. I

can't help starting to feel a bit anxious now (truth be told, though, my adrenaline's been up since I opened my eyes today). Things have come to a head much faster than I expected. But the time is now. Waiting is not an option when your enemy is a master spy, turned crime kingpin and you're playing on his home turf. I have to roll with the punches and get my game face on. The Ricin umbrella guns are lying on the backseat but I don't even know if I'll have a chance to use them. Even if I don't, this thing has to be quiet. The whole point of the job is to decrease public violence in this country.

Tsvetana told me that Velikov will be hiking in the Rila Mountains today, so he will be somewhat isolated. I've got to take this opportunity. Medarov would normally be with him, so its divide and conquer time. I can keep him away from Velikov using Stella as the bait. This is the only chance I have of pulling this off. I don't know if Medarov told Velikov anything about me, but Tsvetana was there, so the Parrot knows that much. You don't have to be a Cold War spy to figure out that the American from the bar last night and the American who dismantled a crew of mugs this morning could be the same person. Medarov wants to meet at Bobov Dol near the coal mines. This doesn't exactly bode well, given the circumstances. There is a chance that Medarov told Velikov who he is meeting, but I doubt it. I certainly wouldn't, were I in his shoes - not that much has gone the way I expected since I arrived here in Bulgaria.

The coal mines are about 45 minutes outside of Sofia, roughly midway to the Rila Mountain range. Construction of a solar park was recently completed right on top of the coal mines. This is where I am to meet Medarov. I'm standing at the base of what looks like a satellite dish made of heliostat panels. There are sixteen such solar dishes arranged in a diamond formation, all pointing at a large receiver tower. Several feet to my right is what I can only imagine is the control center where the monitors and central computer do their work. Much like wind turbines, heliostats require very little supervision, as everything is controlled by a single computer. There are only two cars parked behind the control center, so support staff here is minimal to say the least.

Anton Medarov's black Rolls Royce Phantom Drophead Coupe speeds to a halt a few feet in front of me. You never forget just how large a man like Anton Medarov is. Especially how small it makes you feel. He gets out of the car and just stares at me. There is an inherent amount of menace when a man like him just looks at you, but I don't get the feeling he is trying to intimidate me. I take care of that part all on my own. I push that down and try to keep my cool. Walking nonchalantly over to my car, I pop the trunk. Stella tries to scream and kicks out at me. Luckily I gagged her or, I have no doubt, she'd be biting me too. Her fear is unnerving. I suddenly don't like being in this position. I could drag her out by her hair - put on a real tough guy act for Anton. But it isn't necessary. Pulling her into my arms like a fireman rescuing a child, I lift Stella from the trunk and set her down on her feet. She doesn't thrash and rage against me, thank God. Anton looks her up and down then returns his gaze to me.

"I like Americans very much," he finally says. "You, I do not like. What is all of this for?"

"Let's just say I didn't like the circumstances of our first meeting."

"I do not like circumstances either. Stella tell you not to beat girl. You beat girl. So I beat you. Is fair. You think I like driving across whole city for that?"

"But I didn't beat anyone. Well, except for your friends this morning. No one told me not to beat them." Something's going on here. Why keep up the charade? Did Stella lie to him? There's only one way to find out. I pull the scarf down that covers Madame Stella's mouth. She spits in my face without hesitation.

"What have you told him?" I say, wiping saliva out of my eye. "You know I didn't do anything to Ivona."

"Why I know that? You hit her. So many bruises on her face. Very bad. It take weeks before she make money again."

I'm really beginning to feel out of my depth here. I take a moment to curse Gabriel Sexton then get back into improvisation mode.

"I don't know what you two are talking about. I didn't hit Ivona. But the best thing for you to do is get in your car and go back home."

Stella walks cautiously over to Anton, looking back at me over her shoulder every now and again. Once back in the big man's arms, she says something in Bulgarian. Medarov waves her off then opens the suicide door to let her inside. She quickly grows agitated. Although I can't understand

what she's actually saying, the point is quite clear. She speaks sternly, gesturing toward me often. She's shaming him into a fight. This is so not good. I can see his mood changing. It'd be easier for him to take me down than listen to her go on about it. Or so he thinks. He may be a Bulgarian Olympic wrestler, but his best days are way behind him at this point. The sigh he lets out is big and heavy, just like everything else about him.

The big guy starts walking toward me. I quickly reach into the backseat and pull out the two umbrellas. By the time I get out, Medarov is standing basically on top of me. He stands there for a moment, just breathing on me. This all seems very familiar. He looks at the umbrellas and a smile slowly creeps across his face. He chuckles. The next thing I know, I'm moving backward, propelled by a blow to the stomach that almost knocks the wind out of me and has definitely cracked at least one rib. I deserve this.

Acting as quickly as I can, I take off my jacket, hold it by a sleeve and whip it once around my left hand. Then I grab the closest umbrella with my right. I discovered Achille Marozzo during my last year in the Corps. He was an Italian fencing master who had the same name as me, so I was very interested in him. While in Italy, I had the opportunity to study his system. I was fascinated by his techniques. He taught his students to fight with two swords, as well as the "cloak and dagger" method.

Right now I'm about to introduce Anton Medarov to Achille Marozzo's cloak and dagger technique. I can tell I look real funny to the big guy, maybe even a little desperate. Then again, the goal of this technique is to mask your intentions... Now the big guy is charging me like a bull escaped from Pamplona. I have just enough time to lunge forward and take a wild swing at his face with my cloaked left hand. This perfectly disguises the umbrella coming under my arm in a sweeping right backhand motion. The impact with Medarov's skull shatters the umbrella, but I'm able to put enough mustard on it to drop him. His ear is bleeding and he's clearly dazed. I think I've made my point - he's not getting up for another attack. This is the perfect opportunity to dash back to my car and make a run for the Rila Mountains.

I hear tires screeching to a stop before I actually register the car visually, because of all the dust it scatters. I use the term "car" loosely. It's a black 4-door Mercedes G-Wagen that was probably brand new five seconds ago. The driver side window comes down and I'm staring at the barrel of a

PP-2000 Russian submachine gun. Behind that barrel is the guy who punched me last night. He smiles an impish grin and winks at me. Good, the little bastard remembers me like I remember him.

“Get in.” Papagala’s voice is firm, though not threatening, resonating from the backseat. I really have no choice but to comply. Opening the door there is Velikov in all his glory, seated casually behind the passenger seat, wearing a white linen suit and the same Borsalino from last night. He looks past me to say something in Bulgarian to Medarov. Now on his feet, the big man pulls his cell phone out of his pocket and stares at it. Seeing him there, with that confused look on his face, his ear caked with blood and dust, and noting the look of anger and disappointment on Stella’s face, I almost feel bad for the man. Papagala had been listening to our whole conversation from a comfortable distance. You don’t even have to be ex-KGB to pull that one off. Anyone can set someone else’s phone to automatic answer and silent mode. After that, eavesdropping is as simple as making a phone call.

“You always bug your friends?”

The old man shrugs. “I had to know when to make my entrance.”

I get in the car and close the door. Short Round behind the wheel finally stops pointing his gun at me long enough to drive off. We’re going back toward Sofia.

“So much for a quiet walk in the mountains today, eh?”

“I like this game more.”

“And what game would that be?” I ask.

“Game with you. You are desperate and stupid, but still better enemy than Bulgarian gangster.”

“I’m touched.”

“You see, Bulgaria is country where strength is most important. I am not strong man. I am smart man. Smarter is always better. Besides, violence has nothing to do with strength. Violence is also very important in Bulgaria. Violence, I am very good at.”

I really need to change the subject. I don’t like where this conversation is going at all. “So, what’s going on here?”

“Is game. Your friend Ivona told another girl about you. That girl is my friend. She tell me what Ivona tell her. So I sent Pavel,” he says while nodding toward the driver, “to punish Ivona this morning. He tells Stella

that you hit Ivona. Stella tells Anton, who goes to your hotel to punish you. You were very convincing last night and very surprising today.”

“What can I say? It’s a gift. It’s in my blood.”

“But then you get desperate and stupid, and make big mess. Even though you beat Anton, you still lose. You are mine now. Who sent you does not matter. Who you really are does not matter. But I have friends in Sofia who will enjoy finding out all answers. It is a shame though. You just need more preparation. Regrettably, you will not live long enough to get the training you need. You are too impulsive.”

I damn sure am. Leaping forward, I grab the stubby driver by the head and twist hard, dislocating his spinal column from his brain. The car is going faster now. Pavel must have had his foot on the accelerator. So now I’m reaching over Pavel and driving at increasing speed - from the backseat. And I have no idea where I’m going. Other than that I’m in complete control of the situation, to some degree. I hear Papagala laughing to my side.

“What will you do now, little assassin?”

I ignore him.

In my periphery, I see Medarov’s Rolls Royce pull up alongside us. Stella sees me and immediately alerts Anton. He instinctually rams the G-Wagen. We’re in the larger vehicle, so not much damage is done, but at this speed, I can’t take too many more hits without losing control. Before I can maneuver Pavel’s leg off the gas pedal, Stella pulls out Anton’s copper-plated Desert Eagle and starts waving it in my general direction. I have my doubts that she could do any damage with that thing. Hell, she’s more likely to hurt herself. Still, anyone can get lucky. I reach over and grab the PP-2000. I point it at her and she gets the message. She quickly convinces Medarov to speed up and pass us. This is my chance. I pull myself up and into the passenger seat and bank hard to the left. The car turns hard and just before it starts to flip over I force Pavel’s body out the driver’s side door and use it to shield my fall. The car flips over no less than three times before clipping Medarov’s car, which spins out of control and runs off the road into a ditch. The G-Wagen doesn’t catch fire and explode, like it would in most action movies. It just slides down the road before skidding to a loud, screeching stop.

I grab Pat from my ankle holster and approach the wreck slowly. I don’t want to have to use any bullets, but this all has to end now, one way or another. With 18 confirmed kills in my short sniper career, patience is

not an issue for me. I hold my position for two minutes in anticipation of movement, any at all. Nothing happens. I'm not concerned with Anton or Stella. Their crash didn't seem fatal, but then I didn't have time to notice if either was wearing a seat belt. I put Pat away and jog all the way back to Bobov Dol to retrieve my stolen car.

On the drive back to Sofia, I stop to inspect the G-Wagen one last time. Iosif Velikov is slumped against his window, motionless. I am suddenly reminded of something I saw in Mladen Raynov's file. He was listed as an associate of a murdered Bulgarian businessman, the most recent killing in which Iosif Papagala was the primary suspect. I really hope this wasn't a revenge killing. While I understand that a bad man is dead and that it's a good thing, I'm not enthused about risking my life to be an executioner. The only sign of Medarov's car is the skid marks left behind as he peeled away from the ditch. I can't wait to go home.

I'm on a plane to Italy now. On my way to the airport I got a call from Nancy Pierce, a nurse for *Medecins Sans Frontieres*<sup>12</sup>. She is in Italy taking care of Sudanese refugees who are not receiving the urgent care they need from the Italian government. She wants me to take some photos to try to get the word out and force the Italians to change their stance. Nancy is one of my closest friends and after this little trip, I'm looking forward to seeing her even more than usual.

My thoughts drift to Tsvetana. It won't take her long to figure out why I was there. She will inevitably feel used. I regret that I won't have the chance to explain things to her properly. But Hell, I feel worse for her brother. I can only imagine how their relationship will suffer because of this. For some reason this situation just does not sit well with me. I work with Gabriel Sexton because I trust him. No, I work with Gabriel's Archangel

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<sup>12</sup> Doctors Without Borders

Security Consultants because I trust that he has a genuine desire to do good in the world since retiring from the CIA. But I don't completely trust Gabriel Sexton. There is nothing inside me that doubts the old man could cook up a scheme like this just to take out a Cold War rival. I need sleep. None of these things really matter anyway. The Parrot is dead and Bulgaria is completely safe now. You're welcome.

END