

The background of the cover is a dark, grainy, black and white photograph of a city skyline at night. The focus is on the rooftops of several buildings, some with skylights. The sky is filled with numerous small, bright stars and larger, fainter celestial bodies, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

AMANDA McCRINA

THE
SILENT
UNSEEN

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX
NEW YORK

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For Elizabeth

On the second day after the Red Army invaded Germany, we saw eight hundred Soviet children walking eastwards on the road, the column stretching for many kilometres. Some soldiers and officers were standing by the road, peering into their faces intently and silently. They were fathers looking for their children who had been taken to Germany. One colonel had been standing there for several hours, upright, stern, with a dark, gloomy face. He went back to his car in the dusk: He hadn't found his son.

—Vasily Grossman, *A Writer at War: A Soviet Journalist with the Red Army, 1941–1945*

HISTORICAL NOTE

By late July 1944, the war in Europe has been raging for nearly five years.

German forces are being pushed back on both fronts. Britain and the United States have gained a foothold in France. The Soviet Red Army, with the help of the Polish Resistance, is advancing through Poland.

As the Germans retreat west, the Soviets move to consolidate power in Poland, already anticipating a new postwar order of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. They start disarming and arresting Polish Resistance soldiers. At the same time, they begin a brutal campaign against the UPA, Ukrainian nationalist partisans attempting to carve out an independent Ukraine from Poland's disputed southeastern borderlands.

The Polish Resistance and the UPA have fought each other bitterly and bloodily through the years of German occupation. Historic grievances and injustices have become excuses for atrocities. Civilians have suffered the brunt of it. Tens of thousands have died—Polish civilians in massacres by the UPA, Ukrainian

civilians in targeted reprisals by the Resistance. Now both sides, Polish and Ukrainian, face the prospect of another long occupation, another long war against another oppressive regime.

Both sides look to the western Allies for help against the Soviets once Germany is finally defeated. But western help is months away—if it comes at all.

Neither can afford to wait that long.

And neither can hope to win this war alone.

Southeastern Poland

SUMMER 1944



Map by Gene Thorp



1

MARIA

LWÓW, POLAND

FRIDAY, JULY 28, 1944

SOMEBODY HAD SHOT A POLITICAL OFFICER.

At least—I thought. My Russian wasn't anything at all to be proud of. But I had been handcuffed to this chair in this office listening to the junior officer out at the front desk shout into a telephone for over an hour, and I was pretty sure that was what he was saying between expletives: Somebody murdered a *zampolit* last night—yes, murder—shot twice from behind at close range.

The culprit seemed to be one of their own men, which meant it wasn't me. I doubted I would be *here*, sitting relatively comfortably in this office, if they thought it was me.

My pistol, the Walther they took off me when they arrested me this morning, sat on the desk in front of me, pointing at me accusingly. It was half the reason I was here—carrying a weapon

without authorization—and I guessed it was in here as evidence. It was the *only* thing I was carrying, which was the other half of the reason. I didn't have any papers. I had a perfectly valid excuse, but so far nobody had been interested in listening to it. Everybody had just assumed I was Polish Resistance—a courier, perhaps, and apparently stupid enough to blunder right into a Soviet patrol.

The problem was I didn't know how to prove I *wasn't*. I knew enough about Soviet justice to know you were guilty until proven innocent. Sometimes even then.

The desk belonged to Comrade Colonel F. Volkov, 64th Rifle Division, NKVD. There was a nameplate. There were also two photographs in frames—I didn't know of what; they weren't facing me—and a fountain pen in a holder, all precisely arranged. The drab green papered walls were empty, though you could see the odd dark spot here and there where previous occupants had hung things. They were still clearing out this place from the German occupation. Lwów had been in Soviet hands for all of twenty-four hours. The dust hadn't even settled.

Somebody shut the office door behind me, muffling the sound of the ongoing telephone call.

Comrade Colonel F. Volkov came around the desk, unbuttoning his coat. He folded the coat neatly over the back of his chair, laid his briefcase on the desk, and set his smart blue cap beside it just so. Then he sat down facing me. He didn't look at me yet. He

opened his briefcase and took out a piece of paper—my arrest report, I presumed—and spent a minute reading it in silence.

I knew how these things worked. I could guarantee you he had already read it. This part was just for show. But I wasn't complaining. It gave me a chance to size him up. I would put him at thirty-five or forty, prematurely gray, handsome in a stiff, austere sort of way—absolutely unremarkable to all appearances, but I knew better. You didn't get to be comrade colonel of the NKVD by being unremarkable.

“Maria Kamińska,” he read aloud.

“*Da.*”

“You may speak in Polish,” he said disinterestedly, not looking up. “Tell me if I need to make any corrections. Polish national, sixteen years old, resident of Bród, arrested for unauthorized possession of a weapon.” He eyed the pistol just briefly. It was a German pistol, the Walther, which I assumed was doubly suspicious. “No identification.”

“Yes—I mean, no corrections.”

“Where is Bród?”

I didn't blame him for having to ask. There were about thirty-seven little villages called Bród in Poland. *Bród* just meant “river ford.” It was the sort of name I *would* make up if I were a spy or something.

“On the Słonówka River in Wołyń Province,” I told him. “Ten kilometers from Radziwiłłów.” Four days' walk east of here. I

didn't have a map, but I had divided the distance up by days on the big map in the train station back in Tarnów.

I couldn't tell whether the names meant anything to him. His face was expressionless. "Why are you in Lwów?"

I wasn't, technically. They had arrested me on the road west of the city. But I didn't think *Because your men brought me here* was the answer he was looking for.

"I'm just trying to go home," I said.

"Home from where?"

"Rüsselsheim—in Germany. The Opel automobile plant there. I was—"

"*Ostarbeiter*. Taken for slave labor." He looked up for the first time. There was something almost hungry in the way his eyes searched over my face. "You escaped?"

"During the bombing. There was an air raid—the Americans. The overseers left our barracks unguarded while they were in the bomb shelters. I started running."

"You've come from Rüsselsheim on foot?" He sounded more surprised than suspicious.

"Just from Tarnów. That's where the rail lines stopped. I hopped trains from Frankfurt."

He took out his fountain pen and made a note in Russian in the margin of the paper. "How long since you were taken?"

"Two and a half years."

The pen paused.

"That winter—after the invasion." I was careful not to say the

German invasion, which would draw awkward attention to the fact that there had also been a Soviet one. I didn't want to do anything to antagonize this man. "February twenty-third, 1942." I had held on to that date. I had held on to the memory of that morning—the last time I saw my parents' faces. I had been so afraid I would forget their faces.

Comrade Colonel F. Volkov put his pen down.

"You may find," he said carefully, "very much has changed in two and a half years."

Dear God, did he think I hadn't thought about that?

"I know," I said.

"I wouldn't go any farther east," he said.

There was a warning in his voice. It made my heart clench like a fist. "But—"

"I'll write you a pass." He opened a desk drawer. "Turn around. Go to Przemyśl. Register with the Red Cross there. It's possible they may be able to put you in touch with any of your family who might—"

He cut himself short, but I knew what he was going to say.

Who might still be alive.

It had been two and a half years. I wasn't stupid. I had heard the stories. I knew what the Germans had done to my people, to his people. There were Russian *Ostarbeiter* with me in the Opel plant.

"But I've come all this way." Helplessly, I watched him take out another piece of paper and pick up his pen. It was a struggle to keep my voice steady. Not like this—not when I was so close.

He wasn't listening. He wasn't looking at me anymore. His head was bent as he wrote. The conversation was apparently over as far as he was concerned.

"Please." Maybe I *was* stupid. He was letting me go—didn't even ask any questions about the gun—and I was arguing with him. Not even arguing. Grasping for any and every little excuse like a little kid who couldn't take no for an answer. "All I need is a few more days."

He opened another drawer and took out an ink pad and a rubber stamp. He inked a bloodred hammer-and-sickle seal on the corner of the paper. "Whatever you might find in Bród—I can guarantee it's not what you want to find."

I tried to shrug indifferently. It was awkward with my arms spread, wrists cuffed to the chair arms. "It's still home."

He didn't look up. "Not anymore. Not the home you knew."

"I promised. I told them I would come back." My throat was tight—anger and desperation and hopelessness all at once. I swallowed fiercely. I was *not* going to cry. "Please. Just four more days."

He sighed just audibly. He returned the stamp to the drawer. He slid the paper across the desk toward me under his fingertips.

"You may use it as you wish," he said, "but my recommendation is that you go to Przemyśl."

"Thank you," I breathed.

He ignored that. "Since you're not going to take my recommendation, consider this a warning." His voice was cold. "This is

still contested territory. A pass from me is a death sentence in the wrong hands. UPA or Resistance thugs won't care that you're a civilian."

"I know." At least—I knew what he meant by Resistance. There had been a Polish Resistance squad in the wood outside Bród. A few of them were Polish army soldiers who had avoided internment or deportation under the Soviets during the first invasion, the 1939 invasion. Most of them were boys from Bród who had slipped one by one into the wood in the weeks and months that followed.

I had no idea what he meant by UPA. Another partisan group? The only other partisans I knew of were the Soviet ones—escaped POWs, stragglers left behind when the Germans invaded in 1941. They couldn't be who he meant—not if he was calling them thugs.

He pushed his chair back and came around the desk, taking a key from his pocket. He unlocked my handcuffs and dumped them on the desk. He didn't move right away, so I was still trapped in the chair, suddenly aware of how close he was—suddenly aware that it was entirely possible he was expecting a little favor in return.

Panic roiled my stomach. I fought it down, gripping the chair arms. *Breathe. Think.* My pistol was still there on the desk. I doubted it was loaded, but you could bet I would make it do some damage.

He didn't touch me. He wasn't even looking at me. He reached

across the desk for one of the framed photographs. I let go of the chair arms slowly, cautiously. My heart was racing.

He held the photograph in his hands for a second. His shoulders were stiff.

“If you could tell me—” he started.

He didn’t finish. He turned the photograph around to show me. It was just a snapshot, a slightly blurry personal snapshot—not something you would expect to see framed, under glass. There was a boy of ten or twelve trying to make the obviously struggling white kitten on his lap pose for the camera. The boy wasn’t really looking at the camera. He was looking at the kitten, the corner of his mouth quirked up in a lopsided smile. I imagined the person holding the camera was laughing; that was why it was blurry.

Comrade Colonel F. Volkov watched my face expectantly, waiting for a reaction.

“Your son?” I managed politely.

Obviously not what he was hoping for. His face was blank, but his shoulders dropped just a little.

“Nikolai,” he said. He set the photograph on the desk. “He’s older now—he would be older now.” He corrected himself absently. “He would be fifteen.” He looked away. “He was taken last summer. I thought it might be possible that you might have—that you might know—”

I picked up the photograph and looked at it again. I knew for a fact I hadn’t seen this boy before—the boys in the plant had all

been Poles or Ukrainians, at least the ones who worked in my section—but I didn't want him to think I was just brushing him off.

“Nikolai Fyodorovich,” he told me. His gaze came back to me, sharp and hopeful. “From Bryansk.”

Bryansk was in western Russia. I remembered the name. I remembered the snippets of news bulletins we caught on our contraband wireless that autumn after the German invasion. The Germans had hoped to take Moscow before winter set in. The offensive had stalled at Bryansk—just for two weeks, but two weeks was enough. The Germans had taken Bryansk. They hadn't ever taken Moscow.

I held the photograph up as if I were trying to see it in better light. I wanted to lie to him. I wanted to say, *Yes, I remember, I saw him*. I knew his grief, his pain. I knew it because I had felt it the day we found out my brother, Tomek, was dead. I knew it because I had seen it in my parents' faces the morning the soldiers came for me.

I knew why he was letting me go home to Bród.

I shook my head and put the photograph back on the desk.

“I'm sorry.” It came out in a whisper. My throat was tight again. “There were other factories—other camps—”

He nodded once.

“Yes,” he said, with practiced detachment. “It would have been statistically unlikely.”

He placed the photograph very carefully back in its original position, at an exact ninety-degree angle against the other photograph. Then he picked up my pistol and the stamped paper and handed them to me one after the other.

“My adjutant will show you out,” he said.



2

KOSTYA

L'VIV, POLAND

THURSDAY, JULY 27, 1944

TWELVE HOURS SINCE THE REDS ENTERED L'VIV.

Kostya had been waiting at this bar for six.

Nobody had really noticed him yet. Just another uniform nursing a bottle. If somebody had been paying attention, somebody would have known he'd been nursing the same bottle of vodka all afternoon, and somebody might have started to get suspicious. But nobody was paying attention. Red soldiers drifted in, out, on to the next bar. The barman, a spectacled old relic from another time in apron and white jacket, wasn't asking for money from anybody—in heartfelt Soviet camaraderie or maybe just because he didn't want to get shot. He seemed happy to leave Kostya alone.

The problem was the place was starting to fill up.

It was past six o'clock, and Red infantry had been pouring into the city all day. Bits and pieces of the 60th Army, most of them, but Kostya had seen some NKVD too—secret police. The NKVD made him nervous. Sooner or later, somebody was going to slide in beside him at the bar and try to strike up a conversation, which would be a disaster. His Russian was pretty good—still slightly accented but nothing anybody would think twice about. But he'd been counting on having a little more time to work on particulars before actually having to *use* them. He felt unprepared—too visible, too vulnerable.

When you were unprepared, you made mistakes. And when you made mistakes, you were dead.

The fake Soviet papers in his stolen uniform jacket's breast pocket said he was Valerik Fialko, Second Battalion, 100th Rifle Division. If somebody from the Second—somebody *else* from the Second, better get that straight right now—came in here and started asking questions, he'd give himself maybe five minutes before he was kissing a wall with a gun against the base of his skull.

What kind of idiot picks this for a meeting place anyway?

The same kind of idiot who volunteered to be a UPA mole in a Red Army front, Kostya guessed.

He had no idea what his contact looked like. Didn't know his name either. Whoever he was, he'd been the one to initiate proceedings, and he'd at least been smart enough not to do it directly. The message had come in code through Commander Shukhevych's headquarters over in Volyn. No time, just *Afternoon*

27th. Place, password, countersign, brief instructions: *Take off your cap, fold it in your belt.*

That was it.

He would give it ten more minutes—half past. Then he was out of here. They would try again another day, and this time *he* was going to pick the place.

He poured one more glass and took a last opportunity to survey the room while he tipped it back. Another pack of soldiers was straggling in from the street. There weren't enough open tables. Four or five of them broke away to come stand at the bar. Kostya pretended to be lost in his glass. *Damn it.* The more and more groups that came in, the more and more obvious it was going to be that he was alone. Being alone invited questions.

“Pour me one, Comrade?”

Like that.

He set his glass down a little too forcefully. She didn't seem to notice. She smiled at him. There were sergeant's straps on the shoulders of her uniform tunic. The Mosin rifle across her back had been retrofitted for sniping. Blond hair pulled into a neat, tight bun, cool eyes somewhere between green and brown and gray. Older than he was but not by much. He guessed she was twenty.

She crooked an elbow on the counter—close enough to brush his arm, far enough away to pretend it was an accident.

“You look like you could use a friend,” she said.

Kostya reached across the counter for another glass. *Wonderful.*

She'd said comrade, but she wore sergeant's straps. Rank meant something even to the Reds. He was Valerik Fialko, Second Battalion nonentity. He couldn't ignore her, and he couldn't just brush her off—not without risking a scene. People would start noticing. People would remember.

What kind of IDIOT picks this for a meeting place?

He filled the glass and slid it to her, giving her a teeth-bared grin.

“Who needs friends? I've got vodka.”

She leaned in conspiratorially. Her voice was an exaggerated whisper. “Why settle for one when you could have both?”

“Because now I've got to share my vodka, Comrade Sergeant,” he said.

She laughed. “True.” She lifted her glass, brushing his arm again. Vodka sloshed over the countertop.

Kostya stiffened. She wasn't as drunk as she was acting, which meant—

“*Slava Ukrayini*,” she murmured, tossing the vodka back with a practiced flick of her wrist.

Glory to Ukraine.

For a second, he was too startled to do anything but stare. Then he remembered.

“*Heroyam s-slava*,” he stammered. Glory to her heroes.

Password, countersign.

“Good job.” She set her glass down delicately on the countertop.

“Relax, Comrade. Put your arm around me. Try to look like you’re having fun.”

Obediently, he draped an arm across her shoulders, pulling her close. She nestled her face into his neck. Her fingers slid through his hair, pulling his head down so she could murmur into his ear.

“What’s your name?”

Her lips tickled his earlobe. He closed his eyes, willing himself not to shiver. *Not* the way he’d been expecting this to go. “Valerik. You?”

“Nataliya.” She slid an arm around his neck, pressing her cheek to his. “Let’s get a few things straight, all right, Valerik? First, this is strictly professional, so don’t get any ideas. I promise I’ve got no problem shooting you. Got it?”

“Yes.”

“Second, I’ve set up a cache for you under the bench across the square—third from the end of the row, by the lamppost. Most of our communication will go through there. The less we have to meet, the better. I’ll find you if I need you.”

“Could have said all that in your message.” Kostya rested his free hand on the counter. His pistol was inside his tunic. He couldn’t get to it the way she was pressed against him, which meant she knew it was there too. He was acutely aware of her arm around his neck. “So tell me why I’m really here.”

She turned her head under his chin and leaned her ear on his

chest as though she were listening for his heartbeat. “Nice work. You’re not as stupid as you look.”

Except he was. He should have known Kyrylo would sell him out. He should have known this was a setup.

Damn it, he should have known that was why Marko had sent *him*.

He had walked right into it. He had stood here waiting for it. She must have felt him tense. She let out a breath of a laugh. “Don’t worry. It’s a pretty public place for a murder.”

“What do you want?”

“Not to kill you, just so we’re clear—though now I’m wondering why that would be your first assumption. Guilty conscience?”

Kostya didn’t say anything.

“Relax, Valerik. It was a joke.” She glanced up. “First time out?”

“Yes,” he lied.

“It gets easier,” she said.

Her voice was low—almost gentle. It threw him. He looked away. His chest was stupidly tight.

“You haven’t answered my question,” he said.

Her fingers played absently with the buttons at the throat of his tunic. “You’re here because I’ve got a message for Marko that I didn’t want to send through the regular channels.”

“Why not?”

“If I told you, I’d have to kill you.” She stood up on her toes,

looped both arms around his neck, and kissed him very softly on the cheek. “Thanks for sharing your vodka, Comrade. Watch the cache.”

“That’s the message?”

She lifted her arms away. “And you were doing so well.” She patted his chest. “Pocket. It’s coded, but I’d still recommend trying not to get caught with it.”

* * *

“I was beginning to think you’d gone to Marko and ratted me out,” Kyrylo said. “Either that or you were dead—and of the two of those, I can guarantee you’d rather be dead.”

Kyrylo—code name Lys, the Fox—was Kostya’s cousin. He sat at the dining room table, fiddling with the same dead radio he’d been fiddling with for two weeks, adrift in a sea of pliers and screwdrivers and spare wires under a thick fog of cigarette smoke. He liked to think he knew things about electronics, and about fixing electronics, which was stupid—almost as stupid as his code name. Kostya was pretty sure he’d never touched a tool in his life before he joined the UPA. He’d been studying to be a lawyer, eventually to be a politician, eventually to be a revolutionary.

Kyrylo also liked to say things like *You ratted me out* and *You’d rather be dead*, like some gangster in a pulp magazine, which was even stupider. You could hear money and privilege and a

university education in his voice. He just sounded like an idiot, trying to talk street tough.

He wasn't an idiot; that was the thing.

Lots of people got that wrong about Kyrylo. Lots of people thought that was all he was—talk, empty threats. Lots of people probably thought they knew the type.

Lots of those people were dead.

"I'm not a rat," Kostya said coldly.

"Technically you are, but it was a joke. Lighten up, kid. How'd it go?"

Kostya dragged another chair up to the table. He took the sealed paper from his breast pocket and shoved it at Kyrylo without a word. *Kid* grated too. At seventeen, he wasn't all that much younger than his cousin—five years. The way Kyrylo liked to talk, you'd think it was twenty.

Kyrylo reached for the paper. "Who's the contact?"

"Her name's Nataliya. She's undercover as a junior sergeant with the Hundredth Rifles."

"And the cache?"

"Podwale Street," Kostya recited, "third bench from the end of the row, under the lamppost."

"You'd better not be lying to me." Kyrylo slit the seal neatly with a thumbnail, unfolded the paper, and smoothed it out over the tabletop. "Did you read it?"

"It's coded."

Kyrylo rolled his eyes. He sent the paper back to Kostya under his fingertips. “Here. You can do it faster than I can.”

That was a lie, and they both knew it. Kostya resisted the urge to crush the paper in his fist and throw it at Kyrylo’s head.

“I don’t think I’m supposed to know what it says,” he said tightly.

Kyrylo snorted. “So? Neither am I.”

“You’re an officer. Marko’s probably going to tell you what it says anyway. I’m just—”

“In as deep as I am,” Kyrylo finished. “Come on, Kostya. Don’t you want to know what you risked your life for?”

“What *you* risked my life for,” Kostya snapped.

Kyrylo’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t decide the missions.”

“You’re the one who gave me to Marko in the first place. You’re the one—”

“I didn’t give you to Marko. He picked you because you’re reliable, trustworthy, wise as a serpent, innocent as a dove—”

“Shut up.”

“Need to work on the sense of humor, though.” Kyrylo turned the radio over in his hands, trying to balance it on his knee while he reattached the back panel. “Read me the message, Kostek, or you don’t get paid this month.”

Kostya snatched the paper back. “Don’t call me Kostek.”

“Then read me the message, Kostyantyn Vitaliyovych Lasko.”

It would be a miracle if he didn't kill Kyrylo himself before this war was over. His cousin was a true believer, a convinced nationalist. He'd joined the UPA, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, so he could help build a new, independent Ukraine, a pure-blooded Ukraine, free of Poles and Soviets alike. Kostya had joined because it was that or a bullet—Marko and Kyrylo had made the choice very clear—and even so, Mama would break his head if she knew. He hadn't dared go back home to Bród these past two and a half years, even on leave. He just sent the money every month and prayed Mama would pretend ignorance about where it came from. His sister Lesya had probably made up some story to try to cover for him: He'd made it away to Turkey and was working on a fishing boat; he'd followed the Vistula up to Danzig and gotten across to Sweden.

Mama had probably seen right through it. She always did.

Kostya flipped to a fresh page in his notebook. This month, the messages had started being keyed to Lenin's *The State and Revolution*—harmless enough to have lying around if the Reds came looking. They'd been keyed to German texts before this: anti-Jewish and anti-communist propaganda mostly, or Ukrainian translations of important Nazi speeches. Sick stuff. The call to worldwide violent revolution seemed almost tame by comparison.

"Did you eat?" Kyrylo asked, still busily turning screws on the panel.

Kostya ignored him. He hadn't eaten since breakfast, which

had been one piece of black bread and one piece of cold *salo*, fatback. But pretending-to-care Kyrylo was just as bad as trying-to-sound-like-a-tough-guy Kyrylo.

“Aw, somebody’s sore,” Kyrylo said.

“Shut up.”

“Hey.” Kyrylo’s voice sharpened. “Watch the attitude.”

“I’m not your kid.”

“No. But I outrank you, and I can have you shot—and I will if you ever talk to me like that in front of my men.”

“Fascist prick.” Kostya scraped his chair back, shoving the notebook away. “Decode your own damn message.”

“Hey, Kostya. Kostya.” Kyrylo dumped the radio on the table and got up. Screws and washers and loose wires scattered in his wake. He stepped into Kostya’s path, throwing an arm across the doorway before Kostya could duck past him. “All right. Enough. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Let me go.”

“Did something happen at the bar?”

Kostya flung Kyrylo’s arm away. “I got the message, didn’t I?”

“That wasn’t the question, genius.” Kyrylo clapped both hands on Kostya’s shoulders and pushed him back against the wall, hard. “Tell me what happened.”

Kostya didn’t even *know* what had happened; that was the problem. Something about the way he’d thought—just for a second—he’d been sent to that bar for his own execution. Something about the way Nataliya had said, *It gets easier*.

It never got any easier. You just got more careful.

He was tired of having to be careful.

“I want out,” he said.

He didn’t even know that was what was going to come out until it did.

Kyrylo didn’t say anything.

“I’m sick of it.” Kostya’s throat was tight. Damn it, he was *not* going to cry in front of Kyrylo. “I’m sick of having to watch my back. I’m sick of waiting for that bullet. I want out.”

“It’s not that easy,” Kyrylo said quietly.

“‘I outrank you. I can have you shot.’ Sounded pretty easy to me.”

For a second, Kyrylo just scowled at him. Then he said, “Give me your pistol.”

“Go to hell.”

Kyrylo didn’t even blink. He yanked open Kostya’s tunic with one quick hand, tore the pistol from the shoulder holster, and tossed it across the room.

Over his shoulder, he said, “Dima.”

His second-in-command loomed in the kitchen doorway. He was smirking. He’d probably been listening to every word. “Sir?”

“Busy?”

“No, sir.”

“Then you can take baby to his room.” Kyrylo tousled Kostya’s hair, then shoved him toward the doorway. “Make sure he gets

his nap and his bottle and doesn't do anything stupid. I know it'll be hard for him."

Kostya lunged. Dima snaked a quick, strong arm around him, jerking him back so sharply that his breath whooshed out. Tiny white stars danced across the room.

"Coward," Kostya spit. It came out in a squeak. Dima's arm was like a steel bar across his stomach. "Go ahead—have me shot. Can't even do it yourself, can you?"

"Feel free to shut him up." Kyrylo was already back in his chair, the radio on his lap.

"Do you mean shut him up?" Dima clamped a hand over Kostya's mouth. "Or *shut him up*?" He made a pistol with his free hand and touched Kostya's temple with his fingertips.

"Start with the first one. I'd hate to have to write *that* letter to Aunt Klara."

"I'll talk," Kostya snarled around Dima's fingers. "I'll tell Marko. I'll tell him you've been reading the messages. I'll tell him—"

"Get him out of here before I change my mind," Kyrylo said.

* * *

His room was four blank brick walls and a concrete floor and a single bare electric bulb hung on a wire from the ceiling. He had his old quilt for a bedroll and a line to hang his change of clothes,

and he had his name saint, the Roman emperor Constantine, on an icon stuck in a chink in the wall where a bit of grout had come loose. He'd had a photograph of the family—all of them, Papa, Mama, Lesya, Lyudya, and him, the baby—but Kyrylo had taken that away from him as soon as he'd seen it and thrown it into the kitchen stove.

“What are you—stupid?” he'd snapped. “What if the Poles or the Germans found that?”

Papa was already dead by then, and Lyudya was gone, taken by the Germans. It had been the only copy of the photograph.

That was the first time he'd ever wanted to kill Kyrylo.

The door was locked. He'd tried it. He was pretty sure this used to be a pantry—you could see holes in the brick where the shelves had been drilled in—and it locked from the outside. It doubled as a cell sometimes when Kyrylo was holding a prisoner for questioning. When that happened, Kostya slept on the floor by the kitchen stove, trying not to listen while Kyrylo did the interrogation. Kyrylo always handled the interrogations himself because he spoke all four languages fluently—Polish, German, Russian, Ukrainian. Nobody else in the squad knew German, and most of them wouldn't speak Polish or Russian on principle.

He could hear Dima whistling out in the kitchen, clattering pans and chopping something on a board. The smell of frying sausages and onions drifted in through the cracks around the

door. It was Dima and Yuliya's flat technically—or it was old Mrs. Baranets's technically, but Mrs. Baranets let her grandson Dima and his wife use it, and Dima and Yuliya let Kyrylo use it as his safe house. They'd all met at university, Dima and Yuliya and Kyrylo. Kostya was the stupid one. *Selyuk*, Dima called him. Peasant. He didn't mean anything by it, Kyrylo said. But they all laughed when he said it, as if it were some joke they all knew and Kostya didn't.

The lock rattled.

Kostya had just enough time to flop down on his quilt, face to the wall, eyes squeezed shut, before the door swung open. He'd been expecting Dima, bringing dinner, but he could hear Dima still whistling out in the kitchen when the door creaked shut again.

"Kostya," Kyrylo said.

Kostya lay very still.

"Come on, idiot, I know you're not asleep. The light's on."

The trick was the way you breathed—long and slow in, long and slow out . . .

Kyrylo's boot jabbed him roughly in the ribs. "All right. Up. You've got a date, remember?"

Long and slow in, long and slow out . . .

Kyrylo reached down without another word, hauled Kostya up by his collar, slammed him into the wall, and pinned him there, one hand clamped on Kostya's throat.

He slid Nataliya's paper, carefully resealed, into the front of Kostya's tunic.

"Good as new," he said, giving the tunic a little tug to straighten it.

"Get your hands off me."

"One more little thing, Kostek, before you go—about what you said back there." Kyrylo's fingers tightened on Kostya's throat. "You say these things sometimes, and I don't know if you're really serious or if you're just trying to push my buttons. So—a reminder. Just to make sure we've both got it straight."

He bent close. His voice was low—dangerously low and calm.

"If you ever breathe a word to Marko—if you ever so much as *think* about breathing a word to Marko—I will kill Aunt Klara and Lesya. I will make you watch while I do it. Then I will kill you. Do you understand me?"

This—this was what everybody got wrong about Kyrylo. You didn't think he *could*. He was too cultured, too educated, too well-dressed, too proper, too polite, too charming, to be the sort of guy who would put a bullet in your head once he'd extracted your gasped and whimpering confession.

"Yes, sir," Kostya said.

Kyrylo's fingers tightened a little more. "Look at me."

Kostya looked. "Yes, sir," he said.

"All of it, Kostek."

“Yes, sir, I understand you,” Kostya said obediently.

“Good.” Kyrylo shoved him away. “Clean yourself up before you go. I swear you always look like you’ve just crawled back from a damn bar fight.”