



“Kathy is a remarkable woman who had the courage to tell the truth and stand up for the victims of sex trafficking, putting her own life on the line. I was deeply moved by her story and hope her voice will be heard, raising awareness about the tragic consequences of war.”

Oscar-winning actress, Rachel Weisz

“Most galling is the sad truth that DynCorp answered to no law, nor to the military, the U.S., or the Bosnians...Infuriating and heartbreaking.” *Booklist*

“Bolkovac and co-author Lynn successfully evoke the paranoid atmosphere of a suspense film... the authors shine a light on a neglected area of widespread human suffering...Along with the film adaptation, this book will hopefully draw attention to an underreported tragedy.” *Kirkus*

"We all have a stake in stopping this ongoing atrocity, not least because we're paying for it...." *Ms. Magazine*

PROLOGUE

“I need to speak with the ambassador.”

My palm was sweating as I gripped the receiver. After being transferred around the switchboard, I finally had one of the ambassador’s assistants on the line. I was using the phone of a Swedish friend and colleague, Lotta, who for the past few nights had graciously given me her house keys and made up the couch because I had been too rattled to stay at my own apartment.

“May I ask what this is regarding?” the assistant asked.¹

“I’m an American. My name is Kathryn Bolkovac. He’ll know who I am.”

“I’m sorry, but Ambassador Miller is scheduled to be boarding a flight now. May I have him phone you on Monday?”

Monday? No, I was reaching out to the American embassy in Bosnia-Herzegovina because I was in need of assistance—now. “Please,” I said, “it’s an emergency.”

There was a pause on the line, and I was certain she could hear the quivering in my voice. It was my personal source of pride that I had spent my entire police career clear-headed and tough under pressure, but my situation was dire.

“All right,” she said, “let me see if I can patch you through to his mobile.”

After numerous clicks, there was the sudden rushing sound of wind and propellers. A voice shouted above the noise. “This is Tom Miller.”

“Ambassador Miller, this is Kathryn Bolkovac--”

“Sorry, I can’t hear you. Can you speak up?”—

I raised my voice. “This is Kathryn Bolkovac. As you know, I’ve been terminated by DynCorp—”

“I’m on a tarmac, could you please speak louder?”

I yelled into the phone, “I’ve been terminated by DynCorp and was told the State Department pulled my contract and that you were a part of this decision.”

Through the noise, he shouted that he was not privy to any such decision. Was DynCorp once again passing the buck, this time trying to use the U.S. Ambassador, as its fall guy? But I continued, at the top of my lungs. “I have been threatened by my superiors at DynCorp—”

The roar of the propellers grew even louder. “I’m sorry,” he interrupted, “but I can barely hear you at all, and I need to get on a plane. Call my secretary and make an appointment for next week, okay? We’ll meet next week, okay? Thank you.”

The noise silenced as the phone went dead. My own voice echoed in my ears and in the quiet of the tiny rented house. I must have been absentmindedly pacing, for I was entangled in the old-fashioned, wiry phone cord still commonplace in residences in Sarajevo. I spun myself from the cord, like I used to do as a kid. *You’re really on your own now, Bolkovac*, I thought.

All I could do at this point was put everything I owned in my car and get out. I had my most vital belonging with me: a khaki Eddie Bauer duffel bag. The bag had started this journey as an innocent carry-on, packed with a travel pillow and an extra sweater. Now it was filled with incriminating evidence I had collected over the past two years. Evidence that could implicate one of the most powerful corporations in the world, funded by billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars, with involvement in one of the most profitable and licentious forms of organized crime.

I locked up Lotta’s house and slid the key under the front door, then hurried to my parked car. The previous year, I had used the very attractive discount offered to United Nations employees to buy a royal blue Mercedes in Sarajevo. It was cheaper than a Chevy would be back in the States, and I loved this car. But now it was on my list of things I was wary of. Back when I was a new recruit, a station commander had warned me that car accidents happen in this country all the time—I had rolled my eyes at his air-quotes around the word “accidents,” knowing he was prone to drama. Recently, however, my subconscious had dug this conversation back up, and the words replayed in my mind. I locked the duffel bag in the trunk and turned the ignition.

The engine started with its typical hum, and I sank into the seat, momentarily relieved. As much as I did not want to set foot back in my own apartment, I could not leave without collecting some things, specifically a box of letters from my children. For two solid years my teenagers hand-wrote letters to me, and I would be damned if I was run out of the country without those. I had made difficult choices as a mother, but thinking about the letters from my children gave me a

spark of determination, reminding me how proud the family had been when I started on this mission, how optimistic we were about all the good, meaningful work I was going to do and how much of a difference I could make.

I drove through the city, passing the tall wrought-iron gates of the American embassy, the Stars and Stripes proudly snapping in the breeze. Not long ago, I had lingered at those gates, telling jokes with the Marines standing guard before being welcomed inside to mingle with diplomats and eat ice cream sundaes from a McDonald's tent set up on the terrace. Now, for the first time, I understood what it must be like to be a person without a country. I had used that phrase many times in my human rights work, to describe the young women who had gone through hell and back only to be denied reentrance to their home countries because of ridiculous technicalities and gaping holes in the law. "Original passport confiscated. Denied reissuance. Status: without a county" was a verdict I had written time and time again in my reports before having to hand my paperwork, along with the frightened young women, over to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

I pulled up in the gravel drive of my accommodation (this was what everyone on the mission called our apartments; no one ever referred to their place as "home"), a quaint farmhouse that I rented from a young Serbian landlady named Branca. She had grown up in this house but, after her father died, Branca had squeezed into the small guest house around back along with her entire extended family. The rent we internationals paid was her family's primary income. I occupied the first floor, and an oak staircase led to my roommate's quarters, although he had taken leave back to the United States for health reasons. I had chosen this house for its location on Vrelo Bosne, the Central Park of Sarajevo.

At the source of the river Bosna, the Vrelo (which means "spring" in Serbo-Croatian) had picture-postcard views in every direction, with waterfalls and still pools framed by snow-capped mountains rising up in the hazy distance. On weekends, I would stroll for hours down paths shaded by a canopy of trees, past horse-drawn carriages clip-clopping along, and over footbridges with pebble-covered streams gurgling beneath my feet. You could see people from all walks of life in the park: foreigners who had money would dine at the outdoor cafes, locals would bring a bag from the market to make a picnic in the grass, and the kerchief-wrapped Roma

would beg and linger until they were chased away. It was near effortless to lose yourself in the landscape, completely forgetting what part of the world you were in. That is, until you stumbled upon the red-and-white tape and BEWARE signs, reminding you that this peaceful park had been part of the front lines and that the surrounding hills were still riddled with landmines.

As I approached the front door of my house, my stomach churned, and I prepared myself to find the place ransacked. I pushed open the door.

The place wasn't ransacked. It was cozy and clean, just the way I had left it. I steadied myself. Fear is one thing, but first my car, then the apartment—was I becoming paranoid? Paranoia for a cop is like a tremor for a surgeon.

Ridding the notion from my head, I pulled down my suitcase from the top of the closet and emptied in the bureau drawers, including the bundle of my children's letters. I did not have much in the way of clothes to pack since I had worn the International Police Task Force uniform—blue khakis, button-down top—every day. I threw in socks and underwear, my gym clothes, a couple pairs of jeans, some sweatshirts, and the long black dress I had worn once, to the Fourth of July party at the embassy. I already had turned in the rest of my gear: flak jacket; emergency evacuation bag; blue helmet; and leather utility belt, which was basically a holster for a Maglite since we were not authorized to carry a gun on this UN peacekeeping mission.

I took a quick glance around to see if there was anything I had missed. Branca's mother's collections were everywhere—little figurines, carved relics, trinkets—all displayed on hand-crocheted doilies. “Knicky-knacky, ticky-tacky” is how my own mother would have described the style. But in Bosnia these objects were not garage-sale fare; they signified that the family had enough money to acquire possessions. When Branca's mother had learned I was Catholic, she scanned her collection and ceremoniously chose a tiny brass crucifix, pressing it into my palm and saying it was mine to keep. For her, it was a great source of pride to have belongings that were not only decorative but were nice enough to gift.

Although I was not a particularly religious person, I knew my Hail Marys and Our Fathers and had kept the brass crucifix on my nightstand. I slid it into my pocket and zipped shut my suitcase, leaving behind some khaki pants and a pair of black Army boots, knowing Branca's

teenage nephew would appreciate them; besides, I far preferred my Rocky Mountain boots from the police force back home.

As I turned to leave, I spotted a patch of royal blue peeking out from under the bed: my beret, the universal symbol of a UN peacekeeping mission. Apparently I had forgotten to turn it in. I plucked it up and slipped it into my bag.

Just then I heard a car pull up on the gravel driveway. Instinctively, I shut off the light. A car door slammed and a heavy-footed clomping of boots approached. A sharp knock hit the front door.

My right hand slid down my hip. For a decade I had carried a gun there, and it was force of habit to reach for it—only to be reminded that I was unarmed. I glanced around, looking for something to use to defend myself. My closest weapon was a half-finished bottle of gin. I gripped the bottle's neck and stole some glances through the lace curtains of the window. I could see a man's broad back in a blue shirt—possibly a UN uniform. He turned, and I made out a familiar profile. I set down the bottle of gin. The man was my Icelandic colleague and friend, Thor.

I hurried to the door. "I'm so glad—" I began.

Thor raised an index finger to his lips. *Silence*. His jaw was clenched and his eyes were steely. I had never seen him look this intense, which was saying a lot for a normally serious Viking. He stepped in and, seeing my suitcase, grabbed it and motioned for me to follow him. I tucked the bottle of gin under my arm, suspecting it might still come in handy.

Thor's white truck, a Land Rover with black UN letters on each side, was in the driveway, and two of his British colleagues from the Organized Crime Unit, who were also his roommates, were waiting in the backseat. I knew the men, Ian and Bob, from many Saturday nights sitting around in someone's living room with several bottles of wine and a couple of guitars. But now they had their military faces on too, both dead serious.

"Get in," Thor said.

"My car—" I protested, thinking of my duffel bag.

"We need to talk," Thor said firmly. "In my car."

I looked to Ian and Bob, then back to Thor. I had not been staying at my place, how had they known to find me here at this moment? My head said it was okay to trust them, but my feet stayed planted.

Of the three, I knew Thor best; we had become fast friends after traveling together to Hungary for the International Law Enforcement Academy conference. In Budapest, we had had the idea to take a city bus around to sightsee, which was going fine until the bus came to a halt and the lights went off, and we realized we had missed the last stop and were back at the bus barn. The driver refused to take us anywhere else, so after a good laugh we had to hoof it back to the hotel. Then there was the time Thor and I were in the market and I realized I had left my wallet at a vendor's stand. Without a second's hesitation, Thor bolted like an Olympic sprinter through the crowd to rescue my wallet—and he did.

“Kathy,” Thor said, jolting me from my thousand-yard stare. “Are you okay?”

Barely. I was near mental and physical exhaustion. My fingertips brushed against the outline of the crucifix in my pocket, and I made a quick promise that when I made it out of Bosnia I would go straight to the confessional. Deciding that I needed to trust these men, I slid into the passenger seat of Thor's car.

“We overheard some chatter at Main HQ,” Thor began. “Kathy, we think your phone has been bugged and likely your apartment too. We have reason to believe you're in danger.”

Oddly, the first emotion that came to me was relief: I was not being paranoid after all. My mind quickly defaulted to my kids: all the phone conversations we had had, could they be in danger too? Good thing I had kept my maiden name, my children would be much harder to trace with a different last name. Besides, all three lived in different cities, with two in college and the youngest at home with her dad. Thor's voice filtered into my thoughts; I forced myself to focus. “I know you're planning to leave the country soon,” he said, “but you need to stay with us in the meantime, for safety.”

“I was going to leave straight from here.”

Ian spoke up from the backseat. “You of all people know what goes on after dark on those desolate roads, and that's your only way out. We can't let you leave until sunrise.”

I turned to look at them squarely. “What exactly did you hear?”

The three men glanced at each other as if trying to determine how much they could, or should, reveal. Finally Thor said, “Significant chatter, implying bodily harm.”

We decided I would stay at their house for the night and leave first thing in the morning. Bob and I got in my car and followed Thor’s UN truck to their villa on the northern edge of the city. When we arrived, Thor jumped out, hoisted open a wooden garage door, and motioned me in. We unloaded my bags and then I stepped back to watch as Ian sprinkled a thick coat of baby powder over the ground all around my car.

I spent the night staring at the ceiling, thinking back on the events of my past two years with DynCorp, a billion-dollar Goliath. I was a police investigator certified in forensic science and contracted to work on human rights abuses. But my DynCorp superiors continuously tried to bury my cases. When I was promoted to UN Headquarters to oversee all cases of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking throughout Bosnia, my case files started disappearing on a routine basis from the Internal Affairs office. Files upon files of evidence we human rights officers, and even local Bosnian police, had collected never saw the light of day: victim statements, license plate numbers, identifying badges, names, tattoos, and even instant photographs. All of it gone. Except, of course, for the copies I had in my Eddie Bauer duffel bag.

I thought of Lotta, who was in her early thirties; she was in Bosnia as a member of the Swedish police force and was simultaneously finishing her master’s thesis. We had bonded after she lodged a formal complaint against an American DynCorp contractor who would show up at Main HQ flaunting a suspiciously young foreign girl on his arm. No investigation into whether the girl was a minor—let alone a trafficking victim—was ever initiated, and the only thing to result from Lotta’s complaint was that she and I became friends. I hated to think I may have put Lotta in danger, but she was a very smart, capable woman, with a lot of access and know-how. Besides, her mission time was nearly up, and she was almost as anxious to get out as I was.

Sunlight could not come fast enough, and finally the house began to stir. Ian made me a thermos of coffee and packed up some food, while Thor checked the garage for footprints in the powder.

When he gave the go-ahead, I started up my car. He trailed me several miles outside of Sarajevo to make sure I was not being followed, then waved me on. On that day in April 2001, I

drove nonstop out of the country. I may have been forced out, but this was not over. DynCorp, global leader in the business of military strategy, nation rebuilding, world security, and counterintelligence, had underestimated one thing: a forty-year-old, divorced mom from Lincoln, Nebraska.

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