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Male Istine: A Collection of Short Stories and Prose Exhibiting Pre-War Lifestyles, Experiences, Ideals, & Memories

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Male Istine:
**A Collection of Short Stories and Prose Exhibiting Pre-War
Lifestyles, Experiences, Ideals, & Memories**

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The University of San Francisco
English with an Emphasis in Writing

Europe, Bosnia i Hercegovina, Sarajevo & Mostar
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Methodology

For my independent study Project I chose to take a different route than the typical student. I chose to write a collection of short stories based on life stories of people who lived Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia Herzegovina before any conflict began in the early 1990s. My initial interest was in the art of storytelling and the self-education of events and experiences that happened long ago through this medium. However, when I began to further shape my interest in creating a collection of short stories and the desired outcomes, I found that in learning about the past of others I could not only satisfy my own curiosity and eagerness, but I could also help others from the region as well. I found that in creating a collection of short stories I might be able to share them with the people of the Balkans, as a softer form of a reminder of the past. It seems as though people from the Balkans have difficulties with facing the harsh factual realities of their country's history; among the people who live in this society this occurrence is defined as 'difficulty with facing the past' or 'not acknowledging the past.' Soon I realized that my Independent Study Project could be used as an almost therapeutic medium for my interviewees as well as my possible audience, in order for self-reflection and hopefully settling of emotions that were created during an incredibly hard and traumatizing time in the early 1990s. I wanted to remind the people that lived through such atrocities that there was a life before the war and hopefully in telling stories, the existence of different times might be acknowledge and accepted. I thought that I might be able to add a new light to sensitive topics in order to create a new view of the past.

After I had finally realized what I wanted to do and had the inspiration and motivation to start, I needed to coordinate the technicalities of my journey. Although I was prepared for the emotional and mental journey I was going to embark on, I had to plan where I was going to conduct most of my research and the logistics of where to stay and who exactly to talk to. I knew that I wanted to visit places where there might have been increased tension due to the fact that the city was incredibly varied in an ethnical or religious sense. When the SIT group visited Sarajevo and Mostar the religious division within the cities themselves was incredibly and physically present. I thought that having such a prevalent divide through so many different times among citizens would be a great place to divulge different information and hear many sides of stories from incredibly different perspective. Lastly, considering the fact that the group did not have much free time in these two cities, I decided to definitely visit Sarajevo and Mostar for my Independent Study Project.

After having two major cities down I then spoke with my academic advisor on what contacts would be helpful for me to speak with first. I will say that in addition to having such a helpful advisor I had the opportunity to snag a great project advisor even before I knew what I wanted to do for my Independent Study Project. During the group's visit to Belgrade, Serbia I had the opportunity to interview Jasmina Tešanović, an incredibly gifted writer, feminist and political activist. The interview went so well that I asked her right then and there if she would be my advisor. Luckily she accepted and from there I then created a solid support system for my Independent Study project. I was lucky to have such a

well-networked academic advisor, Jill Benderly, and she helped me with the skeletal outline of contacts in Sarajevo and Mostar as well as giving the names and phone numbers of people who could possibly house me in my desired locations.

Yet even though the plans to visit Bosnia Herzegovina progressed and I made appointments with a few recommended contacts, I felt that needed a more varied influx of information. Then I decided that it was necessary for me to visit Croatia. Considering another student was spending her entire Independent Study Project in Split, that the group did not visit to Split, and along with the fact that it was turning into spring, I decided that I would conclude the last portion of my Independent Study Project on the Dalmatian coast.

But before I would set out in my Independent Study Project, I thought that it might behoove me to do some reading. I had Jill recommend some local writer's works written in short story fiction or prose mediums and leisurely read them. I read some before my trip and some during and even though I did not cite passages from the books directly, the writing styles and translations of the various authors helped me to create and shape my own writing styles and characters. I was even fortunate enough to be given reading materials along the way and wove those techniques, styles, and topics to the fibers of my own writing.

Yet, even with recommendations and advice, students can and will always face difficulties. For me my biggest barrier was my weak understanding and execution of the language. Although I will say I progressed in my knowledge and

proficiency, there were many times where I needed help or directions and could not efficiently communicate with locals. This is a barrier that every student faces and one way or another we have overcome them. However, being the most obvious and predominant barrier it is necessary to mention. Secondly, I soon found out that I couldn't dive into my main objective interview question right away. In doing so I only ended up intimidating my interviewees and they would usually start to get a bit frazzled and say that their English language skills weren't satisfactory or give very bland answers to pretty detailed questions. After making this mistake on the first interview I soon found the importance of easing into topics as well as making the time to have long interviews. Not everyone has a businessperson's mentality; people won't always give you the straightaway answer when you ask them. Not everyone's personality can let him or her do that. I found out that the more time and patience you put into the time spent with your interviewee the more they will be willing to share with you. Yet since I planned my ISP pretty well and left ample time for change, besides my two previously mentioned barriers, I don't really feel that I had significant problems during my Independent Study Project.

Since there were only a few other students who had done literary or writing Independent Study projects before me, I had little advice on how to conduct mine in the most successful way possible. Yet, during a session with a previous student in Sarajevo, I did receive some words of guidance concerning interviews. Based on that session and my own personal experience I can say that the atmosphere is very important when you are trying to interview someone from

the Balkans, especially if the topics that you would like to talk about concern the war. Your goal should be to make the interviewees feel comfortable, you need to be attentive to their body language and personality, if they don't seem like they would talk freely with a recorder don't use it. Take as many detailed notes as possible instead. It is more important to get the best and most genuine information with it costing you and your time than the originality and comfort of your interviewee. Also, if you are going to use information from a particular interviewee, be sure to give them a copy of your work, whether they can read it or not. It is important for them to have the final product of your work. You will truly never know how much this means to your interviewee. Though I was lucky in having all of my interviewees speak some, if not perfect English, don't be afraid to get a translator. This is a very sticky and tricky situation within itself but use your academic and project advisors to set you up with the most non biased translator that you can get. If one of your interviewees gives you a contact that has information that may be useful to you but they don't speak English, don't shy away from it. Pursue every option that you can, as you will never know what interesting and vital conclusions you may come to. Lastly, be flexible in your schedule and sure of your travel routes. Things change, interviews get cancelled, and you just might end up liking one city a bit more than the rest. It is important to have a schedule before you start your Independent Study Project but it is as equally important for you to be flexible within the guidelines; there needs to be room for changes. Also, be sure you know how you will get to each city, make sure buses actually have routes to where you'd like to go or that trains run on the

same times during the weekdays. There's nothing worse than being stranded. By planning ahead you can avoid many problems and frustrations while also maintaining a progressing schedule.

Ever since I can remember I have always loved to hear my Dede's (grandpa's) stories. Stories of the "Old Country," life on the farm, family, and the struggles of coming to America in the 1920s. They seemed to possess this magical quality that never failed to evoke a sense of childlike wonder and awe within me whenever he would speak of stories long ago. He was the fire-starter that ignited my curiosity and my eagerness to know about my heritage, the past, and the history of my family from Croatia.

Although I did not have the opportunity to learn the native tongue of my family, I have always felt a deep connection with the culture of our people and the traditions they have shared through history. It's something that is very hard to explain. Being born in the United States and having little contact with others who speak the language, who know the folk stories, and practice the traditions, I just have this compelling feeling of connectivity towards all of these things. As absurd as it may seem, I can feel that somehow I belong to all of it; that there's something simple but so strong within the confines of my blood that binds me to them, a feeling, a sense, an unexplainable sureness.

So now at this point in my life, being a twenty-two year old college student, I have pursued my feelings and gone to the homeland of my people to study and learn about the history, current events, and language of Croatia. However I have dwelled a bit deeper in trying to understand the place from which my Dede and the rest of my family came from. This collection of short stories is my first attempt to not only help myself understand and connect with the life and the people of Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Serbia but as an opportunity to

share stories based on the lives and experiences of these people with others unfamiliar to the Balkans.

I first embarked on this project to learn about life before the war, attitudes obtained during that time, and current ideas held by the people who lived then. I wanted to simply hear the stories, any stories, of a time before the war or before any major conflict began. I was also motivated by the thought that I could help reshape the knowledge and image of the Balkans. To help show others who only know about Croatia as being “the former war-torn Yugoslavia” that there was a time before all of that, before the fighting before, the bloodshed. That I just might be able to transform such a static and oversimplified media lens into a full colored picture.

During the course of the semester, in my experience with learning about Balkan ideals and cultures, I have seen how the effects of war have affected many people and I have seen how those effects play out in the everyday lives and mentalities of people in the Balkans. These grave situations have developed severe problems for the people of the Balkans concerning their own abilities to deal with the past as well as defining their own ethnic identity. I feel that through this type of medium, through storytelling, it might be easier to listen and accept in a positive light; a different angle to remember life – life before the war. For the international community I feel that my work can not only be an interesting, as well as important angle to tell the stories of Croatians, Serbians, and Bosnians. These alternative stories of times before the war, that the international public isn't used to seeing and has had little contact with, can help to give a better overall

understanding of people who had to face such hard and horrific times in the early 1990s. Hopefully I have not, as it was not my intention to, create any sub-idealism that wishes and focuses on solely nostalgic themes and stories, but rather acknowledges the realities of different times, through the perspective of others, and accepts them as different - that had their own era of existence.

I can still feel my small grubby hands resting in his large soft palm after I had heard one of his infamous folk stories involving magic. Although his wife my Baba, would usually roll her eyes lovingly at filling such a young mind with fairytales, even as a child I could still see the little truths, the small important life lessons that my Dede was teaching me through the many stories of his experiences and the traditions of his people. I dedicate this collection of stories to my Grandfather John Artukovich. There is no way to show just how much I am truly grateful for all he did for me and no words to express how much I love and miss him. He has always been a great inspiration to me with all of the incredible obstacles he faced and overcame within the course of his life, in his knowledge and belief in education as the ultimate step towards change, and in the undying love and commitment he had for his family and for his people of Croatia.

I would also like to thank all of the people who helped me create this writing project. Of course and most importantly, I would like to thank all of the men and women who took the time to meet and speak with me. This project wouldn't have been completed without your willingness to tell your experiences and your hospitality to share them with a foreigner. I truly hope that I have not only created a genuine recreation of your feelings but have had the talent to

emulate the courage you showed me in sharing such various subject matters and events of each of your stories.

I would also like to thank Jill, Goga, Lilly with World Learning/SIT for not only being advisors but mentors in my Spring 2006 journey. It was a pleasure not only working with you, but also learning and experiencing a semester abroad in your company and friendship. Lastly I would like to thank my project advisor Jasmina Tešnović for being so energetic and available to and for me with my Independent Study Project. The opportunity to have a writer with such passion, experience, and talent was something I never thought would occur on my travels abroad. Thank you for your insight, guidance, and most importantly time.

**“It seems as though my friend became a shadow ... only with me for a - short time when sun was up ... and then she was gone”
– Bosnia –**

They were inseparable. Those girls were as close as two grapes from the same vine. It seems as though not a day went by where people from the Old Town didn't see them together during one time of the day or the other. They first became friends in primary school at the age of seven during many recess sessions where they just seemed to find each other in the same places of the playground. Then again Amela didn't have any brothers or sisters so it was natural for her to make and cherish her friends. Ivana had an older brother but they were too many years apart to be proper playmates. He would usually bully her into playing goalie in fútbol or would give his little sister some sideline chore so that she would usually lose interest in her brother and his gang of in-the-mud hooligans, and instead search for Amela to play with.

They used to be such creative children, those girls. Always outside, always; and always making up games to play. Ivana's favorite game was when the two of them would go through their mother's old clothes, too many sizes too big for such small children of course, and create outfits for each other. It seemed as though that was a majorly important part of the game, to pick out the best outfit for the other. Since their mothers hardly cut out their wardrobe fabric from their everyday lifestyles, the girls would usually end up bringing out the same two cardboard boxes, almost two times the size of their little frames, to choose articles from. There the two would simply sit in the sun on the sweet grass and dive and search with vibrant idle hands, and eagerly searching eyes, to see what

treasures they could create. They seemed to pile themselves in layers of clothing, from dress shirts to shawls, worn sleeping shirts to undergarments, as if each layer would magically add years of sophistication and maturity to the characters they were transforming into. Even though Ivana loved her mother's string of green plastic beads, broken without a gripping clasp, she would always end up giving it to Amela as a fashioned belt. And even though Amela loved to flop around in her mother's purple house slippers, with a hole in the left toe tip, she wouldn't think twice before handing them over to Ivana as an essential piece of her lady outfit.

With these superbly superfluous decadent costumes the two girls would then play house; attempt to play house. It seemed as though Ivana was always stepping on her dragging skirt or Amela was catching her large shirtsleeve on a small prickly bush of some sort. But nonetheless, such small distractions seemed to be the consequences that came with the adult territory that they were trying so desperately to gain. The hardest task the two faced was when they would try to cut out play money. They would take pieces of old newspaper, find the editorial section, and then begin to cut out rectangular shapes of dinar bills. The true task of course was being able to cut straight lines with a long dangling sleeve constantly falling into the path of the scissors. With such repeated actions of sharing and caring it became second nature for those two girls to know that they were equals. Although it might have seemed like a simplistic "dress up" game for girls it was in those afternoons that they learned of their devotion to each other and their everlasting bonds of childhood friendship.

During the summers, when all of the flowers and berries were in full harvest, the girls would be off in the hills rummaging through the tall grasses finding herbs; their favorites were thyme, mint, and vervain flower. They would just spend hours searching and gathering, searching and gathering. When they had finally found a small supply they would pick and create little pouches out of their shirts, holding the end of them to their chest with one hand, while they used their free hand to brush away weeds and grass to search. After a few days of hunting they would then make little bundles of herbs and tie them off with small bits of twine. Then the two would set up a small stand outside Amela's home, two fold out chairs and a milk crate, and sell their small collection of herbal concoctions. No matter how long it took them, even if it was all day, the two would sit on those rusty fold out chairs and simply talk to each other; talk and talk and talk and talk, and whenever a possible customer would come up the road they would straighten up and try to sell their little herb bundles. Sometimes they would have their stand out for a week, sometimes a few days; it depended on how many plants they had found. But no matter how long it took them they always had the same celebratory ritual. When they had finally sold all of their bundles the two girls would go down to the market and share their earnings. Juice, ice cream, or pastries, were always the favorites for their labors in the hills as well as in their neighborhood.

But no matter how many times those two girls would make themselves princesses, mothers, stand sellers, or elite ladies, it was always a funny site to see Amela participating in such a feminine games of make believe. She was

more of a tomboy during primary school and even though she had no direct siblings to play with she readily participate in a rowdy games of fútbol or especially a game of cowboys and Indians before she would think about playing dress up. Even though she did not have any siblings she did have many cousins, mostly boys, which she was able to play with during family gatherings, dinners, and town events. But even her mother seemed a bit uneasy with her daughter's interests in sports and rough games. By her fourth year of primary school her mother began to give her dolls, all sorts of them in all shapes as sizes, in the hopes that she might take interest in playing house. But Amela was never interested in dolls and she soon began a very big collection of dolls that she would hang on the walls of her room. It was her father that helped her find one of her true passions.

At the time Amela's father was employed with the aircraft industry and was often away on business trips; flying to Asia, or Australia, and many parts of Europe. After one trip he brought home music from Spain and gave it to his daughter. Almost overnight, she became a keen music lover and had dreams of becoming a singer. Whenever her father would travel she would ask him to get her any local music from the area, especially customary or ethno music of the region. Her father never really understood his daughter's wishes but whenever he was off on a business trip somewhere he would always pick up a record for his daughter. Soon her record collection grew along with her confidence and talent to sing. She soon began to take family meetings as opportunities to perform. Since microphones were so large back then she would try and find the best visual

substitute, usually the cleaning hose from the vacuum cleaner, and would then proceed to belt out songs in French, Spanish or Russian. Afterwards her family would give her standing ovations for performing such songs in a foreign tongue to such a lengthy extent. Soon Amela would sing all the time, when she was walking to school, while she was doing her chores, and even before she would go to sleep, music became a permanent part of her life. Even though she treasured her records and didn't allow anyone to touch them she would of course let Ivana play them in her room while they learned songs together or perhaps even created a dance to a favorite tune.

As the girls grew into young women they were still the best of friends, knowing each other since they were seven it wasn't hard to connect with someone who has shared so much of their life with you as well as having been with you in any memories or experience that you can think of. They both attended the same high school and they were just as much inseparable inside of the school walls as they were outside. Even though Amela was an only child she had a fair amount of freedom. As long as she was a good student she could go out and stay out as long as she wanted during the weekdays but she had to be sure to maintain her grades in school. Even though Ivana's home situation was a bit different, since she was the youngest; her parents would usually let her go out as well as long as she was with Amela. It was just a known fact that the two girls would always be out together whenever any town event was going on. If one of them couldn't go to a nightly summer concert then the other wouldn't even consider going.

The two were so close and thought like sisters. They were always such happy children, such giving children; there was so much hope for them in the future years to come and so many opportunities that were theirs. But still, to this very day, no one is sure what happened in May of 1993 when Ivana slowly began to drift away from Amela. Some say it was her parents, that they simply tried to protect their little girl; to keep her safe with other Croats, and that they were the ones to blame. Others speculate that it was her own doing maybe even her own beliefs that lead to the ultimate loss. Nonetheless the war had already started to seep through the ears and minds of the people of both sides of the town then. Everyone soon became afraid and began to gather to what was like them, so they wouldn't feel alone. One didn't want to chance any speculations of being an outsider, a threat, a potential enemy. Amela had many friends who were not Bosniak, in fact, her family had more friends and family members that weren't. Poor girl couldn't understand; how could she? It was as if her own flesh and blood had disowned her, abandoned her. It made their twenty-year friendship seem petty and superficial, to be thrown away so quickly. If nothing seemed right their friendship was true, sure, and stable. It was not obligatory. It was a mutual bond of utter caring and devotion. Nothing should have been able to touch something so pure and so genuine. How could a war break such sisterly love? And she never knew why, poor girl will never know. She would have given anything for Ivana if Ivana had asked. There was no reason not to, no second thoughts to ponder. And just like that, Amela was alone. And even though the war soon unleashed its ugly head in our small town of Mostar, Amela had already

lost one of the most important people in her life even before any of the shelling began. I don't think she will ever be able to accept people quite the same again, to greet people with open arms as well as an open heart; to be able to enjoy and trust in the company and friendship of others. So many young people could not understand why there was so much fighting, why there were so many problems. There is a stiffness that they have carried in themselves as they grow in this world. For Amela, such a large piece of her heart had died inside of her when Ivana left and she soon faced hard years in the mid-nineties. She was forced to grow up in a world that did not include Ivana, in a town that that soon lost its own loyalties of not only Catholics and Muslims but in the ties that grew from the hearts of all the inhabitants of Mostar.

**Vešna of Klobuk
– Herzegovina –**

“Now if you’d all just hush up,” the first boy whispered in exasperation as turned to the other two, “maybe, just MAYBE we can get the sheep into the barn without any more *noise*.” The second and third boy winced at the first’s muffled explosion but they soon agreed as they tried to get all of the livestock together and on the same general path into the swaying doors. The dogs, feeling as if they had finished their job for the day went into the barn first and soon found themselves a spot to sleep. The scent of tobacco was heavy in the air as the drying racks were moved inside for the evening but the boys continued to move the herd inside as quickly and as quietly as possible.

It was well past dark and the three were supposed to have the herd inside as soon as the sun began to set. Autumns in the countryside were the time where occasional snatchings of new young and older sheep turned into one too many common occurrences as the wolves began to lose their hesitation when people were around and instead would give into their primal instincts of preparation of the fast approaching winter. “We can’t loose any more yearlings this year,” the second said to the third, trying to pass on his older brother’s rage chronologically down the line in an attempt to pass up his brother’s initial sting. “I know,” the third said hanging his head in a solemn reply, “I wasn’t watching the last one close enough. I let my eyes wander for a minute and next I see him in the mouth of” he lost his breath as he played the scenario over again in his mind, his bottom lip began to shake. “I know I know,” the second interrupted,

“don’t be such a baby.” The third was quite the sensitive type, much to the dismay of his oldest brother and father. But his mother and second brother felt a certain space in their hearts to protect the third and they were usually the ones to comfort him when he had moments; which was often.

The sheep soon settled in the newly laid hay and the overall atmosphere began to settle for the evening, “thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty,” the second counted as he turned to the first with the slight hope of recognition. “Good,” the first grunted, “you dim-wits didn’t lose any more today. You’re lucky if anything else.” The second and the third looked at each other as they rolled their eyes simultaneous. It seemed as though their brother was always trying to shove his age all over them and somehow had the impeccable timing to find the best self-proclaimed moments of usurping masculinity. As if a constant reminder of their lower ages wasn’t enough, the first would always take the warmest spots of the barn while the second and third were left to fend for themselves. As they each began to fix a bed for the night, throwing about hay in one fashion or the next, the first, already assembled for the night, turned over one shoulder and slowly smiled, “so did you two twits hear about the blacksmith’s daughter?”

The second and the third froze. The two had heard about the death of Vešna, an eight-year-old girl who lived near the village. She was found dead in her bed the week before. The village seemed to determine that she had simply died in her sleep. The third looked at the second with large fearful eyes, “everyone’s heard about her,” the second replied to his older brother, “she went to sleep and never woke up. What of it?” he asked half challenging the first as he

motioned the third to get settled for bed, pulling the third's small blanket over him. The first tried to hold back a devious smile, "but do you know what happened to her? What happened exactly," he continued as he began to chew on a strand of hay, gazing at the ceiling beams of the barn on his back. The third stopped again and looked at the second a few more times as he made his makeshift bed closer to the second. "Oh you *don't* know then," the first trailed on, "probably better if you didn't. Good night then," he finished as he turned away, his back facing the second and the third. Feeling a bit more agitated and eager to call the first's bluff, the second calmly asked, "well if you seem to know so much about it, why don't you share with us then?" The third then hit the second in the arm as the first nonchalantly rolled over, "Well I think it's too much for *children* to hear, " he hissed narrowing his eyes at the third. "I'm not a *child!*" the third whined as he made a disapproving smirk. Knowing that the first was bluffing the second pulled a blanket over his body and closed his eyes in dismissal of his older brother and his younger all together. The third stuck out his tongue at the first as he rolled to one side giving his back to his eldest brother as well as the second.

After some time the first became very quiet. Curious the second opened one eye to look at him, assuming that he would find him asleep. Surprisingly the second found his older brother staring at him in the darkness, his brilliant brown eyes following every slight movement of his body. The first's pupils dilated in adjustment to the levels of darkness that played off the walls of the barn. The first triumphantly smiled as one corner of his mouth raised slightly. "You want to know don't you?" the first whispered. Slowly shifting his weight as quietly as possible,

as to not wake the third, the second nodded. "I had a feeling you were man enough to find out," the first concluded as the second moved closer to his brother, face to face, so that they could speak clearly to each other. "How did you hear about it?" the second asked the first. "What do you mean 'how'?" the first replied, "don't you think that I know what goes on in *my* village?" he continued. "If you want to know about something you have to find out for yourself," the first babbled, "I found out from the daughter of the weaving woman whose brother fishes with Vešna's older brother," the first concluded matter-of-factly. The second's eyes opened wide in complete interest and belief.

The first took the opportunity to step up on his favorite soapbox, "she didn't just fall asleep and never wake up ...," he paused, "... she was taken." The second's eyes narrowed and his head jolted, "taken? They found her body in her bed where her father had put her the night before," he said. The first sighed and shook his head, "yes of course her *body* was left," he emphasized. The second's face soon drained of tension as a million questions entered his mind. "She had been playing with the fairies from the glen," the first uttered. The second covered his mouth with his hand as he tried not to laugh, "fairies! Fairies..." he whispered between gasping for air in the calmest way possible, "you believe in *fairies!*" he teased the first as he snorted between his shaking fingers. "Shut up, shut up, shut up!" the first snapped as he punched the second in the stomach, "you'll wake him!" Clutching his throbbing belly the second soon quieted down, "what did you hit me for?" he wined. The first grabbed the second by the collar of his working shirt, "now I'm no sissy," he hissed into his brother's ear, "but this is the

truth I tell you, now do you want to hear about it or not,” he asked as he shoved the second a few inches away from him. With a new area of his body to rub in easement, the second nodded in agreement and soon took his original place next to his brother.

“Now I didn’t believe it at first myself,” the first explained, “but spirits and sprites work in mysterious ways. They can never be trusted and no one knows exactly what they can do” The second was well aware of the presence of spirits and the powers they had. Especially if someone died, leaving the Earth on bad terms, everyone who was close to that person in the village had to be sure to watch out for visits from the other side. “She had been out by herself one day early last week. It was the afternoon and she was just off by herself near the stream,” the first said, “she wasn’t quite near the beginning of the forest but a bit before. She was racing leaves on the water and soon found herself following the leaves closer and closer to the glen deep and deeper in the forest,” the first explained as he began to imitate the motion of the leaves on the water with his hands. “She soon lost her bearings and track of time. Slowly she started getting closer and closer to the glen. Finally she took her attention away from the leaves and looked around and saw that she was lost. With all those thorny bushes and thick brush near the water she soon panicked and starting rushing through the thicket,” the first said as he started getting more and more animated and involved in his story. “Then she looked around and she knew that she was really lost. You know all the stories about small children and the forest. Some never even make it out. Well, she started thinking about all those stories that she had heard and she

started getting more and more scared as started running frantically through the forest. She ran and ran as long as her legs would carry her and when she couldn't run anymore she stopped and rested on a rock while she cried," the first whispered as the second leaned in a bit more.

"She started crying for her father and crying for someone to help her. She knew that no one would hear her and that she was alone. The sun started setting and soon it was night and Vešna was still lost in the forest. She tried singing to calm herself down. She started singing our childhood songs about pixies and sprites that her mother had sung to her when she was a baby. This is when the fairies heard her singing and followed the sound of her voice until they found her in the forest," the first continued "Now as you know fairies usually play pranks on us and cause mischief and NEVER show themselves to humans. But they must have really felt pity on Vešna as she sat there on some wet leaves, holding her knees rocking herself, and singing those damn songs," the first sighed as he sat up and continued on. "Soon a few other magical creatures came and listened to Vešna sing and after quite some time the creatures agreed that they should take care of such a pure hearted human and so they spoke to her. At first Vešna was frightened but then when the creatures showed themselves she was overjoyed," the first quietly exclaimed. "What did they look like?" the second asked in a strained whisper. "Who?" the first asked. "The creatures," the second replied as he bobbed his head in anticipation. "How should I know!" the first blurted, "I've never seen a sprite!" the second quickly brushed the importance of the relevance aside as his brother continued on.

“So all the creatures tell her that they would like Vešna to live with them in their magical land within the forest and they take her to their secret village. Vešna sees and meets such creatures that humans have never seen before and eats and drinks such sweets that no person has ever tasted. She spends the rest of the night in the company of her new friends and then falls fast asleep in a bed of clovers. When she wakes up the next morning she realizes that she’ll never be able to see her family again and she begins to cry. The fairies and sprites try to calm her down and tell her that she will live with them forever and never be unhappy,” he explains as uses his body as well as his words to tell the dilemma of Vešna, “she cries for three days, without sleep, without food, and without drink. Soon the sprites and the pixies and the fairies decide that Vešna should return to her family in the village. On the fourth night, while she is asleep, the creatures take her back to her house and place her in her bed. In her sleep they tell Vešna that she can never tell anyone of the things she has seen or the creatures she has met and they leave some sweets by her bed. Then they disappear into the night.

The next morning her father finds Vešna asleep in her bed and rather than being happy he is furious. He hasn’t seen or heard from his daughter in almost five days and then she sneaks back into his house without explaining where she’s been and with whom.” “But she *didn’t* sneak back into her father’s house,” the second protested, “the fairies put her there.” “Yes of course I know that, idiot, but her father didn’t know that at the time. Think about how everything must have looked? All he knew was that his daughter had disappeared and then reappeared

five days later,” the first said as he plucked another strand of hay to pick his teeth. “So Vešna’s father grabs her from her bed and begins to shake her asking her where she’s been and what she’s been doing. Vešna starts crying and tries to hug her father whom she has missed for so many days but he shrugs off her arms and again shakes her demanding answers. She knows that she can not tell her father the truth so she tells him as much as she can,” the first carries on as he chews his lone piece of hay. “What could she tell him?” the second urged but somehow he knew the answer. “What would you say?” the first replies, “she told her father that she was simply with good people, that they were her friends. Of course this didn’t settle well with her father and he began to hit Vešna. Soon her father began to give Vešna a pretty good beating and still she would only continue to say that she couldn’t tell and beg her father to stop. Apparently, his fists became so full of anger that he starting punching the girl and soon her mother heard all the noise from the kitchen and came into the children’s room. Thinking that Vešna had come home hurt she ran to her daughter’s side but her husband held her back. He said that no one was allowed to talk or help a girl who was unclean and had given herself to a man before marriage.” The second’s mouth dropped, “but how could he even think such a thing!?” he exclaimed as the third’s sleep was slightly interrupted. He rustled in the hay a bit as his two older brothers’ held their breath but soon the third let out a deep sigh and continued to sleep.

“What else could the man do?” the first asked, “his only daughter had been missing for days and then miraculously shows up ... the very same thought

would have crossed my mind. The very same. Vešna's mother was heartbroken and soon began to cry as all the hopes for her daughter seemed to vanish right before her eyes. The look on her mother's face was enough for Vešna to tell the truth. Then and there she told her mother and father what had happened a few days before; how she had become lost, how she had met the pixies and fairies, and how they told her not to tell anyone of what had happened. With this Vešna's father became even more angered and told her that if there was something worse than a whore then that would be a liar and he locked her in her room without any food or water for the rest of the day and into the night. The next morning when her mother came to wake Vešna they found her dead!," the first jabbed as his hands flew above his head, "though one could say that the beatings may have really hurt Vešna, that she might have hurt herself, or maybe even that she died of a broken heart. The truth is the fairies came back to Vešna that night and took her soul to keep the secrets of their enchantment with them forever!"

The two boys then sat there a moment looking at each other blankly. Then the first gathered his blanket, closed his eyes, and drifted off to sleep. The second was left awake alone in his thoughts. He closed his eyes and breathed in deeply letting the mixture of hay, mud, sheep, and tobacco leaves waver in his nose. Even though it was autumn the weather wasn't as cold as it had been in previous years and he pulled his blanket close to his chin. The second began to think about snow and how the black-herding dogs loved to prance around in the soft powder. Soon he began to doze in and out of consciousness with thoughts of

the bad winter his village had a few years ago in 1929. His final thoughts were of Vešna and decided that spirits work in mysterious ways.

**Most
– Bosnia –**

Go.

We need more money. There is no way in hell I'm going to do this for only 660,000 dinars. Who do they think we are some cheap whores in a nightclub? Shit! The others really better hype this up if we even want to get something decent. There's no way that I'll do it for less than 1,650,000 dinars. I hope that more tourists show up, I'm roasting in my skin here. As if I need to be any darker than I already am. I could be an African my skin's gotten so much sun. Wouldn't that be the day an African Bosnian. Have to tell the boys that one after. I haven't even been outside that much. Always working Dad's shop. Glad I'm not in that roasting oven; nice to be outside for a change. With my day off I'm going to make my OWN money. I can make the same money that I could make in an entire month in the shop with one good day. God willing. What are you looking at you gawky, round, stubby man with your black socks under your plastic sandals? Oh look it's a mosque 'why look here I've never seen such a thing before in my LIFE! What a pretty little primitive thing that those diminutive Muslims pray in isn't it?' I think they're French. Fucking French; think that they're so superior in this world with their structural "marvel" and their little bicycle races. Would you forget taking pictures of birds with your big bulky camera strapped to your neck for two minutes and focus on something *really* interesting here! Don't act like you don't see me here standing right in front of you. Just stare back at me you coward. Now if you'd all just pitch in a few dinars each we could get this started. They better stop flirting with the Dutch girls and get back to working the crowd. I'd

much rather have one of our own; a Bosnian girl with nice tits and a ripe ass than some fragile pale-face. She's too skinny – would have to pour water on her before I had her. Just to make sure that I wouldn't start a fire with those two sticks for legs. God I love that one. Who told me that? There was an even better one about Slovenian girls. Shit I can't remember. Fucking shit. Yes, yes that's right. I'm only holding onto the metal lead. Look and I can even walk without touching it. What? You don't think that I've got balance do you? I'll show you. See it's easy I've been doing this for years. Good work, good work moving them a bit more over here so that I can create a break. This is all in my control and I've been learning and living this trade ever since I was twelve. That's right, that's right, all of those people are looking at something and you should come over here and see what everyone's gawking at. Shit it's *hot*. The stone's even getting hot up here. But I can't sit down, can't sit. I could go at any moment you know and you'd better be ready to see the truly amazing site. Get your cameras ready for that perfect shot to show all your friends back home. When your friend's ask you what you were doing in August 1989 you can show them your finely embroidered leather journal case with pictures of 'this crazy Yugoslavian boy flinging himself from...' Fuck Mary Mother of God! LEAVE THE DUTCH girls alone horny dogs. Yeah uh huh I'm watching you sons of bitches. That's right that's right you know the sign. No not now we need more people. Just DO it! Good I need a good introduction or announcement to get things going. That's right the 'amazing height of twenty-one meters with techniques handed down from our ancestors and through four generations...' ha. I love that part. I think

that is the real seller for us. That's right there's a "secret diver's society" that's been practicing "impeccable technique" over the decades and now you too can be a part of the fascinating tradition for only a few measly dinars. Hmm. Wonder who was the first? Fucking 45°C. I wonder at what degree does the skin actually begin to melt from the body. I can't wait to get blisters on my heels again.

Somehow I always get to that lovely thought at one time or another when I'm up here now don't I. Perhaps its between points of delirium from heat exhaustion.

Never fails. I wonder what we are having for lunch today? I hope japrik; nothing better than Mom's japrik. I could have eaten all the japrik and Bosnia while mom told me stories. Mom's famous bedtime story. Was it a Muslim girl and a Muslim boy or a Muslim girl and a Croat? Shit I can't remember I need some water. Don't you love drinking water that's the same temperature as the air...? Can't we hurry this up so we can get some beers! I'm still thirsty. Better. Now what were they? Shit I don't' ... Yes I do. Yes I do they were both Muslim and the girl was coming across the bridge into the Old part of town when the north wind blew one of her, one of her ... things. One of her coverings... her ... shawl? Her perida, her perida. And it floated off into the Neretva exposing her face. She must to have been one really beautiful Muslim if I was to go after some flimsy piece of cloth. I mean *really* beautiful. No FUCKING beautiful! Long wavy brown hair with green eyes and round subtle lips and ... FUCK! Almost went too soon there. Try to play it off like my foot was burning from the heat or something. That's right I almost left before he was done with introductions and you weren't going to get a look now were you no! Need to always anticipate, always be ready. How much do we have

in the pot now? Not enough. Fuck your mother you asshole we're going to do it! I'm the leader of this performance. That's right go get ready. Now to swing my arms about a bit; perhaps a bit more. Look athletic, look athletic! More 'ooos' and 'ahhs.' That vocal interest better mean that there's going to be more viewers. That's right I'm warming up getting ready for the big event. Good he's back. Not until I give the signal. How much now? Super. How did we manage to go up 1,650,000 dinars in a matter of a few minutes? We're going to have a good round of drinks after this. Where to? The old baths I suppose. I'm taking a bath in my own sweat here. Could I have a spoon to help me breathe while I try to take pieces of air to chew? Shit. Where else do we end up on such hot days. More money so I can save for a visa. Germany here I come! I want to go now more than ever. Can't believe all those scared asshole left their home for some stupid clerk job in Germany. Fucking scared cowards. Can't even be proud of their own. Fuckers didn't even go to Croatia they just went right past it into Germany. They could have had a perfectly decent job here at home or done the tourist bit for the summer to get by. Still, things haven't been the same without them and they tell me that there are some really pretty girls from all over the world who come to Oktoberfest. I can't wait to get a beer after this are we ready yet? Wait a minute wait a minute. I have to make sure that I'm in the right spot. Need to make sure that I don't get myself caught in the strongest current and end up drowning. Remember dive out and then tuck, dive out and then tuck. Just breathe. God I always get that tingling feeling in the tips of my toes. Almost time to go. Loosen up loosen up. In case I'm off by a few meters a stiff body won't help me when

they take me out piece by piece. Remember to float up. Don't fight the water. Use it to help you to the side of the river like you've done before. A couple more breaths and get ready. I am the best diver. I am the greatest diver. I am the best diver that this town has ever seen. Ready? Now! Off he goes.

One ...

two ...

three ...

Go.

We were such cocky sons of bitches, sons of bitches. We were good at handling the crowds that came to see us dive but we were still cocky sons of bitches. We were the first group to start using the two-diver strategy though. One diver would dive without warning and soon as he hit the water the second would go. It would help to keep our dare devil stunt going, since no one could get a shot of either of the two diving in mid air with the two person-timed distraction. We had three great summers of tourists who would pay hefty sums of money to barely see us hit the water. Soon people got smart and would just wait as long as it took keeping their eyes on one of us at all times. But even though we would get good amounts of money. But it was never about that. Never about that entirely. Diving wasn't our only source of income. It was the thrill of doing it, the pride to have the courage to do it. It was like we were living gods with ultimate town bragging rights. When you're that age you think you're untouchable— that nothing can beat you. We loved that rush, those seconds of doubt mid air when we thought we

might not live to take another breath. But we would hit the water and then somehow take in the sweetest gasps we had ever experienced afterwards. And each time it was just like that but even better than the time before. It was an endless drink from the fountain of youth. We were born again after each dive to appreciate another day. But ... that was it. I can't remember all of my dives but I can remember that one; I remember everything. It took a whole two hours to get the funds paid up ... but that was it. The last time I dove off of the Bridge; THE Bridge. After our bridge was blown to pieces a part of me seemed to go with it. Who the fuck cares who did it the fact of the matter is that someone did it. How can I explain; how can I expect you to understand? To you it might just be some old bridge, some meaningless structure that some Ottoman's had built in the 16th Century. No shit. Who can tell you why it's important to me?

Why is it important to me...?

The Bridge was our continual unity, our brotherhood to one another, a sign of our rich heritage and prosperity, a physical representation and a constant reminder of equality and hope. This new bridge is a reminder of how we destroyed all that. How we ate away at each other, at our brothers and our heritage. Now all I can see is a reminder that man possesses the ugliest darkness within himself that not only has the power, but the will to destroy any and everything it touches.

... Who wants to dive for that?

Comrade
– Bosnia –

We were fed up. Then again it seemed like the entire student population of the larger world powers were also voicing their opinions and protesting one thing or another. Sixty-eight was a big year for that. I remember reading about American students in California, Kansas, Washington D.C., northwest, southwest, all over you name it; forming and actually participating in massive protests. Most of the material I ever saw explained that such physical demonstrations were “in direct correlation” with the Vietnam War. It was hard to get a lot of reading material on such “radical” things going on in such places as the United States, for example. But someone in the Fakultet had a brother, a cousin, a sister, a lover who had the access to written materials with news from overseas. But with such unreliable and unsteady sources I wouldn’t say that there was ever a constant or trustworthy exchange of information from them to us. It just felt like we always heard about the extremes where hundreds of thousands of people would gather to ask about the relevance of the wars their citizens were “fighting” or to simply “send our troops home.” I was so amazed that they could do that, just go out in the streets and say what they really felt. Not only that but the American government actually seemed affected by it. The protests seem to shake them in one way or another. Even though it might have been something small, their government actually heard them. Who knows if they listened to them or not, persay; of course things take time to take action, not everything can happen overnight. But some sort of student fire had been ignited. I remember that this even started to spread through Europe when the

adolescents of Germany began inquire about Nazism and previous generations; 'what were their roles in the matter? Why was everything covered up in World War Two to such a drastic extent?' Questions like that. Look how their fight for justice ended for them; the wall did finally fall did it not? Weren't there also student riots in France? I think I remember something pertaining to cover-ups relating to the Vichy Republic if I'm not mistaken; General Petain and a collaboration with the Nazis? Blasphemies, scandal, disgrace? Something of that abstract ensemble I would speculate.

But I really don't know what started our little display. It was a couple years after sixty-eight. We were living in "Yugoslavia" and things were relatively good. Sometime between seventy-two and seventy-three ... I think. Even though students in the Fakultet could travel, take holidays to the coast with their families, their parents had solid plans for comfortable pensions; we knew that we were paying too much for our education. We were living in a time of trust, security, benefits. So how could it be that the cost of books, living expenses in the dormitories, and overall tuition was not what we were promised? Even though I was a bit intimidated by the situation it was really an exciting time. You could just feel this sea of ideas and emotions churning this way and that. Your peers began speaking about their "thinking outside the box" thoughts regularly and challenging the systems, which we had been following for the few years that we were in university. A few of my classmates started planning a sit in protest. They wanted to talk to the heads of the Fakultet to change policies. Apparently when they scheduled appointments they were either ignored or thrown out as nuisances.

It wasn't scheduled to end at any particular time. Most of us sat outside the Fakultet, right on the river. We decided that we weren't going to go to class or pay anything to any of the resources of the institution until we were given the right to talk to the administrators. Of course we had the whole bit, signs, banners, those and insistent chants and recitations that rhymed on drummed out beats. But it was a very peaceful demonstration otherwise. Our superiors still perpetually ignored us but we continued to stay in front of the Fakultet, day and night. We set up tents and someone organized make shift bathrooms. It was quite a little operation. You could just feel the tension in the air but there was also this sense of hope, that we were going to actual accomplish *something*. I wasn't aware of it, but soon our student protest started to gain local coverage, then people in Mostar, Banja Luka, even Split knew about our want for free education.

We had no idea that he had heard about it, that we had even been brought to his attention. It was just a small student protest of about three hundred kids, at the most. There was no real threat or true interest that he should have had in our display. But he came. On the fourth day of the sit-in he arrived in Sarajevo. It was all so matter-of-factly, so incredibly informal and neighborly. Within a few hours of listening to our various student leaders and organizers, he simply walked them up the stairs, and right to the very offices of the heads of the Fakultet. Only those few students who were with him at the time knew of the occurrences that developed within the walls of those administrative offices. But after a few hours they returned with signed policies for change. He even stayed after we had received our requested terms and spoke with students, right there in front of the

Fakultet. He answered questions, spoke on governmental policy, and just simply spoke with us. We were all equals. I don't know if he continued to stay in the city for any time after that, perhaps he could have also attended some imperative political meetings in Sarajevo. He might have made his trip to our city a bit more worth while. But if there were other matters on his plate when he came to our protest, they weren't apparent to us. What other leader would have made such an effort to help meet the needs of his people? Help maintain the peace while meeting various needs?

Now what do we have in two thousand and six? We have a protest that has been going on for almost a year. Farmers are angry with our government importing agricultural goods from other countries. It's true that we can produce such goods here in Bosnia, fruits and vegetables, and they would swear on their lives that they would be far superior in quality. Farmers have, asked, demanded, plead for new technologies and policies. You can see them and their peaceful protest, over thirty people have been living in tents right outside the remains of the pre-war government building, meters away from the authorities' official offices. They have been asking for reformation of policies for some time now, at least two years, but they have been out there for over three hundred days and counting. Asking for a countrywide coordinator, a construction of a ministry of agriculture, something to give them a voice in the market economy of their hometowns. Just the chance to speak with an official has been perpetually denied. The chance to take change for the farmers in the name of the farmers has been ignored.

There are people who can say what they want about Tito good, bad, in-between people are entitled to their opinions. But I don't believe that others truly understand. He was not a dictator in any sense of the definition; he was no Fidel Castro, Stalin, or Hitler. He spoke and acted not only on the rights and freedoms of the people but also for the overall unification of Yugoslavia. He was a great leader and I have the utmost respect and unwavering affection for such a man, a visionary, and comrade.

“Whenever we would leave our city they would wish us a safe and swift journey and we prayed, that if we ever returned, that their arches would open wide to welcome us on our arrival home.”

– Bosnia –

Even though I am a Croat I will still say that they were some of the most beautiful hills that I have ever seen. Ask any person from Sarajevo and they will agree with me. No matter where we all ended up in the war, what foreign lands we came to and lived in, our hearts still longed for this city and the hills of happy times before. They had such a great presence and pure magnificence. Whenever we would leave our city they would wish us a safe and swift journey and we prayed, that if we ever returned, that their arches would open wide to welcome us on our arrival home.

Everyday is a small battle. You must look out onto those hills and sort through all of the thoughts that come into your mind in one short moment. Sometimes when I wake up and look out from my balcony window I am filled with happiness, hope, despair, and disgust all at the same time. There is more fighting still happening but now it is not outside in the streets, it is in our hearts and in our minds. Sometimes I wonder which place is harder for us to live in. But their beauty still shines through. They are still beautiful. But I can not ignore their history that is written all over their faces. How could I?

There are thousands of small reminders growing up from the Earth; poisonous weeds sprouting from every free space of their faces. They are slowly stealing the beauty of our hills, taking small bits of their dignity and grace. Even if you are not looking for them they will find you and infect your eyes. I do not understand, I do not know why we must always be reminded of such times; why

we must see the brutal aftermath of things that none of us can explain. I do not know. I pray that one day I will understand.

I always had a secret spot when I was in primary school. Even when I became a young lady I would go to my special place to write. One day I told another girl about my special place and soon many others from my neighborhood began to play there. If you drew a straight line up from the Library on the river, up to the very top of the hill, you could not miss it. It was a flat open space before the trees; where the forest started. It was so beautiful up there in the hills. I can not explain. It was just a nice safe place that I liked to go to.

I would go there to play with my friends. We did not need much as children and when we were older we needed even less to keep us happy. When were small children we would gather old tin cans and kick them about as a game. It was simple really. As we grew older we would set tin cans as goal markers for a game of fútbol; girls and boys together. Each part of the neighborhood would make one team or another. Some girls would not like to play rough with the boys and they would watch while the boys would line up tin cans in a row and try to hit them with rocks from a distance. I had many sweet memories in my special spot. The mountains were so beautiful and full of life. But now I can not look at that place with loving eyes.

Soon it was very dangerous to go to my special spot. The Serbian Army had surrounded us and the city was trapped by the very mountains that we loved so dearly. Soon my special spot was made into a sniper's nest. Our beautiful hills held a place where soldiers take specially crafted guns to kill people. Everyday

people, people walking to the market, to Sunday service. We left our tin cans in my special spot. The soldiers used them as target practice when they were bored. I could hear them shooting deep into the night. The bullets would be launched from one place in the hills to another. Sometimes if you were very careful you could see the hills lit by the rockets flying through the night's sky. The hills were still beautiful in the flare lights of the ammunition. It was boasted as one of the best vantage points in the city. I do not know why. I do not know.

These are just the thoughts that I come into my mind during the day, every day of my life. I do not understand why we must always be reminded of such times. I do not know why I can not see that beauty in our hills now. I pray that one day God will grant me one final untainted look at our hills before I leave this earth. Though they still have their beauty I know what is behind the surface, what is buried deep within the ground. I know how many of us will never leave the broken arms of our hills. I am glad that I am still able to remember our hills. How brilliant they were. I am thankful that I can still see our hills and smile but it is not the same. I do not think I will see something that beauty again. I do not know. I can not tell you why. I pray that one day I will understand.

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