

Inspired by true events, DECEPTION follows a team of European operatives and a female CIA agent, Ingrid, from diverting money out of the Miklos Fund's educational programs, to stealing enriched plutonium from the Russia-owned military base of Crimea's Sebastopol, with the purpose to kill an ex-KGB officer in London by poisoning him.

DECEPTION

by Roxanne von Andrian

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This is the story of how we stung the KGB/FSB,
as payback for their evil history of murder and manipulation.

DECEPTION



ROXANNE VON ANDRIAN

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Work

“You’ll get a call from Professor Leni Roviewtski, Cambridge University of United Kingdom, today or tomorrow,” Ron Luceanu told me one morning, during my first week working at the foundation. “Professor Roviewtski signed up with Miklos Fund’s headquarters of New York City to coordinate the selection process for two-week grants at Cambridge University. The program is tailored for Romanian and Hungarian businesspeople.”

“What’s the subject of study?”

“European free markets, currencies competition, tariffs, international trade. They skim the surface of business studies. They are given resources and access to more information channels if they need to go deeper,” Ron said. “It’s more like an immersion in Western European business protocols.”

“What do we pay Roviewtski?”

“A small stipend. Just enough to enhance his meager professorship pay.” Ron took a teasing tone: “Leo Miklos asked me to assign a certain Ingrid Breban as Program Coordinator.”

“Okay, that’s good,” I acknowledged with a large smile. “Let’s get this started.”

Talking to Ron reminded me again why I liked him right away. He was a survivor and a self-made man.

“I was born in a poor peasant family from the rural Oltenia region of Romania,” he would often say, sometimes with a sense of pride, other times sarcastically, as if explaining why he couldn’t grasp certain topics faster.

He often had moments of emotion and compassion for people or events he could trace back to memories of his past hardships.

“I understand what they’re going through,” he would comment about fund’s applicants for individual grants who wanted to open small

businesses in the country; their introductory letter accompanying the financial request application was inevitably a tearing story of their humble and miserable lives. "I've been there before. I was no different than them."

Not more than a few days later, I was getting ready to meet the acrimonious, skinny, seventy-year-old Professor Leni Roviewtski. He and I had several conference calls before his arrival. I received much of the program description and requirements through email.

George Gorza picked him up from the Henri Coanda International Airport in one of the fund's cars. Gail Forlorn joined me in the office to welcome him.

Leni Roviewtski entered the office. He was tired after his flight. He was badly dressed. He looked provincial and seemed confused as to how he'd ended up there. Romania was a country he hardly knew how to point out on a map, much less anticipate what to expect from those who he was supposed to meet.

"Hi, how are you?" Gail Forlorn greeted him, stretching her arm full-length to shake hands while walking quickly towards them, and having a wide smile on her face in that typical ostentatious, American-of-the-nineties-business-friendly way, which caused Roviewtski to take a small step back, seemingly even more disorientated.

I followed Gail in the handshaking ritual. I could feel the awkwardness emanating from the visitor. He sported a typical British and uptight demeanor.

"Hi there, Leni," Ron Luceanu called out as he walked into the lobby. Ron often gave the impression of being slightly aloof and had his ingenuous baby face on with round eyes and chin up, which made him even more likeable. He hid a shrewd core under his social persona. He had oscillated in life from communism to soft rebellion, managing to create a network of both hardcore *Securitate* officers and intellectually unaligned friends, while occasionally leaking information from one group to another along the way.

Ron Luceanu, Leni Roviewtski, Gail Forlorn and I lunched at the Lahovari Restaurant where our employees and board directors were regular customers. We enjoyed the restaurant's ambience, architecture, and patina of history. The building was a mix between a nineteenth-

century college architecture with gothic arcades and an *art deco* Italian villa.

“The Cambridge University’s programs sponsored by the Miklos Fund are divided into several categories: environment awareness, business trends, international journalism, and civil society,” Ron pitched at the table. “The studies are carved to benefit Romanian companies that want to compete in global markets.”

“Yes, I admire Leo Miklos for his courage and forward thinking,” Rovievski answered. Gail nodded radiantly to him. She was a big fan of my uncle.

“The need to gain visibility, and competing internationally is pushing owners of these companies to send select employees to our two-week classes abroad,” Ron continued. “The concept is to have these trainees, who are already accomplished professionals in their fields, become immersed in the European Western civilization while taking these *culture clash* classes.”

“Yes, I’m aware of the fund’s vision,” Leni Rovievski emphasized in his dry, screechy British accent. “For this reason, the training curriculum I came up with is intended to help the participants change their *modus operandi* from a monopolistic, dictatorial, and socialist structure to a civil society.”

“Civil society!” Gail picked up. “This is basically our *credo*.”

“Morning.” I looked at the yellow card I found on my desk. It carried my name, my title *Program Coordinator*, and the name of the fund in capitalized letters. “Nice business card.”

“Now, you can hand out cards to visitors and candidates,” Monica said.

“I’ll start with Leni Rovievski; he’ll understand we mean business. It’s our most important program so far.”

“They were not ready yesterday, for exchanging ours in return to his,” Monica added.

While the foundation had a board of fifteen directors, it had a small staff: I was the program coordinator, the accountant was Monica, the security manager was George, the office manager was Gail, and the

president was Ron. Monica ordered the business cards a day after Professor Roviewtski arrived from United Kingdom, as a first step to a busy year of collaboration of our organization with educational entities in Western Europe. The target was to reach a minimum of one hundred and fifty Romanian students per month. After spending hundreds of hours on the conference calls and exchanging emails, we received commitments for scholarships from UK, France, and Switzerland colleges. We were working with the European embassies of Bucharest to issue student visas for those who were selected to study abroad.

The phones were ringing.

“Good morning,” I said, “this is the Miklos Fund for a Civil Society. How may I help you?”

Monica offered to make coffee for both of us. I nodded.

“Yes, we left several messages last week. We’re getting started with our selection process for the business certificate program at Cambridge. I was promised the entire list of programs for the next few months, but I didn’t receive them yet.” The Miklos Fund headquarters of New York City office manager was on the other end of the line. She sent me the list in an email and waited on the line until I confirmed receipt.

An index of colleges and universities willing to recruit students was in front of me. The selection process was preceded by grants generously distributed by Leo Miklos under an agreement to accept selected Romanian citizens to attend specific subjects of study.

Leni Roviewtski spent the first two days in Romania on a guided tour of historic castles and monasteries in and around Bucharest.

“How is your trip going, Professor Roviewtski?” I listened to Roviewtski thank us for the hospitality. “Okay, we’ll be waiting for you tomorrow at nine a.m. We have the conference room booked for the selection process. We scheduled twenty interviews between nine-thirty and noon. Resumes will be on your desk in order of their arrival.”

Monica and I had spent the week screening eighty-five candidates down to twenty interviewees. We gave preference to those who had bachelor’s degrees in an engineering field or a science discipline close

to the field of study. There weren't any Romanian schools providing free-market business studies under Leninist ideology curriculum.

"I hope we don't need to stay late again," Monica said. "I have an appointment at my house for a new babysitter."

We'd worked until evening hours every day that week.

"Tudor is picking me up today after work," I announced. "Did you meet him last Friday? He got here at about eight ... don't remember if you were still here."

"I left right before his arrival. George was told by his porters that you had a late caller." Monica had a quick smile.

Tudor Graziani was an afterthought partner sent over by Joe to liaise between me and the Cultural Attaché of United States Embassy in Bucharest, for the CIA. Joe Punta announced a change of protocol through a voice message I received on my line home phone: "This is a change to current protocol *Watching Doll*." I let it play without picking up, according to my instructions.

"Tudor's role is to monitor the Miklos Fund from the US side, and debrief you and us on its financial activities and business commitments," Joe Punta said on the cell phone that I was delivered soon after the change of protocol callout. I was using a Motorola MicroTAC cell phone built for the CIA in 1990.

"Upon meeting him, you'll receive your carry-on gun and special equipment," he added.

"How special?"

"It's a 9mm, flat and small, and easy to stripe at any height of your leg. Easiest to mount is one inch above the ankle."

"What's the rationale behind sending Tudor?"

"The need to have Tudor sent out to Bucharest became clear right after you got the job with the Miklos Fund. You've sent your report about passing the hiring interview. We understood you're spending too much time on the inside. You're blind to the foundation's businesses outside its Bucharest location. We need eyes and ears outside the organization, so you can continue to be the eyes and ears inside," Joe explained. "I'll need a risk evaluation of discovery within one week, before Tudor checks in with you."

In a few days, I called Joe back. I had the answers he needed.

“During the interview, my *fake* life story passed Gail’s and Ron’s scrutiny test. Through their line of questioning they were trying to avoid government employees getting infiltrated into the staff, if they were CIA or Romanian, *Securitate* or KGB loyalists.”

“I surveyed Gail, Ron, George and Monica, in separate conversations on how to detect foreign interest infiltration within the Miklos Fund,” I continued after Joe kept silent. “Neither Gail nor Ron have any sources to investigate the backgrounds of new hires. They rely on their own feel and judgment.”

“What about George Gorza?” Joe asked pointedly, which showed the CIA was learning from my reports not only the situations but the profiles of the main players.

“George has the ability to run scattered checks through his relations at the Bucharest Police Directorate, which is connected to the Internal Affairs Department of the new Romanian Government. Many of George Gorza’s old connections are broken because of the changes in the country and the precipitous retirement or leave of government employees,” I related. “The probability that a Romanian citizen would have the resources to discover my CIA connection are close to zero.”

Joe didn’t answer. I added the piece of information George spilled out when we speculated in the office about Russians occupying Romania after the 1989 Revolution:

“George told me and Ron, in an office talk we had, that the links to Moscow’s KGB agents, who had been running Eastern European background checks before the regime change, are severed.”

“It’s a go,” he concluded. “Tudor is in.”

Only a few days later, on Sunday afternoon, I met Tudor. Our designated meeting point was at the ice rink of Cismigiu Garden, downtown Bucharest, near the ice skate rental kiosk. Reviewing the photos that I was sent in advance, I thought I recognized his face from the times I’d participated in cross-departmental intelligence analysis with field agents and military recruits. He arrived at the check-in point sooner than me. He had a dark green winter jacket on, and held his hands in the pockets.

“Hi,” I mustered a smile that was getting larger as he turned around and looked at me.

We hugged, acting like other many couples that were crowding the place. The ice rink and its surroundings were full to the brim. The music was blasting, alternating disco and tango rhythms.

He slid a small package in my jacket pocket.

“This is your special weapon delivery. It’s from our embassy inventory.”

We walked halfway around the ice rink, watching the people circling the oval-shaped venue. They seemed happy and worry-free. Most of them were in their twenties or thirties, skating in small groups or in pairs and holding hands. We could see a few families with young children too.

“I have to go,” Tudor said. “I’ll see you next week.”

“Bye.”

Next Monday, seated at my desk, I picked up the ringing phone. “Good morning, this is the Miklos Fund for a Civil Society.” Calls were directed to me by default. “It’s Birmingham University,” I whispered to Monica.

“Must be the stage-acting summer camp for students,” she replied.

While listening on the phone, I nodded in agreement. “Allow me to direct you to our Office Manager’s voice message, Gail Forlorn. She will call you back with the details and status of the selection process. She is coordinating this program.”

Monica Gorza brought in coffees on a square tray, and took a seat at one of the empty desks in the room. We lit cigarettes and sipped our hot coffee, while answering the phones. I had been smoking like a chimney since I started my Romanian job.

Later on, Gail Forlorn came in, dressed in black slacks, a white blouse, and a jacket with a floral red-and-violet motif. She was getting in later than the staff, and leaving right after lunch to go to appointments with government entities and university representatives, in order to promote the company and leave leaflets behind. She was using Ron’s name that had some fame in political circles because of

his doctoral dissertation, which had been published only recently under Ceausescu's ruling. The purpose of the walk-the-talk intense marketing campaign was to appease bad feelings against the American fund, which was quite a novelty for a traditionally xenophobic culture imbued with anti-Western propaganda. She was also tasked by Leo Miklos to stay closely connected with the United States Embassy. We were regularly invited to cultural events organized at the American and French Embassies.

"How are you, guys?" Gail asked walking in. "Busy?"

"Switzerland's University of Zürich called us back with a certificate program of three weeks for agricultural business development and land recovery. It's intended for Eastern European and North African candidates," Monica eagerly reported. "I know Ingrid forwarded this idea to the board. Fertile soil got drained by the twenty-year policy of intensive agriculture exploitation. How did the University get a hold of our phone numbers?"

"New York City fund's team, of course," Gail Forlorn snapped back. She was very competitive and often suspected the team at headquarters was trying to portray her as irrelevant. Her main responsibility was to act as a *goodwill* ambassador and to present the Miklos Fund as a bucket of money ready to be spent in the best interest of Romania and its people. Every action of establishing a relationship between the Bucharest office and European entities that the New York City headquarters established was like a slap in her face. This was meant to be *her* role.

Monica Gorza bit her lips. She didn't want to see Gail upset. She was sucking up and trying to please her.

"We have to organize the cocktail party Leo Miklos requested by the end of the month. He wants invitations to be sent to the Cultural Attaché of the US embassy, the French Ambassador, the board, certain Romanian Government officials of the new regime, and The Group of Civic Initiative," Gail directed us. "I'll make the calls to the French Embassy."

Gail spoke English, French, and Romanian, and she thought highly of her language skills. She occasionally challenged her subordinates' fluency in English and French. She was openly jealous of Monica's

rudimentary understanding of Hungarian Transylvanian and of my broken Yiddish.

“Gail, you have a message from Birmingham University of United Kingdom, regarding that summer camp for actors you wanted to get started,” I said.

“Thanks,” Gail replied.

“Okay, let’s get ready for our delivery,” Monica turned to me. It was the second time that month we were scheduled to deliver cash money to feed our account at the Romanian National Bank.

George Gorza brought in two shoeboxes filled with \$500,000 each, in stacks of one hundred \$100 bills. He put them on my desk. They had a square motif in a pink-and-white pattern and the writing *Magazin Victoria* on the lid, so they looked pretty authentic, as if containing real shoes from the oldest and best-known clothing and accessories department store of Bucharest.

“I’ll be waiting in the car,” he said on the way out.

Monica printed the confirmation of receipt, folded it and slid it in her handbag. I grabbed one of the shoeboxes and she seized the other one, following me out the door.

The fund’s black Dacia car was waiting at the door. We took the backseats of the vehicle, not different then last time, with the shoeboxes on our knees.

George stopped the car at a side entrance of the Romanian National Bank. Monica had only six to seven steps to the entrance. I had to walk around the car before getting on the sidewalk. George was out of the car fast. He positioned himself in the middle of the sidewalk. He looked around and along the road both ways, then made a quick sign with his hand, signaling it was safe to get out of the car.

We opened the car doors at about the same time. I was still in the street when I saw a red Volkswagen pull out from around the corner, screech to a stop, parallel to our car, at two-foot distance between doors. Monica was only a few steps away from entering the bank, but she stopped and turned to see us.

“Ingrid,” I heard George screaming in my direction, “get out of the street!” He made large gestures with his arms in the air for me to accelerate my pace. Monica stood there like frozen.

As I glimpsed at the red car, I saw a man jumping out from the right front seat charging towards me. I started running towards George. I took two or three steps, then threw the box to him.

“Catch,” I shouted.

Turning to face the aggressor, I sized him up. He was about five feet eight inches tall and definitely heavier than me. Crouched, I turned my right shoulder in the direction of impact. My right foot was extended to make him trip and fall. It worked. The man collided with me and took a plunge forward. Shaken and on the ground, I saw him fall hard. He hit me with his left foot on his way down. I raised my head and shouted, “Get the hell inside the bank!”

George grabbed Monica by the arm and pushed her through the door. We knew since last time we were there the bank had one porter in the lobby, a retired policeman.

The man hit me with his right fist in the hip and abdomen while twisting his upper body in my direction, still on the ground. I unstrapped my ankle handgun, palmed it firmly in my right hand, and hit him on his cheek. Obviously, I didn’t punch hard enough, because even though he continued to struggle to stand up, he managed to kick me with his leg.

“Fuck,” I muttered.

Flexing my left arm to push myself higher off the ground and get more leverage, I slammed his temple with the handgun clasped in my right hand with all the brute force I could summon. His head fell hard on the asphalt.

He was bleeding from his temple. I got up on my feet while watching him. His eyes were closed. I looked around. Three or four people noticed us from across the street, about three hundred feet away, and were moving in our direction.

My gun went in the back pocket of my pants. I grabbed the man by the arms and started to pull his inert body towards the bank entrance. My plan was to get him inside and have the bank’s porter deal with the crowd and the public relations of the entire event: The bank was a client of the Miklos Fund. *Their doormen could at least protect our identities if they couldn’t physically defend us*, I speculated.

Luckily the bank porter, probably at George's call for help, opened the door to peek out and see what was going on. He noticed me and jumped out to the rescue. He was a short-rugged man with grey hair. We pulled the body inside and left it on the marble floor of the entry hall.

"Go get the driver of the red Volkswagen!" I shouted to the porter and two security guards in blue uniforms who were approaching us. They all ran outside, and I followed them.

They leaped on the driver's door and swung it open. The burly porter violently pulled the driver from his car and knocked him out with fists at his head. The security guards brought him inside and dropped him near the other one.

"Get them out of here," the porter told the uniformed guards, pointing at the two unconscious attackers lying on the floor at our feet.

The two bank security agents carried the bodies out of view. Several people entered the bank: They were curious about what they saw happening in the street. The porter who helped me in started a noisy conversation with them.

"Do you know the two aggressors? What started the scuffle?" One of the security guys approached me, while getting down the corridor from wherever they transported my attackers. He was taller than his colleague who was a few steps behind.

"Don't know who they are," I replied. The narrow bank lobby at that side entrance got very noisy, with many talking at the same time. I raised my voice to be heard: "*They* attacked us."

"Are you with the Miklos Fund?"

"Yes, we had an appointment with the director of the bank. My colleagues are in his office now for a financial transaction."

"We saw a man and a woman a few minutes ago running in," the taller of the two security guys confirmed. "They looked very alarmed. The porter let them go to the director's office. He recognized them."

"We've been here once before."

"Did you render the first one unconscious?"

"He fell while running towards George," I stated. They looked at me and nodded at each other. The explanation seemed sufficient enough.

“The men are shackled. We called the police and two ambulances,” the same man added.

I lifted my shoulders in a sign of indifference to their fate. “The question I have is how do we avoid this situation in the future?” I asked.

“The director will come up with a solution,” the taller man responded. “Easiest way to avoid being attacked in front of our bank is to call us before you leave: We’ll be waiting for you on the sidewalk and in the street. We have thirty security guards available for each shift; it shouldn’t be an issue of not having the resources.”

The police finally arrived. Our prisoners woke up from their torpor by the time the four cops started taking notes from me, porters, and security agents. George and Monica walked up to us from the main corridor, which was leading to the bank’s director office. I noticed my left hand was bruised from the fight I had on the sidewalk. I tried to hide it behind my back when they approached.

“I’m retired Captain George Gorza with the Ministry of Internal Affairs office, Bucharest Police, District One,” George introduced himself to the cops. “I’m your main contact for this investigation.”

“We’ll call you at the station sometime today or tomorrow,” one of the policemen replied.

The ambulances turned up. We could tell from the blasting sirens behind the door. The first responders and paramedics walked in and loaded the prisoners on stretchers after checking on their life signs.

Lightly tapping my pants’ back pocket to feel my gun, I thought it was delivered to me just in time for good use.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Adi Coman

Last week of February 1991, Angel Marek went to the Miklos Fund in response to the ad for a two-week course at Manchester University, United Kingdom, on small-business ownership. The program was coordinated by Lady Hughes; she had spent several weeks with us in Bucharest to run it.

After launching her project, Lady Hughes embarked on an idea to survey recently retired, high-ranking members of the Communist Party Central Committee on the merits of small-business curriculum. Her tour agenda was put together by Ron Luceanu and me. I actually accompanied her to meet the interviewees.

“I want to get the ex-apparatchik thoughts on small businesses replacing state monopolistic ownership,” Lady Hughes had told us. “I hope to learn if this type of education could be of interest to Romania’s entrepreneurs.”

Ron designated me as Lady Hughes’ translator, which seemed a funny assignment – the CIA agent undercover.

Although retired by the Romanian Revolution, which immediately outlawed authoritarian systems of governance, the interviewees waited to meet with Lady Hughes at the same offices they’d been ousted from.

“It looks strange to meet the expunged in their previous offices,” Lady Hughes remarked to me and Ron, the morning of our planned face-to-face surveys.

“The overthrowing of the government was completed from within the system,” Ron explained. “Most of them left their positions of power without violence.”

“What happened to those few who didn’t want to leave their jobs and privileges?” Lady Hughes smartly asked.

“They were summarily trialed and thrown in jail for a few years,” Ron shot back. “To give them time to understand their past ways of ruling were over.”

Lady Hughes and I were scheduled to walk into Communist Party’s buildings where Romanians never had access before. We met with Yon Dinu at the Palace of Internal Affairs Ministry. He received us at his office, behind a heavy, expensive desk. The palace had high ceilings, red velvet and marble, venetian mirrors and art hanging on the walls.

“In my opinion, small businesses are the only solution to fix our economy,” Yon Dinu pointed. “I’m only a citizen now.” He took an air of humility. “I’m not a member of the Permanent Bureau of the Executive Political Committee of the Central Communist Party anymore.”

“Do you still work here?” Lady Hughes asked and I translated.

“I retired,” he snapped. “I don’t work here anymore. I scheduled this interview with you only to help my country go in the right direction.”

Yon Dinu was staring at me.

“Are you Romanian?” he interrogated me directly, in Romanian.

“Yes,” I said in one breath.

“And you’re helping this English woman to take a chunk of our country?” he continued. Lady Hughes intervened: “What is he saying?”

“You’re a traitor,” he bellowed at me. I felt my blood freezing in my veins.

“What is he saying?” Lady Hughes repeated.

“He thinks he knows me, but I doubt it,” I replied in English.

Yon Dinu stood up in an abrupt, vertical leap and said in my direction: “This interview is over.” I translated. We didn’t move.

“I think I answered everything you needed to know,” he continued rudely, looking at Lady Hughes.

Lady Hughes suddenly grabbed my arm and whispered in my ear, “Let’s go! Let’s go right now.” Even without understanding the language, she felt the hostility and got scared. She decided to drop the rest of the interviews. We returned to the office. George drove us.

“What happened?” he flatly asked in the car, after learning Lady Hughes canceled the entire schedule for the day.

“Yon Dinu loomed over us at the end of the interview and scared the shit out of us. He called me a traitor,” I said. George didn’t reply. We stayed silent in the car until we got back to the Writers’ Union House.

We learned next day that Lady Hughes booked a flight to London and left the country.

“She probably had a recorder in the handbag,” Joe Punta told me that night, during my reporting. “Yesterday she must have gone straight to the UK Embassy where they translated for her those Dinu’s statements that you didn’t.”

“Yes. You must be right.”

“You’re in danger, and so was she. Just be careful.”

“Angel Marek is a friend of George’s and mine.” Monica Gorza had introduced him to me.

I helped him complete his application for the Manchester University’s small business certificate program. He wanted to open a local office for state and city tax filing, as Romanians had never paid taxes on salary before. This was new to them.

“We’ve had a forum on transitioning to capitalism,” Angel mentioned to me.

“Interesting!” I replied. “Who organized it?”

“The organizers are the management,” Angel said. “We wanted to discuss how to get in contact with Western investors and financiers. How to market ourselves. We realized we have a lot to learn.”

“I’d have liked to participate. We’re interested in this type of events.”

“We have a second forum coming up tomorrow. I’m one of the organizers, so I’m inviting you.” Angel paused for a few seconds. “It’s pretty exclusive because the discussions may turn very personal. The participants could disclose details of their businesses that are not public knowledge.”

“What businesses?” I was getting curiouser and curiouser.

“This is a late-night forum of chief engineers and managers of companies like the Twenty-Third August Factories, the Republic Factories, the Enterprise of Heavy Machinery, and the Titan Institute of Engineering from the industrial park of Bucharest’s First District.”

“Ah!” I said. “Pretty heavy!”

“The topic is how to maneuver the transition of these mammoth companies from national property to competitive corporations and, eventually, set them on the path of privatization,” Angel continued. “We need to understand what the prospects are of finding financial help, as the country’s resources are depleted.

“Any bidders so far?”

“None. We don’t know of any financiers interested in investing or purchasing assets of the Bucharest industrial park of First District.” He had a mellow, pensive voice. “These state companies are totaling twenty-thousand employees. They used to build machines, like machine-tools and army tanks.”

“Are these companies located close to each other?”

“Door to door. It is a large industrial park, with buildings and factories. It was very impressive when business was booming.” Angel’s eyes were moist. I realized thousands must have lost their jobs. “Exports are down to zero. The Moscow umbilical cord has been cut. The Warsaw Pact is broken, as exports of goods among Eastern European countries were stopped to a halt.” Angel’s face dropped in a sad mien. “We must find export deals with the West, which is totally new to us. We need help to get into markets we don’t know much about.”

“I get it. The intent is to revive the industry of such a mastodon like the First District’s industrial park and promote it on the Western market. You’ll have to prove to the entire European market that your factories are filled with topnotch machines that would work to international standards,” I commented.

“Keep in mind these companies had orders from the Warsaw Pact countries. No one *needs* our machines anymore. And those who ordered them have ran out of money and have the same problem we have.” Tears welled in his eyes. “Neighboring countries’ economies, like Poland or Bulgaria, are on hold until they clear their governance

mess. Who will come to our rescue?” he wondered. “How will we take care of ourselves? How are we supposed to take care of our country?”

Without getting any reply from me, he kept on going, “I think if you come to the meeting you may find it interesting. It’s among us who, you know...we’re trying to find our way in unmapped territory.”

I thought the forum might include key voices from the industry that the foundation didn’t have access to.

The forum was organized at the Central University Library, in the basement, at level C, in a room near the *XIII-XVI Centuries* manuscripts repository. The room was organized into four rows of about thirty folding metal chairs. In front to the left was a scorched, old-fashioned desk with a raised, half-foot tall header. It was a hybrid between a conference stand and an antique school desk. The room looked and smelled dusty. Walls were empty and painted with a faint, washed-out, whitish green. The floors were covered in cracked gray parquet having more than fifty years of age.

I didn’t recognize many in the hall, only a handful. Angel Marek noticed me when I got there and waved for me to take the empty seat close to him on the left side of the room in the second row. The conference had already started.

Adi Coman, seated all the way at the end of the third row on the right side of the room, nodded at me. He was in his forties and a director of the fund’s board. I’d met him a week ago. Aunt Ella told me Adi had started his career as an activist of propaganda at the Central Committee of the Communist Party. After a few years, he entered the Police Academy and climbed quickly through the ranks because of his *healthy origin*, a term the Central Committee used for those followers born in poor, proletariat families. Adi had a morose personality that could take turns from sarcastic to macabre. At those times, he had no hesitation when it came to express his most apocalyptic thoughts.

“If we don’t get this right,” he said, referring to the transition of the country from dictatorship back to democracy, “we’ll end up in the same cell, shackled with the political renegades who my bosses had to

send to cuckoo's hospital every other day." He was speaking about the political prisoners who were sent to the insane asylum when they were against the Ceausescu's regime. It was the day he joined the foundation's board. Ron Luceanu was introducing Adi Coman to the staff.

"This change to a civil society must go forward in any aspect, at all times. Never go back. No backwards steps are allowed. Forward only," Adi's another favorite saying was.

Adi Coman was old friends with Cornel Lazar, a blond, poker-face man from northern part of Romanian Moldova, born in a village just north of the historical city of Iassy. Cornel was seated near Adi at the forum. I knew from Aunt Ella that Adi and Cornel completed their military service at the same unit when they were eighteen to twenty years of age. Cornel Lazar attended the University of Iassy where he studied philosophy and psychology. Humanistic subjects, like history, philosophy, and economy studies, were considered by law highly sensitive disciplines where only Communist Party members could register and study. After graduation, they were guaranteed a job in the party's nomenclature, to protect and enforce the Leninist ideology in their day-to-day lives.

Cornel Lazar told me when we first met at the Miklos Fund: "I researched your father's life. I found that your father was born in Moldova. My family is from Moldova too."

My father came from a family who owned hundreds of hectares of land and two wineries during the Hohenzollern Monarchy. They cultivated and commercialized corn and wheat, exporting the grains by train all the way to Austria and Germany, or shipping them on barges down the Prut River to Ukraine. Families of bourgeois origin, if they had survived the first years after 1945 of anticommunist purges, had been kept permanently on the radar of internal affairs. According to the party's ideology enforcement protocol, *recycled*, rich landowners, such as the Breban family, could potentially turn subversive against the system or could get in contact with foreign enemy's forces. They couldn't become members of the Communist Party, because of their non-proletarian origin. They were barred from positions in the government but were allowed to take jobs in manufacturing and were

encouraged to collaborate with the internal affairs on temporary assignments. Cornel researching my family meant he kept his position and connections after the 1989 Revolution.

His approach was a friendly opening line. We both had roots in Moldova, which was like saying *Et in Arcadia Ego*. Anyone who knew any of Romania's history heard about the devastating famine in the region after the split of Moldova in two regions as part of the Yalta's *dirty deal*. Most Moldavian families in Romania had relatives living on the other half of Moldavian territory under USSR occupation. The Soviet Union wanted Moldova split in two, in order to better control a Romanic-language population who was hostile to the Russian control and dominance.

The speaker in the room was a three-star army general, pompously dressed in his parade uniform. After several minutes of introduction, he said, "We are promised democracy, but we don't know how and when?" He kept on going about the insecurity of the days after the fall of the government. "Who are these individuals behind the mic on national television?" he asked, talking about the activists who dominated the media immediately after the fall of Ceausescu. "Are they *irredentists*? *Terrorists*?"

Then, he started shouting at the audience, throwing a tantrum about well-known poets who quickly changed face after the 1989 Revolution—from publishing verses that kept in step with the Communist Party's latest congress's directives to poetry praising the merits of their newfound freedom and European values. He mentioned names like Blandiana and Paunescu, slamming intelligentsia and the audience for lack of integrity and showing haste in switching gears.

"I see here, right now, many of you who received salaries for your loyal service from the now defunct Communist Party. You are now sitting here and trying to ramble about liberty, about how to save your own asses, about how to turn around fast enough and throw away the signs of who you were before. You who are here, traitors all of you!"

I looked for Adi Coman and Cornel Lazar who were seated across the room from me when I got in. Cornel was looking in my direction, but Adi's seat was empty. He may have gotten in the back, close to the exit.

Someone in the middle of the gathering began to rise up from his seat, saying, "Mister...General Ancu! Please. Take it easy. The shouting is not appropriate."

"Don't call me Mister, or General. I am *Comrade* General." He looked at the crowd. "There's nothing I hate more than traitors!"

In a flash, he pulled his service sidearm and aimed it in front of him. He fired one shot.

When turning my head to the right and back to see who he aimed at, I felt a violent pull of my chair accompanied by the screechy noise of the chair's legs being pushed against the wooden parquet. I felt myself being dragged across the floor by my arm. From where I was on the floor, I couldn't see anything but human legs and fallen chairs. I heard shouting, and several gunshots returning fire in the direction of the speaker. The body of the general hit the floor with a thump. The noise went through the roof when panicked people jumped to their feet.

"Don't stand up. Keep on going. Crawl!" I was told by someone close.

When I reached the door opening, I was pulled to my feet. I recognized Adi Coman. He kept walking very fast, dragging me after him while lifting me by my armpit like a prisoner. "Keep moving!"

"She's bleeding from her buttocks or her kidneys," I heard Cornel Lazar who was catching up with us.

While holding my arm, Adi pressed his other hand hard against my back. He looked over my shoulder and pushed against my lower waist. "Does this hurt?"

"Yes!" I cried out in pain.

"Yeah, she's hurt!" he yelled to Cornel, while still pulling me along the corridor. "General Ancu's shot ricocheted in your butt muscle," he said to me.

We rushed to a Dacia parked outside the building. I climbed in the right front seat.

"Get in," Adi ordered Cornel who was cussing into a handheld police radio. We sped away from the library building, and then stopped at a small neighborhood's health clinic three blocks away from my house. Cornel contacted the doctor on call using the clinic

phone. We waited for the physician to arrive. Cornel told Adi he had to get going and left.

When the doctor stepped into the clinic and turned full lights on, Adi Coman was the first to talk.

“I’m from the Police Directorate, and this is Ingrid Breban. You’ll have to fix her wound. She’s bleeding from a gash in her back. A bullet! She’s lucky to be alive.” His voice was loud and clear, like giving orders to a platoon of police recruits.

The physician didn’t look happy being called from home. He started by removing his jacket and putting on a long white apron to cover his clothes.

“I have to go,” Adi said. “What’s your house phone number?” he asked me.

With a voice strangled by pain, I gave Tudor’s number to him.

Adi used the same phone on the doctor’s desk. “We are at the health clinic located at the corner of Stefan Boulevard and Lacul Tei Avenue. Your friend, Ingrid Breban, is in the doctor’s care. She was shot. She’s doing fine.”

Adi listened to the response, gave the complete address of the clinic over the phone, and hung up. He confirmed that Tudor Graziani would be there within the hour. Then, he walked out.

“Get into that side room,” the physician asked me. The pain made me limp and slightly bent forward when walking.

“Climb on one of the beds. Face down.”

The room was equipped with two operations beds, cabinets with medication, surgery supplies, and a surgery metal table where he started ranging his instruments.

“Ready?”

“Yes.”

Using scissors, he cut a slit of five inches from the waist down into my pants and panties to access the lesion. The bullet wound was high on the buttocks. He gave me an injection for local anesthesia. The incision was about two inches long. He used two clamps to enlarge it enough to plunge the forceps in.

“Here it is.” The physician was holding the forceps with the 9mm bullet for me to see it, while I was resting my head on my left ear looking at his moves.

He then tied the cut using a few metal staples. He left it open to drain.

“It’ll heal within a few weeks.”

Tudor walked in.

“Hi there. I’m Ingrid’s boyfriend.” His Romanian language sounded pretty good.

“Hello,” the physician answered. “I’m Doctor Secea.”

The bandages he applied on top of my wound were voluminous enough to keep my cut pants in place when I stood up. Tudor helped me to the car, and then up to my apartment.

“*Watching Doll* reporting,” Tudor said in his CIA-supplied Motorola cell phone.

“Roger, this is Joe.” He was on speaker.

“Ingrid was shot in the buttocks while in attendance to a Forum today,”

“How bad is she hurt?”

“The 9mm bullet was removed. She’s fully awake and in good spirits, right here near me. I brought her home from the clinic where a local doctor operated on her. She has to lie down on the belly for a few days.”

“Ingrid, I need a report of the entire forum event, names and what happened,” Joe asked me.

“Will do. I’ll send the cassette sealed in an envelope by the end of the day.”

Police called me next day to inform me they recovered the bullet from the clinic. Later that week, two police officers came to my house to ask questions. I gave them the full story of what I knew. They confirmed the bullet was from the deceased General Ancu’s handgun.

I got a hold of Ron Luceanu, my boss at the Miklos Fund, to give him the short version of what happened.

The next few days after surgery, Tudor drove me to the clinic for the daily wound cleaning, until I could operate the vehicle myself. The wound exuded pus and fluids for several weeks. I swallowed large

doses of antibiotics. When the infection dried out, Doctor Secea removed the metal staple and closed the wound with flexible stiches.

Because of the participants' clout, the Central University Library event remained hidden in secrecy. None volunteered to give a complete account. The press couldn't publish the details of what occurred that night. The newspapers only mentioned General Ancu died in an armed conflict in the basement of the library building, which resulted from a political altercation.

Before the end of the same week, Gail Forlorn called me at home.

"Hi, Ingrid. How is your injury?"

"Healing." I was lying belly down on the sofa, a pillow propping my head under the chin to watch television. "How are things at the office?"

"Angel Marek won the contest and passed the interview for the scholarship. He's on his way to Manchester University to attend the training for small-business owners," Gail told me over the phone. She made a pause. "We got an anonymous, threatening letter."

"What did the letter say?"

"The letter says we're traitors," Gail replied. "It says the Miklos Fund serves American interests. It says we'll die soon of a quick and unexpected death."

"Who has seen the letter?"

"The entire staff, the board, and the cops. The newly minted Internal Affairs Ministry started an investigation, and they took the original. We were given a copy to keep. We hired a company lawyer, with expertise in criminal law." Gail's voice was shaking.

"I'll be at work tomorrow morning. I won't stay longer than a few hours, because I have to get to the clinic for a bandage replacement."

"You don't need to rush back to the office. Monica and I are taking care of everything. Take the entire week out," Gail said generously.

"I want to see the letter."

"Okay, I'll leave it on your desk."

The next morning, as soon as I climbed into my car, I suspected I was being followed. A blue Dacia car was tailing me at every turn. I

thought I could be wrong, so I opted for a small test. I drove out of my way to the nearest gas station. I stopped at the gas pump closest to the exit lane. I looked in the rear window. The blue car parked in the only spot behind my car. I read the plate carefully: 1-B-224.

“Jesus,” I exclaimed out loud. I couldn’t distinguish any details through the tinted windshield of the car, except that the driver was the only occupant in the car.

The gas station attendant came close to my right door window.

“Fill it up.”

Nervous, I pulled my wallet.

While handing the Romanian currency to the attendant, I noticed the Dacia car backing off with a jolt and abruptly accelerate out of the gas station.

I got to my office. It was noon time.

“Hello, Ingrid. I see you’re limping like a hurt deer,” George said catching up with me in the hall.

“Hi, George.”

“Monica and Gail are not here; they went out for lunch.”

“Is Ron at work?”

“He’s in the building. He’s upstairs, in Miroiu’s office. His favorite pastime.”

The letter was upside down lying on my computer’s keyboard. I picked it up and read it. It had only a few lines. It was handwritten in capital letters.

“AMERICANS ARE ENEMIES.

IF YOU WORK FOR THEM, YOU ARE A TRAITOR.

WE’LL KILL YOU.”

“I promise I’ll find out where this is coming from,” George assured me somberly.

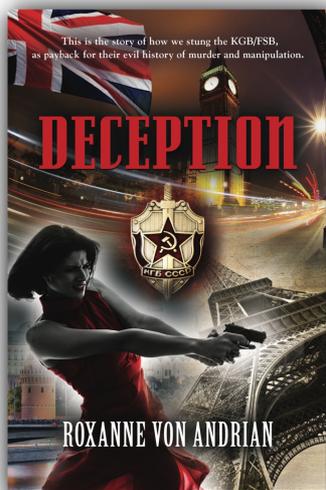
“Any ideas who did this?”

“Must be from the retired operatives of internal affairs, the old *Securitate*. Your new acquaintance Adi Coman is working on it.”

In one simple statement, George made it clear to me he kept tabs on relationships and fraternizing. “My *new acquaintance*,” I repeated in my head.

“I’ll let you muse over this for a while,” he said. “I’ll be behind the counter at the main entrance, with my guys.” He left me alone in the office.

I pulled the Tessina 35mm camera from my handbag, and took several pictures. After getting home, I took the film out of the camera, packaged it in its original black plastic container and then in a padded envelope. I wrote *Watching Doll* on top, and drove to the new, dead letterbox Tudor had setup for me, to drop it off. The protocol required to change drop locations every week. Deliveries were picked up by designated personnel from the US Embassy.



Inspired by true events, DECEPTION follows a team of European operatives and a female CIA agent, Ingrid, from diverting money out of the Miklos Fund's educational programs, to stealing enriched plutonium from the Russia-owned military base of Crimea's Sebastopol, with the purpose to kill an ex-KGB officer in London by poisoning him.

DECEPTION

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