



A Memoir of Identity and Resistance at the Heart of the Lithuanian Revolution

1991 August 19—Lithuania

Mother Earth shook. My gut screamed, *Earthquake!*

I reached out to ground my body. My hand brushed against the gas mask pouch slung over my shoulder, a reminder I wasn't home in California.

I parted the thick drapes of the fourth-floor window to peer into the night, even though snipers might have me in their sights. Sharpshooters were the least of my concerns. What was coming was far worse.

The trembling intensified, rising from the base of the Lithuanian parliament building, up the walls and into the floors, permeating the soles of my cowboy boots and into my bones.

A youthful voice materialized behind me, repeating, "Lights out! Drop to the floor!"

I don't want to die, began to play like a mantra echoing within my skull.

Getting killed in a barrage of bullets at the age of twenty-five was never my plan. I commanded my body to obey. The blood in my veins replied, pulsating with my promise to *him*, forcing my limbs to remain in place.

Outside, thousands of unarmed civilians surrounded the concrete barriers wrapped in barbed wire protecting those of us inside the parliament building, the only defense of their freedom and my last hope to reconcile my fractured identity.

They rushed the barricaded bridge toward the source of the increasing rumbling to create another obstacle, one of flesh, between our advancing enemy and us. I feared a provocateur might be among them. One rock thrown at our adversary

would trigger the assault. Death would come for us in seconds.

I don't want to die. I'm an American. I'm already free.

I filled my lungs with a deep breath to calm myself, but I choked on the petrol fumes of the Molotov cocktails stewing all day in chipped Pepsi bottles stacked up outside our office door.

On the other side of the river, quaint aristocratic wooden homes that survived centuries of invasions awaited the danger approaching this time. In this discarded land, lost stories emerged in the oddest moments. I imagined my ancestors. Old-world peasants dressed in homespun wool garments strolling past blooming tulips on this drizzly summer evening.

Instead, columns of hulking Soviet T-72 tanks gripping enormous guns ending in cruel, cavernous mouths emerged, crushing the gardens beneath their treads.

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