

Bonus Chapter 30.5

“That’s what Addy said.”

(one year before Collapse)

He hated looking at his emails. Hated it. They always contained bad news. Ted, or “Special Forces Ted” as the guys at Capitol City Guns were calling him now, refused to look at his emails on a Friday afternoon because he’d spend his entire weekend pissed off at lawyers.

His soon-to-be ex-wife’s lawyer was a complete asshole. He would file some motion or write a shitty demand letter to Ted every Friday afternoon it seemed like. Ted couldn’t afford a lawyer so he had to represent himself. His wife’s lawyer enjoyed that and took pleasure in reminding Ted that he wasn’t actually a lawyer.

Ted laughed to himself. “He wants me to be ashamed that I’m not a piece of shit like him?” He said to himself while sitting in his tiny, dark, sparsely furnished bachelor pad on the Nisqually Indian Reservation near Olympia, Washington. The Nisqually reservation, or “rez” as they called it, was in pretty good shape, unlike most Indian reservations. Ted wasn’t a member of the tribe but he’d helped out a Nisqually kid in a jam while in Iraq. Ted received his second Bronze Star for helping the kid, and the tribe also rewarded him by letting him stay in a house there, rent-free, which was helpful because he wasn’t really welcome to live in his old house anymore. He was glad to have the place on the rez because it was so close to Ft. Lewis, where he had recently retired from the First Special Forces Group.

A few weeks ago, before everything in his life fell apart, he was excited to plan how he’d relax for the first time in his twenty-five years of going all over the world to various

shitholes and living in the woods with indigenous fighters. Then, the day he got home, his wife was acting very odd and told him she wanted a divorce. It seemed that she was much happier being a part-time wife when he was off on deployments, which was the vast majority of his career, than being a full-time wife there with him. She was happy to cash those checks while he was off somewhere in the world where he couldn't use the money. Now, when it came time for them to be together for their "golden years," he found out she had been hitting the bars. Ted felt used.

"Shake it off," he said out loud to himself again. That was the thing about living alone; he could talk to himself and no one cared. Ted laughed. He was feeling sorry for himself? For getting rid of that bitch? He was much better off.

He couldn't resist checking his email. He was trained to always deal with details; in his experience out in the boonies and battlefields, little things left unaddressed got people killed. That unread email could be the key to something important. He was a responsible guy; he couldn't just let something hang all weekend. He needed to read his emails.

"Don't do it, dumbass," he said to himself. He was starting to worry that he was turning into a mumbling hermit. That's why he hung out at the gun store. It was good to have a solid group of sane people around him during this low point in his life when his whole world — his unit and his wife — were no longer around.

He remembered killing people, people trying to kill him, his friends dying, having to watch people tortured, being exhausted, hungry, and wounded. He'd gotten through all that but — what? — was afraid to look at an email from a douche bag lawyer? "Toughen up, you little baby," Ted said to himself. A big, tough guy like him wasn't afraid of a little email.

He grabbed his laptop, sat on the couch, and opened it up. He saw he had a new email. Might as well get the pain over with, he thought.

To his great delight, the email was from “Adrijana Bringa.” That name brought back memories. After what she’d been through, any little problem he was facing would seem like nothing.

Adrijana, or “Addy” as she called herself to Americans, was a beautiful Bosnian Muslim girl Ted met when he was in the Balkans on a deployment many years ago. He remembered when he first met her. His unit got the call to go into a Bosnian Muslim village called Bijeljina, or “Belly,” as the Americans called it. Serb forces had recently retreated from it. Ted and the other American forces were on a humanitarian mission to go into these villages and try to patch up the people as best they could.

Belly suffered the typical fate. Men, women, and children were rounded up. The men were taken to camps, where most were killed. The young women were sent to rape camps. The older women and the boys were sent to slave labor camps where most died.

When Ted dismounted from his Humvee in Belly, he saw a half-naked girl, who he later found out was sixteen, wondering around aimlessly. She was skinny and bruised. She was in a daze and fell down. Ted and a medic went up to her to help. She saw them and started screaming. It was the most horrifying scream Ted had ever heard. It was a soft wailing from someone who was too hoarse to scream, but was screaming for her life at the same time. She started choking and coughing up blood. She collapsed and, still conscious, waited for the Americans to rape her. She was too weak to fight.

Ted and the medic approached her slowly; they had been briefed that there were still some fighters from all the sides in

the area. Ted and his Air Force special operations medic, who went by the nickname “McLovin’,” shouldered their rifles and scanned the area in case the helpless woman was bait from a sniper waiting to shoot them. It had happened before.

What was taking them so long? Addy wondered. Why hadn’t it started yet? This might be it, Addy thought. She might finally die. Thank goodness. She’d been hoping for this for months.

She felt herself going to the “black place” as she called it. That was where her mind went blank and there was just blackness for a moment. Then she would think her happy thoughts about the place she would rather be; soon she would force her mind to think of good things, like her pet cat when she was a child. She would go into a trance thinking of these good things until the men were done.

“Probuditi nekog,” Ted said to her, which was “wake up” in Bosnian, albeit in a thick American accent. Usually when a soldier told her to wake up, Addy would just stay in her black place. That would get her beaten, but she would not give the man the satisfaction of her full attention.

But, this man was different. This American didn’t tell her to wake up in an angry tone. He said it like he cared about her. She came out of the black place for a second because she was curious. Then she saw the red cross on the other soldier’s arm. He was a medic. They were American. Maybe they were there to help her. She had heard that the Americans were helping.

She stared at the two men for a few seconds. She was trying to determine if they were there to hurt her or help her. The man who said “wake up” smiled at her. No one smiled in Bosnia. No one.

The other man, the one with the red cross on his arm, said “We’re here to help” in English.

Addy understood them. She spoke English. She studied it and had planned on being a diplomat when she was a carefree and naïve child, which was only a few years ago.

She stared at them some more. They looked like they were there to help. Maybe she could trust them.

It took her a few seconds to fully come out of the black place. Now, she was back in the real world.

“Help me,” she said in English. Ted and McLovin’ were shocked that this girl spoke English.

“You speak English?” Ted asked.

“Yes,” Addy said. “I’m cold,” she said, realizing that she was half-naked.

McLovin’ ran back to the Humvee and got a blanket.

“Here you are, ma’am,” McLovin’ said. He smiled. It seemed so odd to see a smile. He led her into the Humvee’s front seat and left the door open so she could talk to him and Ted, who were standing outside the vehicle.

Addy was tired and hungry and could not control her emotions and thoughts. Thoughts and words wanted to flow out of her on their own; she was struggling to hold them back and was succeeding so far. As the soldier with the red cross put the blanket around her and helped her into the military vehicle, Addy started going back and forth between reality and the black place. After a while in the vehicle, and after it became obvious that the Americans would not hurt her, the black place went away. She was now fully back in reality.

“I am hungry,” she finally said. Ted got her an MRE and opened it up for her. She looked at the labels, which were in English. She hadn’t seen English since she was in school. That had been just a few months ago, but felt like a lifetime ago.

That sent her back to the good days before all this started. She remembered being in school, which sent thoughts racing through her mind. They were thoughts she couldn’t keep in,

and before she realized it, they came rushing out. She started talking to the soldiers in English.

“They were my friends,” Addy said. “They sat next to me in school. We played together. We talked about boys and kissing and getting married. We talked about dresses.”

Ted and McLovin’ just listened. They knew that whatever she had to say was important. They had been briefed that victims needed to tell their stories and that listening was an important part of this mission.

“Serbs, Croats, Muslims,” Addy said, “we lived together forever. We lived together. No problems. Until it started....”

Addy collected her thoughts. The English words were pouring out. She couldn’t believe she was speaking English so well, but her mind had things to get out, and English was the language it was using.

“I played with the Petrich family,” she said. “They lived next to us. I played with the Nikolins, too.” She stared out the dirty window of the Humvee. She had no idea why she was telling these Americans everything, but she couldn’t stop talking.

She started crying. “I was babysitting their kids the night it started.” She sobbed for several minutes. Ted and McLovin’ listened as their eyes scanned for threats.

“Mr. Nikolin came into our house with a gun and said we had to leave,” Addy said. “Then he looked at me and said I must stay. My father tried to hit him and Mr. Nikolin shot him. Right there, in front of all of us. My father... how you say? Exploded. His blood was everywhere.” She stared out the window again.

“After a few hours, other neighbors came to our house. Mr. Petrich and his sons. Mrs. Petrich came too, so I thought I was safe. She helped the boys hold me down while....”

Ted put his finger up to his lips to signal that Addy need not describe what happened, and that he understood without her telling him.

“We used to play at their house,” Addy said over and over again. Finally she said, “Bojana, my best friend and a Serb, took my dress. I saw her wearing it while the men were....” She later explained that Bojana was one of the neighbor girls. “I heard Mrs. Petrich tell Bojana that it was OK to take it.”

Later, when coalition forces found the Petriches and Nikolins, the families explained that they were afraid that if they didn’t show their Serbian community how they hated the Muslims, that the Serbs would do the same to them as “Muslim sympathizers.” This was a widespread problem; the Serbs were known to kill and torture fellow Serbs who weren’t participating. The Muslims and Croats weren’t angels either; all sides were killing, torturing, and raping because they thought they could and were afraid they had to.

Ted’s mind returned from his memories of Bosnia to his little bachelor pad on the rez, and the email from Addy. His unit basically adopted her and made sure she was OK, and Ted had kept in touch with her over the last twenty years. He hoped that her email had good news; she’d had enough bad things to last several life times.

Ted opened Addy’s email. The subject line was “Getting married!” She had met a man in New York when she was there working for the Bosnian consulate, (she got to be a diplomat just like she’d dreamed)and they were getting married in a few weeks. She wrote that he was a “nice man” and had three daughters of his own. Ted knew from a previous message that Addy could not have children given the damage that was done to her when she was sixteen. She had always wanted to be a mom. They would live in America, which Addy wrote, “is not Bosnia!”

Not yet, Ted thought. He was happy for her and didn't want to dampen her enthusiasm. He replied back to her email with his congratulations. He smiled for the first time in several weeks.

Ted looked at his watch. It was almost 1900. He took off his pistol and stowed it in his gun safe that his buddies helped move into his new pad. He couldn't carry a weapon where he was going, which was a bar. Washington State had great gun laws with the exception of a ban on carrying in a bar, where a person would be most likely to need it.

Ted was going out for a beer with a young guy from his unit, Jim Hodges. It was more than a social call; Ted was on a recruiting mission for Oath Keepers, the organization of current and former military and law enforcement who pledge to carry out their oath to support and defend the Constitution. Specifically, Oath Keepers take a pledge not to enforce ten unconstitutional orders they might receive such as disarming the American people.

Images of Bosnia kept running through Ted's mind as he got in his pickup truck and headed out to Pints and Quarts, a Special Forces hangout near Olympia. He kept thinking about Bosnia and how it broke down. He couldn't get the image out of his mind of Addy's neighbor lady holding her down and the neighbor girl taking Addy's dress. Ted was amazed at how decent human beings could turn on each other and do horrible things.

It was good to see Hodges. He was a good kid in his mid-twenties. He was a smart guy, but all Special Forces were way above average intelligence. They talked about the usual things, including how Hodges could hook up Ted with some ladies. "Maybe my girlfriend's mom," Hodges said. He was serious. Ted was in his mid forties; he was in the "mom league" now. Ted didn't feel like dating yet, however. He had far more important things on his mind. He knew from the briefings he

got right before he left Special Forces that the situation in the U. S. was becoming serious. The military and Homeland Security were planning for a collapse.

Ted mentioned to Hodges that, given how things were going, seemingly nice people here could end up doing horrific things. They might do this if they thought they wouldn't get caught or that bad things would happen to them if they didn't join in.

"No way, Master Sergeant," Hodges said, still referring to Ted by his rank even though he was retired. "What are you saying? Americans will start killing Americans?"

"Yes," Ted said. "It could happen."

Hodges shook his head. "Like, how?"

"All the scenarios they brief us on," Ted said with a shrug. "Doesn't matter what causes it: power going off, terrorist attack, whatever. No matter what causes it, Walmart is cleaned out in four hours. No food. No cops. You know what happens; you've seen it all over the world on your deployments."

"Yeah," Hodges said, "but the U.S. isn't the rest of the world. We're... the U.S."

"What makes you think human beings would react any differently here?" Ted asked.

"Because we're Americans," Hodges said. He thought that was a good answer. He added, "Because it's never happened here."

"You ever heard of the Civil War?" Ted asked.

"C'mon," Hodges said, quickly lowering his voice at the bar. "A civil war? Here?"

"Maybe, maybe not," Ted said. "But how do you think that guy over there," Ted said pointing to an average white guy at the bar, "would react if the authorities told him immigrants or Bible-thumpers or... left-handed people were the reason that his family was starving and terrified?"

Hodges stared at him blankly, shook his head, and said, "It can't happen here."

Ted laughed. "That's what Addy said."