

# KULTURE

A SCENE FROM FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN

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## *BELGRADE, SERBIA*

23:47 (11:47 PM)

MAKSIM PASSED through the shadows of the Design District. Most but not all of the work vehicles were gone, which left him a bit more conspicuous to CCTV cameras and prying eyes, though he appreciated the veil nighttime provided.

He came through the stairwell and found the gates locked, precisely as he had told Kat they would be. He adjusted the plastic sacks he was holding—three in all—and dug out his keys. The gate groaned, metal clanking, as he let himself in.

He secured the padlock and did his best to blend with the shadows. A neon glow radiated from Viktor's tiny, no-name bar, but the light didn't reach to this level. The lights from the new club, however, did. Techno thumped, dampening the voices below.

Glass shattered, echoing into the night. Shouts went up.

Maksim reached the end of the walkway and peered over. Two men tossed their cigarettes and started toward each other. A well-built man in slacks and a sleek jacket raced forward, attempting to break up the fight. The club's name burned over the chaos, a fiery red that added a hellish glow to the entrance.

Dread dropped anchor in Maksim's stomach. Viktor's clientele consisted of friends, family, and a handful of barflies. Clubs tended to draw a different crowd, particularly drug dealers and organized crime. *If* someone in organized crime wasn't already running the place.

It was only a matter of time before the police began investigating. When they did, Maksim's apartment would be in their purview.

Maksim shifted his attention to the no-name bar on the ground level. Viktor had stepped into the doorway, cigarette ablaze, as a finely dressed couple approached. Viktor anticipated the clubbers with a bland expression and pointed them in the right direction.

The fight ramped up, the shouts becoming more animalistic. Fists connected with bone, and the couple hurried to the railing that wrapped around Viktor's bar, trying to see what was happening on the sublevel.

Maksim gripped the to-go bag and strode for the apartment. He'd been planning to call Daniel, curious to hear what happened with Gabriela, but that wasn't going to happen. His apartment had to go dark before the police showed up.





