

## Chapter 25

Summerlin was the last name of the grandmother of the reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes. For all his eccentricities, he knew a good investment when he saw one. One of his best was the 25,000 acres on the west side of the Las Vegas Valley he purchased in the 1950s. The development of the Summerlin area is one of the largest master planned communities in the United States. Most of the neighborhoods are single family homes with three to five bedrooms. It is one of the most affluent communities in Nevada and was named one of the "Best Places to Live in America."

The one drawback was that most of the neighborhoods in Summerlin were constructed during the housing boom when land was becoming really expensive. Even though most of the homes were a decent size, most of the lots were on the small side, leaving little room for backyards.

However, scattered around the perimeter of Summerlin are older neighborhoods with even larger homes, and some with up to an acre or more of land. One of those larger homes was occupied by Grandma Sofi, the matriarch of the Las Vegas clan. She had been living there for over twenty years, since the family moved to Las Vegas.

She needed the large home because every month, on the New Moon, she hosted a gathering of her family. Inside the higher than usual walls of the property, there was plenty of space for twenty-five or so cars to park without being noticed.

The matriarch of the family originally had two brothers, who had passed away, and her younger sister Cindith. The Las Vegas clan was made up of her direct descendants as well as those of her siblings.

Uncle Franda was sitting on a high stool in Grandma Sofi's great room surrounded by about fifty members of the family. Franda was in his element. He was an accomplished storyteller and, although he was sometimes gruff with adults, he loved to see the expressions on the children's faces as he told his tales of the oral history of the clan.

"In the middle of the last century we lived in a very small town near Wolfsberg, Austria," tonight's tale began. "We chose that village because it was a rural community and not worth noticing by anyone important. Slowly our family moved in, home by home and farm by farm. And slowly the local residents seemed to disappear." The older clan members smiled as they understood his meaning.

"As is our way, we were very cautious. It took us almost a whole year to completely take

over the town. The town was small and out of the way. There was only one back road that ran through the village. We didn't get many visitors. But when we did, we would quickly know when any outsider passed through. And many of them never left."

"It was a sleepy little village. Most of our grandparents were farmers. Some raised crops, some raised animal – after all we still had to eat." Some of the family laughed.

"We were self-sufficient. Everything we needed we either grew or built. We were very happy with the occasional stranger we could waylay. When visitors became scarce, we had to rely on pig's blood. Not quite what we desired but it would do in a pinch. This went on for a number of years, then that damn fool Hitler came to power and the Nazis marched into Austria."

"One day a squad of German soldiers came to town and stayed."

"They didn't trust us poor simple villagers. They set up rules and curfews and checkpoints. The German officers tried to become friendly with our girls but they had no way of knowing that what they thought was a milk maid of sixteen was really a thirty-two-year-old married woman."

"They sent out patrols in the middle of the night, to try to catch us doing something prohibited. We were smart enough just to quietly pick off one or two at a time. A karambit knife is a very effective silent weapon. And even back then we were very good at disposing of bodies. The soldiers started disappearing without a trace. We still needed blood and the only humans were the Germans." Everyone in the room nodded.

"Almost from birth we are taught to use the karambit, both boys and girls. I was just a child myself but the older boys would tell me how clan members would wait along the deserted road until a column of Germans came by. As they passed, our men would throw a stone to land ahead of them so they were all concentrating on the sound. The distracted soldiers would crouch down and peer into the darkness. My older friends would tell me how easy it was to sneak up behind the last soldier and silently take his life."

"Our clan members would hide behind the tall grass at the side of the dirt road. Two of them, one from either side, would sneak up behind the last soldier. One of them would thrust his knife into the German's side and the other would slit his neck. Then they would swiftly carry the soldier away before they were noticed."

"When the soldiers realized that one of their patrol was missing they turned to the rear, again searching in the dark. Then two more of the family would dispatch the one in front."

"Afterwards, soldiers would waken all the families in the area and search every farmhouse, barn and out building. Of course, nothing was ever found. The families would take turns. The ones that lived on the west side of the village would look after the eastern road and the

other way around, the households in the east would watch the western road. That way, when the soldiers came the villagers were really sleeping and knew nothing about what had just happened along the highway.”

As he was speaking, Grandma Sofi took a break from her self-imposed kitchen duties and came into the great room. At 150 years of age, she was still a beautiful woman with shoulder length blonde hair just beginning to turn to gray. Her skin was taught and smooth with just the trace of crow’s feet around her eyes. She was still strong with a desirable figure and kept herself in shape using her karambit knife in her daily exercise regime.

This ancient ritual had been developed centuries ago and was similar to Tai Chi, a combination of exercise and martial art. This was practiced by most members of the clan and, when necessary, made them all efficient killers.

Grandma Sofi had only intended to sit for a few minutes before getting back to the kitchen. She was working diligently preparing fresh blood sausage that everyone in the family could take home with them at the end of the evening.

Uncle Franda noticed when his mother entered the room and smiled and nodded to her as he continued his story. “After a few of the soldiers were taken they started to get uneasy. They were getting suspicious of us quiet, reclusive villagers. One night they unexpectedly rounded up the entire village and brought all of us to the town square. They questioned us about the missing soldiers but, of course, none of the family would say anything.”

“Then they separated us, the men from the women. They threatened to kill all the men if we didn’t tell them what we knew.”

“The older boys, like my brother Valton, were grouped with the men. I remember telling my father that I wanted to stay with him like Valton. He replied that, ‘No, Valton is older, he must go with the other men.’ He told me to, ‘Take Yelny and go with your mother. I’m sure she has a plan.’ I turned to my older brother Valton and pleaded with him, ‘Valton, you’re the oldest brother. Please protect father. Please don’t let anything happen to him.’ Then I grabbed Yelny’s hand and we went to stand next to our mother.”

“As the situation became more and more perilous, the women seemed to become hysterical. They wailed and cried and pleaded. They were such good actresses. Your grandma Sofi was the best.” Sofi blushed as everyone in the room turned to her and smiled. Franda returned to his story, “She begged them not to hurt our men.”

“Then Grandma Sofi gave the signal and nodded to one of the other women to let out a blood-curdling scream. Everyone, including the soldiers, turned to see who it was. That’s when Grandma Sofi struck. She had taken out her karambit knife but concealed it under her apron. When the soldier nearest her was distracted by the scream, your Grandma Sofi silently came up

behind him, her razor-sharp karambit at the ready.”

“From behind she pulled his collar back exposing his throat and in one quick move slashed with practiced precision. The blood splattered like rain and he fell like a ton of bricks.”

“The soldier next to him had no time to react before she turned and plunged her knife into the center of his back splitting his spine in two. His shriek managed to draw the attention of another soldier and Grandma Sofi spun around to get behind him. This time she swung her arm upward in an arc that forced her blade deep into his groin from between his legs.”

“His high-pitched scream drew the attention of a dozen or more soldiers who turned ready to fire their weapons. The women of the clan were on them in a heartbeat, dispatching all of them with lightning-fast moves of their slashing knives.”

“But one of the soldiers managed to get off a single shot before he died. The lone bullet struck your Grandma Sofi’s mate Kirchek, my father, your grandfather and great-grandfather.”

“I remember like it was yesterday. I ran up to him and cradled him in my arms as he died. Valton was there too. I yelled at him, ‘You were supposed to save father. I hate you. I hate you. I hate you.’” Franda’s eyes welled with tears.

As Uncle Franda paused, trying to rein in his emotions, Grandma Sofi, with tears in her own eyes, came up to her son and hugged him. Even after all these years the feelings were strong. She stood next to him, pulled his head to her bosom and stroked his hair.

Everyone in the room was moved. Even Aunt Cindith was close to tears. She remembered that day well. But Cindith was emotionally stronger than her sister and it took a lot to make her cry.

After a few moments, Grandma Sofi kissed Franda’s forehead and started to leave to head back to the kitchen. She made slow progress however, as along the way her hand was grasped, her shoulder stroked and one of her grand-nieces ran up to her and hugged her. By the time she finally made it out of the room, Uncle Franda had composed himself and was able to continue his story.

“In less than a minute the women of our clan had butchered every one of the Nazis except one – the commanding officer. He was a good-looking blonde-haired man. A major, I seem to recall. Four of our menfolk held him down as he begged for his life quite sincerely. As he pleaded, Grandma Sofi came and stood over him, her karambit still gripped tightly. He desperately looked around for a sympathetic face but all he could see were the simple, quiet villagers drinking the blood of his soldiers.”

“The look of fear on his face turned into a blood-curdling scream. He struggled and fought as best he could but our men held him down at Grandma Sofi’s feet. The German was still

alive when Grandma Sofi ripped open his tunic, plunged her knife into his chest and tore out his beating heart.”