Escape from the Balkans

Many years after the tragedy of the holocaust in the Balkans, a video and an email trigger a set of questions and coincidences. This generates in Dinah the desire to learn more about the history of her family.

The two women talk. The memories of those difficult years of uncertainties and fear overwhelms them like a storm. One mentions thunder in the night and the other says those were machine-gun fire. The speak of that cow in the garden, of the weight of the coins sewn in her undergarment and of the humid cold of the mountains they had to cross in order to escape.

Someone records this conversation. Dinah does not want to miss not even one word, not even one phrase. She wants to know, learn exactly what occurred, she doesn't want future generations to forget this story. She begins to understand so many things, to decipher memories that appeared confusing, to smell her grandmother's recipes, her silent way of remembering without words and strongly holding on to the past.

A short time after the recording of this video, Dinah receives an e-mail. She doesn't know the person sending this message from across the ocean, but with a glance at the subject she knows, with a strange certainty, that she can no longer refrain from searching, inquiring and knowing the entire story of her family. The path she will begin to discover is the journey of this book.

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This story has several elements which combine and converge as would in a recipe well scripted: the smells and flavors of a childhood, chance which triggers success stories which cannot be random, the desire to know where we come from and the silence of untold stories which are too painful to be recounted. But which eventually have to be shared and come to the limelight.

The story develops in two levels: Dinah takes off on a journey to the place where over seventy years ago her family had to flee to survive. Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania are some of the locations of her adventure.

The plot in parallel tells us of the lives of the Konforti family between the years of 1940 and 1944. When the realize that they must flee and they begin their difficult journey through a zone devastated by war. Years of trying to decipher what would occur, of guessing what is the next step they should take, of escaping deportations and others turning them in. They must leave always, to an inaccessible place. It is also the story of the righteous who risk their lives and that of their families to help them and fight against this injustice. As a backdrop, a desolate land harmed countless times (the Balkans), is the stage where the characters live, suffer, hide and help each other throughout the novel. From a bombarded Skopje to a village in Kosova, to Albania under Italian command, then the German invasion and lastly an incredible journey through the mountains and forest where the battle took place between communist partisans and defeated Nazis but non-the-less bloodthirsty.

A true story, recreated with the intensity of a novel.