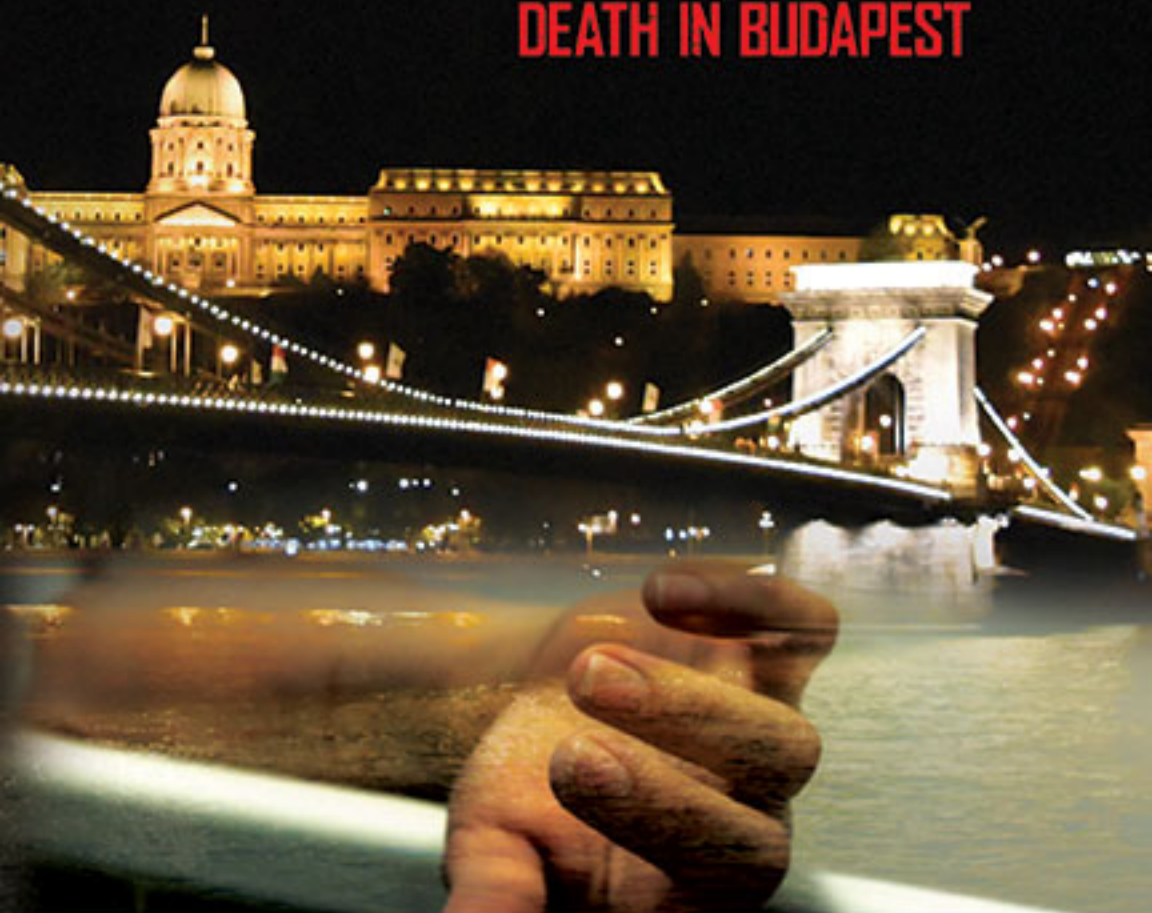


MARK ^{TO} MURDER

DEATH IN BUDAPEST



CHAPTER 1

MORIS SENEGOR

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MARK TO MURDER

Death in Budapest

A Mark Kent Mystery

MORIS SENEGOR

ALSO BY MORIS SENEGOR

Appassionata: and other stories of lovers, travelers, dreamers and rogues

Dogmeat: A Memoir of Love and Neurosurgery in San Francisco

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*To the boys and girls of English High School, Istanbul.
We have dispersed all over the world, yet we are still in Nişantaşı.*

Chapter 1



He took the elevator down to the Royal Suite wearing a luxurious white bathrobe and flip-flops, enjoying cool air after the hot sauna. Pulling out his iPhone from the robe's side pocket, he pressed its home button, checking for time. Five-fifty p.m. More than an hour to prepare for his rendezvous. His eyes lazily drifted to the ornate elevator panel, lights changing slowly on floor markers, as he thought about Olga, the masseuse. Older now, plumper, but it didn't matter. She had skillfully handled his impressive erection, her lips soft, her mouth velvety smooth. He had wanted more but this would certainly do for now. The vigorous massage she followed with had eased all the tension of the past days. She had particularly concentrated on his muscular thighs, which, according to her, were all knotted up. It provoked another erection that she deftly covered with a nearby towel as she carried on, responding to his broad grin with a slight curl of her meaty lips, now free of lipstick. The sauna at the end was brief but divine. As the elevator door opened on the second floor, he thought he had enough time to finish himself off again before taking a shower and getting dressed.

The suite was chilly, a light snow outside dusting windowsills facing an ornate, spacious balcony. A March sun was setting over the Danube, traffic on the Chain Bridge heavy with Tuesday evening commuters. The bridge and its colossal columns were already lit. In another hour, when full darkness fell,

the graceful columns would glow in floodlight, casting long glimmers onto the wavy surface of the river. He walked toward one of the picture windows to take in the scene, emptying the pockets of his gown onto a coffee table in the middle of the capacious living room, next to a house phone. There were only two items, his iPhone and the business card Olga had given him with her private number scribbled on the back. The view was spectacular, scattered clouds bright pink in the sunset, Buda Palace, grand and noble, dominating the skyline to the left of the Chain Bridge, small boats gliding slowly on the river like lit swans.

He was of medium height, balding atop and wore round wire-rimmed spectacles, like those John Lennon once wore. Over the years he had maintained a lean, athletic physique through regular exercise, although he could no longer play soccer as he had for so many years, his knees having failed him. Fortunately, his prowess in bed was still intact. He thought of Olga's ample breasts, her cleavage, generously revealed though the top of her white uniform, and felt another erection beginning. He would call her at the first possible opportunity for a better encounter elsewhere, away from her workplace.

A chill went through him as he realized how cold the suite was. He had to find the thermostat before disrobing. He headed from the luxuriously upholstered living room, through a small dining area with a bar and microwave, to the bedroom. He thought he had spotted something on the wall there that looked like a thermostat. It was to the right of the entrance, an old-fashioned, round, dial-up deal, surprisingly mismatched against the modern appointments everywhere else. It was set to sixteen degrees. No wonder it was so cold. He adjusted his spectacles. They had a tendency to slide down his nose. He leaned closer to the dial.

Suddenly a frosty feeling in the back of his neck sent a fresh chill through his body. It was the muzzle of a gun. He jolted and his glasses fell off. The muzzle pressed harder. He let out an instinctive whine.

"*Tăcere,*" he heard a menacing grunt, *hush*. Romanian.

He tried to turn and look. The muzzle was now pressed against the side of his chin, stopping him. "*No spune nimic!*" *Don't say a word*. He recognized a distinctly Moldovan accent.

Suddenly his arms were jerked behind him, causing the front of his gown to open. The gun was still pressed to his chin. His pulse rose as he realized that there were two of them. He felt the frigid metal of handcuffs first on one wrist, then the other. They rattled as they clamped tight around his flesh, his palms touching together behind his waist, his arms pulling painfully on his shoulders.

"*Deschide-ti gura,*" ordered the same voice, gun back on his neck, at the nape of his skull. *Open your mouth*.

He did as told. He saw a blurry, lean figure facing him. Without his glasses he may as well have been blind. The man shoved a piece of cloth into his mouth. It tasted bitter. Duct tape soon followed, locking the stuffing tightly inside his lips.

As the gun withdrew, he stood, facing the thermostat he could no longer see, eyes wide with fear, his erection long gone, his unrequited member exposed and shrunken. It would no longer come to life.