

## Payback for Revenge

**Alex Markman**

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Bad things happened in the former Yugoslavia after the collapse of the federation. *Payback for Revenge* turns over more than one rock on that war-wracked landscape, revealing foul beasts within its pages.

The book begins by introducing Chantal and her husband Marvin who are indulging in the life of the rich and pampered amongst the New York elite. But Chantal soon becomes intrigued by the melancholy history of her masseuse, Branka, a refugee from war-torn Montenegro. With the opening scene symbolically back-lit by a thunderstorm, the story turns wicked with the news that Branka's daughter has been killed, and it falls to Chantal to deliver the tragic news. The story grows complicated when Branka's husband, Jovan, fresh from a stint as a front-line surgeon in the civil war, enters the picture. The grieving father is bent on revenging his daughter's death, and enlists the help of Chantal, a former journalist.

When Chantal announces that she has signed on as a freelance reporter and intends to fly to the war zone, Marvin rightfully believes that he will be cuckolded and tells her, "Go. I don't ever want to see you again."

Jovan and Chantal wing their way to Yugoslavia, and Branka disappears into melancholy. *Payback* ends happily ever after, but its conclusion is unforeseen and overly artful.

*Payback for Revenge* is part mystery and part adventure, stitched together by war, genocide, drugs, and white slavery. There is heavy romance too, apparently driven by Jovan's Svengali-like allure: "I glanced up, only to fall into his insolent, lustful eyes," Chantal says. "A hot, invisible arrow ran through my body, from the groin to the throat."

The book is a relatively quick read but is over-populated by adjectives and adverbs rather than subtly drawn scenes and characters. For example, Markman writes, "About nineteen years old, she observed our place with a slow roll of her large and languid blue eyes, a reflection of ocean water under a bright sunny sky. They had somewhat of an oval shape, like olives, suggestive of a distant Asian relation."

Jovan is repeatedly labeled as "lazy" ("Jovan advised me in his usual lazy manner") but in the context of the story, the word makes little sense, for nothing about Jovan, is *lazy* in the readily understood meaning of the word. When Jovan learns that his teenage daughter may have been caught up in a widespread prostitution ring, Markman writes, "Jovan collected his thoughts and had another drink. A mask of lazy confidence returned to his face."

While some of the writing seems forced, and there are noticeable copy-editing errors, *Payback for Revenge* carries readers into unfamiliar territory, provides intriguing details, and would make for a good beach read.

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