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**Sarajevo Behind Him, Kemal Begins Trek North Toward Border**  
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Editor's Note -- This is the fifth installment of the story of a Bosnian Muslim who seeks to be reunited with his wife and children after more than two years in a Serb prison camp. In the previous chapter, Kemal Mehinovic made his way into friendly territory but was still within range of Serb guns.

Kemal Mehinovic startles awake by the clatter of police officers gathering for their morning cup of kafa, the thick Turkish coffee that begins the Bosnian workday.

He feels a tinge of panic, thinking for a second he is in prison. Then he relaxes, recalling he is in friendly territory now and that friendly Bosnian government police here in Pazaric took him in late last night after his five-hour hike over Mount Igman from Sarajevo.

It is Oct. 13, 1994. Kemal is working his way north in search of his family.

The relief-agency driver who gave Kemal a lift last night to Pazaric from Igman is already up, chatting with the police officers about the latest word from the battlefield, where the Bosnian government army and rebel Serbs have been trading gunfire off and on for the past few days.

The driver bids him good morning and says they should get on their way soon. Kemal grabs his few belongings -- the clothes he is wearing and a plastic sack of food and water.

A policeman offers Kemal coffee and a handful of cookies, which he consumes hastily. He thanks his hosts for their hospitality and walks outside with the driver into the chill of an autumn morning in the mountains.

The journey is slow, as Kemal and his driver must pass several columns of Bosnian army trucks loaded with supplies, fuel and troops. The roads are bumpy, damaged by the flow of heavy equipment as well as an occasional Serb artillery shell aimed at army convoys.

To make small talk, Kemal's driver asks him where he's from and about his experience in prison. Exhausted, mentally and physically, Kemal is in no mood to talk about it, so he

gives a few details then changes the subject.

Mostly, Kemal stares out at the ruggedly beautiful Bosnian countryside, still awash in fall colors. Dotted with farms, the landscape is buzzing with activity as peasants harvest their fields. Kemal has missed these small slices of life he once took for granted: a woman picking beets and loading them into baskets on a trailer hooked to a tractor; another gathering sticks into a bundle for her woodburning stove; a pair of old men burning a field on a gentle slope.

Kemal daydreams about his family and the life they used to have before the war, of the lazy summer days, weeks even, they would spend with their friends in the woods along the Bosna River. Fishing. Kayaking. Roasting a fatted lamb. Singing around the campfire until the early morning hours.

He wonders about his 16-year-old son, Damir. It pains Kemal to have missed his son's coming of age, that he has missed his past three birthdays. Is he taller than I am yet? Does he look anything like me or does he still resemble his mother? Is he taking care of his mother and sister, like I told him to?

He thinks about Elvira, his blond "baby," who turned 13 less than two months ago. Is she still a top student in school? Does she like boys yet? Has she outgrown her Barbies?

Finally, his thoughts turn to Fazila, the dark-eyed beauty he has known since childhood. In a few days, it will be 19 years since they were engaged to be married. He hopes he will have her in his arms in time to mark that anniversary.

The driver pulls into a village, his destination, and lets Kemal out, wishing him good luck. Kemal walks up the highway and sticks out his thumb. The only vehicles on the roads are military and humanitarian. Within a few minutes, one of the latter stops and offers him a ride to Olovo, a town known for its lead factory, a favorite target for Serb artillery.

Another ride takes him to Kladanj, another toward Gradacac.

At a roadblock outside of Tuzla, police search Kemal's latest ride for weapons, then wave him and his driver on, warning of renewed fighting in Gradacac.

Shortly after noon, the vehicle crests a hill and Kemal sees Gradacac for the first time in 2 1/2 years. Smoke and dust waft over the town, which the Serbs appear to be shelling from the north. A town of about 55,000 people, many of them Muslim and Croat refugees who have been "cleansed" from their homes elsewhere by the Serbs, Gradacac is a militarily strategic town on the frontier with Bosnian Serb-controlled land. It is defended by an uneasy alliance of Bosnian government soldiers and the breakaway Bosnian Croat Army, which, in other parts of Bosnia, is at war with the government.

The driver stops just south of the town center and parks the truck on the safe side of what appears to be an ancient but sturdy wall.

Kemal nods a thanks and exits the truck carefully, walking to the center of town, zigzagging from building to building, taking cover when he hears the telltale whistle of incoming shells.

He has no idea where his mother is but assumes she will be near downtown, within walking distance to the market and the mosque. There are few civilians on the streets, and the soldiers he stops have never heard of Kemal's mother.

With the bombardment intensifying, Kemal ducks into the basement of a big residential building. Kemal dozes off and wakes two hours later to the sounds of civilians in the streets. The bombing has stopped.

"Excuse me. Have you heard of Refika Mehinovic?" Kemal asks a woman as he steps outside.

The woman gives him a strange look.

"You just came out of her building," she says.