

*SpyMistress* by Fiona Marsden

The man lay still as death on the operating table. Only the slight rise and fall of his chest indicated the badly injured diplomat lived. But the night was young.

The room stank of fresh blood and stale sweat. Gabe tied off the last stitch and glanced at the anaesthetist, carefully monitoring the patient. She nodded, a slight dip of the chin the twitchy soldier behind her shouldn't notice.

There were three rebel soldiers in the room. Probably more outside but the gunfire had eased off nearly an hour ago.

“We need to transfer the patient to the ICU.”

The only response was a sharp negative and a wave of the AK-74 from the leader of the group, positioned by the door.

Keeping a close eye on Twitchy, Gabe grabbed the blankets from the adjacent trolley and spread them over the man on the table. The poor guy would be regretting his decision to visit the unstable region in southern Russia for the rest of his days.

A movement near the door caught his eye but he kept his head down as he continued to swathe the blankets. He didn't want to end up bleeding out on the floor like the nurse. She'd panicked and paid the price.

The shadow moved again and the leader staggered, a faint whistle indicating an injury to his lungs. Twitchy barked out something as he turned but the shadow was already there, a nasty looking knife glistening with fresh blood. The barrel of the AK rifle dropped but the knife was in the man's gut. He grunted and dropped to the floor.

Gabe stepped back, swinging his arm to knock away the rifle of the third man who'd stepped forward with a yell that sounded like a call to arms. The dull thunk of a silencer and the gun dropped at Gabe's feet, followed by the rebel.

Turning, Gabe met the eyes of the shadow. Icy blue eyes that were way too familiar. “Anna Khalanova?”

### **SYTYCW Editor Critique:**

**You've done a great job plunging us into the action. Who is the man on the table? Why is he nearly dead and who are these soldiers with guns? The tension is palpable. I also enjoyed your use of imagery—the fresh blood and stale sweat immediately tell us so much about the scene we find ourselves in. I was immediately intrigued by the shadow, and the fact that Gabe knows her. What past do they share? Who really is this hero? I want to read more.**

**In setting a suspenseful scene like this, it's great that you're holding some information back to keep the reader in the dark and up the tension. But be sure to be as clear as possible so we don't get lost following the action. It's not always clear whether it's Gabe or the anaesthetist nodding or speaking, or whether some of the action is happening because of the soldiers or the shadow. For example, this para: "*A movement near the door caught his eye but he kept his head down as he continued to swathe the blankets. He didn't want to end up bleeding out on the floor like the nurse. She'd panicked and paid the price.*" I'm not quite sure what "swathing the blankets" means or what that has to do with bleeding out on the floor. Is Gabe worried about himself bleeding or about the patient? And which nurse? There isn't quite enough information here to understand what he's thinking, which takes the reader out of the story.**

**Thank you for sending your first page in. I hope you continue working on this story and submit it to the contest. I really want to find out who Gabe and Anna are and what their relationship is!**