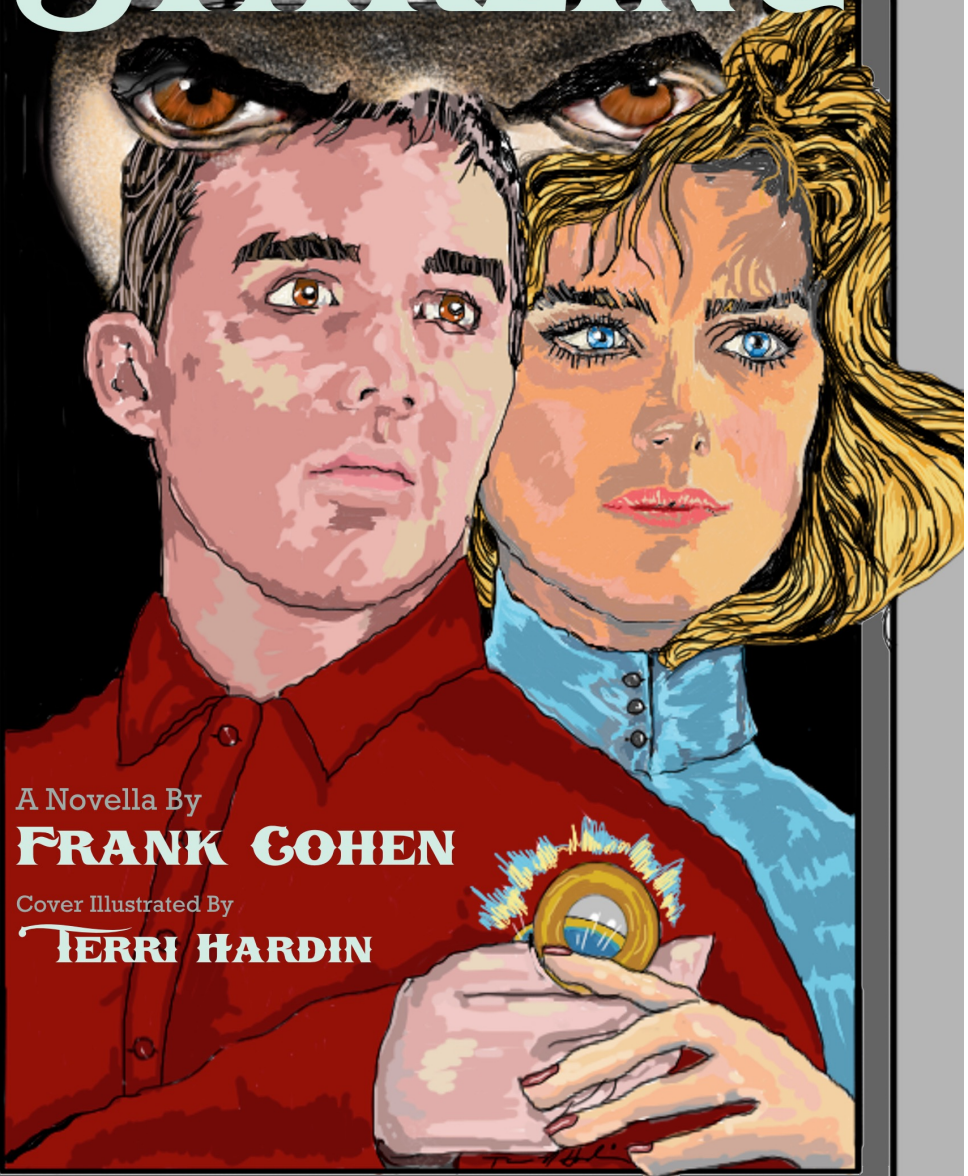


STARLING WATCHES

# STARLING



A Novella By

**FRANK COHEN**

Cover Illustrated By

**TERRI HARDIN**

[www.STARLINGwatch.com](http://www.STARLINGwatch.com)

# STARLING

A Novella By Frank Cohen



# STARLING, A Novella Book

Part of the STARLINGwatch.com Experience

By Frank Cohen

Copyright (c) Frank Cohen 2015. All rights reserved. Please feel free to share this work with your friends and associates, provided you include all the attribution to STARLINGwatch.com. And please look at the STARLINGwatch.com website. It will blow your mind—and you'll see that the watches are real.

This is the March 2016 revision. It fixes typos and formatting issues. It fixes a time-travel issue with the phone call in Chapter 3. It fixes the cover illustration credit to Terri Hardin.

Cover Illustration and beta story editing by Terri Hardin, [terrihardinspeaks.com](http://terrihardinspeaks.com)

Logo design by Jared England, [IceDesignGroup.com](http://IceDesignGroup.com)

Logo mark design by Stephanie Gudanets

Copy editing and layout by Mel Dawn, [mel.dawn.9@gmail.com](mailto:mel.dawn.9@gmail.com)

Illustrations by Matthew Tsirides, [newtone.3g@gmail.com](mailto:newtone.3g@gmail.com)

Story direction by Mira Hilbert

Story editing by Lynette Eklund and Travis Farrar

Thank you and Acknowledgments: Dorote Lucci, Leo Holzer, Aiden Keane, Liam Keane, Mary Keane, Marc Farley, David Coursey, Werner Humpert, and Lindsey Jackson.

STARLING watches are instantly collectible pocket watches unlike anything you've ever seen before. STARLING is the design and invention of Frank Cohen and Disney Imagineer Terri Hardin. Open each watch and the millions of light color combinations that emerge have the power to improve your life, bring you relaxation, and make you more mindful of the things that unlock fulfillment and happiness. The STARLING novella is wonderfully illustrated in bas relief sculptures in a cast resin box by famed Disney Imagineer Terri Hardin. STARLING is collectible and limited edition.

Details at: [STARLINGwatch.com](http://STARLINGwatch.com)



## Chapter 1

“You want those?” The gas station clerk asked in broken English, and pointed to the bag colorfully labeled *Offal*.

What was in the bag didn’t faze Jeff Thompson — this time a combination of baked salted sheep’s brains and organ meats. It was a taste of his mother’s salty home cooking he craved. When he was a child his mother caught a flu the night of a Christmas dinner and she didn’t feel well enough to finish cooking for the big gathering. As she rested in her bedroom, one-by-one the family guests went into the kitchen and tasted her soup — each added a helpful pinch of salt. The family was amazed that Jeff enjoyed the saltier-than-the-ocean taste. It was his mother’s cooking and he was happy.

The clerk handed Jeff his change, including two U.S. pennies some other traveler had left behind. He smiled — *find some pennies, pick ’em up, and all the day you’ll have good luck* — and into his black pea coat pocket went the coins, as he fished out his car keys.

With the car in gear, the brake released, a little gas, and some salty offal bits stuffed in his mouth, he headed toward Sinop, the next town up the coast of Turkey. It was still too early on a Sunday morning for most people to be awake, and the clear, open road felt good after being pinned to college medical textbooks for so long. The past two months of leading tours around this beautiful region was a good start to depressurizing, but this — just driving along in the crisp fresh air, with the white sand and turquoise water of the Black Sea on the right, the rolling green tree-covered hills on his left, and the curving road ahead — was just about perfect.

He came upon a car driving a thousand feet ahead of him. The road curved to the left but the car didn’t complete the turn. It caught in the unpaved shoulder and continued to drive into the sand before coming to a stop.

The conservative doctor-to-be touched his foot to the brake and began to slow his car. As Jeff's car got close he could see the outline of a woman. She was rocking left and right. Seeing her open her car door and then she stopped moving brought him to attention. He stopped his car and walked at a rapid pace over to her car.

The sand slowed his progress and reminded him of frustrating dreams he had where everything moved in slow motion. No worries, Jeff thought to himself, all will be handled in due time, just don't panic.

Jeff opened the car door with care and her body slid from the driver's seat. He caught her and lowered her onto the sand.

She was so light, so frail-seeming. He was at once concerned to not hurt her and wondered who she was. Her gray hair went well with all her wrinkles, and he could tell she had been beautiful once upon a time. Spring might be done for this woman but the fall was going to be equally glorious.

Having laid her on the sand he heard a very quiet voice he had not heard before say in his head, "Get on with it."

His hand moved to her wrist to feel for her pulse. No pulse. His other hand felt for her breath. No breathing. His doctor training took over and he began deliberate CPR immediately.

She moved her head first — just a little — and then her eyelids fluttered open slightly showing him the deepest blue eyes he had ever seen.

"You had an accident," he said in his most doctor-like voice. "I'm a medical student. I'm not a doctor yet, but I've started my internship, so I can help you. I am going to ask you some questions."

She rocked her head from side to side.

"Have you had a fever recently?" he asked her.

She tried to right herself, but then she winced and fell back. Jeff's eyebrows moved downwards in an empathy and sympathy for what she was going through. Jeff observed her on her back moving like a turtle trying to right herself. He concentrated on a diagnosis to determine a treatment, all the while suppressing his feelings that she may die.

"Do you speak English?"

She nodded.

“Do you experience any chest pain?”

“No,” she answered annoyed. She clearly did not want to be there.

“Do you ever feel like you’re choking?”

She didn’t answer this last question. She was unconscious again. Jeff began to feel panic, and quickly quelled it by remembering his instructor’s coaching in the emergency room back home.

He dialed 911 on his mobile phone and got a recording in Turkish he didn’t understand. So he called the Parovoz Hotel in Sinop where he would be staying instead. The hotel clerk understood there had been an accident and help was needed. Then he turned back to the old woman, and slapped her cheek.

Her eyes opened again. Better, he thought.

“Can you tell me your name?” Jeff asked.

“My name is Allisandra Menshikov Benli.” She had a blend of Russian and Turkish accents that made her words thick and rolling.

“Well Allisandra, help is coming.”

“No, no, I’ll be fine.”

She attempted to roll to her side, away from Jeff, and made it part way. Gravity drew her back towards Jeff. She had enough momentum that when she rolled back, her face came very close to Jeff’s. She smelled of old glass.

She was able to see Jeff’s face closely. Her reaction was sudden and abrupt. Her eyes locked on Jeff’s—the blue somehow looked deeper—and she said, “You’re back!”

Jeff knew that stroke patients sometimes mistook strangers for old friends or relatives. It was their weakened minds working overtime. He empathetically resisted correcting her.

“Stay calm and try to relax until help arrives.”

“Jeff, you don’t need to treat me like I’m some old woman.”

It would be impolite to not recognize her. His mind searched down old corridors of his family, his community village, and his friends. He went back

to his childhood in New England. Yet, her face was new to him. He did not recognize her.

“You know me?”

“Of course, I know you. A bit of salt in the corner of your mouth. Pennies in your pocket for luck and love. You’re back! You’re back. I’ve missed you so.”

Jeff had a mystery to solve and he loved solving problems. He was pretty good at observing and better at connecting the dots. He began to work out the difference between administering therapy to keep her alive and solving this new mystery.

“How do you know my name?”

“You’ve been with me for the past 50 years,” she said while her eyes took him in. She made sure she found the attractive features were still there: broad shoulders, deep brown eyes, and appealing lips.

Jeff felt like all the other times in his life when he had no idea how to speak with a woman—he felt like someone pushed him onto the backs of his shoes.

“You are my ghost, my love, my partner..”

He looked downwards to avoid looking into her eyes. It was romantic to him and a bit overwhelming.

She sighed. “It’s okay. You’re a ghost again, I understand,” she said. Again, she tried to sit up, and again she fell back. On her return, her arm swept around, and her hand landed in Jeff’s hand. He grasped her hand to share his warmth with her.

The human touch between them gave her a sudden surge of strength and she pushed her body toward him. She pressed her lips onto his in a one-sided kiss. Her kiss felt all wrong. He was empathetic to her and carefully offered his warmth, his spirit, and his energy to her. Her kiss took it over the top. He did not want to insult her and yet her kiss was... creepy. He shuddered and pulled back to the familiar, the known, the diagnosable, and the fixable.

Allisandra's energy was spent and she leaned back to rest on her back on the sand. Jeff said, "Look, I'm not a doctor yet, but I know a stroke when I see one. Help is coming." And fast, he hoped.

Allisandra muttered something that didn't make much sense. Words and numbers. A location or something. Suddenly, she stopped and began rummaging in her skirt pocket. She felt something important, smiled slightly, and pulled her hand out. Her fingers opened from around a beautiful old pocket watch. She shoved it into Jeff's jacket pocket.

"You carry the Memories now."

Her eyes closed and her body began to shiver. Jeff's face showed new determination. Jeff knew his mission was to keep her stable until the ambulance arrived.



It was past noon when Jeff drove into Sinop. The hotel was large and elegant, at least at some point in its history, now it needed what Jeff's mother would call "The Big Cleaning." Jeff needed some energy from his experience with Allisandra. He went to the restaurant next door for a hot meal. As he was paying his check, an ambulance pulled-up and parked. He recognized the Paramedics that helped Allisandra. They walked slowly into the restaurant.

Recognizing Jeff from the accident scene, one Paramedic said in broken English, "I'm sorry, friend. She is dead."

The language barrier made it impossible for Jeff to find out anything more about the old woman, so he could only hope her family had been close enough to get to the hospital before she passed away. When his own mother had died last year, he and his father had been there to hold her hands during those last moments, but as a hospital intern, he'd seen many times when the families hadn't made it until it was too late. At the very least, Allisandra was convinced he was someone she knew. Whatever she'd seen in him, she died having been in the arms of someone who she thought loved her. Those that offer kindness to others receive a redemption. He would look back to understand how far she had come.

Back in his room he tried to unwind from the events of the day by lying on the bed, listening to the distant roar of the jets flying into Sinop's airport



and the occasional diesel-engine tourist bus, but Allisandra's words ran a loop in his head.

*Jeff... You're back... You've been with me for the past 50 years...* She called him a ghost.

Remembering the pocket watch, he pulled it from his jacket, and studied it closely.

It felt good in his hand. The faceplate looked copper, tarnished but still shining from its many years of handling. Roman numerals encircled a center opening to show the time even with the watch face closed. It looked very old, maybe Victorian or Edwardian. Inside was a blue dial with white hour, minute, and second hands, and on the back of the watch were etched illustrations of flowers from some lovely hidden garden.

He set the time but the winding mechanism appeared to be broken. Nothing. He was the proud owner of a broken watch. Still, giving it to him had meant something to her, so he would keep it. The watch was beautiful, and it reminded him that he had done well by supporting her at her end. His father would say "Be kind, it's all we really have." He looked forward to a prideful reaction the next time he talked to his father and told him what he did for Allisandra today.

Jeff continued to think about Allisandra over the next two weeks. He wondered about the area she lived in, the people she knew, and the history of the region. Much of it he should already know as a tour guide, but had never bothered to learn. All the knowledge he needed was freely available and he found a renewed interest in hunting for it. And, retaining the knowledge he learned was much easier now.

"The Crimean War began in 1853 right here," he told a student on one of his tours. And for the first time in his short career as a tour guide, he was correct!

Jeff kept Allisandra's watch as he would his train pass, passport, and money. It became part of his outfit every day. It still didn't keep time, but that wasn't the point. Holding the watch filled his mind with a vivid memory of helping Allisandra at the accident. Helping her soothed him from the shock of losing his mother last year. Ever since her death colors were dull, food tasted bland, and his memories darkened. These new memories he was making came with bright colors and warm loving thoughts. He realized that

he couldn't go on being a half-hearted tour guide forever. He anticipated a reckoning in his life.

Two weeks after Allisandra died Jeff had a free day with no tours. These free days were tough on him for his heart dwelled on the loss of his mother. He avoided feelings of despair by celebrating her memory. Doing the "Big Cleaning" on his hotel room and his personal things helped him to deal with the grief. His mother would clean every part of a room in a clockwise direction from the center outward.

He found a visible bit of dirt wedged in the timepiece. Sinop was typical of a vacation town. Everything was a little dirty and old. The grime eventually caught up with everyone and everything staying too long.

After a few flicks of his finger with the screwdriver from a glasses repair kit he found the dirt came free of the watch pin. He wound the watch and the second hand started ticking away. He smiled at his success and relaxed back onto the bed to watch the hand tick away the seconds.

After several revolutions of the little white second hand, he pressed the top of the crown pin and the pocket watch opened. A blue glow appeared from the faceplate of the watch. This wasn't a beam of light from a flashlight. Four spots of light were beneath the surface of the front dial. They made the dial change from the typical opaque watch face to a blue translucent swirl. Tear-drop shapes of brightly colored light slowly moved between the four spots. When they collided the light emanated away from the watch face and into Jeff's face and eyes.

In the light, Jeff began hearing his childhood friends yelling at him on a children's playground at his first grade school. He smelled his mother's cooking from Easter a dozen years ago. He felt a baseball impact a leather glove he wore as a teenager. The watch was taking him on a voyage. He smiled in eager anticipation.

The blue glow grew narrow until it was just a spot of light not larger than a person's iris. A woman with the deepest-blue eyes stood before him. He was no longer in his hotel room.

"Where am I?" he asked sincerely.

Her hand reached out to him. But his view of her was distorted in some way. He tried to move his focus from her blue eyes to her face and his eyes slowly agreed.

“What am I seeing?” he asked.

“What am I seeing?” she echoed back to him. “What an odd question. Why ... you’re seeing me.”

He knew those eyes, knew that voice. It was Allisandra—but she was youthful. She was in her 20s. Her eyes drew him in, and he imagined what her lips felt like now — now that they were full and supple, and he wanted to pull her to him and find out —but he didn’t.

“This is going to take some getting used to, Allisandra.”

The glow dissipated like a retreating fog, and his senses were all telling him that he was really here and standing before her.

“Only my father calls me Allisandra. Please, call me Alli. Have we met before?”

He stood in the same Parovoz Hotel lobby as before. But this was new and fresh and grand, with twin staircases rising from the entrance up to the first floor.

Gone were all the shabby patches. The stairs were new and circled around a fountain decorated in marble with images of angels. A small plaque told of the opening celebration of the hotel, many years ago.

“You look stunned,” Allisandra said, “Stupefied, dumbfounded, oblivious. Are you feeling well?”

He looked around the lobby in fascination. Every possible surface was elaborately finished with wood and brass furnishings, with curlicues and flowers as decoration, and with glass and light bringing colors into the room. Years ago he would drive around New England on weekends hunting for examples of Victorian Gothic buildings and he loved this lobby now.

Even the lobby machinery — a chime to call the bellboy; an adding machine to tally people’s bills; a dumbwaiter table to offer refreshments — was beautifully decorated.

While one part of his brain had a hard time resolving what he was seeing, the rest was enjoying the experience. He was a world away from Apple Computers’ aesthetic of white, slick, minimalist surfaces. This place invited him to explore. This place offered frills and adornment. He enjoyed them and appreciated them.



Best of all, he was in what appeared to be a dream, with an attractive woman. But it couldn't be a dream, because he never went to sleep.

"I look around, and I recognize these styles from old books," Jeff said, "And look at you. Your clothes look new, tailored and stylish, not even vintage, like you have great fashion sense but from a long time ago."

"I might not be the only one whose looks are out of date. Although your smile is distracting." She looked from his broad shoulders downwards to his shoes. Her gaze returned to his face.

"While we have made great progress since the end of the war, I hope that at some moment in my lifetime I have a style that is less than ten years out of date, as mine is at the current moment — not that I'm complaining." Her hands waved at the clothes she was wearing.

Jeff's mind was catching-up but slowly. She was calling her dress ten years out of date? They were more like seventy years off, but so was everything else. A tailored square-shouldered jacket that hit right at her waist—her slender waist—and a matching straight skirt that hit just below her knee and square-heeled shoes—showing off shapely calves. And her pure red lipstick made her lips look almost velvety, not shiny or frosty.

“So, what is it you do?” She asked. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, her eyes met his but then darted towards the door, almost as if she was going to make a run for it.

A young man dressed in a bellboy's uniform walked past, offering the daily newspaper. While the headlines were written in a Slavic language, Jeff could still clearly read that the posted date on the paper was November 10, 1955.

“How is that even possible? I'm sorry, what year is this?”

“It's 1955,” she answered immediately. “Are you having some sort of crisis?”

Then he remembered. Alli said to him before her death — *You've been with me for over fifty years.* It was time for him to either accept that somehow he had travelled through time, or to reject the whole thing and be locked up as a crazy man. He thought a moment and decided.

So this was that missing ingredient in his life's plans? Time travel? Allisandra —Alli—was going to have answers to where he should go next?

Jeff noticed her hand move slowly down to a pocket in her skirt. He would wager her pocket was filled with a round pocket watch - maybe even *the* watch.

“I'm sorry,” Jeff said, “This is just a lot for me to take in. You see, one moment I was pondering some big questions about my life, and the next moment here I am talking with you. In my life I am looking for meaning and I hadn't considered living in the past.”

She kept her eyes on Jeff, observing him to make sure he could be trusted.

“Sinop is a small town, but it holds its own for comfort compared to the rest of the area. You may not think you'll be happy here, but then what do you know of the past? Or is it the future you seek?” she asked.

He grinned.

Then she grinned, and her arms opened as an invitation to proceed. “Ok, what does the future hold for us?”

“You first, tell me what you think will happen in the future?”

Her smile continued, her head tilted down slightly, she clasped her hands, and he looked straight at her.

“Well, the war was ended by man harnessing incredible technologies and spilling a lot of blood. But even now I see here the same troubles we’ve had for a long time. So it’s my hope that the same energy will hurl us to other worlds, and we find ways to feed the hungry, and to cure their diseases. I want everyone to eventually benefit from these brilliant inventions like we have over the past hundred years. And I want each person to be able to see hope in a common future.”

His eyes looked at her and his eyebrows drew down. She didn’t talk like anyone he’d ever known in his time. She was so hopeful right after suffering through World War II.

“Who inspired you to feel this way?” he asked.

“My mother and father were very optimistic, even with all that had gone on during their lifetime. They’re both gone now.”

“I’m sorry.”

She tipped her head a little and went on. “They encouraged me to read Jules Verne and Rider Haggard. Their novels were well ahead of their day. And it’s all there for us to see their thinking and wondrous inventions. Inspiration for us all. Bridges that move cars. Cities of light like Paris all over the world. People traveling by air. Typewriters that make copies of pages by themselves. And lost civilizations that are out there for us to find.”

Jeff felt inspired by her like he was by the occasional guest lecturer at school. He wanted to sit down with her for a long conversation.

“I think you will be happy with the future,” Jeff said.

“What makes you think so?”

“Traveling by air anywhere in the world will be commonplace and inexpensive — and frustrating because everyone takes it for granted. And, those typewriters not only make copies of the pages you give it, they also

print copies of everything every other typewriter in the world writes. It will be a future of information sharing freely.”

Her face brightened. “What about the people? Do they treat each other better?”

“Better than what?”

“Than now?”

“I suppose so, it’s much more difficult to hide one’s skepticism, bigotry, and racism, because we can’t lead anonymous hidden lives anymore. And, everyone has an opinion.” He frowned. “But they generally look to themselves for happiness and love.”

“Sounds lonely.”

Her hand reached for her skirt pocket again. His eyes looked to her pocket too and she noticed this time.

“It can be at times.” He continued, “How do you feel about people?”

She shifted her weight and her body rotated. Her hand and the pocket were now slightly away from Jeff.

“What do you think about my nails?” She held her free hand up in front of her face and peered out from between her fingers.

“Well,” he straightened his posture, and took on the tone of a fashion critic, “the rest of your fashion sense is about modernism, and I find it quite stylish, but I don’t like your nails. Too dark.”

“Honesty, I like that. You speak your mind well.”

He cocked his head to one side. “And you changed the subject. Why?”

Alli laughed nervously and then stood still. And now, he was not sure where to go with the conversation. He looked across the room to a table with glasses of water. “A drink, m’lady?”

She moved toward the table and he followed watching her walk. It interested him to see her be coy one moment and carry herself with confidence the next. Her hand reached down and she lifted a glass to her lips and took a sip of water.



The bellboy, still holding the day's newspapers, approached Alli and leaned-in close to her so Jeff wouldn't hear what he had to say.

"Madam, we have had a strange man in a bowler hat lurking about the lobby the past few days. Do you think he," the bellboy said, indicating Jeff with a subtle nod, "is with the other man I speak of?"

She smiled, more to herself than for the benefit of anyone else. "No, I don't believe so. This man may appear strange, but he is not too strange."

The bellboy looked curiously at Jeff, but then he smiled graciously and started to step away.

"Excuse me." Alli handed the bellboy a small blue-green cloth sack with a golden drawstring. "Can you lock this up for safe-keeping. Please?"

"Yes, madam. He put it in his pocket, and headed toward the service doors.

The bellboy's words about the man gave Jeff an impression that time was more valuable than they were treating it. And Alli was shifting her weight again and held yet another thing in her pocket. Jeff looked down at her pocket again.

"Why are you here?" she asked Jeff directly.

That was a question he couldn't really answer, so he muddled his response to something that might fit.

"This area is filled with history, and filled with stories. I've been studying it a lot lately, and have been enjoying it. For example, did you know this town is where the British beat back the Russians a hundred and sixty years ago?"

"You're speaking about the Crimean War, and it happened in Sevastopol. Look in that direction. It was one hundred years ago." She pointed north through the hotel lobby windows and across the waters of the Black Sea. "Directly across, about 300 kilometers from here."

"Oh," was all he could think to say. Jeff wasn't the smartest student in his class. He found that students bragging with knowledge he did not possess intimidated him.

"And it wasn't the British versus the Russians," she said, "Eventually, it was the Russians versus everyone else."

"They must have wanted it pretty badly."



“You really don’t know much.”

Jeff wanted to impress her so he took a different tact, “A lot of people died,” he said.

“How many?” she asked pointedly. Jeff wondered if a wrong answer would mean she would lose interest in him.

“You’re scaring me,” he laughed nervously. He wanted to be more forthcoming in his answers but he just didn’t have the knowledge.

She answered for him. “Listen carefully because it is my history and it is important. Some 800,000 in all died, but most didn’t die in the war. They died of disease waiting for the battle.”

“I heard the victory let the British expand their empire and usher in a good long period of peace,” he said trying to recover.

“You’re pronouncing moral judgments on one or other factions in a God-forsaken war?” Alli asked, “Pick up a book — any book — maybe Savenko or Bulgakov’s *The White Guard*.”

Jeff looked blankly at her.

“Not knowing your history could be a problem for you and me. What if you want to have good conversations here in my community?”

She took a breath. “The Crimea is bloody. Life in the Crimea over the past hundred years means you survived the fall of the Ottoman Empire, both World Wars, and the pogroms, as the two most powerful and merciless armies in history pushed each other back and forth over those grassy plains.”

He gazed through the hotel windows at an outline of the trees against the water of the Black Sea.

“But it just looks so beautiful here,” Jeff looked around and said, “I mean, if I lived in Russia it wouldn’t be hard to see why a place like Crimea makes the average Russian drool. Most of Russia is flat, freezing, and landlocked. And here we have Crimea, a peninsula full of Mediterranean-like forests and rocky hills, with warm blue water. It’s the closest thing they have to the Greek Islands.”

“Good. You do know something.” She looked at him for a very long time. Her face looked directly at him, her arms opened towards him, and she relaxed. He appreciated the compliment.

Jeff reached out his hand to Alli. She started to accept it, but then retracted her arm and walked toward the fountain. He followed her, she turned around, and he turned to face her. Jeff could see the rest of the lobby over her shoulder.

The water made a gentle relaxing sound. The lobby was empty, except for the staff going about normal tasks.

A tall dark man with a bowler hat — he had to be the man the bellboy mentioned — tread across the lobby, clearly with a purpose of some kind. He walked in the direction of the bell boy.

Jeff noticed the man over Alli’s shoulder. If Jeff were to compare himself to the man, the differences outweighed the similarities. He was at least five inches taller, and thirty years older. His nose had been broken at least once. His eyes were brown and bloodshot. His bowler hat and coat looked expensive.

In the man’s arm was a black hexagonal hatbox with tiny windows. Every few seconds a white light would flair within. When that happened Jeff could see small gears turning alternating strips of leather and rabbit fur across a set of tightly held rollers.

The man stopped close to Jeff and behind Alli. He pressed a small green button protruding from the side of the hatbox. Jeff could hear the influence of static electricity from within.

Jeff’s attention followed the hatbox as the man approached the bellboy.

The man and bellboy talked to each other, out of Jeff’s earshot. Jeff noticed the body language between the two men shift. The man become agitated. He raised his arm and moved the hatbox close to the bellboy. The bellboy was trying to defend himself — but not very well.

Alli reacted to the look of concern in Jeff’s face. She turned to see the man approaching the Bellboy. She turned back to face Jeff and quickly surveyed the lobby for something to defend herself. Over Jeff’s shoulder she saw a bucket of umbrellas across from the fountain, and she rushed towards it.

Jeff was not a man to sit idly by. He felt his heart race and rushed toward the men. He reached to take the legs out from under the man, but his whole arm plunged into the man as if he were made of water. A moment later Jeff caught his balance and took several steps back.

The man's hatbox machine connected with the bellboy, and a sudden crack and pop sounded in the air. The bellboy tumbled to the ground, dazed, and the man fumbled through the bellboy's pockets until he retrieved the blue cloth sack. The man's hands shook terribly as he opened the sack and pulled out a pocket watch.

The pocket watch appeared to be new. It was all copper and had shiny details with the outline of twisting ivy sculpted into its front face. The man's shaking hands caused the pocket watch's lid to open and reveal a mottled blue-green light for a few seconds. Then the man pressed the lid closed. The man popped it into his pocket and walked quickly through the doors of the hotel and out into the street.

The bellboy stirred on the floor, rolled over, and let out an audible sigh that at once meant he was in pain and would recover after his ordeal.

Alli arrived with an umbrella in hand. She pointed it at Jeff defensively, and then lowered it.

"What happened?" she asked him.

"That man ... he got away with ... I don't even know."

"Are you alright? Is he alright?" she asked.

She kneeled to hold the bellboy up. He was facing Jeff.

The bellboy looked up and said, "I will never forget you trying to help me. Thank you, sir."

The bellboy reached for his pocket and found the watch had been taken, "It's gone. I'm so sorry."

"At least he didn't get the other watch," Alli said.

Jeff's eyebrows raised in unison, and he asked "The *other* watch?"

# STARLING WATCHES

We hope you enjoyed this chapter.  
Read all the chapters for free:

<http://www.starlingwatch.com/chapter-1/>

And then see the actual watches from the story



For sale at STARLINGwatch.com