

# **Hotrod**

**By**

**James Marinero**

The water is close to freezing as I hit it hard, but my body is in good condition and functions well, responding positively to regular exercise and careful maintenance. Still warm after recent exertion and the short, brisk walk in a ski jacket from the Union railroad station in the late evening, I know that my life is ending now. The South Branch of the Chicago River under the West Adams Street Bridge closes over me. My bulk sinks quickly to the muddy bottom.

What a waste!

There is no chance that I will float to the surface.

Nature gets to work immediately, breaking me down atom by atom and starts to flush me into Lake Michigan. My total dissolution will be a long, slow process in terms of the lifetime of a great city, but completely insignificant on the timescale of the earth itself.

As my bulk reaches the ooze and detritus of the river bottom, I reflect on my life of over 60 years. It has been relatively active with much travel and many companions although there have been long periods of idleness or, should I say, mindless waiting. I have been involved in events which have drawn some political comment, much police interest and on two occasions I came close to retirement. Would retirement have been preferable to this end? To me it would not have mattered. I am not exceptional so no relevant institution or specialist would want me.

My name is Česká Zbrojovka and my parents Jan and Jaroslav Kratochvíl conceived me in 1952, in Czechoslovakia. They lived in a crumbling apartment block a short way from the factory where they both worked. Their firm was trying hard to establish its own identity under Russian dominance after the Second World War, and their efforts as senior managers brought them to the attention of Moscow.

Earlier attempts by my parents had failed, but my birth was finally approved with a German, Dr. Werner Gruner, remotely involved in my conception. I was one of the first.

Our family is larger in size than is normal and more powerful – physically – than is typical. We are unique in several ways - but doesn't everybody think that? My many siblings have also travelled widely and even today still enjoy popularity –

even notoriety - of sorts. Today, many of them are cherished, some retired. Some have been altered at the hands of others, supposedly to improve them or to cater for other, special needs but at heart we are all the same.

I was institutionalized from birth and my early years were spent moving from town to town living in what can only be described as boxes in the dark days of communism. I had little exercise, no stimulation and only intermittent human contact.

It was 1968 when the Prague Spring came and Alexandr Dubcek led a government which tried to shake off some of the shackles of communism. On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1968, five hundred thousand Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. Jan Palach burned himself to death in front of a tank in Wenceslas Square. That was when I came alive properly. Freed from temporary captivity in a police barracks outside Warsaw, I began work with the underground movement.

A soldier must learn patience and I had patience aplenty after almost twenty years of inactivity. A virgin until I was sixteen years old, I will never forget the release of that first time. It was on a training exercise, and my body worked superbly under the tutelage of expert hands.

Then one day – I think it was in 1982 – I fell into bad company and the result was the death of a policeman in the red light district of Bratislava. That was my first proper assignment. Of course, under communism there was no official red light district – the government had demolished the district of Vydrica – but there were known areas of such activity. The police needed such areas to supplement their incomes, and shaking down pimps was a nightly activity. Tokarev was involved in my first real work. Powerfully built with narrow shoulders, it was a perfect fit. Then, that first quick release and the hot load moving through me with purpose. Twice. The exhilaration was tremendous. The first notch on my notional bedpost.

After that night I spent several years as a fugitive, usually concealed in a variety of homes, passed from hand to hand like a whore for money. I stayed clean and went out occasionally – always in bad company - but in those days I was never properly used, not even exercised. However, I acquired a silent partner at this time and we worked well together when the time was right. During night-time trips I

was sometimes given some air and shown off - usually in illegal drinking dens and various business transactions. I particularly recall one night in a very flashy Prague nightclub when I showed what I was capable of in front of many VIPs.

Change was afoot and in 1989 the Velvet Revolution started and the Czech Republic and Slovakia were formed as a result. I was back in Bratislava at the time and after a series of false starts I moved in 1991 - concealed on a truck - down through Hungary into Croatia where the War of Independence had started. I worked hard over the next few years and saw a lot of tough action with one regular partner (although he was an irregular in the military sense). The work tailed off as my partner gained seniority and my bedpost – if I'd had one – would have been unrecognizable. Then the war ended.

It was a time of considerable flux – not only politically but also in terms of technology. The Internet was expanding rapidly and all kinds of websites were being created. My guardian at the time was very active in extending his business interests into this lucrative area. Soon-to-be billionaires were inventing new business models and paradigm shifts occurred regularly.

Despite all the change, my own profession remained constant – as did others. Drugs were moving through the Balkans in huge quantities. It was personal and dirty and my sponsors at that time were of the lowest moral order, but I still worked effectively. I even did some work for some of the new Russian entrepreneurs – always on a contract basis and no names to be mentioned.

From the outside I was by now showing some superficial signs of wear and tear but my body was still in good shape and still gave satisfaction to those who used it. If there was any failure, the fault was never mine. I did not respond well to poor handling and inexperienced hands.

Then, in 1998 my life changed yet again. I moved – legally - to the United States as part of a complex trade deal, and ended up living in Boston. Like some trophy wife I was occasionally introduced to visitors, but unlike a trophy wife, they were allowed to handle me. The next few years in the country estate overlooking the Charles River were a quiet time during which I sometimes exercised in the extensive private grounds. I stayed clean and enjoyed occasional outings to shows, but never any serious work.

It was at one of those shows that I met my new guardian. The change was legal and relatively informal. Heather was my first female companion and one good thing (of many) about this period in my life is that I didn't have to spend a lot of time near the more odorous parts of males.

In the first week of my time with her I underwent cosmetic surgery. 'Identifying marks' – a term which was once used on passports – were carefully removed from my body during a procedure in her basement.

Heather was efficient in her work and treated me well, with regular exercise during trips out into the country. I had some special needs and she ensured that they were met – my efficiency depended on them. Given my size, I was not the best companion for a lady but she had a big frame and with her strong hands she managed me comfortably. All the work I did with her was in New England and the North East, typically one assignment every six to eight weeks. Most travel was in hire cars but occasionally a train was used, always with two others in the regular team.

My companions were always replaced after a job because Heather never worked with the same individuals twice. She never used me for my true purpose and I eventually realised that it was because she considered me to be her most important and reliable companion, her friend of last resort. It was a high honour to be so treasured but I did miss my real work.

On one of our trips out into the country, Heather brought along another companion and during our exercise I could see that change was afoot yet again. It's not that I was jealous – I've never felt emotional about anything – it's just that true professionals recognise their limitations. Besides my size, my weight could be seen as relatively excessive, but when it came to performance, there was little to choose between us – except when we were required to perform quickly. My companion was much better able to stay focused when the pressure was really on for speedy results, but that was academic.

In reality there was never a need for rapid performance and I do not recall any occasions when 'the pressure was on'. All Heather's work was precisely planned and very carefully orchestrated. There were no surprises as she was the

consummate professional, and, as a woman was a rarity in her line of work, she was rarely scrutinised.

The real Tokarev had not travelled with me to the United States and I was being fed a special diet prepared by Heather herself, but even so I still could not match the precise focus of the new age companion she was trying out.

My guardian did not take major decisions lightly and I was certainly given plenty of opportunity to win out, but I could see that my days were numbered. I didn't know how they would end but a separation was inevitable. Tokarev could not have helped me.

My years with Heather are very fresh in my memory – right up to the present – and my trail in the United States was clean, simply because I had never been used for real work. However, circumstances change and people get bored. They look for novelty, the latest fashion, technological improvement. I'd had a good run and had experienced a richer, more varied life than many of my siblings.

Then just two days ago we left Boston on a train for Toledo. I had been cleaned and prepared carefully for the journey, like a child being prepared to visit a special aunt. We got off the train in Union Station, Chicago, for what I now know was my final walk – and the one time Heather used me for my true purpose. It was quick and clinical, outside the metro station.

It is possible that my remains will be dredged up in the future – maybe during a re-modelling of the Downtown district - but little of any use will be left of me. If I were to be found it would be serendipity and it is possible that my identity could be uncovered using the latest scientific techniques, but I am probably lost forever.

I have been handled by many men and one special woman, but never again will I feel the warm touch of a human hand or the loving rubbing of oil, never again will I be brushed; never again will I feel the smooth elongated shape of a Tokarev inside me, primed and ready to go.

Formally known as CZ52, I am a 1950's pistol nicknamed the Czech Hotrod. Tokarev was my special Russian ammunition.

Goodbye.

