

BALKAN GHOST

FADE IN:

EXT. "KARAMAN'S HOUSE" - BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (1992) - DAY

A dilapidated farmhouse in the town of Foča, Bosnia. Weeds and overgrown grass glisten with dew in the dawning light. SOUNDS of suffering and violence escape through the broken window panes. Ethnic cleansing has begun.

INT. "KARAMAN'S HOUSE" - CONTINUOUS

Several terrified young women huddle together in a dank hallway. The youngest is fourteen. Another YOUNG WOMAN in her early 20s, her cotton print dress now almost nothing but soiled and bloody rags, clutches her INFANT DAUGHTER.

A disheveled, drunken SOLDIER stumbles into the hall and attempts to grab this woman for his next victim. Terrified, knowing what is coming, she struggles in vain to fend him off. Annoyed, the soldier increases his force until he can yank the baby girl away from her mother's grasp.

He tosses the infant underhanded across the room to another SOLDIER, slouching against a wall and slicing a greasy sausage with a combat dagger. The second soldier looks up just in time to catch the infant, but the little girl's left foot catches the blade and bleeds all over the soldier and his sausage.

As the woman is dragged away to the adjoining room, the infuriated, bloodied soldier raises his dagger, almost as if to sacrifice the child, but he is stopped by VUK DRAGOVIĆ, late 30s, the local chief of police. Dragović is noticeably less unkempt and much taller than the others, and his shabby uniform insignia suggest he has some authority over the other paramilitary thugs.

He places the infant gently on a torn, stained pillow on the floor.

DRAGOVIĆ
(gruffly, in Serbian)
[Give me my knife back, you pig!]

(NOTE: All instances of the Serbian-Bosnian language shall be indicated by being enclosed in brackets. On screen, this text will appear in subtitles.)

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Dragović seizes the dagger and wipes the blood off the handle with the soldier's rumpled shirttail, then hands it to the screaming baby as though it were a toy or pacifier. Dragović abandons the infant to join the other soldiers in the torture and abuse of the young Bosnian woman.

The baby girl, her tiny foot covered in blood, is bawling in pain, but she suddenly stops and looks up toward the next room. Her own pain is nothing compared to the violence being done to her mother. She then stares at the elaborate outline of a wolf in carved into the haft of the shiny Damascus steel dagger. She picks it up.

EXT. PAVILION GARDEN, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA (PRESENT) - DAY

Late afternoon on a warm early fall day. In a private garden hemmed in by serpentine brick walls, a small award ceremony is coming to an end. Standing on a makeshift dais in front of a few other faculty members seated on folding chairs, PROFESSOR IVAN MYASNIKOV holds up the plaque that has just been awarded to him by the CHAIRMAN of the Center for Slavic and East European Studies.

Myasnikov, a big man, mid-fifties, is sweating profusely through a white short-sleeved dress shirt with loosened polyester tie. He towers over the white-bearded DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN, a Southern gentleman-type wearing a seersucker suit, bow tie and horn-rimmed glasses. He makes up in style for what Myasnikov has in size.

HANA ZELJKOVIĆ, 25, is a visiting lecturer in International Studies who has come to the American University in Washington from the University of Sarajevo, Bosnia. She sits in the front row of the small audience. Her eyes are fixed on Dr. Myasnikov, her supervisor at A.U.

After shaking the Chairman's hand a bit too forcefully, and clutching the smallish plaque in his left hand, Myasnikov turns to address the audience. There is no microphone, so he speaks loudly, without notes.

MYASNIKOV

Thank you again, Bob, and thank you,
Dean Jennings, and of course thanks
to my patient and supportive
colleagues, from both my university
and of course this great institution,
for this award.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MYASNIKOV (cont'd)

It is a testament not so much to the value of my research, as to the willingness of so many victims of that war who were willing to discuss with me their often deeply painful experiences.

Myasnikov pauses to wait for applause, but there is only brief and tepid clapping by a few colleagues.

Myasnikov turns to shake the Chairman's hand one last time, then steps down from the short dais onto the lawn. The applause is slightly louder this time, but still does not measure up to the expectation set up by Myasnikov's stentorian exclamation.

Hana, however, stands and claps enthusiastically for her sponsor. A few senior faculty, maybe envious that an award was given to a professor from another university, and a handful of bored graduate students stare at her curiously.

Myasnikov soon finds himself standing unexpectedly alone after this ceremony to honor him, as people stand and start to file out or chat among themselves.

Hana walks up to him, beaming with pride that this great man is her fellowship supervisor.

Hana speaks with only a very slight East European accent, but would not be taken for a native of the U.S.

HANA

Professor Myasnikov, I think this is a great honor you are getting. You know, I read your book while I was still living in Bosnia.

MYASNIKOV

(deadpan)

Yes, I know. Otherwise, you wouldn't have gotten the appointment.

(his smile broadens
to show
facetiousness)

How did you like it, by the way?

Out of nowhere, BARBARA TISDELLE, a youthful 48, inserts herself into the limited space between Myasnikov and Hana, separating them.

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CONTINUED: (2)

[All characters pronounce Ivan Myasnikov's first name the Russian way, with a short 'i' and the accent on the second syllable, like "Yvonne".]

BARBARA

Ivan! Welcome back. How's life in the District treating you?

MYASNIKOV

Well, the commute, of course. But you can't beat the Library of Congress. Almost as good as Leninka.

Barbara is quizzical.

MYASNIKOV (cont'd)

Lenin Library. Moscow.

BARBARA

(broad grin)

Oh, I'm sure! Congratulations on the award, by the way.

MYASNIKOV

(stares down at the dinky plaque, then up at the small crowd)

They could have just sent it to me.

BARBARA

(notices Hana standing next to Myasnikov)

Oh, hello. You must be Hana. I'm glad to finally meet you in person. Barbara. Tisdelle.

HANA

You are Barbara? Zdravo! Hello! I am so happy to meet you, too! You are being so helpful.

Myasnikov fails to control a mildly resentful sneer. Barbara notices his unnecessary petulance.

BARBARA

(a maternal smile, toward Myasnikov)

Yes, yes, Ivan. You were helpful in getting Hana here, too. We're both glad she got here safely, aren't we?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HANA
(looking around)
It is so beautiful here. Like
paradise.

BARBARA
I hear the Balkans are beautiful,
too. I'd like to go some time.

MYASNIKOV
Yes, especially the Dalmatian Coast.

BARBARA
(moving on)
Hana, now that you're here...

Barbara pauses to check for Myasnikov's reaction before her
big ask.

BARBARA (cont'd)
I am wondering if you would have time
to help us out. I mean I.R.C.

HANA
I don't know. I--

BARBARA
It's nothing big. We're producing a
documentary about refugees living in
Virginia. A lot of them came here
from your country during the war.

HANA
So how would I help you?

BARBARA
Well, for some of them...not all, of
course...this still just isn't
"home".

HANA
But they have been here more than
twenty years, no?

BARBARA
They say they feel unwelcome. Even
more so now.

HANA
(knowing)
Sometimes my country doesn't feel
like home even to me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

BARBARA

Maybe you could just tell them a little about how things are going there now? I mean, since you speak their language...

HANA

Oh, of course. I am glad to be helping if there is time. But you know, I am teaching now in Washington, and I do not have car.

MYASNIKOV

Yes, Barbara. I think it's a great idea. But you need to be mindful of Hana's time.

BARBARA

(laughing)

You mean your time, don't you?

MYASNIKOV

(grinning)

Of course I do. I have great plans for her. But if you can arrange to get her down here when she has time...

BARBARA

Don't worry about that. We'll handle the logistics.

(to Hana)

When are you going back to D.C.?

MYASNIKOV

I have a dinner here with some colleagues, so not until after that.

BARBARA

I want to introduce you to Peter.

(turns to Myasnikov)

You remember him?

MYASNIKOV

Yes. He was in one of my classes. Hana, if you want to go back with me, just be here before 8:30 or so.

HANA

O.K. I will.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

BARBARA
(walks away with Hana)
Don't drink too much, Vanya!

INT. INTERNATIONAL RESCUE CENTER - DAY

Barbara guides Hana around the interior of the local office of the International Rescue Center. As they walk down a well-lit hallway, Barbara points to rows of unframed, brightly colored paintings and drawings done by refugee children.

BARBARA
We just had a little exhibition here.
All these were done by refugee
children. Aren't they wonderful?

Hana suddenly stops by a painting of a little boy standing with his mother. Buildings around them are broken down, as if by bombs.

HANA
Where is this one from?

Barbara looks at it more closely.

BARBARA
Oh, that one. Yes, very sad. Iraq.
His father was an S.I.V. -- "Special
Immigrant Visa". A translator for the
United States Army. He was eventually
allowed to come here, but his family
got held up in bureaucratic limbo. He
waited for his wife and son to be
allowed to come. They had finally
arrived, had just settled in for a
week or so, when the father was
killed by a car. Walking to work.

Hana gasps.

HANA
Where is his family now?

BARBARA
(shakes her head)
Back in Iraq of course. We did
everything we could, but they had no
money, no job, spoke almost no
English. And, you know, they were
probably terrorists.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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BARBARA (cont'd)
(shakes her head
again)
A mother and her five-year-old son.

Barbara and Hana continue to walk down the hall in silence, no longer looking at the paintings on the wall. Eventually they come to a room marked with a sign saying "MEDIA ROOM". The door is open. Barbara goes in first. Hana follows.

The small room is filled, in an organized way, with a couple of cameras and a basic A/V set up for viewing and editing video content.

PETER GENTRY, a young 30, sits at a desk, wearing headphones and staring into a large computer monitor. He is good-looking and of undeniably Virginia-preppy stock. He wears an out-of-place, rumpled tan photo vest, as though he had just come off a dangerous assignment to Zimbabwe.

BARBARA (cont'd)
Hello, Peter.

Peter continues to stare at the monitor, oblivious.

BARBARA (cont'd)
(louder)
Peter!

Peter looks up, sees visitors, takes off the phones, but doesn't stand up.

PETER
Oh, hi, Barb. What's up?

BARBARA
This is Hana. She came down here with Ivan. I asked her if she'd be willing to help us with the Bosnians.

PETER
(stands up, extends
his hand)
How do you do? I'm Peter.

HANA
(shakes Peter's hand)
Hana.

PETER
So you work with Professor Myasnikov?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHANA

Yes, I am writing my dissertation
under him. And teaching.

PETER

We were sorry to see him leave here.

BARBARA

Hana's from Sarajevo, but came to
American University just to work with
Ivan.

(under her breath)

...believe it or not.

(turns to Hana)

The origins of the Balkan Wars,
right?

HANA

(blushing)

Well, yes, in a way.

(to Peter; points to
monitor)

And what are you working on?

PETER

Ah. Well, in fact, I was just editing
some clips from interviews we've been
doing. Bosnian refugees who settled
here. Among others. More recent.

HANA

Can I see?

PETER

Sure. But I'm not finished yet.

HANA

That's O.K. I just want to get an
idea of how I could help you.

PETER

(to Barbara)

Is it O.K. to show her what we've
got?

BARBARA

I'd like to see them, too. She
doesn't have much time. Maybe just
show her some of the clips we've been
struggling with.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PETER

O.K. Give me a couple of minutes to get set up.

Peter begins to clack on the keyboard and use the mouse to line up some video clips. He talks as he works. Barbara and Hana move around behind him so they can see the monitor.

PETER (cont'd)

Mostly women so far, but a couple of men, too... The women talk a little more openly, but they don't always make sense.

BARBARA

Sexist!

PETER

No, seriously. They--

BARBARA

I was just kidding, Peter.

HANA

I think he's right. At least, Bosnian women. Maybe because of how they suffered.

This statement has a chilling effect. Peter makes a few more clicks in silence.

PETER

O.K. This first one is from an interview with a woman named Jela. Things are going fine, then she just freaks out, for no reason. Then she says a lot of stuff I don't understand. I guess it's in Bosnian... Here we go.

Barbara and Hana move a little closer, as Peter runs the clip.

CLOSE ON VIDEO -- VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH JELA DŽINO

CUT BETWEEN VIDEO OF INTERVIEWS AND REACTIONS

JELA DŽINO, 55, looks severely and directly into the camera, trying to shade her eyes from the misplaced, bright camera light. The production values of the interview are modest, suggesting minimal equipment and quick setup.

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CONTINUED: (4)

PETER (O.S.)
Do you ever get back there?

JELA
Some day. But still not safe.

PETER (O.S.)
Really? After all these years?

JELA
Not going there... Coming back.

PETER (O.S.)
How do you mean?

Jela stares into the camera, says nothing. Her face tenses.

PETER (O.S.) (cont'd)
What do you mean, "not safe"?

Jela frowns and reaches her hand toward the lens until it is completely covered by her palm. Muffled CURSING in Bosnian continues while the screen remains almost black.

END VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH JELA DŽINO

Hana appears to be shocked by what she has just understood in Jela's cursing.

PETER
Well, Hana, what do you think?

HANA
I would have to know a little more about what you were talking about before. I can talk to you about her cursing later. Do you have any others?

PETER
Of course. This next one also ends rather, um, abruptly, to say the least. Guy's name is Sulejman.

Peter sets up the next clip.

NEXT INTERVIEW WITH SULEJMAN ZUKORLIĆ - CONTINUOUS

SULEJMAN ZUKORLIĆ, late 50s, looks passively into the camera whenever he is being asked a question by Peter, but when he answers, he looks around as if someone were watching or listening.

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PETER (O.S.)

So you occasionally travel to Croatia? What do you do there?

SULEJMAN

I have some business there. In Split. They're not Muslim. But business is business.

PETER (O.S.)

Is that a problem?

At this question, Sulejman looks around much more actively, as though very suspicious.

SULEJMAN

Well... They are Russians. You know. Orthodox.

PETER (O.S.)

So what kind of business is it?

Sulejman frowns silently, to indicate that he's not about to answer that question.

PETER (O.S., CONT'D)

Ever get back to Bosnia?

Or that one.

PETER (O.S., CONT'D) (cont'd)

Never mind. I'm really interested in how you're getting along here. Let's talk about that.

Sulejman stares intently into Peter's camera and mumbles something unintelligible but forceful. He then turns his face away from the camera. The clip ends.

END VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH SULEJMAN ZUKORLIĆ

PETER

This guy you just saw, Sulejman, he just stopped the interview right there. Whap! I couldn't get him to talk about his "business" with Russians.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARBARA

(ironically)

Hmm, let's see if we can figure out why: (A) Russian businessmen, not in their own country, (B) doing business on a sea coast in (C) a country that was a known haven for trafficking, with (D) a Bosnian Muslim refugee living in America but (E) who somehow has enough money to fly to Eastern Europe. Sound above-board to you?

HANA

(smiles, then becomes serious)

There may be another reason.

PETER

What would that be?

HANA

I'm not sure, but at the end, when he starts mumbling...

BARBARA

What?

HANA

Well, I'd have to listen again, but it sounded more like Serbian than Bosnian.

BARBARA

So? I thought they were the same.

HANA

Yes and no. Just strange, for someone named Sulejman. That's a Turkish name. Muslim. But like I said, I couldn't really hear what he was saying.

PETER

That's interesting. Maybe we could ask him about that.

HANA

Something else was strange. You know, Russian "businessmen" would be much more welcome in Montenegro than Croatia.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BARBARA

So do you think he's lying?

HANA

Oh, don't ask me that. I have no idea. I just noticed a couple of things.

Peter looks at Hana, about to follow up on this statement, then changes his mind. He clicks the mouse again, to roll the next interview.

PETER

Let's go on to the next one.

NEXT INTERVIEW -- NIVES NIKIĆ

NIVES NIKIĆ, 35, is pretty and very animated. She speaks English without a significant accent, due to the fact that she came to America as a young teenager.

NIVES

I don't think Americans really know much about our war. Lots of younger people here don't even know there was one.

PETER (O.S.)

You must have arrived when you were, what, fifteen or so? Did you understand the war back then?

NIVES

It is hard to understand how people who were once neighbors or friends -- or even husbands or wives -- could do those things.

PETER (O.S.)

What things?

NIVES

(almost snidely)

You really don't know? It's not exactly a secret.

Peter interjects an explanation of the situation over the video.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PETER

(to Barbara and Hana)

Of course I knew what she meant. I was just trying to get her to discuss it on camera.

BACK TO VIDEO

PETER (O.S.)

Well, a lot of things were done during the war. I just didn't know exactly what you were referring to.

NIVES

Would you like to see what things? They did to me?

PETER (O.S.)

I didn't mean--

NIVES

I didn't think so. Anyway, those things. People who lived together, as friends, countrymen -- they suddenly thought it was OK to turn into vicious animals. They--

(says something
unintelligible,
presumably in
Bosnian)

Nives is suddenly overcome with emotion, and tries to hold back tears. She waves her hand at the camera to stop the interview. The screen goes black.

END VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH NIVES NIKIĆ

The screen stays blank for a moment. Almost in unison, three low, soft WHEWS express the impact of the clip with Nives.

PETER

So, Hana. Could you understand what she said at the end?

HANA

I didn't hear it all, but she is calling them some kind of animals. Something about wolves, and then she calls them pigs. Which to a Muslim, of course...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANA (cont'd)

She says other bad things, if you let me see whole interview some day. But maybe not now.

PETER

Calling who animals?

HANA

Oh, sorry. Serbs, I think. She doesn't use the word, but we know.

PETER

Great! That's exactly why we need your help. I have one more of these. This last one... I don't know what to say about it. Just watch.

NEXT INTERVIEW -- ASJA MIKULIĆ

ASJA MIKULIĆ, early 70s, has white hair and a face full of character lines. Her Yugoslav accent is strong, and her English grammar and pronunciation could use some work. She takes time before uttering each sentence that she says directly into Peter's camera.

PETER (O.S.)

How do you get along with the younger Bosnians here?

ASJA

The women, we all understand. The good ones. We share stories.

PETER (O.S.)

Oh? The good ones. So there are bad ones?

ASJA

Yes.

PETER (O.S.)

How bad?

ASJA

Very bad. Evil. They are even selling the children. To buy the magic. To come here.

PETER (O.S.)

Seriously? Magic? How do you know this?

No answer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETER (O.S.) (cont'd)
Do these people live here now?

ASJA
You can find them.

PETER (O.S.)
Have you ever talked to them?

Asja starts to say something, then changes her mind.

PETER (O.S.) (cont'd)
So do you know what happens to the
children?

Asja says nothing, but starts quietly singing a Bosnian Sevdalinka, a melancholic folk song that often describes subjects such as the death of a dear person. Peter listens for a moment, then tries to return to his question.

PETER (O.S.) (cont'd)
So do you know what happens to the
children? The ones you say are sold.

Asja continues to sing. The tune is slow and melancholy and very Balkan.

END VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH ASJA MIKULIĆ

Peter gestures to Barbara that the video is over and she may close the window on the monitor.

BARBARA
Wow. Those are fascinating. Too
short! Do you have any more? Of these
interviews I mean?

PETER
Sure, just not edited yet. I think
the ones from the Balkan refugees
kind of have something in common, but
I'm not sure what, actually. Weird.

HANA
Maybe in a way these people have been
through even more than the ones still
living in Bosnia.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER

(surprised)

How can that be? They seem to be
living like comfortable lives now.

HANA

Their horrible memories. They don't
fit in. No one here can really
understand them.

PETER

Seriously?

HANA

That song, for example.

PETER

Yeah, what was that all about?

HANA

We call it sevdalinka. It is
traditional song about loss,
heartbreak, death.

BARBARA

Bosnian?

HANA

Yes. Why does this woman sing such a
song? She only answered your question
with a song. One she knew you
wouldn't understand.

PETER

(brightening)

But there's something else, don't you
think? I don't know what it is.

HANA

They have not let go of the past. I
wonder if there is some reason. The
war, I am sure it is hard to forget.
But it is a long time ago. I hear
something, something in the present.
That won't let them forget.

Peter is enchanted by Hana's depth and her understanding of
the immigrants.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETER

Listen, I know you're going back tonight, but if you can come back in the next couple of days, I have another interview set up. It would be great if you could be with me.

HANA

I'll try. Can you take me back to the university now?

PETER

Sure.

INT. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY - MYASNIKOV'S OFFICE - DAY

Professor Ivan Myasnikov sits uncomfortably at his large maple desk covered with books, forms and overflowing manila folders. His office is appropriately spacious, yet the walls are taken up more by certificates and framed photographs of Myasnikov and various Russian political celebrities than books. A picture of him shaking hands with Vice President Al Gore is prominent.

The perspiration on his forehead and the same white short-sleeved shirt suggests that the office is hot and stuffy. Across from him sits Hana, clutching an old-school steno pad and loosely holding a pen in her lap. She leans forward.

HANA

All those people seemed...I don't know--

MYASNIKOV

Nervous? Why wouldn't they? An American with a camera, digging into their past.

HANA

Of course. But this wasn't about the past.

MYASNIKOV

(condescendingly)

It's always about the past.

HANA

How can you say that?--- Well, for example, one older woman talked about "magic".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MYASNIKOV

Sorry, I've got a meeting to get to.

Myasnikov stands up and moves toward his poplin sports jacket, hanging on a rack. He puts it on clumsily, then picks up a couple of folders from his desk.

Hana gathers her materials and stands up.

MYASNIKOV (cont'd)

(moves toward the
door)

Old wives' tales. People take their beliefs with them. Wherever they go.

Myasnikov opens the office door and gestures gallantly to Hana to go first. She goes out into the hall, he follows.

INT. AMERICAN UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Myasnikov and Hana walk out of his office into the empty hall. Myasnikov closes and locks his office door, then the two walk down the hall.

Hana, much shorter than Myasnikov, hurries to keep up with him as he walks briskly toward his meeting.

MYASNIKOV

I've never been to Bosnia, but I know these old beliefs are still common among the uneducated.

HANA

(animated)

These people are not uneducated.

MYASNIKOV

O.K. Relax. I just don't think you can understand who they are, what they want.

HANA

What does that mean? Why not?

MYASNIKOV

I just wouldn't pay much attention to such nonsense, that's all.

Hana starts to object, then holds her tongue. They reach the end of the hall. Hana goes up a half flight of stairs to a landing with a door to the outside. Myasnikov turns right and passes through a pair of doors.

EXT. APARTMENT OF ZIBA AND EMIRA SARIĆ - DAY

Hana helps Peter pull out some camera and lighting equipment from the back of an old Econoline van. A logo on the side panel shows a clearly recognizable silhouette of Einstein reads "IRC Media."

PETER

Glad you could help me with this. I can drive you back up to D.C. by the way.

HANA

That's alright. I can take the train tomorrow.

PETER

Where you staying?

HANA

U.V.A. has some deal with A.U. where I can stay in the International House when I need to do research here.

PETER

That's good. Is it free?

HANA

No, but it's not like a hotel. It's just a dorm room. Barbara helped make the arrangements.

PETER

Ah, she's great that way. Anyway, she said this should be an... interesting... interview with these two sisters. The ones from Srebrenica. Ready?

HANA

Ready.

INT. APARTMENT OF ZIBA AND EMIRA SARIĆ - CONTINUOUS

ZIBA SARIĆ, 43, sits on a small, worn sofa dressed in a loosely sashed floral pattern polyester robe.

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CONTINUED:

Two bright lights on stands sharpen the contours of a bitter face prematurely wrinkled by years of smoking.

Though her face and limbs do not read as obese, Ziba's partly open robe suggests a gut distended from years of drinking plum brandy and eating Balkan pastry to excess.

On the sofa next to Ziba sits her very pretty sister, EMIRA, 36. Her Adriatic beauty is marred only by a long but now faded scar running down her left cheek. In contrast to her sister's, Emira's expression is open and naive.

While Peter moves from positioning the lights to making final adjustments to the camera, Ziba and Emira sit quietly, staring straight into the camera and smiling stiffly, as though posing for a snapshot.

PETER

Just to remind you. The camera will be rolling all the time. Be natural, don't worry about me, the camera, anything. Ready?

Ziba and Emira continue to stare in the direction of the camera, but otherwise do not react to Peter's instructions.

PETER

So, Ziba, could you start by telling us about how you were able to get refugee status? What year was it, and where were you at the time?

Hana looks at Peter inquisitively, then backs off. Ziba and Emira glance at each other, then they both look at Hana. Neither replies.

PETER (cont'd)

(coaxing)

I don't need you to go all the way back there, to Sreb-- to Bosnia, the war and everything. Later on...

Ziba and Emira again say nothing, look toward Hana for explanation.

HANA

(in Bosnian)

[Perhaps you don't want to discuss this in front of me?]

Ziba shakes her head almost imperceptibly, surprised by Hana's suggestion, but once more, neither of the women replies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANA

[I was too young to have seen
anything like what you saw. But I can
tell you that my mother was in Foča.]

Ziba gives a sympathetic smile, which turns into a sad
frown.

ZIBA

[Karaman's house?]

Hana gives an inquisitive look to indicate this means
nothing to her.

ZIBA (cont'd)

[Do you still live there? In Foča?]

HANA

(switching to English)
Sarajevo. But I have relatives near
there. And some childhood friends.

ZIBA

[Did your mother survive?]

HANA

(back to Bosnian;
deeply downcast)
[No.]

ZIBA

[Your father?]

HANA

(pauses, trying to
find the words)
[Shot by Chetniks. Trying to protect
my mother, they told me. It's funny:
I never knew her, but I miss her.]

Ziba and Emira become more engaged, but their interest is
clearly more in Hana's experience than Peter's film.

ZIBA

[Bastards.]

HANA

(drifts off; in
English)
There was this old woman once,
though...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ZIBA
(under her breath)
[A witch.]

Hana and Emira both react momentarily to Ziba's strange comment. Peter, confused by the code switching, tries to tune in.

EMIRA
Ziba, let's talk in English. We don't live in Bosnia anymore. And for their film--

PETER
(sighs in relief)
Thank you!

EMIRA
(looks straight at Hana)
You can understand. It never goes away. She had two children.

ZIBA
(also to Hana)
They'd be about your age. Babies. They just took them away. They had guns. And knives.

Ziba looks down at the floor, suddenly caught in her nightmare memory.

HANA
This must be very difficult for you both. Let's talk about how you got to the United States. Did UNPROFOR--

ZIBA
(suddenly animated)
U.N. do nothing! They are for shit! United States, U.N., NATO--they only come in after what the fucking Serbs do. To me. To Emira. So many of us.

EMIRA
(worried)
I don't remember.

ZIBA
You don't remember. Hah! Lucky you. They were drunk. You don't remember them? With their filthy, stinking beards.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ZIBA (cont'd)

You don't remember them? That smell!
Piss. Sweat. Garlic! How do you
forget?

EMIRA

What do you mean? I don't remember!
Why are you telling me this?

ZIBA

They make me watch what they do to
you. I cannot forget. So why should
you--

EMIRA

I don't know! Please don't tell me. I
don't want to know!

Peter is transfixed by the sight of these old psychological wounds being opened up right before his rolling camera. He looks toward Hana to see if he should keep it going or shut it down. She shrugs deferentially.

HANA

(in Bosnian)

[Please, let's focus now on your life
in America. The film--]

ZIBA

(in Bosnian)

[The film?]

(switches to English)

What kind of film? Maybe your
boyfriend wants porno film, yes?

With that, Ziba suddenly yanks open her robe and lets her breasts fall out. They are horribly scarred and misshapen, unmistakably the result of human violence. Ziba has a bitter scowl on her face. Her sister breaks down and hides her face in her hands. She cannot look.

INT. A DOWNTOWN BAR/CAFE - NIGHT

Peter and Hana sit across from each other at a two-top in a trendy cafe on the downtown mall. Menus have been brought, but for now, they just have drinks. Peter holds a bottle of a local microbrew, while in front of Hana sit two small brandy glasses, one empty, the other full, and a glass of sparkling mineral water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANA
(slightly tipsy)
Muslims aren't supposed to drink. But
in the Balkans, you can't pass up a
bit of rakiya.

PETER
Mind if I try it? What's it called
again?

Peter reaches his hand across the table to take her glass.
His fingers touch hers. She doesn't withdraw.

HANA
"Slivovica". Plum brandy.

PETER
Hmph. I thought that was Serbian.

Hana releases her glass so Peter can take it. He sniffs the
plum brandy deeply, a mock-connoisseur, then raises his
forehead and eyebrows, and takes a hefty sip.

PETER (cont'd)
Whoa! That's strong...
(shakes his head)
But not bad, actually. Kind of like
the stuff we call moonshine.

He hands the glass back to Hana, she tosses back what's left
without batting an eye. Peter looks amazed. He turns, finds
the waiter, and gives the signal for another round for the
table. Hana shakes her head 'no', but not convincingly.

HANA
That was painful.

PETER
I'll say!

HANA
No, I mean the interview.

PETER
(shaking his head)
What they did to her.

HANA
To both of them. Emira can't even
remember.

PETER
This is getting too heavy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANA
(unfamiliar with the
slang)
Heavy?

PETER
Look, I just agreed to help Barbara
make some video recordings. You know:
interview a few immigrants, living in
Virginia for awhile, how are you
getting on, what do you do, ...

HANA
So?

PETER
So take those four clips. I didn't
get at all what you got out of them.
I had no idea.

Hana says nothing, but looks at Peter, unsure what his
problem is.

The waitress arrives with another round. Hana reaches for
her shot, but then stops herself.

PETER (cont'd)
(animated)
I mean, what am I getting mixed up
in? Wolves? Pigs? And then! All that
stuff about magic and witches. It's
the twenty-first century, you know.

HANA
Peter, calm down. I understand how
unfamiliar this must be to you. But I
know these kinds of stories. They
don't go away.

PETER
I get that. What about those two
sisters. Ziba and --

Hana at last picks up her brandy glass again, tosses it back
angrily.

HANA
Emira.

PETER
Right, Emira. We can't use that
footage.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PETER (cont'd)

And how can she not remember everything? I mean, if that had happened to me...

HANA

You don't know. You really don't know. And why can't you show those things?

PETER

Too violent, I think. We're not making a documentary of the war. If anything, Barbara wanted me to show how well they're getting on now. How I.R.C. has helped them.

HANA

Is something wrong with the truth?

PETER

No, but--

HANA

Peter, I see this must be shocking for you. The war was almost over when I was born, but my whole life I've lived with signs of destruction. Mortar holes in the sides of buildings, still there. My parents killed. These people--

PETER

Yes?

HANA

Well, these people have lived in your country a long time now. But it seems something's still bothering them. Maybe not the same thing, but they all are worried about something. You've got to stay with this. It's important.

PETER

I know you're right. I'm just, well, not used to this kind of thing.

HANA

I hope you never have to be.

PETER

If I continue with this project, will you help me understand?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

HANA

If you do the same for me.

Peter's mobile phone, which is lying screen-up on the table, suddenly rings. The caller ID screen reads "Barbara". Peter quickly taps the "Decline" button.

Hana looks at the name and the time displayed on Peter's phone before it disappears. Hana hunts for her purse, which is hanging off the back of her chair.

HANA (cont'd)

Peter, I just realized it's getting late. And I think I'm a little, you know...

(gestures to suggest
dizziness)

Do you think you could take me back to the dormitory?

PETER

What about dinner? You need food.

HANA

I'm sorry. Not really hungry. I can't stop thinking about Ziba.

(almost inaudible)

And my--

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA - INTERNATIONAL HOUSE -
CONTINUOUS

Peter and Hana stand close to each other outside the main entrance of International House, a residence and meeting hall for foreign students and visitors. A few students, some dressed in customary clothing such as a chador, pass by them on their way in.

HANA

It's very nice here. Not much privacy, but at least I have a room at the university whenever I need it.

PETER

(peers inside, looks
around)

Whoa! Undergrads! Takes me back. Creed's "Weathered" album. "Freedom Fighter" blasting through the halls.

Hana smiles to indicate that she has no idea what he's talking about, but is sure it was before her time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER (cont'd)
Let's just say privacy's overrated.

HANA
(laughing)
Maybe that's why you like to
interview people?

PETER
Hey, by the way. Barbara lined up
another interview for us in a couple
of days. A Bosnian woman, lives in
the country, west of town. Beautiful
out there. Interested?

HANA
Of course. But I've got to get back
to A.U. to teach a language course.
Part of my contract.

PETER
When will you be free?

HANA
After Thursday.
(hesitates,
embarrassed)
But can you--

PETER
Of course. Like I told you, Barbara
and I will cover your travel
expenses, if that's what you were
going to ask.

Hana smiles demurely.

Peter stands there with nothing else to say, but not quite
ready to leave. Hana leans into Peter and gives him a
friendly European-style kiss on both cheeks.

HANA
Good-night, Peter. Thank you.

PETER
Good-night.

INT. INTERNATIONAL HOUSE - HANA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hana enters her small dorm room without turning on the
lights and walks over to the room's sole window.

(CONTINUED)